

All The Things They Didn't Say

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All The Things They Didn't Say

by [probablyrunning](#)

Summary

Ilya's heart shouldn't be pounding at the prospect of having Shane in his arms once again. And yet, it was.

When Ilya exited the club, he saw Shane inside a sensible car—a blue Jeep. Seconds later, the car was skirting off the gravel road. Ilya tried his best not to be disappointed, or hurt, but managed neither.

(Or Alt. post-club scene from Ilya's POV. He finds Shane's car pulled on the side of the road. They talk.)

Notes

Thank you Wadjilicious for the prompt: Club Scene goes differently... they talk!
Also thank you to Kayla and Wadjilicious for beta reading the scene!

Chapter 1

Chapter Notes

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

The Club

Ilya hoped Shane was looking at him from across the night club. He hoped the other man's gaze was on him as Ilya kissed the neck of the woman grinding up against him.

She was beautiful. By all intents and purposes, she was Ilya's type. But each kiss he gave her, fell flat. All he wanted was to cross the packed club and kiss Shane instead.

Shane didn't want that though. He'd made that perfectly clear the moment he ran out of Ilya's penthouse back in Boston. And then, if Ilya had had any doubts, Shane had squashed them when he started publicly dating Rose Landry.

Ilya kissed the woman in front of him harder, hoping it would erase the memory of Shane Hollander. The woman bit his lip in return, as if she too, wanted to forget someone who had broken her heart.

Ilya tried his hardest to get lost in the woman, but it was impossible. Every time their lips touched, Ilya wished he were kissing a slow hockey player with beautiful freckles instead of the random blonde.

Ilya broke the kiss and was about to excuse himself when he saw Shane grabbing his jacket and bolting out the club...alone.

Rose Landry was on the other side of the club, drink in hand, staring after Shane. Her face looked sad, a little ashen. But she schooled her features before returning to face her costars.

Ilya's feet moved towards the door before he could rationalize what he was doing.

Shane was leaving. Alone.

And Ilya's chest felt like it was being clawed from the inside out.

In that moment he felt pathetic, to be chasing after a man who clearly didn't want him. It was irrational for Ilya to want Shane Hollander more than he wanted his next breath. Not when he could have anyone he wanted. Well, anyone except Hollander.

And yet, Ilya's feet picked up speed as he crossed the dance floor and up the stairs.

His heart shouldn't be pounding at the prospect of having Shane in his arms once again. And yet, it was.

When Ilya exited the club, he saw Shane inside a sensible car—a blue Jeep. Seconds later, the car was skirting off the gravel road. Ilya tried his best not to be disappointed, or hurt, but

managed neither.

“Fuck,” he murmured, and fished into his pocket for the keys of the red sports car he’d rented while in Montreal. There was no point in going back to the club. All he wanted was to forget this night ever happened.

As the engine in his car started, he gripped onto the steering wheel for dear life. Taking deep breaths, he exited the club’s parking lot and merged onto the road.

Ilya sulked, and cursed the moment he asked for Shane Hollander to be part of the commercial they’d recorded during rookie season. It had been his idea to bring him onboard. Back then, Ilya thought it was to satisfy a curiosity of knowing if Hollander liked him back. Now, as tears prickled the back of his eyes, he wondered if he’d be better off without knowing.

What would Ilya’s life be like now if Shane Hollander had never invited him to his hotel room that evening? Certainly he wouldn’t feel like his heart had been scooped out of his chest like ice cream. He would be numb as he had been before meeting Hollander, but at least he wouldn’t be in pain. He’d rather be numb right now, he realized.

How could Ilya let this happen? And how was it possible that Shane Hollander, of all people, was the only person in the world who could make Ilya feel complete. When they were together—no matter how fleeting those moments were—Hollander made him happy. When Hollander was near, it’s as if everything in life made sense.

The navigation system told him to take a left, towards the hotel near the rink. As he followed the annoying voice of the GPS, Ilya spotted a blue Jeep pulling to the side of the road and into a vacant parking lot.

What were the chances that—

Ilya didn’t know where Shane lived. Hollander had made sure that they only met in the building he’d bought for them to fuck in. Was it possible that Shane Hollander lived close by?

Ilya slowed his car to a crawl, as if something higher was telling him to follow the sensible car. He diligently obeyed.

When Ilya parked his car next to the Jeep, he saw him: Shane Hollander bent over the steering wheel of his car.

Maybe Hollander had had too much to drink and had decided it was best to take himself off of the road.

Again, as if by gravitational pull, Ilya unbuckled his seatbelt and exited his rental. Shane’s face was still buried between his folded arms and pressed against the steering wheel.

Ilya knew this was the last place he should be at. Instead, Ilya should’ve taken someone, anyone, back to his hotel room, fuck them, and completely obliterate the avalanche of

feelings seeing Hollander tonight had unraveled in him.

Ilya needed to be as far away from Hollander as humanly possible. The other man ran out of his apartment the moment Ilya had shown a sliver of his feelings. Ilya certainly didn't need a repeat of that rejection tonight.

For weeks, after Shane dropped him faster than a hot coal, Ilya couldn't stop replaying his afternoon with Shane. Before Shane had left, it had been blissful in many ways. And then, like glass shattering, their relationship was over. Ilya couldn't figure out what he'd done wrong, or how he could've fixed it. He just knew that he hated himself for ruining whatever he and Hollander had... because it had been the best thing that had happened to Ilya in a long time.

Shane made him want to try. To let himself feel something other than lust and despair. When he was with Shane, he felt seen. Understood. All of those things were foreign to Ilya. Until he met Shane.

As Shane crouched deeper into the steering wheel, Ilya's self-preservation left the conversation. If Shane was in any sort of trouble, Ilya wanted to be there for him. Just as Shane had, knowingly or not, been there for Ilya.

With an exhale, Ilya let his shoulders drop. Then, using his knuckles, he knocked on the passenger side window of Shane's car.

Shane jolted from his crouched position over the steering wheel. Startled, it took Shane a few moments to focus on Ilya. Even through the dark glass, Ilya could see Shane's eyes were glistening.

He was crying.

Why was he crying?

Had he had a fight with Rose Landry?

Then Shane's unguarded, sad face, turned angry. His eyebrows bunched and he pressed his lips into a straight line.

Before Ilya could gesture for Shane to lower the passenger side window, Shane stormed out of the car and charged towards him. Ilya found himself pressed against the side of the Jeep. Shane's freckles were inches from his face and his fingers gripped Ilya's shirt tightly.

"What the hell do you want, Rozanov?" Shane's voice carried throughout the empty parking lot and reverberated through Ilya's entire body.

Ilya wanted so much from Shane, but he couldn't have any of it. So he settled for, "Are you okay?"

"Why do you care?" Shane gripped Ilya's shirt tighter.

Ilya cared. More than he was ready to admit. It was scary how much he cared about anything that even remotely concerned Shane Hollander. “Why are you crying?” Ilya asked.

This was the first time they’d really talked in months. Shane looked as distraught as Ilya felt. However, something told him Shane was distraught for reasons that had nothing to do with Ilya and everything to do with his girlfriend.

Shane scoffed as if the question had been a stupid one. “You’re seriously asking me that?”

“Yes,” Ilya said in an even tone. It broke something inside him to see Shane like this. Even if it was because of Rose Landry. “Did you and Rose Landry break up or something?” Ilya ignored the pang of hope that sprung inside his chest. “I’m sure if you ask nicely she will take you back.” After all, Ilya would. In a heartbeat.

“You’re such a fucking asshole,” Shane replied. Fresh tears welled in his beautiful brown eyes.

“How am I asshole?”

Shane shook his head, as if Ilya was being obtuse. But they were too close and Shane’s lips were right there. Ilya couldn’t bear the proximity. At the same time, he couldn’t imagine pushing Hollander away. Not when this was the closest they’d been since he stormed out of Ilya’s apartment.

This was too much. And yet, not nearly enough.

Ilya found his voice somewhere in the depths of the turmoil brewing inside him. “Are you okay to drive home? I just wanted to make sure you were alright. I can call Rose Landry to come and pick you up, if you want. Or one of your teammates if you did break up.”

Shane blinked at him exactly twice. “I’m not drunk!” Shane realized how close they were because he let go of Ilya’s shirt and took a step back. Though both men were an arm’s length apart, they might as well be on different continents with an ocean in between them. Then, as an afterthought Shane added, “Or broke up with Rose.”

It was as if Hollander had stuck a knife in his abdomen and twisted it. If Ilya thought he was in pain before, it was because he didn’t know how awful it would feel to hear Hollander accept he was, in fact, in a relationship with Rose Landry.

Tabloids and pictures were one thing. Hearing him say it out loud, to Ilya’s face, shredded his heart into tiny little pieces. Somewhere in the back of his mind, he had convinced himself that maybe what Hollander had with Rose Landry was only a fling. Temporary.

Oh, but he was wrong.

In that moment, Ilya wondered if he would ever manage to put the pieces of his heart back together or if he, for the rest of his life, would bear the mark of having loved and lost Shane Hollander. Why had he been so weak as to fall for someone he could never have?

Trying really hard to keep everything bottled inside, Ilya fished his phone and handed it to Hollander. "Call whoever you need to. I can wait in my car until someone picks you up." Ilya wanted this night to end already.

Shane eyed Ilya's phone as if it were a gun.

When it became clear Shane wouldn't come close to the phone, Ilya rolled his eyes. "Then you are okay." The quicker he got into his car, the quicker he'd get to the hotel and forget this whole night ever happened. He pushed himself from the side of Shane's car to hide inside the rental sports car.

"Ilya," Shane choked out.

And his name coming from Hollander's mouth made Ilya want to weep with both joy and sadness. Ilya's hand gripped the door handle of his rental harder than it was necessary.

"I'm not okay." The anger in Shane's voice was palpable. "Far from it actually."

Ilya closed his eyes and exhaled through his nose. "If not a ride, then what do you need, Hollander?" He made sure to put as much emphasis on his last name. Reluctantly, he turned to face Shane.

"First, you show up at the same club I am. Make out with some blonde right in my face, then follow me here, and then expect me to be okay?" Shane's chest was rising and falling with each breath. "How do you think that makes me feel?"

"You?" Ilya almost screamed. "How it makes you feel?" Then he laughed because the alternative would've been to drop to his knees in defeat. He was so tired of fighting his feelings for Shane. He was so exhausted from being rejected by everyone he loved.

"Yeah, I know you don't care about anyone other than yourself, but yeah. You fucking around—you making out with that blonde, it made me feel ridiculous for—" Shane cut himself off. He was angry. Angrier than Ilya had ever seen him, even on the ice. "You're always with someone else. We get it, you can have anyone you want as long as it's no strings attached." Shane's voice had gone small.

Ilya's knees threatened to buckle, so he stayed put against his car. "You're the one in a relationship with Rose Landry." Jealousy cradled Ilya's muscles and poisoned each of his words with as much venom and hurt as Ilya could muster.

"And you've fucked the entirety of the East Coast!" The well of tears in Shane's eyes managed to escape. He used the back of his hand to clean the tears flowing down his freckles as he started walking back to the driver's seat.

Shane leaving him in this dark parking lot was probably for the best. And yet, in a broken voice, Ilya heard himself say, "Shane, you left me."

Ilya knew that using Hollander's first name had had something to do with the other man leaving him back in Boston. But just like in his penthouse, Ilya couldn't stop himself from

saying it. Shane's name on his lips felt right. Like the name belonged on Ilya's tongue. And if he was going to crumble in the middle of an empty parking lot, then he was going to dig his own grave by calling the man he was in love with by his given name. "You left me, even after you said you'd stay." It was childish to bring it up. Ilya was stronger than this. But Shane's broken promise had cut deeper than anything Ilya had experienced before. Shane's rejection had left him raw and vulnerable. It made him feel stupid for thinking... for hoping... for loving.

Shane turned to face him, tear marks on his face. "I-I didn't mean to."

Ilya felt defeated. Depleted. Shane Hollander had infiltrated every inch of his heart and soul. Only to crush him under the weight of his indifference.

"But you did. I knew you would eventually call it off," Ilya said dryly. Hollander was too good for him. It was foolish for Ilya to think he could have Shane for more than a few stolen moments. "I just didn't expect you would replace me so quickly or that it would hurt—it doesn't matter." Ilya took a shaky breath and straightened his spine.

Ilya realized he'd said too much the moment Shane's eyes widened.

"You think I was trying to replace you with Rose?"

Ilya just shrugged and opened the door of the rental. This night needed to be over or Ilya would not be able to take it anymore.

"Wait, Rozanov." Shane's hand was on his shoulder. And all Ilya wanted was to sink into the warmth of Shane's hand on him. But instead of doing that, Ilya shrugged it off. "Ilya I wasn't trying to replace you." In a softer voice he continued, "I was trying to forget you."

To forget him?

That would mean Hollander—

"Why were you trying to forget me?" Ilya didn't turn around to face Shane. He couldn't. Each and everyone of Ilya's muscles were taut. Waiting for a verbal blow that was sure to come.

Shane's scoff carried no bite. "Because it was different. Last time we were together. It felt different."

"What was different about it?" Ilya tried his hardest to keep his composure. "We got together, we fucked. And you freaked out."

"Don't be an asshole."

Ilya dropped his head between his shoulder blades.

Shane's voice shook. "You know it was different. Don't lie to me!"

Ilya's hands shook as well.

“It was,” Ilya finally said after a long silence. “But that doesn’t change that you left.”

“I’m sorry, okay? I’m sorry I freaked out. Ilya—” Shane’s hand landed on Ilya’s shoulder again. “Look at me.”

And this time he didn’t push Shane away.

“Look at me, please,” Shane repeated.

Slowly, Ilya did. Their eyes met.

Shane moved his hand from Ilya’s shoulders to cup his cheek.

At seeing him so close, the tears Ilya had been fighting off since he left the club finally won. Ilya tried to turn his face away from Shane, but the other man didn’t let him.

“Ilya, I’m sorry,” Shane said again, and wiped a tear away from Ilya’s cheek. It made Ilya want to crumble even more. “I was scared... and it’s no excuse, but I was. I still am.”

Ilya didn’t trust his throat would actually produce any words. So instead of saying anything, he took a leap and crushed his lips to Shane’s.

It felt like coming home. Nothing, not even winning the Stanley cup, compared to how it felt to have Shane in his arms again.

Shane parted his lips, granting Ilya’s tongue access.

They kissed hard, and messy. It was as if the last few months had taken as much of a toll on Hollander as it had on Ilya.

Shane’s fingers dug into Ilya’s curls, and he used that leverage to pull Ilya closer. Ilya let himself be drowned by the force that was Shane Hollander.

When Shane moaned against Ilya’s mouth, Ilya took charge of the kiss. He gripped Hollander by the waist and walked them back until he had Shane pinned against the Jeep. Hidden between the two cars, Ilya kissed Shane’s neck, cupped his erection over his jeans, and whispered in Russian, “I missed you. I missed you so much.”

In return, Shane whimpered, “Fuck, Ilya. I need you.”

Shane still wanted him.

A cluster of emotions bubbled up Ilya’s throat. Breathless, Ilya said, “Get in the car.”

Shane’s eyes turned darker. And then, the only sound in the dim park lot was that of Shane’s door handle clicking open.

As always, thank you so so much for your comments and kudos, they seriously make my day. Feel free to come find me over on threads or Instagram -- @romancerunner. I post updates on fics and other upcoming projects.

Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

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

Ilya reached for Shane as soon as the door of the car clicked shut behind him.

As Ilya held on to Shane's chin and planted a bruising, desperate kiss, Shane fisted Ilya's shirt. It was earth-shattering, the way Shane whimpered into Ilya's lips. He was drowning in Shane's touch and he never, ever wanted to come out for air.

Ilya pulled Shane onto his lap. And Shane straddled him without breaking their kiss. For the first time in his life, Ilya was grateful to be inside a boring car. This wouldn't have been possible in Ilya's rental or any of the sports cars he owned back in Boston.

Shane grinded on Ilya. And Ilya's hand slid underneath Shane's shirt, tracing his soft skin and the ridges of his torso. He wanted Shane to keep edging them both, until they were covered in sweat and couldn't do anything more than give in to each other.

Ilya fumbled with the buttons of his shirt as Shane pulled his t-shirt over his head. It might've been the dark of the cabin or maybe it was that Ilya's fingers were shaking, but either or both of those things, made it impossible for Ilya to successfully unbutton his shirt.

Shane placed a hand on top of Ilya's, bringing his failed attempts to a stop. "Let me," Shane said.

The frenzy they were in, had slowed down and Ilya was afraid that Shane would realize they had gotten caught in the heat of the moment and the other man would bolt like he'd done back in Boston. So he chased Shane's lips to try and kiss him again.

Shane reciprocated. And this time, kissed him a little slower while diligently undoing the buttons. "I got it," Shane said between kisses.

Once both of them had lost their shirts, there was nothing gentle in the way they devoured one another. The momentary pause only fueled the hunger in the way they touched.

"Just like that, Shane," Ilya said. He needed to say Shane's name. Again and again. He needed to know that Shane wouldn't run away this time. That he'd stay even when Ilya bared his heart wide open. "Shane," he repeated. And then in Russian, "My Shane."

It was as if Ilya was making up for all those months they'd lost. For all the times he ached for Hollander and he wasn't there.

The lid on the little composure Ilya had left was blown away when Shane murmured against his lips, "I want you, Ilya."

"Again," Ilya rasped. He wanted to be consumed by Shane Hollander. "Say it again."

“I want you.”

“No,” Ilya exhaled, pulling away enough to meet Shane’s gaze. “My name. Say it.”

Shane framed Ilya’s face with his palms, and without breaking eye contact he said, “Ilya.”

Ilya’s entire body soared. Each of Shane’s kisses, and each time he said his name, it was a stitch that sutured the gaping hole that had bled into Ilya’s chest for all those months.

Both their breathings were laboured—the sounds of their moans bounced off the darkened cabin.

There wasn’t enough space for them to move around, but Ilya wasn’t going to let that stop him from worshipping Shane. Ilya wanted to taste him, and bring Shane as close as possible to the same euphoria Ilya was experiencing at that moment.

“Lay down,” Ilya said. The backseat of the Jeep wasn’t big enough for them to move around as much. But after wiggling down from Ilya’s lap—bumping into Ilya’s shoulder in the process—Hollander settled himself along the length of the seats. His back resting against the door and window.

Ilya positioned himself as best as he could, face between Shane’s legs, and pulled Shane’s pants low enough that it allowed his erection to spring free. He was hard and ready for Ilya to take.

A deep moan escaped Shane’s lips when Ilya wrapped his mouth around his cock. Hollander’s erection twitched against Ilya’s tongue.

Not long after Ilya started bobbing his head, Shane sank his fingers into Ilya’s curls and gripped hard.

“Fu—Ilya, fuck.” Hollander’s expletives, combined with his name, were music to Ilya’s ears.

He took Shane deeper into his mouth. From the way the other man moaned and held onto Ilya’s curls, it wouldn’t be long until he came.

Ilya wanted to get lost in the feel of Shane’s cock filling his throat, but couldn’t seem to take his eyes away from Shane. He looked beautiful, mouth agape, bathed in the low light coming from the nearest lamppost. *This is all I ever want*, Ilya thought to himself. *Shane is all I will ever want*.

Then the dim cabin turned bright.

The headlights of another car, Ilya realized.

Both Shane and Ilya froze.

“Ilya,” Shane whispered. Panic was evident in his voice.

They were close enough to the road that it could've been a car taking a shortcut from the intersection. But there were two seemingly abandoned cars in a parking lot in the middle of the night. Cops could be pulling up to check on the suspicious cars.

Infinite possibilities of how the situation could play out ran through Ilya's head. And each of his muscles were paralyzed with fear. Mostly for Shane than for himself.

Ilya's heart pounded against his ribcage for the few seconds the headlights of the other car exposed them.

Soon enough though, the cabin of the car went dark again.

It was just a passing car. They were safe.

Shane and Ilya, who apparently had stopped breathing, exhaled. And their relief broke the silence in half.

For Ilya, that relief was short lived, because a still panicked and wide eyed Shane said, "We can't keep doing this."

Ilya deflated faster than a popped balloon.

He had been waiting for the other shoe to drop. And there it was.

They'd been caught in the heat of the moment. And this had given Shane enough time for him to come to his senses.

Ilya straightened from the uncomfortable position he was in, and solemnly nodded. He fished his shirt from where it had landed on the car's floor, while disappointment wrapped itself around his throat.

Flatly, Ilya replied, "Okay."

There didn't seem to be more cars in the vicinity, so he might be able to cross the parking lot bare-chested until he reached his car and could book it to his hotel.

Shane's brow bunched. "Where are you going?"

"You just said we can't keep doing this." Even repeating it made Ilya's stomach tighten. It felt wrong to leave Shane half naked and still hard.

"Ilya, that's not what I meant." Shane cut the short distance across the back seat and placed a hand over Ilya's forearm to stop him from opening the door. "I meant... not here."

Confused, Ilya just stared at where Shane was touching him. He did so with a deep longing. Except Hollander was only a breath away from him. "Where?" Ilya finally managed to ask.

There was a small quiver in Hollander's voice when he replied, "Come to my house. Stay with me tonight."

Ilya wasn't sure if his own imagination was making him hear things. He'd never seen Hollander's house. He had imagined it, sure, but never thought he'd really get a chance to see it. He never thought he'd be important enough for Shane to invite him over.

Ilya studied every inch of Shane's expression. "Are you sure? We've never—" Ilya cut himself off because he didn't even know how to finish that sentence. All he knew was that he just didn't want Hollander to regret him. Ilya wouldn't be able to survive that kind of thing.

"Ilya," Shane said softly, "I'm sure." Silence stretched across the back seat of the car. When Ilya didn't say anything back, Shane added, "I'm not going anywhere this time. I won't freak out. I promise."

Ilya felt the familiar pang of fear he often got when thinking about losing Shane. "You do?"

Shane nodded. A tear rolled down his face. "I promise."

"Okay. I'd like that."

Shane's face broke into a wonderful, breathtaking smile.

And Ilya couldn't help it. He pressed his lips against Shane's, then traced kisses along Shane's cheeks, and jaw. All while whispering, *I love you* in Russian against Shane's skin.

"I love you too," Shane said quietly.

Ilya froze. Had he—had he said it in English?

"*Ya tebya lyublyu*," Shane said this time.

Ilya was perplexed. "You speak Russian now?" Leave it to Hollander to know exactly how to surprise Ilya at every turn.

Shane shook his head, then hid his face on the crook of Ilya's neck. "I learned a few phrases. That was one of them." And then once more said, "*Ya tebya lyublyu*, Ilya."

All Ilya could do was hold the other man in a tight hug that lasted for a long time.

As they settled into the front seats of Shane's car, and Shane reached across the console to interlace his fingers with Ilya's, all Ilya could think about was: This is what happiness must feel like.

Chapter End Notes

Hope you enjoyed the car scene :)

As always, thank you so so much for your comments and kudos, they seriously make my day. Feel free to come find me over on threads or Instagram -- @romancerunner. I

post updates on fics and other upcoming projects.

Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

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

Ilya walked on clouds as he exited Shane's boring car. Hollander, on the other hand, seemed off.

As both of them entered the apartment building, Ilya didn't see anyone else in the lobby or the elevator. So Ilya wasn't sure what had shifted in Hollander from the moment they held hands over the console of the car, to Shane inviting him into the apartment.

"Something wrong?" Ilya asked as he took off his shoes and placed them next to the apartment's door. Not meeting his eye, Shane hooked the keys on the wall and turned on the apartment's soft lights.

"I think... I need to make a phone call." Shane was nervous. Ilya could tell by the way his shoulders bunched close to his ears and how he was fidgeting with his fingers before he hid them inside his jean pockets.

"Okay?" Ilya was a little perplexed that the night was taking, yet, another turn, but tried his best to not let it show.

"To Rose," Shane added. "I told her I would check in when I got home."

Oh.

Is not that Ilya had forgotten about Rose, actually, she'd sort of taken a permanent residence in Ilya's brain since the press made it a point to document every bit of her relationship with Shane.

But foolishly he'd thought that Shane's declaration of love would appease the jealousy he'd had since Shane started dating the movie star.

Ilya's stomach turned, making him feel a little queasy. Why did Shane need to talk to Rose *right now*? Couldn't it wait? Wasn't Ilya more important than her? *Of course he wasn't*. Even if by some miracle he was, in the world they lived in, love was not enough. Shane may very well want so much more than Ilya could offer.

Ilya wanted to beg Shane not to leave him to talk to his girlfriend. But he bit his tongue. And instead, he repeated a little flatter, "Okay."

Shane's brows furrowed, creasing his forehead into a small frown before he took his leave to an adjacent room. Maybe his bedroom?

Feeling slightly inadequate, like a puzzle piece that looked like it belonged but didn't quite fit, Ilya roamed the vast kitchen and snooped in Shane's kitchen drawers. That would take off his mind from whatever conversation was happening in the adjacent room.

Everything was as pristine as he had imagined Shane's home to be. Not a spoon out of place. The rest of the living room and dining room were no different. Abstract art decorated the far walls. The large beige couch had several blue accent pillows. It looked comfortable. He could imagine Shane laying there on days off, reading some boring book—about the history of hockey, no doubt. Or watching a hockey game when the Metros weren't playing. Ilya's face muscles softened into an almost-smile. Seconds later though, as he made his way across the living room, a vision plagued Ilya's mind: Shane and Rose cuddling on that very couch, watching some movie or show. In that vision Shane looked happy. The domesticity of the vision was what gutted Ilya far more than anything else.

It was hard to imagine that fifteen minutes ago, Ilya had been ecstatic to see Shane's home. Now that Hollander had disappeared to talk to Rose, Ilya wanted to crawl out of his own skin.

Getting restless of waiting—and of envisioning scenarios where Shane was happy without him—Ilya walked close to the door where Shane had disappeared. Shane's voice carried softly and Ilya stopped dead in his tracks to listen.

He overheard Shane say, "Let's have dinner. Yes. Wednesday works." A pause. It might've lasted a few seconds but to Ilya, it felt like an eternity. "No, I think just the two of us. We can go to that restaurant you like." Another pause. Ilya's pulse picked up. He wasn't even sure why his chest tightened to the point of pain. Maybe it was the familiarity Shane had with Rose. After all, Shane had no idea what Ilya's favorite restaurant was. Or vice versa. Or maybe it was the confirmation that although Shane said he loved him, he wasn't willing to part ways with Rose.

What would Ilya do if that were the case? Be Hollander's lover? But honestly what else could he be? It's not like they could go public, not even if they were exclusive—which they'd never been.

"Text you tomorrow," Hollander said into the phone, then after another pause, "Yeah, me too."

Ilya scrambled to the other side of the living room where Shane had last seen him, and tried his hardest to school his features to something resembling disinterest. A quick glance at his reflection on the hallway mirror told him he didn't succeed. The ups and downs on the night had taken a toll on him, and it showed.

"Sorry that took so long," Shane said, looking even paler than he had when they entered the apartment.

A familiar pang of fear hit Ilya straight in the gut.

"It's okay," Ilya replied. Cause what else could he say? *Why were you talking to Rose when I'm right here? Am I not enough?* That would sound needy and uncharacteristic to the nonchalant persona Ilya had worked so hard to cultivate.

Well, but if Ilya was honest with himself, maybe he wasn't enough. He had never been enough for his family. And those were people who were supposed to love him just as he was.

And yet, no matter what Ilya did for them or how much money he sent back home, Ilya would never be enough. Why would it be different with Hollander?

Shane crossed the living room until he reached the couch. The way he sat on it, made Ilya reconsider his initial assessment of the comfortability of the piece of furniture.

Shane sounded pained when he said, “I think... we need to talk.”

Ilya stood frozen in place but tried to sound playful when he quipped, “It sounds serious.”

“Can you sit or something?” Shane’s brown eyes widened with exasperation.

Ilya didn’t think he could sit. Not with all the nerves rattling his bones. So he opted to lean on the wall across from Hollander.

That seemed to satisfy Shane because he started, “I spoke to Rose.”

Ilya nodded, and as imperceptible as he could, he swallowed. It was a feeble attempt to push the knot in his throat threatening to choke him.

“We weren’t exclusive, you know.” Shane looked down at his feet. “We were still trying to figure out our relationship. But I still wanted to let her know.”

“Let her know what?” Ilya crossed his arms over his chest. Another feeble attempt, this time to protect his heart.

“About us. Well, I didn’t tell her your name. I wouldn’t do that without asking you first.” The same panic that was present back in the parking lot returned to Shane’s voice. “But she guessed. I think she noticed why I left, so there was really no point in denying it when she asked if it was you.”

Ilya was flat out confused. “What do you mean?”

Shane exhaled. “Can you please just sit?”

Reluctant, Ilya peeled himself from the wall and walked towards Shane. He didn’t sit as close to Shane as he wanted. There was still a very big chance Ilya would end the night with a massive gap where his heart currently resided.

“She knows you’re here.” Shane closed his eyes. He looked as tired as Ilya felt. “I couldn’t be with you—not without telling her.”

“So she give you permission to fuck me or something?” Ilya knew he sounded petulant, but he couldn’t help it.

Shane’s eyes turned to slits. “Can you stop being an asshole for like a whole second?”

Surrendering to whatever came next, Ilya raised his hands in the air.

Shane sighed. “I told her I couldn’t be with her because I’m in love with you. We broke up.”

Ilya breath caught in his throat. He couldn't deny the way his heart twitched. It was as if it had been reanimated after being still for far too long. He wanted to let his face do what it wanted to do, which was break into a smile, but Hollander's expression stopped him. "Is that not what you wanted?" Ilya asked cautiously.

"Yes, that's what I wanted." Hollander sounded annoyed.

Like someone approaching a particularly skittish cat, Ilya said, "Then why you look so sad?"

Shane closed his eyes and pressed the bridge of his freckled nose with his index finger and thumb. "Because if I'm going to blow up my life for us to be together, I need to know that this—" Shane pointed to the space between them— "is real. And you didn't even seem to care that I was going to talk to Rose. Even now you don't seem to care about this conversation!"

For us to be together. Hollander wanted to be with him?

"You want to be with me?" Ilya's voice was dangerously close to cracking.

Shane let out a noise somewhere between a sigh and a groan. "Of course I want to be with you. It's all I can think about, actually. Every time I'm not near you it hurts. All I want to do is love you." He let out a more pronounced sigh this time. "I need you to be honest with me, Ilya."

Ilya wanted to keep his emotions in check, but Shane needed him to be open. And though Ilya was scared he was not equipped—or even capable—of doing that, he needed to try. There was nothing he wanted more than to be with Hollander.

Without moving, Ilya confessed, "It feels real to me." Then gave a bone-shattering exhale. "What I feel for you, Shane, is the most real thing I've ever felt. The best thing I've felt." He pushed through the words before he could back down. "But I might not be enough for you."

The freckled bridge of Shane's nose turned a soft shade of pink. In a small voice he replied, "You're more than enough. You're everything, actually."

After not crying for over a decade, crying twice in a night seemed excessive to Ilya. But he couldn't stop the tears as they rolled down his cheeks.

Before he could clean his tears, and hide them as he was taught to do, Shane was there, kissing him. Soothing him. Comforting him.

Ilya kissed him back and tried to convey everything he wasn't yet equipped to say into the kiss. Like how much he wanted Shane. How much he needed him. How much he was willing to give to be with him. And how much he truly loved him.

Though they shared countless kisses over the years, that particular kiss, in Shane's not-so-comfortable couch, turned out to be the sweetest one Ilya had ever experienced.

Finding a grip under his thighs, Ilya scooped up Shane from the couch and carried him across the living room to where he hoped Shane's room was located. In the past, Shane had

protested when Ilya carried him like this. That was not the case tonight. Shane wrapped his legs around Ilya's waist and didn't stop kissing him.

Ilya had been right, the room Shane was calling from earlier, was his bedroom. The bed was full of pillows, but Ilya paid them no mind. Carefully, he dropped Shane onto the mattress. In between kisses, both men pulled out their clothes until they were left naked and wanting.

"In the drawer," Shane breathed, dick already impossibly hard.

Ilya pulled the lube and condoms out of the nightstand and before he could make use of any of those things, he got to work on Shane's hole with his tongue.

Mostly intelligible sounds came out of Shane's mouth. But some of those noises were Ilya's name.

Ilya continued to make Shane ready for him with the lube and his fingers. And then when Ilya positioned himself between Shane's legs and used the tip of his dick to rim Shane, Shane made the hottest noises known to mankind.

"You love me, yes?" Ilya asked, still unsure if he could trust this wasn't all a dream.

Shane nodded. "I love you, yes."

With more emotions than he knew were to put, Ilya sank slowly into Shane. After all this time apart, Ilya wanted to witness the beauty that was Shane Hollander coming undone under him. And he wanted to be unraveled and stitched back together by Shane.

Ilya found a slow pace that had Shane moaning and whimpering. Unlike any other time they'd been together, there was no rush anymore. Because although Ilya had to leave Shane's bed in a few hours to catch a flight, it was the first instance that it didn't feel like they were on borrowed time.

Regardless of how much he wanted to come, Ilya wanted this to last. Hopefully forever. Ilya wanted to tell Hollander, with his body, how much he meant to him. Words were never his strong suit, and in another language even worse. But he could show Shane.

"Holy shit, Ilya, that feels so good," Shane whimpered and Ilya was sure he would come just from the other man's breathy words.

"More?" Ilya asked.

Shane nodded.

Still keeping the slow pace, Ilya rocked a little harder inside Shane. It made Shane's back arch on the bed.

Eyes closed and with his fingers digging into Ilya's shoulders, Shane panted, "Tell me your mine."

Ilya stopped his hips all together, which made Shane open his eyes. It was like looking into the future he'd wanted but never dared to dream. But now, with Shane underneath him, Ilya could allow himself to hope for the happiness he never thought he could have. "I'm yours, Shane. Only yours. Always yours."

"Fuck, Ilya." Shane said in a shaky voice. He found Ilya's neck to pull him in for a hard, soul-crushing kiss.

Ilya let himself be swept by Shane. His hips started moving again. This time, there was nothing slow about the way they fucked. They stopped kissing only to inhale chunks of air, but neither of them lost contact with the other.

Shane came first, his load covering both their stomachs. Ilya wasn't far behind. When he came, Shane was there, kissing him deeper than he had all night.

"Yours," Ilya said, like a mantra against Shane's skin after he pulled out of him. He couldn't seem to stop worshipping every inch of Shane's body. So he kept kissing him until Shane stood up to go clean himself up.

* * *

The alarm on Ilya's phone would go off soon. He had to go pick up the stray rental car from the parking lot, return it, and be at the hotel before the bus picked up the team. Ilya had barely slept. Truth was, Ilya had been too wired from last night's events to sleep. So now, as dawn seeped through the cracks of Shane's beige curtains, Ilya just let himself sink into the warmth of Shane's naked body on his.

Shane's head laid on Ilya's shoulder. One of his arms was draped over Ilya's bare chest and his bent leg pressed on Ilya's thigh. Shane breathed softly, and each time he exhaled it warmed the skin on Ilya's chest.

All Ilya could do—and wanted to do—was count Shane's freckles and memorize their patterns. He wanted to drop kisses on them but didn't want to wake up Shane. For minutes that seemed far shorter than he would've liked, Ilya just stared at the beautiful man. He remembered the first time he'd seen Shane Hollander. Freckles, like constellations under deep brown eyes. Ilya was sure the world had stopped the moment they shook hands outside the ice rink in Saskatchewan. Staring at Shane now, while remembering their first encounter, was like being suspended in time.

As the years had gone by, Ilya had only imagined what waking up next to Shane would be like. And now that he knew, Ilya wanted to tattoo this moment to the back of his eyelids. He tried not to breathe too loud, or move a muscle for that matter, so as to not wake Shane.

The minutes ticked by and eventually Shane fluttered his eyes open. Ilya tried his best to pretend that he, too, had been asleep.

A sleepy, unabashed smile appeared on Shane's lips when his brown eyes found Ilya's. Seeing Shane happy like that, made everything seem to be alright in Ilya's world.

“G’ morning,” Shane said, sleepiness dragging the word. It was quite literally the most adorable thing Ilya had ever heard.

And he couldn’t help himself any longer, Ilya leaned and dropped a kiss on the bridge of Shane’s nose. “Good morning,” Ilya repeated. “Sleep well?”

Eyes heavy with sleep, Shane nodded. Then curled a little closer to Ilya’s body, like a cat would when they found a patch of sunlight under a window. Ilya’s chest soared as he held Shane closer.

Ilya knew for certain he would stay in this position forever if it meant he got to hear Shane sigh in content like that.

When Shane started stirring again, he wiggled over Ilya’s chest, as if wanting to cover Ilya with his own body. Ilya’s fingers traced a path up the smooth skin of Shane’s back until they reached his hair. Shane made another noise, letting Ilya know that he liked getting his hair stroked.

Ilya wanted Shane again, but at least for today, time was running out.

As if reading Ilya’s mind, Shane planted a soft kiss on Ilya’s collarbone. Followed by another one on his neck.

Ilya’s cock stirred in response.

“Shane,” Ilya exhaled. “I have flight to catch.” They shouldn’t start anything when Ilya had to leave so soon. And yet, Ilya found himself rotating his hips against Shane’s body. He could feel Shane’s erection pressing against his. It was glorious.

Ilya should stop this, be sensible or something, but he couldn’t find the will to protest.

Shane’s lips traced the length of Ilya’s neck, the curve of his jaw, until he reached Ilya’s earlobe and whispered, “We won’t see each other until the All Star Game.” That was almost a month away.

Softly, Shane sucked on the sensitive skin behind Ilya’s ear. A jolt of pleasure shot from where Shane nipped, all the way to Ilya’s now throbbing cock.

Ilya felt Hollander’s hand snake down his chest until it was in between their bodies.

Angling his wrist, Shane started stroking Ilya’s erection.

“Fuck, Shane.” If he could help it, Ilya would never, ever call Shane by anything other than his first name.

As if he was the one getting stroked, Shane moaned against Ilya’s skin.

That’s when Ilya lost whatever semblance of composure he had left and flipped them over. His lips crashed onto Shane’s with hunger.

The other man bit Ilya's lower lip, then said, "Are you gonna make me come?"

Ilya's heart was ready to punch itself out of his chest. "I'll do whatever you want me to do."

The alarm on Ilya's phone blared. Making both of them groan.

Ilya reached towards the blasted thing and desperately clicked on the screen until it stopped beeping. If he called the car rental company on his way to the hotel, they could pick up the sports car from the parking lot. That would give him some extra time to be with Shane.

He could also fake being ill and tell his coach he'd fly tomorrow. Ilya was sure his roommate would cover for him if needed. But if someone had seen Ilya leave the club right after Shane left, then maybe it was best for Ilya to be where he was supposed to be, at the time he'd been told.

Calling the rental company was the smartest plan.

Ilya positioned himself behind Shane, his cock already hard against Shane's ass.

Spooning Shane, he opened his palm, an invitation for Shane to put some lube on it. Shane, who was closer to the night stand, did as asked.

With his front flushed to Shane's back, Ilya could feel the thump of Shane's heart. It matched the rhythm of his own, he was sure. Ilya stroked Shane's cock while kissing his neck and shoulder. "Come for me, sweetheart." The endearment slipped out of him, but Shane seemed to like it because he swirled his hips against Ilya's erection.

Their heavy breaths and moans bounced off the walls. And it only took a few more strokes for Shane to splutter his come over Ilya's hand and on the bed covers.

As soon as Shane came down from the high of his orgasm, he pushed Ilya to the bed and took him in his mouth.

The warmth of Shane's throat had Ilya seeing stars.

"Shane," he breathed.

Eagerly, Shane bobbed his head. Ilya's balls contracted, the impending orgasm ready to burst out of him. Knowing Shane's preferences, Ilya pulled him up and locked his lips with Shane's while he stroked himself. The climax was so wonderful it made Ilya's vision blurry. But when he returned from the stratosphere, Shane was there, nuzzling his nose against Ilya's jaw. Peppering kisses anywhere he pleased.

"I have to go soon," Ilya said with heaviness in his chest. Leaving Shane here, looking satisfied and beautiful, was the last thing he wanted. But it was for the best if they wanted to keep this secret.

"I know." Shane dropped a few more kisses on Ilya's collarbone and placed his hand on Ilya's chest, right over the cross pendant Ilya always wore. "I'll miss you so much."

“Me too,” Ilya bit back tears. This was too perfect not to be a dream. Wanting to confirm, once and for all, that all this was in fact real, Ilya asked sheepishly, “You’re mine too, right?”

Repeating what Ilya had said earlier, Shane replied, “Only yours. Always yours, Ilya.”

Chapter End Notes

As always, thank you so so much for your comments and kudos, they seriously make my day. Feel free to come find me over on threads or Instagram -- @romancerunner. I post updates on fics and other upcoming projects.

Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

Thank you so much for reading and all your lovely comments! If you liked how part 3 ended, please feel free to skip the next parts coming. The new chapters will cover from the All-Star Game to their Happily Ever After.

If you choose to keep reading, happy reading!

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

BOSTON

ONE WEEK LATER

Ilya wanted to see Shane. It had been an entire week since they'd kissed goodbye in Shane's apartment. A whole week since Ilya felt Shane's lips on his. It was absolute torture to be so far away from the man he loved.

They had exchanged messages here and there but with both their schedules filled to the brim, it had been impossible to keep a consistent conversation going. Often Ilya would send a text only to receive a reply hours later from Shane. One that Ilya himself couldn't answer until another couple of hours had gone by. It was like playing a poorly executed game of tag.

As he laid in his bed, waiting for yet another reply from Shane, he started to wonder if this was what them being together would be like. The whirlwind and excitement of their time together had left little time for them to talk about what a relationship between them would really look like.

The phone in his chest buzzed.

Jane: Sorry, I was at a photoshoot with Reebok.

Lily: How did it go?

Jane: They want me to wear more Reebok.

Ilya chuckled into his empty room. In all the years they'd secretly hooked up, Ilya had probably seen Shane wearing Reebok...once?

And now Ilya wanted to tease Shane about it. But through text it wouldn't be as fun, because he wouldn't be able to see Shane's annoyed reaction. The way Shane scrunched his nose and

knitted his brows when Ilya ragebaited him, was so cute. Every time that happened, Ilya wanted to drown Shane in kisses.

Lily: Are you alone?

Jane: Yes, why?

Lily: Can I call?

The bubbles in the chat popped up, then disappeared. For a moment, Ilya was worried he'd overstepped somehow.

But then his phone rang.

The name **Jane** appeared on the screen.

Ilya scrambled to sit up against his headboard and ran a hand through his hair trying to smooth the unruly curls, before answering the call.

"Hey," Shane said.

Ilya couldn't help the smile that broke his face in half at seeing Shane also sitting against his headboard, tendrils of wet hair framing his beautiful face.

"Hi," he replied. "Long day?"

"The longest. They had me at that photoshoot forever. And then they made me do a few videos for Instagram or whatever." Shane locked eyes with Ilya, then quickly looked off screen, as if he was nervous.

"Everything okay?" Ilya asked.

Shane's gaze came back to the screen. "No. I just... can't believe we haven't done this before. Calling, I mean. It's nice."

"I missed seeing you," Ilya confessed. Since Shane had asked him to be honest back in Montreal, Ilya had tried his hardest to be just that. He couldn't flat out be an open book from one day to another, but he could communicate these kinds of things to Shane. He'd waited for so long to show his affection towards his rival, it was basically pouring out of him now. Besides, now Ilya knew Shane felt the same way, which made it harder for Ilya to keep his feelings from overflowing.

The morning after the club had been cathartic for Ilya, and nothing short of magical. He got to be with Shane Hollander. And Shane wanted him back.

Shane's nose got that maddening shade of pink. "I missed you too."

For a moment, they just stared at each other through the video call. Ilya's heart simultaneously soared and ached at seeing Shane but not being able to touch him.

"Three more weeks and I get to kiss you," Shane said, breaking their silence. It wasn't necessarily a whisper, but it was low enough that it let Ilya know Shane was testing the waters of this new phase of their relationship.

Ilya smirked. "I'll be doing more than kissing you, Shane." Then Ilya's voice got lower, "I can tell you what I want to do to you, once I have you in my arms."

The pink in Shane's cheeks deepened and Ilya wanted to high-five himself for riling him up. From their time together, Ilya knew that Shane wasn't as comfortable expressing himself verbally when it came to sex. But the times he had, Shane had visibly enjoyed himself. So Ilya pushed a little further. "Or you could tell me how you would like to be fucked."

Even from the visual on his screen, Ilya could see Shane's chest rising and falling a tad bit faster. If he had to bet, he would bet his entire collection of sports cars that Shane was getting hard. Ilya was halfway there himself.

Shane parted his lips but nothing came out.

"How about you show me, instead?" Ilya offered.

"Wha—how?" Shane was flustered.

So Ilya took the initiative by propping his phone against a high pillow and took off his shirt. "I want to watch you. Show me what you want me to do to you."

"A-are you sure?" Shane asked while moving his phone a little further.

"I'm sure," Ilya's voice had gone two octaves lower. "You're my favorite view, Shane." Those were the truest words Ilya had spoken. How had he gotten so lucky? He certainly didn't deserve Shane, but somehow the universe had granted him this one wish. And he'd do anything to make himself better. And maybe someday he'd be good enough to deserve Shane Hollander.

Ilya's praise seemed to be the encouragement Shane needed because he slipped his shirt off. Then there was some rustling and Ilya was treated to the sight that was Shane, naked, and already hard. "Are we really doing this?"

"Show me," Ilya rasped.

Shane closed his eyes and snaked his hand down his toned chest and abs until he reached his cock. Lazily, he started stroking.

"Look at me while you touch yourself," Ilya instructed.

Shane fluttered his eyes open as he continued to pump his shaft.

Under his boxers, Ilya was already impossibly hard.

“I wish you were here, sucking me,” Shane breathed.

“There’s nothing I wouldn’t give to have you in my mouth, Shane.” Ilya’s chest was tight with a mix of desire and longing for his man. Ilya’s own hand found his erection.

“I can’t see you,” Shane pointed out, “I only see your hand moving. I want to see you too.”

Ilya chuckled before moving the phone and pillow farther.

Shane took that moment as an opportunity to reach for lube on his nightstand. When his lubed hand returned to his cock, Ilya’s entire body was in the frame.

They both stroked themselves, while watching the other. Shane tried his hardest to keep his eyes open but eventually his pleasure gave in and he dropped his head against the headboard.

Ilya on the other hand, couldn’t stop watching Shane coming undone. Precum already covered the tip of Shane’s cock.

“I wish you were inside me,” Shane said between pants.

“I know, sweetheart. Come for me,” Ilya’s cock throbbed as he stroked it, but he knew he could probably come just from looking at Shane chasing his pleasure.

Shane fucked his fist, and came with Ilya’s name on his mouth.

Ilya’s cock pulsed with need as he pumped himself. Shane’s dark eyes devoured Ilya through the screen.

“You’re so fucking hot, Ilya,” Shane said between gulps of air. “And you’re mine. Only mine.”

That’s all Ilya needed to jump over the edge. Ribbons of cum spurted from his cock, covering most of his chest and stomach.

More than ever he wished he could be next to Shane. Holding him. Kissing him.

“Three more weeks before we see each other,” said Shane, after both their breathing evened out.

Ilya nodded while grabbing the phone and bringing it closer to him. “I can’t wait.”

* * *

ALL-STAR GAME - TAMPA BAY

THREE WEEKS LATER

Ilya hadn't seen Shane in four weeks. Sure, they'd texted and called almost every night, but it wasn't the same. As he sipped on his beer at the bar where the All-Star welcome party was happening, Ilya scanned the room, anxiously waiting for Hollander to appear.

How would it be to finally be face-to-face again? During the last few weeks they had gotten closer, talking about everything and nothing at all. Ilya knew Hollander's favorite restaurant now, a boring burger joint next to where he grew up in Ottawa. Ilya wanted Shane to take him there, someday.

They hadn't talked about their future together during those phone calls though. He wasn't sure where Hollander stood, but Ilya knew he was in it for the long haul. Something told Ilya that Shane Hollander was it for him. Ilya wanted forever with Shane.

As he nursed his beer and pretended to listen to a conversation happening between Scott Hunter and another player from Boston, he saw Shane walk through the doors.

Shane.

Ilya's heart skipped so many beats he thought he'd flatlined. Shane looked better than he remembered, if that were even possible. And Ilya's anxiousness turned immediately to giddiness.

Smiling, Shane patted the backs of a few of his Montreal teammates. He only made a few steps into the venue when other players approached him. It seemed everyone wanted Shane's attention.

And Ilya was no different. For the life of him, Ilya couldn't take his eyes off of Shane. Shane must've noticed the weight of Ilya's gaze because he looked past the shoulders of the player he was talking to and locked eyes with Ilya.

The breath caught in Ilya's throat. And everything around Ilya sort of stopped. Even the chatter of the bar ceased. All that existed in his tunnel vision was Shane Hollander smiling at him.

Ilya wanted to stop pretending he was listening to the boring conversation, cross the bar, and give Shane a hard and long kiss.

"Do you agree, Rozanov?" Scott Hunter asked. One of his brows arched as he waited for Ilya to reply.

"Eh, yeah, sure," Ilya supplied. He had no clue what he had agreed to but ultimately, he didn't care.

The other Boston player talking to Hunter didn't seem to notice, or care either, about Ilya's reply. Because he nodded and asked both Ilya and Scott if they wanted a beer refill. When both of them declined, the player took his leave.

Ilya was about to do the same, when Hunter said in a low voice, “You might want to be a little more discreet.”

Ilya furrowed his brows in confusion. “What do you mean?”

Scott Hunter, with his hundred-year old wisdom, sighed. “About Hollander.”

“Hollander? What about Hollander?” Ilya shifted his gaze from Scott to Hollander and back. He had no clue what discreet meant but based on the way Scott was looking at him, Ilya could only assume it was about Hollander and Ilya being together.

Scott Hunter knew Ilya was bisexual, he had told him at the Scott Hunter Party night, right after Hunter came out as the first openly gay hockey player. But Hunter didn’t know about Shane’s sexuality. Did he?

Scott sighed again and explained, “Hollander didn’t deny it. About you two.”

To that Ilya stood a little taller. And tried his hardest not to let his face give any indication of his surprise. Had Shane said something to Scott Hunter? Why hadn’t Hollander said anything to Ilya before?

“By your reaction, I’m assuming it’s a secret and maybe you want to keep it that way? With you being rivals and all... So, just be less obvious.” Before Ilya could confirm or deny anything, Scott took a gulp of beer and left Ilya standing at the bar, perplexed, as he watched hockey’s oldest player walk away.

Ilya wasn’t sure how Scott knew about him and Hollander, but the ancient man was right. Ilya needed to keep it together. And yet, his eyes kept drifting to wherever Hollander was. The pull Shane had on Ilya was stronger than that of the moon on the tides.

However, all the years they were secretly hooking up, came in handy. For the rest of the night, Ilya and Shane ignored each. But as the beer flowed, and the hockey players became more rowdy, Ilya became more restless. As he was joining a group of players, Ilya passed next to Shane and brushed his fingers against Shane’s lower back. If he hadn’t been so close, Ilya would’ve missed Shane’s small gasp. The electricity that coursed through Ilya after that small contact, left him breathless. It was as if a match had lit up an entire forest fire inside him.

Twenty or so minutes later, Ilya couldn’t take it anymore. As he made his way to the elevator, he pulled out his phone and texted Shane his room number.

* * *

Ilya had barely made it to his room when there was a knock on the door. He looked through the peephole to make sure it was indeed Shane. The door hadn’t even closed behind Hollander, when Ilya found himself pinned to the opposite wall. Shane’s fists gripped onto Ilya’s shirt and his lips pressed hard on Ilya’s.

Ilya loved this side of Shane and was reveling in the warmth of Shane's tongue on his. Roughly, Shane sank his fingers into Ilya's hair and pulled at his curls. Four weeks without Shane had been too much. Too long.

Holding onto Shane's hips, Ilya walked them backwards until Shane was pinned to the door.

"Oh, God," Shane whimpered when Ilya dropped wet, desperate kisses down his exposed neck.

Throughout the past years, Ilya had memorized where Shane liked to be touched and kissed. In this aspect, he knew Shane so well. And that filled Ilya with pride.

"On the bed," Ilya said, but it sounded more like a plea than a command. It had been so long since they'd last been together, Ilya was sure he'd combust the moment he sank into Shane .

Across from him, Shane's pupils were dark with need. Quickly he stripped down and folded his clothes, before stretching over the white covers of the hotel bed. God, Hollander laying on the bed, was one of his favorite sights. Only topped by Shane wearing his glasses, and Shane blissfully smiling at him.

With his heart pounding—from a combination of love and lust—Ilya climbed on top of Shane, dropping kisses from Shane's knee all the way to his neck.

"I need you inside me, Ilya," Shane groaned as Ilya kissed his jaw. "But I might not last long...it's been a while. Since Montreal."

"Same," Ilya replied, tracing his lips down Shane's torso. He was so lost in his desire for Shane, it felt like a bucket of cold ice was dropped on him when Shane went perfectly still.

Ilya stopped what he was doing and immediately looked up at Shane. The other man's face was one of surprise.

"What's wrong?" Ilya studied Shane's face to figure out if he'd hurt him in some way.

But then Shane framed Ilya's face with his hands. "You haven't been with anyone since we were together at my place?"

Ilya shook his head. "Of course not." A twinge of panic pressed down on Ilya's chest. Had he done something wrong? But if he did, why was Shane smiling?

That smile right there, was Ilya's favorite sight in the world.

Shane slid his fingers through Ilya's curls, gentle this time, until they rested on the base of Ilya's neck. "You haven't. But it's been weeks." It wasn't a question. "Does that mean, we're...Are you my...Are we like..."

Ilya's knee-jerk reaction was to say something sarcastic to deflect where this conversation was heading, but he promised he'd be completely honest with Hollander. Ilya locked his gaze with Shane. "I'm yours, Shane. Only yours."

A little more nervous than before, Shane asked, “Are we...like together?”

“I think so. Probably. Yes.” Ilya had never been in a relationship. For the entirety of his adult life he’d cruised from hook up to hook up. And he wasn’t sure if he would be any good at it. But so far, everything he’d experienced with Hollander had been different. “Unless you don’t want to.” Now it was Ilya who was a little nervous. “If you don’t we could—”

“I want to, yes!” Hollander cut him off. “So much.”

The weight of Ilya’s nerves eased and he leaned in to give Shane a bruising kiss.

When they both came up for air, Shane said, “Please fuck me.”

Ilya wanted nothing more. “On your stomach.” He’d prepared for this, by bringing everything they’d need for their reunion. Ilya grabbed the lube and condoms and made Shane ready for him.

Underneath him, Shane moaned and lifted his hips until the side of his face was pressed onto the pillow.

Before sinking into Shane, Ilya traced the length of Shane’s spine with kisses. Once he reached his neck, he asked, “Ready?”

As a reply, Shane made an approving sound.

Careful, Ilya slid into Shane.

Their groans echoed against the walls of the generic Floridian hotel room.

After a few thrusts, Shane began to fuck Ilya back. The sound of skin against skin, and the breathy moans from Shane were enough to drive Ilya to the edge. He held onto Shane’s hips and buried his cock over and over.

“Ilya, I’m almost there,” Shane breathed, reaching back with his hand until it found purchase on Ilya’s strained forearm.

He knew it was physically impossible, but Ilya needed to find a way to be closer to Shane. Without slowing the pace of his hips, Ilya leaned his chest over Shane’s back until they were both flushed together. Ilya interlaced his finger over Shane and pressed their palms to the bed, right next to Shane’s face, while whispering in Russian, “You’re my everything, Shane Hollander.”

From their previous phone conversations Ilya knew that particular phrase wasn’t something Shane understood. But that didn’t stop Shane from replying, “*Ya tebya lyublyu.*”

The rhythm of their hips stuttered. They were close to coming.

Ilya dropped sloppy, wet kisses on Shane’s cheek and temple.

And Shane whimpered in English this time, “Fuck, like that Ilya. Fuck, I love you so much.”

That's what made Ilya explode. His entire body shook with the orgasm that coursed through him like a bolt of lightning. Shane wasn't far behind. Ilya didn't stop grinding on Shane until Shane tensed and relaxed under him.

As they lay in bed, catching their breaths, Ilya wasn't sure where to put all his emotions. So he wrapped Shane in his arms, fully planning on never letting him go.

Soon though, Shane would have to go back to his hotel room. But he wanted as much time as he could with Shane. As he stroked Shane's hair, Ilya asked, "Discreet, what does it mean?"

"To be careful, like if you want to keep a secret. Why?"

"Scott Hunter says I need to be more discreet when it comes to you. He knows about us. Said you didn't deny it before. You didn't tell me."

Shane lifted his head from Ilya's chest, his face pinched. "He said something to me on the ice a few years back. Before the Olympics in Sochi. Something like, I was starting to sound like you. We got into a fight. But a few hours later he texted and said he wouldn't tell anyone. I didn't reply, which I guess he took as admission."

Ilya's mouth dropped to his chest in amusement. "Was this time you fought him after the game finished?"

Shane nodded.

Ilya couldn't help but laugh. "You know, I always wondered if all that was about me."

"Not everything is about you, you know," Shane chirped.

"This was," Ilya shook his eyebrows suggestively.

"You're an asshole."

"Why asshole? He's hot. I'm *really* hot. Makes sense you would fight for me."

Shane slapped him on the shoulder but a soft smile betrayed his fake annoyance. To hide it, he left the bed and walked to the bathroom, presumably to clean up. Moments later that was confirmed by the sound of running water.

While Shane was busy, Ilya stared at the ceiling, rehearsing different ways in which he could ask Shane what the next steps in their relationship would be. As Shane returned to the room, Ilya took a deep breath to summon the courage to ask, "Do you want us to come out?" Ilya was terrified of the idea. Although he wanted to tell the entire world that this wonderful man was only his, coming out meant he could never go back home to see his family.

Sitting on the side of the bed, Shane worried his bottom lip between his teeth. "I...I don't know. I don't think so. Our careers—But if you want to—maybe I could—" Shane looked away. His breaths got shallow.

“Shane.” Ilya sat up. “Shane, breathe.” Ilya placed a palm on Shane’s cheek and nudged him to look at him. Shane met Ilya’s eyes. “We don’t have to. At least not now. Or ever, if you don’t want to.”

“Do you want to?” Shane said after his breathing evened out.

Ilya could tell Shane about his complicated family dynamics. That his father was in the later stages of dementia. Or how devastating the consequences would be for Ilya to come out as bisexual in his home country. But he said none of that. Instead he replied with the most honest answer he had to give, “I would like to have a future with you. A real future.”

“I do too. Is it okay if we take some time to figure something out?”

Ilya nodded before pressing his lips to Shane’s temple

* * *

ALL-STAR GAME

Ilya had never had as much fun in a game as he was now. Playing side-by-side with Shane Hollander was an experience he never thought he’d have, but was thoroughly enjoying. Since the puck dropped, it was as if Shane could read Ilya’s mind and vice versa.

Ilya assisted Shane in scoring a goal. Together, they were unstoppable. And the quips from the opposite team only proved that further.

Shane celebrated the goal and Ilya beamed at him. That was his man right there, killing it on the ice. Ilya wanted to scream it from the rooftops with pride.

Unable to contain himself, as their whole team cheered, Ilya kissed the side of Shane’s helmet. “Great goal, captain.”

For a brief, almost imperceptible moment, Shane melted into Ilya’s side. “Thank you for the assist.”

In a low voice that only Hollander could hear, he said, “You can thank me properly later.”

Shane was suppressing a smile. Good thing the exertion of the game would be a good excuse for the color Hollander’s cheeks had acquired.

Content with the way he’d riled Shane up, Ilya patted Shane on the shoulder and took his place in the face-off.

The referee blew the whistle, and Ilya got a hold of the puck. In a swift move he passed the puck to Hollander who was behind him, exactly where Ilya expected him to be.

Shane skated away with the puck. He looked over his shoulder to grin at Ilya. Ilya was about to smile back but the sight of a player charging for Hollander stopped him.

Shane hadn't seen the other player yet, because he was still looking back at Ilya.

"Shane!" The panicked warning had barely left Ilya's lips when a player from the west conference slammed his body into Shane.

The noise of the crash was louder than the collective gasp from the crowd.

Ilya could've sworn his heart stopped beating the moment he saw Shane's body hit the ice. Every muscle in Ilya froze as he saw Shane crumpled, and unmoving.

It was as if time around Ilya had slowed to a crawl. The noise around him turned to static.

This couldn't be happening to him. Not again. Not again.

Please not again, Ilya's brain looped. I can't lose him too.

Flashes of finding his mother's unmoving body on the bathroom floor of their house back in Russia, swarm Ilya's thoughts. His chest tightened to the point of pain. It was getting really hard to inhale.

Please not again. I can't lose him. Not him too. Please don't take him from me, Ilya pleaded to whatever or whomever was up there listening. Please!

Ilya wasn't sure when his muscles had regained movement, but suddenly he found himself kneeling by Shane's side. Much like he had done when he was twelve.

"Shane, Shane!" He said desperately to his boyfriend. "Shane!"

He wanted to shake Hollander, but somewhere in his brain he knew that would only make things worse. But Shane's beautiful eyes remained closed. His entire face pinched in pain. And there was blood pooling on the ice. Ilya didn't know what to do. Why weren't the paramedics here? Why wasn't anyone helping?

Panic, like one he'd never felt before, clogged his throat.

"Shane, wake up! Please wake up. Please stay with me, please," Ilya pleaded, as if it would make a difference. As if Shane would magically stand up if he begged hard enough.

Ilya looked around, desperate to find someone, anyone that could help him. To his relief, people who looked like paramedics were sprinting on the ice to reach them.

He felt someone reach for his arm, and Ilya's first instinct was to fight them off. But Scott Hunter's voice broke the fog Ilya was trapped in. "Rozanov, let them help him."

Then the referee was there, telling both Ilya and Scott to get out of the way and to return back to the benches. But Ilya couldn't move. He was glued to the ice.

“Come on, Rozanov,” Scott whispered.

Ilya nodded. And he was grateful Scott Hunter helped him to his feet because Ilya didn’t think his legs would actually support him. Not when Shane was being put on a stretcher and the paramedics were telling an unconscious Shane to stay awake.

He still wasn’t responding.

Shane needed to wake up. He needed to be okay. Ilya couldn’t lose him.

The grip Hunter had on Ilya was strong enough that it grounded Ilya but not hard enough to bruise. “He’s going to be alright,” Scott murmured as he escorted Ilya to the sidelines.

“You don’t know that,” Ilya’s voice cracked. “You don’t know that.”

All Ilya wanted, as he watched the paramedics wheel Shane off of the ice, was to run after them. And tell Shane, one last time, that he loved him.

Chapter End Notes

As always, thank you so so much for your reading, your comments and kudos, they seriously make my day. Feel free to come find me over on threads or Instagram -- @romancerunner. I post updates on fics and other upcoming projects.

Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

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

Sweaty and dazed, Ilya changed into his clothes and left the arena towards the hospital. Blood rushed in his ears making it hard for Ilya to hear, and his throat felt like it was made of sand paper.

The ride to the hospital they'd taken Shane to would take Ilya, and the private rideshare he ordered, at least twenty-five minutes. Ilya knew where Shane was because reporters and sports broadcasters had posted about it online. No one, however, had any news on Shane's health status. Ilya feared the worst. His stomach flipped, and Ilya was sure he was close to throwing up on the pristine leather seats of the SUV.

As the rideshare stopped at a red light, all Ilya wanted to do was jump out of the car and sprint the remaining blocks. But that would surely get him spotted. So instead of leaving the car, he kept refreshing his feed in case ESPN announced something—anything!—related to Shane.

Ilya's display on the ice wasn't taken lightly by the referee, the coaches, or the fans, for that matter. Though it was a friendly game, his lack of sportsmanship got him kicked out of the game for misconduct. And the people of Twitter were quick to judge his outburst. Some speculated the worst of Ilya, saying he wanted to stop the paramedics from getting to Shane. While others came to Ilya's defense saying he felt guilty that he gave Hollander the unfortunate pass. Regardless, everyone agreed that Hollander's injury had been so great that it even managed to shock Ilya Rozanov. And no one, as far as Ilya could spot, had labeled Ilya's reaction for what it really was: heartbreak and gut-wrenching fear.

Had no one heard Ilya call out for Shane on the ice? Had Ilya imagined the whole thing? The replay on one of the tweets showed Scott Hunter pulling Ilya to the side, so at least Ilya knew that had happened.

Everything else was a complete blur.

But, Ilya couldn't care less what had really happened or what everyone was saying about him. Because he was on his way to Shane. That's all that mattered. Never in his life did Ilya think his reputation for being an asshole would come in handy. But in that moment, he was eternally grateful that people thought so little of him they failed to see what was in front of their eyes.

Ilya's hands were still shaking as he closed the door of the private rideshare and crossed the sterile lobby of the Tampa Bay hospital.

Holding himself back from breaking into a run—which would only bring attention to him—Ilya pulled his ballcap lower and prayed his sunglasses were enough to conceal his identity.

Before he reached the nurses station in the emergency room, Ilya took several deep breaths behind the vending machine. And hoped like all hell that his legs didn't give out in the few meters he still had to walk.

"Hello, I'm looking for a patient. Shane... Hollander." God, just saying his name in this setting made Ilya want to hurl. Shane shouldn't be here. He should be smiling and playing hockey. He shouldn't be— Flashes of Shane sprawled on the ice, blood pooling under him made Ilya's throat tighten.

"Are you family?" said the nurse without looking up from behind the computer. All Ilya could see was her blonde, almost white hair.

"Umm... no, I—" Ilya couldn't flat out say that he was Hollander's boyfriend. But he could still tell some sort of truth. That he was a fellow player who'd come to check up on a colleague's well being. It wouldn't be totally crazy. But Ilya was in Florida, a state that had a lot of Boston fans. Fans who were very aware of Ilya and Shane's legendary rivalry. Ilya decided to ignore the question of his relationship to Hollander all together and instead replied with, "He...umm... he came in ambulance. Not long ago."

His hesitation made the nurse look up. Her blue eyes widened at seeing Ilya. Well, there went all the hope that his disguise was enough to conceal him. She recognized him instantly.

"Are you—" The nurse started, but Ilya cut her off with a nod.

"Is he okay?" Ilya wanted nothing more than to see Shane. But he would settle for knowing if he was alive.

"I can't give you that information. Only family and next of kin." Her smile was apologetic.

Ilya, though, wanted to scream. If this were a normal day, he'd probably try to charm his way into wherever Shane was. But right now, his thoughts were scattered. And his throat ached with unshed tears.

"Please just tell me, is he—" the lump in his throat cut him off. "Is he alright?"

The nurse must've seen something in his body language, because her smile turned to one of sympathy. "Come with me."

Ilya wasn't sure where the nurse was taking him, but decided not to question it. He followed her into an elevator and prayed no one else recognized him. Especially not a press that were sure to be swarming around the building.

Ilya's entire body was shaking now. Each number displayed on the elevator sent jolts of fear to each one of his extremities. Not even when he was a child, had Ilya been this scared.

To his relief, the nurse didn't try to engage in any conversation as the elevator bolted up to the fifteenth floor. Soon, the doors dinged and both Ilya and the nurse stepped into a brightly lit hall. It was very empty, when compared to the emergency room.

“This is for VIPs,” the nurse explained in a soft, almost delicate voice. “I don’t know the status of Mr. Hollander, but the nurses on this floor may be able to help.”

Ilya nodded.

“Here, sweetie, you might need this.” The nurse handed him a fresh tissue from her pocket.

Confused, Ilya took it, and was about to ask why he needed it, when he realized his cheeks were wet under the sunglasses. “Thanks,” he said. Ilya hadn’t even realized when he started crying. Showing his emotions was really getting out of hand lately.

“Don’t worry about it.” She walked down the hall and motioned for Ilya to follow.

When they got to the nurses station, another nurse with dark skin and wearing a hijab almost the same color as her scrubs, greeted the nurse next to Ilya. “It’s been a while since we’ve seen you around here, Dana.”

“Tell me about it. The ER keeps me busy. Just dropping by to escort Mr. Rozanov. Could you come and find him when there’s news of Shane Hollander?”

The nurse pingponged her gaze between nurse Dana and Ilya. Then gave him a soft smile and nodded.

“Perlah will take care of you, sweetie. The waiting room is just down the hall. There’s some coffee and drinks there.” She pointed to a door a few meters down.

“Okay,” Ilya said. “Thank you. Really.”

Nurse Dana smiled. “I hope he’s doing okay.”

Before she walked back to the elevator, Ilya called out to her, “Nurse Dana, can I ask you not to tell anyone you saw me here?”

Her blue eyes went soft. “Your secret’s safe with us.”

Perlah, the other nurse, gave Ilya a small nod. “There’s a service elevator you can use.”

Ilya pressed his lips together to form something he hoped resembled a smile. He wished he could express how grateful he was for them, but no words left his tangled throat. As the door of the elevator closed behind nurse Dana, Ilya took a deep, shaky inhale, cleaned his face under the sunglasses, and walked to the waiting room.

* * *

The seconds stretched into minutes and the minutes into long hours. When Nurse Perlah checked up on him an hour or so into the waiting, she informed Ilya that Shane was in surgery. But that’s all she was able to share. She reassured Ilya that he’d be the first to know

when Shane was out of surgery and moved Ilya to what would be Shane's recovery suite. The room was spacious, with a living room. And though Ilya could make use of the big couch, he tucked himself in the farthest chair, trying really hard not to glance at the hospital bed Shane would occupy soon.

For the past four hours, Ilya didn't know what to do other than conjure the worst case scenarios. He tried to lose himself in rabbit holes on the internet to take his mind off the worry that was gnawing at him. But all scrolls lead back to clips of Shane getting hit.

Every time a replay of Shane's accident jumped into his screen, Ilya's stomach sank deeper. Could fate be so cruel as to take away the only person in the world who loved him? No, he couldn't think of that. He couldn't give that possibility any significant real estate in his mind.

Ilya would grow old with Shane. They would bicker and tease each other until their heads were full of grey hair and their skin was covered in wrinkles. Maybe have kids, grandkids and lots of dogs—if that's what Shane wanted. That was the only option here. It had to be because if it wasn't, Ilya didn't know what he would do. Or how he could possibly keep going.

To clear his head, Ilya opened the photo app on his phone and clicked on an album titled "Boring". The selfies he took of Shane and himself in Las Vegas, years ago, stared back at him. Those were the only six pictures Ilya allowed himself to keep of Shane. Those pictures were Ilya's most prized possession.

How needlessly foolish he'd been all those years by keeping his feelings for Shane hidden. They'd lost so much time. And now, they may never be able to make up for it.

The coffee in his hand had grown cold hours ago, but Ilya still held onto the cup as if it were a lifeline. Lost in a hurricane of thoughts, Ilya almost missed the phone vibrating on his other hand.

It was his brother Andrei.

Ilya had made a point to ignore his brother's phone calls for the entirety of the All Stars weekend. He hadn't wanted his family drama to taint the precious and limited time he had with Shane.

Now that Shane was in surgery, Ilya knew for certain he couldn't deal with his family. If he answered Andrei's call—who probably wanted more money, or to remind Ilya how useless he was—Ilya's chest would finally cave in on itself. He needed to keep the little strength he had left to wait for Shane.

"Mr. Rozanov," someone called for him from the door.

Ilya looked up from the phone he'd just turned off to find two women wearing scrubs standing close to the door. One had curly hair pulled in the bun, and the other had long blonde hair and glasses.

At once, Ilya stood up. “Yes?”

“I’m Dr. Garcia, and this is Dr. King. We’re the attendings who operated on Shane.” The pause Dr. Garcia took might’ve lasted a second, maybe two, but to Ilya it felt like years had gone by before she spoke again. “He’s going to be okay. The operation of his clavicle and arm were successful and he’ll make a full recovery. He also has a concussion which we’ll have to monitor for a few days.”

Then Dr. King added, “He needs to rest and won’t be able to play for a few months.”

“He’s okay?” Ilya asked them. He needed to hear them say it again. His heart was beating so hard against his ribcage he was sure it would leave a bruise.

“He’ll be okay,” Dr. Garcia replied.

The shaky breath Ilya let out shook each and every one of his bones. Shane was alive. Shane was okay. Shane was still here with him. He’d get to see Shane again.

“Can I see him?” Ilya’s voice was close to breaking again. The outline of both doctors became a little blurry. Ilya was sure his eyes were swimming in tears already. He didn’t care. Not when he knew that Shane was alive and would be alright.

Dr. King was the one who nodded. “He’ll be sedated for a while. But you can sit with him while he wakes up.”

“Okay,” he replied.

“Do you have any questions for us?” Dr. Garcia asked.

Ilya was about to shake his head when he remembered Shane’s parents. The various times Ilya had landed in the hospital due to a hockey injury he’d never called anyone other than his coach. Even when he was in the junior leagues, his father would only come to pick him up after Ilya had been stitched up. But Hollander would want to make sure his parents were aware of what was happening. “Have you told his parents he’s out of surgery?”

“We have. They’re stuck in Mexico until tomorrow. We’ve also informed Shane’s team,” replied Dr. Garcia.

Ilya straightened his back. If anyone from the league was on their way to see Shane, it would be unwise for Ilya to be here. At the same time, Ilya couldn’t even fathom the possibility of leaving Shane’s side anytime soon.

As if reading the distress in Ilya’s face, Dr. King added, “Visiting hours for non-family members don’t start until tomorrow at eight.”

All Ilya could do was nod or he would break right there.

“He’ll be here shortly.” That was Dr. Garcia speaking. “He may be a little groggy from all the anesthesia. Let us know if either of you need anything.”

“Thank you,” Ilya practically whispered.

“Of course,” she said before both doctors left Ilya alone.

* * *

Ilya stood in the corner of the room as the nurses brought Shane to the hospital suite. They hooked him to different beeping machines while typing into their tablets.

Shane looked so small, so fragile in the hospital bed. It broke Ilya’s heart to see him like that.

When it was just him and Shane, Ilya pulled up a chair next to Shane’s bed and kissed his knuckles. Then held his hand, to reassure himself that Shane was there. That he wouldn’t vanish if Ilya took his eyes away from him.

The day was starting to catch up to Ilya, but he forced himself to stay alert for the moment Shane woke up. Ilya needed to make sure Shane woke up.

“You’re the best thing that’s happened to me, Shane,” Ilya said in Russian. “My life had no color in it. Not until you showed up with your beautiful freckles and your weak backhand. Before meeting you, everything seemed pointless. And now, with you in it, my life is full.” Ilya took a deep inhale to calm his racing heart. “You know, I never thought I could allow myself to love anyone. Or that anyone would love me back. But then you came along and as always, proved me wrong. It’s a privilege to love you, Shane Hollander. One I will never, ever, take for granted.” He kissed Shane’s hand again.

“If you were to leave, I don’t know if I could ever love again. I’m so afraid to lose you.” Ilya choked on his own words. “Fuck, Shane. I wish I could go back in time and send that puck to someone else. I wish I could’ve been the one to take that hit instead of you. I wish—God, I wish you would wake up right now. Tell me I’m an asshole or something. I just need you to tell me you’re alright. I promise to take care of you, as long as you’ll let me, I’ll take care of you. Just please, please wake up for me, sweetheart. Wake up because if you don’t—fuck. Please just wake up.”

All of Ilya’s fear and love streamed down his cheeks. All the tears he had valiantly fought all day, found a way out. In the privacy of the suite, he didn’t even try to stop them.

Ilya lightly squeezed Shane’s hand before pressing his forehead to it.

One of Shane’s fingers twitched.

For the first time in hours, the lump in Ilya’s throat eased. He raised his head to find dark eyelashes fluttering open.

“Shane?” Ilya asked, a little wary. There was a real possibility that he’d fallen asleep on Shane and this was all just a dream.

Beautiful brown eyes focused on Ilya’s face. “ILLYYYYYYAAAAAAAAA,” Shane drawled. “Ilyyaaaaaaaaa.”

Okay, this had to be real because not even in Ilya’s wildest dreams would Shane be this high.

“How are you feeling?” Ilya asked as softly as he could.

Shane took a deep inhale and with an exhale relaxed into the pillow. “I’m feeling sleep-py.”

Ilya cupped Shane’s cheek and with his thumb stroked his freckles. “You should sleep. I’m here.”

“You’re heeereee,” Shane sighed. “I’m happyyou’re... here.” The pain meds made Shane’s words slur a little. “Pleasedon’tleave. I...wantyouhere.”

“I won’t leave. I promise.”

“Good. Good. That’s good.” Shane’s eyes fluttered closed. Before Ilya could say anything, Shane had fallen asleep, with his fingers interlaced with Ilya’s.

* * *

For the next few hours, Ilya alternated between drifting off on the chair next to Shane and guarding over his boyfriend—in case Shane needed anything. And honestly, Ilya feared that if he did fall asleep all the way, he would wake up to find Shane gone forever. If Ilya had it his way, after all of this was over, he was going to wrap Shane in bubblewrap.

Shane’s arm stirred, which made Ilya sit up straight in his chair. Shane opened his eyes, and though still sleepy, he seemed more alert than the previous times he’d woken up.

“Heeey...” Shane’s smile stretched across his face. It was as if he had no worries at all.

Ilya smiled back. “How are you feeling?”

“Mmmmmmm.... Like a six foot two hockey player knocked me out cold.”

Ilya pressed his lips into a thin line and cupped Shane’s cheek. “You scared me.”

“I’m sorry. I’m okay.” Shane sounded a little more sober. “I’m okay.”

And Ilya’s chest might rip in fucking half from the accumulated anguish of the past day, but also from pure joy of knowing Shane would be okay. Shane was coming back to him. With

every minute that ticked by, Shane was recovering. And each time he heard Shane speak, it felt like a warm and tender hug.

Shane gripped Ilya's hand. "Thank you for being here."

"There's no place I would rather be." Though every nurse and doctor on this floor probably knew that Ilya was in Shane's hospital suite, Ilya still looked towards the closed door before standing up and brushing his lips to Shane's forehead.

A sigh of content escaped Shane's lips. When Ilya returned to the chair, Shane had one eye closed. Then the other followed.

"Sleep. I'll be here for as long as I can, yes?" He'd have to leave in a few hours before Shane's parents and his coach came to visit, but there was still some time.

"Okay," Shane mumbled. "Don't go."

Ilya squeezed Shane's hand to reassure him.

"Oh, Ilya?" Shane dragged his words.

"Yes?"

"Can you tell my parents I'm okay? They'll worry."

"Of course. I'll make sure the hospital calls them."

Shane hummed his approval. "Thank... you." And just like that, Shane was out like a light.

Ilya stayed vigilant of the machines for the rest of the time he was allowed to stay with Shane. He was extremely nervous of leaving Shane, but he knew his parents would take good care of him.

He just wished everything was different and he could stay with Shane until he was discharged. But that wasn't the case. To the world, Shane and Ilya hated each other. They were nothing more than rivals.

As dawn peaked through the hospital windows, Ilya untangled his fingers from Shane's and dropped one last kiss to his forehead.

"I love you," he whispered against Shane's skin in Russian. "More than anything in this world."

Thank you so much for reading! Hope you enjoyed the little cameo from The Pitt characters :D

And as always, thank you so so much for your comments and kudos, they seriously make my day. Feel free to come find me over on threads or Instagram -- @romancerunner. I post updates on fics and other upcoming projects.

Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

Thank you so much for reading thus far!

Three things I'd like to mention before you read this chapter:

1. The hockey/playoff timelines are way off.
2. I promise this is the last chapter Ilya goes through it.
3. I might break chapter 7 into two chapters because it's getting a little long. (will post soon)

Happy reading!

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

Ilya woke with a jolt to the sound of a ringtone. His heart hammered at the base of his throat. Ilya had given his phone number to nurse Perlah in case Shane's health took a turn for the worse. She'd assure him Shane was stable, but also promised to keep him updated.

Frantically, Ilya scrambled around the bed covers until he found the phone. To his immediate relief, it wasn't the hospital, just Andrei. Again.

Just like he'd done countless times yesterday, he ignored his brother's call. Ilya would return the call as soon as he had some coffee and food in him. Maybe this would be the day he told his brother once and for all to fuck off.

It had been only a few hours since Ilya stumbled into his hotel room, exhausted from the entire night of standing vigil over Shane. A headache due to the lack of sleep pounded at the bottom of Ilya's skull

He took in a few deep breaths. Shane was okay. He was probably still sleeping and recovering. Ilya hoped Shane's parents had already arrived from Mexico. He would feel better if he knew for certain that Shane wasn't alone.

Ilya had a few days off before his next game, and though a little hasty, before falling asleep he'd come up with a plan to stay in Tampa Bay, close to Shane. He was sure the nurses would help him sneak in and out.

The only trouble would be telling Shane his plans. But that would be a bridge Ilya would cross once he got to it. He was sure some coffee and eggs would allow him to gain clarity.

Knowing full well he wouldn't be able to go back to sleep now that he was awake, he ordered room service. Ilya was still feeling too raw and exposed from yesterday's emotions to run

into anyone from the hockey world. He was better off hiding in his hotel room until everyone left.

The coffee and hearty breakfast arrived thirty minutes later. After eating and drinking, Ilya felt way better than he had since leaving the hospital at the crack of dawn.

As he nibbled on a piece of buttered toast, Ilya wished Shane was with him. No matter how much he kept reassuring himself Shane was okay, Ilya couldn't shake the fear he felt of losing the man he loved.

Finally, with the coffee swimming in his veins, the exhaustion took a back seat for a few glorious minutes. A plan for visiting Shane was starting to take form. Maybe he could stay in this hotel a few more days, lay low and then go see Shane right before visiting hours were over. He wasn't sure he would be allowed to stay overnight again, but a glimpse at Shane was better than nothing. He'd take anything he could get.

Possibilities brewed inside Ilya's mind. He'd have to get creative to get back by Shane's side. But he most certainly would.

Maybe today Shane would be better and they'd allow him to have his phone. That would be really helpful.

Just in case they gave Shane his phone back today, Ilya send him a quick text: *Call me when you're awake?*

And followed it up with: *I love you.*

Then he remembered Shane's parents would probably be there and Shane wouldn't be able to call Ilya, anyway.

A deep ache strangled Ilya's chest. More than anything, Ilya wanted to be able to tell the world that he was Shane's. That Shane was his. He wanted to claim his boyfriend. Stand by his side. Openly love him. But... as far as Ilya knew, Shane's parents didn't even know Shane was gay. Or that he'd broken up with Rose.

Ilya was a dirty little secret and he hated everything about it.

He shook his head to clear his foggy thoughts. It wasn't only Shane who was keeping secrets after all. Ilya hadn't come out to anyone either. And he probably wouldn't. Not as long as he had to go back to Russia in the off-season.

As if he'd summoned his family with his thoughts, Ilya's phone buzzed on the table again. His brother needed to stop calling him. At this point Ilya would give Andrei whatever amount of money he wanted, just so he would let him breathe. Even thousands of miles away, his family managed to suffocate him.

Ilya pressed the phone to his ear and snapped in Russian, "What the fuck do you want?"

His brother didn't snark back right away like he usually did, which should've been Ilya's first indicator that something was really wrong.

But then, Andrei let the silence stretch for more than was comfortable. And then let out a shaky breath. Even before Andrei replied, Ilya already knew what was wrong. He'd been expecting it, after all. But the knowledge of it didn't make the news any easier. Ilya's stomach sank when his brother said, "He's dead."

It was complicated, mourning someone Ilya already knew would die. A part of Ilya thought he had already made peace with it, long before this moment. And yet, he choked at the news that his father was no longer with them.

It's true, Ilya's father had never had anything nice to say to Ilya. He was unkind to him and his mother. For as long as Ilya could remember, he'd been afraid of his father. Of his harshness, his critiques, and the way he belittled Ilya every opportunity he had. But... he was his father. Ilya's only living parent. Grigori Rozanov was the only constant in Ilya's life. And he was gone.

Despite all the conflicting emotions, what really struck Ilya was the overwhelming sadness of not being by his father's side when he took his last breath. That knowledge was painful in ways Ilya couldn't quite even begin to understand. He should feel free. Instead, he felt like the walls around him were collapsing. He was beginning to drown under a wave of grief.

"When?" Ilya asked after a brief moment of silence.

For the first time in a long time, Andrei didn't snark or insult Ilya. He just said, "Last night."

That's why Andrei was calling so insistently. Shame and guilt rose inside Ilya's chest. He didn't answer when his father was on his deathbed. He forfeited his last chance to talk to his father. Not that Ilya would've even known what to say. His entire relationship with him was complicated. Ilya hated the man his father was. But also, sympathized with the version of him that had fallen ill.

"It was quick," Andrei added as if reading Ilya's thoughts. It wasn't characteristic of his brother to give Ilya any type of comfort. So Ilya was grateful for that. "We need to prepare the funeral. When will you get here?"

"Okay," Ilya said after a few beats. Andrei didn't need to ask for money for the funeral, it was implied in the question. "I'll be there soon." Ilya didn't wait for Andrei to reply before he hung up the phone.

Exhausted and grief-stricken, Ilya slumped into the chair. He foolishly wished the inanimate object would take some of the burden off his shoulders. It didn't. Since he was seventeen and got drafted to the NHL, Ilya had carried family burdens that weren't his to carry. And yet his father and brother dumped them on Ilya anyway. What would happen now that his father was gone?

More than ever, Ilya wanted Shane to be there with him. For Shane to hold him, and protect him from the avalanche of responsibility that was sure to be waiting for Ilya back in Russia.

He wanted to be so overwhelmed by Hollander that Ilya could forget the shitty cards he'd been dealt with. But right now, Shane was the one who needed Ilya. And Ilya couldn't be there for him. Ilya would have to leave to go back to a place he wasn't welcomed, to a family that hated him, instead of being where he wanted to be, by Shane's side.

Ilya was tired of doing everything on his own. He was completely drained from being everything for everyone back in Moscow. And no matter how much he did, it was never enough. Even now, after caring for all his father's bills, he failed to be there for him in the moments that mattered.

"Fuck, fuck!" This couldn't be happening. Ilya ran a hand over his face. It felt like the entire weight of the world was collapsing onto him. The muscles in his shoulders tightened to the point where it was becoming hard to take another breath.

He tried though, to inhale, and then exhale.

Eventually, after he managed to lift his face from his hands, and his breathing was less labored, Ilya stood up from the chair, and started packing.

* * *

Jane: The nurses told me they texted you yesterday.

Jane: Thank you for coming. I'm sorry we didn't get to spend the night together like we planned to.

Jane: Are you still in Florida? Can I see you?

Jane: Are you okay?

Jane: Is everything alright? I haven't heard from you in a few days.

Jane: I'm leaving the hospital today, driving back to Ottawa with my parents so I don't have to fly with a concussion.

Jane: Ilya? Why aren't you playing tonight?

Jane: Did something happen? ESPN is not saying anything about why you're not playing.

Jane: I'm worried. Please answer me.

A week and a half had gone by since Ilya left his hotel in Tampa. The nurses from the hospital kindly let him know Shane's health status as he was en-route to the airport. After

that, Ilya wanted to reach out to Shane, tell him everything that had happened since he arrived in Moscow, but he simply couldn't.

Everything from organizing the funeral, to dealing with his family and all his father's affairs had drained Ilya. Ilya felt so unworthy of anything resembling affection, that it was hard to even think about talking to Shane. Or sharing his feelings with him. Besides, Shane needed to focus all his energy on recovering, not on Ilya's shit-show of a life.

He loved Shane so much, which was why Ilya couldn't just let Shane see how broken Ilya really was. He didn't want Shane to regret choosing him. Ilya always knew he didn't deserve Shane, and the way he was handling his father's death and the fallout with his family, was only proof of that. He hadn't even told Shane yet that his father was sick. Or that coming back to Russia only amplified the heart-wrenching absence of his mother. He'd never told Shane how debilitating and disheartening it was for him to come back here. He didn't want Shane to see him like this.

Another text popped up.

Jane: Ilya, please.

Ilya considered ignoring Shane's text until he could keep his emotions in check, but he missed him so much. The absence of Shane was eating away at him faster than the grief, shame, and loneliness ever could. Without Shane, Ilya felt like he was drowning.

And he was tired of fighting his thoughts. His grief.

So Ilya took his phone and replied: *I'm okay.*

Jane: Where are you?

Lily: Back home.

Lily: Moscow.

Jane: Why? Is everything alright?

Lily: Yes.

Lily: I don't know.

Lily: Probably not.

Lily: It's bad.

The bubbles on Ilya's screen appeared and disappeared a few times. Then after what seemed like an eternity later, a new message from Shane appeared.

Jane: Can I call you?

Right then and there, Ilya wanted to shed all the tears that he'd been holding hostage for the past week and a half. He nodded into the empty room before replying to Shane.

A few moments later, his phone rang with a video call.

"You're okay? How are you feeling?" Ilya asked as soon as Shane's beautiful face appeared on the screen. He was wearing a sling and had a visible bruise close to his temple. Ilya's stomach curled at the reminders that Shane had been hurt, because of him.

"I'm better. At my parent's house in Ottawa." Shane's eyes scanned Ilya's face through the screen. "But you knew that. The nurses told me they told you about me."

Ilya nodded. "I'm sorry I couldn't be there when you woke up."

Shane shook his head. "You were there when it mattered. I might've been all drugged up but I remember you there. Thank you. It made me feel safe, knowing you were there."

Ilya gave him a soft smile. Even during one of the worst moments of his life, Shane could manage to make Ilya feel better. Ilya really didn't deserve him. "I would've stayed longer. If I could."

"What's wrong? Why are you back in Russia?" Shane sounded so concerned. Ilya wanted to kick himself for making him worry. Shane already had enough to worry about with his recovery.

Ilya deflated. The walls he had purposely built from the moment he got on the plane to Moscow came crumbling down like a house of cards. He knew talking to Shane would do this to him. "I-I," Ilya cleared his throat. "My father..."

"Is he okay?"

Ilya shook his head. "Dead."

Shane's eyes widened. "Ilya, I'm so sorry."

"Is okay. He was sick for a long time. Dementia." Ilya hadn't allowed himself to cry, but the look of sympathy in Shane's face was edging him to his breaking point. Ilya took a deep breath to steady himself. "I'll be back soon. Maybe I can still get the team to playoffs." Though with the way the Raiders had played these past few days, Ilya worried that he would get back to a disqualified team.

"You can take more time. I'm sure your team will understand."

"No," Ilya said, decisively. "I want to go back." Then with a sigh confessed, "I don't want to be here anymore."

Shane pressed his lips into a thin line. With caution in his voice, he asked, "Is your mother doing—"

"Also dead," Ilya interrupted. "A long time ago."

To that Shane let out a small exhale. “Do you have anyone there to keep you company?”

“My brother and his family. But they are not good company. My friend Svetlana, she’s here. She cares for me.”

Shane’s nose did a slightly adorable wrinkle when he asked, “Your friend from Boston?” Ilya had told Shane the last time he was in Boston that he and Svetlana occasionally hooked up. Ilya had also mentioned that they would never be more than friends.

“Yes. She is friend. Only friend,” Ilya reassured him.

Shane let his shoulders drop. “I’m happy you have someone there with you.” Then after a pause, “I wish I was there with you.”

Ilya’s heart squeezed. “I wish you were here too. I miss you.”

“I love you,” Shane replied. And that right there made Ilya’s tumultuous, dark day, a little more calm and a little more bright.

* * *

“Since the Raiders got disqualified, I wanted to ask you something,” Shane said through video call two days later.

Ilya quirked up one of his eyebrows, encouraging Shane to continue.

“I wanted to know...” Shane was nervous, Ilya could tell by the way he was chewing on his cheek.

“Shane, what’s wrong?”

“Nothing. Nothing.” Shane took a deep breath, as if bracing himself for a battle Ilya wasn’t aware was happening. For a brief moment, he worried Shane had realized Ilya was in fact a terrible choice of a boyfriend and would finally dump him. But then, instead of breaking things off with Ilya, Shane blurted, “Willyoucometomycottage? Instead of going back to Boston, come here.”

Shane spoke so fast, it left Ilya stunned. “What?”

“No one will know. Well, that’s not true. My parents—” Shane took a big gulp of air before saying, “—they know about me... ummm... me being gay.”

Ilya was happy Shane came out to his parents, but he still wasn’t sure he fully understood what was happening. Had Shane just invited him to stay at his house? Or was his sleep-deprived brain making things up?

“And about you.” Shane continued. “Well, us. It’s sorta happened. I kinda blurted out, actually. My mom was so worried about me and kept asking why I was so distracted. I think she thought the concussion was getting worse or something. And I was so tired of hiding how wonderful you are with me. And how much I wished I was there with you instead of being stuck here, with this stupid sling in my arm. I just... I couldn’t take it anymore. I told them.” Shane’s shoulders slumped. “I’m sorry I didn’t ask you before. If you were okay with me telling them about us, I mean.”

Ilya’s eyes went wide. He could see his reflection in the tiny picture on the corner of the screen. “Your parents know? About us?”

With how fast Shane kept speaking, Ilya wasn’t sure he caught everything he said. And Ilya wanted to be one-hundred percent sure his brain wasn’t supplying the things he longed to hear. But even without confirmation, Ilya’s heart was already soaring, leaping to wonderful conclusions.

Shane paled. “Yes. I’m sorry. They’re really happy for me. For us. They couldn’t believe it at first, which makes total sense. But after—especially when I told them you were there with me at the hospital—they were happy to know that I have you. They want to meet you. I know it’s a lot. And of course if you choose to come, we wouldn’t be staying at their house. They have a cottage like ten minutes away from mine. But maybe they could come for dinner sometime... so you can meet them? I’d really like that, actually.” The freckles on Shane’s face had gone that maddening shade of pink Ilya loved. “I know it’s sudden, but I really want to see you. And be with you for more than a few hours. We both don’t have to play until next season starts. We could have a few weeks to ourselves. But it’s... just an idea. If you hate it or whatever, I understand.” Shane’s chest was visibly rising and falling.

Ilya should tell Shane to take a deep breath before he hyperventilated, but all Ilya could do was grin. Someone knew about them. *Shane’s parents knew about Ilya’s role in Shane’s life.* And they didn’t barf at the idea that Shane was in love with Ilya. And more importantly, Shane wanted Ilya to come visit. He could relish in Shane’s warmth for days, weeks even. Soak in his love, and wake up next to the man he loved every day.

Every fiber in Ilya’s being was vibrating with a resounding yes.

For the first time since Ilya got the news of his father, it felt like he could finally breathe. Like things in his life didn’t have to be so bleak. A light at the end of a very long, very dark tunnel. Last night, after another heartbreaking fight with his brother, Ilya had decided it was enough. Now that his father was gone, Ilya had no reason to return to what remained of his family. He couldn’t take it anymore. So, he would give Andrei his Moscow apartment so his brother could sell it. But other than that, he was done with being everyone’s wallet and punching bag. And for a while, following the fight, as Ilya laid in bed, staring at the ceiling, he had felt completely alone in the world. Unwanted. And unworthy.

But Shane’s invitation made him feel the opposite of that. The way Shane was looking at him now made Ilya feel loved. And wanted. And deserving of good things.

“Okay,” Ilya said softly, even though he wanted to scream his excitement from the rooftops.

“Yes?” Shane sounded surprised.

Ilya smiled even wider. “I’ll come to the cottage.”

Shane let out a loud exhale. “Okay. Good. Good. Great.”

Shane was so adorable in that moment, with his pink cheeks and wide smile, Ilya thought his heart might explode from all the love it was struggling to contain.

Chapter End Notes

As always, thank you so so much for your comments and kudos, they seriously make my day. Feel free to come find me over on threads or Instagram -- @romancerunner. I post updates on fics and other upcoming projects.

Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

Thank you so so much for reading thus far! And for all your lovely comments here and on threads. I cherish each and every one of them!

The cottage was getting a little long for one chapter so I decided to split it into two. The reason now I have 9 chapters on the overview section is because I wrote a short epilogue, but I'll probably upload both chapter 8 and 9 (epilogue) at the same time <3

Happy reading!

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

Ilya pulled his black cap a little lower as he crossed baggage claim at Ottawa's International Airport. Because Shane's arm was still in a sling, and he technically shouldn't be driving, they'd agreed Ilya would take a lyft to Shane's parent's house. Then, Ilya would take Shane's car and drive them to the cottage.

As he rolled his suitcase out onto the airport's pick-up area and into the rideshare, Ilya's hands were slightly shaking. He couldn't remember the last time he was this nervous. He had never met the parents of someone he was dating. And Ilya had most certainly never met the parents of someone he was madly in love with.

He wanted to make a good first impression. But he hadn't slept well in days and probably looked wrung and exhausted after traveling for more than twenty-four hours straight. According to Shane, his parents knew what Ilya had gone through in the past weeks. So maybe they wouldn't judge him as harshly. Ilya really hoped so, because he wanted to gain Yuna and David Hollander's approval. He even spent some of the restless hours on the plane googling them. Apparently David had played hockey during college and Yuna was a die-hard hockey fan.

If all else failed, Ilya could talk to them about hockey, he was sure.

Ilya sent a text to Shane letting him know he would be arriving soon. The car stopped outside of a long driveway concealed by a thick row of trees. Ilya thanked the driver and walked up to the small gate close to the house. He waited until the sound of tires rolling over gravel subsided, before he gathered the courage to ring the bell. However, before he managed to do just that, Shane opened the front door.

Ilya's heart leapt out of his chest. And his breath caught in his throat.

Shane.

His Shane.

Ilya was so grateful to see Shane, his knees almost gave out. God, he'd missed Shane so much.

Even with the sling, Shane looked healthy now. His cheeks were full of color and his impossibly dark eyes shone. A world of difference from the Shane he'd seen in a hospital bed a few weeks ago.

"Hi," Shane said sheepishly.

"Shane," Ilya breathed.

Ilya wanted to make a good impression on Shane's parents—who, as far as Ilya could tell, were nowhere near the door. But as he gazed at Shane, wonderful and gorgeous, and here, Ilya didn't care about anything other than getting Shane in his arms.

Suitcase forgotten and backpack collapsing onto the floor, Ilya cut the distance between him and Shane. One of his palms cupped Shane's cheek and then their lips crashed. Even though the kiss was soft, given that Shane was in a sling and Ilya didn't want to hurt him, their lips still managed to be desperate. Tracing his tongue over Shane's, Ilya wanted to show him how needy he was for him. How much it meant to him to be in Shane's orbit once again.

"You're here," Shane murmured against Ilya's lips. His voice broke a little.

Then Ilya pressed their foreheads together, a tear rolling down his cheek. "Thank you for inviting me."

* * *

They didn't kiss for long after that. Shane warned Ilya that his parents were inside waiting for them to have lunch, and that they would most likely interrogate Ilya.

Energized by having Shane by his side after weeks of being apart, Ilya knew he could take on anything the Hollanders threw at him. As long as Shane wanted him, Ilya would endure any curve ball Shane's parents threw at him.

"Mom, Dad," Shane said, as soon as they reached the living room of the cozy house. Pictures of Shane at all stages of life decorated the surfaces—maybe Ilya would be allowed to gawk at them later. And in the middle of the brown couch and wooden coffee table, stood Shane's parents. Both were young. Younger than Ilya's father by two decades, at least. Yuna's features resembled Shane, with the same dark hair and high cheekbones. While David's mannerisms were similar to that of Shane. Just like Shane, David also stood idle with his thumbs dipped in his pockets. "This is Ilya, Rozanov. My boyfriend." Shane shifted his gaze between his

parents and Ilya. If Ilya hadn't been as nervous as he was, he would find Shane's nerves adorable.

Ilya stood very still and said, "Hi. Nice to meet you. Thank you for having me."

Ilya was expecting a nod from them, maybe a stiff handshake. What Ilya wasn't expecting at all, was for Yuna to hug him?

Her slim arms wrapped around him and pulled Ilya down. She was at least a foot shorter than Ilya. "We've heard so much about you. It's nice to properly meet you, Ilya," Yuna said while embracing him.

A tad bit perplexed, Ilya hugged her back. "You too."

"Thank you for being there for Shane when we couldn't," she said a little more quietly.

Ilya nodded. "Of course."

When they broke apart, David extended his hand to Ilya. As soon as Ilya shook it, David pulled him in and patted Ilya on the shoulder. "We're sorry for your loss. I hope the trip back wasn't too taxing."

"Thank you," Ilya replied. "No, it was okay."

Next to him, Shane dropped his shoulders with an exhale and smiled. Ilya didn't miss how Shane's eyes had gone soft. It made Ilya want to pull him in and bury his face in the crook of Shane's neck.

But then, Yuna clapped her hands together. "How about I get us some drinks. The table is set. Ilya, do you like pasta?"

"Yes, thank you."

"Great!" she said with a warm smile. "It's David's specialty." She walked towards the adjacent room and David followed, leaving Ilya and Shane alone.

"You okay?" Shane asked hooking his pinky with Ilya's.

"Yes. I'm here with you." Ilya wasn't sure how to navigate this dynamic. He wasn't expecting this warm welcome from people he'd never met before. The whole situation was foreign... and nice.

Without breaking contact, Shane said, "We'll have lunch, then we can head towards the cottage. Or if you're too tired, we can stay here for the night. My parents offered to drive us too."

"No, is okay. I can drive." Though, with each passing minute, Ilya felt more comfortable at the Hollanders, he wanted to be alone with Shane. He was tired, but he supposed it was more emotional exhaustion than physical at this point.

“Okay.” Shane smiled and swung their pinkies back and forth. Then added, “Dad’s pasta is actually really nice. But if he ever offers you stew, make up an excuse. Trust me.”

Ilya chuckled and his chest flooded with warmth at the implication that there might be a next time. He couldn’t even remember the last time he had a home-cooked meal. Suddenly, that realization made the back of Ilya’s eyes prickle with tears. Before he could stop himself, he took Shane in his arms and hugged him tight.

“Hey. Hey, is everything okay?” Shane traced his palm down Ilya’s back in a rhythmic patter.

Against his neck Ilya replied, “Yes, you’re here.” For weeks he’d fantasized about seeing Shane again. And for even longer than that, he dreamed of having other people know about them. Ilya squeezed Shane a little harder, more to prove to his own brain that this wasn’t some fantasy or dream. After years of secretly hoping he could love Shane, Ilya finally could. And he could do so in a place they both felt safe.

* * *

The meal with the Hollanders was nice. Really nice. David’s pasta was actually great. Ilya served himself a third plate while he listened to Yuna tell Shane about a sponsorship photoshoot with Rolex they needed to reschedule.

Shane groaned. “Mom, can we talk about this later? I’m not even out of this sling yet.”

“Fine,” Yuna replied before she took a sip of wine. “But we need to give them an answer by the end of the week.”

The chatter of mundane things soothed Ilya. He wondered if this was what every meal at the Hollanders was like. In Ilya’s own home growing up, meals were always tense, and as volatile as his father’s mood would allow. Except when it was only Ilya and his mother. Ilya had murky memories of those times, but he remembered laughing while helping his mother with the dishes.

“Ilya,” It was David who spoke, “How long will you be staying at the cottage?”

“A few weeks, I think. I also have a few commitments with my sponsors to take care of.”

“Should we head out soon?” Shane asked, while reaching to hold Ilya’s hand that laid on the table, next to his now empty plate.

The visible contact made Ilya’s heart hum inside his chest. “I’m ready whenever you are.” Then added, “But first, I need to see all your baby pictures.”

“I’ll get the albums.” David’s chair creaked as he pushed it out of the table.

Yuna added, “You’re gonna love the ones where he was first learning to skate. He was so adorable!”

“No, we’re leaving,” Shane declared. “You really don’t need to see that.”

“Oh, I really need,” Ilya’s seriousness had Shane rolling his eyes.

“Come on, sweetie, we’ve never gotten to embarrass you in front of a boyfriend before.” Yuna’s statement made Ilya chuckle.

Decisively, Ilya put his palms on the table and stood up. “Show me baby Shane.”

* * *

The drive was not as long as Ilya had initially imagined. Though they would’ve probably made it in half the time if Shane didn’t own a boring car. Well, not so boring. Ilya had to admit he was fond of the blue Jeep—though he would never, ever, admit that to Shane. But this was where Ilya had confessed to Shane that he loved him. It was where their relationship started.

Since they left the Hollander’s house back in Ottawa, Ilya hadn’t let go of Shane’s hand over the console. He didn’t want to let go of Shane, and Shane didn’t seem to mind.

He was telling Ilya all the things they could do at the cottage for the next two weeks. “I have a gym, and in the evening, we could start a fire.” What Shane didn’t know was that Ilya had seen ESPN’s coverage of Shane’s cottage and he knew all the activities the cottage had to offer.

Ilya didn’t care for the hockey rink, or the lake. He only cared that he would be spending two weeks with the love of his life. Whatever Shane wanted to do, Ilya would be happy to oblige. And if that was staring at the fire, well, then so be it.

When they arrived at the cottage, it was already dusk. The moonlight shimmered in the ripples of the lake outside of the cottage.

It was quiet here. Peaceful.

The full day of traveling was catching up to him. Ilya tried to muffle his yawn.

Shane noticed though, because he said, “How about you go take a shower while I prepare us some dinner?”

Ilya didn’t have it in him to argue. He wanted to spend as much time as he could with Shane, but a shower sounded great. So he took up the offer.

When Ilya emerged from the shower, feeling slightly refreshed, he found Shane serving two plates with chicken and salad.

His second home-cooked meal of the day. God, Ilya must really be exhausted for this to make him want to tear up again. But he was having dinner with Shane. In Shane's house, wearing Shane's shirt. This was more than he ever dreamed of having.

Once their plates were cleared and stuffed into the dishwasher, Shane extended his hand. Instinctively, Ilya grabbed it and followed Shane. The crisp air hit Ilya's cheeks as soon as they stepped outside.

"I thought we could start a fire. Or maybe you want to sleep? It's probably been a very long day for you." Shane sounded a little unsure.

"It has, but I want to spend more time with you." Besides, even this tired, Ilya knew sleep wouldn't come easy.

Shane smiled and dropped a quick kiss on Ilya's lips. To which Ilya couldn't resist pulling Shane back for a deeper, longer kiss. And maybe things would've escalated if it weren't for the howl that pierced the air.

Ilya broke their connection and looked around, heart pounding at the base of his throat.

"What's wrong?" Shane's gaze scanned Ilya's face.

"What the fuck was that?" Ilya was afraid of like two things in this world. One of them was losing Shane, and the other was...wolves. And that right there, sounded like an angry wolf that would eat him, which meant he wouldn't be able protect Shane from being eaten next.

Shane furrowed his brows. "A loon."

"What the fuck is a loon?"

Chuckling, Shane replied, "It's a bird."

"That's not bird. That's wolf." Ilya looked around expecting to see a fully grown wolf ready to pounce at them.

"Ilya, that's a loon. I promise you, it's not a wolf."

Ilya wasn't convinced. He didn't make it all the way from Moscow just to be eaten by a stupid Canadian wolf bird.

"Come on, I'll protect you," Shane made a sound that was very close to the wolf bird sound. Of course Shane would also know how to speak bird.

"You're safe here," Shane said. And the pitter patter of Ilya's heart returned to a normal beat when Shane gave him a quick peck on the lips and squeezed Ilya's hand.

After Shane successfully got the fire going, he sat next to Ilya. Their hands drifted towards each other until their fingers were interlaced.

“So... do we just sit here and look at it?” Ilya was enjoying the warmth of the flames, and the soothing crackling of the logs. But, he couldn’t pass up an opportunity to get under Shane’s skin.

Shane pressed his lips together, suppressing a smile. “Yes, we just sit here and look at it.”

“Wow, Canada is really fun,” Ilya said.

Shane reached around Ilya’s shoulders and encouraged Ilya to lay his head on his lap. “Even when you’re tired, you’re such an asshole.”

Ilya snuggled on Shane’s thighs, and felt a blanket drape over him. Soon, Shane was racking his fingers through Ilya’s curls.

His mother used to do that when Ilya was sick or had had a hard day at school. Involuntarily, all of Ilya’s muscles relaxed and he yawned again.

Chapter End Notes

As always, thank you so so much for your comments and kudos, they seriously make my day. Feel free to come find me over on threads or Instagram -- @romancerunner. I post updates on fics and other upcoming projects.

Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

Thank you so much for reading!

I closed this chapter with my favorite line from the show because it's beautiful and makes me cry every time.

Happy reading!

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

Sunlight draped the master bedroom of the cottage. Ilya felt the warmth of Shane's skin against his before he opened his eyes.

Shane stirred in Ilya's arms, looking more beautiful than ever. The light covered his freckles and made his brown eyes shine. It was precious, waking up next to Shane like this. If Ilya could, he would freeze this moment in time. Live in this pocket of heaven forever.

"It's unfair how attractive you look after waking up," Shane mumbled against Ilya's chest. Then snuggled closer.

Ilya's arms tightened around Shane, but he was careful not to squeeze too hard and hurt Shane's shoulder. "Were you watching me sleep?"

"No." Shane grumbled. Then, after a pause, "Yes. Is that weird?"

Ilya shrugged. "I'm really hot. Can't blame you for being creep."

Shane scoffed. "Okay, we're done here." He started wiggling out of Ilya's embrace, but Ilya pulled him closer. After a few seconds, Shane relaxed and nuzzled Ilya's neck.

"Did you sleep okay?" Shane asked.

"Yes, your bed is comfortable." Actually, it was the best sleep Ilya had gotten in a while, and he was sure it had nothing to do with the mattress and everything to do with the gorgeous man in his arms. "Maybe I should sleep here every night." And wouldn't that be the dream? Ilya moving in with him, getting to see a sleepy, rumpled-haired Shane first thing in the morning? Just the thought made Ilya's heart flutter.

"That would be nice," Shane dropped a kiss on Ilya's neck. Then his jaw. "You can sleep a little more, I'll get started on breakfast."

"No, I'm okay. I can help. You shouldn't be doing things with your arm like that."

Shane stopped kissing Ilya's skin and looked him straight in the eye. "Ilya," Shane said, more serious than anyone should sound early in the morning, "For once let someone else take care of you. Let *me* take care of you."

Ilya couldn't explain why, but those words hit him square in the chest. But the blow of them didn't hurt, the opposite actually. They made him feel lighter. Lighter than he'd probably ever felt.

Ilya studied Shane's face.

"Please," Shane said. "I couldn't be there for you when your father died. Or when I got hurt. It must've been horrible to see that happening. I know *I* would've completely lost it if you were the one who got hit on the ice. God, I almost completely lost it during those days you weren't answering me, thinking the worst had happened."

"You were the one to get hit." Ilya's eyes shifted to the sling.

"But I had you. I knew everything would be okay because you were there. With me. You had no one while all that was happening. I'm really sorry you had to go through that alone, Ilya."

That acknowledgement made Ilya's breath hitch. A thick lump of emotions clung to the walls of his throat.

It had been terrifying, seeing Shane hurt like that. Ilya didn't even want to recall those memories, because although a healthy Shane was pressed against him right now, the memory of the accident still made Ilya's muscles tighten with unbridled fear.

Maybe this is why Ilya hadn't allowed himself to love before. The looming fear of losing someone he loved was paralyzing. Just like when he lost his mother, deep down, Ilya knew that losing someone he chose to love would break him beyond repair.

All of that had changed with Shane, though. Shane made Ilya want to be brave. If he ever lost Shane, Ilya would take that pain over and over if it meant he got to spend time with Shane. Every minute with him was precious. And Ilya wouldn't waste it. Ever.

With his free hand, Shane cupped Ilya's face. He brushed his thumb over Ilya's cheek, to clear a rouge tear that had escaped Ilya.

"I want to be here for you now. Will you let me?" Shane said in a soft, almost whisper-like tone.

He knew what Shane was asking was not just making Ilya breakfast, but something much more deeper than that. To let Shane take care of him, Ilya needed to break himself open for Shane. Be himself fully, and allow Shane to see every flaw and fear Ilya had. He'd never done that before for anyone. But he could be brave for Shane. He would be brave for Shane.

Ilya nodded. "Okay."

"Okay?" Shane asked, a soft smile on his lips.

“Okay,” Ilya repeated.

* * *

After a full day in the sun, Ilya found himself on the couch, watching a scary movie with Shane’s head on his shoulder. It had been a wonderful day. He still felt emotionally raw from their conversation that morning, but at the same time, some of the weight that had been crushing him had been lifted.

He didn’t feel like he was alone anymore. Not when Shane was cuddling next to him, fully invested in the horror movie they’d picked.

“Why is she going into the attic alone?” Shane sounded exasperated.

This was the first time they watched movies together. And Shane was the type of person to provide commentary on how inaccurate movies were when compared to real life. Ilya found this extremely amusing and endearing.

“Because they all decided to separate, remember?” Ilya provided. Just to be useful.

“It’s the worst idea! I bet the killer is behind that door. She’s definitely going to get murdered. ”

“I mean, they all will. That’s the point.”

Shane propped his head up from Ilya’s shoulder and glared at him with narrowed eyes. “I know that.”

Ilya chuckled. “I don’t think you would survive if you were in one of these movies.”

“Pff,” Shane scoffed. “Of course I would. Easily.”

Ilya seemed to consider this for a few moments. “You are right. You would just bore the killer to death. Smart.”

Shane’s eyes widened. “You’re an asshole.”

Ilya’s grin split his face in half. “It’s okay. I like it when you’re boring, sweetheart.”

Shane pressed his lips into a smile, even though it was clear he wanted to be annoyed.

Ilya raked his fingers through Shane’s hair.

And Shane's eyes drifted to Ilya’s lips. The air around them went from playful to charged. Would it ever stop being like this with Shane?

Heat rose in Ilya’s body and without missing a beat, Ilya pulled Shane in for a deep, breathtaking kiss. Ilya doubted he would ever not want to devour Shane completely. Shane’s

lips on his felt too right. It was as if they were made for each other.

Shane got onto Ilya's lap. He could feel Shane's erection pressing on his stomach.

For the entire day, Ilya had wanted to be like this, but he was a little afraid to hurt Shane.

Which is why he broke the kiss. "Shane, you're hurt."

Both of them were struggling to catch their breath.

"I'm okay," Shane panted, chasing Ilya's mouth.

Ilya placed his hands on Shane's chest to stop him. "No, I don't want to hurt you."

Shane groaned. "As long as I don't put any weight on my shoulder, I'll be okay. I asked the doctor."

Ilya's eyebrow shot up, almost touching his hairline. "You asked the doctor about sex with an injury?"

Pink colored Shane's cheeks. "Yes, I called him."

Amusement rose in Ilya's face at the thought of Shane having this conversation with his doctor. Shane hated talking about anything sex-related.

"It's not funny," Shane protested.

"A little funny," Ilya chuckled. But his hand traveled from Shane's shoulders, down his toned chest and stomach, until it rested on Shane's hard cock. He massaged Shane's erection until it twitched under his palm. "Are you sure it's okay?"

Shane was already grinding on Ilya's lap, against the pressure of his palm. "We just...need to be...careful."

"If your shoulder hurts we stop," Ilya said in a firm voice. "Will you tell me if it hurts?"

With his eyes closed, lost in the sensation of Ilya's touch against his dick, Shane nodded.

Ilya stopped moving his hand. "Words, Shane."

"Yes," he replied, annoyed. "I'll tell you. Now please just fuck me. It's been too long."

"So needy," Ilya rasped. But his own composure was hanging on by a thread. Ilya pulled Shane's cock out of his shorts and started stroking it. While with the other he found Shane's hole and started massaging the area there.

Against his ear, Shane moaned. "There's lube on the side table." His words were breathy, and needy.

"Take off your clothes," Ilya ordered.

Shane got out of Ilya's lap and started unstrapping his sling to take his shirt off. Ilya stood up and carefully helped Shane undress. While Shane readjusted his sling over his naked chest, Ilya pulled Shane's shorts and boxer briefs down. On the way up, he kissed Shane's knees, thighs, balls, and shaft. Shane let out a groan and sank his fingers into Ilya's curls when Ilya took him deep in his mouth. Ilya twirled his tongue around Shane's tip and dug his fingers onto Shane's asscheeks.

"Ilya if you keep that up, I'll cum," Shane said between clenched teeth as he rocked into Ilya's mouth, fucking his face.

Ilya continued sucking Shane for a few more moments, then kissed his way up Shane's chest until he reached his lips. Ilya planted a kiss that left both of them dizzy and electrified.

When they separated, Ilya sat back down on the couch and asked Shane to straddle him again. Once Shane's strong thighs were bracketing Ilya's hips, Ilya took his lubed fingers and prepared Shane for him.

Shane's moans rocketed on Ilya's ears. Then, as if that wasn't pushing Ilya closer and closer to orgasm, Shane began sucking on Ilya's earlobe.

"Ilya I need you, please."

Shane's cock was glistening with pre-cum. And Ilya's own cock and balls were heavy with need. He rolled on a condom, and applied lube.

Holding on to Shane's hips, Ilya helped him lower onto his cock. Both their groans were louder than whatever was happening on the TV screen.

"Fuck. Oh, fuck Ilya," Shane whimpered.

It was magnificent, seeing Shane taking him. Grinding on him. His fingers gripped onto Ilya's shoulder for stability, as he set the pace for both of them.

"Tell me if it's too much." Ilya was surprised he managed to string words together. "For your arm."

Shane made a noise that sounded like, "I will." But it was in between moans, so it was hard to tell.

The pleasure was rippling inside Ilya and he was struggling to keep his eyes open. "Come for me," Ilya groaned.

"Make me, Ilya. Fucking me make," Shane exhaled.

Ilya was about to lose it. He wrapped his fingers around Shane's shaft, while holding onto Shane's hip with the other. Ilya stroked fast. And Shane didn't stop taking Ilya's cock.

Ilya was close to madness. The impending orgasm made his balls tighten and he was struggling to catch his next breath.

“You feel so good,” Shane’s words were strained. “Don’t stop. Don’t fucking stop.” His fingers sank deeper into Ilya’s shoulder. He might be leaving a mark on Ilya’s skin, but right now, Ilya’s sole focus was on holding off his orgasm until Shane came.

Ilya didn’t stop stroking or moving his hips to meet Shane’s. Not until Shane’s cum coated Ilya’s hand and stomach. The moan Shane let out was the catalyst for Ilya’s own orgasm. Pleasure rocked his entire body.

Shane’s lips found his. And the kiss was both tender and hungry. Ilya couldn’t get enough of Shane.

He wanted this moment to stretch for all eternity.

“I missed you,” Shane whispered against Ilya’s lips. “Please never leave me.”

“I’ll love you until my last breath, Shane.”

* * *

ONE WEEK LATER

Ilya sat at the edge of the deck, staring out at the sun rising through the horizon of the lake. It was peaceful here.

When he was a child, Ilya’s mother woke very early. She said she liked the chirping of the birds at this time of day. Ilya used to beg her to wake him up so he could also hear the birds with her. He was young, and his mom said he needed sleep. But sometimes, she did wake him up. Those early mornings were Ilya’s most cherished memories of his mother.

Then when he got older, Ilya gravitated towards early mornings. It was the only time when there was no screaming in his house. At the break of dawn, no one was awake. Even when times got really dark, or when he realized he was forgetting the sound of his mother’s laugh or the timber of her voice, listening to the bird’s chirp brought him comfort. Once again, he felt close to his mom.

The morning breeze was chilly, but Ilya didn’t mind. He took another drag off his cigarette and held the memory of his mother a little longer.

Ilya wished he could tell her all about Shane. How incredible he was. “You would really like him,” he said into the empty space of the lake. “I got really lucky finding him.”

Ilya wished his mom could see him be happy. Like truly happy. In the confines of their house back in Russia, smiles were limited, and laughter could only be heard at the break of dawn. But now, even taking into account all the struggles Ilya faced to be here—or all the ones

Shane and Ilya would face once they came out to the world as a couple—Ilya was the happiest he had ever been.

Ilya still couldn't believe this was his life. Being here, in Shane's cottage. Getting to love Shane. Letting Shane love him back.

He wished his mother would be here to see how good life got for Ilya. And more than anything, he wished she would be here to witness what came next. The charity they would build in her honor, marriage, dogs, children, maybe grandchildren.

But that was impossible. So Ilya settled for telling Irina all the things he loved about Shane. Ilya was sure that if his mother were alive, she would love Shane too, and would be proud of Ilya. He traced one of his fingers over the only thing he had left of his mother—the crucifix pendant Ilya never took off.

“May I join you?” Shane’s voice came from behind Ilya.

Ilya gave him a soft smile. “Always.”

Shane handed Ilya a cup of steaming coffee before draping a blanket over him. Then Shane sat next to Ilya and rested his head on Ilya’s shoulder.

For a long time they were silent. Ilya even suspected that Shane had dozed off on his shoulder. But when he looked down, Shane was focused on the shimmering water.

“Were you talking to your mom?” Shane asked.

“Yes,” Ilya replied. He had told Shane about the early mornings and about his mother. It had been nice to talk to someone about her.

“I wish I could’ve met her. Tell her how grateful I am for you.”

Ilya’s heart thumped against his chest, overflowing with love for Shane. He wrapped his arm around Shane and pulled him closer. Pressing a kiss to his temple he said, “She would’ve loved you, like I love you.”

Chapter End Notes

As always, thank you so so much for your comments and kudos, they seriously make my day. Feel free to come find me over on threads or Instagram -- @romancerunner. I post updates on fics and other upcoming projects.

Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

In my head, the cannon divergence leaves us with both Shane and Ilya at the cottage and merges into everything that happens in TLG. Hope you enjoy this epilogue.

Happy reading!

* * *

I'd never written in a serialized manner like this (normally I finish writing the entire draft then share it). This was really fun, and dare I say, cathartic? Writing from Ilya's POV destroyed me in the best of ways. Thank you for all the love and support with this story line. Every time I read one of your comments or mentions on threads I get all giddy and do a little happy dance.

The librarian (Wadjilicious) thank you so much for letting me join in your birthday bash and for beta reading the initial chapters! I hope you liked how this story turned out! Happy bday!

And the biggest shoutout Kayla for beta reading everything I put out into the world and for listening to all my unhinged voice note ideas. Love you, friend!

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

EPILOGUE

Thirty-three years after TLG

“Ilya, hurry up, we’re late!” Shane chirped from the kitchen. His voice made the two dogs at Ilya’s feet raise their heads.

“Wait, I’m fixing the bow,” Ilya replied. The wrapping on the gift had to be perfect.

When the dogs realized it was nothing of interest to them, both Dino and Bee, the two rescues—one long-haired dachshund and the other a brown labrador mix—went back to sleep, unbothered by the bickering of their parents.

“Ilya, she’s a baby, she doesn’t care if the bow looks good. Let’s go!” Shane’s voice was drawing closer. Which meant Ilya had like three minutes before Shane completely lost it.

Ilya smirked and proceeded to redo the bow on their grandchild’s gift. Baby Irina turned one today. And she loved to play with the ribbon on gifts. So Ilya had spent an entire afternoon

finding the right one—a thick, blue silky ribbon with little loons in it. She was going to love it.

Ilya couldn't wait to see baby Irina's brown eyes widen in excitement at seeing her favorite color and favorite animal on her favorite thing to play with.

"Ilya, come on. Eliza is waiting for us. She texted the group chat like five times already." Eliza, their youngest daughter, was a carbon copy of Shane. But unlike Shane, Eliza loved blowing up the group chat. That trait, she got from Ilya. Shane had already made it to their bedroom where Ilya was meticulously twisting the bow around the box for the third time.

"She's so impatient, I wonder where she gets it from," Ilya quipped.

"I'm not impatient," Shane retorted.

"Pff, look at you now. Impatient." Ilya had his back to Shane but he could practically hear Shane roll his eyes. After being together for over forty-five years—counting their hookup years and raising two beautiful kids together, Eliza and Kira—Ilya knew Shane like the back of his hand. Better even.

Which is why he knew that Shane was freaking out about his age again. Birthdays did that to him.

Behind him, he heard Shane sigh before he felt strong arms wrapped around his torso. For a moment, Ilya forgot his project and relaxed into Shane's warmth. Even after all these years, being in Shane's arms felt right. Shane was Ilya's home.

"How is it that our baby girl has a one-year-old already?" Shane's words vibrated against Ilya's back. He knew this was hard for Shane, to see their kids grow everyday.

"We are getting old," Ilya said.

"I know. I hate it," Shane had had a hard time grasping at the concept that they were not as fit or agile as they used to be. After retiring from the NHL, Shane took a job as the coach for the Ottawa Centaurs, and like everything he did, he was great at it. But when their granddaughter was born, Shane decided it was time to call it quits, so he could spend more time with his family.

Ilya turned to face Shane. Shane's hair, though still black had streaks of white in it. The corner of his eyes crinkled a little more. But Shane was still as beautiful as the day Ilya saw him for the first time in a cold parking lot in Saskatchewan. Ilya framed Shane's face with his palms and looked at the gorgeous man he had been lucky to love for the past forty-five years.

"I like you old. You are, what they call it—" Ilya pursed his lips and snapped his fingers in hopes it would bring back the word lurking on the tip of his tongue "—ah yes, sugar daddy. You are my boring sugar daddy."

Shane rolled his eyes. "You look as old as I do. And I'm like five weeks older than you!"

Ilya unhinged his jaw dramatically, even though Ilya's hair had gone fully white and his body, though still fit, had lost a lot of the muscle from his hockey days. "Excuse you, I don't look a day over forty."

Shane humped.

"Sweetheart." Ilya stroked Shane's cheek with his thumb. "You are the hottest man I've ever seen. My favorite part of everyday is waking up next to you, snoring."

Shane made another noise that sounded like a grumble.

Ilya leaned in to kiss Shane's pursed lips. It took Shane a few seconds before giving in, and opening up for Ilya. Though their bodies were getting older, and the sex wasn't as frequent as it used to be when they were in their thirties, the fire between them never extinguished. Ilya was head over heels for Shane. And Shane for Ilya.

"Let's make a deal," Ilya said against Shane's ear once they separated.

The little fire behind Shane's eyes ignited. Age hadn't changed Shane's competitiveness one bit. "What deal?"

"You let me finish this bow, and then we go to the birthday party. We have fun, see our kids. Make fun of their partners. Let them know they will never be good enough for our babies. Irina plays with the dogs, and we eat cake." At the cake part, Shane scrunched his nose but didn't interrupt. "Then, when we come back home, I'll light up *all* those candles you like. And then I fuck you until you remember that you are the most beautiful man in the world. Sounds good?"

Shane's breath had turned a little shallow. Ilya loved that after all these years, he still managed to have that kind of effect on Shane.

"Okay," Shane said, "Deal."

Ilya gave Shane another swooping, ground-shaking kiss. Then returned his attention to the gift, and the loon-printed blue bow.

Chapter End Notes

As always, thank you so so much for your comments and kudos, they seriously make my day. Feel free to come find me over on threads or Instagram -- @romancerunner. I post updates on fics and other upcoming projects.

PS: since this is a fic based on Harrison's version of All The Things She Said, I thought I'd mention that while writing, I had these songs on repeat:

Club Scene: All The Things She Said by Harrison

Car Scene: I Wanna Be Yours by Arctic Monkeys/ Do I Wanna Know? by Arctic Monkeys

Apartment Scene: Who We Are by Hozier / Movement by Hozier

Morning After: Dandelions by Ruth B.

Phone call: So Easy (To Fall In Love) by Olivia Dean

All Star Game Party: Where is my husband? by RAYE

Shane getting hurt: Chasing Cars by Snow Patrol

Ilya running to the hospital: How To Save a Life by The Fray

Ilya sitting next to Shane's bed: Chasing Cars by Tommee Profitt, Fleurie (I watched that edit so many times *insert sobbing emoji*)

Waking up at the hotel: Numb by Tommee Profitt, Skylar Grey

Moscow: Matilda by Harry Styles

Going to the cottage call: All The Things She Said (Orchestra version) by Joseph William Morgan

Visiting the Hollander's house/drive up to the cottage: Rather Be (feat. Jess Glynne) by Clean Bandit

By the fire: Somewhere Only We Know by Rianne

Waking up together: I, Carrion (Icarian) by Hozier

Watching a movie: Call Our My Name by The Weekend

Dawn: One Soul by Peter Peter, Heated Rivalry Soundtrack

Epilogue: Everywhere, Everything (with Gracie Abrams) by Noah Kahan

Playlists are my love language. I've shared the full playlist on threads <3

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!