

to be loved and to be in love

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by [SuchASeeweedBrain](#)

Summary

Instead of taking her own life, Irina Rozanova takes her youngest son and flees to Canada in the middle of the night. It only makes sense for her to flee to Ottawa. Her son really only wants to do one thing, and that's play hockey. So it only makes sense for her to find him a team for talented young players. There just so happens to be another very talented young player already on that team.

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He eyes Ilya, a little weary. 'Hey,' he then says. 'I'm Shane.'

Even in the short time he's been here, he knows enough English to understand that at least. 'Ilya.' He says, pressing a hand to his chest.

Shane nods. He says something else, too quick for Ilya. All he catches is "play". It must read on his face, but Shane doesn't laugh or roll his eyes or anything that the kids at school have been doing. He says it again, slower and then taps his stick on the ice, sliding a puck back and forth between his forehand and backhand.

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'Da.' He says and then he steals the puck off Shane's stick and takes off.

Chapter 1: all i can do, is say that these arms were made for holding you

Chapter Notes

I'm back!

I've been writing this story somewhat obsessively? Every minute not spent at work or sleeping has pretty much gone into this. I've written about 13k in like 4 days which is a little batshit for me.

This idea just gripped me as soon as it popped up. If anything doesn't make sense with real life, just remember that this is an AU and I wanted it to work that way so now it does! :D

The boys will be a little different from canon because they grow up a little different, but I think they still feel like themselves.

Anything spoken in Russian will be underlined.

Title from 18 by One Direction (do NOT judge me XD)

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

There's a hand shaking Ilya awake. He blinks his eyes open with a confused frown already on his face.

'Mama?' He asks. His mom is kneeling next to his bed. Her hazel eyes are wide and she's smiling, but she doesn't seem all that happy.

'Hi love, would you get dressed for me please? Now.'

Ilya glances at his window. There's no light coming from under his curtains. It *feels* like he shouldn't be awake.

'What is going on?'

'Ilyushka, now please.'

There's something nervous in his mom's voice, but her eyes are brighter than they've been recently, so Ilya does what he's told. His mom hands him sweats, a t-shirt, a sweater and socks. While Ilya gets dressed, his mom starts packing his suitcase.

He's incredibly confused, but her movements are frantic enough that Ilya is a little afraid to interrupt her.

'Are we going on a trip?' He asks carefully after he's done getting dressed.

‘Um, yes darling. A little bit like a trip.’

‘Can I bring my skates?’

‘Um no, darling. Your hockey stuff has to stay here.’

‘But-‘

‘I will buy you new ones, darling.’ His mom says, urgent, nervous.

‘Mama?’

‘It’s okay Ilyushka. You trust me, right?’ She says, kneeling in front of him, her hands resting on his shoulders.

‘Of course, mama.’

‘Come with me.’

‘Okay.’

When they leave his bedroom, his mom makes him be as quiet as possible as they head down the stairs. His mom has a car waiting on the driveway, her own bag already in the back. She plays Ilya’s favourite music and lets him sit in the front as they drive away from the house. When they get to the airport, Ilya is still very confused, but his mom still looks super nervous and a little bit like she’ll break if he asks another question. So, he doesn’t.

They board a flight to a place Ilya doesn’t know.

Ilya falls asleep as soon as the plane is at altitude.

When he wakes up, they’re flying over the open ocean. His mom hands him his favourite book and he reads for a while.

After the plane lands, the pilot comes over the intercom and he speaks in two languages that Ilya doesn’t speak. He thinks one of them is English. He has been planning on learning, but hadn’t started yet. His father had thought it was “distasteful”.

‘Where are we, mom?’ Ilya asks as they get off the plane and walk through the airport. All the signs around him are in the weird European letters (the Latin alphabet, his mom offers)

‘We’re in Ottawa, Ilyushka.’ He must still look confused, because she continues. ‘In Canada.’

He doesn’t know much about Canada except for the fact that it’s a good hockey country.

‘Are we going to a hockey game?’ He asks, suddenly excited.

‘No darling, not right now.’

His mom takes him to the taxi place where the driver loads their bags in the back and then he asks Ilya something. He must look panicked because the man turns to his mom instead. His

mom ushers him into the backseat, joining him there. Ilya looks out of the window as the streets of Ottawa pass by, it's only early evening here which is really throwing Ilya off. They've travelled back in time? He wants to ask his mom so many questions, but ever since they've landed, his mom still seems like she's going to look over her shoulder and so he holds it in.

He holds it in until they get to a building where his mom helps the driver unload their bags, pays and then the driver leaves. His mom walks up to the door and rings one of the doorbells. A minute or so later an older woman comes to the main door of the building that looks to house apartments. The older woman and his mom speak in English for a bit, the only word he recognizes is *house*. The older lady hands his mom a key and smiles at Ilya.

Ilya doesn't smile back. He's exhausted and yet wide awake. He has a billion questions and he needs answers yesterday. The older woman leads them up the stairs, Ilya struggles with his suitcase but refuses to let his mom help him. She has her own stuff to carry and he can do it. Hockey has made him strong.

The place that goes with the key his mom got turns out to be a one bedroom apartment. It's small and a little cramped and *nothing* like their home in Moscow, yet his mom looks so relieved when she closes and locks the door after the old lady leaves that Ilya starts to feel a little sick.

'Mama? What is going on? Why are we in Canada? Why do you have an apartment here? When are we going back to Moscow?'

His mom sits heavily on the older-looking, brown couch and pats the space next to her. Ilya sits.

'I'm sorry to have dragged you along like this Ilyushka.' His mom says first. 'I- this is hard. I am renting this place from Maggie, the lady we just met, but because of our circumstances, she's agreed to skip the first month of rent. It will give me time to find a job.'

'A job? But mama, why do you need a job?'

'I don't want to go back to Moscow. I was very, very unhappy there. Your father made me very unhappy and I wanted something better for you. So I managed to find someone willing to help me. Your aunt Petra helped me set this up.'

'You don't want to go back? But what about Alexei?'

'Your father would never have given up if I had taken Alexei as well.' His mom says, her eyes watering.

He wants to scream and rage. He wants to demand that they go back to Moscow, *now*, his friends are there, his hockey team is there, but he also remembers how dull his mom's eyes had looked over the past few months. He remembers going to the bathroom a few hours after his bedtime and hearing his father screaming at his mom. He remembers seeing a bruise on her arm that she tucked away under a long-sleeved shirt.

He remembers how cold his father's eyes were when he laughed at Ilya for having dreams of the NHL, saying he'd never be good enough. That he was lazy and weak. He remembers how hard his father had gripped his arm, breath stinking of liquor as he yelled at Ilya for interrupting his poker game with his rich friends. He remembers how long those bruises took to fade.

'What about hockey?' He asks, carefully.

His mom smiles at him, watery. 'I can't afford new gear right away and I couldn't afford to bring it on the plane, but there is a very good youth team here, it's where most of the best players in the province play and I think I can convince them to give you a try-out. We'll just have to convince someone else to loan you some gear.'

'Okay.' He says.

In the bedroom there's two single beds, one for him and one for his mom and a dresser and a clothes rack which they also share. There's one bathroom which is also small and the tiles are freezing cold underneath Ilya's feet. It's small and cramped and it feels foreign and the sounds are all off, yet Ilya is completely exhausted and falls asleep as soon as his head hits the pillow.

Over the next few days, his mom sets off to run a whole lot of errands. She enters Ilya into a Canadian school, which is anxiety inducing enough that Ilya throws an entire tantrum over not wanting to go. They'll expect him to go to school where they will speak to him in English (which he doesn't even speak!) or French (which he speaks even less!), he will know *no one* and it's halfway through the school year so everyone will already have made friends. But when his mom begs him, teary eyed, to please try. He goes.

She talks to the hockey team, which takes some convincing, but then they agree to let Ilya at least try out. His mom apparently had to show them some videos of him on the ice in Moscow, but then they caved.

She tells him she also met another mom there. She says that her son already plays for the team, that he's very good. She tells him that she'd been kind when she heard their story and that she'd offered to talk to her husband. He works at some boring accounting place that might have a job for his mom. She might not be the best with the language, but math is something they've both always excelled at and it's something that she doesn't need to know the language perfectly for.

So, his mom gets a job and Ilya gets his try-out.

Which is where everything changes.

See, school has been fucking *hellish*. The kids, as expected, don't really pay Ilya any attention. He can't (or wants to really) talk to them and none seem willing to make an effort. They talk about him behind his back, but he can't understand them anyways. He has to stay late for extra English lessons, to learn their stupid alphabet, and they're also making him sit through fucking *French*, which makes even less sense than English.

But as hellish as school is- all of that fades when he steps onto the ice.

It turns out, ice is ice, whether that's in Moscow or Ottawa. His mom is off to the side, talking to the mom she met a few days ago. She's biting at the nail of her thumb, a nervous gesture Ilya recognizes all too well.

Ilya skates up to centre ice, his borrowed gear just feeling a little clumsy on his frame, where there's only one kid already there.

He's got black hair peeking out from underneath his helmet, slightly Asian looking, dark eyes and freckles across his nose and cheekbones. He's got number 24 stitched on his team jersey.

He eyes Ilya, a little weary. 'Hey,' he then says. 'I'm Shane.'

Even in the short time he's been here, he knows enough English to understand that at least. 'Ilya.' He says, pressing a hand to his chest.

Shane nods. He says something else, too quick for Ilya. All he catches is "*play*". It must read on his face, but Shane doesn't laugh or roll his eyes or anything that the kids at school have been doing. He says it again, slower and then taps his stick on the ice, sliding a puck back and forth between his forehand and backhand.

Ah, Ilya doesn't need to fully get it to *get it*.

'Da.' He says and then he steals the puck off Shane's stick and takes off.

'Hey!' Shane calls out behind him, but then there's the sound of skates gripping the ice as Shane chases after him.

Ilya is surprised when Shane manages to somewhat catch up and when he doesn't lose Ilya when he turns hard on his edges. In fact, he snags the puck off Ilya's borrowed stick and takes off.

They play. A little bit against each other, a little bit with each other. They can't really communicate, but Shane is the first player... maybe ever that can keep up with Ilya, that manages to surprise him, that actually challenges him.

Shane says something, Ilya doesn't know the word, but Shane passes the puck to him, taps his stick on the ice and then says the same word again.

Ah, that probably means *pass* then.

So Ilya passes to him and Shane nods, smiles and then says the word again. Ilya tries to repeat it back to him, tapping his borrowed stick on the ice. Shane passes him the puck, makes no comment on his pronunciation.

He decides he likes Shane.

Shane makes a turn so sharp it makes Ilya stumble. He whirls around on the ice and calls after Shane. 'How did you do that?'

Shane turns around, slowly coming to a stop from where he'd been skating away from Ilya, he tilts his head in confusion. Right. English.

'You teach me.' Ilya says, frowning at the way his voice sounds in that dumb language.

Shane says something back. It takes Ilya a second, but he realizes he understood that. 'Teach you what?' With that flick up at the end that means it's a question.

Ilya doesn't know the words for: "teach me how you did that ridiculous turn on your edges" so instead he just says: 'You teach me turn.' He tries to mimic what Shane did, but he loses his grip and stumbles.

'Ah,' Shane says and he comes skating back. He casually shoots the puck into the empty net and he stops next to Ilya. 'It's- um-'

They mess around with that for a while. Shane tries to teach him, but they don't have enough words to really talk about it. Shane says some things with "feel" which is a word Ilya knows, but the words around it are too much.

Shane seems to get that. He skates a little ahead of Ilya and just says: 'Watch.' And he gives Ilya a front row seat to look at the turn again.

It's, to be honest, beautiful and Ilya doesn't think he can do it right now, not while he can't properly talk to Shane.

By the time the other players arrive, Ilya has decided that he will stick to Shane. Shane hasn't laughed at him once, seems to take him seriously and he's as good as Ilya is, which is something he's never found before. Maybe all the kids on this team will be as good.

They are not.

It takes Ilya about a minute to realize that Shane is the best player on this team, by far. The coach, a balding man in his fifties does a lot of yelling, most of which Ilya doesn't get. He recognizes his own name though, it sounds a bit off, coming from that man's mouth, but he recognizes it. The man does a lot of motioning at him while speaking English.

Ilya tries his best to infer what the man means just from looking at him, but it's not always easy.

Shane helps though. He steers Ilya in the right direction a few times. It's probably stupid. Ilya is easily Shane's biggest competition, if he makes the team of course (but he doesn't see why he wouldn't, he's easily better than most of these other kids even without knowing the stupid language). He should maybe be more cautious and let Ilya drown, but he doesn't.

He starts to recognize Shane's last name too. *Hollander*. After practice, his mom tells him that the coach agreed to give Ilya a spot on the team. He'll need gear, but they're willing to let him practice with the borrowed gear he's got now.

When they get off the ice, Shane loses that easy grace he'd had. Ilya notices the other players don't really talk to Shane much. At first, he'd thought he just didn't notice because of the

language thing, but even after practice, there's no cheerful conversations or post practice chats. Shane stands with his mom, who's talking to Ilya's mom, as the other players leave. A few say goodbye, but that's it.

Weirdos.

When they figure out that not only Shane is like *good* good, but Ilya is as well, they have a lengthy talk with the coach (or you know, they talk and his mom translates for him) and decide to have Shane try out being on Ilya's right wing for a while, just to see how he likes it.

Shane never quite tells him, but they both score a stupid amount of goals (so many that their opponents get a particular look of fear on their faces when their line gets on the ice) and it works *so* well that they just never go back.

When Shane offers him English words, he asks Ilya for the Russian word in return. Ilya gives him that, but he waits for the moment Shane gets bored and stops asking, but he doesn't and so Ilya starts offering.

First it's hockey sentences. *Pass here, faster, behind you, head up*, but then he starts to offer other things. *Friend, mom, dad* and then curses, which Shane blanches at at first, but then he starts to see the advantages of it. He teaches him *fuck and shit and son of a motherfucking polar bear*. That all goes fine until Irina finds out, who tells Yuna, who gives Shane a *look* that makes him shrink.

Ilya learns English faster than Shane learns Russian, but Ilya is also learning in school and Shane is only learning from Ilya. Yet, by the time they're sixteen and scouts seem to be at every single game, Shane can hold a solid conversation, curse and talk hockey in Russian with the best of them.

Shane is also Ilya's best friend in the whole world.

See, school would have stayed hell without Shane.

Shane helped Ilya with his English far more than any teacher ever managed. He had a way of putting things in perspective for Ilya. It also helped that it felt like a trade. Ilya learned English, while Shane learned Russian. It was hours and hours spend on the ice, in their bedrooms, Ilya struggling though his homework at the kitchen table, but with Shane at his side to help him figure stuff out.

The kids at school never quite understood Ilya and at Shane's school no one quite understood him.

Luckily they understood each other.

Every single scout their moms had spoken to had said pretty much the same thing. Individually they were already better than anything they'd seen in years, but together, they were unstoppable.

‘Shane!’ Ilya calls out. Shane turns after he’s thrown his hockey bag in the back of his mom’s car. He’s grown a few inches over the last few months and his body has been having a hard time keeping up with him. He’s still strong, but he looks a bit stretched out, not quite fitting into his new height. Ilya is still taller, has been since they were thirteen.

‘Ilya,’ Shane says with a smile. ‘ready?’

‘Of course.’ Ilya grins, stepping up to put his hockey bag in the back next to Shane’s. ‘this will be easy.’

Shane makes a face. ‘You know I hate it when you say that.’

‘That’s why I do it.’ Ilya says.

‘You’re a dickhead.’ Shane says and Ilya grins at him.

‘Oh come on Shaney, this team is going to be so easy to beat.’ Ilya needles him.

Shane rolls his eyes. ‘Your overconfidence will bite you in the ass one day.’

‘Oooh, big word.’ Ilya says and Shane glances over to check if Ilya is messing with him or if he actually doesn’t know the word. It doesn’t happen all that often anymore, but it’s a habit so ingrained in Shane, Ilya doesn’t think he’d know how to stop if he wanted to.

‘We’re leaving in ten.’ Shane says, seemingly deciding that Ilya is, in fact, just messing with him. ‘How’s your mom?’

‘Good, finalizing the Canadian citizenship stuff today, we have to go in tomorrow to make it official.’

Shane’s grin is positively blinding. ‘So you’ll be able to play for Canada at Worlds?’

‘Looks like it.’ Ilya says, smiling back.

Shane laughs and then steps up to hug Ilya. Shane’s not the biggest fan of physical contact. He only really accepts it from a few people and he rarely initiates it. Ilya counts himself lucky to be one of the people Shane trusts like that. He’s firm and warm in Ilya’s arms.

‘Congratulations, Ilyushenka.’ Shane says, the Russian rolling of his tongue nicely. His breath is warm against Ilya’s neck.

Shane lets go and steps back and Ilya clears his throat and shifts his feet.

‘I am glad I will get to play the tournament with you.’

‘So am I, I wouldn’t have liked to do it without you.’

‘You would have been fine.’

‘Well, yes, I still would have won, but it’ll be more fun with you there.’ Shane says and it makes Ilya throw his head back with a delighted laugh. Shane can be so self-deprecating, it’s nice to hear him be confident.

‘Boys,’ Yuna’s voice cuts in. ‘English please.’

‘Of course, Yuna. Hello.’ Ilya says, smiling warmly at her.

‘Hello Ilya, darling I feel like you get bigger every time I see you.’ She says, smiling back at him.

‘I think I am.’ Ilya says with a smirk in Shane’s direction.

Shane flips him off behind his mom’s back.

‘Alright, ready to go?’

They both confirm they are and they get in the car to drive to today’s game. Their coach had already told them that there will be team Canada scouts at the game. They’re scouting for World Juniors and while they’ve been talking like they’re going to be on the team, they haven’t technically been selected yet. Everyone knows they will be though. They are the two best prospects in the whole country.

They probably shouldn’t be nervous, but Shane is anyways (and Ilya will absolutely deny it, but maybe he’s a *little* bit nervous too). As they get dressed, their teammates chat around them. They aren’t popular, per se. You might think that, being the players that win their team most of their games, Ilya and Shane would be loved by their teammates, but that isn’t quite the case. See, they are at a level where teens like themselves want to go pro and Ilya and Shane make them look worse than they are.

‘So uh, Katie said she might try to make it to the game.’ Ilya says as they’re lacing up their skates.

Shane’s shoulders go tight.

Right, wrong thing to say. Stupid.

‘Oh, that’s nice.’ Shane says. It’s one of those lines he says that he never seems to mean. Like he rehearsed it over and over, but can never quite get it right.

Ever since Katie started to really pursue Ilya, Shane’s been weird about it. At first, Ilya thought it was jealousy, maybe, that a pretty girl was interested in Ilya, but Shane has shown zero interest in Leila, Katie’s best friend who definitely tried to flirt with Shane. So then Ilya thought maybe Shane was just really into Katie, but then again, Shane didn’t seem to give a crap about Katie either.

Ilya had thought about asking his mom about it, but it had made him nervous so he didn’t.

That’s probably the toughest thing about having basically one real friend and that friend being Shane Hollander. Shane is intense about a lot of things; hockey, working out, food,

Ilya, but gives very few fucks about other things; his looks, girls' attention, the popular kids liking him. Ilya's pretty sure his priorities are odd for a teenage boy.

Katie does show up. Ilya hears her call out his name as they start their warm-ups. The other team is out as well, their captain, a seventeen-year-old defenceman has been watching him and Shane carefully since they stepped on the ice. It's no use, they'll beat him anyways.

Ilya abandons his spot next to a stretching Shane.

'Hey,' he skates up to find Katie along the boards, with Leila. 'you made it.'

'Of course, you know I love to watch you play.' She says, smiling and tucking a strand of her dark, wavy hair behind her ear. Her brother had been on their team, but he quit a few months back, Katie stuck around though, watching their games and sometimes even popping up at their practices.

Ilya smiles at her. 'Get some good seats, I'm betting on hattrick tonight.'

Katie and Leila laugh, warm, share a look and Katie bats her lashes at him. 'Are you going to get me a puck from one of those goals?'

'If you want.'

'Oh, I want.' Katie says, her smile goes a little slick and she really is pretty. Big brown eyes, long waving dark hair. Slim, but with more curve to her than many other sixteen-year-old girls at his school.

Ilya feels himself grin, though there's an edge that feels a little fake.

'I will see you after game, yes?'

'Of course.' Katie says.

Ilya pushes off and skates back to Shane. Shane has moved on to stretch his hips. Low to the ice, leg to the side. He's looking away so firmly, Ilya immediately feels unsettled. Shane always looks at him.

Ilya stands there, feeling uncertain until Shane seems to sigh and look up at him. His face is carefully neutral. 'Was your girlfriend happy to see you?' His voice is awfully neutral as well.

'She's not my girlfriend.' Ilya says. He feels like these conversations are probably supposed to go differently.

When Ilya kissed Olive Connors after school when he was fourteen, his singular friend at the same school as him had been so intrigued and he'd been almost *proud* of Ilya. So when he'd gone and told Shane, he'd expected a similar reaction. Shane had been... Shane. He'd asked questions, mostly about what Ilya felt, if he thought he would do it again, but every question had been tinged with something distant and steely. Like he was just asking what he was supposed to ask or like he was trying to confirm something.

‘She’s not my girlfriend *yet*, you mean, right?’ Shane asks, but he still sounds *off*.

‘I mean, I don’t know.’

Then when Mona Traveaux had asked him to the end-of-year dance when he was fifteen, Shane had glared at her so hard Ilya was worried she’d drop dead on the spot. Ilya hadn’t liked her anyways, she was rude to Shane, so he’d said no.

It was just sort of what happened.

If girls flirted with Shane, he would get squirrely or barely reply. When girls flirted with Ilya, Shane would go cold and distant. Ilya didn’t like to think too much about what *he* felt when girls flirted with Shane.

‘Ready?’ Ilya asks after the silence becomes uncomfortable.

‘Of course.’ Shane says, standing up with a move far smoother than it has any right to be. ‘We’re going to do great.’

‘Of course, we are best players here.’

‘*Davai*.’ Shane says, a peace offering.

Ilya grins at him. ‘Let’s go.’

Shane scores first after only 25 seconds. Ilya wins the face-off and passes to Shane while he takes off up ice towards their opponent’s goal. With a pass via their left winger (poor guy, but at least he gets a point) the puck gets back to Ilya, who watches as Shane shakes his defender and sets himself up beautifully at the point. Ilya doesn’t hesitate before sending the puck to him. Shane scores easily.

25 seconds in and they’re up 0-1. He’s been told games like this don’t tend to draw too much of a crowd beyond parents and stuff, but there’s been some people from outside those circles coming to their games for a few months. True hockey nuts that have heard about the two future NHL players on this juniors team.

Ilya skates over and knocks his fist against Shane’s, then he bumps their helmets together. Shane grins at him and Ilya’s stomach goes tight.

He promised someone a hattrick. He should get on that. Their coach learned early to not always switch out their line after they scored, it impacted their ice-time too much. Nowadays he tends to just go by time played. Ilya and Shane both easily log 30 minutes per game, sometimes more. It’s stupid and probably not the greatest idea, but their stamina is good enough and they are responsible for about 75% of the team’s goals.

Their opponents have clearly done their homework though and while Ilya is too big to really be intimidated by their hard checks and elbows in his side, Shane isn’t. The captain of the other team, the big guy who, up close, looks like he’s probably almost eighteen, has clearly decided that Shane’s his man to cover and after his first slip, he’s been on Shane’s ass the whole time.

Ilya has been watching, because fuck that, Shane's *his* wing and if this fuckwit hurts him Ilya will absolutely punch him, fuck the rules in juniors. He's also been trying (with the emphasis on *trying*) to let Shane fight his own fights. It's just that Shane is too nice sometimes (often), too willing to let things go. Not a fighter.

Shane is all skill. Fast, smooth, easily the best skater on the ice at any time. The way he can turn on his edges is something Ilya has been trying to replicate since they were twelve and he still can't do it the way Shane can. Shane has a way of reading a defence, reading intention in the most subtle shift of a player's skates or shoulders that sometimes makes Ilya feel bad that he hadn't been the one to move to a wing.

But as he was saying, Shane is a skill-player, through and through. And sometimes opponents take advantage of that. Trying to intimidate him by throwing hard checks and hounding him around the rink. And Shane doesn't do anything about it. Ilya fucking will though.

'If he checks you like that again I will deck him.' Ilya says when they flop onto the bench after their shift ends and their second line is sent out on the ice.

'No you won't, the scouts are here.'

'I don't give a fuck, they can see I will protect my teammates.'

Shane looks at him, eyes sharp. 'You know that is not what they'll see.'

Ilya rolls his eyes, but he knows exactly what Shane's talking about. Ilya doesn't need to gain a reputation for being volatile. He's already got the almost-formerly-Russian thing working against him in that regard.

Between the two of them, Shane is known as the level-headed one. The calm, collected wing to Ilya's fire in centre. Ilya is the shit-talker, the troublemaker. Shane is the golden boy. Perfect.

And look, Ilya *agrees* okay. He knows Shane Hollander is perfect (apart from his backhand, though Ilya has been trying to fix that). Shane is *his* best friend. He's funny in the driest way, much less sweet and soft than people think he is. There's steel in his spine, but he just rarely shows it and Ilya knows how much it costs him to call on that steel. So he does it instead.

It works for them, but they need to be careful that they don't get to be too much of their... role. They are trying to be as perfect of a hockey player as they can be.

'There's also a few NHL scouts here tonight, boys.' Their coach leans down between them, a hand on their shoulders.

Shane tenses.

'Thanks coach.' Ilya says, in hopes the man will back off and he does.

Shane relaxes a little when coach's hand leaves his shoulder, but not entirely.

'We are fine, solnyshko.'

‘Yes.’ Shane replies.

There isn’t time to try and reassure Shane more, they get the tap and they’re sent back out onto the ice. Shane darts straight into helping their defence out to stop their opponent from setting up a proper attack. Ilya circles, making the opposing defence check nervously where he is.

Shane steals the puck off an opponent’s stick and sends it right to Ilya, he doesn’t even check if Ilya is there. He just knows. Ilya takes off towards the blue line. Ilya can hear the defence curse behind him, but they won’t catch him.

There is only one defender and his eyes keep darting to the side, letting Ilya know Shane is on his wing. It is just enough of a distraction that Ilya manages to slip past the defender and finds himself one on one with the goalie. It is almost too easy. He bites on a fake and Ilya can easily send the puck over his shoulder. The light goes on and there is another cheer from the crowd.

Ilya spins around and points at Shane. ‘What a fucking set-up!’

‘Nice way to finish it.’ Shane replies, bumping his fist against Ilya’s and then knocking their helmets together.

As the game continues, they get into the flow of things, they both log almost 35 minutes of ice-time. It’s a stupid amount and Ilya’s legs are actually tired as shit, but it feels *good*. They win 5-1. *Shane* is the one who gets the hattrick. He smirks at Ilya about it, who logs two goals himself. He fucking loves when Shane gets like that. He acts so humble all the time that it feels really good when he shows that he’s just as much of a little shit as Ilya is; he’s just better at hiding it.

‘Fucking Christ Hollander,’ their fourth line centre says when they’ve all filed into the locker room. ‘I thought that d-man was going to *cry* after that second goal. That was almost cruel.’

Shane’s cheeks had already been flushed from the exertion, but now they get pinker for a whole different reason. ‘Thanks Luke.’ Shane says.

Luke Cormack is probably the only player on the team that looks at the two of them with a sort of worship and not mild disdain. He especially adores Shane.

Ilya fucking hates him.

‘Not as good as the move that led to my first goal. Talk about highway robbery.’ Ilya says.

‘Enough.’ Shane says, cheeks flushing an even more vibrant shade of pink. ‘We all had a good game. Cory only let in one goal.’

Ah yes, there’s also Cory. Cory doesn’t hate them either, because he’s the goalie and goalies live in their own world and are... fucking crazy. Cory is no exception. He’s sixteen and walks around quoting Shakespeare and according to their defencemen he recites poetry whenever he stops a shot on goal. He knows who Tolstoy and Tchaikovsky are, unironically.

After they've gotten changed, Ilya hopes he can sneak off and see Katie, but him and Shane are swept into a conversation with the scout for Canada's junior team. The man is very glad to hear that Ilya will be allowed to play for team Canada and ensures them that if they just do what they're doing and stay healthy, there will certainly be a spot for them on the team.

Yuna stands in the middle of them and asks questions Ilya wouldn't have thought of, like ever. Like who would pay for flights and if they'd have to practice far in advance. That's why she's there though, to be the smart adult, so he and Shane can just grin at each other and think about gold medals and the NHL draft.

Speaking of the draft. Ilya craves it as much as he dreads it.

You see; he and Shane are good enough to go within the first five, probably first and second overall. Which means they'll go to different teams. Which means they'll be separated for the first time since they were twelve. He knows it's still two-ish years away, but he can't help but want time to slow down sometimes.

When the scouts leave and Yuna tells them she'll wait for them at the car, they burst into excited chatter. Ilya switches to Russian because that's still most comfortable for him and Shane can keep up.

'We're going to fucking World Juniors Shane!'

'I know! It's going to be crazy! We can get a gold medal, that would be so sick.' He doesn't quite use the right word at the end, but Ilya gets it.

'That goal in the second-'

'That back check in the first-'

'Your control-'

'That hit-'

'Um, hey Ilya.'

Shane's smile drops so fast it nearly gives Ilya whiplash.

'Right, your girlfriend.' Shane says. 'I'll leave you to it.' He says before walking off, probably to wait with his mom.

Ilya turns to face Katie. 'Hey.' He says.

'Great game. I heard some people behind us saying that there were scouts here today. It was a good one for them to see, right?' She's without Leila now and Ilya wonders where she is. Katie's looking intently at him, hair tucked behind one ear, smile inviting.

'Yes, they're scouting for World Juniors.'

‘Oh that’s cool.’ Katie says. ‘I um- I didn’t know Shane spoke Russian too.’

‘I taught him while he helped me with English.’ Ilya says with a shrug. ‘He’s very smart.’

She lets out a little laugh that sounds fake. ‘He doesn’t seem to like me very much. I was kind of hoping he’d be into Leila so we could go on like, a double date-’ She blushes. ‘-I mean, if you’d want that, of course.’

‘I, um-’ This should be a fucking easy answer, so why doesn’t it feel like one. He likes Katie, she’s pretty, she likes hockey, she’s nice enough. ‘sure, yeah, I’d like that. Not sure if I can convince Shane though.’

‘That’s okay.’ Katie says, her smile much brighter now. ‘Leila will be disappointed, she thinks he’s hot, but I’m just glad- well, I’m happy we can go out sometimes.’

‘Yeah, let’s make a date.’

‘Great.’ She squeezes her hands together and then darts closer, stands on her tiptoes to press a kiss to his cheek. ‘I’ll text you.’

When Ilya makes it to the car, Shane acts aggressively normal. Like there’s absolutely nothing wrong, which means there’s definitely something wrong.

Ilya doesn’t know what to do about it though. So he plans a date with Katie and tries to pretend that he doesn’t notice the way Shane’s jaw goes tight whenever Ilya mentions her, or how his stomach feels funny when Shane mentions he’ll go hang out with Luke when Ilya goes on his date with Katie. Ilya tries to pretend that the idea of Shane hanging out with Luke, alone, doesn’t make him want to cancel the whole thing with Katie and stay home, hang out with Shane instead.

Ilya has had a key to the Hollander house for over two years. As soon as he and Shane got old enough to stay home alone while their parents went to dinner or a show. Tonight is one of those nights, Ilya knows, it’s why he picked tonight for his date with Katie. She’s funny and nice and pretty and she’s clearly really into Ilya. He thinks he should feel more when she shyly touches his arm. He thinks he should be more into it when she kisses him outside of the diner they went to. He thinks he should be more bummed when she says her parents are expecting her home by nine and no, she can’t be late.

He thinks he should maybe think about her when he gets off in the shower at home. She should be thinking about her mouth on his, her hands on him. He should be thinking about the feeling of her hair in his hands.

But he’s... not.

He’s also very much avoiding the images actually flashing through his brain.

Shane doesn’t text him. It’s stupid. He doesn’t sleep well.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading! I don't have an upload schedule in mind, but maybe another chapter on Saturday? I've got a really busy rest of my week.

Comments are like still-slightly-warm cookies to me. Please feed me XD.

Chapter 2: a long way from the playground

Chapter Summary

‘What the fuck was up with you today?’ Shane asks when they’re the last two in the locker room. They would usually be gone by now, but they had, by some unspoken agreement, both lingered.

‘What the fuck was up with me? You’ve been acting like someone pissed in your breakfast all week.’

Shane is looking at him, furrow between his eyebrows, eyes narrowed. ‘Seriously? I wasn’t the one tripping over my own feet today. What time did you go to sleep last night?’

‘Fuck off, you’re not my mom.’

‘No, I’m the one lying to your mom so you can go fuck Katie.’ Shane snaps.

Chapter Notes

Hello! I'm back! Thank you for your lovely comments on chapter one!

This chapter will go from where we ended to the days before the draft. I also added some tags. There's some homophobic language in this chapter. Nothing that isn't used in canon, really.

Again; suspend your disbelief with me, this is my world and i'll do what i want with it. XD

Also; Alexei did get left with their dad and I don't really plan on touching on it in the story too much, so I'll clarify a little more here. Alexei was already 14/15ish when Ilya and Irina left. He was already far more in his father's mindset and claws than Ilya was. Irina was certain that if she took him too, their father would never let them go and/or Alexei would find a way to tell their father where they were and they would be dragged back. It obviously hurt her to leave him behind, but she didn't see another way. Ilya and Alexei's relationship had already soured at this point. Alexei had been echoing a lot of his father's sentiments about Ilya, that he was weak and useless and soft.

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

But yeah, Ilya gets himself a girlfriend and Shane- well Shane is still his best friend, but he is clearly uninterested in getting to know Katie and Katie isn't exactly interested in getting to know Shane either. When they hang out and play hockey, things are exactly as they've always been. Shane is bright and quick, with the driest sense of humour, he's the best goddamn hockey player Ilya's ever seen and he reads Ilya like an open book. He's still warm and he laughs at Ilya's stupid jokes and he's just *Shane*.

But when Katie comes around, Shane steps back, fades, disappears and suddenly there's fucking *Luke*. Sidling up next to Shane, smiling at him and laughing at things Shane doesn't mean as jokes and Ilya fights the urge to *rip* him away from Shane. It's *fine*. Shane can have other friends. It's fine.

They get selected for World Juniors. They go and practice with the team in Saskatchewan (it takes Ilya a *week* before he can say and spell that) three times before the matches start. Ilya and Shane are on the first line with a kid called Kyran, who's completely aware that he's mostly there for window dressing.

Ilya won't deny that he's nervous about possibly (probably) facing Russia in the finals. Everyone knows he was born there. Not many people know the real, full story of how and why he left. He doubts it will matter. With his last name on a team Canada jersey, he's sure it won't be a pleasant game for him.

The advantage to World Juniors being in fucking Saskatchewan is that Katie can't be there. His mom is though, along with Yuna. David is flying in for the final (they're all kind of expecting that they'll make that).

Their first game is against Germany and they win with a whopping 7-0. Ilya gets a hattrick and Yuna and Ilya's mom give them a rundown of all the scouts there for the tournament. NHL scouts. Boston, Montreal, San Jose, LA, New York, Detroit, Philly, Toronto, Ottawa, Vancouver. It seems like the list just keeps going, all teams with top 10 draft picks. It's almost enough to make Ilya nervous. Which means it makes Shane anxious as fuck.

Which means they go for a 10-mile run at 6am. Ilya wants to *die*, but Shane looks so wrecked Ilya can't even find it within himself to be grumpy.

They beat Sweden 5-2.

Then they beat the US 4-3.

And then they face Russia in the final.

David arrives and pulls both of them into a long, tight hug.

'Good luck boys. Just keep it calm and do what you always do.'

'Thanks dad.' Shane says, shifting uncomfortably.

'Thank you, David.' Ilya says before tugging Shane along to the locker room.

There's a healthy tension in the locker room as they get ready. Shane is quiet in that very focussed way he gets, where he laces up his skates with a precision that might seem unnecessary to others, but is super necessary to him.

Russia is made up of mostly guys that are *just* young enough to still be allowed to play. Which means most of them are a year, if not two years older than Shane and Ilya. They're certainly big. Ilya knows how they play. They shoot hard, hit harder and try to bully you into hesitating.

'A look, the little treacherous bitch.' The captain of the Russian team, Andropov says, stopping near Ilya and Shane during warm-ups.

'Ah yes, all that talk about him, I thought he'd be more impressive.' His wing, Petrov says.

Next to Ilya, Shane's gone tense.

'Ah and he's brought the little Canadian faggot with him-'

Shane turns Ilya sharply, grabs his sleeve and they skate for the bench, stopping Ilya from telling them exactly where they can shove their fucking stick (and if they won't do it themselves, Ilya will volunteer). Their coach didn't call them, but he meets them at the boards like he did.

'This is going to be a bit nasty, huh?' He says. He's only coaching them for the tournament, but Ilya likes him. He's no nonsense, but with more humour than their coach in Ottawa.

'If they keep running their mouths like that, yes.' Ilya says.

'A reminder; fighting is an automatic ejection during this tournament. You're not in the NHL yet.' Their coach says and Ilya nods. Shane does not.

'We both end the game on the ice, agreed?' Ilya says, tucking his glove under his arm and holding a hand out for Shane to shake.

Shane rolls his eyes, but tucks his glove under his arm as well and shakes Ilya's hand.
'Agreed.'

The game starts hard and fast and Petrov scores within a minute. Shane tries to help their defence out, but a massive Russian defenceman shoves one of their guys off the puck and they're like a bunch of bulldozers. Their defence scrambles, the goalie goes too early and just like that, they're down.

But they haven't scored 16 goals in the last 3 games for them to simply give in. Kyran (their left wing, remember?) sends the puck to Ilya, who draws two players to him and then sends the puck to Shane, threading the needle, and Shane slips past a defender, cutting inside in a move so smooth it should probably be illegal and then finds Kyran again, who's actually done the right thing and gone inside. Kyran scores.

The insults keep coming though.

‘Weak bitch.’

‘Treacherous dog.’

‘Your mother is a whore.’

‘Filthy cocksucker.’

And Ilya knows they’re saying the same shit to Shane, they just don’t know he can understand them.

They’re targeting Ilya and Shane, it’s not difficult to figure out. They take the hardest hits, get the worst insults thrown at them. In the second, when it’s still 1-1 and Ilya feels like his blood is starting to boil, Shane takes a hit that’s just barely legal, but hard enough that there’s a whistle and he’s slow to get up.

Ilya’s heart clenches painfully at the sight of Shane using the boards to get himself up.

‘You good?’ Ilya asks, skating over to him.

‘Fucking peachy.’ Shane says, tension in his jaw. He looks Ilya in the eye. ‘My ribs hurt, but it’s nothing *bad* bad. Just got the wind knocked out of me.’

‘He should be *punched* for that hit.’ It was Andropov, of course. He looks far too pleased with himself for Ilya’s liking. ‘Do that again and you’re going to find out that my right hook is as good as my backhand!’ Ilya calls to him, hoping to wipe that smug fucking look off his face.

It doesn’t work. He gets, if possible, even more smug.

‘Stop that.’ Shane says. ‘That’s exactly what he wants. He wants you or me or both off the ice so they can have an easy game and win.’ The refs call for a faceoff in Russia’s zone. Shane waves Ilya off. ‘I’ll take it.’

Shane lines up across from Andropov. Ilya can’t hear what Shane says, but he can see the look of surprise on Andropov’s face before the ref skates up. The puck drops and Shane wins the draw, takes off towards the Russian goalie. Ilya is right on his heels, they keep the tempo high, exhausting Russia’s bigger (and slower) defencemen. Shane sneaks inside and with a slick little fake he manages to slip the puck through the five-hole. Another goal for their line.

He gets a cross check in the back for it from Andropov and again; Ilya isn’t close enough to hear it, but Shane turns and says something. There’s a quick back and forth between them as Ilya rushes to- well he’s not sure, he just goes closer.

‘-you motherfucker-’

Ilya’s just in time to see Andropov shake off his gloves and punch Shane in the face. The refs that had already been convening around them as well, let out a collective “hey!” and they’re

pulling Andropov away immediately.

Ilya just rushes for Shane. 'What the fuck? Are you okay?' Ilya asks as he reaches Shane. He grabs his upper arm just to make sure he doesn't like, lose his balance and go down. Shane has a bare hand pressed to his mouth, his glove tucked neatly underneath his arm.

'Oh yeah, I'm fine.' Shane sounds... really fucking calm.

'What the fuck, Shane?'

Shane looks at him, his eyes show that he's smiling just a little behind his hand. 'You needed him off the ice, right?'

'You-' Ilya glances over his shoulder at the refs. They're guiding Andropov off the ice, he's talking- *yelling*, but it's coming out in a mix of Russian and English and none of the refs speak Russian. 'Did you goad him into punching you so he'd get ejected? Solnysko, that's my kind of move.'

Shane shrugs. 'I'd like to win this game and not get injured so-'

A ref comes within earshot and Shane stops talking. 'You good, Hollander?'

Shane pulls his hand back and glances at it, his teeth are bloody and there's blood on his hand too. 'I'm bleeding, but I don't think it's anything major.'

'You've been taking a beating tonight kid, let your med staff look you over.' The ref says. 'Andropov was saying you were shit-talking him in Russian, how much of that is true?'

'I mean- I know some Russian, but definitely not enough to talk shit at him. I was just saying that he should focus more on playing hockey and less on throwing slurs at my head.' Shane says, no Shane *lies* (well, probably not about the slurs, but that's *definitely* not what he said). He does *something* that makes him look smaller and wide-eyed and innocent and Ilya is fucking amazed by him.

See, Ilya has the reputation for being a shit-stirrer. Shane does not. Shane's known as the good one, the golden one. The one that never gets himself into trouble. He's a fucking genius.

'That's what we figured. Get that cleaned up. Let's get back to playing hockey, alright?'

'Of course, sir.'

'Yes, sir.' Ilya adds. As they skate away Ilya reverently adds: 'You are unreal.'

Shane's cheeks go pink. 'Shut up.'

'Hollander, you good?' Their coach calls as they get to the bench. Shane gets whisked away by the med staff to get checked over and rinse his mouth. Their second line gets sent out and Ilya sits on the bench, the spot next to him very much open and waiting for the person who always sits there.

Russia does not fall apart without their captain. They're a good team, even without him, but they do lose a bit of their vicious edge. They're less aggressive with Shane who absolutely skates laps around them. They give them more space which allows Canada to score. Shane scores *again* off an assist by Ilya and even though Russia gets one back when their third line is on the ice, Ilya scores two in the third to put the nail in their coffin.

When the clock runs down, Ilya and Shane are on the ice together watching as the final seconds tick away. Shane's like the sun with how bright he smiles. They throw their gloves into the air, sticks and helmets get dropped.

It turns into a group hug eventually, but in the middle of it all there's Shane wrapped up in Ilya's arms. There's shouting around them in English and French at the same time, but Ilya doesn't give a shit.

'We did it, *Ilyushenka!*' Shane is saying. 'We did it!'

'Yes, we did.'

They get their gold medal a solid ten minutes later. Ilya can see his mom, she's crying with the biggest possible smile on her face. Ilya feels like he could cry as well, but he doesn't. Shane cradles his medal in both hands, smiling down at it with the most unguarded expression Ilya's ever seen on his face, where others can see it at least.

There's a celebration on the ice with all the families. Yuna and David fold Shane into their arms, holding him tight, telling him how proud they are. Russia leaves the ice as soon as they've gotten their silver medals and they can go without looking incredibly rude. Ilya's mom hugs him tight, telling him over and over that she loves him and that she's so proud of him.

Then there's a celebration in the locker room with just the team. They're almost all underage or barely legal, so there's soda and they all *act* like they're drunk. Their coach tells him and Shane that pretty much every single scout that had been at the tournament had told him that he had something real special on his hands; and they weren't talking about Olly and Pete on the fourth line.

Ilya doesn't even think about Katie until he finally gets his phone in his hands, probably two hours after the final whistle, which probably says something.

She's sent him a nice text, asking how the game went and then a link to an article written about their win. It names both Ilya and Shane as top prospects with bright futures in the NHL.

They're only seventeen and yet it feels like he's on top of the world.

When they get home to Ottawa, their team throws a party for them. A celebration. Ilya hadn't exactly been expecting it, they aren't super friendly with their teammates, but they do seem genuinely happy for them. Luke is... frustrating. He hangs around Shane the whole time. He asks about the bruise on Shane's face (curtesy of Andropov) and he asks about fifteen times if it hurts and if Shane's sure he's okay.

He might be exaggerating, but Luke is *annoying*. He's trying too hard. He probably wants something from Shane. Like being close to Shane will make him better at hockey (fat chance, he's terrible).

But Katie is here too and she's got a hand curled around Ilya's bicep and she's been giggling at pretty much everything he says, batting her lashes at him, telling him her parents are out of town. He knows what she wants. He's pretty sure he wants it too. He thinks.

He can feel Shane's eyes on him though. It's making his skin feel itchy. Maybe this is what Shane meant when he talked about how certain fabrics make him feel like clawing off his own skin.

He goes home with Katie. He tells his mom he's going to hang out with Shane for a little longer and he asks Shane to cover for him if necessary. It's the single most uncomfortable conversation he's ever had with Shane. Shane's face is cold and distant as he assures him that; yes, he will tell Irina that Ilya is with him if she asks and no he's not mad. It's *fine*.

It doesn't feel fine.

When he gets home at ten, his mom asks him if he had fun. He doesn't tell her that he had sex for the first time, nor does he tell her that it was... nice. Not spectacular, but good. Katie had been sexy and she'd enjoyed herself and it was all... fine. He doesn't tell her that he almost called it off because he kept thinking about the downwards slant of Shane's mouth and the way his freckles became more pronounced when his cheeks were all flushed or the coldness of his eyes of which Ilya just couldn't shake the feeling that it was *hurt* hiding in there.

Both of them turn eighteen. Ilya dates Katie for a solid few months, during which Shane starts hanging out with Luke more and more. It makes Ilya feel all kinds of grumpy and snarly (he refuses to admit it's jealousy). Still, whenever they get on the ice, things are as they've always been.

Off the ice though, things are different. Ilya's irritable and Shane's been distant and brushing Ilya off whenever he makes a comment about Luke. He should have known they would end up in a fight sooner or later.

It's a very rare practice where things don't go well. They hadn't been connecting on passes and Ilya's legs had felt like lead and he'd been tired because Katie had wanted to hang out last night and it got late and Shane's pissy and snappy, and then to top it off, coach yells at them too.

'What the fuck was up with you today?' Shane asks when they're the last two in the locker room. They would usually be gone by now, but they had, by some unspoken agreement, both lingered.

'What the fuck was up with me? You've been acting like someone pissed in your breakfast all week.'

Shane is looking at him, furrow between his eyebrows, eyes narrowed. 'Seriously? I wasn't the one tripping over my own feet today. What time did you go to sleep last night?'

'Fuck off, you're not my mom.'

'No, I'm the one *lying* to your mom so you can go fuck *Katie*.' Shane snaps. 'That's where you were, right? You were too busy fucking her so now I have to deal with you being fucking useless on the ice.'

'Just because you're jealous that I'm getting some and you're not, doesn't mean you can say that shit Hollander.' Ilya snaps back. He pretends he didn't flinch at Shane calling him useless. It's been five years, but that word still makes him think of his father.

'I'm not fucking *jealous*!' Shane stands up. He's still shorter than Ilya, but he's strong and broad and *angry*. 'You can fucking keep *her*! I just want you to not be an idiot and make sure you're ready to fucking *play hockey*! You know? The thing we've been doing together since we were twelve? The thing we want to go pro in? That thing?' Somewhere in Shane's rant he seems to go from angry to mostly upset.

'I have *one* bad practice and this is what I get?'

'It's not about this one practice!' Shane shouts. 'I just want my best friend back!'

Ilya- he doesn't know what to say to that. He wants to go back to the way things were as well, but he doesn't know how. He's supposed to do this, right? He's supposed to get a girlfriend and spend time with her and want her and whatever. It's normal to spend less time with his best friend because of that, right?

'But it's fucking fine. I get it. She's more important to you.' Shane says and before Ilya can find his voice, Shane's grabbed his bag and he's shouldering open the locker room door and he's gone.

'Fuck.' Ilya says to the empty room.

Normally he'd catch the bus with Shane, but when he comes outside Shane's gone and he's just missed the bus. Fucking shit. Instead of going home, he takes a different bus to Katie's house. He-he's got to do something.

When he knocks on her door, her mom opens. The house is perfectly white-picket-fence. Katie's mom looks a lot like her daughter and she smiles at the sight of Ilya.

'Hi Ilya, how are you? Did you come to see Katie?'

Why else would he be here? He wants to ask, but that would be rude. 'Hello ma'am. Yes, I'd like to see Katie if that's okay.'

'Of course, of course. Did you just come from practice?' She opens the door wider to let him in. The house is crisp and clean as always. Perfectly suburban and neat.

'Yes I did.'

‘Katie’s upstairs, just leave the door open.’ Katie’s mom gestures for the stairs with a wink. Ilya doesn’t know if she’s just ignoring that Ilya’s definitely had sex with her daughter or if she actually believes they haven’t.

‘Thank you.’ Ilya says and he heads for the stairs. Katie’s room is at the end of the hallway on the left and the door is closed. Ilya knocks and only goes in after he hears Katie’s voice call out.

‘Ilya!’ Katie says, when she sees him. ‘Oh my god, hi! I didn’t know you’d be coming over.’ She hops off her bed. She’s dressed in leggings a Rozanov jersey, her hair down and waving around her face. She stands on her tiptoes to kiss him. She smells like something sweet, it’s probably the strawberry lip gloss he can taste on her mouth.

He’s not *really* kissing her back. She looks perfect, she should feel like a dream come true, but he still feels unsettled from arguing with Shane and her parents are downstairs and he’s just-

‘Hi.’ He says gently stepping back from her.

‘Why didn’t you text? I would have dressed a little nicer.’ Her tone is flirty, tugging on the edge of his jersey, trailing her other hand over his chest.

‘I wanted to talk.’ He says, taking her hand so she’ll stop touching him.

She tilts her head a little and makes a face. ‘O-kay.’ She tugs him over to her bed. He sits down next to her. ‘How was practice?’

Ilya lets out a laugh that doesn’t have any humour in it at all. ‘Bad.’

Katie frowns at him. ‘Oh, sorry to hear that. What was wrong?’

‘I didn’t sleep enough last night, was tired. I was not as good as usual and Shane got annoyed with me.’

Katie rolls her eyes. ‘Oh come on, you have one bad practice and he’s immediately on your ass about it? He’s too hard on you Ilya.’

‘No, he’s not. I want to go pro, he’s right.’ Ilya defends Shane automatically. He stands by it too. If he’s in the NHL by this time next year, he can’t afford days like this. He’ll need to prove himself. He needs to have his priorities straight.

‘Ilya, you’re allowed to have fun. You can’t let him control your life. I know he’s your best friend but-’

‘I think this is the problem.’ Ilya says. He tries not to interrupt her, as a rule, but he does not want to hear the end of that sentence.

‘Problem?’ She lets go of his hand. ‘What do you mean, problem?’

‘I think we should break up.’ He says, only realizing that’s why he’s here when he says it.

‘What?’

‘I don’t think this is going to work. I want to focus more on hockey. I can’t be the boyfriend you deserve and do that at the same time.’

‘Ilya come on-‘

‘No, I- this is what I think we should do.’

‘But Ilya, I love you.’ She’s never said that before and Ilya doesn’t even think she means it. She’s just trying to keep him with her.

‘Sorry Katie, but I’ve made up my mind.’ He stands. ‘I’m going to go now.’ When he turns to look at her, there’s tears in her eyes.

‘Fine.’ She says, her bottom lip wobbling. ‘Go running back to him, I doubt he can suck your dick as good as I can.’ She tosses her hair over her shoulder, crosses her arms and looks away from him. ‘Get out of my house.’

He should probably say something, goodbye or whatever, but he doesn’t. He just turns and leaves. He manages to get out without running into her parents again.

He starts walking.

He’s just broken up with his first proper girlfriend, yet all he can think about is Shane. Her last words have put *something* in his head. The idea that Shane might want to- the idea of Shane on his knees-

No, he needs to fucking stop that.

Shane’s pissed off, narrowed eyes flash through his mind.

Before he realizes it, he’s walking towards Shane’s house. Shane might be expecting him anyways. They’ve never fought the way they did today. Ilya- he’s just going to go over there and apologize. Their parents are out tonight, that’s why they had to take the bus home from practice.

It’s parents’ night. Which is basically when their parents get together and talk about adult shit (taxes probably) and drink wine. Tonight, they’re at some bar downtown.

When he gets to the Hollander house, there’s light on in Shane’s bedroom. Ilya uses his key to let himself inside, locks the door behind him and takes his shoes off before heading upstairs to Shane’s bedroom. He’s about to call out to Shane, let him know he’s here, when he stops.

He hears voices. Plural.

‘-not sure what it is you want.’ He hears Shane say.

‘I just think you need to accept that he’s not *perfect*, Shane.’ That’s fucking *Luke*.

‘I don’t think he’s perfect.’ Shane sounds defensive.

‘It’s okay, I know how you feel about him, but maybe he’s not worth all that. Maybe there’s someone better out there for you. Someone who *really* gets you.’ Luke sounds... like he’s trying to make Shane see something. It’s quiet for a few seconds before Luke continues. ‘Just let me-‘ and then there’s silence again.

Something cold sits in the pit of Ilya’s stomach. Before he full well realizes what he’s doing he’s pushing Shane’s bedroom door open.

It takes his mind too long to process what he’s seeing. Shane leaps back from Luke. He leaps back because Luke had a hand on his face. He had a hand on Shane’s face and his mouth pressed against Shane’s. He had been kissing Shane. Shane had been tense, hands in fists at his side.

‘Out.’ Ilya says. Looking Luke in the eye. ‘Get the fuck out.’

Luke looks shocked, but he steels himself. ‘I’m not leaving unless Shane tells me to.’

Ilya feels his lips twitch into a snarl.

‘Please leave, Luke.’ Shane says just as Ilya opened his mouth to tell him what the fuck he thinks of that.

‘I- I’ll text you.’ Luke says before stepping carefully around Ilya. ‘Let me know you’re okay, okay?’

‘I’m not going to *hurt him, you-*‘

‘You’ve already hurt him.’ Luke snaps back at Ilya.

‘Luke! Get out.’ Shane says. ‘I’ll lock the door behind you.’ He herds Luke from the room and the sound of voices travels down the hall and down the stairs. Shane’s sentences are short and clipped. The door opens, closes and then there’s a few seconds of silence before Shane’s footsteps come back up the stairs. Ilya can just imagine him, forehead pressed against the door, taking two deep breaths before facing Ilya.

It hurts.

Shane avoids making eye contact as he comes back into his room and closes that door as well.

There’s silence for an awful few seconds.

‘I’m sorry.’ Ilya says.

Shane blinks at the floor and then looks at Ilya, blinks again and says: ‘What?’

‘I’m sorry. I’m sorry.’ He swallows. ‘I was off today and in locker room I was mean. I broke up with Katie, I- you were right.’

‘You-‘ Shane shakes his head. ‘No, I’m sorry too. I was cruel to you. You’re- you’re allowed to make mistakes. I shouldn’t have called you useless, you’re *not* useless. You’re *never* useless.’

‘I appreciate that.’

‘You broke up with her?’

Ilya nods. ‘I think I liked the idea of having a- of having someone more than I actually liked her.’

Shane nods, bites his lip, wrings his hands together.

Ilya clears his throat. ‘So... Luke?’

‘He just, he showed up when I just got home, he asked why I looked upset. I- I don’t know what made him do... *that*. He’s never done that before. I-‘ Shane stumbles over his words. He looks flushed and pale at the same time.

‘You- did you want him to kiss you?’

‘No!’ Shane protests immediately, vehemently.

‘So I should go punch him?’

‘What? No, I- don’t do *that*.’

‘Why not? He kissed you when you didn’t want him to-‘

‘No that’s not-‘

‘Shane.’ Ilya says. It’s a bit like someone cuts Shane’s strings. He sits on the edge of his bed, shoulders slumped, eyes downcast. ‘Will you please tell me the truth?’ Ilya steps closer, sits on the edge of Shane’s bed too, leaving a little room between them.

Shane looks at the space between them like it hurts him. ‘I-‘ He stalls, stops.

‘You’re my best friend.’ Ilya says softly. ‘Nothing will change that.’ He’s not even entirely sure what he thinks Shane is going to say, or maybe he does know but he just can’t make his brain admit it.

‘I think I’m gay.’ Shane admits. His voice shakes, cracks and he’s looking at his own hands now, digging his nails into his palm.

Ilya nods to himself. ‘Okay. And- and did you really not want him to kiss you?’

‘No.’ Shane says, insistent. ‘He’s just- he’s been nice to me and maybe I had *some* idea that he wanted something like that, but I didn’t think he’d actually do it.’

‘He should have asked.’

Shane shrugs. 'It was kind of brave. Fucking stupid, but brave.'

Ilya narrows his eyes.

'Since- since I've been honest, I need you to be honest too. Why do you hate Luke so much?'

Ilya has to breathe before he can answer that. 'He- he looks at you like he wants- like he wants to *own* you. Like he wants you to be *his*.' Ilya says.

'And why can't I be his?' Shane asks, stubborn slant to his mouth.

Because you're mine, Ilya's mind supplies, but he absolutely cannot say that out loud. 'You- you don't want to be his.'

'No, I don't.' Shane agrees. Shane looks at him, eyes still a little guarded. 'Are you- are you actually just going to say "okay" to my whole- my whole "I think I'm gay" thing?'

'Well,' Ilya says. 'it is okay, right? We are in Canada, is okay here?'

'Well, *yes*.' Shane says like that is not his point. 'But there's a difference between that and you finding out that your- your best friend doesn't give a shit about Leila and Veronica and Suzie.'

'You didn't even like Veronica?' Ilya asks, no, teases. 'She's a hockey nerd, like you.'

Shane rolls his eyes. 'Fuck off. I liked talking to her about hockey, I just didn't want to kiss her.'

There's usually a reason for Shane to switch to Russian. Ilya does it sometimes just because words are hard in English or because he wants to use a specific sentence that he can't make work in English or just because he's frustrated and done with that dumb language. Shane tends to switch along with him, but now Shane is the one to switch languages.

'But you didn't want to kiss Luke either?' Ilya asks, Shane's already said as much, but he would like to hear him say it again.

Shane throws him a look like he knows exactly what Ilya is thinking. 'No, I don't want to kiss Luke.' Something shifts over Shane's face. 'Have you... ever thought about kissing a guy?'

Ilya finds himself blinking a few times. Little flashes of half-thoughts, maybe's pushed away quickly, a glance at a guy's mouth- Shane has a pretty mouth-

'Not *really*.' Ilya says. 'But... I feel like I can't say I don't like it until I try it?'

'Yeah... I mean, same, technically.' Ilya loves the way Shane speaks Russian. His pronunciation is *good*, not perfect, but good. He has a way of twisting sentences around in a way that doesn't technically work in Russian, but Ilya understands him anyways.

‘But who would you try it with, right? Who can you trust?’ Ilya says and as he says it, the solution pops up so bright and easy that it almost feels stupid.

‘Yes, who can I trust not to throw that information around. That can’t be out when we get to the NHL.’ Ilya adores that Shane uses *when* and *we*. Like there’s simply no other way than them both making it to the NHL. Like it’s a given.

‘I mean... you can trust *me*.’

Shane breathes, tilts his head and says: ‘Wait, I need you to say that in English so I know for sure I got that right.’

‘You can trust *me*, right? I can trust you?’ Ilya says. His heart is in his throat. What the *fuck* is he doing?

‘I’m having a hard time with this. Can you be clear?’ Shane says, an edge of frustration to his voice. Shane gets like that sometimes, where he gets lost in subtlety.

‘If *we* were to kiss, we could try it out and be safe. You would never betray me and I wouldn’t do that to you either.’

‘You-‘ Shane’s eyes dart away and then back to Ilya, but he’s looking at Ilya’s ears or something, because that “eye contact” isn’t actual eye contact. ‘But won’t that make things weird? I don’t want to lose you.’

‘You will never.’

‘That’s sweet, but I’m not convinced.’ Shane says, he worries at his bottom lip with his teeth. It draws Ilya’s eye there.

‘It can be like- like a test. Practice. Like when we simulate game scenarios during practice.’

‘Simulate game scenarios? Fancy.’ Shane teases, eyes bright.

Ilya faux-glares at him. ‘Genetics.’ He says, just to be a little shit. ‘Superfluous, resilient, extraordinary.’

Shane tips his head back and laughs. It’s one of those beautiful, truly unguarded laughs that Ilya adores. It makes him want to do something insane like press his face into the curve of Shane’s neck.

‘Do you actually know what those words mean?’

‘Like half of them, maybe.’

Somewhere during their conversation the space between them has vanished and his leg is now pressing against Shane’s. His whole face looks different now. Soft and warm and open.

‘We will be fine, yes? We always are.’

Shane looks at him, his eyes searching for *something* in Ilya's face.

'Yes, we will be.'

'So we try it?'

'I guess so.'

They sit there for a second, just looking at each other. Shane is wringing his hands and his foot is making these subtle, nervous movements. Ilya knows he needs to be the one to move here, because if he waits for Shane, they will still be here by the time their parents come home or when the sun comes up.

Ilya sets his hand on the bed behind Shane and leans in slowly. Shane goes still. 'Still okay?'

'Yes.'

Ilya swallows and then brushes his mouth along Shane's. When Shane doesn't recoil or flinch away, Ilya does it again. For a second, Shane is still under Ilya's mouth, but then he moves. It's like his mouth softens underneath Ilya's and then he's kissing him back.

Ilya expects it to maybe feel weird. For it to maybe feel wrong. But like everything with Shane, it seems like it's impossible for things to feel wrong with him. He reaches for Shane, touches his face, grips his chin to tilt his head and make the angle better. Shane just lets him. Follows his lead, lets Ilya move him. Shane's hand grips Ilya's forearm and for a second he thinks Shane will push him away, but he doesn't, he just holds Ilya there.

He kisses him again and again, breathing him in, trying to commit the softness of his mouth to memory.

He doesn't realize he has a hand on Shane's thigh until he shifts and he can feel the corded muscle move under his hand.

He pulls back, takes his hands off Shane.

Shane blinks his eyes open slowly. Swaying gently after Ilya before righting himself.

He's stupidly gorgeous.

Ilya wants to run his hands through his hair. Grip it. Kiss the line of his jaw. Bite at him, just to see what he'll do. He wants to see how far this uncharacteristic compliance will go.

He needs to get up. He's eighteen which basically means a stiff breeze will give him a hard-on, and he's certainly hard right now.

Ilya clears his throat. 'That was- that was nice.'

He has to clear his throat as well, voice croaky at first. 'Nice?' Shane replies, face hard to read.

‘Yes, did you not think so?’

‘I... I did.’

‘I- should we-’ Ilya stalls, he doesn’t know what to say now. Fuck, he promised things wouldn’t be weird.

‘Should we play a videogame?’ Shane offers.

‘Yes, I’d like that. Beating you at a videogame sounds like a perfect way to end my night.’ Ilya says, trying not to let out a sigh of relief.

‘Asshole,’ Shane swears at him. ‘you’re not winning, just you wait.’

Ilya tries not to notice, because they’re ignoring it, but Shane is hard too.

It’s a bit like they’re both trying to prove that nothing is different. They sit on the couch downstairs and play videogames for a solid hour and a half. When Shane’s parents come home, they find them on the couch, swearing at each other in Russian, arguing over who won their tournament (it’s a tie, but neither of them will admit it).

David offers to drop Ilya off at home. Ilya says yes because he’s done enough walking today and he needs a proper night’s rest.

When Ilya gets home, his mom presses a kiss to his cheek. ‘Hello Ilyushka, how was your day?’

‘I broke up with Katie.’

His mom blinks at him. ‘Ilya, what?’

He shrugs. ‘It just wasn’t working.’

‘I’m sorry darling.’

‘It’s fine mom, I hung out with Shane after. It was good.’ *I also kissed him and I liked it*, he thinks but does not say.

‘I’m so glad you two have each other.’

‘So am I, mom.’

They both pretend the kiss didn’t happen. Or maybe they just do what they agreed to do, which is that they don’t let it change anything.

There’s been a rock growing in the pit of Ilya’s stomach over the past few weeks, because there’s one undeniable fact he can’t simply ignore anymore: They’re going to be separated by the draft.

Ilya's probably going to be picked first and go to Boston, while he thinks Shane will go second over all and go to Montreal. Shane will be the highest a wing has been picked in about fifteen years, but he's so worth it. Montreal and Boston though, are like mortal enemies and far apart. Ilya's not too excited about the idea of being separated from Shane, even if he's dreamed of the draft for *years*.

They both play their absolute butts off in the lead up to the draft. The two of them score 16 goals in only 4 games and opponents are starting to hit harder and get more feisty with them. Ilya's punched three people in those last 4 games as well. They're not technically supposed to be fighting in juniors, but refs tend to look the other way if they don't go overboard.

Shane's been giving him that disapproving look every time Ilya does fight, but he's kept his mouth shut. Ilya mostly punches them because they target Shane anyways.

But then two weeks before the draft, Shane comes bursting into the Rozanov house on a Sunday morning. They're supposed to go for an easy skate later, just to move their legs and get the blood flowing.

'Good morning Irina,' he rushes to say. Shane almost always speaks Russian to Ilya's mom. 'Ilyushenka, have you heard? Did you see?'

'Hello Shane.' His mom says, amused.

'See what?' Ilya asks.

'The fuc- the rumours! About Boston!' Shane looks slightly frantic, eyes wide and hands fluttering around.

Ilya finds himself smiling. 'What rumours, *solnysko*, slow down.'

Shane takes a deep breath when Ilya motions for him to do so. 'Those guys with the NHL blog? The ones that have like *actual* insider information? They wrote about the draft. Apparently, Boston is trying to convince Montreal to trade them the second over all pick.'

Wait what? 'Wait *what?*'

'And why, Ilyushenka, would they want both the first *and* second pick?' Shane asks, smiling broad and true.

'Maybe because they want both halves of a very successful young duo?' Ilya's mom says, coming over to them. She's also smiling widely.

'Exactly!'

'But Montreal won't go for that, right?' Ilya says, that would be dumb. To hand a direct division rival both Ilya *and* Shane?

'Well they haven't just outright said no, otherwise it wouldn't have turned into a rumour good enough for them to discuss it.' Shane says. 'We could- we could end up in Boston *together*, Ilya.'

And that would be the dream, wouldn't it?

Ilya tries to temper his excitement. Usually Shane is the pragmatic one between them and Ilya is the dreamer, but now that Shane seems so ready to believe in this rumour, Ilya feels the need to be the level-headed one.

'That would be great.' Ilya says. 'But let's not get too excited before it is actually confirmed, okay *solnysko*.' He knows his mom has thoughts about what he calls Shane and what Shane calls him.

Solnysko is... well, it's a good thing Ilya was responsible for a large part of Shane's Russian vocabulary. (He knows Shane started looking up stuff on his own a while ago, but so far he hasn't seemed to look properly into what that word means.) And Shane calls him *Ilyushenka* sometimes, which is a very intimate diminutive of his name. Different from what his mom calls him too. It's- it's *fine*. It doesn't matter that any native Russian speaker would probably think they were *together*, if they heard them call each other those things.

It's not even the point. Shane is looking at him with his soft, kind eyes, still smiling despite Ilya's hesitance.

'Okay, I will try to calm down but it's just such a nice thought.'

Ilya feels the look on Shane's face somewhere in his chest. Behind his breastbone where all his soft and mushy feelings live.

'Should we go for a run? Do you want to go skating now?'

'I want to get on the ice.' Shane says and Ilya's never been particularly good at resisting Shane so he gives in, of course.

They head to their local rink. The owner knows them well at this point and he's agreed to let them skate there whenever, basically, as long as they promise to come back when they've made it big in the NHL (his words).

The ice is still crisp, though Ilya knows the Timbits have practice in about 30 minutes, but they all adore Ilya and Shane, they're *so excited* about knowing them and always ask a billion questions. Shane had been awkward and unsure at first, but now he's warmed up to the little ones and he's trying to teach one particularly feisty Timbit how to turn on her edges like he does.

They do a few lazy rounds before speeding up a little. They're not even in full gear, just sweats, hoodies and skates. Ilya saw a figure skater doing a really cool jump at this competition that was on TV the other day, so he spends a few minutes trying to jump on hockey skates, which is really not ideal, but it makes Shane laugh, so that's always worth it.

Shane does a lazy spin that looks a little like the stuff figure skaters do. Not as neat and tidy, but he goes pretty fast.

Shane doesn't often find the calmness to mess around on the ice like this. He's usually all sharp focus and icy determination.

Ilya loves seeing him so free.

Shane grips Ilya's arms and tries to get him to spin as well, Ilya protests half-heartedly, but he mostly enjoys the way Shane's nose scrunches when he's truly laughing and the way his eyes go all sparkly and Ilya kind of wants to kiss him again.

Okay, wait. Hold the fuck on.

It is... not the first time he's thought that since... that one time a few months ago. Shane is just- well he's stunning and sometimes Ilya thinks that Shane might be thinking about it too. And up until about an hour ago, Ilya had been telling himself that the whole thing was stupid for multiple reasons.

One: They were going to the NHL, not exactly the most accepting place (like *at all*) for anyone not straight (or white, which was already strike two for Shane).

Two: They would be extremely busy and in different countries, if Ilya was right about the draft. Otherwise they'd certainly be in different cities on different schedules.

But now, there was a chance that maybe- *maybe*- the second point wasn't valid anymore. And everyone knows they're close so maybe- *maybe*- they could get away with it...

He should stop. This isn't something he even needs to think about. Shane would never go for it. He would never risk their careers for Ilya. He's not worth that. Shane loves hockey more than anything, even Ilya.

Ilya's drawn from his own head by Shane's gentle tug on his hoodie. 'The Timbits are here.' He looks at Ilya, smile a little more subdued now. 'You okay?'

'Yeah Shane, I'm fine.'

Shane doesn't look like he believes him, but he lets it go in favour of greeting the small balls of pure enthusiasm dressed in tiny hockey gear.

They all talk over each other and they tug on Ilya to get his attention and he finds himself laughing, skating around with a train of little skaters chasing after him. Shane stays in the middle with his favourite Timbit, Savannah, who has a stubborn tilt to her chin that reminds Ilya of Shane.

The Timbit's coach, Mona, lets them mess around with them for a bit. There's a bunch of parents watching, smiling as their kids scramble around on the ice with two future NHL players. After ten minutes though, Mona claps her hands and calls her Timbits to order. Ilya and Shane wave goodbye and head off.

They do go and work out after.

When they're sufficiently tired and sweaty, they head to the showers. Communal showers are a thing that you just kind of get used to when you play sports like they do. It's been harder though, since Ilya knows that Shane is- is into guys and since he knows what Shane's mouth feels like pressed against his, since he knows what Shane's thigh feels like under his hands.

Ilya's usually good about it, but he steals a glance this time. Shane's body is unreal. He's not as tall or broad as Ilya is, but he's strong. He's just beautiful to look at.

Ilya tips his head back under the water, trying to flush the thoughts from his head. He's being such a fucking idiot.

Shane is his *best friend*, he needs to stop this and behave. What is he even doing?

Still, he *thinks* he's not the only one who still thinks about that day. There's an odd tension now when it's just the two of them in any place, but especially the showers. Like they are both hyper-aware of the fact that it's just them and they're both naked and they are Not Supposed To Look.

When they're both mostly dressed, Shane clears his throat. 'Did you wanna hang out?'

'Yes, let's go to the smoothie place.' Ilya says. Shane's very conscious of what he eats and neat to a fault, always folding his clothes neatly, even his hockey gear as much as possible.

'Alright.' Shane agrees.

They walk, because it's a nice day (meaning; it's not raining). Ilya's telling Shane about this school assignment that he has to do to make up for what he would be missing for the draft. They both get to skip certain assignments and miss class because of their high level of athletics. It means they have to do some weird shit and have basically no friends at school because they're gone all the time, but it doesn't matter. They're graduating this year and they have each other.

When they step into the smoothie place, Shane's gotten to explaining what *he* did for the exact same assignment that Ilya has just gotten. Shane did it 2 months ago and they're not above giving each other a few tips. (An advantage of being in different schools: Ilya can just turn in Shane's assignment with his name on it, and they'll never know.)

'Oh, hey Shane.' They're in line when a voice interrupts.

Ilya looks to their right and finds Luke.

'Oh, hi Luke.' Shane says. His cheeks flush and he shifts his feet uncomfortably.

'Yes, hi Cormack.' Ilya says, deadpan.

'Right. Hi Rozanov.'

Shane looks between the two of them. 'How- how are you, Luke?'

'I'm good. How's your Sunday been?'

Things have been all kinds of awkward and tense between the three of them. Shane is awkward around Luke because of the kiss, Ilya hates Luke because he's a best-friend-stealing piece of shit that can't keep his lips to himself, Luke hates Ilya in return because he seems to think Ilya's too controlling *and* then Luke is still trying to act like Shane is his friend even though they haven't hung out alone since that night that Luke kissed Shane.

'Good, Ilya and I went for a skate and stuff.'

'Oh, that's nice.'

'Yeah.'

The silence that follows is fucking unbearable.

So Ilya touches Shane's shoulder and steers him to the counter, where a bored looking college girl is waiting for them to order. Shane jumps but he sort of mumbles something about speaking to Luke at practice and then he steps further towards the counter with flushed cheeks.

'Hi, what can I get you?'

'I'd like the Berry Bonanza.' Ilya says and he remembers to take his hand off Shane.

'Um, and I'd like the Green Deal, please.' Shane says. 'You can ring them up together, I'll pay.'

'Shane-'

'Nope.'

'Okay.'

Shane's smoothie is green and has kale in it and is probably far healthier than Ilya's pink and purple berry monstrosity. They sit at a little table at the window and chat. Shane slowly relaxes again. The tension of running into Luke easing from his shoulders.

The sun actually starts shining as they talk about nothing and when the sun hits Shane's face Ilya feels like he's just gotten absolutely hammered into the boards by a guy twice his size. Shane's eyes are like molten chocolate and with his freckles dusted over his cheekbones and nose; he looks like a fucking angel.

'-Ilya?'

'Hm?'

'Are you okay? You've seemed a bit out of it today.' Shane tilts his head.

'What? Yes, I'm okay. Just- just a bit in my head about the draft and stuff.'

Shane smiles at him. 'Sorry for bursting in like that this morning. I didn't mean to make things more difficult for you.'

'No, *solnyshko*, that's not what I meant. It's nothing bad.'

'Okay.' Shane says. 'How is your mom?'

'She's good, her therapist adjusted her meds recently and it seems like it's really helping.'

'That's good to hear.' Shane says with a genuine smile. 'Mom said something like that, but I always like to get my intel from you as well.'

Ilya laughs. 'Good, as you should.'

Eventually they both head home. They're no good reason for them to hang out even longer, but he still feels like both of them are hesitant to separate.

Ilya tries not to get his hopes up with the whole Boston thing, but still, he keeps his eyes on the hockey news and to his shock, the rumours are starting to spread further and the craziest part is that people actually in the world of hockey seem to think that Montreal might go for it.

The draft is being held in Ottawa this year, which feels like a sign of some sort. Especially because only a few weeks later, they will be playing in their second and last World Juniors tournament. It feels like everything is coming together. Almost too perfectly.

Ilya will probably always remember the moment when he hears the news. Ilya and his mom are over at the Hollanders. They're having lunch, preparing to drive to Ilya and Shane's final practice before the draft. It's only two days away now and he and Shane have been running, skating and working out more and more, just to try and keep the anxiety under control.

Yuna's phone rings. She glances at the screen and then picks her phone up immediately. Shane, who had been talking to Ilya's mom, stops mid-sentence. It makes them all go quiet as Yuna answers the call.

'Hi Farah-' Oh fuck, that's their agent. 'No not yet, we were just having lunch. Yes Ilya and Irina are here too. We have a minute, yes.' Yuna glances over at Shane, who's biting at the nail of his thumb.

Before Yuna can do so, Ilya reaches over and tugs his hand away from his mouth. He brushes his thumb over Shane's knuckles before letting go.

'Really?' Yuna says, her eyebrows rising. 'Well, the boys will be very happy to hear that. Yes, thank you Farah. We will see you at the draft. Bye now, bye.' Yuna hangs up and looks to Ilya and Shane.

'Well?' Shane presses when she doesn't start talking immediately. 'What did Farah say?'

There's a million things it could be, but it isn't any of those million things, it's the one they desperately want it to be.

‘Farah called to let us know that the deal between Boston and Montreal just went through. Boston is trading their first line centre, half of their second defensive pairing and their third-round pick to Montreal, for Montreal’s second overall pick. Boston has also told Farah about their intent to draft the two of you first and second overall.’

Shane’s breath stutters on an exhale. He looks at Ilya and Ilya’s unsure of what his own face is doing, but if it looks anything like Shane’s-

Shane looks like he could pass out or sprout wings or both. The tension in the room cracks when Shane breathes out; ‘*Ilyushenka-*’ and then they’re basically falling from their chairs and hugging each other tight. Shane’s pressed against him, breath stumbling hot against Ilya’s neck.

They stand there for too long of a time probably. Their parents are moving around them. Talking, maybe. Ilya doesn’t care. He just cares about the press of Shane’s body against is, the weight of him wrapped up in Ilya’s arms. The pure fucking relief of knowing that he’s not going to Boston alone. That he will still be with Shane.

He will still be with Shane. He wants to be with Shane. In more ways than he can really, fully admit to now. This isn’t the moment, but now that the thought is there, it’s like a little seed planted in his brain and he’s pretty sure it’s going to grow roots and grow big.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading!

I hope you all felt that I tried not to make either Luke or Katie a villain here. They're just teenagers with a crush who're also idiots. It's not their fault really.

I love every single comment even if it's a string of emojis <3

Chapter 3: i wanna love like you made me feel, when we were eighteen

Chapter Summary

Ilya brushes that off. ‘Marley understands that he’s the third wheel here.’

‘He’s our captain.’

‘He understands, Hollzy.’

Shane bites the inside of his cheek and looks away. ‘Just- just don’t do anything dumb, okay?’

‘I would never.’

Chapter Notes

Hey! So this took longer than planned.

It got longer than planned too.

I've had an insane few weeks, but I think it's done!

Thank you for all of your lovely comments!

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

When they finally let go, all three parents in the room are teary eyed and Yuna admits she might have taken a picture or two of them. Ilya wants to set the picture as his phone background, but the image is too intimate for that. Ilya has his hand cupped around the back of Shane’s head, hand in his hair. Shane’s one hand is fisted in the back of Ilya’s hoodie, clutching tight. Ilya has his eyes closed, head turned towards Shane.

It’s a great picture, but it should never leave the Hollander home.

Walking into the draft now feels so much less scary. They’re both in suits that their moms helped them pick out. Black, basic, but nice enough that they won’t feel embarrassed to see the pictures in fifteen years.

Their parents are with them, but they still get stopped a lot by different team owners and general managers that are present. Ilya lets Shane do most of the talking. He might be an anxious ball of nerves sometimes, but he's a good talker and very good at acting like he's cool, calm and collected. Ilya finds that with fancy people like this, the kinds of people rich enough to own an NHL team, he suddenly feels self-conscious about his English. Shane has told him so many times that no one minds his accent, that his English is really good, but still, with stuff like this, he prefers to let Shane do the talking.

Finally, they get to their seats. Around them are other guys hopeful to get drafted early or by a good team, but they're all looking at Shane and Ilya like they know *they* are the reason they won't go in the top 2, there has been about 2 words spoken about who's going third overall. No one really cares. It is not making them any friends and Ilya is very aware that it will likely also put somewhat of a target on their backs.

Luckily Boston is a team known for standing the fuck up for their teammates. He's sure there will be plenty of gloves dropped in the first few games as they establish how contact with their rookies will be handled. Ilya himself will probably be punching some assholes to make sure they understand what happens if they touch Shane.

The beginning of the draft is kind of boring, they do a bunch of stuff for TV and Ilya mostly works to keep Shane talking.

Finally the commissioner of the NHL, Roger Crowell, steps up.

'Good evening everyone. *Bon soir* and *merci* to the wonderful city of Ottawa for hosting us tonight.' There's scattered applause. 'There's plenty of hopeful young hockey players here tonight that are undoubtedly hoping that I'll keep this short, so I will. Hockey is a wonderful sport; fast, dynamic and with so much talent you hardly know where to look. All those stars on any of our teams started somewhere, and for most that start was here; at the NHL draft. Tonight there will be a lot of dreams that come true and I am very glad that we will have so much new talent to join us in the league. Thank you, good luck and have a good night.'

Ilya and Shane clap because they are supposed to.

'To announce the first overall pick of the 2008 draft, here is Bruce Cassidy, general manager of the Boston Bears.' The commissioner announces.

Now Ilya and Shane applaud genuinely.

Ilya knows the man by face. Kind eyes, dark hair with some grey streaks in it. Former head coach turned GM. 'Good evening everyone. I'm very glad and proud to be able to stand here tonight to not only announce the first overall pick of this draft but the second pick as well.' Behind him, on the stage are the head coach; LeClaire and someone else from management. Most of the time there would only be one jersey in their hands, the jersey with the name of their pick, but they are *both* holding jerseys. 'When we started looking into who we would like to pick first overall, we saw a duo that I think everyone is aware of at this point.' There's cameras that are aimed at them now. 'And choosing was... nearly impossible. So, we decided that we didn't want to choose. Therefore, with the first and second overall picks of the 2008 NHL draft, the Boston Bears select: Ilya Rozanov and Shane Hollander.'

It's kind of poetic. They've done everything together and they will also get to do this together.

Shane grins at him and they hug their parents, Shane hugs Ilya's mom as well and Ilya hugs Yuna and David too. Then they make their way to the stage together. They shake hands, get handed their respective jersey and get their picture taken. Ilya thinks that *technically* he got picked first, but it doesn't actually really matter. He and Shane are really, officially going to Boston together.

The rest of the night is a bit of a blur. The only clear part is his mom's proud facial expression and Shane. Shane's bright eyed and smiling easily and he never leaves Ilya's side. It's another show of how well they know each other because Shane knows the exact moment when he needs to help Ilya out finding a word because the pure emotional whirlwind of the day has made some of his English disappear and when Ilya's got it.

Even though the draft is in Ottawa, it's a lot more in the centre of the city and they decided to splurge and get three hotel rooms, one for Shane's parents, one for Ilya's mom and one for them. To "get used to it for next year", they're hoping they'll be allowed to room together on road trips. Their parents tell them to go to sleep. They agree and close the door.

When it's finally just the two of them, no cameras, no other eyes, no parents, it's a bit like they finally, really look at each other.

Shane looks exhausted, but there's still something bright in his eyes. His face is like an open book to Ilya. Pride and joy, but also something softer dance across his face.

'We've done it.' Shane says into the silence.

'Yes we have.' Ilya agrees. He reaches up and tugs on his own tie. He's about done with the thing. He goes to say something else, he really is, something normal and easy, but then he sees where Shane's eyes are looking. Shane's looking at Ilya's throat and the look on his face is different now. Hotter, hungrier.

Ilya only realizes that he's frozen when Shane seems to snap out of it and his eyes widen. Ilya knows that look too. Fear.

'S-sorry.' Shane says, his face flushing quickly. 'It's been a long day- I didn't mean to- I'm sorry-'

'Shane, *solnyshko*, stop that. No panicking.' Ilya reaches out and manages to snag Shane's forearm before he can flutter it anxiously around him and back away.

'I- I wasn't *looking*- I'm just tired and-'

'*Shane*.' Ilya stresses. 'It's fine.'

'No it's *not*-' the word wrenches itself from Shane. '-you're my best friend, I'm supposed to keep it under control.'

'Shane- keep what under control?'

‘Nothing.’ Shane lies.

Ilya isn’t even sure why he asked, he *knows*. After a silence that’s just a little too long where he thinks Shane might actually *leave*, he says: ‘Have you- have you ever looked into what I call you?’

It takes Shane a second to process what Ilya said, his sudden change of topic throwing him off. ‘What? Have I looked into my name?’

‘No not your name; *solnyshko*.’

‘Oh, that. Um, no I’ve never looked it up.’ Shane says, he’s still holding himself like he’s expecting things to go wrong. Like he did something wrong. ‘I figured it had something to do with the sun?’

‘Yes, but it is like-’ Ilya tries to find the right words, Shane deserves the right words. ‘-what is it called? A name for someone close to you?’

‘A nickname?’

‘Yes, but not for a friend.’

Shane tilts his head. His panic is mostly gone now, he’s focussed on Ilya. ‘So is it like how my mom calls me darling?’

‘No, not like that either.’ Ilya says and he swallows. ‘It’s more like what you would call someone that you are *with*.’

‘With... like, together?’

‘Yes, it is a name for someone you- you are dating.’

Shane stares at him for a few seconds before he exclaims: ‘You’ve called me that in front of your *mom*! You started that when we were like *fourteen*!’ Shane doesn’t sound horrified, but he sounds disbelieving.

‘I know, I know, my mom has... opinions on that, but it- it just suits you. You are golden boy, you are like the sun, you smile and I-’ Ilya cuts himself off, but Shane looks so *hopeful*. ‘You smile and it’s like you’re the sun to me.’

‘Ilya.’

Ilya steps closer. ‘I know this is terrible timing. I know, and we don’t need to do anything about it, okay? But I want to make sure you understand. Nothing you feel about me is wrong, yes? I- I feel it too.’

‘You’re incredible.’ Shane says, soft and genuine and it makes Ilya feel like crying.

‘Like I said; I feel the same about you.’

Shane lets out a laugh, his face so horribly fond Ilya wonders how he ever thought Shane didn't feel the things he was feeling himself. Shane doesn't look at anyone else that way.

'We- we should just let it be though, right?' Shane says. 'At least for now?' He sounds... unsure, like he's actually asking for Ilya's opinion.

'Probably. Get settled in Boston, in the new team and then we can... talk about it?'

'Let's set a time though, I know myself and I'd get fucking anxious if we don't.'

Ilya grins. 'How about after our rookie season, we talk.'

Shane holds out his pinkie. 'Promise.'

Ilya hooks his pinkie around Shane's. 'Promise.'

They touch thumbs and only linger a little where their hands touch.

'Just- I'm going to just-' Ilya says after they let go. He can't not- he needs- He watches Shane's face carefully as he raises his hand again, but Shane doesn't show any hesitation. Ilya brushes his thumb along Shane's cheekbone, following the line of his freckles. Shane's cheeks go pink immediately, but he doesn't move back or remove Ilya's hand off him. He just stands there and lets Ilya touch him.

'That's unfair.' Shane breathes.

Ilya takes his hand off Shane's face and holds them out to his sides. 'Wouldn't want that.'

Shane brushes his thumb along Ilya's bottom lip, which is *actually* wholly *unfair* and it makes him want to take that thumb into his mouth and *suck*, but that's not what they're doing here. Then he traces the line of Ilya's jaw and runs a hand through his hair. It's getting a little long, but Shane lets a curl spring back after tugging on it a little and smiles.

'Alright, I'm good.'

The tension in the air between them is still there, but it's different now, less crackling like electricity and more soft, simmering.

They get ready for bed and when Ilya looks at himself in the mirror, there's a truly dumb smile on his face. He looks... happy. Stupidly happy.

They decide to get an apartment together in Boston. It might be a bit dumb, considering they now both know they have big feelings for each other, but it just feels dumb not to do it. They're going to live on their own for the first time, in not just a new city, but a new country. They're best friends before anything else.

But before they move and do all that stuff, they play their second World Juniors. They're the team to beat and the players to beat.

In game one against the US, Ilya gets himself ejected.

Shane steals the puck from a cocky American asshole with a move so filthy it should be illegal and he trips Shane for it. He just blatantly hooks his stick around Shane's skate and pulls. Before Ilya can even do anything Shane gets up and snarls: 'Don't be a fucking sore loser.'

The linesmen have already whistled and are approaching, but Ilya is faster.

'Shut up *bitch*,' the American dickwad snaps, getting up in Shane's face, shoving at him. 'why don't you go suck Rozanov's cock some more huh?'

Shane opens his mouth to reply, but Ilya yanks the guy off Shane. 'Get your fucking hands off him.'

'Ah there we go, here's your muscle.' He's still talking to Shane, so Ilya shoves him again. He looks Ilya in the eye. 'Is he good? I bet he looks pretty on his knees, right? He looks like a girl anyways, does he cry? I bet he does-'

Ilya thinks he's been exceptionally controlled, but there is such a thing as lines and crossing them and how Ilya will allow you to say pretty much anything about him, but when you start talking about *Shane*? That's where he draws lines. Many lines.

So he punches him in the face and he gets himself ejected.

Shane sighs and waves Ilya off as he tries to apologize.

Dickface gets a two minute minor for tripping Shane and Ilya gets ejected. The linesmen *conveniently* didn't hear what shithead was saying to Ilya or Shane. Somehow.

Shane though, gets his revenge in the best way possible. He'd already scored once when Ilya was on the ice, but he scores twice more to make it a hat trick and then absolutely hammers the asshole into the boards. He's slow to get up, but the hit was squeaky clean, so they can't even give him a penalty for it.

Ilya can't read his lips, but he's certain Shane said something after he hit him.

They win the game.

And then the next.

And then they beat Russia in the semi-finals.

And then they beat Sweden in the final.

And they get their second gold medal.

The media attention is much more intense this time. "What are your expectations for your rookie season with Boston?" To play as many minutes as they'll let me and to score like fifty goals. "Your line scored less goals this tournament than you did last time, are you worried

defences are figuring you out?” No. “How do you think being in the NHL will change your friendship?” It won’t.

It’s exhausting, but while he’s tired, Shane looks *drained*.

He flops onto his bed in their hotel room, face first.

Ilya flips the bedside lamps on and goes to close the curtains. He goes to the bathroom and turns the shower on. ‘Come on.’ He says to Shane, before going back and checking the temperature of the shower. He turns the heat down a little. Shane doesn’t like his showers too hot, he says it makes his skin itchy.

Shane is hanging his jacket on a hanger when Ilya gets back into the room. His tie, shoes and socks are already off and he starts working on his shirt. Ilya tries not to look, but it’s hard and Shane *knows* so like, maybe he sneaks a peak.

There’s a dark bruise on the left side of his lower back. Courtesy of a fuckwit on the Finnish team. It’s already going a little green around the edges. His shoulders are wide, muscles defined and beautifully functional. Ilya kind of wants to bite him a little.

Shane goes to the bathroom with his pants still on, carrying pjs with him. Ilya’s appreciative and disappointed at the same time.

When Shane comes back out, he looks much better.

He walks over to Ilya where he’s sitting on the bed and leans down, pressing a kiss onto Ilya’s hair. ‘Thank you, *Ilyushenka*.’

‘Of course, *lyubimy*.’

Shane tilts his head. ‘I don’t know that one.’

Ilya smiles. ‘Good.’

Shane narrows his eyes, but the shower, their Long Day and his current level of exhaustion means that he lets it go.

They move into their apartment mid-august. It’s nice, two bedrooms, nothing over the top, but comfortable. Their parents are teary eyed when they leave the two of them there, but Ilya feels good. He’s with Shane. It will all be fine.

They spend two weeks getting to know their neighbourhood, running several new routes and making sure they are as strong as possible before training camp starts (it’s close to the Bears training facility, another bonus). They’re supposed to report with the other rookie hopefuls on September 10th. The vets will arrive a few days later. They’ll have their physicals and early ice sessions. The other rookies will be gunning for a spot on the roster, but everyone and their mother knows that no one but Shane and Ilya really stands a chance.

Boston didn't trade away two players and a draft pick to then *not* play Shane and Ilya and usually two rookies on a team is enough, though they might give one of the defensemen rookies a go.

Arriving at their first real NHL training camp feels a lot more manageable because he has Shane at his side. Shane who has done the absolute most to prepare them for this. Shane who knows who each and everyone of these rookies is, their strengths, their weaknesses. He also knows all of that for the vets. His rundown on the Bears three goalies has been repeated enough that Ilya knows exactly where he'll be shooting when facing any of them.

Their physicals are nothing they haven't done before. The team doctor that does them is nice enough, calm and easy going.

Stepping on the ice of Warrior Ice Arena is a bit surreal. It's Boston's practice facility, but it's still nicer than any place Ilya has trained before. The lights feel brighter, somehow. The ice is unreasonably smooth and Ilya gets handed a red practice jersey by an assistant coach. Shane gets handed a white one.

They had already talked about this. They knew they would be separated at some point. They were going to size them up, see if they were useless without the other.

According to the assistant coach running their "early ice session" this is just to "get them used to the unfamiliar arena" and "get the jitters out", but all of them know it's game on.

Ilya and Shane are called to take the face-off as they go to run a "practice game".

Ilya grins at Shane from across the face-off circle. 'Ready, Hollzy?'

Shane raises an eyebrow at him. 'Fuck off, Roz.'

The assistant coach also acting as ref drops a puck and Shane wins the face-off. He takes off and Ilya scrambles to follow him. Shane is fast, but so is Ilya. A defenseman tries to intercept Shane but he passes the puck off to Newman, who hesitates for a second. Ilya steals the puck from him and goes for the other side of the ice.

They go back and forth like that for a few minutes. Shane is Ilya's best friend and also his worst fucking nightmare on the ice. Shane can read him like no one else can, but on the other hand, he can also read the shift of Shane's skates better than anyone else can.

By the time the assistant coach calls to switch lines, Ilya's breathing is laboured and he's both grinning and sweating.

Shane grins right back at him.

One of the other assistant coaches makes one of Ilya's teammates switch so that Shane is now also wearing red.

That's when things get nasty for the other rookies. Shane and Ilya are... well, skating circles around them would probably be an appropriate term. They include the others on their team, or they try, but they're really not on the same level. He can tell there's a level of frustration in

Shane when their linemate Eriksson seems incapable of reading the plays Ilya is trying to set up. Maybe it's unfair to expect him to just... know, but Ilya and Shane have been playing with a third liney for, you know, seven years, and usually they catch up a little quicker.

This guy seems to be shaking in his skates though.

They run some individual drills after where Shane kicks everyone's absolute fucking *asses* in the accuracy drill and Ilya wins their little speed competition (Shane's a close second and Ilya can tell he's annoyed by it).

By the time the day is done, he's tired as shit, but also feeling good. This was so manageable. He and Shane are easily the best players here and they'll be doing more of the same tomorrow.

As expected, the next few days go pretty much the same. They work out with the other rookies, play a few practice games, run some drills and then go home. Shane had insisted on meal prepping for the whole week. Ilya thought he'd been exaggerating and that he would think it was over the top, but when they get to their apartment, Ilya will admit he's glad he doesn't have to stand in front of the stove and cook a whole ass meal.

But when the vets come in, that's where shit gets serious.

The captain, Cliff Marlow introduces himself to all the rookies present, but he starts with Ilya and Shane.

'Welcome to Boston.' He says as he shakes hands with both of them.

He's a big guy, tall and broad, with dark hair and a nose that's definitely been broken at some point. He's about twenty six, a left winger and known to throw a punch when needed.

'Thank you.' Shane says. 'It's good to meet you. Your percentages on the penalty kill were really impressive last season.'

Marlow raises his eyebrow. 'You know my penalty kill percentages from last year?'

Ilya grins. 'He's just like that.'

'Right, you two are the two-headed dragon.'

This makes Ilya's grin even wider. 'We are what now?' He looks at Shane, who rolls his eyes at the look on Ilya's face.

'Please, he's enough of a brat as is, we don't need to make it worse.'

Marlow laughs. 'Oh I've got bad news for you Hollander. In Boston, we love a pest.'

'What is pest?' Ilya asks Shane.

'I don't know the translation, but literally it's like a rat, but in the sense of an annoying little shit, someone who antagonizes.'

Marlow blinks at them. ‘You speak Russian, Hollander?’

Shane shrugs. ‘Yeah?’ *What, like it’s hard?* His tone says.

‘Oh you two are going to be a wonderful nightmare.’

They try a whole bunch of line combinations between drills, work outs and fitness tests. They play Ilya with Shane, without Shane, with the fourth line, the third, the second and the first, they play him with Varkov and Cadyn and St-Simons and Dubek and Kohn, but the line that works the best is pretty clear. Himself in centre, Shane on his right wing and Marlow on his left. When they go up against their first line from last season (Hammersmith, St-Simons and Dubek), it’s actually pretty competitive.

Which, for two rookies fresh from the draft is pretty damn impressive, if he says so himself.

Their starting goalie, Howard, is fucking weird, but he and Shane kind of get along immediately. Howard is one of those stat-maniacs and Shane loves stats too. Howard is like, twelve years older than them, but he doesn’t seem to really care as he blinks slowly from behind his mask, looking kinda high for lack of a better term, while still slamming his pads down to block shots Ilya was really expecting to go in.

That’s probably the biggest difference with where they played before.

The defencemen and goalies can actually kind of keep up with them. They still have the advantage of speed and youth and being unpredictable fucking menaces but it’s certainly harder to score now.

He doesn’t think anyone is surprised that by the time training camp is done and the pre-season games start coming around, Ilya and Shane look set to get a place on the team.

The coach, LeClaire is both complimentary and critical. He tells them when they do something he likes, but he also tells them when they pull shit he doesn’t.

Shane’s his favourite, which Ilya completely understands. His best friend is the perfect hockey player after all.

Ilya hears “Rozanov, less talking more playing!” a lot, but coach doesn’t actually pull him aside and tell him to tone it down, so he’s pretty sure he’s fine.

Then the time comes for Boston to announce its roster for the season.

They’re in the conference room, everyone who was at training camp present and chattering amongst themselves. Kane and Cadyn to their left are talking about Kovalev’s new girlfriend and how they think she’s an absolute nightmare, Connors and Hammersmith are on their right talking about the season opener against the Carolina Whirlwinds and how they’re really looking forward to embarrassing their starting goalie.

‘Mom called, by the way.’ Ilya says. ‘You were in the shower this morning. They’ve booked their tickets for the season opener.’

‘We don’t even know yet if we’ll be playing.’ Shane says.

Ilya rolls his eyes. ‘Shane please, everyone knows we’re making the team.’

Still, Shane’s leg bounces nervously and Ilya has to suppress the urge to put his hand on his leg to stop him. ‘You don’t know that for sure.’

‘If they don’t start us they’re fucking idiots and you know that. There was no rookie better than us and we’re clearly better than half the vets, better than *all* the vets.’

‘Still, stranger things happen.’

‘You need to be more confident.’

‘You could do with less confidence.’

Ilya smirks at him. ‘You don’t mean that.’

‘You’re insufferable.’

‘Alright everyone!’ Coach LeClaire calls, stepping up next to the big board that will soon show the roster for the year. The room immediately goes quiet.

The general manager, Cassidy, steps up as well. ‘Before we start, we would like to thank everyone for their effort during training camp and the pre-season. It’s always really great to see everyone work so hard for this sport that we all love. Every year, it’s difficult to make these decisions. We know that everyone wants this more than anything, but unfortunately we can’t give everyone a place on our starting roster. If you did not get selected now, please know that all of your names have been noted and that if we need back-up at some point during this season, we will be calling on you. Thank you.’

The head coach continues: ‘Yes to all of what Bruce said, with the addition of: Myself and the rest of the coaching staff have seen all of your hard work up close and we really appreciate it. Now, I won’t keep you in suspense any longer. Our forwards for the upcoming season in alphabetical order: Aud, Cadyn, Dubek, Hammersmith, Hollander, Kane, Kohn, Kovalev, Marlow, Rozanov, St-Simons and Varkov.’ As he says it, their names also appear on the board. Shane’s hand grabs onto Ilya’s forearm and squeezes hard in the time between Shane’s name being called and Ilya’s. When Ilya looks at him, he sees the way Shane’s breath shakes on his exhale. His relief at being able to do this together. The defensemen are called too, along with the goalies and just like that, the roster for the Boston Bears is set.

That’s when shit gets *real*.

Before they know it, it’s time for the season opener. They’re playing at home against the Carolina Whirlwinds and TD Garden seems to be shaking with the force of the hometown crowd roaring for the start of the season.

He knows their parents are out there, up in the family box with some of the WAGs.

He can feel the tension radiating off Shane. He looks nothing but calm from the outside, but Ilya has known him for seven years. He's spent nearly every single day with him since they were twelve. He knows when Shane is hiding his anxiety and panic.

He squeezes Shane's shoulder. 'We will be fine, we always are.' He says and Shane, who is in front of him in the tunnel, turns his head so Ilya can see him in profile.

'Yes, we will be.'

The announcer starts calling out the names of the line-up for tonight, the crowd roars, the music is pumping and even Ilya finds his hands shaking in his gloves as he follows the line of his teammates out onto the ice. Their A's and their captain are the last 3 out and when they're all on the ice, a whirlwind of black and gold, Ilya can feel it down to his bones. They're going to win tonight.

He and Shane get their legs going, doing a few laps around their own zone. Shane goes and bumps his helmet against Howard's, their goalie tapping the back of Shane's legs with his stick.

The Whirlwinds are announced to raucous booing from the crowd.

Shane and Ilya are on the second line with Marlow, who has taken their weird, almost telepathic sense for each other in stride better than anyone else ever has. Their captain seems perfectly comfortable being the third wheel to their "two-headed-dragon-ness" as he calls it.

After the anthems are played, he gathers the two of them a minute or so before things are actually going to get started. 'Alright you two, big expectations for tonight, okay? But let's try to ease into it as much as we can. Try not to overthink or try too hard. It'll come, okay? Just relax and do what you always do. These idiots won't know what hit them.' He says. 'Oh and a final reminder. Carolina's number 50 is a mean one. If he does something dumb, I'll deck him, don't worry about it.'

After Marlow pats them both on the shoulder and skates for the bench, Ilya catches Shane's jersey.

'Hey.' He says and Shane looks up at him.

'Hey?'

'This is it, yes? Our dream?'

Shane swallows. 'Don't go emotional on me now, I can't cry before the puck even drops.'

Ilya laughs. 'I just mean; let's play, yes? It's just you and me, as it's always been.'

'You, me and Marlow.'

Ilya brushes that off. 'Marley understands that he's the third wheel here.'

‘He’s our captain.’

‘He *understands*, Hollzy.’

Shane bites the inside of his cheek and looks away. ‘Just- just don’t do anything dumb, okay?’

‘I would never.’

Shane gives him the most bitchy “are you for fucking real?” look he’s got, which makes Ilya laugh. He knocks their helmets together. They skate for the bench and sit next to Marlow as their first line starts the game off for them.

The crowd is insane. Ilya knew Boston was a hockey city, but this feels bigger than even he imagined. Play starts hard, but clean. Carolina gets a chance early, but Howard blocks it with his typical, casual manner, sending Hammersmith up the ice with the puck. No one scores, but two minutes in, Ilya gets the tap along with his lineys.

When they switch with the first line, the crowd roars.

Even though NHL hockey is faster and harder than the hockey they’ve played before, it’s still just hockey. It’s still hockey with Shane. And hockey with Shane is never difficult.

As they set up their first attack, Marlow hangs back, sliding left to draw a defenseman away while Shane, in his typical Shane way, slips inside the defence like a ghost. When Carolina realizes, it’s already too late. Ilya snipes a pass straight onto Shane’s tape and darts past the guy covering him. The goalie looks at Ilya and Shane snipes it right into the gap above the goalie’s right shoulder.

The light goes on.

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Ilya slams himself into Shane. ‘Fuck yes!’

The others on the ice crowd around them. ‘Fucking sick.’ ‘Hell yes rooks.’ ‘Fucking god that move was filthy.’

Shane looks all kinds of overwhelmed, so Ilya pushes Shane ahead of him for the first bump line while the goal song still blares through the arena. 25 seconds into their first NHL shift and Ilya just picked up his first point and Shane his first goal.

Marlow has snagged the puck and tosses it to their equipment manager who tucks it away for safe keeping. They flop down on the bench as the third line goes out and Ilya turns to Shane with a wide grin.

‘Let’s fucking go.’

‘Fuck I can’t believe it, that felt easy.’

‘That’s just how good you are.’

‘Shut up.’ Shane says, but he’s smiling now. Tension melting out of him.

‘Now I want one too.’

‘Well, then let’s go get it.’ Shane says, in that same *what, like it’s hard?* tone. Ilya loves him so much.

‘Heads up.’ Marlow cuts in from Ilya’s other side. ‘Next shift you’re going to take some hits. They are not going to make it that easy for you again.’ Marlow points at the other side of the ice, where Carolina’s bench is. ‘See number 34?’

It’s the defenseman that was supposed to cover Shane. He’s glaring at them. He clearly did not appreciate getting embarrassed by a rookie in his first ever NHL game.

‘If he touches Shane-‘

‘I will punch him for touching our rookie.’ Marlow says, but Ilya will not promise he won’t deck the man himself if he’s closer. He might be bigger and older than Ilya, but he’s got motivation. ‘Roz-‘

‘Yes, I heard you.’

‘Don’t think I don’t notice that that doesn’t mean you’re going to listen.’

Ilya shrugs. ‘Touch my best friend and you die.’

‘I don’t speak Russian.’ Marlow says.

Shane leans forward. ‘I think you’d rather not know what he said.’

‘Fucking great.’ Marlow rumbles, but Ilya ignores him.

Their next shift is rougher. Ilya takes a hit first, but it’s not that bad. This guy clearly knows how to hit a rookie in a way that doesn’t get him punched. Shane doesn’t stay still long enough for 34 to hit him, but Ilya can tell the guy is tracking him. 50 gets involved too, but Shane is too quick for both of them, at least for now.

During their fourth shift, which comes in the second period, Marlow slips Ilya the puck and lets him take off up the ice. Shane’s right behind him, he recognizes the scrape of his skates even as the crowd roars. Shane fans out right, drawing a defenseman away. He passes to Shane and Shane passes back at him and Ilya shoots, snaps the puck up high. It tings off the crossbar and goes in.

But Ilya barely sees the goal light go on, because 50 slams Shane into the boards. The hit is hard and maybe not high enough for a penalty, but too high for any of the Bears’ liking. There’s the rise of shouts and Ilya can see Marlow rush for 50, but Ilya gets there first.

He shakes his gloves off, grabs the guy's jersey, drags him away from Shane (who is already getting to his skates) and punches him in the face.

'Fucks sake Rozanov-' He thinks that's Marlow.

He takes a hit, but throws one back hard enough to surprise the asshole. They trade a few more hits before the guy shoves so hard that they both go down. They let go as they land. Not a clear winner, a tie, Ilya would say, but a message sent none the less.

'Alright, come on up Rozanov. To the box you go.' A linesman holds onto his upper arm as Ilya gets up.

'I know how it works.' Ilya says which earns him a look from the linesman.

The attendant of the box opens the door for him and Ilya heads inside easily.

'Sir?' Ilya turns to see Shane come skating up towards them. 'Sorry about him, I've got his gloves and stick.'

'Don't apologize for me.' Ilya says but Shane ignores him.

'Thanks Hollander. Hand that off and then go back to your bench, no chatting. You good after that hit?' The linesman says.

'Yes sir, I'm fine thank you.' Shane says.

Ilya narrows his eyes, Shane is doing his best good boy impression. Wide-eyed and innocent.

'Good to hear, Hollander.' The linesman says and then he skates off.

Ilya throws Shane a look as he hands over his gloves, skates and a slightly hidden ice bag.
'What's this for?'

'Your hand, you fucking idiot.' Shane says. 'Gordie Howe hattrick though.'

Ilya tips his head back and laughs. 'First one.' He wiggles his eyebrows.

The box attendant coughs pointedly and Shane backs away. 'I'm going to score more goals than you this game.'

'Fuck off Hollander!' Ilya calls after him as Shane skates away.

Ilya gets an appreciative roar from the crowd when his penalty is announced. Both him and 50 get five for fighting, meaning that they play five minutes of four on four.

Shane is on the ice for most of the four on four, a strong two-way forward as he is, young with fresh legs. Ilya watches from the box, ice resting on his hand, as Shane sets up an attack with St-Simons and Carmichael and he fucking scores *again*. It's 3-0 Boston and all three of those goals have been made by their two rookies.

It gets even better when Hammersmith makes it 4-0 with 5 seconds to go on the penalties.

When Ilya gets released from the box, he stays on the ice. The lines are shuffled now, but Ilya's got the freshest legs out of all of them, so he plays a bit with the third line wings, Varkov and Kane and then his wings get switched in.

Carolina ices the puck and Marlow and Shane skate up to him.

'How was the box?' Shane asks.

'Boring. You should join me next time.'

'No he should not.' Marlow says. 'You need to let me handle this stuff.'

'You're the captain, you should be on the ice, no?' Ilya asks.

'Let. Me. Handle. Fuckwits.' Marlow says, but Ilya will not promise *shit*.

Shane shrugs and says; 'Gordie Howe hattrick for you, real hattrick for me?' The look on his face might look calm and relaxed to others, but Ilya recognizes that hungry gleam in his eyes.

'Fuck me, a hattrick in your first NHL game would be insane.' Marlow says, but he sounds intrigued.

'It will be easy. Carolina defence can't keep up. They are all old men.' Ilya says. He can tell Marlow wants to add something onto that, but the linesmen are ready to get back to hockey.

They make it happen in the third. Carolina has clearly realized that they would prefer not to have a rookie in his first NHL game score a hattrick on them, but Ilya thinks they should not have a say in it.

Howard makes a really impressive block on a shot by Carolina's captain and he gets the puck to Marlow. Shane and Ilya dart up the ice together. Marlow passes to Ilya as Shane wraps around the back of the goal. The poor defenseman assigned to him is struggling to keep up. They try to switch off but Shane slips away. Ilya puts the pass right on Shane's tape and Shane gets inside pokes the puck through the five-hole. 5-0 Boston.

Ilya gets another point. Shane gets his hattrick. TD Garden must be close to exploding. The goal song blares as Shane gets celebrated by their teammates, hats get thrown on the ice and Carolina's coach starts yelling as he throws his clipboard down.

Shane's cheeks are completely pink when he sits down on the bench again.

Coach keeps them off the ice after that. The assistant coach explains in a low voice that it's mostly protection. They don't want to risk Carolina getting more vicious and injuring them. Kane makes it 6-0 twenty seconds before the game ends and if you want to talk about a game to set the standard, a game to make intentions for the year clear, this is one for sure.

6-0 during your season opener at home, against a team that hasn't been great, but isn't terrible either, with 4 goals scored by your number 1 and 2 draft picks? That sends a pretty damn

strong message. Boston means business.

‘So Shane, first ever NHL game and you get 4 points; a hattrick and an assist. How do you feel?’ Ilya watches Shane being interviewed from his stall. He’s still sweaty, hair messy and cheeks flushed.

‘I feel good. It was a really good game for the team. Howie was incredible in goal, making some crazy saves for us. The defence was really helping us set up attacks well and we just kept the pressure high. My linemates made some really good passes.’ Humble fucking idiot.

‘Speaking of your linemates, Ilya Rozanov had a Gordie Howe hattrick tonight with two assists. What are your thoughts on how he played tonight?’

‘I’ve known Ilya for a very long time and his game has always been fast and physical. I would have, of course, preferred for him to be on the ice the whole time and not in the box, but it’s also a part of hockey.’ Shane says with a shrug.

‘Would you say the hit on you was worth the fight?’

Shane shrugs again. ‘I didn’t see it. That’s for my teammates to decide.’

‘Ilya, a fight in your first NHL game, is this a precedent for what’s to come?’

‘What the fuck is precedent?’

‘They want to know if you’re going to do this every game.’ Shane chimes in from behind the gaggle of reporters now surrounding Ilya.

‘Ah, it was not in the plan to fight, but if you’re going to hit Shane like that, you should expect to get punched.’ He shrugs.

From the corner of his eye, he can see Shane put his hands in front of his face. ‘For fucks sake Ilya.’

Ilya just grins at the camera, unrepentant.

It doesn’t take them too long to realize people have started to call Ilya Shane’s attack dog. It pisses Shane off, he says it makes it seem like that is all Ilya is. Shane says it takes away from Ilya’s skills. Ilya thinks that’s bullshit and that his stats speak for themselves, but Shane has taken it upon himself to be more feisty. To fight his own battles.

Which is how they end up here.

They're in Columbus and there's one particular defenseman (he's from their draft class, seventh overall and he seems like he has something to prove) who's been hounding Shane all game. Shane waved Marley off when he'd offered to punch the brat in the face.

They're trying to set up an attack but Columbus' defence is keeping it tight. Still, Shane, Ilya and Marley keep the puck moving. Johansson comes over to help out while Carmichael holds it down with Howie.

Shane darts inside with the puck but that asshole Sauvage slaps at him with his stick and then bodily tries to shove Shane off the puck. Ilya is trying to find a lane when he catches it from the corner of his eye. Sauvage's elbow comes up and catches Shane in the face. It's so obviously not an accident it's impressive.

'Motherfucker!' Shane shouts.

Ilya, and therefore the linesmen as well, can hear Sauvages reply just fine. 'Oh stop begin such a fucking pussy bitch, you don't even belong here! Go back to China or wherever the fuck you're from!'

Shane drops his gloves. 'I've fucking had enough of you.'

The crowd roars as their rookie also drops his gloves. He looks like he thinks this will be easy, but Ilya knows better. Shane grabs Sauvage's jersey and throws the first punch. He gets Sauvage good with the first hit. There's blood on Sauvage's face immediately, but Shane isn't done. Sauvage gets exactly one hit in, but then it's all Shane. He gets in two, three more hits before he takes the dickwad down to the ice with a hard shove.

'And watch your fucking mouth next time!' Shane shouts before letting go and letting the linesmen separate them.

'Alright Hollander.' The linesman that's holding him says. 'That's enough.'

'Yeah, yeah.' Shane says, not struggling at all as he's taken to the penalty box.

Ilya can't help but smirk at Sauvage as he has to be helped to his skates by his teammates.

'Fuck off Rozanov.' He says, lisping a little. There's blood on his mouth. There might be a tooth loose.

'I didn't say anything, but now that you've started a conversation; next time you talk to him like that, I'll break your fucking jaw.' Ilya says it with a smile.

Once both Shane and Sauvage have been put into their respective penalty boxes the ref uses his mic to announce the penalties. 'Boston number 24; five minutes for fighting. Columbus number 31; five minutes for fighting, plus a two minute minor for rousing.'

'Damn,' Marlow says, skating up next to Ilya. 'who knew Hollander could throw a punch like that?'

'I did.' Ilya says with a grin.

‘Then why the fuck have you been fighting all his fights for him?’

Ilya shrugs. ‘Shane doesn’t like to fight, doesn’t mean he can’t.’ Ilya glances over at Shane, who has ice on his right hand while sitting casually in the box. ‘His mom taught both of us how to throw a punch.’

‘His mom taught him how to do that? Well fuck, I’d like to meet *her*.’

Ilya glares at Marlow. ‘Watch it, Yuna Hollander is a gift and you do not deserve her. Plus, Shane’s dad is a great guy.’

Marlow laughs. ‘Relax Roz, I’m just messing with you.’ He glances over at Shane as well. ‘It’s good that he’s let people know now that he can take care of himself. It’ll help him out, he’s too nice sometimes.’

Ilya notices that something is different about two months into the season. Himself and Shane have yet to have a pointless game, even when they have lost games, always getting either a goal or an assist between the two of them. The Bears are solidly in the lead of their division and they’re looking like they will make it to the playoffs, even though the season isn’t even half way over yet. It’s been amazing, but the last few days or so, Ilya has felt off.

It’s nothing serious, he’s not *hurt*. He thinks he might just be getting a cold or something, but he doesn’t have a headache or a stuffy nose. He just feels... off. A little cold, a little empty.

At first Shane doesn’t seem to notice, so Ilya figures it’s not that bad, but after a Friday practice before their Saturday game against the New York Admirals, Shane sits on the bench next to him in the locker room. Varkov and Kovalev are gone already, meaning no one understands him when he says: ‘Are you okay?’

‘What do you mean?’

‘I mean, you seem off. Are you okay?’ Shane doesn’t really look at him, acting like this is a casual chat.

‘Of course.’ Ilya says and Shane looks at him like he’s lying to him.

‘If you weren’t, you would tell me, right?’

‘Of course I would, *solnyshko*.’

Ever since Ilya explained what it meant, Shane’s cheeks have gone pink when he calls him that and this is no different.

‘Shut up.’

The thing is though; it doesn't go away. It doesn't stop him from playing or even playing really fucking well, but it's almost like everything is more exhausting than it was before. Like now spending a day at the rink, chatting and laughing and chirping means that when they get home, all he wants to do is lay in bed and not move. Sometimes he struggles to get up, to leave the house at all.

One particular day, about three weeks after the feeling first started, Ilya's gone out to grab more of the tortilla brand Shane likes, forcing himself out of the door and when he comes back, Shane is on the phone.

'-worried, he just seems off. Like he's trying really hard to pretend everything is fine, but I can tell it's not.' He's speaking Russian, which means he's talking to Ilya's mom. What the fuck? 'Do you- do you think it could be what you have?'

Ilya slams the door shut behind himself and Shane curses and there's the sound of a mug shattering on the tiles of their kitchen.

Fuck.

He rushes towards the kitchen. 'Stay there.' He tells Shane before anything else. Shane's in socks surrounded by the remains of a mug. The shards look sharp and he does not want Shane to step in one. 'Stay still.'

Shane nods, eyes wide. 'Yes, I'll call you later.' He says before he hangs up. 'Ilya-'

'Just stay there.' He says and he goes to get their dustpan so he can get the worst of it swept up. Shane stays there, his eyes tracking Ilya, a vulnerable look on his face. He seems to know Ilya heard something. Maybe the way Ilya is avoiding eye-contact has something to do with it.

He gets the vacuum out next and vacuums around Shane, making sure all the little shards are gone too. After he puts it away and goes back into the kitchen, Shane is still standing in his spot, frozen. And when Ilya looks at him, his eyes look watery.

'Why are you crying?'

'I'm not.' Shane says, but his eyes are *definitely* teary.

'You don't usually lie to me.' Ilya says, maybe a little annoyed.

'Like you haven't been lying to me?' Shane snaps, suddenly angry.

'What the fuck do you mean?'

'You're not okay, Ilya! You keep smiling and saying that you're fine, but you're *not*. Something is wrong and I'm scared that-that-that something will go bad. I'm scared that I'll *lose* you.'

'You won't-'

‘You don’t *know* that! You won’t even admit something is *wrong*.’

‘Shane-‘

‘No!’ Shane yells and he steps closer. ‘Stop lying to me. Tell me the truth. What is happening?’

He’s beautiful, even in his anger. His eyes are bright, still a little moist, but fierce. Like a feisty little kitten. His freckles are so clear on his face, flushed as he is. They’re like little stars all over him.

‘I- I’ve felt off recently. It’s been hard to get up, no matter how early I go to bed. Talking to people feels exhausting. I feel fine when we play, I don’t think it’s actually physical, but I’m just so- so tired.’

‘Why didn’t you tell me?’

‘I didn’t want to worry you.’

‘Well that didn’t fucking work asshole, I’ve been worried for weeks.’ Shane says, some of the anger melting out of him. ‘I think you should talk to someone.’

‘You think I am depressed, like my mom?’

‘I mean, it’s possible, right?’ Shane says. ‘And if that is it, you can figure out meds and you won’t feel like shit anymore, right?’

‘I don’t feel like *shit*.’

The look Shane throws him is so deadpan it almost hurts.

‘Ilyushenka, please, talk to someone. You know Kayden wouldn’t judge you and maybe he knows someone in the city.’ Kayden is their main physio, he’s a mellow guy, a nice dude.

‘I will.’ Ilya swallows. ‘I’m sorry for worrying you.’

Shane shakes his head before Ilya is even done talking. ‘Don’t apologize. I’m sorry for yelling at you and talking to your mom before I talked to you.’

‘It’s okay. You love me.’ Ilya says. It’s one of those moments where he speaks before he thinks. Where he just absolutely puts his foot in his mouth. They used to say this to each other, when they were younger, they were best friends with moms who didn’t tolerate that dude-bro no-homo bullshit. But now, since they’ve known that they have like, capital F feelings for each other, they’ve kind of stopped.

‘I do.’ Shane says after a deep breath. ‘I do love you. Depressed or not.’

And suddenly Ilya maybe feels like he could cry? Like Shane just punched him in the solar plexus, like he can’t really breathe right.

Ilya does talk to Kayden, who makes some calls and finds Ilya someone he can talk to, someone who has experience with professional athletes. It takes only a few sessions for them to decide to put Ilya on meds. They make sure they're noted on his athlete file so they won't try and say he's using them for doping or whatever. Kayden is, as expected, super fucking chill about it. He doesn't name names, but apparently Ilya is not the only NHL player on meds of some kind.

It's tricky, they don't get the dosage right immediately and there's a delicate balance between too much and too little, but Shane is right there, helping Ilya make sense of what his brain is doing while also helping him not to overthink every little thing he feels.

Not that Shane isn't the king of overthinking.

Meanwhile the NHL season keeps rolling. They do end their points streak, a frustrating loss against the Colorado Flurries where nothing seems to go their way. *Shane* gets a penalty, which he rarely does. He's gained a reputation amongst the linesmen that he's cooperative and a clean player. Someone who can even wrangle Ilya on a good day. Howie twinges something and has to be taken from the game. Marley takes a slapshot to the hand and needs to get x-rays. It's basically a fucking shitshow and nothing will fall their way.

But they bounce back. They're the only two names really in conversation for rookie of the year, though a brave soul will occasionally mention some winger from LA. Shane leads Ilya in points, while Ilya has scored more goals. Shane though has scored more game winners and Ilya's has spent more penalty minutes in the box.

According to pundits, it's a toss-up.

Whenever they're asked, they both say the same thing; they're glad they are not the ones who have to make the decision.

The first time one of them gets hurt, it's Ilya.

They're playing Vancouver and there's this massive forward by the name of Kowalski has clearly been tasked with hounding Ilya around the rink, but he's been taking it a little too seriously.

Ilya's already taken too many hits for Shane's liking (he bitched about it during *both* intermissions) and Ilya wouldn't be Ilya if he wasn't chirping the fuck out of Kowalski.

'C'mon big guy, is that the best you can do?' Ilya asks, skating past Kowalski after the play has been blown dead. They're leading Vancouver by one in the third and Ilya already knows he's got some nasty bruises on his back and shoulder.

Kowalski doesn't reply. He's been annoying like that.

Shane glares at him before lining up across from Vancouver's captain to take the face-off.

Shane wins the face-off and gets the puck to Ilya. Ilya takes off down the ice. There's the scrape of skates from his right. A hit hard enough to throw him off balance. He hits the ice and then the boards and something in his shoulder explodes in pain. He tries to get his arm underneath him so he can get up but it hurts like a motherfucker.

For the first time maybe ever, Ilya stays down.

He knows Shane comes up to him because he recognizes the sound of his skates.

'Stop trying to move, just stay still for a second.' Shane says and a hand lands on his shoulder.

'Fucking ow.'

'What is it?'

'My shoulder.' Ilya says and Shane holds him steady while Marley brings over the medical staff.

They ask him a bunch of questions and then Marley and Shane help him to his skates. He keeps his arm tucked close and avoids Shane's worried eyes as they guide him to the tunnel and off the ice.

'Be honest.' Shane calls after him as Ilya and the med staff head down the tunnel.

He gives Shane a thumbs up with his good hand before turning away.

Ilya won't see the rest of the third period until much later. They take him for a scan at the local hospital where they conclude there's nothing broken and no significant muscle damage. They say he probably hyperextended a ligament in his shoulder. Out for two weeks at least. No-contact until he can rotate his arm without pain.

His mom has texted to call her asap and Ilya does, explaining that he's fine, that it's nothing serious and no, she doesn't need to fly to Boston. Shane will take care of him.

When the taxi drops him off at home, Ilya finds somewhere he can rewatch the third period. He watches himself go down. He watches Shane rush to his side. Marley rushing to the bench to help their med staff over to him. He watches Carmicheal try shove at the Vancouver forward, but being held back by Johansson. He watches how the version of himself gets up slowly. He watches Shane; his tight jaw, his worried eyes, his icy look at Vancouver's number 16.

When play resumes, the third line goes out as coach shuffles with the other lines. Ilya dropping out means some shifting. Coach shifts Shane to centre and the first line right winger down to second, while he puts Cadyn from the fourth in with the first.

As soon as Shane's skates touch the ice, Ilya feels a shiver run down his spine. Playing on the same line with Shane means he doesn't often get to just watch him play. He sees the highlights on TV sometimes, but this, watching him circle, getting to see the way his mind works even when he doesn't have the puck is a gift.

He's truly a beautiful player. He looks so smooth, so calm on the ice, even after being put in a position he hasn't played since he was twelve, with a wing he doesn't usually play with, he still looks completely unbothered.

Ilya thinks Shane is going to be the perfect, good boy for the rest of the game, but then 16 gets too close to him and Shane just- well, Ilya has to replay it a few times to make sure he sees it right- he puts the blade of his stick underneath 16's skate, it looks *incredibly* accidental, but after seeing it four times, Ilya knows it's not. 16 goes down, tripping forward onto the ice while Shane slips away. He doesn't even get a penalty for it.

Fucking awesome.

Shane gets home much faster than Ilya expected. With media and stuff he didn't think he'd see Shane for at least another hour, but here he is, opening the front door and calling out: 'Ilyushenka?'

'Living room!'

Shane comes into the room to find Ilya installed on the couch with a pillow under his bad arm and the New York/Florida game on.

'The verdict?'

'You are hot and I adore you?'

Shane blinks at him, flushes a deep pink and then says: 'About your arm, idiot.'

Ilya pouts at him. 'Hyperextended ligament in my shoulder, probably out for two weeks. No contact until I can rotate my arm without pain.'

'I should have hit him.' Shane says. 'What are you going to drink? Do you need painkillers? I will get you painkillers.' And he disappears towards the kitchen.

'Solnysko, they gave me painkillers at the hospital, but I'd like some soda or something.' Ilya calls after Shane.

'What time was that?' Shane calls back.

'Like, two hours ago?'

'I'll put some down for when they start to wear off. Food?'

Ilya wants to sigh and roll his eyes at Shane's mothering, but he also just adores Shane and he kind of loves that Shane loves him so much he'd do all this for him even after just playing three periods of NHL hockey.

'I can make something myself-'

'Something light?'

Ilya caves. 'That would be nice, thank you *lyubimy*.'

It only takes ten days for Ilya to be able to rotate his arm without pain. He misses three games in those ten days and they make him sit out a fourth before they let him back on the ice. The *only* good thing about it is that he gets to watch the two home games they play from the box up high and he gets to see Shane hold down the fort.

He's back on the ice for their game against the Admirals, in New York.

'What was it like?' He asks as he skates up to Scott Hunter at the blue line.

'What was what like?' Hunter asks, he's so serious-faced. It makes Ilya want to poke at him even more.

'Playing hockey in the time that dinosaurs were still around?'

Hunter rolls his eyes at him. 'I'm barely thirty-'

'Were t-rex good at like, powerplay? I think their short little arms would be bad for holding a stick, no?'

'You really are insufferable. Where's your better half at? I much prefer him.' Hunter looks over Ilya's shoulder, trying to find Shane.

'Of course you prefer him, he is boring, like you. A good boy- though you are more like good grandpa. You haven't been a boy in about two hundred *years*.'

'I'm *thirty one*!'

Ilya just laughs and goes to find Shane himself, who is looking at him, unimpressed.

'You just got back on the ice, please do not antagonize anyone into hurting you again immediately.' Shane says.

'I had to ask the dinosaur some questions Shane, I'm just curious!'

Shane sighs and mutters: 'Dear god, please save him from his own idiocy.'

'You don't even believe in god.' Ilya grins and Shane shoves him away.

'Marley! I liked it better when he was off the ice, is it too late to bench him?' Shane calls to their captain.

'Ah I see that with you two, absence just makes the heart grow annoyed.'

Shane throws Ilya and Marley a mild glare and skates off.

He doesn't mean it anyways. He's thrilled to have Ilya back. They celebrate by combining for seven points as they whoop the Admiral's butts.

The play offs come around and by that time, they're both exhausted. While they are obviously fit and young, they aren't used to playing 82 games of NHL hockey in a season. Ilya doesn't think his body has ever felt this exhausted. He tries to rest as much as he can, sleep and take care of himself, but he still knows he's not at his best when they play their first play off game against Montréal.

They are hellbent on winning this series.

Montréal's captain has been talking shit in the lead up; saying that they will prove that they didn't need the second over-all pick. That they will show Shane and Ilya are overrated compared to a steady and experienced team.

Gilbert Comeau is a raging asshole and Ilya wants to deck him, but Shane has managed to somewhat convince him that the best way to make him regret his words is by whooping his team's asses. So that's what they set out to do.

Game one is in Boston and it is a little shaky. Boston and Montréal are mortal enemies and Montréal comes out hitting hard and trying to rattle a relatively young Boston team. Shane takes a really hard hit in the first period that makes Marley have to hold Ilya back from punching the guy in the face. Shane is slow to get up, but he shakes the trainers off when they try to tell him to sit out a shift, catch his breath. Ilya doesn't think anyone else notices, but he does; Shane isn't moving quite like himself after that. He's still the only one who can keep up with Ilya, but he's favouring his left side, which he usually doesn't.

'Ribs?' Ilya asks during a stoppage. It's still 0-0 in the beginning of the second period.

'It's fine, but yes, ribs.' Shane says, looking down the ice at Montréal's goalie, Drapeau. He's a prick.

'I'll fucking kill him.'

'No, you're going to be right where I need you to, so you can accept my pass and break this scoreless bullshit, get the crowd going.' Shane says before thumping his fist against Ilya's chest. 'Let's play goddamn fucking hockey.' Shane holds eye-contact until Ilya nods and then they skate off, getting in position for Marley to take a face-off.

After a whole NHL season, teams have gotten better at limiting Ilya and Shane's scoring chances. They've learned to make things harder on them, cutting them off from each other. Forcing them into situations where they can't connect, but they are still Shane Hollander and Ilya Rozanov and they are fucking good at this.

Ilya slips away from his defenseman and Shane turns on his edges so quickly his defenseman loses him. he puts a perfect pass on Ilya's tape, Ilya fakes a shot high that Drapeau bites on and slips the puck through the five-hole. The goal light comes on, the crowd roars and Shane slams into him.

'Hell yes!' Shane shouts.

‘Another one.’ Ilya grins back at him.

It’s as if Ilya’s goal breaks something open for Boston, because their third line scores not even a minute later. Ilya’s shoulder aches, his legs feel like overcooked noodles and there’s a twinge in his thumb, but he feels like he could play another fourteen games. The roar of the crowd, even louder than normal, the frustration on Montréal’s faces, that twisting, tingling feeling of *maybe this is the year*, maybe he’ll get to touch the Cup.

They win the game 4-1.

They win game 2 as well, 3-0.

But then they go to Montréal and they’ve played games there before, obviously. They know how hostile it is, but the play-offs make a difference. Shane is narrow eyed and focussed, but their team is tired.

Hammersmith is nursing a knee issue, Ilya has his shoulder, Shane his ribs, Varkov is skating with a cage because of a broken nose and both Price and Feller probably have elbow issues.

Still they scrape a 2-1 OT win in Montréal in game 3 before losing game 4 after a frustrating late penalty.

The advantage is, it means they get to win the series during game 5 in Boston. The crowd is delirious with joy. *Ilya* feels delirious with joy. Especially when Shane grins at him like *that*. When they’ve both scored their first play-off goals and managed to keep producing points despite their lingering aches.

But then they go to Pittsburgh. Pittsburgh is the team to beat and even though they try hard and still manage to score, they lose the series in 5.

Still the atmosphere in the locker room isn’t too dejected or disappointed. There’s a real feeling of “we learned a lot and we’ll be even better next year”.

‘Rest first, then talk?’ Shane asks and it takes Ilya a second to figure out what he’s talking about.

‘Oh, yeah. Let’s vegetate for like a week.’ The *Talk* they were going to have.

They do basically nothing for a week. Ilya rests his shoulder, Shane give his ribs a break. They stay off the ice for the whole time, which is very long for them. They barely even work out. Vets told them to actually rest. Do nothing. So their body could actually heal. Recover.

After the week is over, Ilya cooks them a nice meal from scratch. He’s the better cook between the two of them, but Shane has a particular way he likes to do laundry and he’s perfectly happy to do Ilya’s as well. Ilya is more than happy to cook in exchange.

When they sit down for their dinner, Shane’s in a plain white tee and still looks better than anyone else Ilya’s ever met. Ilya knows that his feelings haven’t changed, but he’d like to

hear that Shane's haven't either.

They've gone out with the team on occasion and women will flirt with them, but Ilya hasn't been interested and he doesn't think Shane has been interested either. He thought for a while that maybe Shane would figure out he was bi as well and that he might want-

It would have been fine, of course, but Ilya's kind of glad Shane hasn't seemed interested in literally anyone.

'So,' Ilya says and Shane freezes with his fork halfway to his mouth.

He looks at Ilya. 'So?'

'We agreed to talk after the season ended and the season is over.'

'We did agree to do that.' Shane says, he looks hesitant, but Ilya knows this side of Shane. He's trying to read Ilya to figure out what the right conversational direction is here.

'Has anything changed for you this season?' Ilya asks.

Shane thinks about it for a second. 'Yes.'

That stings.

'I think-' Shane says. 'I think it's more now, worse? Better? I don't know how to explain it.'

Oh, okay, wait.

'You mean that there's more feelings now? Good feelings?' Ilya asks.

'I- yes, I think they are good feelings. Warm and tingly and... I just want to- to-' Shane stumbles into silence. 'What about you?'

'The new nickname, have you figured it out yet?'

'Well, I know the word for love so...'

'Exactly, *lyubimy*.' Ilya smiles. 'There's nothing different for me. *Ya tebya lyublyu*.'

'I love you too.' Shane says, cheeks pink and biting at the corner of his mouth.

Ilya puts his fork down. 'I want to kiss you.'

If he thought Shane's cheeks were pink before, they're scarlet now. He's beautiful. He's smart and warm and kind and a fucking bitchy idiot and Ilya loves him more than anything. He's the only one Ilya trusts entirely and completely, who knows all of Ilya's darkest thoughts, thoughts about his brother and his father and his mom and leaving and how he sometimes thinks about dumping his meds down the drain and trying without them and-

'Do it.' Shane says. 'I want it too.'

Ilya finds himself licking his lips on pure autopilot and Shane's eyes lock onto them. Something sizzles, snaps and then breaks into pieces.

Then they're both out of their seats and Shane's mouth is pressed against his.

Ilya grabs onto him. His body is so familiar, they live together, work out together and celebrate goals together and yet this feels entirely different. He puts his hands on Shane's hips, pulling him closer and pressing him backwards at the same time. The living room wall stops them as he presses Shane against it. Shane lets himself be moved. Ilya grips his chin and tilts his head and Shane just *lets* him. Shane's hands are gripping him too, trying to pull him closer, trying to push his hoodie up so Ilya will take it off.

Ilya will gladly do that. He pulls back only long enough to tug the garment over his head before he's pressing back against Shane. Shane's hands drag along Ilya's body, he's a bit irritated he didn't take his tank top off at the same time.

There's fire racing through Ilya's veins, lava dripping down his spine. This is Shane, *his* Shane, his best friend in the whole world and he's letting Ilya move him, letting Ilya kiss him and touch him and he's hard where they're pressed together. Shane's hand digs into Ilya's hair and grips, Ilya groans and drops his head down to Shane's neck so he can kiss his throat.

Shane's head thumps back against the wall.

'Ilyushenka, please.'

'Please what, solnysko?' He says against the skin of Shane's throat.

'Anything, please.'

'Come on.' Ilya says and he pulls back, takes Shane's hand and starts heading towards his bedroom.

He presses Shane down onto the sheets, tips his head back and kisses his throat.

'Ilya-' He's always adored the way Shane says his name. It's the Russian way, the way his mom says it, the way he hears it so rarely with all these North American journalists and commentators.

'Solnysko, tell me what you want.'

'Anything, anything.'

So Ilya pushes Shane's shirt up and helps him take it off. The bruising over his ribs is yellow now and he doesn't show any discomfort when Ilya runs his hands over his toned stomach. He kisses the old bruises anyways, because he can.

'I love you, *ya tebya lyublyu*.' Shane breathes, digging his hand into Ilya's hair again.

'Can I?' Ilya asks, his hands on the waistband of Shane's sweats.

‘Please, pozhaluysta, *s’il te plaît.*’

Ilya won’t pretend that he knows what he’s doing, per se. He hasn’t looked at anyone other than Shane since he broke up with his last girlfriend. There’s been some research, but that’s not the same.

Still, getting naked is easy and doing the same to Shane is a gift.

He wants everything and Shane isn’t helping narrowing his options, so Ilya decides he wants a taste. He takes Shane into his hand and brings his mouth down towards him.

‘Yes?’

‘Yes.’

Ilya licks, the taste isn’t bad so he puts Shane’s cock into his mouth and sucks. He’s careful not to go too deep and he keeps his hands on Shane’s hips to stop him from bucking up into his mouth. The noises Shane makes are enough to drive Ilya to the edge. The words that tumble from his mouth are in Russian and English and some weird mix of the two that Ilya’s mushy brain can hardly follow.

‘Ilya, I’m close.’

Ilya keeps going and only pulls off when Shane gives a particularly hard tug on his hair. Watching Shane come all over himself from between his legs is... life-changing maybe? He knows he wants this again and again and again.

Shane’s chest is rising and falling rapidly, his whole chest is flushed pink.

He’s fucking stunning.

‘C’mere.’ Shane motions him up, tugging uselessly at Ilya’s shoulders.

Ilya leans over him and Shane pulls him down to kiss him. Shane doesn’t care where Ilya’s mouth has just been, good to know.

Shane’s hand wraps around Ilya’s cock and he drops his head down to Shane’s shoulder, moaning.

‘*Solnyshko*, pozhaluysta.’

It takes embarrassingly few strokes for Ilya to add his release to the mess on Shane’s chest.

Ilya flops down onto the bed next to Shane and stares at the ceiling. When his breathing is slightly more normal, he tips his head to the side to look at Shane. Shane is looking right back at him, eyes warm and sleepy. Then he looks down at himself and frowns, lip pulling up in distaste.

‘I need a shower.’

Ilya laughs and then laughs some more. Shane hits him with a pillow and then drags Ilya into the shower with him. It's the happiest he's ever been.

Shane wins rookie of the year. Ilya isn't bitter about it. Especially not when Shane presses him against the door of their apartment and drops to his knees as soon as they get home.

They tell the team after their second season. A rough OT loss in game 7 against Toronto has left all of them feeling rough, but the team's response is better than expected. St-Simons shrugs and says that his brother is gay and he couldn't give less of a fuck who they sleep with as long as they keep playing hockey the way they have. Marlow says he totally saw it coming, to which at least half the team calls bullshit. Marlow claims that because he's their liney, he totally knew and it sets off a whole round of bickering which has nothing to do with the fact that they just found out that two of their teammates are in a relationship.

Ilya can't stop smiling.

When they win the Cup in their third season, they decide to fuck it all and as Shane hands the Cup to Ilya, he presses a kiss to his mouth and that's that.

Of course they deal with shit. They were never not going to have to deal with shit, but their team has their back, they're the reigning champions and they win again the next year, solidifying their position as the team to beat. A dynasty some commentators dare to say. They win awards and more Cups and they do it all together.

And maybe there's a ring hidden somewhere in their home, or maybe two, because in the end, no matter where, no matter who's playing around them; Shane and Ilya have been best friends since they were twelve and nothing, kissing, Cups, changing teammates or even the whole world knowing will change that.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much for coming on this ride with me.

This grew way longer than I expected but I really enjoyed it!

If you would leave a comment I would really appreciate it!

Until next time!

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!