

Compromised

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by [ggfj84](#)

Summary

Nine years ago, CSIS Trainee Shane Hollander stole a file from the Boston Bears Crime Syndicate and the heart of its leader's son. Now, Ilya Rozanov's father calls him to the Raiders nightclub, the Bears' headquarters, to give him a gift - his captured archrival.

As Ilya is tasked with uncovering all Shane's and his organization's secrets, he has to fight to keep his relationship - and his betrayal - from being revealed - or risk losing the best thing that ever happened to him.

There are many things Ilya is willing to do for his father. Losing Shane Hollander is not one of them.

Notes

Please excuse any errors made about the spy community. I'm not cool enough to know the ins and outs.

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

Chapter 1

Now – Boston

Ilya received the text message after 2 a.m. and swore under his breath. Father was calling him in. There were only a handful of reasons why he would at this time, but Ilya didn't allow his mind to go there. Not tonight.

He pushed off his large sectional couch, careful not to wake Svetlana, and dressed in casual attire – jeans, T-shirt, and leather racing jacket. There was no reason for him to grab any weapons other than his Yarygin pistol. If his father needed a job done, he wouldn't have called Ilya into the "office." He would have just sent him the specifics.

But it was Cliff Marlow – Marly – who met him at the "office's" back door, an eager leer upon his callous face.

"What are you so smug about?" Ilya all but accused in Russian.

Marly's eyebrows wagged. Annoying. "You will see. Your father has a surprise for you. A gift."

"Gifts" from Father were never good. They usually ended up with Ilya beating the shit out of someone or drugging them stupid for information he didn't care about or need.

ETM music pounded Ilya's ears as he entered Raiders, the nightclub his family owned off Tremont Street. Throngs of sweaty, delirious, sexy people swayed on the dance floor, and Ilya wanted to grab a glass of vodka on the way through. He abstained, though, and followed Marly to the elevator on the opposite side of the dance floor. A swipe of a keycard and a few rhythmic buttons sent the elevator car down into an abyss. Once it stopped, Marly allowed him to exit first into the stronghold of the Boston Bears Crime Syndicate.

It wasn't a large area, but the underground facility housed Father's office, a small warehouse for their most important cargo, and even a conference room where Father often met with associates and assets alike. There was also an exit to the next-door parking garage, just in case law enforcement officials ever raided the club above.

But today, Marly was leading Ilya to the interrogation room at the far end of the hall.

It was one of the larger rooms in the facility, usually reserved for the most dangerous adversaries of the Boston Bears. It resembled a dentist's office with a chair in the middle of it – long back, raised leg rest, overhead LED lights. Cabinets ran the perimeter, holding all sorts of tools and toxins, while some of the most commonly used equipment – brass knuckles, saws, and even teeth extractors – hung on the far wall.

Ilya gazed through the two-way mirror, which allowed members of the Bears to watch interrogations.

Unfortunately, Father blocked the person who occupied the chair. He dressed similarly to Ilya in jeans, though he wore a dark polo shirt and bloodied gloves. He was working.

“Go on,” Marly urged, practically giddy. “You will like this surprise.”

Ilya doubted it, but he proceeded to the door and opened it.

Father turned then, a dangerous, vicious glint in his eyes. “Ah, Ilya! We were just talking about you. Come. Come! There is someone who has been waiting to see you.”

There was blood dripping from Father’s hands. His weapons remained on the counter, appearing cleaned and unused. He hadn’t dug into the cabinets yet for any toxins, and it was only those observations that kept Ilya sane when Father stepped aside to reveal the person strapped to the chair.

He was young – around Ilya’s age of twenty-seven – with his black hair askew and face bloody. Adorable freckles dotted the bridge of his nose and his cheeks, which were swollen and dark from Father’s work. He wore a simple blue work-out shirt over Adidas pants, and his athletic jacket had actually been removed and hung on a hook in the corner.

His eyes were half-lidded, pain-filled, not at all the bright and radiant gems Ilya knew them to be. They widened when set upon Ilya, and Ilya’s heart broke.

“Hollander...” he breathed.

Father slapped him hard on the back. “Yes, Ilya! We have captured your rival, and now it is time to find out all his and the Voyageurs’ secrets.”

Nine years ago

The job had been ridiculously easy. Father wasn’t known for easing Ilya into anything, but apparently, he had wanted this particular file stolen from a local police department and the digital copy deleted – probably to protect a business associate who had been compromised or otherwise inconvenienced.

The job went off without a hitch. The security was abysmal. The technology was outdated, and the personnel weren’t properly trained.

He’d had harder times ordering a coffee from Dunkin’. Now, he waited at a café in the North End, sitting at an outdoor table – in the middle of the fucking winter – for his father’s associate to pick up the original file.

They really couldn’t have done this inside?

Ilya never expected his contact to be someone as young as himself with adorable freckles, a winter coat, and a black toque. The guy eyed his cigarette with a dark scowl and took a seat at the table across from Ilya, to-go cup in his hand.

“Smoking is bad for you.”

“...okay.” Ilya’s English wasn’t the best yet, or he might have told the guy what he could with his opinion. “Coffee?”

The guy lifted his cup. “Large decaf, black, sugar.”

The passphrase.

Ilya pulled the envelope from his backpack and put it on the table. “Shitty order.”

When the guy laughed, the corner of his eyes wrinkled. “Shitty place. I would have picked somewhere inside.”

Ilya could like this guy.

When he moved to grab the envelope, Ilya made sure their fingers touched. Why his contact wasn’t wearing gloves in the freezing Boston winter was a mystery, but his skin was warm and soft.

Ilya wanted to know how it would feel against his lips.

The guy froze, eyes widening just a fraction, before he pulled away quickly. Then, he cleared his throat and glanced away, allowing Ilya to see his flushed cheeks. “So...uh, any way... thanks for this.” He hesitated and stood. “I guess...uh, I’ll see you around.”

His contact put out his hand, which was just weird, but perhaps all clandestine meetups ended this way? Ilya gingerly accepted the hand, and wow, yeah, the guy moisturized.

As he turned to leave, Ilya called, “Maybe I’ll see you first.”

On instinct, he winked.

He was rewarded with an adorable flush across the guy’s cheeks. “I’ll, uh, I’ll be on the lookout then.”

Ilya watched him go, and they’d need to do one of these meetups in the summer. Maybe the guy would wear tight shorts that allowed Ilya to see more than those fitted jeans did.

By the time the guy was halfway down the street, Ilya’s phone was ringing. He huffed and hit it on. “Alexei, what the fuck? I’m doing a –”

“Did you do the drop yet?” his brother demanded in Russian.

“Yes, the contact was just here.”

Anger seized Alexei’s voice. “No, he wasn’t. Marlow just found him unconscious behind a dumpster on Powers Court. Get after that guy!”

Ilya stood and sought out his contact – who now stood on the other side of Hanover Street. The guy smiled, waved, and then after a bus passed, was gone.

Ilya smirked. Game fucking on.

Now

Father allowed Ilya to take over the interrogation. Shane was his rival, after all, and Ilya owed him for all the years of hassle and frustration he'd put the Boston Bears through.

Alone in the room but with an audience, Ilya sat down on the doctor's stool and slid over to be next to Shane's chair. Shane's wide and frightened eyes followed Ilya's every movement, his chest rising and falling in quick, jerked movements. Sweat slicked his flushed cheeks, making those adorable freckles more predominant. Blood was caked in the corner of his lips and had dried on his chin.

Ilya couldn't give him much comfort, but he could provide *something*.

"Hollander, what am I going to do with you?" he began, leaning on the chair's arm.

To anyone else, the words came across as a mock exasperation to an enemy. To Shane – whose eyes softened – they came across as a weary request. Good.

"I guess you won't just let me go...?" Shane's voice was tired, strained. Ilya usually enjoyed it under different conditions.

"Oh, so you are comedian now." Ilya rolled over to a cabinet and opened the top drawer. He made a production of his movements, pulling out several tiny bottles one at a time. "You know, I take great pleasure in making grown men cry like little babies. Is like hobby for me."

"Was stamp collecting too hard?"

Ilya let out a surprised snort. "Is boring but you know all about being boring, don't you, Hollander?"

"So my boyfriend tells me."

Finally, Ilya collected a syringe and stuck it in the top of the first bottle. "Ah, you have a boyfriend."

Shane waited for Ilya to look back at him before replying, "Jealous?"

"Of a boring man who does boring things with you? I do not think so." Ilya rolled back over, his thumb poised over the syringe's end. "Are you ready to answer all my questions?"

"Do you have them written down or what?"

Shane loved to be pissy. Ilya loved when he was – usually. "Let's start with an easy one. You were recruited by the Canadian government through your father's job at the treasury."

It wasn't common knowledge, per se, but David Hollander was at one time a predominant figure in Canadian politics. "You know that wasn't a question, right?"

“You studied at McGill while also running field missions for the CSIS’s national security arm, the Montreal Voyageurs.”

“Still not a question.”

“The Voyageurs and FBI recently detained my brother and seized a shipment of ours from Moscow.” Ilya tapped the needle against Shane’s forearm, causing Shane to stiffen. “Where is my brother, Hollander?”

“That’s, uh, that’s above my paygrade.”

“I doubt that.”

Shane’s eyes were wild, earnest. “I can’t tell you what I don’t know.”

“Where’s the shipment?”

“Would you believe it was returned to sender?” Shane cringed. “Though...that sender was probably arrested.”

He shouldn’t be telling Ilya that. “Who told you about the shipment, Hollander?”

Shane froze up. God, he was such a terrible liar. “Alexei. He thought the Voyageurs would give him a better deal than your buyer.”

That...was actually a really good answer, but there was no way Father would accept that. Alexei was the Boston Bears’ most loyal servant. “Let us test that theory.”

"Waitwaitwait!" Shane hissed, but restrained to the chair, he had no choice but to endure Ilya's hands upon his arm and the needle pressed through his skin. His head fell back against the rest as Ilya imagined the cool rush of drugs offered Shane an inebriated sensation.

Ilya cupped his far cheek, bringing Shane's now half-lidded eyes back to him. "Hey, hey, hey. You do not need to worry. I am here, okay? It has always been you and me, from the beginning, yes?"

Shane swallowed hard, his eyes welling with fresh tears. He offered Ilya a short nod. Even though he continued to struggle for a few more seconds, he eventually relaxed against his bonds. The serum was taking effect. Good. Shane would either forget the rest of this or at the very least, not feel it as acutely.

"Let's start over." A crooked smile crossed Ilya’s features. "Tell me, Hollander. When did you fall in love with me?"

Ilya could hear the raucous laughter behind the two-way mirror. His father and Marly thought he was joking. If they only knew the truth...

Shane's response came as a tired mumble, "New York... Field Office... but maybe before that...?"

Ilya sucked in a deep breath. He had thought Moscow, perhaps, or maybe even Paris. But the New York Field Office? That was their second meeting.

Eight years ago – New York

"*This is a bad idea, Ilyusha,*" Svetlana said in Russian, her voice in his ear and also in his conscience, most of the time.

"I can't hear you," Ilya muttered. "Must be going through a tunnel."

"*Do not do this. He will ruin you.*"

"You promise?"

Before she could reply, Ilya cut the connection and opened the clear door of Special Agent Scott Hunter's office. Ilya was good at his job – the best, actually – because the object of his attention remained bent over a computer console, that sweet, sweet ass pointed directly toward him like it was teasing him.

If there was one thing Ilya could say about "archrival," as Father called him, it would be that he could fill out a black suit and cargo pants.

"Shane Hollander."

Hollander whipped around, and Ilya added a point to his mental total. He had effectively sneaked up on the Canadian spy.

He acknowledged Ilya with a tiny nod. "Ilya Rozanov."

Ilya wasn't surprised, and Hollander didn't look it, either. There were assets and moles in every organization. The Boston Bears Crime Syndicate was no different. It had a whole drive on what it had learned about Montreal Voyageurs' newest phenomenon, and Ilya would have been disappointed if Hollander's organization didn't have one on him.

He wondered if Hollander had studied it.

In his bedroom.

Not that Ilya had done that, of course.

"You took something from me," Ilya said with a sigh as he leaned back against the desk, so he faced Hollander.

The computer screen cast Shane in a light blue glow that made him look intense. *Sexy*, his mind thought traitorously. *Adorable*, another part of his brain acknowledged when Hollander's face scrunched and his freckles crowded the top of his cheeks.

Hollander straightened his back in a manner that had no place being that sensual, and Ilya tsked. He would have liked Shane to have stayed in that position.

"So Canada is spying on their allies now," Ilya began.

"We spy on everyone."

"Even me?"

"You're not an ally."

Ilya laughed and leaned until he was within Hollander's orbit, his lips all but touching Hollander's but not moving any closer. "Perhaps I could be."

A sudden explosion jerked both Shane and Ilya, and belatedly, Ilya realized the console's screen had blown out.

"Did you feel that or was just me?"

"I didn't close out the program." Hollander's eyes widened. "There must have been a self-destruct protocol."

Ilya arched an eyebrow. "Were you distracted?"

The lights in the building flashed off and then clicked back on in with a red hue, flooding the offices and halls in what looked like blood.

Panic hit Hollander's voice. "We got to move!"

"No shit!"

They burst out of the office, and Hollander led the way down the hall – three rights, a left, and then into a stairwell. Hollander made it there first but just by a hair and only because Ilya enjoyed the view. Annoyingly, Hollander held the door and let Ilya go first down the stairs. Ilya was the faster runner and beat Hollander out the bottom door and into the alley leading to Duane Street.

All they had to do was make it to Chambers Street a few blocks over, and they could get lost in the throngs of subway travelers.

Unfortunately, the door clicked closed behind Ilya before Hollander exited, and the emergency protocols kicked into place. Hollander slammed the door's bar twice, but it failed to disengage. That was definitely a violation of some fire code, but Ilya guessed the government cared more about protecting its secrets than saving the lives of those stealing them.

Hollander's eyes were wide with fear. He twisted around and looked up the stairwell. Security must have been on the way.

Hollander would probably be dejected when he turned around to find Ilya gone. He probably felt betrayed and scared and so very alone in that one moment.

Ilya would make it up to him. A mad dash took him to a nearby dumpster, where he had stashed a breaching shotgun for emergencies. As he loaded the gauge, he clicked on his comm. unit.

"Svetlana, I need you to connect me to Hollander's earpiece."

Her disapproval was palpable. *"You want me to hack the CSIS's system, find their star recruit, and then connect his device to our systems?"*

Ilya stopped loading the shotgun for the briefest of moments and nodded. "Yes."

An annoyed sigh. *"Done."*

Ilya could hear the background clatter of the stairs. "Hollander."

Hollander's voice was breathless and uncertain. *"...Rozanov?"*

Ilya stepped up to the door and leveled his shotgun. "Duck."

He gave Hollander less than two seconds before he fired a round. The lock immediately blew off, leaving a gaping hole in the door. Hollander swung it open and gave Ilya and the shotgun pointed looks.

"You were hiding the good toys."

"Oh, those I have back at my penthouse."

"Are you trying to flirt with me while we're running from the Americans?"

"I can do two things at once."

Hollander let out a smoke screen while Ilya tossed the shotgun into the dumpster – it was clean and he'd worn gloves – and they took off into the night.

Svetlana took care of the local security cameras, giving them a chance to change and disappear into the local subway station. Hollander slid into a seat across from Ilya, letting out quick breaths from exertion and relief.

God, he was breathtaking, even in his new casual wear – a gray hoodie, loose jeans, and comfortable sneakers.

"Sorry I messed up your job."

"No, you're not."

Ilya laughed. "No, I'm not."

They sat in silence for a bit, the train car rocking back and forth as it made its way through the New York underground. Hollander seemed nervous, shifting every so often in his seat and

trying to steal glances of Ilya. He was a terrible liar, so how he made such a good spy, Ilya didn't know.

They were headed east on the J Train, toward Queens, though Hollander probably should have jumped on the G Train north toward LaGuardia. So Ilya thought he would try to be helpful.

"What's your stop?"

Hollander sighed and ran his hands down the front of his thighs. "I...hadn't thought that far in advance."

Hollander didn't have a plan?

Okay. Ilya would improvise. "There is late-night deli. Flushing. You like tuna melts?"

Hollander blinked, the tiniest of smirks twisting up the edge of his lips. "You want to buy me a tuna melt?"

"I'm hungry. You suck at your job."

"Fuck you."

"You say such nice things to me." Ilya hit him on the leg and stood. "Come. This can be your consolation prize."

Either Hollander liked his company, had better nothing to do, or was just hungry, but he followed Ilya's lead. They eventually took up residence on a bench outside the deli. Ilya'd bought Hollander a ginger ale and himself a coke, and they passed the time talking about everything and absolutely nothing as they ate.

A perk of the job.

"Boston is okay," Ilya said with a shrug and a bite. "I would have rather gone here or even L.A., but is not so bad."

"You didn't have a choice after training?"

"My family is in Boston, so..." It wasn't like Grigori Rozanov wasn't known to be the head of the Boston Bears. If Hollander didn't know, then he wasn't worthy of being called Ilya's rival.

To his credit, Hollander nodded. "I get that."

He didn't elaborate, and Ilya didn't push. Hollander's father worked for the Canadian treasury, but his mother wasn't in the file. That meant she either wasn't in the picture or was a member of another spy organization.

He'd ask Svetlana to investigate later. Maybe.

“And you enjoy Montreal?”

“It’s nice,” Hollander said with a shrug. He crumpled up his empty wrapper. “Close to home.”

Where was home for Hollander? Ilya guessed Ottawa or Toronto. He didn't speak with a French accent, so that ruled out Quebec as his native province. Plus, the name “Shane Hollander” just didn’t sound French.

Another crumb to follow. Ilya enjoyed this cat-and-mouse game of theirs.

Hollander stood then and glanced about the almost-empty street. "So... I guess I should get going."

"Got a plane to catch?" Ilya hedged.

Hollander smiled. "Something like that."

He turned to leave, but it was too soon. When would Ilya see him again? "You owe me."

Hollander stopped short at the blunt accusation, confusion upon his face. Oh, those freckles were bunching again. "What are you talking about?"

Ilya stood and held up one finger. "First, you steal me." Second finger. "Now, I save your life. You owe me - two times."

"You handed me the information."

"After you knocked my contact unconscious."

Hollander looked more smug than anything.

Ilya sighed, dramatically, and put out his hand. "Give me your phone."

"Hell no."

"I don't care if it's your burner or your personal. Just give me one."

Hollander's eyes were dark and cautious, but he did reach into his back pocket. His iPhone looked old, maybe one of the first models, and it was worn. Either he had picked it up secondhand or this was his actual cell phone.

Ilya would not jump to conclusions, even though his heart fluttered. He put his number into the phone before sending himself a text message.

"Lily?" Hollander said with an incredulous little laugh. "What am I in your phone?"

"Jane."

"Sure, no one will get that."

People were stupid. Ilya pocketed his personal phone and allowed his usual crooked smile to twist the corner of his lips. "Now you only owe me once."

"I don't like owing anyone." With no other warning, Hollander seized Ilya's cheeks and pulled him into a desperate, hungry embrace.

Ilya would have been lying if he said he never thought of this before, and it was better than anything he had imagined. One swipe of his tongue along Hollander's bottom lip opened Hollander's mouth, and Ilya leaned forward until Hollander was pressed against a light pole, his legs straddling Ilya's thigh.

They eventually broke for air, though Ilya mouthed down Hollander's neck.

"I'm surprised you didn't make it three," Hollander muttered and disengaged, though not without an apologetic smile. He held onto Ilya's fingers for as long as possible as he backed away. "You didn't even try to complete your job."

He would tell his father Hollander prevented him from doing so. Grigori would believe him, though he wouldn't be happy.

"I already got what I came for." Ilya waved his phone.

Hollander scoffed, but Ilya could see the blush darkening his cheeks. "Don't forget to use it."

"Oh, I won't."

Now – Boston

"Do you know where Alexei is, Hollander?" Ilya asked, clear but still soft, as if trying to coax an answer from a drunk man.

Shane's cheek remained pressed to Ilya's palm, though he shifted almost constantly. He was trying to fight the drugs. "Hnnn..."

"You owe the Voyageurs nothing," Ilya continued. "They aren't coming for you. You know that, yes?"

Shane tipped his head back, eyes blinking rapidly like he was trying to hold back tears.

"Even if we were to release you now, they would deem you compromised and cut all ties. That is the best-case scenario." And it was true. Government organizations rarely reactivated captured spies. "You have no reason to keep their secrets anymore. Share them with me."

Shane rolled his head to the side, eyes now unfocused and glistening. "Hayd says he hates you," he said in a light, airy voice. "Wants to punch you."

Ilya sighed and drilled, "That's not really a secret, Hollander." Hayden had told him no fewer than five times the last time he saw the guy.

“But likes you and likes how you treat his kids. Calls you Uncle Ilya behind your back.”

Don't react. Ilya dragged a heavy, long breath through his nose. Hopefully, it looked like frustration rather than him cooling the sudden warming in his chest. “I don't need you making up stories, Hollander. Focus. Tell me where the Voyageurs are holding my brother.”

“Terrible view, decent room service, wicked small room...834...”

A view and a number? Why would Shane give him a number? Unless...

“Are the Voyageurs holding my brother at a hotel, Hollander?”

Seven years ago

It began as random text exchanges that went on for too long and filled Ilya's lonely nights at the docks, during interrogations, and on long-haul flights.

Jane: Your bosses don't splurge for first class?

Lily: Budget in rubles.

Jane: Ouch!

Lily: Flight attendant is hot tho.

Jane: 🙄

They evolved into pictures, which was just foolish and sloppy.

Lily: You wear glasses? How did I not know this?

Jane: It's not like I telegraphed it to the criminal underworld.

Lily: Perhaps you should have. Get them all hot for you.

Lily: Can you send me shirtless pic with glasses only?

Jane: No!

Lily: Yes! Will make it worth your while.

Lily: [IMG_356.png]

Ten minutes later

Jane: [IMG_0107.png]

Ilya immediately looked at the location information, which was suspiciously left on. Montreal this time, Vancouver another time, Ottawa more than a dozen times but that made sense. The Voyageurs probably had to check in at the Canadian Security Intelligence Service

headquarters every so often. Perhaps they all sat down with coffee and doughnuts to have boring debriefings.

He and Hollander didn't seem to ever meet up like they had before. Either the Voyageurs wanted to keep Hollander out of Boston, or they worried he'd be compromised by their continuous conversations – if the Voyageurs monitored his phone.

Svetlana monitored Ilya's communications for the Boston Bears, and she was nothing if not discreet. He knew he'd eventually cross the line, and she'd yell at him. He doubted he would stop texting Hollander until he couldn't anymore because those freckles, those dark eyes, that tight ass – Ilya would admit he was a bit obsessed with Shane Hollander. But no one could blame him, even Svetlana who would comment when the Canadian spy was in their briefings.

“He is gorgeous, yes?”

“If you're into that sort of thing.”

Which he was and she knew it.

He eventually was dispatched again to New York for a quick weapons exchange, and whoever did budgeting must have needed to burn some cash. Ilya received a suite at The Pendry. It didn't have the best views of the city, but the modern and sleek accommodation fit Ilya's style.

He snapped a photo of his suite and sent it to Hollander.

Lily: All alone in the big city. What is a lonely girl to do?

Ilya went about his work, readying his gear and planning reconnaissance work to find the best place for the meet. He was just about to order room service when he received a reply.

Jane: Room number?

This was stupid and wrong and so many others things, but Ilya could chock it up to a dry spell. He hadn't bedded nearly as many women – or men – since he made out with Hollander almost six months ago.

So Ilya did what all idiots do when they want to get laid.

Lily: 703

Less than five minutes later, he received another text.

Jane: Here.

When he opened the door, Hollander sneaked through the opening. He was dressed like he'd put some effort into his look with a plain button down, pressed slacks, and hair styled just so. He was breathless and breathtaking, all at once.

“Sorry for the short notice, but when I saw your view, I realized I wasn’t that far away. Figured we could meet up.”

“Meet up?” Ilya parroted. “I want to do more than just *meet up* with you, Hollander.”

“Good because I was thinking of something else, too.” He made an obscene hand gesture, and Ilya didn’t need to be told twice. He pounced, his lips finding Hollander’s immediately, his fingers tailing through Hollander’s hair, as Hollander’s fingers fumbled with his belt.

Ilya walked them backwards until he lifted Hollander by the thighs and dumped him on the bed. And Hollander – thoroughly kissed, hair messy, eyes demanding – was a sight Ilya never wanted to forget.

He fell on top of Hollander and began his reconnaissance.

Sometime later, Ilya awoke to a tiny ping, and he rolled over to see Hollander playing with his phone. “What are you doing?”

“Turning on Find A Friend.”

“You are joking.”

Night had fallen. The only light in the suite was the glow of the cell phone, and Hollander was beautiful and shirtless, back pressed against the headboard. He squinted as he tried to read the tiny screen without his glasses.

Ilya had the sudden urge to kiss him again. Maybe for eternity.

Hollander eventually put down both phones and shifted to be near Ilya again, allowing Ilya to give into his temptations.

“You know that is irresponsible,” Ilya warned between kisses.

“You don’t trust me?”

“You trust me?”

Hollander’s fingers played with a wayward curl in the middle of Ilya’s forehead. “I wouldn’t be here if I didn’t trust you.”

Ilya could hear the lectures he’d gotten from everyone in the Bears’ organization – his father, his brother, Svetlana, Marlow. You could never trust a spy.

And yet...

And *yet*...

Hollander’s phone vibrated, and he sighed into their latest lazy, heated kiss. Ilya refused to let him go, and Hollander laughed and struggled until he retrieved the device.

He huffed again. “I have to go.”

Ilya buried his face in the crook between Hollander’s throat and shoulder. “No, you don’t.”

Hollander’s laugh jostled him up and down. “Unfortunately, I do, but we can meet up when we’re close.”

But how long would that be? The pictures Hollander shared rarely showed them in the same city. He eventually asked Hollander the same.

“I’ll be back in Boston at the end of the month.”

Ilya had no reason to believe he wouldn’t be back in Boston by then. “2886 Beacon.”

The adorable crinkle returned between Hollander’s eyes. “What’s that?”

“My penthouse.”

The shock on Hollander’s face was close to horrified at first, and Ilya thought he might have chased away the best thing that ever happened to him. But then Hollander’s expression softened, and he leaned forward to press his lips, body, his heart against Ilya’s. Ilya almost thought that maybe, *maybe* Hollander felt what Ilya did.

But he still got out of the bed and got dressed.

Before he left, though, Hollander leaned down to Ilya, gripped his cheek, and captured Ilya’s lips again. The kiss was slow and indulgent, teasing Ilya with the building heat of the second round that couldn’t happen now.

But Hollander pulled away. Breathed against Ilya’s swollen lips, “Good night, Rozanov.”

“Good night, Hollander,” he replied, equally soft.

And then Hollander was pressing his phone against his ear and disappearing out the door. “I’m on my way, J.J. Geez. I won’t be late...”

Ilya wanted to smoke. Damn American hotels.

He took a long shower and came out of the bathroom to find himself not alone. Svetlana sat by the suite’s living room table, dressed in a dark, shimmering cocktail dress and stiletto heels with her curly hair up in a stylish bun. She had set up a makeshift computer console in the time it took Ilya to shower.

“What the fuck do you think you are doing?” she bit off in Russian.

Ilya moved to the clothes tossed about the room and found his underwear by the window. Oh, right. That’s where Hollander had –

“I monitor your communications.” It was then he realized she held his cell phone. “You’re compromised.”

He really needed that cigarette. “Oh, come on –

“I didn't say anything when you started exchanging messages. I didn't say anything when you started sharing pictures, but now Find A Friend? On your personal phone? Ilyusha – “

“It's fine.”

“It's not fine. This is the exact opposite of *fine*. He works for the Canadian government. If he hasn't turned you into an asset yet, he will try.”

He pulled up his jeans and zipped them before seeking out his shirt. “I shared pictures from my phone. With metadata. He could have used that at any time to find my location and disrupt our missions. You monitor their movements. Have you noticed diversions in the Voyageurs' actions?”

“...No.”

“No, because he hasn't used it. Because that's not what this is.”

“And you don't think he's going to use Find A Friend to do that?”

He really didn't.

Svetlana sighed and stood, coming to Ilya's side as he finished pulling on his shirt. She rested a comforting hand on his shoulder. “You know how this will end, Ilya. You will have to choose to be with him or choose to end him. And if you choose the former, you will both be on the run forever.” When he rolled his eyes, she grabbed his chin and once more held his gaze. “You'll never be able to go home. Are you ready for that? Are you ready to make that choice?”

Ilya closed his eyes briefly, and he could see Hollander, underneath him, smiling up at him like his whole world revolved around Ilya.

“...He has freckles,” he finally admitted, pitiful. “They are adorable. What am I to do?”

Svetlana threw up her hands and left the suite.

To Be Continued...

Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

Six years. Four cities. The first time Shane asks Ilya to stay.

Now – Boston

Ilya leaned against the two-way mirror with Marly as his father spoke with some of their Boston Metro contacts. Father was loud and demanding, and Ilya found his sight drifting back into the interrogation room. Shane was still under the effects of the serum and would be for a few more hours. Ilya could readminister, but he could only prolong the interrogation so long before Father became impatient. He needed to get answers out of Shane to keep him in one piece.

Marlow leaned over with a conspiratorial whisper. “Would you like me to try? I bet I can make him sing.”

Ilya had heard Shane sing before. No one wanted that.

Ilya tried to look bored, crossing his arms. “Father already tried your method and failed. I at least got where Alexei is being held.”

“And you really think they’ll find him?”

No, he didn’t.

“Did you hack into Hollander’s phone yet?” Ilya asked. “There has to be contacts, pictures –”

“Svetlana is working on it now, but she said most of it had been wiped clean. A contact, a few pictures, a few apps.”

“Anything we can use?”

“Hollander apparently has a girlfriend he sexts every so often, so he was lying about that boyfriend.”

Ilya snorted. If only.

“A few pictures while on a job,” Marly continued. “A Find a Friend app. Svetlana is looking into who Hollander was keeping tabs on with that.”

“Hm. I need a smoke.”

Marlow hit him on the shoulder. “Don’t be too long. If the guys don’t find your brother – ”

“Yeah, yeah. Father will be out for blood.”

Ilya made his way up to Raiders. The nightclub was still loud and filled with throngs of drunk partygoers at 3:30 a.m., but it would be closing in less than an hour. Years ago, Ilya would have found a woman, captured her attention, and enjoyed her company.

Today, he put a cigarette to his lips, waited until he stepped out the back door, and flicked on his lighter. The electronica music became muted in the dark alley, and if he wasn’t one of the most skilled criminals in the world, he would have worried for his safety.

Instead, he took a long drag of his cigarette, pulled out one of his phones, and preceded to slam it over and over against the top of a nearby dumpster. It broke tiny shards of glass, plastic, and metal, and he dumped the rest inside the trash container.

Then, he enjoyed his cigarette for a few minutes and allowed it to calm his nerves. Eventually, he pulled out his work phone and saw a message from Marlow. Father was ready for him, and their operatives didn’t find Alexei at the Hilton Boston Park Plaza. It appeared the Voyageurs had held him there, though.

Ilya stubbed out the remnants of his cigarette with the toe of his sneaker and headed back inside.

He had another date with Shane.

Six years ago – Paris

The flight from Moscow to Boston was an arduous nine hours and thirty minutes long, and by the end, Ilya was usually stir-crazy and sometimes a little drunk. He could never get the local Boston hockey game, and there were only so many hours he could binge-watch the latest high fantasy TV show before he wanted a dragon.

That was usually when Marlow cut him off.

But Marlow wasn’t with him this time, and Ilya wasn’t due back in Boston until later in the week. On a whim, Ilya opened the Find A Friend app.

Sure enough, Hollander was a pitstop away in Paris.

A pitstop that was seven or eight hours one way because there were no direct flights.

Ilya booked his flights.

He landed less than twelve hours later, grateful that Hollander’s blip hadn’t moved out of the city center. He took a train from the airport into Paris, dropped his suitcase off at the hotel, and made his way to Café de Flore – where he saw a very North American-looking Shane Hollander.

Hollander sat in the middle of the clutter of tables, wearing a Montreal Metros' baseball cap, a blue button up with rolled sleeves, khaki shorts, and suede loafers.

Ilya weaved between the tables and pulled out the empty chair across from Hollander. "You suck at this. You know that, yes?"

Hollander's surprised but delighted grin was worth the double flight. "Says the guy who could pass as Parisian if he ever kept his mouth shut."

"First, you don't want me to do that." He winked; Hollander rolled his eyes. "Second, I do not speak French. You can probably do it with a perfect Parisian accent."

Hollander muttered something in French, which was not at all sexy, and then switched to English. "Unfortunately, something else makes me stick out."

He motioned toward his face, but Ilya shrugged.

"Your boringness? The French are never boring."

Hollander kicked him under the table, but not hard, and Ilya responded by resting his shoe next to Hollander's loafer. He wasn't surprised when Hollander didn't pull it away.

"Whoever you are trying to hide from, they probably know you are already here. Maybe next time you should try wearing Figaret or Zara even. Leave the Roots at home."

"Fuck you."

"Is why I'm here, yes."

Hollander ignored that and jerked his chin toward an area beyond Ilya. Ilya lifted his phone and used the reflection in the black screen to see a well-dressed man at the very edge of the café. He sat with a woman much younger than him, and Ilya didn't want to guess if she was the man's wife or daughter. Perhaps neither.

"If I'm so out of place, go and pick that guy's pocket for me," Hollander all but demanded, taking a sip of his ginger ale. "I need his phone."

Ilya flagged down the waiter and ordered a coke. "Oh, sure. Make me do the heavy lifting."

"I can do it, but you're telling me he knows I'm here."

"So now I become Canadian government errand boy? *Nononono.*"

Hollander leaned forward and whispered, "Look, Monsieur Asshole over there is known for human trafficking. A guy like that shouldn't be on the streets. Even you can agree with that."

Ilya sighed and let the cold coke roll over his tongue. Ilya knew his father's criminal organization wasn't completely free of these types of transactions, but Ilya was. He never touched those, never would, and made sure his father knew that was his line.

He would run guns. He would extract information. He would even commit assassinations when need be and sell secrets to the highest bidder.

But he would never sell someone to another.

Ilya sighed and stood. "I better get a good reward for this."

"Dealer's choice," Hollander said with a wink, and Ilya hated how right Sveltana was about all this.

Shane Hollander would ruin him completely.

When Ilya returned sometime later, phone in hand, Hollander quickly went to work. He placed the phone under the table and spoke to a person via AirPods. "I'm attaching the dongle now, Rose. Do your thing."

"Did you just say 'dongle'?" Ilya laughed. "What is that? Your idea of foreplay?"

"Shut up. We can get out of here in a few minutes once Rose finishes her thing and you put this back."

Great, now he had to return it? "Two rounds, no sneaking out for another job."

Hollander looked up from under the rim of his hat with a baiting grin. "I'm all yours for the next forty-eight hours."

Totally worth it.

Five years ago

Jane: Did you send me five cases of ginger ale?

Lily: 😊

Jane: You can't just send ginger ale to the CSIS Quebec Regional Office!

Lily: Is your birthday.

Jane: I didn't tell you my birthday.

Lily: So? You don't think I can find out?

Lily: You don't know mine?

Jane: June 15.

Jane: It's weird for criminals to send CSIS agents birthday presents!

Lily: Is not weird.

Lily: Only if you make it weird.

Lily: Show me your birthday suit. Send bathroom pic. 🐱

Jane: NO.

Lily: YES.

Lily: I will do whatever you want when in Montreal in 2 weeks.

Jane: Anything?

Lily: ANYTHING.

Jane: [IMG_854.png]

Lily: 🤔

Four years ago – Boston

Ilya didn't dislike Special Agent Scott Hunter. The FBI agent for the CID was only doing his job when investigating the Boston Bears Crime Syndicate, and in all fairness, Ilya's family was conducting organized crime.

But Hunter was getting too close. He had already arrested some of the Bears in New York, and chatter from informants had Hunter coming into Boston for a joint operation between the two cities. So Grigori tasked Ilya with intimidation.

It wasn't too hard to find that Hunter had a boyfriend who worked at a smoothie shop, but Ilya had a rule to never mess with family. It wasn't Kip's fault that his FBI boyfriend was really good at his job and Ilya's family were really terrible people.

A few calls found Ilya the apartment where Hunter would be staying in Boston. Now, he just had to decide how best to get under the veteran agent's skin.

Sitting at the kitchen table and checking out the home's Zillow listing, Ilya took a long drag of his cigarette as he considered his options. Unfortunately, he missed the sock-muted footsteps upon his hardwood floor, or he would have slammed shut his laptop. Soft but toned arms slid down his naked chest and curled about his neck from behind. A warm cheek settled against his.

"I thought you said you quit."

"And I thought I told you not to nag me about it."

"Because you said you quit."

Ilya made a production of lifting up the cigarette and smashing it into the nearby ashtray.

“Thank you,” Hollander said, as if Ilya wasn’t going to light up another the moment he left the room. “Are you doing recon? On our night together? I guess I haven’t tired you out enough.”

In the computer’s reflection, Ilya could see Hollander put on a pair of Ilya’s loose sweatpants and a hoodie. His hair was askew, and he wore his glasses. God, he loved when Hollander stayed in his penthouse.

Ilya didn’t extract himself from Hollander’s hold but managed to shut the computer. “There is no choice. Father wants this done.”

Hollander shifted without breaking contact and settled in Ilya’s lap. “Should I be jealous that you’re reconning Scott Hunter’s rental?”

Ilya blinked. “How did you – ”

“You’re not the only one watching Hunter. The CSIS keeps tabs on FBI movements, too.”

“Hm. He’s old. And boring.”

“Shit.” Hollander dropped his head to Ilya’s shoulder. “He’s your type.”

Ilya ran his fingers through the short strands on Hollander’s neck. “You should go. I need to work, and you don’t want to be part of this.”

“Hm. I’m not really into a threesome but maybe with Scott Hunter – ”

“Don’t tease me with good time.”

Hollander sat up now but didn’t move from his spot, straddling Ilya’s lap. “You’re not going to kill him, are you?”

This was crossing a line, Ilya knew, but it was also a test. How much could they actually trust each other? And how far was Ilya really willing to go for the Bears, for his father? Was he willing to kill an FBI agent?

There were many things Ilya was willing to do for his father. Losing Shane Hollander was not one of them.

“No. I just need to give him a reason not to investigate the Bears any longer.”

“And you *really* have to do this?”

Did Ilya have to? Yes, probably. Father did not tolerate insubordination. It was how he kept a firm grip on the Bears’ business and its associates.

“Do you *want* to do this?” Hollander prodded, this time his fingers teasing the curls on Ilya’s forehead.

This was all Ilya knew. He grew up in his father's organization. He was taught by his father's associates how to steal, how to fight, how to forge, and how to survive in the world of intelligence and crime.

But did he actually *want* to do all that? Possibly not. Probably not, but other than a few specific jobs he outright refused, he'd always done as he asked, as he was told.

This wasn't the job to bulk.

Hollander seemed to understand. "Hunter's practically freaking Captain America. You're not going to get him to back off the case."

Ilya dragged his hands back and forth along Hollander's hips and down his backside. "Then what do you suggest?"

"Distraction. Send his attention somewhere else."

"How?"

Hollander bit his bottom lip as he thought for a moment. "There's a group of up-and-coming gangbangers in Toronto. Call themselves the Guardians. They've used Molotov cocktails to burn down their rivals' hide-outs."

Ilya couldn't believe what he was hearing. "You're saying I should burn down Scott Hunter's rental and frame a Canadian gang?"

His Canadian spy boyfriend was giving him advice on how to firebomb an FBI agent's apartment. What had his life become?

Hollander shrugged. "Use a Crown Royal bottle. That's their signature move, and there's a special concoction I can give you. Also, make sure there's no one in the surrounding homes. These things are highly volatile." Hollander then climbed off his lap, leaving Ilya cold and bereft. "Y'know what? I'll just come with you."

Ilya raised his voice as Hollander walked back toward his bedroom. "You are going to come and commit a felony with me? *You*? Shane Hollander?"

Hollander popped his head in, working his T-shirt over his arms. "Well, if you're not here, I'll have to work on that paper for my psychology course, and I really don't want to."

Right. Hollander was now studying for his master's at McGill.

"And anyway, don't most couples do things together?"

Ilya ignored how his heart fluttered at Hollander's casual use of the word "couple." "This is too exciting for you. You probably want to do something boring, like play pickleball or cook."

Hollander threw Ilya's shoes at him with impressive aim. Ilya resolved to make it up to him later with incredible sex in his Porsche.

Three years ago – Moscow

Hollander was in Moscow.

For a moment, Ilya thought he had come to bait him. Hollander was in a nightclub owned by Grigori, wearing a too-tight dress shirt with a pattern that was anything but boring but also anything but Hollander's style. He drank. He tried to flirt and failed miserably. Still, he was a beacon on the dance floor, despite not being able to dance for shit.

Why Hollander would come all the way to Moscow to play the role of honeypot – was lost upon Ilya, unless Hollander had been sent just for him.

Ilya dismissed the thought. If Hollander were trying to seduce him, he would have shown up in his glasses, wearing a boring button down or maybe even a set of Adidas sweats.

Hell, he could have shown up naked.

Ilya sat in the corner booth, ordered drink after drink, and just watched. He couldn't engage with Hollander. Not here. Not like this. Any conversation would become chatter in the criminal community within minutes, and even if no one suspected his and Hollander's situationship, their associates would expect one of them to not be standing by the following morning.

If anyone knew Hollander was in Moscow, that was, which it appeared no one did.

If they had, Hollander would never have made it inside the club. Someone would have caught him at the door and brought him before Alexei by now.

Sigh. One day, Ilya would need to stop saving Hollander's ass... even though it was a cute ass.

When a breathtaking older woman with long black hair and a drunken smile set her sights upon Hollander, Ilya finished off his beer and stood. Hollander turned, hand out to greet the woman, which Ilya seized. He then spun Hollander 360-degrees and twisted his arm behind his back. Hollander could have spun out of the hold if he wanted, Ilya knew, but he allowed Ilya to push him through the nearest door and into an exit stairwell.

"What the fuck do you think you're doing?" Hollander demanded. The club's ETM boomed in the background.

One day, Hollander's bunched freckles would not be adorable. Today was not that day. "What am I doing?" Ilya scoffed. "You should not be in Moscow."

"You don't own Moscow."

"You work for the Canadian government, Hollander. You cannot tell me you are here to see the sights. You probably didn't even arrive with your real passport."

Hollander was pissed. "Maybe you don't know my real name. Did you ever think of that?"

Ilya leaned back against the staircase's railing with raised eyebrows. They both knew that wasn't the case.

Hollander sighed. "Look I just need to make contact with someone, and then I'll be out of your hair."

Ilya wanted Hollander's fingers in his hair. "Who are you meeting?"

"You know I can't share that with –"

"Rose?" Ilya guessed. "You are here to meet your contact Rose?"

"Rose?" Hollander echoed, that tiny little line appearing between his eyebrows. "No, Rose is my tech support. She works for – She's not Russian."

That didn't mean anything.

"Wait...are you jealous?" Hollander asked, his eyes practically dancing.

"No, I am not jealous." He threw up a hand. "I'm just saying –"

"Who's Svetlana?"

Now, it was Ilya's turn to be taken back. "We are just friends. Sometimes we fuck, but it's for fun. We're not like *that*."

Hollander didn't seem surprised or comforted by his answer. Well, it was the truth, and lying to Hollander just felt wrong.

"I'm gay," Hollander replied, as if Ilya hadn't known that for at least five years.

"Not so gay that you can't be a straight honeypot. Here. In Moscow, of all places." Okay, maybe Ilya was a little jealous, but they had been doing this dance for *years* now. And he liked not sharing boring, annoying Hollander.

"You think I like this?" Hollander gripped the front of his stylish shirt. "I'm not you. I don't enjoy this type of covert mission."

"I did enjoy it," Ilya admitted. "Yes. For sometime."

Hollander blinked. "*Did*. As in past tense?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

Ilya blew up his bangs and couldn't believe he was saying this, "Because of a boring Canadian spy who has freckles, terrible fashion sense, and no self-preservation."

Hollander's eyes were glistening. "I have style."

“You cannot honestly believe you pull off that shirt.”

Hollander flipped him off.

Before Ilya could retort, the door to the stairwell burst open. The middle-aged woman from earlier peaked inside and giggled, then took a quick sip of her drink. “Oops! Boys in the women’s bathroom? Naughty naughty!” she admonished in Russian.

Ilya let out a growling, “Next door,” in the same language and guided the woman back out onto the dance floor. He then turned back to Hollander. “You need to go. I cannot be seen with you.”

Hollander looked like he wanted to say something but ultimately shut his mouth. Then, he forged ahead. “When will you be back in North America?”

“I don’t know. I have business to finish here before I can return.”

“But you are returning.” Hollander didn’t pose it as a question, but Ilya could tell it was one.

It had been three months since they saw each other. Was it possible that Hollander came all the way to Moscow just to see him?

Ilya couldn’t close the gap between them, couldn’t brush his knuckles across those freckles, and devour Hollander’s lips like he wanted. “Yes, you cannot get rid of me that easy, *moya lyubov*.”

If Hollander knew what that expression meant, he didn’t show it. “Good. I would hate to have to seduce Scott Hunter.”

“Is that what you think?” Ilya couldn’t suppress his laughter. “*You seduced me?*”

“What? You think I just fell head over sneakers from a tuna melt?”

That was part of it, but – “Breaching shotgun.”

Hollander froze, eyes widening. “Yeah. Yeah, I guess so.”

With that realization, Hollander abandoned his mission for the night and headed down the stairs toward the emergency exit.

Ilya waited more than minute to get his nerves under control before starting up the stairs. He needed to erase the footage from the night and take a very long, very cold shower.

Now - Boston

“You lied to me, Hollander,” Ilya said, annoyed. “Our men went to the hotel. My brother was not there.”

Shane's cheek remained cradled in Ilya's palm, even as he fidgeted in his seat. "H-He was... so gross... eating chicken fingers with mayonnaise... and mustard..."

That was Alexei's dipping sauce of choice. His brother had been there. Hollander had seen him.

As much as Ilya hated to admit it, Alexei wasn't his priority. "Someone told you where the shipment was coming in. The CSIS, the FBI, the Boston Metro Police – they were all at the docks waiting for the shipment.

"Someone in our organization tipped you off. Who was it, Hollander?"

Shane rolled his head to the side, so his now glistening eyes met Ilya's. They were desperate and frightened and haunted in ways Ilya never wanted to see. "I-I can't," he whispered, gutted. "S-She trusts us. We can't."

"She? Your girlfriend? From your phone?"

Shane's eyes were distant, confused. "Lily? N-No. Not this time."

Shit. He was getting close to the truth. "Hollander, I need you to focus. If you do not, my father will send Marly in here, and you saw how well his methods worked the first time."

It didn't. While Shane had all his bones still intact, he hadn't released any information about the Montreal Voyageurs or the specific contact his father sought.

"Who was your contact, Hollander?" Ilya prodded, factual and direct. "You can tell me."

A small shake of his head. "Shh...Shh...they'll hear..."

"My father is out for blood, Hollander," Ilya continued in a sweet murmur, teasing the very edges of Shane's bangs. "You know how this will end. Perhaps you'll have all your appendages intact. Perhaps you will not, but you have a higher likelihood if you tell me what I want to know."

Shane struggled again, uncomfortable in his own skin. "Ilya...Ilya, please...I-It...isn't safe..."

Huh. Perhaps Ilya was asking the wrong question.

He glanced back at the two-way mirror. "Hollander, where is your safehouse?"

Last Year – Montreal

Ilya was fucked.

He'd heard whispers that Fucking Asshole Dallas Kent was in Montreal for a job with the Americans, and Ilya's conscience wouldn't let him rest until he ended Kent. He boarded a plane, landed at Trudeau, and tracked the assassin to his rental property in Old Montreal.

The place was a turn-of-the-century, four-story penthouse with brick walls, exposed beams, and elegant modern features. It also had large windows, which Kent kicked Ilya through and sent him slamming to the cobblestoned street below.

Ilya was good at mixing toxins. It was what made him so effective in the field, but Kent was a master. He made murder look like suicide, and something in his condo must have pricked Ilya's skin. Ilya could barely focus through his blurry sight before his impromptu exit. Now, his back ached, his arms were sore, and his breathing had become heavy and labored.

People would soon start to crowd around him, even though it was past 2 a.m. The shattering of the glass had echoed through the once silent street. Unfortunately, Kent found him first.

Ilya's last thoughts weren't of his father or Alexei. They never truly cared about him. They only cared about how he could contribute to the organization. He would miss Svetlana, of course, but she wasn't on his mind.

Ilya thought of Shane. He wondered if Shane would miss him or would he find another rival to fuck. He wondered if Shane ever thought about him when they weren't together, if he wondered if they could ever be together, if he wanted to have a future away from this life, away from the blood and pain.

At one time, Ilya had thought about playing hockey, finding a nice, normal person, and settling down to have a couple of children between seasons.

It was a pipe dream. Shane was a spy for the Canadian government, and Ilya did whatever the fuck his father told him to.

Ilya at least wanted one more cigarette before he went. Unfortunately, Kent smiled that shit-eating grin, and well -

It didn't matter now. Nothing would matter again.

Three quick shots echoed through the silent street in rapid fire. Ilya thought he'd feel more pain, but nothing came.

Kent's hand dropped. The gun slipped. He toppled out of Ilya's eyesight.

Oh. Kent had been the one shot.

Ilya's eyes welled with tears at the person who suddenly bent over him, concern paling his face, trembling hands cradling Ilya's cheeks.

Shane was there.

"It's okay, Ilya. I'm here. Stay with me."

His voice was pleading and wet, like he was crying, too. He gripped Ilya's hand, anchoring him to the world, and Ilya remembered very little after that.

He woke sometime later in a large, comfortable bed with too many pillows and what must have been cotton sateen sheets. He appeared to still be in Old Montreal but this time in a loft with hardwood floors, large floor to ceiling windows – complete with massive navy curtains – and an open floor plan.

There wasn't much inside the loft – a rather large sectional, a desk in the corner with a massive computer console, and a modern kitchen with high-end appliances. Behind the couch was the bed, allowing Ilya to see almost the entire apartment.

Shane looked like he fit into this very boring place with his Addias pants, socked feet, and tight blue workout top.

“Hey,” Shane greeted, placing a glass on the end table and taking a seat on the edge of the bed. He rested his hand over Ilya's. “How are you feeling?”

“Shitty. You got the bastard who hit me?”

Shane nodded. “He won't be hurting anyone else.”

“Good.”

“You scared me,” Shane admitted, thumb running along the back of Ilya's bruised and bandaged hand. “I didn't know you were coming to Montreal.”

A couple years ago, they began to text each other when scheduling trips to their home cities. It only made sense to actually make plans, which allowed them to spend a few days together rather than an hour or two between jobs.

“To be fair, I didn't know that I would be in Montreal. I had only heard rumors about Kent, and I didn't want to lose his trail again.”

Shane lifted the glass of water to Ilya's. The liquid was cool and soothing as it slid down his throat.

“Sounds like you have something personal against him?”

Ilya tried to school his features. “Maybe.”

Shane didn't press and instead, came to rest his forehead against Ilya's. “You should have called me. I would have gone with you.”

“To stop Kent?”

“To stop a guy who clearly had never been hugged as a child and became a mercenary because of it?” Shane shrugged. “I can think of worse ways to spend an evening.”

Ilya wanted to keep it a secret. He needed not to reveal this, but the way Shane looked at him with earnest concern, the way he brushed back the curls from Ilya's forehead, the way he never let go of Ilya's hand – he couldn't hold back any longer.

“My mother’s death was an accident. She swallowed too many pills.”

“Ilya...you don’t think – ” Shane sounded sick. “You don’t think that *Kent* – ”

“I don’t know. But I found out he was in Montreal and didn’t know why. I just kept thinking – if my father or another organization hired him – he didn’t have a good reason to be in Montreal.”

Ilya couldn’t reveal the full truth – that he feared Kent’s next job was to assassinate a certain Canadian spy with freckles and a cute mouth. That Ilya couldn’t sleep thinking that Kent would try to take Shane away from him the exact same way he might have taken away Ilya’s mother.

Shane somehow understood because he lunged forward to seize Ilya’s lips.

“Ilya...” he breathed against them, hand petting the side of Ilya’s bruised cheek.

Ilya groaned, which caused Shane to back off with a soft, “Sorry.”

Everything hurt. He must have broken at least a few ribs in the fall, if not his ankle and maybe even his wrist. He probably had a concussion as well, not to mention the numerous bruises from the hits Kent managed to land. He wouldn’t be much help in a fight for the next four to six weeks, perhaps, not that a few broken bones would stop his father from sending him out on other job.

Or stop Kent’s team from finding them.

Ilya glanced around the room. There weren’t many weapons out. “Are we safe?”

“Yes. We’re off the grid.”

“Where?”

“My safehouse.”

Safehouses were sacred in the world of espionage, Ilya knew. Every spy had one – away from their day-to-day home, away from their family and their organization. It was the place they went if they were compromised, a place no one ever knew about – even their closest allies in the field. It was completely isolated from the rest of the world, in case a spy needed to disappear.

Shane was sharing his sanctuary – his lifeline – with Ilya.

A bang came at the door.

He apparently had shared it with one other person, at least.

Shane squeezed Ilya’s hand once more before letting in the visitor.

A slightly older man – in his late twenties – rushed into the room, bundled in a winter coat, a pair of jeans, and heavy boots. A messenger bag hung over his shoulder, which he dropped onto the kitchen island.

“All right, Shane. What is this *biiiiig* emergency that couldn’t wait until morning?”

Shane motioned toward the bed, and the person pulled off their hood to see Ilya more clearly.

Short brown hair, shocked expression, punchable face. Dr. Hayden Pike, a member of the Voyageurs when he wasn’t doing rounds at the local children’s hospital.

“You have Ilya Rozanov in your bed, Shane,” Hayden said, slowly, cautiously.

“I’m aware, Hayd.”

Hayden’s voice grew tight and panicked. “Why is Ilya Rozanov in your bed? In your safehouse. I’m not even supposed to know about this place, and you brought *him* here?”

“Rozanov took out Kent last night.” Shane grabbed Hayden’s bag and brought it to the bed. “I couldn’t just leave him bleeding in the middle of the road.”

“And how could you possibly know where Rozanov and Kent fought?” Hayden pulled off his jacket and placed it over the spine of the couch. “Why would you even care that Rozanov took out that asshole? You should have let them kill each other.”

“I appreciate your concern for my well-being,” Ilya snapped.

Shane opened the bag, which Ilya could now clearly see held medical supplies and tools. “Kent was a rabid dog. You know that.”

“And Rozanov here is just – ”

“ – a delight, both during the day and at night.” For good measure, Ilya winked in Hayden’s direction.

Hayden glared. “Ew.”

“Can you just check him out and make sure he isn’t going to die from injuries?” Shane asked.

“I don’t know. I could catch rabies.”

Ilya turned his attention to Shane, who had already extracted a thermometer, gloves, and a blood pressure cuff. “Have you caught rabies from my dick yet?”

Hayden’s voice rose three octaves. “You’re sleeping with him?!”

Shane rolled his eyes. “You just had to say that, didn’t you?”

“Your boring story of, ‘I found him on the street,’ was not working.”

“He didn’t know.”

“I know now!” Hayden rushed forward to grip Shane’s shoulders. “Shane, buddy, listen to me. We can find you some nice guy in Montreal, right? Someone respectable or at least flexible. Maybe a yoga instructor, I dunno, but you can do so much better than *him*.”

Ilya snorted. “You flatter me.”

“You are a loose cannon who has probably slept his way through the espionage and criminal worlds.”

“Jealous I didn’t come onto you or do you just have a thing for Hollander?”

Ilya felt Shane’s eye roll.

“Buddy, the only thing I got for Shane is a laundry list of nice dudes who would be better for him than you.”

Ilya wanted a knife. There had to be knife around here somewhere. And a cigarette.

“All right. Let’s just bring this down a few notches, okay?” Shane said with a few loud breaths. “Hayden, please check out Rozanov. For me. And Rozanov, can you try to be less *you* for two minutes?”

Ilya waved his hand, and Hayden begrudgingly came over. Sure enough, it was what Ilya expected – a concussion, a few broken ribs, a sprained wrist, and a broken ankle. Hayden wrapped the wrist and set the ankle right then and there. He promised to return later in the day with a soft cast and a boot.

As he put away his gear, Hayden added, “Hey, uh, thanks for getting rid of Kent. The world’s a little safer today.”

Ilya hadn’t been the one to end him, but for some reason, Shane needed him to be. “Of course.”

He never took death lightly, but Kent deserved what had been coming to him. Ilya could take solace in that.

Once Hayden left, Shane collapsed against the front door. He stood there for a good minute before pushing off and coming to stand at the edge of the bed. “You want something to eat? I’m not the best cook, but I got a few things here. Or I can order out.”

Ilya had more pressing matters. “Will he tell?”

“Hayden?” Shane shook his head. “He has four kids and a wife the Voyageurs don’t know about. We’re fine.”

Ilya hadn’t known that either. God, Shane was either naïve or trusted Ilya way too much.

Something else nagged at Ilya’s gut. “I cannot stay, Shane.”

Shane arched an eyebrow. “You cannot walk, Ilya. You have to stay at least until Hayden comes back.”

“I will leave after.”

Shane once more sat down by Ilya, his hand coming to take Ilya’s good one. “Stay.”

“You know I can’t.”

“Just for a few days. Until you feel better. You can tell the Bears that I held you captive, did all sorts of terrible things to get you to talk, and you rebuffed every single one of them.”

Ilya arched an eyebrow. “Do I need to rebuff them?”

Shane let out a surprised laugh.

Now – Boston

“Our Montreal team found nothing in the safehouse for us to use,” Father said, hitting off his phone and turning to glare in Ilya and Marlow’s direction. “No computers. No phones. Not even money or passports. It was clean. The Voyageurs must know we have him.”

Small miracles. Perhaps they would send someone to retrieve Shane.

“There was one little tidbit we may be able to use,” Father said with a vicious smile. Ilya dreaded his next words. “Apparently, there was a second toothbrush in his bathroom.”

Fuck.

“So the boyfriend is real?” Ilya said with an incredulous laugh and pushed off the wall. “Let’s find out.”

“No, you had your time,” Father snapped. “Now that Hollander’s drugged, perhaps he’ll be more susceptible to Marly’s way of extraction.”

Ilya’s heart jumped into his throat. “Hold on. I got the location of Alexei out of him.”

“He wasn’t there.”

“But he had been. And Hollander shared with me his safehouse address. He is giving *me* information. We just need to find the one thing that gets us what we want.”

Ilya’s blood pounded in his ears; his heart thundered as Father seemed to consider his argument. Then, after a charged moment, he nodded.

“Fine. You can go back in there, but I don’t care who Hollander is fucking.”

Ilya highly doubted that.

“I want to know where Alexei is. I want to know the fucking rat who sold him out, and I want my shipment returned to me.” He came forward to grip Ilya’s cheek and neck roughly. “Give me this, Ilya, and I will give you Hollander. You can dispose of him however you see fit – a tortuous end deserving of your rival.

“And I will enjoy watching you do it.”

To Be Continued...

Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

Shane reveals who is feeding him information about the Boston Bears' shipments.

Chapter Notes

Happy Sunday, everyone! I hadn't planned to post today, but your comments are just so lovely! Thank you so much for your kind words! I hope you enjoy this chapter!

Content Warning: Mentions of human trafficking. Nothing graphic is explained or explored. Also, some sexual situations.

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

Last Year – Montreal

Ilya meant to stay only a few days – a week tops – but he ended up staying a full thirteen days to recover at Shane's safehouse. Hollander helped him shower, cooked him meals, laid him out on the bed several times and worked him to a slow, indulgent, exhaustive release.

Even though each time left him all warm and limp on the bed, Ilya would whine, "I want to fuck you," to which Shane would poke his ribs. Ilya would jerk and grimace and lose the fight. But overall, he couldn't complain about the medicinal blowjobs.

They cuddled on the sectional couch – actually *cuddled* - and watched the local hockey team's games. They would talk about things they shouldn't – about Ilya's mother, about Shane's father, about the jobs or case they hated, about Svetlana and Rose, and about the normal life neither of them had.

"What do you think you would have done if you hadn't joined the CSIS?" Ilya asked one evening, sitting on a stool at the kitchen island.

Shane blinked, taken back, before putting some thought into it. "I was always good at hockey. I originally went to McGill on a hockey scholarship."

"Whoa! McGill? Seriously?"

Shane threw a dish towel at him. "Shut up. It has a great hockey team." Shane sliced up some cheese on the kitchen island in front of Ilya and placed it on top of a set of chicken breasts.

“But I was recruited by the CSIS my freshman year and ended up not playing for the team. Duty called, y’know?”

Ilya didn’t. He never had a choice, and “duty” meant something different to Shane than it did to him.

“What about you?” Shane prompted. “What would you have done if you hadn’t gone to work for your father?”

“I dunno,” Ilya admitted. “I played hockey, too. Maybe could have made a career. Maybe would have been a race car driver or mechanic.” He shrugged. “It doesn’t matter.” He shouldn’t have asked.

When Shane turned off the sauce that had been simmering on the stove, Ilya asked, “What are you making?”

“Chicken parm. It’s not the best recipe, and I’m not the best cook but – ”

“You’re making me chicken parm?” No one had ever gone out of their way to make his favorite food before.

“Yeah, it was either this or Kraft Mac and Cheese.” Shane poured the sauce over the chicken breasts. “Figured I’d give this a try.”

Shane was making him chicken parm. There was coke in the refrigerator, a toothbrush in the bathroom, Ilya’s phone on the nightstand next to the bed.

“Ya lyublya tebya.”

“Not sure what you just said but I hope it wasn’t, ‘I hate chicken parm.’ That would suck.”

Ilya could lie, but it always felt wrong to lie to Hollander. And now that he said the words, he wanted Shane to know. “I love you.”

Shane stopped in mid-pour, his tender, glistening eyes finding Ilya’s. “Holy shit.”

Oh, God, he’d fucked this up, hadn’t he? Ilya had destroyed the best thing he’d known, the best thing he’d ever know, with the only person in the world that mattered. Shane couldn’t want a relationship beyond casual hook-ups with a criminal. There was no way for Shane to have a future in the CSIS if he dated – or God forbid *married* - a member of the Boston Bears Crime Syndicate.

It was only a matter of time before Shane realized that and ended this thing between them. Ilya had been fortunate to hold onto it for all these years, and of course, he’d be the one to fuck it –

“I love you, too.”

Oh. *Oh*. Shane Hollander was in love with him.

Shane abandoned the chicken parm to wrap his arms around Ilya, and Ilya responded with kisses to his forehead, his cheek, his neck, his chest. Any part of Shane's skin Ilya could touch with his lips, he did. Over and over, he murmured, "*Ya lyublya tebya. Ya lyublya tebya. Ya lyublya tebya.*"

The next few days were the best in Ilya's life. He woke up and fell asleep next to the man he loved. Shane finally gave in and allowed them to have slow, lazy, incredible sex, even if it did hurt Ilya's ribs a bit. Thankfully, Shane did most of the work.

Ilya enjoyed being the instigator, but he also enjoyed the times when Shane took charge, gave into his desires, and came completely undone in Ilya's arms.

God, he loved Shane Hollander so much. Probably too much.

"How did we let this happen?" he whispered, lips ghosting Shane's neck.

"We were stupid, irresponsible."

But Ilya didn't regret it. He didn't regret any of it.

It took them eight years to get to this point, where they could be honest with their feelings and what they wanted, and though Ilya seriously doubted he could be with Shane Hollander forever, he would steal these precious days with the love of his life.

And this would end. It was a matter when, not if, and Ilya knew he would never get over Shane Hollander.

...seriously, how the fuck did he fall for a Voyageur? Freckles. It was those adorable freckles.

On day thirteen, he finally got a text.

Svetlana: Stalled as long as possible. Grigori wants Kip Grady. Thinks he can get Hunter to find you. Also putting bounty on Hollander.

Ilya: Coming.

Literally.

Shane collapsed upon his chest, breath tickling his collarbone, lips dusting the underside of his chin. Tired, dazed eyes drifted upward. A tiny frown darkened Shane's expression.

"Are you seriously texting during sex?"

Ilya shrugged, clearly amused, but still breathing heavily. "You are...*huff*... that boring."

Shane lightly punched him in the side. "Fuck you." He then froze, seeing the look on Ilya's face, and said in a broken whisper, "You're leaving."

Ilya captured those swollen and glistening lips again, nipped Shane's bottom lip, and dove inside. It was somehow both tender and filthy and *needy*, for he refused to let Shane leave his

embrace without knowing just how much he meant to Ilya. Words would always be insufficient, no matter how many times he said them, but he would always show Shane just how much this meant to him, how much *he* meant to Ilya.

Shane was everything.

A few hours later, Ilya led Shane to the front door, their fingers threaded. When Ilya grabbed the knob, Shane put his hand upon the door to keep it shut. He took a deep, bracing breath, then met Ilya's worried gaze with pleading eyes.

"Stay."

"Shane – "

"Don't go to Boston. Stay here. With me. In Canada."

Don't make this harder than it already is. "In your boring country, in your boring safehouse, with your boring coffee and doughnuts?"

"Don't knock the Timbits."

Ilya loved the blueberry and sour cream ones, though he wouldn't say that. "We can't... be whatever you want, Hollander. You know that."

"You can be asset. The Voyageurs would let you – "

"So I can become lapdog for the Canadian government? My father would find me and kill me after finding and killing you." He shook his head. "No, I will go back. We will keep this up, and – "

"We'll figure something out," Shane vowed. He gripped Ilya's hand in both his own. "He doesn't own you."

Perhaps that was why Ilya hated his father's human tracking business so much. He always thought it was the morality his mother gave him, but perhaps he felt his father owned his life, too.

Ilya wanted to be free. He wanted to stay here in this boring country with his boring boyfriend, but Grigori had his own assets everywhere. The fact that he'd taken Ilya back after the Toronto debacle was a miracle in and of itself.

So Ilya would have his boyfriend. He'd indulge in this love, for however long he was allowed, and then he would accept its end, however it came.

He only hoped it would come on their terms and not his father's.

Now – Boston

Ilya's hand cupped Shane's clammy cheek; his thumb brushed along the bone in a soothing, delicate manner. Sure, when they fucked, he listened to Shane's pleas for "harder, faster, yes," but he always cherished Shane. He would always cherish Shane.

Ilya lifted Shane's head and tried to capture his half-lidded, dazed eyes. "Hollander, is time. You held on long enough. Time to let go."

"No..." he mumbled, whiny. "...I can't..."

"Yes, you can. Tell me who gave you information. Who ratted out my brother? Who told you about our human trafficking operations?"

"...Ilya..." Shane whispered, so broken and desperate. The tears he'd fought hard to contain slipped down his flushed cheeks, thanks to the drugs. "...Ilya...please..."

Ilya lifted himself out of the chair, coming intimately close to whisper against Shane's cheek, "I know. I know. You want to tell me. Don't fight it, Hollander. Tell me who the traitor is."

Shane's now glistening eyes were desperate and frightened and haunted in ways Ilya never wanted to see. "...Ilya..." he repeated over and over. "...Ilya..."

Two Years Ago - Toronto

Ilya didn't travel to Canada often. There were times, of course, a few jobs a year, but a majority of the Bears' operations were in American cities – Boston, of course, New York, L.A., Chicago. Sometimes Tampa Bay and Jacksonville because Florida was...well, Florida.

But Grigori sent Ilya to Toronto for a "special project," which made Ilya's skin crawl but whatever. Ilya could move a shipment of drugs with the two associates Grigori assigned – Mironov and Koslov. Ilya didn't know either of them well. They usually worked with Alexei on some of the Bears' more harrowing jobs, but his brother trusted them completely. Ilya would do the same.

The shipment came into the Port of Toronto sometime around 2 a.m., and Ilya was there when the shipping container was taken off the impossibly large bulk carrier. He walked up to the container and unlocked it with the key his father had provided.

When he opened the door, Ilya froze at the thirty or so pair of eyes that stared back at him.

"Let's go, Rozy," Mironov demanded in Russian. "We need to get the cargo loaded onto the truck before security comes back around at three."

Later, Ilya wouldn't remember what he thought in that moment. He wouldn't be able to tell anyone what snapped inside him, but his mind shut down. His body worked on instinct alone.

He turned and fired.

Mironov fell.

Koslov started. *“Fucker! What the – ”*

A second shot sent Koslov to the ground, unmoving.

Ilya turned and walked away, pocketing his gun in his back holster and pulling out his personal phone.

He typed a single message to Jane.

Lily: Port of Toronto. Birth 512. BOSU 8124567. Do not go alone.

He then lit a cigarette and walked to the edge of the port before hotwiring a car and driving into the city. He ditched the vehicle in a skyscraper’s parking garage and made his way to the Delta Hotels Toronto. He went to his room, sat on the balcony, and proceeded to smoke cigarette after cigarette.

He wasn’t sure how long he sat there, cold both inside and out. His cheeks burned from the stinging temperatures, and his fingertips became numb. Dawn lit the morning sky, and the city went from deserted to bustling. Eventually, the door to his room beeped, and the lock disengaged.

Ilya didn’t turn. If it was his father, he hoped he wouldn’t feel the end. If it wasn’t his father, then it was Hollander, and he didn’t need to worry.

The person came out onto the balcony.

“May I touch you?” Hollander.

Ilya nodded, not yet trusting his voice.

Hollander seized the cigarette that was down to the filter and put it out in the overflowing ashtray. Then, he took Ilya’s hand in his own and guided him inside.

So this is what Hollander wore “to the office” – dark blue denim, a light roll-neck sweater, and a black over jacket that cut at his thighs. Ilya thought the outfit looked good on him. He wanted to see it on the floor.

Hollander placed Ilya on the edge of the bed and then took off his jacket. Since he was inside Canada, he didn’t carry a firearm, though he did have both his phones. He proceeded to the safe, locked them up, and came back to rub Ilya’s arms in a soothing motion. His hands moved up and down – from Ilya’s shoulders to his elbows – trying to warm him.

He muttered a few meaningless things, like, “You’re so cold,” and “How long were you out there?” before he realized Ilya wasn’t responding. So he knelt at Ilya’s feet, hands on Ilya’s thighs.

“Do you want to know anything?”

Ilya considered. “Are they all right?”

“IRCC is on the scene. I don’t know the status of everyone, but they are being taken care of. They should be able to stay in the country as refugees or return home if they so choose.”

Ilya would take solace in that. He should ask about Mironov and Koslov, but he knew the answer. Ilya was highly trained. He didn’t miss.

“Are you here to arrest me?”

“I received a tip from a trusted informant. It would be a mistake for the CSIS to arrest someone who provided us with information about a human trafficking operation within our borders.”

Ilya nodded. He hadn’t even thought far enough ahead to hope for that.

Hollander’s hands stopped and gripped Ilya’s jeans. “Will you be safe?”

Returning to Boston. To the Bears. To his father.

Ilya nodded. “I will tell him we were ambushed. I will need your help making it convincing.”

Hollander’s grip never wavered. “Do you have to go back?”

He wanted to stay. He wanted to pull Hollander into his lap and kiss him until neither of them could feel their lips. He wanted to stay in Hollander’s arms until he didn’t know where Hollander ended and he began, and then he wanted to wake up in the morning and do it all over again.

“Stay, *Ilya*,” Hollander finally pleaded. “Please.”

“I-I can’t...*Shane*.” He liked how the word felt on his tongue, how his lips formed his lover’s name. “You know I can’t.”

“I can protect you.”

“It is not your protection I need.”

There were others. There would always be others, and Ilya could help them. He might have been the only person who could.

Shane crawled into his lap then. He pressed his forehead against Ilya’s before lightly taking his mouth. The kiss was tender and indulgent, and when Ilya couldn’t breathe anymore, Hollander wrapped his arms about Ilya’s neck and clung to him, desperate and wanting.

“How can I help you?” Shane whispered.

Ilya simply held him for the longest time, face pressed into Shane’s shoulder. Eventually, his hands slid down to cup Shane’s backside.

Their clothes made their way to the floor.

Fifteen Months Ago

Lily: Vaiu Terminal. BOSU 5647858.

Seven Months Ago

Lily: Vancouver. Terminal 5. Birth 17. BOSU 7556942.

Four Months Ago

Lily: Conley. Birth 10. BOSU 5975642.

Last Month – Boston

After breakfast at his father's townhouse in Back Bay East, Ilya decided to romance the pants off Shane Hollander – literally. He could make his way around the kitchen, even with Shane's strict diet – sauteed greens, brown rice arame, baked winter squash. For dessert, he made fresh apple sauce with oat cream.

Ilya turned on his gas fireplace, lit electric candles about the dining room, and popped a can of Shane's favorite ginger ale. Then, he put on a knitted tank top that showcased his biceps since he knew Shane couldn't stop staring at them.

Shane arrived a little after eight, fresh from the plane. The moment he stepped inside, Ilya pressed him against the foyer wall and devoured his lips the moment. Shane made a tiny whimper in the back of his throat, and Ilya chased it. He pressed kisses down Shane's throat until he reached his chest.

Shane laughed, breathless. "It's good to see you, too."

"Missed you."

"I always miss you."

Before they started their nighttime activities, Ilya took Shane's duffle, then his hand, and led him into the dining area. Shane immediately clutched Ilya's hand harder.

"Are you going to kill me and this is my last meal?"

Ilya laughed and pressed a kiss to the corner of Shane's mouth. "*You* will be the death of *me*, Hollander."

The meal was perfect. Ilya absently dragged his fingertips along the back of Shane's hand and up his forearm. Shane's cheeks wore an adorable blush the entire time, and Ilya even brushed his knuckles across them a few times.

"There is thing I need from you," Ilya began while Shane was finishing his dessert.

“Same,” Shane said with a tiny smile. “As much I loved the food, I actually came for something else.”

Ilya took a bracing breath before revealing, “My father knows you are in the city, knows you are working with Scott Hunter. He wants me to find out what your target is.”

Shane’s face grew pale, ashen-shocked. “You’re compromised. He knows you’ve been the one feeding me information.”

Ilya dismissed his fear with a wave. “He does not know shit, Hollander. He simply wants me to find out why you are here.”

“It’s a test. You get that, right? If you feed him wrong information, he’ll know you’re covering for me.”

“That’s not what – ”

“So I’ll tell you the truth.”

Ilya blinked. He could not have heard that right and said as much.

Shane stood and went to Ilya’s liquor closet for the good vodka. “I’m not going to send you back to your father to be killed, Ilya. Scott and I are – ”

“Shh-shh-shh!” Ilya flew from his seat to stand before Shane, snatching his hand mid-pour. “You cannot tell me. You understand? I was only asking, so you can give me some bogus excuse he will accept.”

“Ilya – ”

“Shane.” Ilya’s hand was shaking. “You are not compromised. You are loyal and brave and strong. You save so many people with the good work you do. I cannot be the one who brings you down.”

Shane threaded their fingers together. “And I can’t be the one who lets you go. Do you understand that?”

His expression was fierce and determined. His nose scrunched, so his freckles gathered on his cheekbone. He was challenging Ilya, like he always did, like Ilya hoped he always would.

Ilya was frozen at that moment, staring at the anger and desperation in Shane’s gaze, that he couldn’t rebuff Shane’s argument or his words.

“I’m here for your brother, Ilya. We have a credible source who says a big shipment is coming into the Port of Boston next week. Our agencies created a joint taskforce to intercept the shipment and arrest your brother. If we can get evidence on your father, we’ll bring him down, too.”

Ilya couldn’t stop the words from tumbling from his mouth. “He’ll kill you.”

“He’ll *try*,” Shane replied. “But there’s no way I’m leaving him on the board if I can help it. It’s time we bring down the Boston Bears for good.”

Ilya ran his fingers through the sides of his hair and turned his back to Shane. “Why are you doing this? Why now?”

Shane came around the side of the kitchen island and pushed himself back on top of it. He took another sip of the vodka. “You’ve been feeding me information for two years now.”

“I send you text. Every few months. It’s nothing.”

“You don’t think your family is going to realize soon, if they hasn’t already? I can’t imagine your dad has handled this well.”

And he’d kill Ilya in the most painful way possible.

“I need to get you out of there,” Shane insisted.

“So instead you will arrest my brother, get him out of there.”

“Because you won’t listen to me,” Shane sounded frustrated. “I’ve asked you to stay how many times now? Every time we are together. You can’t tell me you don’t want to.”

Ilya turned then, expression cruel, tone cold. “What do you want, Hollander? You want me to give up my life here, in Boston, and go to work for Canadian government?”

“Of course not, but the country will give you immunity for helping me take down the Bears.”

“First, you cannot guarantee that,” Ilya replied, which was true. A single CSIS agent could not provide someone with sanctuary, and Ilya highly doubted Canada would want the second son of a crime lord. “Second, my father knew you were coming. He knows when Hunter comes. You don’t think he could find me?”

Shane jumped down from the counter and quit the distance between them. He seized Ilya’s cheeks and held his gaze. “I won’t let that happen. You hear me? Where we will go, your father won’t be able to touch you.”

“Where we – ?” Ilya cut himself off. Tears stung in his eyes, and he tried to look away.

Shane tugged him back. “You and me. This. It’s real, Ilya, and I will protect it with my life. I need you to understand that.” Shane pulled him into a cradling hold, his fingers gliding up Ilya’s neck and through the short strands at the nape. “I’ll do anything to keep you safe.”

Which was why Ilya couldn’t let him.

When they went to bed that night, Ilya took Shane apart. He savored every part of Shane in a slow, thorough exploration of his lover’s body, worshipped him with tender kisses, with deft touches, with lingering embraces. Ilya wanted every moment to be special. He wanted Shane to remember the way Ilya’s lips felt against his, the way Ilya’s fingers dug into his hips, the way Ilya felt inside him.

And then Ilya stared down at Shane, cradled in his arms, looking up at him with all the emotions they said and all the ones they didn't – affection, devotion, undeniable want, and *love*. Shane always looked at him with love in his eyes, perhaps even the first time, and Ilya wanted to live in the moment forever.

But he couldn't. They couldn't, and instead, he tried his best to commit Shane's image – right here, right now, so intoxicating yet soothing and incredible – to memory. Then he surrendered in the warm and comforting embrace of Shane's arms.

Ilya blinked back the tears as he buried his face in the crux of Shane's neck. He breathed in his unique scent of mint and citrus, and he kissed Shane breathless.

He wanted to never stop kissing Shane.

Eventually, reality and morning crept into their room. Shane was scheduled to check in at the FBI Boston field office at nine, and Ilya had to report what he'd learned about the CSIS and FBI movements. He'd say he broke into Scott Hunter's temporary office in the city and Svetlana hacked Hollander's phone. It would work. His father would believe him, and then when the time came, Hollander would come for Alexei.

Ilya wondered if he should have felt something for his brother. Sadness. Anger. Regret. But all he could think of was his niece and how she might grow up outside the Boston Bears' organization, how nice that would be – for her to be free.

Shane left with one last plea. "Come with me."

"You know I can't," was Ilya's simple response. He punctuated it with a long, heated embrace that left Shane dazed and glass eyed as he left.

Ilya shut the penthouse front door and fell back against it. He didn't know how long he stood there, fingers pressed to his swollen lips, body bereft from the lost of Shane's warmth against it, before he dropped his phone onto the kitchen island and went to clean up.

He took longer in the shower than most days, wondering how he would finally break up with Hollander. They couldn't keep doing this dance, and he wouldn't be the reason Hollander was cast out of the CSIS. Ilya had stepped over a metaphorical line *years* ago and didn't regret it. Wouldn't regret it. But Shane was teetering on the edge and offering everything to Ilya in the hopes of a future that they couldn't have.

Even if he hadn't killed the organization's enforcers and served information to Hollander, Ilya was always destined to either be a member of the Boston Bears or to die by his father's or brother's hand. Intervention from Hollander wouldn't change that, as much as they both wanted it to.

Ilya turned off the shower and toweled his hair. He'd start today by delivering the information his father sought. He'd help by finding whatever information he could regarding Alexei's shipment, and then once Hollander finished his latest bust, he would figure out how to end their relationship for good. Perhaps he'd ask his father to move back to Moscow. He

never wanted to return to Russia, but it would get him off Hollander's radar. In the last decade, he'd only known Hollander to have visited Russia once.

His phone chimed with a new message, perhaps from Hollander. Maybe Svetlana or Cliff. If he wasn't lucky, then perhaps even his father or brother sent him a text about a job or his tardiness.

Wrapping the towel around his waist, Ilya left the en-suite bathroom and headed toward the kitchen. He stopped short.

There, sitting at the dining room table, was Alexei. He wore a snide little smile along with his usual suit pants and dress shirt, sleeves rolled up to his elbows. Over the back of the chair was his suit jacket. On the table was Alexei's Yarygin pistol. In his hand was Ilya's cell phone.

"Good morning, Ilya...or should I say 'Lily'?"

To Be Continued...

Chapter End Notes

I wrote an interlude for this story with Shane, Ilya, and Hayden. Please find it here - [Interlude: Ilya Saves Ruby.](#)

It doesn't particularly move the plot along, but I don't pass up an opportunity to freak Hayden out.

Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

Ilya's family finds out about his betrayal, but so does Scott Hunter. And Shane makes his move.

Chapter Notes

Content Warning: Verbal threats of sexual assault. It does not happen.

Also, a brief thought of suicide. To skip that section, stopping reading at - "He had no one now except Svetlana..." and pick up again at - "The next evening..."

Happy Saturday! Hope you have a great weekend!

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

Last Month – Boston

Ilya wasn't alone with his brother in his penthouse. Stationed by the door were two of Alexei's known enforcers – Varkov and Kovalev. Both doubled as Boston Metro Police officers, helping to facilitate the Boston Bears' criminal activity by hampering law enforcement intervention.

Alexei sat in a relaxed manner, one arm hitched and resting on the back of the dining room chair. His eyebrows were raised as he strolled through Ilya's personal phone.

"I would say I was shocked to learn that you betrayed us, but you have always been an ungrateful little shit."

Ilya swiped his tongue along his bottom lip. He could play this one of two ways, and admitting that Alexei was right would not save him. Playing dumb might prolong his life until he could figure something out.

"What the fuck are you talking about?"

Alexei rose from his seat then, anger enveloping his once calm countenance. "I am not as stupid as you take me for, Ilya."

"But you admit you are stupid."

The punch was expected. Alexei wasn't one to slap. Ilya was just grateful he wasn't pistol-whipped or he would have been on the floor. Instead, he was simply wiping the blood from his nose and lip.

"I've had men staking out your penthouse for the last few weeks." Alexei tugged down his sleeve where it had bunched up. "You should have told Hollander to leave through the back exit."

Time to see how dumb his brother truly was. "Why? He gave me the information Father wanted, and I fucked him for it. Why would I hide him like a mistress? He has everything to lose, not me."

Alexei actually seemed to consider that for a whole five seconds before he landed a second hit. This one sent Ilya to the floor. "I will not be taken for a fool, Ilya! You have been feeding Hollander information about our cargo movements. Four shipments in the last two years – gone! Stolen by the Americans and Canadians. And it will stop. *Now*."

"Or perhaps you are just sloppy. Perhaps one of your mistresses texted Hollander or Hunter while you were coked out of your mind."

If Ilya wasn't already on the floor, he would have been. Alexei clenched his hands in shaking fists. His face turned a dark, fierce red, and his eyes grew wide and wild.

"I will have you respect me, Ilya," Alexei said in a low, dangerous growl. "'Jane' is Shane, is she not? The number on your phone matches the number Svetlana found for Hollander."

He'd need Hollander's number to hook up. Ilya could spin this.

"You have the Find A Friend app on your phone, which I'm assuming..." Alexei tapped to open the app, Ilya assumed. "Jane appears to be at the FBI offices in Chelsea right now... oh, no, he's at the Dunkin' across the street. I wonder if he's too hyped up and will need decaf or if he will need the caffeine after the night you two had. The lights didn't go off until after three. Impressive, Ilya."

Fuuuuuuuuuuuuck.

"So what?" Ilya stayed on the floor. His towel bunched at his thighs as he rested his elbows upon his knees. "You will tell Father? It won't save you. Hollander and Hunter are onto you, Alexei. They know a shipment is coming. Their plan is to intercept it and arrest you."

"That is why I have moved up the timetable," Alexei admitted with an annoyingly smug leer. "Our shipment is coming within the next forty-eight hours. It's too fast for Hollander to find out and intercept. And you will not be telling him."

Ilya dreaded Alexei's next words.

"You will not leave my side, brother." Alexei walked back to the dining table and picked up his Yarygin pistol. It was a silent threat. "For the next forty-eight hours, you will stay where I

can see you. You will go with me to meetings. You will sit as I manage the games in the back of the club. Need to use the bathroom? Varkov or Kovalev will accompany you.”

“What if I have to go number two?” Ilya spat.

“Then it will be a very uncomfortable few minutes for you and your chaperone. Now get dressed. We have a few errands to run for Father.”

Varkov and Kovalev came to Ilya’s side, grabbing his arms, and hoisting him to his feet. As they manhandled him toward his room, Ilya shouted over his shoulder, “Does Father know?”

Alexei threw Ilya’s phone on the kitchen counter and pulled a pack of cigarettes out of his jacket pocket. “No, this would break his heart. I have yet to decide what to do with you.”

Varkov all but pushed Ilya into his bedroom.

The two days were almost unbearable, to say the least. True to his words, Alexei kept Ilya by his side at all times. They rode together in the town car. Ilya sat in the corner of every meeting like a misbehaving child. When he had to go to the bathroom, Varkov or Kovalev stood in the corner with blank or annoyed faces. He slept on Alexei’s couch that night with Varkov in the perpendicular love seat for half the night and Kovalev there in the morning hours. Even when he showered, Kovalev sat on the toilet and scrolled through his phone.

Ilya thought of trying to overpower one of the enforcers, but he never seemed to be in the right position to do so. There was always more than one person who could shoot him at any given moment.

He also was sporting a very noticeable shiner and a sore jaw.

Ilya was bored and alone and always a bit hungry, despite Alexei feeding him McGriddles and hamburgers. He wondered almost every other minute if Hollander noticed anything. He wasn’t as perceptive as Ilya, but he had good instincts. They texted each other daily. In the last few years, they began to call more days than not. Alexei left Ilya’s phone in his apartment, which meant if Hollander looked at the app, he’d see the device hadn’t moved since the morning they parted.

Did Ilya want Hollander to know? There was no way this ended well, Ilya knew. If Alexei let him live, his life would most likely be just like this – caged, anxious, and miserable.

Just under forty-eight hours, Ilya stood next to his brother at Berth 10 of the Conley Cargo Terminal in South Boston. The chilly November air swept through Ilya, even with his Tom Ford Melton Peacoat. He wore matching gloves and torque, while Alexei was dressed to the nines like always – double-breasted suit, long cashmere tailored coat, and matching accompaniments.

They were surrounded by no less than twenty of Alexei’s most vicious and trustworthy enforcers.

Alexei lit a cigarette while they waited and to his credit, offered Ilya one and the lighter. Then, his brother took a long drag and blew the smoke out with a prolonged sigh. “Tell me, Ilya. Is Hollander a good fuck?”

Ilya snapped the lighter shut and all but chucked it at Alexei’s head. “Don’t be gross.”

“What? I have eyes. He’s a pretty guy. You always liked the pretty ones.” Alexei took another drag. “I bet he’s needy in bed. Probably begs you to fuck him, doesn’t he?”

Ilya’s skin crawled, even as he closed his eyes and saw Hollander underneath him, telling Ilya how much he needed him. He shook the alluring image from his mind with a shiver. He really didn’t want his brother envisioning him having sex with Hollander.

“I have decided what to do with you,” Alexei announced without preamble. “When the delivery is secured, I will have you text *Jane* and ask him to meet you at your penthouse. When he arrives, I will end him while you watch, unable to do anything.

“If you’re good here, I’ll let him pleasure you one last time before I do it.”

Ilya’s blood ran cold. He ground out through clenched teeth, “Motherfu – ”

“Ah, ah, ah. Do not lament, Ilya. You knew it would come to this one day, did you not? You cannot be so naïve as to think that you could fuck a CSIS officer, and we’d just let that pass.”

Ilya barely kept himself from attacking Alexei right there and then. “You know I won’t text him.”

“That’s the funny thing about texting. You never know who is really on the other end, do you?” Alexei’s cruel smile maimed Ilya in ways he never thought possible. He was going to be sick.

“As for you,” Alexei continued, “I think I will ship you back to Russia on one of these vessels. Our contact in Moscow – Dubek – he will put you to good use. I’ll let him decide the nature of it, but I will tell him not to be kind. Father will be none-the-wiser, and well – we will probably never see each other again.” Alexei dropped his spent cigarette to the ground and stubbed it out with his foot. “Hm. The vessel is late. Varkov, find out what is taking so long.”

Ilya’s hand shook as he put the cigarette up to his lips for a long drag. He blinked back the tears that he would never let Alexei see and then wiped his eye with his thumb. So this was how it would end between Hollander and him. Oh, he would never let Hollander get to his penthouse. No. When the time came, he wouldn’t allow Alexei to text Hollander. He’d fight, and most likely, Varkov or Kovalev would end him.

Since Alexei’s enforcers were police, they would “investigate” a potential shooting at Ilya’s penthouse. The FBI would be called in, and hopefully, Hunter would be with Hollander when he found out. Hunter seemed like a decent guy, despite his advanced age.

Ilya just hoped that Hollander would discover Varkov and Kovalev's role, so they wouldn't get the best of him. Hollander was good at his job. Ilya had to trust him to save himself.

He needed another cigarette.

The Besposhchadny arrived more than thirty minutes late, but Alexei surprisingly kept his cool. Apparently, having the CSIS's asset in your sights helped to elevate any unnecessary concerns.

...Hollander had ended up turning Ilya to an asset after all, hadn't he? Perhaps unintentionally but it happened. Damn, Svetlana was right all those years ago. If Ilya somehow survived this, he'd never hear the end of it.

The next hour crawled by excruciatingly slow. Ilya remained bookended by Alexei and Varkov as the crew began to unload the vessel. When Ilya fussed, picking at his clothes and shifting his shoes, Alexei took pity on him and gave him the pack of cigarettes.

Ilya was about ten cigarettes in – there was no need to fight his cravings or nerves now – when the crew finally came across their container - BOSU 6799524. The crane lowered it to the cleared area just before them, and Ilya's insides turned cold. His shoulders shook. For a set of people, the world was about ready to open right underneath them once more, and for Ilya, he was step closer to death.

Kovalev unlocked the container and opened the door. He immediately put his hands up.

"Freeze! FBI!" someone shouted from inside the container, and then the door was kicked opened completely to show no less than twenty people inside. They were different than Ilya expected, not haggard masses trying to escape Russia only to find themselves enslaved by it. These were men and women dressed in suit tops and slacks, wearing bulletproof vests and jackets that read "FBI" and "CSIS."

The cocking of weapons sounded behind them, and Ilya glanced over his shoulder to see another set of officers pointing their guns as the Boston Bears.

Scott Hunter led the team behind him. Ilya slowly turned his head to see the container again, and there, at the very opening, was Hollander.

It was wrong to think in that moment, but Ilya couldn't deny how *hot* Hollander looked in denim, an open-collared dress shirt, a bulletproof vest, and a CSIS jacket. Laser safety glasses sat upon the bridge of his nose, and he wanted Hollander to wear them when they were together.

But they wouldn't be again.

"You fucking bastard!" Alexei snarled.

Ilya hardly had time to flinch, let alone react, before Alexei lunged at him. A single shot thundered across the once silent terminal, and Alexei fell, grabbing his right calf and writhing in pain.

Then Hollander was there, placing himself between Ilya and Alexei and pressing his foot into Alexei's shoulder. He kept his Colt C8 trained upon Alexei's neck.

"It's over, Alexei. Stay down."

An unforgiving hand seized the back of Ilya's neck and started to push him down. "On your knees, Rozanov," Hunter ordered.

Ilya slowly went to the ground with his hands threaded behind his head. "You wanted me here? Just needed to ask nicely."

Well, Hunter didn't like that. He definitely tightened the cuffs more than they needed to be.

Hunter placed Ilya away from the rest of the Boston Bears, on the ground cross-legged by the tire of a police vehicle. From a distance, Ilya could see the entire scene, including where Hollander remained near Alexei as he received medical attention. Eventually, medics and agents loaded Alexei into an ambulance, and Ilya resolved that to be the last time he saw his brother.

Hollander then scanned the scene until his eyes rested upon Ilya. He mouthed, "Are you okay?"

No. No, he probably wasn't. He'd just been held hostage by his own brother for the last two days. He was about to destroy the best thing that ever happened to him, and somehow, he found Scott Hunter, the ancient FBI agent who had been after his family for *years*, kinda hot.

Still, Ilya nodded, and Hollander let out a relieved sigh.

The next few hours were a blur. Hunter eventually loaded Ilya into the vehicle, and he was transported to the FBI Boston field office in Chelsea. Once inside, Hunter led him to a small interrogation room, where he attached Ilya's cuffs to the table in front of him.

"Don't get too comfortable," Hunter warned before he left, and then Ilya was alone for the first time in days – but only for a moment.

The door opened again, and this time, an attractive woman with brown hair, a girl-next-door smile, and a V-neck blouse entered the room, followed by Hollander. She pulled out the seat across from Ilya and dropped her tablet to the table. Hollander moved to the corner of the room, crossed his arms, and remained silent.

"Hello, Mr. Rozanov. I'm Special Agent Rose Landry." Ah. So this was Hollander's Rose. She was prettier than Ilya had hoped. "And this is Officer Shane Hollander of the CSIS. We just want to ask you a few questions."

Ilya had waived his right to a lawyer since the lawyer would probably be an assassin hired by the Bears.

"Can you give us a rundown of the last forty-eight hours and how you came to be at Conely Terminal with your brother?"

Ilya needed a cigarette.

Without naming names, he explained how his boyfriend had stayed the night. When he left in the morning, he went to shower, only to come out to his brother and two enforcers waiting for him. He explained how Alexei was furious because he believed Ilya had leaked information to the authorities.

He glanced at Hollander, who gave him the slightest of nods to continue.

And so Ilya told the truth – that he'd been giving information about the Boston Bears' human trafficking shipments to a CSIS officer for the last two years. Alexei decided to move up a shipment to stop the authorities from intercepting it and brought Ilya along for the ride until he could figure out what to do with him.

Rose took notes, though Ilya knew she must have been recording him. When he finished, she typed on her tablet and then glanced up at the camera in the corner of the room. The little red light above the lens on the camera faded.

"Okay, I have the camera on a five-minute loop. If anyone comes, I'll tap on the window."

Then Rose quit the room, leaving Ilya alone with Hollander.

Shane crowded into Ilya's space immediately, coming to sit on the table next to him. Even before he spoke, his fingertips dusted across Ilya's shiner.

"Are you all right?"

"Yes...no, probably no," Ilya admitted, terrible. He wanted to lean against Hollander, revel in the comforting scent of mint and citrus, and just ignore the rest of the world. "How did you intercept the shipment?"

Hollander didn't stop touching him, now playing with Ilya's longer strands. "Svetlana. She texted me and told me Alexei had wanted information from my phone. She had to give it to him, or he'd believe she was compromised."

"And it showed I was." He'd have to thank her one day for saving his life – if he ever saw her again.

"Your brother is a fucking piece of work."

Ilya wasn't sure how to respond to that, so he heaved a half shrug.

"You're coming back to Canada with me," Hollander said. "You can't go back there."

No, he couldn't, but he also couldn't go with Hollander. After Ilya attacked Dallas Kent, he went missing for two weeks, and his father was ready to put a bounty on Hollander's head. If he simply disappeared after the police arrested him, his father would tear his way through the FBI and CSIS until he found Ilya and ended him properly.

Before Ilya could respond, there was a double tap on the two-way mirror. Hollander jumped off the table and moved a respectable distance away. Ilya missed him already.

Hunter entered the room a moment later, followed by Rose. He flashed a quick glance toward Hollander and then leveled Ilya with a dark frown. “Here’s the deal, Mr. Rozanov. I’ve been informed that you are the CSIS’s asset who has helped us intercept the Boston Bears’ shipments, so I’m willing to offer you a get-out-of-jail-free card.

“Help us bring down your father, and I’ll work with the federal prosecutors to drop the charges against you.”

Ilya wasn’t sure what any of the charges were, actually, but he already knew his father wouldn’t rest until he was dead. He might as well save some lives while he was at it.

Before he could reply, Hollander growled, “Absolutely not. Rozanov’s already put his life on the line for us. We’re not sending him back to his father to be killed.”

“I know he’s your asset, Hollander – ”

Ilya should have been hurt that Hollander made him an official asset in his organization, but he was more shocked that his father hadn’t killed him already.

Oh, Hunter was still talking.

“ – were the one who insisted we take down Grigori. And we’re on a time-crunch. It’s only a matter of time before he learns we have both his – ”

“So you’ll serve Ilya to him as a sacrifice?” Hollander sounded on the verge of hysteria.

“Rozanov killed Dallas Kent. He’s more than capable to – ”

“ – die because you want what’s expedient?”

“Hollander.”

Ilya spoke before he even realized he had, but he recovered. He knew he wouldn’t be able to keep his voice from trembling, but he could at least act angry.

Ilya locked eyes with Rose, who blinked at his sudden attention upon her. He raised his eyebrows and shifted his gaze to the camera, which had reclaimed its red button. After a moment of consideration, she sighed and tapped her tablet to life. “We’re all gonna be indicted for this.”

The red light on the camera clicked off, and Ilya’s gaze snapped to Hollander. “Is okay, Shane. I will do this.”

“Shane?” Hunter parroted, but Shane ignored him.

“No. I won’t let you.”

“When we hooked up, what did you think was going to happen? Were only two ways this was going to end. This is better of them.”

“What are you talking about?” Shane demanded. He seemed so furious, so lost.

“Either I kill you, or my father kills me. I would never let anything happen to you, so...” He offered a helpless shrug. “...here we are.”

“Mr. Rozanov, it is not my intention to put you in danger –”

“But you are,” Hollander interjected.

“ – *but*,” Hunter conceded with a raised voice, “you are the only one who can help us take down your father and his human trafficking operation. Officer Hollander has told us how you have helped us in the past, how you are a man of integrity. Can you help us again?”

Ilya never clocked Shane to be a clingy boyfriend, but he should have known. “You don’t have to do this.”

There was no point in hiding the truth. “You know what my brother wanted to do? He was going have you blow me before killing you and making me watch. Then, he was going to ship me back to Russia for God knows what.”

Horror flashed across Shane’s face. Hunter grew pale, and for a brief moment, Ilya thought Rose might vomit. He continued, undeterred, because Ilya had seen worse during his time with the Boston Bears. Not much but worse.

"That day in Toronto, when I messaged you, I crossed a line. Knew I could not go back.

“Despite this – ” His cuffs jingled as he motioned between Shane and himself. “ – you are not compromised. Let us end this before we both do things we cannot live with.”

Ilya could not live with knowing his father still sold souls. He could not live with knowing Shane gave up his life for Ilya, especially since Ilya would never be free of his father. He could not live with knowing what his father would do to Shane when – not *if* - he found out about their relationship.

Shane’s face was set in a terrible glower, all intense and fierce and sexy. “I can protect you.”

Ilya reiterated what he’d told Shane when he was broken in a Toronto hotel room two years ago, “I do not need your protection.”

“But you’re trying to protect *me*. ”

“Not everything is about you, Hollander!” Something in him fractured, and despite the audience, despite their situation, despite his hands cuffed to the table, Ilya found himself spouting, “I do want to see you hurt. I do not want to see you broken like I have seen my family do to many, *many* people. You cannot be so selfish as to ask me to watch.

“I would do almost anything for you, Shane. All you need to do is ask – but this? No, I cannot.”

The only way to protect Shane was to break up with him and then take his father down before he could find out about him.

He should never have bought Shane Hollander that fucking tuna melt all those years ago.

Tears shimmered in Shane’s suddenly gutted gaze, but they refused to fall. Hunter seemed to snap back from his shock with a quick shake of his head.

“I, uh, take it you will help us, Mr. Rozanov?”

“Don’t do this,” Shane all but pleaded.

Ilya fought the urge to reach out to Shane one last time. “I am sorry, Hollander…”

For hurting you. For putting you in harm’s way. For loving you.

He finally settled on, “...for everything.”

Stone-faced, Hollander turned and left the room.

Now

Shane kept saying Ilya’s name over and over until he finally passed out. He looked so peaceful in the chair, face calm, skin slick with sweat, cheeks slightly flushed from the serum.

Ilya wanted to kiss Shane awake but not now, of course. Not with his father and Marly watching. He probably only had a few more seconds before they came into the room, and his father would not be kind.

Either his father figured out what Shane was saying and would be pissed, or he’d think Ilya hadn’t gotten the answer from Shane and would be pissed.

Ilya really couldn’t win here, and he didn’t know how he’d save Shane.

He brushed his knuckles up and down Shane’s clammy forearm. “How did you they catch you, Hollander?” *How could you let them?*

The interrogation room door opened, and Grigori entered, jaw clenched, cruel face as cold as ever. Ilya’s stomach immediately became lead.

“Capturing Hollander was surprisingly easy,” he said, pulling the karambit knife from his shoulder harness. “We let it be known that you would be in the North End last night, in the nightclub on Chatham Street. Weapons exchange. Figured wherever you are, Hollander isn’t far behind. I just didn’t realize why...until now.”

“Papa,” Ilya started, pushing to his feet. “It’s not what you think.”

Grigori would not be deterred. He spun the karamit knife about his thumb, a cold, almost *hurt* gaze in his eyes. Had Alexei been right? Would his father be heartbroken about Ilya’s betrayal?

“All this time, Hollander was telling us the truth.” He spoke as if he’d eaten something disgusting. “I would say I’m disappointed, Ilya, but you have always been too soft, too weak. I should have known you would be the one to betray me.”

Marly entered the room behind his father, slipping to the side of the doorway. Loud heel clicks signaled Svetlana’s arrival. Along with her tight, portrait neckline top, designer jeans, and calf-high boots, she wore a disapproving scowl. It wasn’t sexy like when Shane was pissed at him. Maybe it was the lack of freckles.

“My apologies, Ilya, but Hollander’s phone betrayed you.”

That wasn’t all that had.

Last Month

Hunter outfitted Ilya’s phone with features connected directly to the FBI and then turned him loose in Charlestown without even enough money for an uber.

Ilya called Marly, who picked him up and drove him to his father’s opulent townhouse in Back Bay East. Built in the 1700s, the place always reminded Ilya more of a museum than a home with its grand foyer, 14-foot ceilings, and hand-carved woodwork.

Most of his father’s top associates were gathered in the formal dining room, discussing the lost shipment and Alexei’s disappearance. Father welcomed Ilya with false affection – a half-hearted hug and a kiss upon his cheek.

“We are grateful to have you back, my son,” Grigori said. “Tell us what happened.”

Ilya did. He recounted the dock raid, how the shipment had never been there and the FBI captured Alexei. He, of course, left out that Alexei had held *him* captive for the better part of two days and it had been Ilya’s own boyfriend – er, ex-boyfriend – who made the arrest.

He explained how he’d hidden among the other containers for *hours* until the authorities dispersed and only then felt comfortable enough to contact Marly.

Grigori slapped Ilya’s cheek twice, not kindly. “Hollander and Hunter. It is time we put an end to their interference.”

Ilya had been worried about this.

“But first, we must find the person who sold us out, and I want my shipment returned to me.” His fierce voice commanded the attention and allegiance of his men, including his son. “Ilya,

it is time for you to take your rightful place in the organization. Come! Let us discuss next steps.”

It was late in the afternoon before he finally returned to his penthouse near Fisher Hill. An abrasive, uncomfortable chill settled under Ilya's skin now that Alexei had been here, had threatened to harm Hollander here. An invisible hand coiled about his throat and threatened to choke him, and perhaps it would have if not for Svetlana. She met him at the door in a pajama jacket and sweats.

“Here to say ‘I told you so’?” Ilya bit.

Hollander had compromised him, ruined him, even unintentionally. She has been right, all those years ago.

Svetlana nodded. “Yes, absolutely.” Then she opened her arms.

Ilya stepped into them and cried.

Life became boring and not in the way he liked to tease Hollander about. Gone were the everyday texts from Hollander. For Ilya, there weren't plans past the next day, the next hour, the next minute. Grigori was only one call or text away from finding out his one son was in FBI custody and the other son was an official asset for the agency. And then he would take all his frustrations out on Ilya before finally putting him out of his misery.

Maybe that would be a gift, an escape from the constant fear and monotony that had become his life.

Ilya got up. He went to work for his father – moving drug and gun shipments, collecting bribes, overseeing the backroom games at the club.

"You okay, Roz?" Marley would ask every so often.

Ilya would take a long drag of his cigarette and snarl something like, "My brother is missing. Our organization may be compromised, and my father won't stop tearing through the city until we find his missing shipment. What do you think?"

Cliff would put his hands up and back away.

Ilya'd take pictures on his phone and send them to Scott Hunter of all people, who didn't even award Ilya with appreciative sexting. The one time Ilya cracked a joke about Hunter's tight ass, he received a stern, "Stay on task," which was just rude. These were messages that would be shown during some trial. Ilya needed to see the look on Hunter's face when some ancient federal prosecutor read them out loud in a monotone voice for a full courtroom to hear.

Ilya reached out to a Boston Bears' contact in the FBI, a low-level analyst named Ryan Price. He had some gambling debts that the Bears had forgiven while also leaving his fingers intact, so he used his hacking skills to help the Bears when asked.

According to the report, Hollander and his team had boarded the vessel before it entered Boston Harbor, but there was still no information on the CSIS's informant. Ilya let out a

relieved sigh. Apparently, Shane had never shared Ilya's name with anyone but Hunter and Rose in the FBI, and Hunter hadn't attached it to the case.

Alexei was registered in the FBI system as having been apprehended and transferred to Massachusetts General Hospital for treatment. There was no further information.

Good. In all honesty, Ilya could go the rest of his life without seeing his brother again and be happy.

He had no one now except Svetlana, who came to stay with him every night. They huddled on his couch and watched the local hockey game, and more often than not, Ilya fell asleep with his head in her lap. Of course, he wanted it to be a different lap, even though Ilya loved her with all his heart.

He smoked. And drank. He no longer had a nagging CSIS officer on his case about it, and he wanted to forget the way Hollander's freckles bunched when he was pissed. Ilya's position as an asset for the FBI was tenuous at best, and he dreaded the day his father found out. So he had no incentive to take his health seriously.

Ilya's mind continued to run worst-case scenarios. Would he do what Alexei promised and ship him back to Russia to be used? Or would Father simply end him in the most excruciating way possible? Ilya could think of so many ways his father could do it and prolong his agony.

Ilya could, of course, save himself from his father's wrath by simply surrendering to the cold embrace of liquor and a pill bottle.

Shock and fear and panic swelled up inside Ilya. Is this how his mother had felt? Had she really taken her own life to escape from his cruel and unforgiving father?

Ilya immediately ran to the bathroom and expelled whatever was in his stomach. Svetlana came to his side and brushed back his curls and pressed a cold compress to his neck. They spent that night on the cold bathroom floor when his legs refused to support him.

The next evening, the doorbell chimed a little after eleven. He hadn't ordered anything, and Svetlana shook her head, bewildered.

Ilya grabbed his pistol off the coffee table and purposefully held it as he walked to the front door. Through the window of the foyer, Ilya could see the rather tall man in an old Expos cap wearing a fade T-shirt, jacket, and jeans. In his hand he held a red insulated food delivery bag.

Ilya knew this was an ambush. He'd run this play himself, actually, to great success. Social norms required people answer their front door when prompted, and few could or would turn away free food. Apparently, neither could Ilya.

He opened the door and immediately leveled his gun at the deliveryman.

"Whoa, whoa, whoa!" The man threw up his hands. "DoorDash, man. DoorDash! I have your order."

Huh. He had a thick French accent. In Boston. He appeared too old to be a college student. Maybe he was in graduate school?

Ilya glanced around his penthouse front entryway. He didn't see anyone else. Even the elevator was closed, and the level indicator showed it on the first floor.

Was he really just getting a food delivery?

"You have the wrong place." Ilya lowered his gun and used it to shoo the man. "Go. Now."

The guy made a production of pulling his phone out of his pocket and tapping the DoorDash app. He read out loud, "2886 Beacon. Penthouse. That's you, right?"

"I didn't order anything."

"I don't care, man. My job isn't to know who ordered. My job is to deliver it." He opened the red delivery bag and pulled out a brown package that appeared to be from a local Italian food establishment. He thrust it into Ilya's empty hand. "Enjoy, man. My tip can be you not shooting me as I leave."

He hurried to the elevator then, glancing over his shoulder every few steps. Ilya just watched him go, the paper bag warming his hand.

What the fuck?

Ilya finally shut the door and walked back to the kitchen, where Svetlana waited.

"What is that?"

"I dunno." Ilya put down his gun and then opened the bag. He slipped out the aluminum takeout container and popped open the plastic top.

He couldn't speak. His eyes teared up, so Svetlana had to poke the dish with a fork.

"Someone sent you chicken parm?"

Fuck you, Hollander.

They were over. Ilya ended things. Shane was supposed to go off into his own life and find a nice, respectable man in Montreal with a boring job. They would have 2.4 kids and maybe get a dog, and Shane would be safe. Maybe not as happy as he was with Ilya - a crime lord's son could dream - but he would be safe.

Instead, Hollander was sending chicken parm love notes to his ex.

Ilya shared it with Svetlana, who agreed. It wasn't terrible. It wasn't particular good, either, but it was the best chicken parm he'd ever had.

His father summoned him the next morning, and Ilya arrived to find Shane in Grigori's clutches.

Now

It made no sense. Shane said Svetlana contacted him when Alexei held Ilya. She gave Shane the information about the shipment, just for Shane to be caught and her to betray them both now...?

Grigori took a menacing step forward, the karambit blade shimmering in the overhead light. "Where is my shipment, Ilya?"

Of course, Grigori's first thoughts weren't to Alexei and where his son was. It was to his cargo, his money.

"I do not know." Ilya moved to stand in front of the interrogation chair, placing himself between his father and the unconscious Shane. Ilya never knew what happened to his father's shipments. It was better that way, safer. If he didn't know, he could never tell his father where the refugees were located.

"I do not like being made a fool, especially by my son."

"That was not my intention."

Grigori paused before Ilya, eyes clear and savage. "If you truly do not know where my shipment is, then you are no longer of any use to me. I will take great joy in taking you apart – piece by piece." His usually cruel grin grew even more sinister as he pointed with his blade toward Shane. "But I will start with him."

"No," Ilya sneered. "I will not let you."

"As if it is your choice."

Grigori lunged with a horrible snarl. Ilya hissed as the blade sliced across his bicep, but when Grigori turned to swipe again, the lights shut off. The ETM music cut out; the sound of gunfire took its place.

"WHAT THE FUCK?" Marly shouted into the darkness before the emergency lights clicked on. They cast the room in a surreal amber glow.

Grigori barely missed a beat. "See what is happening," he demanded before once more rushing Ilya.

Ilya gnashed his teeth, pain shooting up his injured arm as he elbowed Grigori in the side. He then caught his father's arm and slammed him into the nearest wall. With one hand, Ilya kept his father's wrist pinned against the wall. With the other held, he held Grigori's neck.

"You have destroyed your last life," Ilya promised.

He banged his father's hand against the wall over and over until the blade clattered to the floor. Though older, Grigori was a large, stocky man with years of fighting experience, and

he kneed Ilya in the stomach before delivering a hard punch. The momentum sent Ilya to the floor.

The momentary disorientation allowed Grigori the upper hand. While Ilya struggled to stand, Grigori kicked him *hard* in the stomach – once, twice, three times.

A single shot rang out. Grigori jerked backwards, hand coming up to his ear from the close call.

“Get away from him, Grigori,” a haggard Shane demanded between heaved gasps.

Struggling to breathe, struggling to move, Ilya looked up to see Shane with pallid skin and half-lidded but intense eyes. He was barely sitting up, holding a Yarygin pistol, and looked like he was moments away from passing out of again. Svetlana bent by his side and worked to free Shane’s restrained arm.

Ilya wouldn’t waste the brief reprieve they gave him. He rolled upon the floor and came up to knee his father. When Grigori hunched over, Ilya delivered a powerful uppercut. Unfortunately, Grigori retaliated with a crushing elbow that sent Ilya back to the floor, near the weapon wall.

From the hallway, Marly’s pained shout echoed. The gunfire grew louder, closer.

Grigori spared one quick glance toward Shane and Svetlana, both who remained by the chair. “Perhaps I was too lenient on you. That is on me, but I taught you the pretty ones are always trouble, Ilya. You should have enjoyed the goods but then ended him before seconds.”

Ilya’s hand skimmed across the floor. “Then I would be a sick fuck like you.”

Grigori eyed the bone saw just over Ilya’s head. “Perhaps, but you would still be alive. Instead, you will end up like your mother – cold, broken, and forgotten.”

Ilya never forgot his mother. Her cross hung around his neck. Her memory lived in his heart, and she bestowed upon him a kindness and grace that allowed him to keep a few pieces of his soul.

So when Grigori lunged for the saw, Ilya gripped the fallen karambit blade and took no pleasure as he buried it in his father’s side. When Grigori choked, Ilya finished him off with one last blow, sending the man to the ground, unconscious.

Ilya fell back upon the ground, knees bent, back against the wall. He wrapped one hand around his midsection as he struggled to breathe. Maybe he actually broke a rib this time.

He didn’t offer his father another glance. He looked up to see Shane had passed out again, his eyes shut, mouth slightly open. A shadow stood at his side. Svetlana. She had freed Shane and gave him a weapon to defend himself, but now she lifted that weapon toward him.

“I told you he would ruin you, Ilyusha.”

Ilya’s blood flashed cold. “No!”

Svetlana fired two quick shots toward Shane. She then pointed the weapon directly at Ilya. He barely raised his arms before she pulled the trigger twice again.

Nothing. No pain. No metallic smell of blood. When he opened his eyes, Svetlana lowered the gun – the pistol Shane had used. Her face never wavered from its terrible scowl. “Stay down.”

The gunfire finally reached the hallway outside the interrogation room, and three people dressed in black, long-sleeved shirts, cargo pants, and dark goggles rushed into the room. The shortest of the group – definitely a woman – typed on her tablet for a moment and then announced, “Cameras have been deactivated.”

“Time to go!” a man with a thick French accent shouted, running to Shane’s side.

The third man grabbed Ilya by the waist and hauled him to his feet.

When Ilya hissed, the man snapped, “Suck it up, all right? I don’t want to carry your ass.”

Hayden. That was fucking Hayden Pike.

The French man threw Shane over his shoulder in a fireman’s carry, and together, the six of them made their way through the hallway, to the stronghold’s secondary exit, and into the parking garage next door. The special-ops woman made it to the black van first and threw open the side door before hopping into the driver’s seat.

They were out of the parking structure as the first police SUV swung onto the street.

Clutching his wound, sucking in messy, loud breaths, Ilya collapsed against the van’s wall next to Hollander’s unmoving form. Ilya was good at his job, so he knew Shane wasn’t in any danger. The effects of the serum would wear off in a few hours, and Shane would be groggy and probably grumpy until he finally slept off the drug over the course of the next few days.

Still, Ilya made sure to watch the rise and fall of Shane’s chest.

The black ops. team pulled off their masks, and sure enough, there was Hayden Pike along with Rose Landry and the DoorDash delivery man from the day before.

And Svetlana, who came to bookend him with Shane. Svetlana, who was always there for him.

“You fucking better marry this motherfucker,” the French man demanded, thumbing toward Shane. “If we just saved your ass and you dump him in five minutes, I’m gonna piss.”

“Going to *be* pissed, J.J.,” Hayden insisted with an exasperated sigh. “Going to *be* pissed!”

Ilya let out a tiny laugh that hurt his ribs. He never thought he’d be so happy to see boring Canadians and stupid Americans.

To Be Concluded...

Chapter End Notes

I have a poll on my Tumblr about what to post next. If you are interested, please vote here - [Final Chapter of Spy AU or Ilya HAB Story.](#)

Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

Ilya has been freed from his father's criminal empire. Now he and Shane have to make some difficult choices about the future. (They still can't play pickleball.)

Chapter Notes

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

The next thirty-six hours were a whirlwind for Ilya. Instead of heading to Boston-Logan, the Voyageurs' team drove up to New Hampshire, where they boarded a small private jet at Manchester-Boston Regional Airport. Rose stayed behind to coordinate with Scott Hunter, who apparently had been called to the Boston Bears' stronghold after reports of gunfire.

According to CSIS communications, Grigori was in custody.

Shane had woken briefly as they entered the airport tarmac, the van jostling after hitting a pothole. His half-lidded, tired eyes searched the small compartment until they landed on Ilya. His face relaxed; his pale lips formed a tired, relived smile.

Since Shane was lying on his side, head on a backpack, Ilya simply rested his hand on Shane's hip. So Shane slid his hand down his side, found Ilya's, and threaded their fingers together. Sleep claimed him again a few moments later.

No one objected when Ilya insisted he and Shane share a row of seats. Shane took up two of them, his feet against the far armrest, his head in Ilya's lap. Ilya trailed his fingers through his ex-boyfriend's hair and tipped his own head back against the rest.

He'd almost lost this, lost Shane. He allowed himself a terrible moment to feel the fear that had consumed his life for the last however many years and then expelled it in a prolonged sigh. He repeated the process until someone knelt in the aisle by his chair. Pike, of all people.

"You mind if I take a look at that nasty gash?" He snapped on gloves and then dug into the medical bag at his knee. "Want to make sure you don't get lockjaw or anything, though maybe that wouldn't be so bad."

"Would make blowjobs hard."

"Are you offering?"

Ilya snorted. Hayden won that round.

Over the last year, he'd come to know Shane's best friend. Hayden Pike was a good man. He could be a bit of a dick at times, but that made Ilya like him more. It hadn't hurt that Ilya saved his daughter Ruby from the San Francisco Mission. Ilya got the impression Hayden would always feel indebted to him, but he saved the child because it had been the right thing to do.

And Shane asked him to.

"Suck it up," Hayden admonished when Ilya hissed. The antiseptic *stung*. "I'm helping save my best friend's love life here."

"A priority for you."

Hayden blinked, face hardening. "Dude, I literally just helped save your ass from your crime lord dad. If I didn't care, I wouldn't have stormed the Boston Bears' stronghold for you."

That was a good point. "Thank you," Ilya said, and he meant it.

Hayden nodded and held gauze to Ilya's bicep. "You're welcome, but next time, let's try to do things the easy way, not the hard way."

"There is an easy way?"

Hayden finished wrapping Ilya's bicep and then leaned back on his haunches. "Look, I'm not going to try to guess what's bouncing around in that head of yours. I'm assuming years of childhood trauma followed by years of fucking your rival, followed by years of suppressing your feelings while fucking your rival.

"What I can say is," Hayden continued after a heaved sigh, "there has only ever been two other guys. And they were hook-ups."

Ilya's heart swelled, and it threatened to burst out of his chest. He needed to school his features, not show Hayden just how much the revelation affected him. He must not have done a good job because Hayden rolled his eyes.

"God, how did you ever fool your dad and brother? Seriously. You can't even hide your heart eyes from me right now."

"It has been problem since the beginning," Ilya admitted with a shrug. "I have never denied this."

Hayden snorted. "Look, man. I'm just saying – he's been a basket case all month trying to figure out the best way to save your ass."

"And you let him get captured and drugged?" Ilya still couldn't believe that was the plan. "That was the best plan you could come up with?"

"You see why I'm asking you not to do anything stupid going forward." Hayden laughed and pulled off his gloves. "Maybe we think of not putting ourselves in situations that require armed assaults and truth serums, okay?"

Ilya looked down at Shane, his fingers still working through the soft strands. “Okay,” he whispered.

Shane was too precious to put through all this again.

“Okay, now I’m going to check your ribs. I’m still not a hundred percent sure you don’t have rabies, so don’t bite me, okay?”

“You would enjoy it too much.”

“My wife bites me just – y’know what? Just take off your shirt.”

Ilya won that round.

Ilya watched as Shane’s eyes fluttered and then opened. It wasn’t the first time his ex-boyfriend had woken up since they landed in Canada, but Ilya could tell this time was different. Shane’s eyes were still tired and sunken, but there was an awareness in them that wasn’t there before.

Shane’s system was metabolizing the serum. He would just need to sleep off the rest of the effects over the next few days, and in the meantime, Ilya was reserved to enjoy his cuddly and probably a little grumpy ex-boyfriend.

Shane lay face down on Jade’s twin bed with a green comforter and too many stuffed penguins. Shane’s eyes softened when he saw Ilya sitting on the floor, back against Ruby’s pink bed, their eyes even.

“Hey.”

“Hey.”

Shane reached out. His voice was weak and disbelieving. “You’re here.”

Ilya’s hand crossed the short distance to thread their fingers together. “I am here.”

After they landed at the Montreal Metropolitan Airport, J.J. headed off to the CSIS regional headquarters to check in and connect with Rose. Hayden loaded Shane, Ilya, and Svetlana into his Mercedes GLC 300 SUV and brought them all back to his white-stone house in Brossard.

It had been wonderful, Ilya would admit. Jackie, Hayden’s lovely wife, invited them in and made them breakfast. Their four kids were precious and brash and terrors, and Ilya loved every single one of them.

Especially Ruby, of course, who crowded into his space at any given moment and asked him all sorts of questions.

“What’s wrong with your arm?”

In a tight black tank top, Ilya's bandage was on full display. "Got in a fight."

"Did you win?"

"Yes but was injured."

"Maybe duck next time."

"Good plan. I will do that."

Ruby beamed, and Ilya felt like none of this was real. He feared he'd wake up in a world where Svetlana shot Shane, and his father was taking him apart, piece by piece. There was no way he could be in Montreal, in Hayden Pike's house, safe with all the people he cared about most in this world.

Shane shifted now, reclaiming his hand, before rolling onto his back and scooting over in the bed. He padded the empty space once, and Ilya didn't need another invitation. Despite his bruised ribs, he climbed into the bed and wrapped an arm around Shane's waist, pulling him close.

Shane rested his head against Ilya's bare shoulder, then kissed it. "You're an idiot," he mumbled.

"I thought I was an asshole."

"You can be both."

Shane took Ilya's free hand in his lap and traced the various lines and scars. It was somehow both soothing and intoxicating, and Ilya turned his head to press a long kiss to Shane's temple. Shane's scent of mint and citrus comforted Ilya, and he was happy here, holding his ex-boyfriend and just existing.

Unfortunately, Shane liked to ruin quiet moments. "I'm sorry," he said, a whisper that sounded more like a muted scream.

"Why are you sorry?"

Shane closed his eyes and dropped his head back onto Ilya's shoulder. "I didn't listen to you. You've always told me no when I asked you to stay, and I just *stole* you from your life." He heaved a deep sigh and opened his eyes to show the tears that were there but refused to fall. "I didn't give you a choice, just like your father."

This was going to hurt. Ilya held in his cringe as he rolled on top of Shane. His ribs twinged, but he managed to lie between Shane's knees and press their bodies together, pelvis to forehead. So close, he could see the flecks of silver in Shane's dark eyes.

"Are you holding a gun to my head?"

"No. Well – technically you're not here officially, so it's not like you can just leave –"

“Are you holding a gun, Hollander?” Ilya reiterated. He needed Shane to understand this.

“N-No.” It wasn’t as strong as Ilya would have liked.

“No, you’re not.” Ilya’s fingers brushed up and down Shane’s sides. “What happened, Shane? Hayden told me some of it, but... why would you let my father have you? Why would you let Svetlana tell him about us?”

Shane glanced away, uncomfortable or embarrassed, Ilya couldn’t tell. When he spoke, though, his tone was crisp and honest. “You said you’d never be free of your father unless he thought you were dead, so I needed to make it look like we’re dead. Svetlana shot us. Rose will make sure the recording shows what we need it to show.”

Ilya narrowed his eyes. “There won’t be any bodies, Hollander. The FBI – ”

“Scott will make it work.”

“He won’t.” Ilya hated how his hands shook, and he gripped the sides of Shane’s shirt to regain some semblance of control. “Hunter does not compromise. You know this. He will – ”

“ – do what it takes to protect his husband.” Shane’s firm gaze never wavered in its sincerity. “I told him you refused to go after Kip Grady.”

Now, Ilya glanced away. He didn’t need a special agent in the FBI to feel beholden to him. That’s not why he did it.

“I told him you would never be free of your father if he knew you were alive, so Scott’ll sign off on the paperwork. Svetlana is out of the country, and there’s no reason for the Bears to go after her. You betrayed them. She did the organization a favor.”

Hollander didn’t sugarcoat anything, and what he said was true. The Boston Bears Crime Syndicate was probably not finished, not completely. Some new wannabe crime lord would seize power, but the organization would be weakened, if nothing else. Grigori’s human traffic channels were destroyed, and that would help Ilya sleep at night.

“So you got yourself captured and tortured, so you could fake my death.” It wasn’t the best plan Hollander ever came up with.

“That was part of it, yeah. I also needed Grigori to have concrete evidence in his possession of his human trafficking business. Scott will find it in the Bears’ stronghold.”

It was not there, Ilya knew. If it had been, he would have sent it to Hunter.

“You planted evidence?” Ilya said, skeptical and somewhat impressed. “Hollander, you?”

“Technically, J.J., but Alexei flipped. Made a deal with a Boston federal prosecutor. So we left what he told us on your father’s desk. Literally. Shipping routes. Container numbers. Dates and times. It’ll be enough to put your father away for good.”

Shane's fingers slid from Ilya's jaw to the back of his neck, teasing the soft curls at the nape. "It's over, Ilya. He can't touch you anymore." Shane ducked his head. His eyes bore into Ilya, through him. "You are *free*."

Ilya's eyes burned. His throat tightened. His hands shook, fisted in Shane's shirt. Shane leaned forward, kissing Ilya's forehead, his cheeks, the tears as they fell, and Ilya crashed. He tucked his face into the crook of Shane's shoulder and neck, inhaled the comforting and familiar and distinctive scent that was Shane Hollander, and reveled in the unbelievable warmth that always consumed him when they slept in the same bed.

Shane simply held him as Ilya released twenty-seven years of fear, heartache, and pain. Not hushing him. Just holding him, like he was something precious and wanted and deserved, and Shane had been doing it since they met all those years ago.

Ilya wondered, not for the first time, if his mother sent Shane Hollander to save him.

Eventually, Ilya raised his tear-stained face to croak, "Thank you."

"You don't need to thank me. I didn't do it just for you," Shane said with a little laugh. "I also did it for *me*. I love you, Ilya."

Ilya wanted to say the words back. He *had* said them back, so he had no doubt that Shane knew how Ilya felt about him. But Ilya couldn't say the words now. Not this time. Not after what happened below the Raiders nightclub. Not after they left Boston and landed in Montreal and now Ilya had to figure out how to go on without Hollander in his life.

Because there was no way Shane and he could be together now. Ilya was dead, and Officer Hollander could not be seen with his dead lover, let alone marry him.

Reality would eventually creep into the twins' bedroom, cold and terrible and unwanted, and Ilya had to be prepared.

"What happens now?" he dared to ask.

Shane shrugged, more tired than anything. He needed to be asleep again soon. "I already shifted some money over to a new bank account, but I have an officer in the CSIS' Ottawa Centaurs division who will help us with the details. New names, a new address, new Social Insurance Numbers –"

"Us?" Ilya echoed.

Shane nodded. "Yeah. Svetlana pretended to shoot us both. I faked *our* deaths, not just yours."

Ilya loved cuddling with Shane. He loved when his body folded against Shane's, like now when his chest was pressed against Shane's, Shane's thighs hugging Ilya's hips, his arms cradling Shane's shoulders, fingers playing with his hair.

But Ilya pulled away, rolling off Shane and standing. Finally, the totality of the last thirty-six hours crashed down upon him. "You threw your life away," Ilya breathed, trembling fingers

raking through his hair.

“What are you talking about?” Shane asked, an edge slipping into his voice. “You were always so afraid of what Grigori would do if he ever found out about us, so I took care it. If he thinks we’re dead, you don’t have to worry.”

Ilya would always worry. No matter what Shane did or didn’t do, Ilya would always be looking over his shoulder for the rest of his life, but he could admit he would worry less if his father wasn’t actively looking to kill him.

Or his partner.

Something inside Ilya snapped. “What were you thinking?”

Shane’s head jerked as if hit. “What was I thinking?” he parroted. “I was thinking that I was going to save my boyfriend’s life. And maybe have a vacation with him for once. And just maybe Valentine’s Day dinners and birthdays that don’t include espionage or firebombing Scott Hunter’s apartment. And, if we’re lucky, a couple kids we can screw up like our parents screwed us up. And a cat.”

Ilya desperately needed a cigarette. “Dog.”

“Dog?”

“Yes, we are not getting a cat. Cats are mean. We will have one dog and maybe three more.” But Ilya was freaking out, even as he heard Shane shift behind him and felt his ex-boyfriend’s arms wrap about his waist from behind.

“Okay, we can get a dog.”

“This was stupid, Hollander!” Ilya pulled away from the embrace, and Shane fell back onto his hunches on the bed. “You can’t just throw your life away for me.”

Shane’s face scrunched into something complicated, but always, always those adorable freckles were on display. “Is that what you think I did?”

Ilya wiped the corner of his eyes, not surprised to come away with fresh tears. “You should not throw away everything you have worked toward for someone who cannot give you what you want.”

“I don’t want anything but you.” The admission hit Ilya directly in the gut, and he turned, shock draining the heat from his face. Shane plowed ahead, undeterred. “I *need* you. Only you. However I can get you.”

They never talked about it. Not really. Not before two moments ago. “You really thought about this before?”

“It’s been nine *years*, Ilya. Haven’t you?”

Of course, Ilya thought about it, but a future together always seemed impossible. It was inevitable that his father would find out about Shane, and the moment he did, there would be no future for Ilya. Because there was no future without Shane. Thinking about a life that wasn't attainable was equal parts heartbreaking and depressing.

Apparently, he took too long to respond, so Shane continued, voice soft and gutted. "I've been waiting for this exact moment for years, Ilya. When I ask you to stay and you finally *fucking* stay."

There was a moment, a beat, when Ilya just stared at Shane and Shane stared back with a desperate, pleading expression.

Ilya turned and fled.

Ilya couldn't leave the Pikes' residence. He didn't have a car. He didn't have any money or a passport. He had a borrowed pair of pajamas with hockey sticks on them and a bag of ketchup chips he stole from the pantry.

He devoured them while sitting in an Adirondack chair around the Pikes' cold firepit.

The cooling temperatures signaled evening's arrival, and since it was November, a warm firepit would have been a warm and welcomed blanket against Ilya's skin. But he wasn't just cold outside. A block of ice had formed in his gut while speaking with Shane, and its chill slowly seeped through the rest of his body.

Soft footsteps approached from behind. Hayden was light on his feet, which was important for both espionage and surgery. Shane walked with determination and purpose. No, these steps brushed the ground, moving from one graceful motion to another like a dancer.

Svetlana slid into the seat next to Ilya and reached out to steal a few chips from the half-empty bag. "I have seen you do many stupid things, Ilyusha. Eating a full bag of chips is not in the top ten."

Ilya shook his head once and dove his hand back into the bag. "They are good."

"They are terrible. Why are you here and not with your boyfriend who is finally conscious?"

Couldn't he just sit outside, alone, and wallow in his misery? "He is not my boyfriend. We broke up."

"You chose to put yourself in danger over his disapproval. I'm not sure that is technically 'breaking up.'"

Ilya let out a prolonged sigh and fell back into the Adirondack chair. "He gave his life for me. He is going to regret it, and when he does, he will resent me."

Svetlana rolled her eyes. "He sent you chicken parm."

Shane also made Ilya chicken parm, but he wasn't going to tell her that. He'd never hear the end of it. "Yes. Should I start writing my wedding vows?"

"Is probably not a bad idea."

"What are we supposed to do, hm?" He crunched the bag in his hands. "I go to school to learn how to be a mechanic, and he becomes a low-level analyst for something like the Bank of Canada? We have dinner every night together and watch the local hockey team and fall asleep in each other's arms and be happy."

"Would that be so bad?"

No, it sounded absolutely perfect and terrifying. "It will never work."

"Why?"

"Because we aren't normal." He added with a dry, humorless laugh, "I cannot play pickleball."

"Then you will learn." Svetlana sat up and reached out to massage Ilya's forearm warmly. "You both have been making this work for almost a decade, Ilya. I have tried to deter you every which way, but you persisted. You even refused to help your father because you knew Hollander would disapprove."

Ilya scoffed, but Svetlana snatched his chin, forcing his gaze to match her steel one.

"Are you really going to deny that you wouldn't have helped your father or Alexei if it hadn't been for Shane Hollander?"

He would like to think he wouldn't have helped that part of his father's business, but he wouldn't deny that having a CSIS officer as a boyfriend helped to keep his moral compass on the right course.

Of course, Shane Hollander wasn't perfect. "He helped me firebomb Scott Hunter's apartment once."

"See? You both made concessions." Svetlana leaned forward to whisper, "What is really bothering you, Ilyusha?"

Ilya sat back, freeing himself from Svetlana's hold, and admitted, "I *hurt* him." His voice broke. "My father captured him, tied him to a chair, and I tortured him."

"He put himself in that position. He *chose* to surrender to Grigori, and then he trusted that you would keep him safe as we worked to save you both. And you did."

"What happens if he flinches at my touch? Hm? What happens if one day I reach for him, and he – "

Svetlana swiped a hand as if to brush away all his objections. "Do you give him such little credit? He is not weak, and neither are you. And if he does ever flinch, then you will work it

out. It's what partners do." Svetlana pulled her sweater tighter about her body. "You are partners, are you not?"

"I trust him more than anyone."

"I will ignore that comment."

He sent her a sheepish smile. "Sorry."

Svetlana moved to the edge of the seat and gripped both Ilya's hands in hers. "You deserve him, Ilya. You deserve to be happy."

He ran his thumbs in circles over her palms. "What if I don't know how to be?"

What if all his years working for his father, being the son of a crime lord, and trading pieces of his soul for survival made him defective somehow? What if he couldn't be happy and somehow hurt Shane by trying?

"Do not run from happiness because you are scared of it," Svetlana said. "You are strong, Ilyusha. Run toward it and never let it go."

As much as home and happiness would always be Shane, Shane wasn't the only person he loved. "If I try, will you try with me?"

Svetlana glanced back into the house, and Ilya followed her gaze. There, watching them through the Pikes' back bay window was J.J., who quickly turned away.

Ilya looked between her and J.J., eyes widening when she said, "Perhaps. I am interested in learning if all Canadians are as boring as Hollander."

Ilya found Shane in Hayden's den, swallowed by a large recliner, face pallid with lines written by exhaustion. A warm fire raged in the office's fireplace, and its red and orange glow made Shane look so much younger than his twenty-seven years.

Ilya just wanted to climb into the chair next to him and stay there forever.

"How would this work?" Ilya asked, leaning against the den's doorframe. "What is your plan?"

When Shane opened his eyes, Ilya almost gasped at the hollowed look in them. Had Shane really thought he just...left?

"You don't have to stay, y'know," he said in a miserable murmur. "Your life is your own now, and you get to choose what you do with it. If you want to –" He swallowed, gathered his bearings, and pressed on. "– *leave*, I won't stop you. I'll even help you go wherever you want to go."

Curiosity got the better of Ilya. "What would you do if I left?"

Shane shrugged, helpless. “I don’t know.”

“You don’t know?” Ilya arched a skeptical eyebrow and ventured into the room. “*You*, Hollander, who plans everything – you don’t know what you would do without me.”

Shane shook his head, not even lifting it from the recliner’s back. “Why would I ever make plans without you, *moy lyubimyy*? I thought we would figure it out together.”

Ilya refused to give into his desire to claim Shane’s mouth as his own, the same mouth that just called him “his darling,” “his favorite,” in Ilya’s native tongue. “How?” he pressed, voice unsteady. “Where do we go from here?”

Shane kept Ilya’s gaze, fearful but earnest. “I’ll call the head of the Ottawa Centaurs division, get her started on the paperwork we’ll need to live.”

“You trust her?”

“She gave birth to me, so yeah.”

The fuck? That brought Ilya down into the recliner across from Shane.

“You met her once. In Moscow.”

Shane wore a cheeky little smile, and the puzzle pieces that had been scattered in Ilya’s mind for years clicked into place. “The woman who came into the stairwell looking for the bathroom. She is your mother?”

Hollander had introduced him to his mother, all those years ago. Ilya wouldn’t read in it. He *wouldn’t*.

He did.

“I told her I found an ally I could trust in the Russian underground. She didn’t believe me and wanted to meet you herself.”

So Shane had traveled to Moscow just to see him and brought his mother with him.

Ilya felt the warm smile creep onto his face. “You missed me.”

“We hadn’t seen each other in like three months at that time. Fuck yeah, Ilya. I missed you.”

The words crawled their way into Ilya’s heart, and he’d keep them there forever. “What did your mother think when you brought home a Russian crime lord’s son?”

“I told her we were just friends,” Shane said, then crossed his arms, an adorable pout finding his features. “She clocked us as a couple before you even grabbed me.”

Spies generally were good at interpersonal relationships. “She approved?”

“She didn’t disapprove, especially when I told her about the breaching shotgun.”

Who knew that one act would change the course of Ilya's life?

"She also liked that you took out Dallas Kent."

"*You* took out Dallas Kent," Ilya reminded him. "I just took credit for it."

Shane's smile was smug, almost giddy. "Can't say it didn't help your cred around the CSIS offices."

Ilya sat back, hands gripping the chair's arms. "You were setting me up to be an official asset."

"Maybe." A shrug. "I never logged it since there are moles everywhere. Didn't want to get you trouble."

That might have saved both their lives.

"So your mother will help with paperwork? Money? What?"

"All of it. She'll get new identities, help us set up wherever we want, start new lives away from all this."

"And you want this?" Ilya demanded, blood pumping so fast that he could hear his heartbeat in his ears. "You want us to be together?"

"So much," Shane said without hesitation, those tears back in his eyes and refusing to fall. "It fucking kills me when we're not together."

Ilya took a long, bracing sigh. Shane needed to know. If he was going to give his life, his love, his soul to Ilya, he needed to know exactly what he was getting into.

In a low voice, Ilya confessed, "That week I went back to my father, I... realized how my mother could have felt in her last moments. I think I'm like her, Shane."

Shuffling sounded from the chair across from him. Shadows blocked the light of the fireplace, and muscular, warm legs straddled Ilya's lap. Shane pressed his forehead against Ilya's, and this close, Ilya could feel his breath on his cheeks, the heat from his lips, the addictive scent of mint and citrus on Shane's skin.

"I'm sorry I wasn't there for you."

"You were," Ilya insisted. His arms clamped around Shane's waist. "You sent me chicken parm."

It was true. Shane's chicken parm – and Svetlana, of course – probably saved his life.

Shane dipped down to capture Ilya's lips in a quick but true kiss. "How can I help you?"

"I'm happy with you," Ilya admitted against Shane's lips. "You make me happy, but I don't know if I can play pickleball and go to farmers' markets and be...happy."

“I don’t know about happy, but my parents weren’t normal.” Shane relaxed back on Ilya’s lap. “I lived with my dad, but he worked for the treasury and was gone a lot. My mom heads the Ottawa Centaurs, so she and my dad only saw each other a few times a year.

“I don’t want that. I want a life *with* you. Maybe that’s not farmers’ markets and pickleball, but if you want to try to be together, *really* together, I want to try. And if you need help, then we’ll get it for you. Whatever you need.

“I just *need* you.”

Ilya’s throat tightened. His eyesight became blurry, and he blurted, “I hurt you. Back in Boston.”

“I don’t remember much of it,” Shane admitted, eyes slipping shut, forehead still resting against Ilya’s. “I remember the way you spoke to me, how you made me feel. I wasn’t scared there, not with you.” Shane opened his eyes then. They were dark and glistening and full of everything they spoke and didn’t say. “You and me since the beginning, right? It’s always been you and me.”

The words rang true in Ilya’s heart. Ever since the beginning, when Shane smiled at him at that café in the North End, Ilya had fallen for him and never recovered.

Ilya’s hands cradled Shane’s hips. “Ask me again.”

Shane’s eyes widened. They glistened. He swallowed. “Will you please stay?”

“Yes, Shane. I will stay. Here. In boring Canada with you.”

Shane let out a strangled sob and launched forward, wrapping his arms about Ilya’s neck and pressing his face into Ilya’s curls. Ilya all but engulfing Shane’s body with his own, arms tight about Shane’s waist, his face buried in the space between Shane’s neck and shoulder.

They stayed like that for a long time.

Eighteen Months Later - Ottawa

Boot heels clicked upon the concrete floor, echoing through the large autobody garage. Ilya barely heard it over the sound of the high-pitched squeal of the torque wrench, Dykstra’s terrible country music selection, and Ilya’s own Bad Bunny playlist. Lying on a creeper underneath a C-Class Mercades, Ilya just finished replacing the transmission fluid when Svetlana’s face appeared just beyond the tire.

“Ilya!”

“Geez!” Ilya jerked so violently he almost banged his head against the metal undercarriage. “Are you trying to give me a heart attack?”

“Perhaps if you would stop smoking, you would not worry.”

“I had one.”

“This hour?”

“Shut up.” Ilya pushed out from underneath the sedan’s carriage and wiped his hands in a nearby rag. “Is it time?”

“You told me to tell you when it’s three-fifty.”

Ilya slipped his phone out of his pocket, and a little unconscious smile found his lips at the sight of his cell phone’s wallpaper. Ilya carried Shane piggy-back with Shane’s arms about his neck, his lips pressed against Ilya’s cheek. Ilya’s smile brightened his entire features, crinkling the corner of his eyes, his joy easy and true.

A scowl found Ilya’s lips once he noticed the time. “It’s after four.”

“I may have been distracted. Jean-Jacques texted.”

Ilya swore in English and then in Russian and then in French for good measure. He climbed off the creeper and growled in Svetlana’s direction before hurrying off toward the break room.

“Have a fantastic evening!” Svetlana called after him. “Do everything you and I used to.”

Ilya jogged backwards to yell back, “The mechanics are a little different.”

“But the orgasms are the same.”

Ilya stopped briefly in the bathroom to clean up before heading to the break room and his locker. He was working through his usual post-workday ritual – unclasping his necklace, pulling off the ring, and returning it to his fourth finger – when Bood popped his head into the room.

“You finish the Mercades, Rozy?”

“Just the transmission fluid replacement. I’ll get the tune-up done in the morning.”

“Awesome. Weibe know you’re out early today or do you need me to cover for you?”

“Asked for it off last week but thanks, Bood.”

Bood winked. “Tell Shane I said hi.”

Then he was gone, and Ilya followed a few moments later.

Seven hundred twenty hours of technical training. Four hundred eighty hours of apprenticeship – with six thousand more to go – and Ilya still hadn’t found a way to go a full day without getting some sort of liquid on his coveralls, in his hair, on his face.

He wore a backwards baseball cap. He slipped out of his coveralls' sleeves and tied them around his waist before grabbing his bag. He exited the autobody's back door, an unconscious smile upon his lips. Shane wasn't due at home until after six, and before then, Ilya had plans to shower, start dinner, and then meet Shane at the door with coffee – large decaf, black, sugar.

All that went out of the window as he walked up to his Ducati motorcycle to see Shane leaning back against it, arms and ankles crossed. As a data hockey engineer for the Ottawa Senators, he usually wore the team's official-unofficial uniforms – quarter-zip up sweaters, polo shirts, or hoodies over his jeans or dark athletic pants.

But not today. Shane had put extra effort into his look with his hair swept up and back. He wore a cream long-sleeve knit shirt under a navy wool overcoat over denim, but the kicker was his shoes, boots specifically. They were TCX Mood 2 Gore-Tex Boots, perfect for motorcycle riding.

Shane had prepared, like he did for most of his life.

An unconscious smile grew upon Ilya's lips as he neared, the same smile that twisted on Shane's. "You remembered," Ilya breathed. It came out softer and more tender than he meant. A private, indulgent tone, just for Shane.

Shane's eyes softened. "You thought I'd forget?"

Eleven years to the day, they met at a North End café, where Shane stole a file and Ilya's heart.

Here, now, they met halfway. Ilya's hand came up to clasp Shane's cheek and pull him close for a slow but heated kiss that spread through Ilya's body. Shane responded, opening his mouth and welcoming Ilya inside, his own hands coming up to knock Ilya's cap off and rake through the golden-brown curls.

Desire and promise swept through Ilya, pooling low and deep. Shane broke their embrace just before Ilya was going to push him against the Ducati and instead pressed his forehead against Ilya's.

"You smoked."

Ilya huffed. "I skipped lunch."

"Every cigarette can take off eleven –"

"Is that really what you want to do tonight? Quote health stats?"

"No, but I'd like as much time with you as possible. Cigarettes are my rival."

"I thought that was me."

Shane thought for a moment, his fingers playing with the edge of Ilya's dirty undershirt. "Okay, then they are my mortal enemy."

“You say the most romantic things to me.” He stole another quick kiss. “Why don’t you start rattling off Public Health Agency facts about dementia or hepatitis? I’ll get all hot and bothered.”

Shane released him and started toward the bike. “Okay. We’re done.”

“What? This is foreplay for you, no? I can roleplay a hot nurse, take your temperature with my dick in your ass.”

Shane straddled Ilya’s bike and held out a helmet to him. “I’m beginning to wonder if Hayden was right all those years ago, and you do have rabies.”

Shane knew the quickest way to kill a mood: Mention Hayden Pike.

Ilya followed Shane’s lead, taking the helmet and straddling the motorcycle. Shane wore Ilya’s backpack and pulled on his own helmet before placing his boots on the foot pegs. He then slid forward, wrapping his arms around Ilya’s waist and staying close.

Ilya loved tearing through the Ottawa streets on his Ducati, but he always drove a little slower, a little more cautious, when Shane was behind him. And he didn’t mind taking his time getting home with Shane’s warm body pressed against his back, his husband’s scent of citrus and mint surrounding Ilya in its familiarity and comfort and desire.

Just before they married last July, they’d brought a house outside of the city on the Ottawa River. It was a big, blue Cape Cod-style home, brand new with gambrel rooflines, gray stonework, and a three-car garage. A long driveway and a gated entrance added extra privacy and security.

The best part of the home was the mailbox with a shared last name – Hollanov.

Shane and Ilya Hollanov.

“You can hide in plain sight,” Yuna had said over a dinner one night, the table warm and inviting with chicken parm and the Hollanders’ approval. “Just don’t give anyone a reason to look for you.”

And they hadn’t. Shane became a low-level analyst with a name and no picture on the Ottawa Senators’ website. Ilya trained to become a mechanic and apprenticed in a Kanata autobody garage.

Their life was pedestrian. It was boring. It was perfect.

Ilya barely cut the engine to the Ducati before Shane was off the back and tearing the helmet from Ilya’s head. Shane didn’t like the Ducati. Not really. He’d threatened Ilya once, right after Ilya bought it with, “If you die on a motorcycle, I am going to be very angry.”

But the adrenaline rush from being on the back of the Ducati drove Shane crazy.

He walked backwards toward the house, leading Ilya by the lips, fingers looped in Ilya’s waistband. They didn’t break the kiss in the driveway, not once, and Ilya ended up pressing

his husband against the front door, knee between Shane's muscular thighs, hand already fumbling with Shane's belt.

Shane's breath hitched. An indelicate, involuntary noise sounded in the back of his throat – a mix between a moan and a growl.

Ilya could fuck Shane right here, in their entryway, outside for the whole world to see, and it wouldn't matter. They were married. They were husbands. Shane was his, and though they hid, they no longer hid from those who mattered.

Ilya barely got his hand down Shane's pants before his husband began fumbling for his keys. He sighed into their kiss and decided to help Shane, mouthing down his throat while simultaneously grabbing the keys and opening the door.

He allowed Shane to fall, right there, onto the foyer floor.

"Ouch, asshole," Shane grumbled, and Ilya thought there were worse places to have sex.

They didn't manage to shut the door until they were both sticky and spent.

"Do you ever miss it?" Ilya asked hours later, his mouth asking before his mind decided to.

They were huddled on the couch with take-out containers on the coffee table, the Montreal Metros versus Minnesota Nomads' game on the TV. They had already moved on to dessert – cookies and cream ice cream that they ate from the same container.

Shane gave the question thought, which Ilya knew was Shane's way of showing his love. He never took anything Ilya said lightly or for granted.

Ilya would have liked an instantaneous "no," though.

"Not really, no," Shane admitted, chin down, spoon playing with the melted cream. "I mean, I liked investigating a good case. I liked finding answers to problems that didn't seem like they could be solved. The sex was above average," he added with a sly little smile that Ilya wanted to kiss.

"Above average," Ilya parroted with a laugh.

Shane shrugged. "Solid B. Maybe even B-plus." But then frown darkened his usually calm features. "But I always...worried."

The soft word was an admission, a confession, forced through a heavy jaw by a thick tongue.

"About what?" Ilya asked, equally as low.

"What happened if you decided this wasn't worth it anymore? What if you found someone else?" Shane paused, debated, and then pushed forward, "What if that was the last time I ever saw you? What happened if Kent got you or Vaughn or the San Francisco Mission?"

Shane shook his head and dug back into the carton. “I wasn’t meant to be a CSIS officer anyway.”

Ilya snorted. “Liar. You were their golden boy.”

And you gave it all up for this, Ilya thought but didn’t say. *Sex on the foyer floor, ice cream on the couch, socked feet tangled under a shared blanket.*

“I was *compromised*, Ilya,” Shane replied. “From my very first mission. My entire career was doomed from the start.”

Ilya’s eyes narrowed. “From your first mission? You never told me about your first mission.”

Eleven years and this never came up. How the hell was Shane compromised on his very first mission? Who had he met? What had he done?

Shane’s voice was flat, eyes in a mock-glare. “Yeah, I walked up to this asshole with hazel eyes that have a hint of amber when in the sun. Golden-brown curls flattened by a toque. Most gorgeous guy I’d ever seen. He reeked of smoke, which was absolutely disgusting, but I choked it back.”

Ilya’s eyebrows rose.

“It was cold. He cracked a joke. I don’t even remember what he said, and then he gave me a package.”

A snort and a laugh.

“Shut up.” Shane abandoned the ice cream and climbed into Ilya’s lap. Thighs tightened on thighs, forehead pressed to forehead, heat to heat. He grabbed Ilya’s hand and brought it up to kiss the ring on his fourth finger. “This, Ilya. I waited nine years for *this*. And I choose you, in my bed every morning and every night, instead of a cellphone with an app and quick sex in hotels between jobs.”

Ilya found the silver in Shane’s eyes, the tiny glint he could only see when this close. “We made it work.”

“I like to take my time.” Shane’s grin fell after a moment and asked, “Do you miss it?”

Ilya shook his head. “No. I am where I’m supposed to be, moyo lyubov.”

He didn’t miss his old life. He didn’t miss the gunfights or the drugs or his father and brother’s fists and disapproval. When he woke up in the middle of the night, drenched in a cold sweat from his brother’s threats and his one-time empty bed, Ilya would stare down at Shane’s vulnerable and relaxed face, the fear from a life before still alive in his brain and body.

And he would wrap his arms about Shane’s waist, bury his face his husband’s back, and listen to Shane’s steady and soothing heartbeat.

This is what he never thought he'd had, and he was never, ever going to take it for granted or let it go.

Shane didn't leave Ilya's lap and leaned down to kiss him in a slow, sensual way that explored all the crevasses of Ilya's mouth. Ilya responded by arching up, hands running up Shane's thighs and down his backside. Just as the heat started to stir in Ilya's groin, Shane muttered against his chin, "Hayden wants us to babysit this weekend."

Ilya pulled away. "You want round two, yes? Then you need to stop mentioning Hayden."

Shane at least had the decency to look apologetic, but the moment was ruined.

"Hayden wants us to drive two hours each way on our day off to take care of his little terrors." Ilya sighed. "Really?"

Shane laughed, lips still inches from Ilya's. "So I'll tell him yes."

"Of course you will tell him yes, but he better have his fridge stocked with coke this time."

"I'll remind him."

"Cherry. I want cherry coke." He added with a little smirk, "Ruby makes raptor noises when she drinks cherry coke. Large burps."

"When we have our kids, you are not feeding them cherry coke."

"I am absolutely feeding them cherry coke. And ice cream. And anything else they want because they will be spoiled, Shane. They will be so very spoiled."

Shane's hand froze on Ilya's face. "When?"

Ilya blinked, head cocked to the side. "When what?"

"When do we want to start...maybe...thinking about having our kids?"

They weren't hard up for money. Shane's dad was in the treasury department and had helped Shane invest early on his career. Ilya had a stash of cash in Montreal that he'd brought to Ottawa with him from the time they referred to as "before."

Ilya lifted up his bent knuckles to brush across Shane's cheek bones, his freckles. After nine years of living from rendezvous to rendezvous – never hoping for more than the next moment together, Ilya now welcomed a future, side by side with his husband.

"Tomorrow," Ilya said.

"Tomorrow," Shane echoed, his eyes dancing as he leaned down for another kiss. "Tonight, you are all mine."

Ilya's enamored mind added, *Tonight and forever.*

Fin

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much to everyone who read this fic! If you enjoyed it, please consider leaving a comment. They make my day! If you didn't enjoy it or just don't like to comment, then I hope you have a great afternoon!

Also, this was actually the second ending to the story. If you're interested in the original ending, which features Scott Hunter, I posted it here - [Scott Hunter Visits the Hollanovs.](#)

Thanks!



End Notes



Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!