to build a home

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to build a home

by foxriverblues

Summary

A day after Ilya asks Shane if he'd marry him when they turn thirty, Ilya's mother dies. Within a week, Ilya and his family return to Russia, leaving behind nothing but an empty house next door.

Eighteen years later, Shane stumbles across a comment on his Instagram that brings back a flood of memories, emotions, and feelings that he'd thought were long buried.

Notes

This is a very, very loose rewrite of a fic that I previously wrote for a different fandom (don't ask, you don't want to know). The genesis of the plot is similar, but the execution of said plot is very different. Any similarities to that one are probably because I wrote them both, and I borrowed a handful of tiny things from it.

As most of my fics do, this borrows from both book and show canon, with some creative liberties taken on my part as well.

I've got a working knowledge of hockey but I'm not invested enough to make sure everything works out logistically as far as games and timing and scheduling go – so if some of the logic doesn't make sense, just pretend that it does.

If you can't see the images due to location restrictions, I added them to a Google Doc here -- hopefully this allows people to see them.

And then finally, I used online generators to make all of the embedded images – if the style of the messages are not accurate to the time period, just look the other way. I haven't coded since my Myspace era and I'm not about to start now. (The one exception is the images at the start of each chapter - I used my passing Photoshop knowledge to make those. Photoshop I can do. HTML not so much.)

Enjoy!

See the end of the work for more notes

Chapter 1: one.

It's the night before Shane Hollander's 30th birthday and he is drunk.

Okay, maybe he's not *that* drunk, but he's definitely buzzed enough that it feels a little bit like he's floating instead of sprawled out on his couch, feet up on the coffee table and beer bottle in hand. It's late and his apartment is dark, only barely illuminated by the lights of the surrounding buildings shining in through the windows. Shane doesn't believe in using his overhead light, especially in the evenings – if he can see into the building across the street and can essentially watch the lives of the people who live in that apartment like his own personal sitcom, that means that they can see him too if his light is on.

He'll stay in the dark, thank you very much.

He takes a lazy swig from the beer bottle dangling loosely between two fingers, reaching out to set it on the glass coffee table with a 'clink'.

For the most part, the day before his birthday has been a relatively normal day. He'd woken up in the morning to a handful of early 'happy birthday' texts from friends and family, his teammates (read: Hayden) had surprised him after their game (that they had won) with a sheet cake (that he couldn't eat, thanks to his current diet), and his parents had taken him out for dinner afterwards. All typical birthday things.

But once he had arrived back at home, standing in the darkness of his apartment… the quiet, peaceful, *lonely* darkness… Shane had made an almost immediate beeline to his fridge for

alcohol.

His birthday is just another reminder that he is alone.

It's not something that Shane allows to bother him too much most days; he's much too busy for that. Between hockey games, hockey practice, exercising to stay in good shape for hockey… he has no time to spend devoted to his personal life. But then days like today roll around – holidays, birthdays, winning the fucking *cup* – things he wants to celebrate with someone special. When Montreal had won their second cup in a row, he'd watched as everyone's families poured onto the ice afterwards. His teammates had embraced their wives and girlfriends, scooped their children up into their arms, and Shane had felt a pull of envy in his gut that he'd never felt before. The smile on his face had felt forced, tight-lipped, and while he was grateful that his parents were there to celebrate with him… it wasn't the same.

To their credit, Hayden and JJ have tried (and failed) to pull him from his self-imposed exile in their own ways. Hayden has given his number to more than a handful of Jackie's single friends, but Shane gets distracted and forgets to respond, and then when the conversation inevitably dries up he's left apologizing to Hayden and promising that he won't ghost the next one. Eventually Jackie's friends start actively declining offers to share their numbers, and so that dies off.

JJ, for his part, invites Shane out every single time he goes to the bar, or the club, or wherever he finds himself invited to. It's usually made as an open-ended invitation, with no commitment required on Shane's part, since JJ is going out with or without Shane joining him. He usually says no, feigning tiredness or he says that he's busy, but sometimes he'll actually take JJ up on his offer and will show up at whatever location it is that week. Sometimes it's worth it to see the shock on JJ's face when he walks through the door, quickly replaced by genuine glee that Shane actually came out.

It was on one of these outings that Shane had met Rose Landry. It had been a complete accident – he'd needed to take a moment to step away from where JJ and two friends were engaged in a heated discussion about politics of all things. The whole conversation was getting too into the weeds for Shane to follow, with everyone talking over each other and contradicting each other's points, and it was all just a bit much for him.

He'd walked away and sat down at a booth without looking if it had been completely empty, and had been a bit startled when someone had spoken up from the other side of the table where she was sat, snacking on an order of loaded fries. While he'd declined her offer to share the appetizer, they'd fallen into a comfortable conversation almost immediately. Talking with Rose was easy, comfortable, and Shane had found himself enjoying her company immensely. It was easy to make her laugh, especially when he forced himself to step just that little bit outside his comfort zone and say something that he'd normally be too anxious to say.

He'd left the bar with her number in his phone, and the promise of a date the next week.

Things had gone great with Rose, at least for a month or two. They'd see each other as much as his hockey schedule and her filming schedule would allow, with her coming to see his games wearing his jersey, and him sneaking onto her set the back way to avoid the seemingly

ever-present paparazzi. The sex had been… lackluster, if he's being honest, but he'd blamed his performance issues on hockey and how grueling his schedule had been, and she'd accepted that. But then she'd asked him to go to dinner, and at the same restaurant where they'd first met, she had taken his hand and very gently asked him if he was sure about how much he enjoyed being in a relationship with a woman.

Because the thing is, Shane is gay. He knows he's gay, deep in his heart. But it's *hard* to give a voice to it when everyone around him has a wife or a girlfriend, when his teammates drop slurs in the locker room like it's no big deal, when he sees the way that people like him are looked down on by friends and fans…

There are no MLH players that are publicly out, and Shane is not interested in being the first. He's resigned himself to spending the rest of his professional life on his own, and so it's not worth spending his time dwelling over it. He's just… he's too busy, is all. It's a good enough cover for his parents, for his friends, for the media when a reporter gets the dumb idea to ask about his personal life.

So he pushes through. Says yes to Hayden, lets JJ introduce him to people at bars, goes out with Rose… and in the end, he's lucky to be able to call Rose one of his best friends, now. She texts him whenever she's in town and they'll meet up for dinner and drinks, or when he's playing in a city that she's filming in she'll still come to his games and cheer for him whenever he scores goals.

But tomorrow is his fucking *birthday*. And right now, he wishes more than anything that there was someone here to celebrate with him. Even if it's just someone who he could curl up against on the couch, someone to wrap their arms around him and hold him close, someone to sing him happy birthday at midnight… he *wants*.

Shane reaches for his beer and takes another drink, tipping it all the way back until the last dregs of the dark liquid drain down his throat. He pushes himself to his feet, wandering into the kitchen to grab another.

The last remnants of his sobriety are screaming at him. He absolutely should not be getting drunk right now; he's got a playoff game in two days. He's too sad and too buzzed to care about that, though.

He falls back down on his couch, stretching out his legs, opening up his phone to do some mindless scrolling, because really, what else is he going to do besides scroll and drink? It'll take his mind off of how lonely he's feeling, at least.

"Last one," he mumbles out loud to himself, eyeing the beer in his hand.

He taps through folders looking for some sort of dumb game to keep his mind occupied, playing a few that he'd downloaded and then forgotten about, until he gets bored. Eventually he settles on opening up Instagram. It's not something he uses often, if ever. His mom had made him make the account once he was drafted and started receiving endorsements. His entire grid is essentially a walking advertisement for products that he's paid to wear, with the exception of only one photo (his first ever Instagram post) of the lake at the cottage.

He clicks on the picture now, remembering back when he'd taken it. It was just after he'd had his cottage built, close enough to his parents' place that it is convenient to get back and forth, but far enough away that his sojourns there give him enough privacy. It's on the same lake that theirs is on, just on the opposite side of it. He retreats there every off-season, abandoning Montreal for the serenity that only waking up to vivid sunrises, reading out by the water, and having absolutely zero responsibilities can provide.

Scrolling down from the photo, he can't help but read through the comments. There aren't as many as there are on his more recent photos, but there are still enough. Most of them are from fans, leaving comments in the hopes that he'll notice or respond back. He considers liking a few of them, just for fun, but he knows that there are accounts on Twitter dedicated to broadcasting any move he makes on social media, so even in his intoxicated state he knows that it's not worth it.

There are a few comments from teammates, most of them with that blue checkmark delineating them as verified accounts. It makes it easy enough to pick out Hayden's *well when are you going to invite me* and JJ's *god i love montreal* with a few others sharing how excited they are that Shane will be playing for the Metros. He hadn't realized that there were quite a few celebrities that also apparently commented as well, and it makes him chuckle to himself.

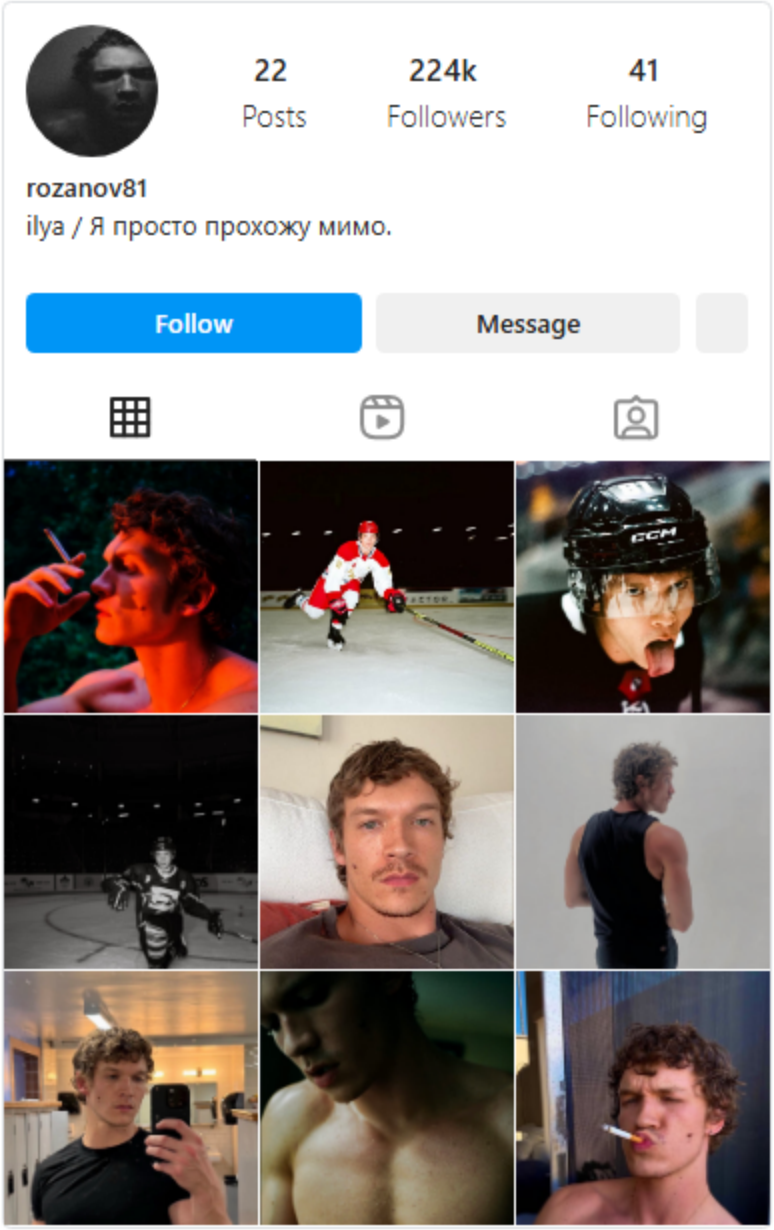
He almost swipes away after that, but something makes him stop. Frowning, he squints at the comment.

@rozanov81 looks very familiar

Why did that catch his eye? Shane rereads it once, twice… it's almost like this person has been to the cottage, which makes no sense because *nobody* has been to this cottage except his parents. He's made absolutely certain of that; it's his own personal fortress of solitude, hidden away from almost everyone.

Frowning, he considers the real possibility that there's someone stalking him. His eyes lift from the phone to look out the window, instantly kicking himself because he's several floors up in a luxury apartment building and there's not going to be a stalker clinging to his window like Spiderman or something. Get a *grip*, Shane.

He looks back down at his phone, then taps on the person's profile.



There's something about this guy that nags at the back of Shane's mind, but he ignores it for now and instead taps into his pictures, looking at the first one. It's a portrait of who Shane assumes must be the owner of the account, a cigarette held between his fingers. He is bathed in a red glow from the sun, the light illuminating the high points of his face and accentuating the sharp line of his jaw, the curves of his muscles…

Shaking his head, Shane scrolls on. There's plenty of hockey photos on the account, and it looks like he plays hockey in Russia. All of the comments are in Russian, and so are the guy's responses to them, so he might be a part of the KHL. There are a few more shirtless photos of him, and Shane spends an embarrassing amount of time staring at them.

He backs out and scrolls back up to the top – he doesn't even know what this guy's name is, he shouldn't be drunkenly thirsting after him.

The name at the top of the page stands out. Ilya. His name is Ilya.

Shane continues browsing Ilya's profile, until he can't scroll down any further. He's reached the last photo. It's a photo of a Polaroid being held by a thumb and forefinger in the corner, Ilya's fingers, most likely. It's of a woman with long blonde hair laughing, her smile bright and her eyes crinkling in the corners. She's looking over her shoulder at whoever is taking the picture, happiness all over her face.

It makes Shane freeze, because he *knows this woman*. Irina Rozanova, who moved in next door to Shane's family in Ottawa when he was in the first grade. Irina Rozanova, who loved to sit with Yuna Hollander out on the porch for hours and talk, who would always be in her garden tending to the rose bushes alongside the house, who would bring over homemade Russian cakes and pies and cookies for the whole Hollander family to enjoy.

Irina Rozanova, who died when Shane was twelve, and whose husband packed up what was left of their family and moved them back to Russia.

The name Ilya Rozanov hits Shane like a freight train as the memories come flooding back.

He *remembers*.

Before Ilya had moved into that house, there had been an older woman who'd lived there. Mrs. Andrews. The name still makes Shane cringe as he remembers. She had always glared across the fence at Shane, scowling at him whenever he was too loud when playing outside, and had even gone so far as shuffling over to his house one time to berate him for missing a spot when he'd shoveled her driveway (without her even asking, mind you) after a particularly bad snowstorm. She was mean and angry, and he'd never liked her. But one day a car pulled up in front of the house, her daughter coming to visit from out of town, and then a few weeks later Mrs. Andrews was being packed up into the front seat of her daughter's car and driven to a senior living facility a few miles away.

A 'For Sale' sign went up in the yard a month later.

Yuna had been outside when Grigori and Irina Rozanov shook hands with the realtor. She had gone over to introduce herself shortly after, and had shared over the dinner table that evening that their new neighbors had two boys, one of which was a son Shane's age and that it would be good for the two of them to be friends. She had even set up their first playdate, something that had irritated Shane at the time, because what if he didn't want a new friend? It was now his responsibility to welcome this new kid to the neighborhood? What if this boy didn't like anything that Shane did? What if they were so different that it was hard to get to know him?

The next day their doorbell had rang, and Yuna had ushered a small boy into the kitchen. He was about Shane's size, though his hair was blond and curly instead of dark and straight like Shane's. He looked like he'd rather be anywhere other than standing in a stranger's kitchen. Shane liked him *immediately*.

They'd gone outside to the Hollanders' backyard, where Shane learned that Ilya knew only a very rudimentary amount of English. Luckily, playing with miniature hockey sticks and tiny goalie pads was something that could be done in any language. Pretty soon, both boys were laughing as they chased each other across the yard, the ball that had stood in for the hockey puck long forgotten.

The two were inseparable after that. Ilya quickly became Shane's best friend despite the language barrier, although every day Ilya picked up more and more English words in the way that little children always do. They'd ride the bus to school together in the mornings, would sit with each other in every class that they had together, and would do their homework at one of their kitchen tables in the evening. Shane loved the days when he would get to go over to Ilya's house, despite the fact that he had always thought Ilya's dad was kind of mean – Irina always made the most delicious Russian meals for them, and would sit with them sometimes and help with their homework where she could.

Ilya even came with Shane and his family to the cottage in Lanaudière for a few weeks during the summer one year. It had been Shane's idea, and after he'd convinced his parents he'd pitched the idea to Ilya and his mother. Ilya had said yes almost immediately, looking up at his mom hopefully, and she had been unable to say no. They'd spent those two weeks splashing around in the lake, eating s'mores by the bonfire, and getting to relax and just have fun together.

With a sudden clarity that only comes from a combination of reminiscence and alcohol, Shane remembers the way that everything had ended.

They'd been sitting on the swings in Shane's backyard late one summer evening, when Ilya had spoken up. "Will you marry someone someday?"

Shane had furrowed his brow. "I dunno. Maybe." Marriage, at this age, was still something that was unattainable. The thought of even holding hands with someone made his nose wrinkle, because everyone knows that girls have cooties. Yuck. "Will you?"

Ilya had ducked his head, staring down at the ground. "Maybe."

It was silent long enough after that Shane thought that perhaps that was all Ilya had to say – but no, he *had* brought it up, after all. Maybe there was more to it.

Sure enough, Ilya took a deep breath, and continued. "I want… different from my mom and dad." He looked unsurely up at Shane, in the way he did when he couldn't find the right English words to describe what he wanted to say. "They do not… is not…" He shook his head, frustration clear on his face. "I want *good* marriage."

Was he saying his parents' marriage wasn't good? Shane wasn't about to ask *that* particular question.

"Would be easy to marry *you*. You are nice." Ilya turned to look at Shane, giving him a shy smile.

"*Me*?" Shane had squeaked – he can remember the way his voice had cracked embarrassingly. He can also remember the way he'd considered it, what it would be like being married to Ilya. His only frame of reference had been his own parents, and seeing what their relationship was like, and he'd just assumed that all other families were like that too. But what Ilya was saying, or at least hinting at…

“Yes, you. You are my friend. I like you.” Ilya had stood up from the swing then and walked over to Shane. “We are young now, but. Maybe if…” He trailed off, looking down as though he was trying to find the words. “When we are older.” It was clearly not all he wanted to say, Shane could see it on his face.

“How much older?”

“Thirty.” Ilya seemed determined, brow scrunched as he stood in front of Shane.

“Okay.” It had surprised even Shane that he had agreed to it so readily, but really, something so far away that it didn’t even matter was easy enough to say yes to. They would still live next door to each other, and would still spend all their free time together. Maybe they’d go to college together, play hockey together after they graduate… their future was wide open. So really, what harm did it do for him to say yes? And Ilya was a boy, he didn’t have cooties.

Ilya had smiled, and wrapped Shane in a tight hug, kissing him briefly on the cheek, before he’d gone home for the night.

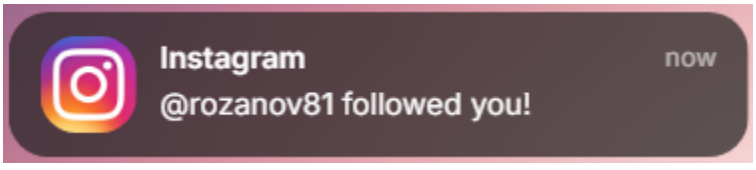
The next morning, there had been an ambulance parked outside of Ilya’s house. Two days after that, there had been a moving truck parked there instead. When Shane had tried to ask his mother what was going on, she had looked at him with tears in her eyes, unable to find the words.

A week later, the house next door was empty. Shane never saw Ilya again.

And now, here he sits, buzzed and alone on his couch, staring at Ilya’s profile. He sees it now, the resemblance to the Ilya he once knew. He looks older now, obviously, all hard lines and angles, muscular and fit.

Before he can stop himself, he hits the ‘follow’ button. He then promptly tosses his phone on the other side of the couch, reaching for his beer again. What does he hope will happen? That Ilya will follow him back (because he doesn’t even follow Shane, at least not anymore, if he ever did in the first place) and that they’ll start texting again and become instant best friends? That Ilya will confess he’s been harboring a massive crush on Shane for the last 18 years of his life, and that he’s been doing nothing else but staring at his phone and waiting for Shane to become active on Instagram so that they could start talking?

He’s embarrassed at how fast he grabs for his phone when a notification comes through – but sure enough, there it is.



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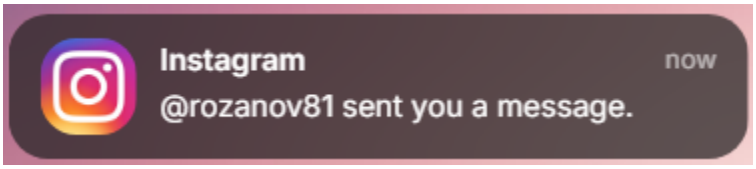
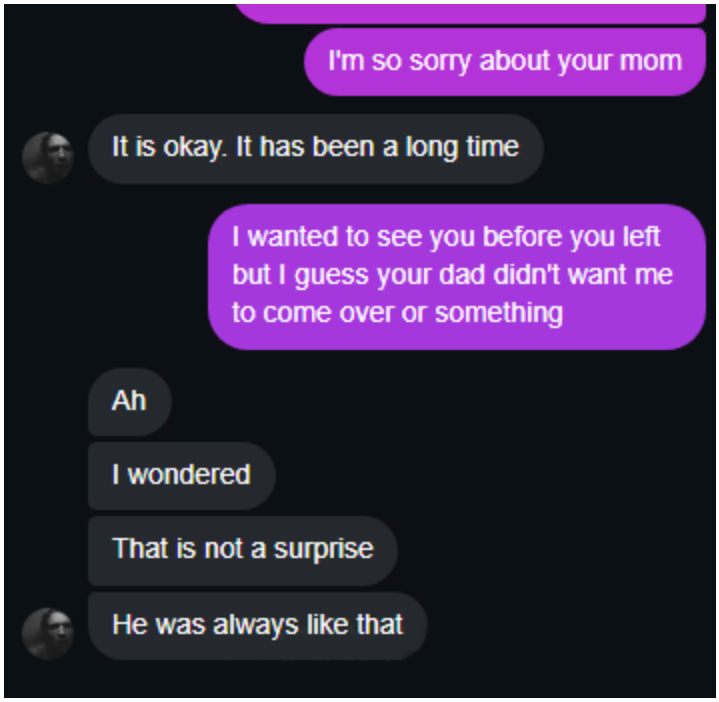


Shane clicks into it.

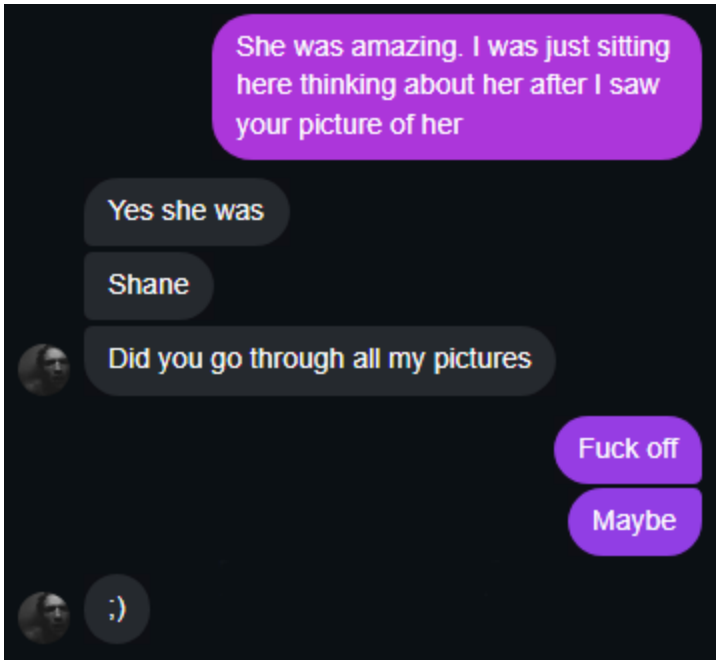
Shane thinks back to the days just before Ilya had moved away, about how Yuna had sat him down, holding his hand tightly as she told him that Irina had died.



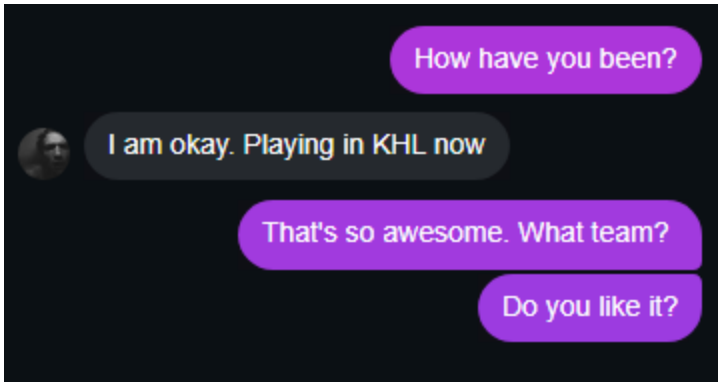
When he'd asked to see Ilya, Yuna had walked next door, a homemade lasagna in hand. She had only been gone for a few minutes when she had returned, a strange look in her eyes, and had wrapped him in a hug and told him that Ilya's dad had said no. Shane remembers the way he'd been so angry that he'd fought against his mother's grip to try and break free. But Yuna had lifted him into her lap and rocked him back and forth, soothing him as hot, angry tears tracked down his cheeks.

He wishes now that he had done something more. Fought harder to see Ilya, maybe, or made up some excuse as to why he had to go over to his house. He could have snuck over in the middle of the night and thrown rocks up at Ilya's window like they did in the movies…

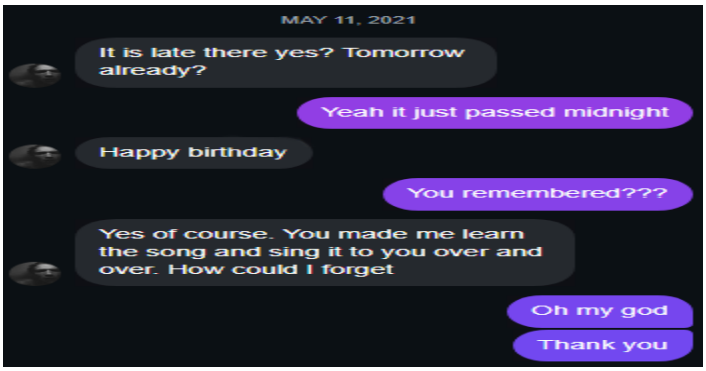
But he didn't. And days later, Ilya was gone, the house next door empty.



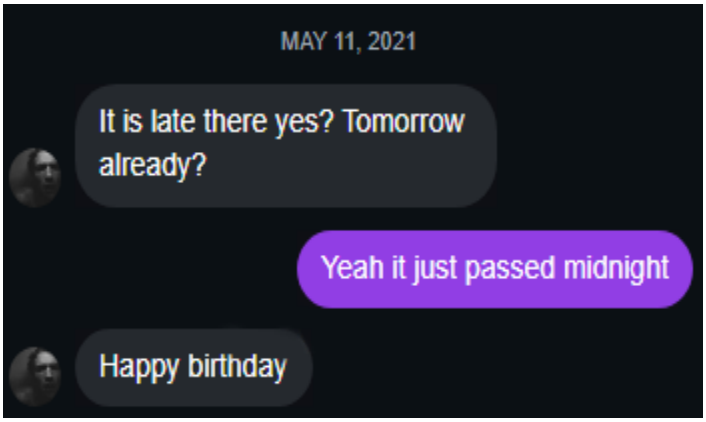
Shane stares down at his phone, chewing on the lace of his hoodie as he types back.



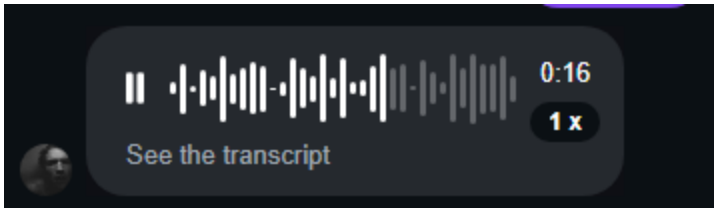
The messages continue, conversation flowing familiarly. It's light, nothing too in-depth, and it feels *good* to catch up with Ilya. They talk about everything, from hockey to the things they're interested in doing when they're not playing hockey and everything in between. Shane lets himself fall into the conversation, tucking a pillow behind his head so that he's a little more comfortable. The hours tick by without realizing, until:



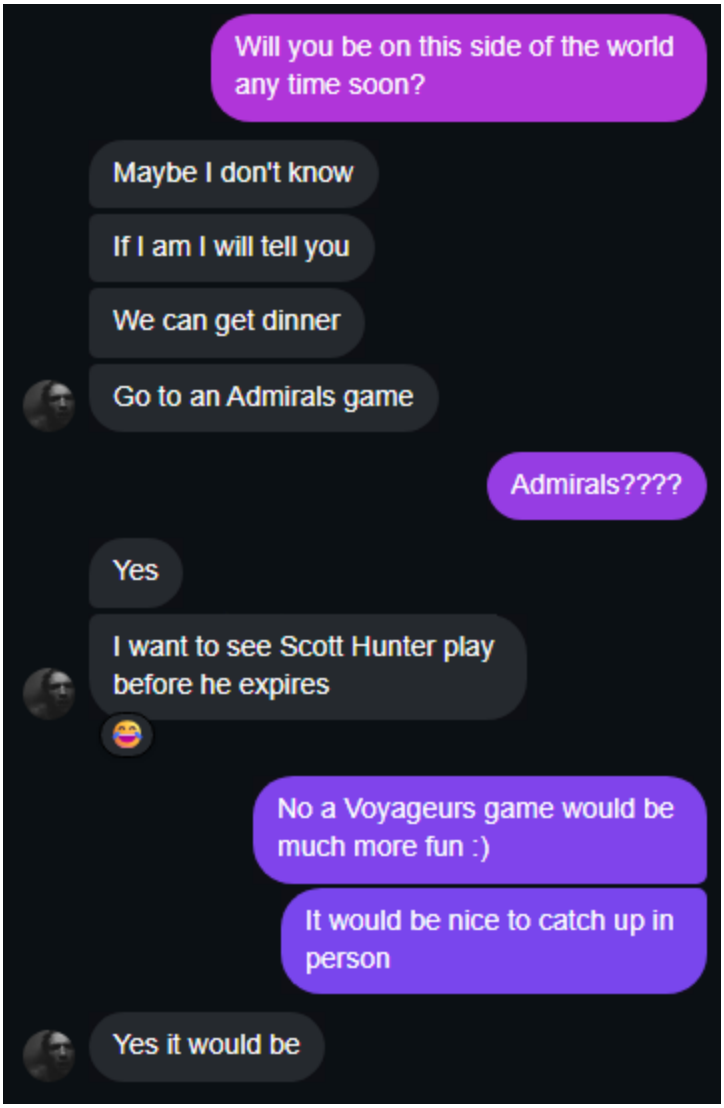
Shane stares down at his phone, because *what*. Ilya *remembered* his birthday?



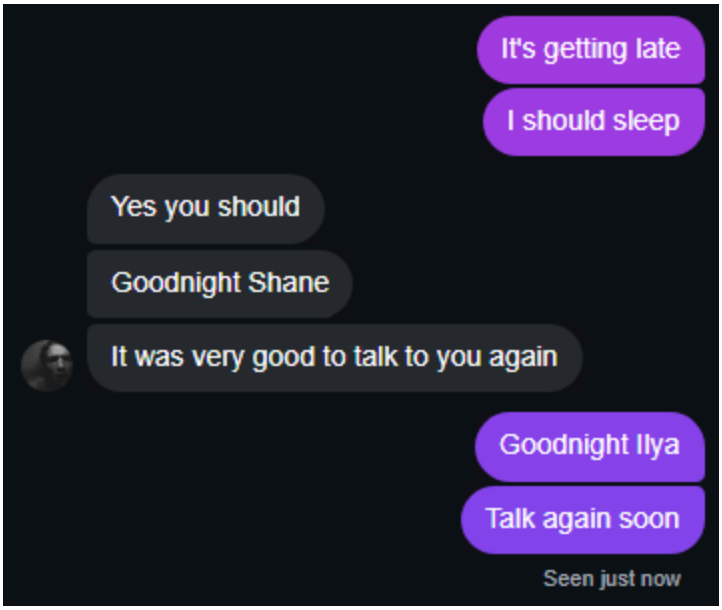
There's a long pause, and then a voice memo comes through. Shane's thumb hovers over the play button for a long moment before hitting it.



A voice filters through his phone's speakers, low and raspy, singing happy birthday. His accent is thick, and his voice is so much deeper than Shane remembers it being, but it's still distinctively *Ilya*. It makes something warm in Shane's gut, like striking a match and lighting a small piece of kindling.



Shane rubs at one of his eyes, stifling a yawn.



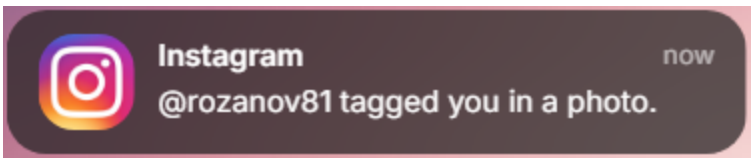
Shane's chest feels tight, but in a good way, as he gets up off the couch and heads into his bedroom. He strips out of his clothes and crawls into bed, asleep before his head hits the pillow.

The next morning finds him groggy and exhausted when his alarm goes off, ringing shrilly next to his ear. He pulls himself out of bed and fights through the hangover threatening his head, chugging a glass of water before getting himself dressed and heading down to the gym to get a workout in. His phone is constantly pinging, teammates and friends texting him happy birthday, so he silences it and locks in to the workout, turning up the volume in his headphones to drown out the rest of the world.

An hour and a half later, panting and drenched in sweat, he climbs off the stationary bike and wipes at his forehead with a towel. His mind is already focused on his itinerary for the day – he doesn't have practice, since Coach wants them to stay well rested in between playoff games, so he doesn't have to go to the rink. His parents had mentioned dinner again tonight, although Shane's not sure what it will be since he doesn't want to eat heavy before the game. Maybe he'll have them over, and they can relax and watch a movie or something…

He checks his phone as he waits for the elevator to take him upstairs, leaning against the wall. It's easy enough to respond 'thank you :)' to every person who has sent him a birthday text; if he doesn't, he feels like they'll be annoyed or upset with him, which he knows is a dumb thing but he does it anyway.

The notification from Instagram surprises him:



Shane's brows lift and he opens up the notification to find a picture that Ilya clearly took of a printed photo, holding it in the same way that he had the photograph of his mother. It's grainy

in the way that photos from the early 2000's were, the colors blooming brightly. In it, a younger version of Shane and a younger version of Ilya sit side by side at a table, a birthday cake in front of Shane. The lit candles glow, brightening up the center of the image and making the background fade away to nearly blackness.

The Shane in the photo is grinning at the camera, all his teeth showing as though the person taking the picture had told him to 'say cheese, honey' (Yuna, probably). Next to him, Ilya is also smiling, but he's looking at Shane as though there's nowhere he'd rather be than right by his side.

The photo is captioned:

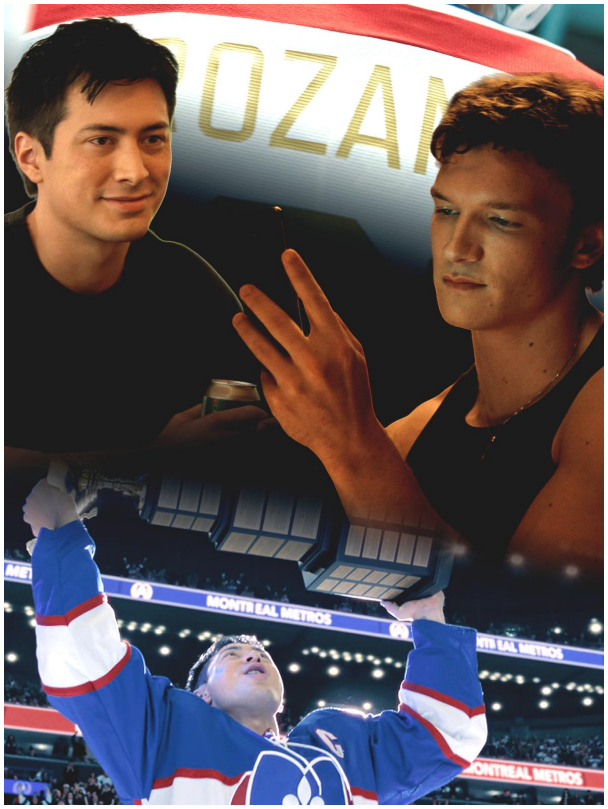
> с днем рождения / happy birthday

Shane smiles, liking the photo. After a moment, he reposts it to his story, then tucks his phone back into his pocket.

Chapter 2: two.

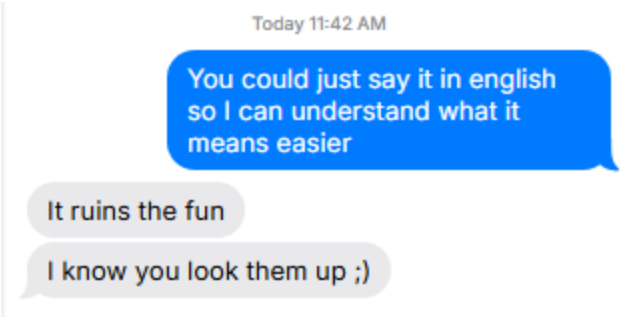
Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes



Shane might be a bit biased, but life gets *very* good for him after his birthday.

He and Ilya message *all the time*, with Ilya having sent Shane his phone number a few days after reconnecting. After a couple of days of awkwardness, the conversation a bit stilted, their friendship falls right back into a rhythm that Shane hadn't realized had been missing from his life. He remembers Ilya had always teased him as a child, something that he immediately continues doing as an adult, except his jokes are now much better timed and much better crafted than they had been. He can't count the amount of times he copy-pastes what Ilya says to him into Google Translate and chokes on the spit in his mouth because *what*.



Shane finds himself texting Ilya nearly every free moment he has. If he's not working out, not playing hockey, not reviewing film with Coach, and not asleep… he's texting Ilya. Sometimes the conversation is bland, just casual updates on their day. Other times, they'll send news articles, get into deep discussions about hockey or various workout techniques… they never run out of things to talk about. They'll usually debrief after every one of Shane's games too, with Ilya sometimes able to talk right after the game, but other times it waits til the next morning once he's had a chance to catch up and watch the highlights. Ilya is surprisingly well versed in the MLH, familiar with nearly every team (especially the ones that Shane is facing as Montreal inches closer and closer to the cup with each win).

They talk about Ilya's hockey games as well, but not so much, mostly because Ilya's team is already out of the playoffs in Russia. He teases Shane about how he's enjoying getting to relax, to spend time on his couch instead of at the rink, and how he's able to eat all the awful food that he wants. While the passion for the sport is there in Ilya's words, the enjoyment of the game itself (and especially the winning)... Shane thinks, secretly, that perhaps Ilya doesn't like playing hockey all that much, at least not for the team he's on. Ilya will sometimes say something off-handedly about his coach, or another teammate, that makes Shane's nose scrunch as he reads the text, unable to compare it to his own experiences.

Shane's favorite times, though, are when the conversation gets so heated that one of them will just say *fuck it* and call the other, the discussion too in-depth to continue just over text. They spend hours on the phone, and with Shane putting his phone on speakerphone and the conversation flowing as he goes about his evening, it's almost like he can pretend that Ilya is there with him. Sometimes, and he'd never admit to it, he'll shut his eyes and imagine it, that Ilya is sitting in the armchair across from the couch, settled into Shane's space as though there's been room for him there all along, long legs stretched out in front of him and grin on his face as they talk.

Nearly every single time they talk on the phone, Shane has to hold himself back from asking Ilya if he can buy him a plane ticket to Canada. For one, that's a whole hell of a lot to ask of someone – to just drop everything in their life and get on a plane and come halfway across the world. For another, he doesn't know how Ilya would take that sort of gift. Some people would be more than fine with accepting it, but Shane doesn't want to push. He just got Ilya back in his life, and he doesn't want to risk pushing him away. It stings that he doesn't know his friend as well as he should, and Shane has made it his mission to find out as much about Ilya as possible, cataloguing it away in the rolodex labeled 'Ilya' that now lives permanently in his brain.

And of course, as predicted by a majority of the analysts (and Ilya), the Voyageurs win the cup. The road to the final game is a hard fought one, with every single player on the team playing their to their absolute limits, fighting through injuries and exhaustion. Shane's body is absolutely worn out by the time he hoists the cup over his shoulders, holding it high above his head as the arena explodes in cheers around him. He doesn't think he'll ever tire of this feeling, of the rush that fills him knowing that he was able to play a role in bringing another cup to Montreal. It's exhilarating, and he hands the cup off to Hayden with a broad grin, one he reserves only for moments like this.

The players' families swarm out onto the ice and Shane wraps his mom in a tight hug, pulling back only to wipe happy tears from her cheeks. His father is up next, ducking his head to hide the dampness in his own eyes.

Sometimes when Shane lays awake at night, waiting for sleep to come, he'll allow his mind to sink down into a place that's not so comfortable. It will whisper things to him that make his stomach turn, wrap lies around his throat and squeeze until he has to fling the covers off of himself, sit up and take a long drink of water, and sometimes even get up and out of bed and walk laps around his bedroom until his mind clears. It tells him he's not good enough, he's a disappointment, he'll never make his parents proud of him.

Moments like this, though, are what drive those thoughts away, back into the shadows. Looking at Yuna and David now, where they stand next to him, his mom's head on his shoulder and his dad's hand on his back, Shane knows without a doubt that they *are* proud of him, practically overflowing with it.

He has to leave them in order to do media interviews on the ice, although he bows out pretty quickly so that he can shower. His sweat from the game has started to cool on his skin, leaving him feeling clammy and damp. He wants a hot shower, wants to be in comfortable clothes, and wants the off-season to be here *now*. The knowledge that in a few days he'll be headed up to the cottage for the summer is something he's been using to get himself through this last stretch of games.

Shane only stops at his locker quickly to strip out of his gear before disappearing into the showers. The water feels good as it rains down on him, and he stands underneath the warm spray for longer than he probably should. His muscles are already starting to ache, that bone-deep weariness that pops up near the end of playoffs every year threatening to set in. He lets himself drift a little, eyes shut – he hears some of the other guys come in and start to shower, but he pays them no mind.

"Holy *shit,* Hollzy–" Mitka claps Shane on the shoulder as he walks by him. "What a fuckin' game, huh?"

Someone has started to play music in the locker room – Shane can hear the thumping bass coming from what must be Couillard's bluetooth speaker. It echoes through the shower room, along with the sound of several of the guys singing along. He can't quite catch who all is singing, but it definitely sounds off-key.

"All thanks to you, Mitty," Shane says, pulling himself out of the near-trance he'd been in. He should probably actually get washed up before the media bursts into the locker room and any privacy is lost. "I can't believe you stopped that wraparound shot in the last minute, I don't think I could have handled going to OT–"

"No, bud, we got there because of *you*." Mitty scrubs at his hair, suds foaming around his hands. "Are you kiddin' me? That breakaway in the second period when we were down by two, I thought you were gonna lift off the fuckin' ice you were goin' so fast."

The party happening in the locker room spills into the showers, and any hopes of further conversation are immediately drowned out by celebration. Shane finds himself grinning as he

turns off the water, wrapping his towel around his waist, the happiness from his teammates contagious enough to overpower the exhaustion.

“Get your ass out here, Hollander–” It’s Hayden, shouting for him across the room. “I’ve got a bottle of champagne with your fuckin’ name on it.”

“I literally *just showered*, Hayd,” Shane groans, one arm up weakly to cover his head from the chance of being sprayed.

“No, to *drink*. Here.” Hayden presses the bottle into Shane’s hand. “It’s the off-season now. You can eat, drink, be merry, *whatever*. Loosen up a bit.” He grins as Shane sighs loudly, dramatically (for show, mostly) and lifts the bottle to his lips, taking a long swig from it.

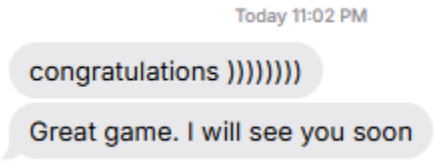
“Hell yeah, *Capitaine*!” JJ whoops from across the room.

Marcel pokes his head into the room, ducking under outstretched arms. “Hey, Shane – I need you to talk to the press in the tunnel in like ten minutes, if you can get yourself ready for that.”

“Yeah, sure–” Shane towels off his hair roughly, changing into comfortable clothes. He *could* put on the same suit and tie he’d shown up in, but the thought of wearing literally anything other than sweatpants and a t-shirt right now makes him want to actually throw up. Luckily, someone has stacked fresh championship shirts and Voyageurs branded sweatpants in everyone’s lockers, and so the choice is easy enough for him.

He drapes the towel over his head again to try and soak up a *little* bit more water from his hair (and to protect himself from the champagne that is being sprayed around the room), then reaches into the upper shelf of his locker and pulls out his phone.

Unsurprisingly, there’s a text from Ilya.



Shane frowns at that. *I’ll see you soon*? What the hell does that mean? Maybe he meant that he’d talk to Shane soon? Lost in translation, perhaps. He taps into the text box to type back, to lightheartedly tease Ilya about the slip-up, but–

“Shane? They’re ready for you.”

Sighing, he pockets his phone, then hangs the towel on the hook inside his locker and slides his feet into his sandals, following Marcel out of the locker room and into the tunnel. Despite being the one who’s always made to speak during them, he has never enjoyed press interviews, especially after games when he’s hungry and exhausted and just wants to go home. Luckily there’s a lot to talk about with this game – it had been hard fought, with the scoring bouncing back and forth, and so Shane is able to navigate the reporters’ questions

easily. He knows hockey and he knows the right things to say, and he just puts them together in a way that gets the reporters their sound bites for the evening news.

At some point Marcel steps in and finally, *finally* ushers Shane back to the locker room, just in time for the cup to arrive along with the photographers. He poses for pictures with the cup and with the team, shakes Coach's hand and does his captain's duty and makes what he hopes is a good speech that conveys how proud he is of their team… but he wants nothing more than to just leave, to get in his car and drive home. He even considers bowing out of brunch tomorrow with his parents, but they were insistent on celebrating him (or just getting brunch to celebrate the season being over, his mother had said on the phone yesterday, in the off chance that Montreal lost. Which they wouldn't).

So he goes through the motions, finally grabbing his bag and leaving once the party seems to have run its course. Brunch with his parents is a great way to dip out of having to go out bar hopping with some of the guys tomorrow, although as he leaves he tells them that if they're still out and about when he finishes up, maybe he'll join them. (He's lying.)

The car ride home is silent; Shane turns off the radio the second he slides into the car. Having it on is too much, and he needs this time of peace and quiet, focusing on the drive and nothing else. It's enough to help him recenter himself, so by the time he pulls into his parking space he feels much better.

The doorman waves him into the building with a joyful congratulations, gesturing to the Voyageurs pennant hanging behind the front desk with a bright grin. The television in the lobby is on, coverage of the game still going strong.

His apartment is dark, and he flicks on the small lamp by the couch before dropping all of his things by the door, trudging into his bedroom. It's unlike him to leave a mess like that, and if it had been a normal game he'd likely have cleaned out his bag and tossed his clothes in the laundry, but tonight he's *tired* and just wants to sleep. There are other things he needs to do too, although he can't *quite* remember what they are… but they'll all be fine to deal with in the morning, he's sure.

He doesn't even bother to change out of his clothes, just flops down onto the bed face-first and shuts his eyes. Blindly, he reaches out with one hand and grabs for his phone charger; the sound of his phone acknowledging the connection is the last thing he hears before he drifts off into dreamland.

—

The spot where Shane's parents have chosen for brunch, one of their regular places to visit when they're in town to see him, is close enough to his apartment that he doesn't even have to drive. It's one of his favorite things about living in downtown Montreal – anything he could ever want is close enough to get to on foot. He pops in a pair of earbuds and puts on some music, not just to keep him company as he goes, but also for plausible deniability in case someone recognizes him out on the street. He's got a hat on, and sunglasses, but he also is painfully aware that in a world where he's just led this city's hockey team to the cup, he's likely to be noticed.

It's not that he hates when people recognize him and ask for a picture — in fact, sometimes it feels good, especially when it's a little kid who clearly looks up to him. It's just… he's always felt extraordinarily awkward about it. He's thankful that he's chronically offline when someone gets a rare photo with him and shares it on the internet, because that means he doesn't have to see it – at least, not at first. Unfortunately for him, it always goes viral enough (at least in the Montreal social circles) that he'll have his teammates teasing him about looking like a dork the next day at practice. Or worse, his mother will message him reminding him he needs to wear more branding for some of the partners he's connected with for advertising.

He pushes open the door to the restaurant, thankful that it's relatively empty inside for once. The hostess smiles at him and gestures towards the back with a soft "Congratulations!". As Shane heads in, he takes off his sunglasses and hooks them in the front of his shirt, focusing on not dropping them on the ground… which is why he doesn't notice until he's nearly at the table that there's someone sitting there already with their back to him and their head lowered, someone who is very clearly not either of his parents. His parents aren't there at *all*, actually.

Shit. Is he at the wrong table? Did he misunderstand where the hostess had directed him to go? His eyes dart around, searching, but he doesn't see anyone familiar in the restaurant. The person pushes back from the table, chair squeaking as they stand up, and suddenly Shane finds himself staring at Ilya Rozanov in the flesh, who is looking at him with a hesitant, almost nervous, smile on his face.

"Oh my *god*."

Shane's mind goes blank as he stands there, frozen, mouth agape so wide that it feels like it's on the *floor*, because what do you mean Ilya is standing here, right here in front of him and not all the way on the other side of the world in Russia? Just the other day Shane had hung up from a four hour call with him and had immediately looked up the cost of a plane ticket from Russia (again) because even though he knows it's not a good idea, he just *wants*. What he wants, he's not sure, but whatever it is, it's curled in his gut like a snake ready to strike.

"Hi," Ilya says, almost shyly, and it's that now-familiar voice that spurs Shane into motion. He all but launches himself forward, wrapping his arms around Ilya tightly in a hug. He can count on one hand the amount of times he's gone out of his way to initiate casual touch with someone other than his parents, let alone a hug, other than on the ice. He'll tolerate it from his friends just as long as is acceptable, ducking out from underneath arms casually thrown around, and stepping back from hugs before they last longer than a couple of seconds. But now, he doesn't hesitate at all.

"Oh my *god*," he breathes incredulously, squeezing tightly. "You're *here*."

Ilya chuckles as his arms lift to hug Shane back; Shane feels the low, rumbling vibrations of laughter against his chest. It's familiar and foreign at the same time, a sound Shane has only heard through his phone speaker.

"Yes," he says, "I am here." His palm is warm where it rests against Shane's shoulderblade, steady and grounding. Shane wants very much to stay right here, in Ilya's arms, forever.

"*How*?!"

"I, ahh–" Ilya pauses as he steps back a little, smiling. "I sent your mother an Instagram message. She was very happy to hear from me. To help me plan this." He waves a hand loosely, encompassing the restaurant.

"So brunch was *your* idea." Shane rolls his eyes fondly. "I was gonna tell her I wanted to cancel. Now I'm glad I didn't."

"Me too. It was a long flight, I am glad I did not do it for nothing." Ilya sinks back down into his chair, and Shane settles into the one across from him. "It is good to see you, Shane. In person." The smile on his face softens.

"I can't fucking believe it." Shane feels like at some point he's going to wake up from a dream. He can't stop staring at Ilya, as though he'll blink and Ilya will disappear, and then Shane will wake up in his bed at home and this will have all been a horribly cruel nightmare.

"You look…" Ilya pauses, staring at Shane as he searches for the words to say. "You look as though you have seen a ghost."

Shane shakes his head, one hand lifting to cover his lips. "I didn't – I mean, I knew we'd get to see each other in person *someday*, but I wasn't expecting today. It's *surreal,* is what it is." He feels like he should pinch himself to check if he's dreaming.

"Yes. I… when I left Canada, before, I did not think I would ever see you again." Ilya's smile falters at that, and he lowers his gaze to the table in front of them.

"Me either. I was devastated when you left."

"I did not want to go. My father… he could not stay in the house. My mother wanted to live in Canada, but my father never did. When she died, he got us tickets back to Russia that night." Ilya frowns. "Was so quick, I think he… maybe he planned to go back anyways, even if she wanted to stay."

"Can I… can I ask what happened? I remember seeing an ambulance…"

"An accident." Ilya's face twists, so brief that if Shane had blinked he'd have missed it. His hand comes up to touch the cross that hangs around his neck, twisting it between thumb and forefinger in an unconscious movement. "They were not happy. My mother and father, I mean."

"I'm sorry."

Shane interlocks his fingers in front of him to stop himself from reaching out to take Ilya's free hand, but *god* he wants to. He thinks back to their shared childhood, about how it had always been Ilya's mother spending time with him and never his father. It was always Irina getting them off the bus, taking them out for ice cream, bringing Ilya to Shane's travel hockey games… Ilya's father had been there, but never really present. He'd spent most of his

time in his office when Shane was over, or in another room, only showing his face if he needed something from Ilya or Irina. He never came over to Shane's house for dinner when Irina and Ilya would. Shane had been intimidated by him, and had avoided him at every chance he could.

And what Ilya is implying now does not sound good at all.

"Is okay. She would be happy we are here together now." Ilya's lips curl at the corners.

A waitress steps up to their table, and takes their brunch order – Shane orders quickly, having had the same meal every other time he's been to this place. Ilya needs to skim the menu a little more closely, but eventually settles on just getting the same thing as Shane.

"I'm on kind of a weird diet," Shane says apologetically. "Or rather – I was, I guess I can chill out on it a bit since it's the off-season now. Anyways, it's… I don't know if you'll enjoy it–"

"I am sure I will like it," Ilya reassures Shane as the waitress leaves with their menus. "Is fine. Don't worry about me, I will eat anything."

"How long are you here?" The words are out of Shane's mouth before he can stop them. In his head, the question makes sense. If Ilya is here only for a few days, then Shane can show him around and treat him to an *actual* good meal in Montreal. So of course, logically, it follows that he'd ask how long Ilya is staying. For Ilya, though, he's sure the question comes out of nowhere.

"For at least four years." Ilya takes it in stride, lifting his glass of water to his lips and taking a long drink.

"*What?*" Shane nearly chokes on his own spit. He'd expected Ilya to say a few days, or if they were lucky, a week. In his mind, he's already started to plan out the places he can take Ilya to show him around Montreal. Good food, sure, but there's so much else to see here.

"You can *not* say anything." Ilya turns and looks over first one shoulder and then another, as though there's someone spying on them, lurking behind one of the fake potted plants scattered around the room. "I am signing with Ottawa in a few days."

"*WHAT?*" Shane is sure he looks like a cartoon character, with how wide open his eyes are. "You mean you'll–" Ilya will be in the same country, the same league, the same *division* as Shane. He will be right down the road.

"Yes, Shane, *shhhh*–" Ilya's eyes are wide; he looks like he's one more loud outburst away from reaching over the table and covering Shane's mouth with his hand.

"Oh my *god*–"

"You have said that a *lot*."

"Well there's *clearly* a lot happening, Ilya, oh my–" Shane clamps his jaw shut before he says it again. "Fuck you, don't even say it." A pause, as he processes, then– "How long have you

known?! And you didn't tell me??" It's false outrage, no actual hurt behind the words. Shane knows what contracts are like, that they're kept under lock and key until the pen is pressed to paper and the documents are signed. Ilya likely *couldn't* tell him.

"A little while. Not long, but… I wanted to keep it secret. You finding out this way is better than any other way." There's a sparkle in Ilya's eyes, one that Shane remembers from childhood. It would be there whenever something that Ilya had badly wanted was finally coming to fruition.

Shane is sure the smile on his face is broad, wider than it should be, but he can't control it. He's so fucking *happy*. "Ottawa is only two hours from Montreal. We'll play against each other quite a bit."

Ilya nods. "So I've heard." His own lips twitch. "If someone was to be contacted by multiple MLH teams, that may have been… important to them. Being near Montreal."

"Really?" Shane grips the edge of his seat so that he doesn't throw himself across the table.

"Yes." Ilya opens his mouth to say more, but the waitress returns with their drinks, setting them down on the table before disappearing back towards the kitchens.

"And– your dad? Your brother? They were fine with you just… leaving Russia?" Shane wonders what it would be like, if he was in Ilya's shoes. If he had been presented with the offer of a lifetime, to move halfway across the world to a completely different country, to be handed an opportunity he literally could not refuse… but it would mean leaving his parents behind. That would be one of the hardest things he'd ever have to do.

"My father is dead. My brother is…" Ilya turns his head, sniffing. "мусор." The word sounds as though it tastes bitter in his mouth, his upper lip curling slightly in disgust.

"I… don't have Google Translate."

"Garbage," Ilya translates, shaking his head. If Shane didn't know him, didn't grow up with him, he'd think the look on Ilya's face was anger. But Shane recognizes the deep, painful sadness there for what it is. "I am done with Russia. Am never going back. There is nothing for me there."

Shane nods, ducking his head. It's none of his business, at least not over brunch. "I'm sorry about your father."

Ilya shakes his head. "Me too." He exhales heavily. "But it is done. And now I am here." He clearly doesn't want to talk about it, Shane can tell, and so he doesn't pry. Perhaps later they'll have a little while to sit and talk, to catch up on their lives outside of what they've shared over the phone.

"Where are you staying?"

"A hotel in Montreal. Just for a week. Then I go to Ottawa for signing."

Shane's heart leaps in his chest. "So… you're saying we have some time, then? To… hang out? Catch up?"

"...yes." Ilya's expression brightens significantly. "We have time." And really, it's not just one week. They have four *years*, assuming that Ilya doesn't leave after his contract is up.

"You could, um." Shane sips his ginger ale. "You could always stay with me, if you wanted to. Cancel your hotel. And then in between when you sign and when the season starts, too. While you're looking for a place in Ottawa."

Ilya blinks, lips parting slightly. "I… would not want to, ahh..." He pauses, considering. "Overstep."

"You wouldn't be." Shane shakes his head. "I think it would be really nice. We'd get to spend a lot of time together, and you wouldn't have to live out of a hotel room." The thought of Ilya existing in his apartment, of getting to spend literally his entire day with him… it's almost too much for Shane to process. So he tucks the thought away for later – he'll deal with it when he's alone.

"I– if you are sure."

Shane watches as Ilya's lips twitch, trying to tamp down the smile that threatens to break across his face. "Of course I'm sure," he says. "It will be good to make up for lost time."

There is a pause, as Ilya's brow furrows, and then he speaks. "Can we also go to the cottage?"

Shane's smile softens. "Really?"

Ilya nods. "Yes. I have thought about it a lot in the past few years. I would like to go and see it again."

"Well, it's not the same one–"

Ilya's lips part in surprise. "What? Did you move?" He looks genuinely concerned, and Shane can't help but laugh softly.

"No, I– well, I mean, kind of." Shane lifts a shoulder. "I have my own place now, on the other side of the lake from my parents."

The relief on Ilya's face is palpable. "I knew something was not the same, from your picture. I did not know what, but that makes sense." He nods, almost to himself.

"It's better," Shane can't help but add. "My place. Theirs is nice and all, but… mine is better." It makes his heart flutter, how much Ilya is looking forward to this. That after all this time, he still remembers how special it had been when they'd spent time there, and he'd been thinking about it. Shane files that away to ask about later.

"Yes, well. You have hockey money now," Ilya says, teasing. He nudges at Shane's leg under the table with his foot. "Of *course* yours is better."

Their food arrives, and Ilya looks down at the dish set in front of him, his eyebrows raising. It's Shane's usual, a quinoa bowl with egg whites and smoked salmon.

"Shane…"

"Hm?"

"Do you *always* eat like a bird?"

Chapter End Notes

Trying to write about the Voyageurs in a nice way was literally like pulling teeth for me, so this was a bit of a struggle, but I did my best.

Part three coming sooner rather than later, I hope, since it's already mostly written! :)

Chapter 3: three.

Chapter Notes

PLEASE MIND THE TAGS there has been a bit of an UPDATE these boys just do what they want (and apparently what they want is to make this fic explicit whoops)

I'm normally a fade to black girlie, so if the sex is bad that's probably why HAHA I'm so sorry in advance, I tried

I've also uploaded the photos I've been using to promo each chapter of this fic to the beginning of each chapter, just because I'm using Photoshop skills that I haven't had to touch since I was in middle school, so why not show them off

Ilya makes himself at home almost immediately upon arriving at Shane's apartment. After toeing off his shoes at the front door and depositing his suitcases in the guest bedroom, he wanders around and looks in every room, pokes his head into Shane's fridge and pulls out a bottle of water, then flops down on the couch with a grunt.

"Are you jet-lagged?" Shane hadn't even thought to ask that at the restaurant – he'd been so preoccupied with *Ilya* that he hadn't considered that Ilya had just likely gotten off a nearly 20 hour flight.

“I slept on plane,” Ilya comments, stifling a yawn. “I am tired, yes, but just from sitting for so long. I am fine to do whatever you want to do.”

Shane eyes where Ilya sits, legs up on the coffee table, head back against the couch cushions. He looks comfortable, relaxed, his eyes half-lidded and lips parted as though he could very easily drift off into sleep at any moment.

Shane has to fight the urge to drop down onto the couch and curl up next to him like a cat. He imagines it would be comfortable, Ilya’s arm gentle around his shoulders, the solidness of his body like a weighted blanket.

He sits down on the couch instead, close enough that he can feel the heat from Ilya’s body but not close enough to touch. “Maybe we… hang out here for today, watch a movie or something, and then if we’re feeling up for it later we can go for a drive and I’ll show you the city?”

Ilya nods. “Mmm, sounds nice. What movie?”

Shane flips through Netflix, settling on a documentary about animals. It’s slow paced, narrated by a British man with a soothing voice… It's a purposeful choice, exactly the kind of documentary that would put him to sleep. If he was tired.

Which, of course, he isn’t. He’s well rested, or at least as well rested as a hockey player who just won the cup can be.

Ilya, on the other hand, is not well rested. He is jetlagged, operating on a time zone that’s eight hours ahead. He falls asleep fifteen minutes in.

Shane doesn’t notice at first, because despite selecting the documentary because it’s boring, he’s too engrossed in the way that the male greater sage-grouse does the weirdest fucking thing with its chest to attract a mate. But at some point in between that and the narrator’s deep dive into why male birds and female birds look so different, Shane becomes conscious of a weight on his shoulder.

He looks down, the tip of his nose brushing against a head of blond curls. Ilya is leaning against him heavily, eyes shut and lips parted as he snores just loud enough to be heard over the show. He’d been making comments at the beginning, jokes about the animals on the screen looking dumb, but as the documentary played on, his interjections became quieter, few and far between, until they had tapered off entirely.

Shane can’t help but smile, shifting ever so carefully to tug the blanket down off the back of the couch, draping it over Ilya’s shoulders. Ilya adjusts himself, exhaling heavily as he scoots a little closer, breath tickling the hairs on Shane’s arm.

And *fuck*, if that doesn’t make butterflies soar in Shane’s stomach.

He’s not sure when the crush (because yes, that’s exactly what it is and he’d be kidding himself if he tried to label it as anything else) on Ilya had started, but he knows it’s there now.

He feels it in his brain, his heart, his fucking *soul*. It's like Ilya is a match that lit his entire being aflame; it's too much and at the same time, nowhere close to being enough.

He doesn't know if Ilya feels the same way, and honestly he doubts it. They've only been reconnected for a few months, and even though they've texted or talked almost every day, other than today it's not like they've spent time in person together since they were twelve. And it's not like Shane can just *ask*. Not like he would, either.

But.

But Ilya left Russia. Ilya is signing with Ottawa because it is close to Montreal, where Shane is. Ilya is *here,* in his apartment, on his couch. That has to count for something, right?

Shane watches the documentary for a little while longer, but his own tiredness (because okay, maybe he's *not* well-rested) creeps up on him until he catches his eyes closing involuntarily, head drooping forward. The combination of the soothing narration and Ilya's deep breaths in his ear are enough to lull him into a nap of his own.

He dreams, nondescript hockey games where he chases the puck on an ice rink made of glass fading into interior design meetings where his decorator pitches him an open concept living room filled with loons, the sound of their cries enough to bring him a little closer to awareness. He's moving, he thinks, shifting through space and time, and as galaxies burst across his consciousness, he lets himself drift off to sleep again.

When Shane finally opens his eyes, he's in a completely different position than where he'd started. His head is pillowed on something firm and steady, his body wrapped in soft warmth. He inhales, smelling cedar and woodsmoke and something else that he can't quite place.

"Mmmm…" The body beneath him–because yes, it is a body–shifts, Ilya's arm tightening a little where it rests on Shane's back, palm splayed out flat against his linen shirt. "I think we slept through dinner." The words rumble through Ilya's chest, sounding loud in Shane's ear where it's pressed up against the front of Ilya's shirt. He can hear the double-thud beat of Ilya's heart.

He lifts a hand to rub at his eyes, yawning involuntarily despite having slept for– oh *shit*, they did sleep through dinner. He grabs for his phone where it rests on the coffee table, checking the time, decidedly not thinking about how he's laying on top of Ilya, their bodies pressed together from head to toe, their legs tangled together beneath the blanket.

He doesn't make any attempt to move from Ilya's arms; Ilya doesn't pull away either.

"It's nearly seven, holy shit–" Shane shakes his head. "I can't believe we wasted the whole afternoon–"

"Mmm, not a waste."

Ilya's fingers are moving, dancing across Shane's back as though they're trying to write out words. It feels comfortable, familiar, and Shane shuts his eyes as Ilya's hand slides up and into his hair, fingertips rubbing at his scalp.

“Is this okay?” Ilya asks.

Shane nods. “Feels good,” he mumbles, turning his head to smile against Ilya’s chest.

“Good.” Shane thinks he can hear an echoing smile in Ilya’s voice.

They eventually get up to eat dinner, although it’s nothing special (at least, according to Shane). He has ingredients to make tuna melts, and while he initially suggests it as a joking alternative to ordering something for delivery, Ilya lights up the second that the words ‘tuna melt’ leave Shane’s mouth.

“Seriously?” Shane lifts a brow.

“Yes. I have not had a tuna melt since I was very young and your father would make them for us.” Ilya slides into one of the bar stools, leaning forward on his elbows.

And so Shane makes them grilled tuna melts for dinner. They’re not his best work – they’re slightly burnt on one side, and he’s running low on kewpie mayo, but it doesn’t seem to matter to Ilya. They sit side by side at the kitchen counter and eat, stealing glances at each other when they think the other isn’t looking.

“Is it okay? Just like you remembered?” Shane doesn’t know why he’s nervous, but he *really* wants Ilya to say that he likes the tuna melt.

Ilya nods, mouth full. He chews, swallows, wipes his mouth with the back of one finger, then: “Just like I remembered.” He meets Shane’s gaze, and holds it.

Fighting through the urge to duck his head shyly and break eye contact, Shane keeps his eyes locked on Ilya’s. “Good,” he says. “I’m glad it lives up to your expectations.”

—

They play tourist for the next week as Shane shows Ilya all of the parts of Montreal that have made his time there so special. They wander through Vieux-Montréal without a destination in mind, walking shoulder to shoulder, fingertips brushing every once in a while. The butterflies in Shane’s stomach continue to flit around; he continues to ignore them.

They end up in a park by the St. Lawrence River, settling on a bench, conversation flowing between them as it always does. Only this time, they’re together, and Shane is able to watch Ilya’s face instead of just listening to his voice. It’s what he has always longed for, Ilya sitting right next to him, close enough that Shane can reach out and set a hand on Ilya’s arm if he wants to.

There, on the bench, Ilya tells Shane more about his father and his brother. He stares out at the water as he speaks, voice dull as he recounts how, despite his best attempts, his father had eventually lost his battle with dementia. He tells Shane how hockey had been his escape from it all, but his brother had turned it into leverage and had spent the last ten years draining Ilya’s savings account dry, wasting any spare funds on gambling and cocaine.

He tells Shane that Alexei's demands had only increased when he'd walked in on Ilya in bed with his hockey coach's son. It hadn't been a serious thing, just something casual, but Alexei had no way to know that. He only knew what he saw, and what he saw was enough for Ilya to know he needed to get out.

He'd been planning to go soon anyways – he'd been talking with the scouts, and the deal with Ottawa was basically done. The timeline had only accelerated a bit, was all. After a phone call that Ilya had tried very hard to keep from being a frantic one, Ottawa management was able to accelerate his travel visa and permits to enter Canada, and once he got the thumbs up from them, he'd packed everything that he had into his suitcases and fled for the airport.

The timing, him being here for Shane's final game… it had all been coincidence. Everything had just worked out.

Shane's hand finds its way into Ilya's, something that happens almost subconsciously. By the time he realizes, Ilya's fingers are tight around his, not letting go.

"You said there's nothing left for you in Russia," Shane says quietly, understanding settling deep in his gut.

"That's because there is not." Ilya shuts his eyes. "Not anymore."

They sit there, hand in hand, until it gets dark.

—

The pair go for morning runs in Mount Royal Park, Ilya keeping pace with Shane easily. It lets Shane take a step back, considering Ilya for the first time as a rival hockey player, his future opponent. He wonders what it will be like to play against Ilya on the ice, whether they'll trade chirps over the puck at faceoff, if Ilya will check him into the glass or if he'll go easy on him… he finds himself energized at the thought of it, of the friendly competition that he knows will brew between them. He doesn't have that with any other players in the league, despite knowing a few of them fairly decently. They're all fun to play against, but they're on different levels from him – not in a bad way, just… different.

They eat out at Shane's favorite off-season restaurants, where Ilya tries real Canadian maple syrup (which he likes) and real Canadian poutine (which he doesn't). Evenings after dinner are spent on Shane's couch, something inconsequential playing on mute on the television while they talk. It's like they never run out of things to say to each other, staying up late into the night until they're both fighting to keep their eyes open.

They talk a *lot* about hockey. This time, Shane gets Ilya to open up more about his time spent playing for the KHL. After some cajoling, Ilya pulls up some game footage on his laptop, hooking it up to the television so that they can watch together. And Shane finally gets to see him play.

It takes the breath from his lungs, because Ilya is fucking *incredible* at hockey. He's fast, quick on his feet in a way that Shane has only seen from… well, himself. He expertly dodges

other players, makes risky decisions for the sake of high reward goals, and Shane finds himself on the edge of his seat, hooked on the game as though it's live and not recorded.

He can see Ilya watching him from the corner of his eye, instead of the game, gauging his reaction.

"Ottawa doesn't even know how fucking lucky they *are*," Shane says after the game ends. "Holy *shit*, Ilya."

Ilya ducks his head, trying (and failing) to hide a smile. His cheeks flush pink, although Shane isn't about to say anything about it. When he meets Shane's gaze again, his grin has shifted to one that's a little more cocky, a little more of what Shane is sure he'll see across from him on the ice, bending to take a face-off. "It will be a fun season, yes?"

—

When it finally comes time for Ilya to go to Ottawa to sign his contract, Shane insists on driving him there.

"I can take the train," Ilya says with a wave of his hand as he gets into the passenger seat of Shane's car.

"Why would you take the train when I can just drive you?" Shane shakes his head, starting his car. They've been having this argument, if one can call it that, for hours, long enough that any trains that would have taken Ilya to Ottawa have long since departed. "I'll just drop you at the arena and then go visit my parents for a bit. Text me when you're done and I'll come get you."

It's an excuse to spend more time with Ilya, is what it is.

Shane ends up having lunch with his parents, and then dinner, Ilya's text to pick him up arriving around ten at night. He remembers what it had been like that first time visiting the Voyageurs. They'd showed him the entire facility, had him pose for pictures with what felt like every single person he'd encountered. And while Ilya hadn't been a number one draft pick like Shane had, he was sure he was getting a similar treatment.

"Sorry," Ilya says with a grimace, thunking his head back against the headrest after sliding into the car, looking exhausted. "There were pictures and interviews and tours, and they measured me for my gear…"

"Did it go well?" Shane pulls away from the curb.

"Is a bad team, but now they have me. We will win the cup next year."

Shane snorts. "We're officially rivals now, Rozanov. There's no chance in hell you're winning the cup."

"Mmm, I like it when you chirp at me like a bird. First bird food, now this– what else? Do you have a nest somewhere you're not showing me?"

“Fuck off.” Shane grins.

“Where are we going?”

“Oh.” Shane didn’t realize Ilya had been paying *that* much attention. “Well, it’s late. I figured we’d spend the night up here instead of having to drive all the way back. If that’s okay?”

Ilya lifts his head to look over at Shane. “At your parents’?”

Shane nods.

“Yes. *Yes*.”

It’s obvious when Ilya recognizes where they are – he stares out the window, breath fogging up the glass as he takes in things he last saw in his memories. It must feel surreal, seeing things that he never thought he’d see again.

The second that Shane parks the car in his parents’ driveway, Ilya is up and out of the car. Shane eyes him as he stands waiting for Shane to turn the car off and get out, looking for all intents and purposes like he wants to sprint up to the front door of the house at full speed.

Ilya noticeably does not turn to look at the house he used to live in. It’s painted a different color now, and there’s an extra addition over the garage, but it still mostly looks the same as it had eighteen years ago. Shane feels like if he looks too long at the front door he’ll see it open and Irina step out onto the porch, her blonde hair blowing in a gentle breeze as she bends down to tend to the rose bushes still growing next to the front steps. He wonders, for a very brief moment, if he’d see her ghost standing in the upstairs window of what used to be her bedroom, one hand pressed to the glass, tendrils of ice spreading out around the spectral handprint.

“Come *on*–” Ilya says, breaking Shane’s reverie as he urges him to hurry up; once Shane is out of the car, Ilya all but runs up to the front door and knocks.

“I have a *key*–” Shane’s voice cuts off when the door opens and Ilya steps forward right into Yuna Hollander’s waiting arms.

“Oh *honey,* it’s so good to see you again.” She holds him gently, one hand cupping the back of his head as though he were still the twelve-year-old boy that he had been when she’d last seen him. Instead of having to bend at the waist to hold him like this, she almost has to stand on her tiptoes. Shane watches as Ilya ducks his head, burying his face against her shoulder, his arms around her tightly.

He busies himself at the car, pretending to need to go back to grab something just long enough to give them privacy; his eyes are *definitely* not wet when he emerges from digging in his glovebox. The hug ends and Ilya steps back, looking at Yuna as though she has personally hung the moon in the sky and sprinkled stars all around the universe, just for him.

“It feels very good to be home,” Ilya says, his voice thick.

Home, Shane thinks. He still considers this, a place where he only lived for a few years of his life, to be home. Not Russia, where he was born. Here. With Shane and his family. *Here.*

"Come inside," she tells him in response, one hand on his shoulder gently. "Come on, Shane, I've got some hot water boiling. Tea will be ready soon."

—

Ilya's reunion with David goes about the same as it did with Yuna – that is, he steps right up to Shane's father and is almost instantly enveloped in a tight hug. Shane's not sure if he's ever seen his father hug anyone that tightly, but Ilya is squeezing David back just as much.

Shane wonders if Ilya is thinking of his own father (and what they might have been if life had been different) at this moment, watching from the doorway where he stands with his mother leaning her head against his shoulder. Ilya's shoulders are shaking, very slightly, and Shane can see his father's lips moving as he murmurs something reserved only for Ilya in his ear as his hand rubs circles against Ilya's shoulderblades.

"We're so glad you both came here tonight," Yuna says quietly. "Seeing you two together, it's… it's something special. I really never thought we'd see him again."

Across the room, David pulls back, holding Ilya in front of him. They're still talking quietly.

"I'm still in shock," Shane says, exhaling slowly. "And he's playing for *Ottawa*, he's not going anywhere–"

Yuna smiles gently. "Only two hours away from Montreal."

"I will be here every night for dinner." Ilya walks over, wiping at his eyes. "I think you will get sick of me."

"We could never." Yuna reaches for his hands, squeezing them between her own. "We could *never*."

—

"I don't know if my mom thought things out when she said we could stay here overnight," Shane says, standing in the doorway of his childhood bedroom. It looks almost exactly the same as it had when he was a kid, from the trophies on shelves and medals hanging on the walls all the way to the twin bed up against one wall. The comforter on the bed is different, a muted gray instead of the garish red one he remembers having as a child, but that seems to be the only difference.

Regardless, Shane isn't sure how two fully grown men would be expected to share a twin sized bed, let alone two fully grown hockey players, one of whom stands nearly 6'3".

"I, ahh–" Ilya eyes the bed. "I can sleep on the floor, I don't mind–"

"No," Shane says with a shake of his head. "Let me– I'll go see if she has an air mattress or something." He wanders off to find his mother, knowing full well there is *not* an air mattress

in this house, or at least not one he knows about.

In reality, he needs to step out of the room for a minute to take a breather. His palms are sweaty at the thought of sharing a bed with Ilya. He tries to push it out of his brain, so that he can get back to normal, but it's not working. All he can think about is what it would be like to sleep next to him. And he knows they took a nap together, he knows what it feels like… but an accidental nap is not intentional sleeping. It is completely different, a different beast entirely.

As expected, Yuna does not have an air mattress. She offers the couch, but Shane knows from years of sleeping out in the living room when he's been sick that it's not the most comfortable place to sleep. His back twinges in anticipation, and he shakes his head and gives her a good night hug before returning to the bedroom.

Ilya is sitting on the edge of the bed, a framed photo in his hands, staring down at it with an unreadable expression on his face.

"What is it?" Shane walks over, lowering himself to sit next to Ilya. The bed dips; their thighs touch.

Ilya shows him the photo wordlessly, turning it so that Shane can see past the glare from the bedside lamp. It's an action shot from back when Shane played travel hockey; maybe he's ten in the photo, or even eleven. He's in full gear, mid-game, stick lifted back as he gets ready to take a shot on goal. The determination on his face is clear even then, he realizes, looking at a younger version of himself that he hasn't looked too closely at in a long time. The set of his brow is the same, he thinks, and the tightness in his jaw. He's seen a grown-up version of it hundreds of times when the team's photographer shares the official game photos.

And really, Shane has seen this photo a hundred times too. His mom has had it in his room for years, although Shane has never really given it too much attention.

But now… the tip of Ilya's index finger taps the glass, not on top of Shane's figure but the crowd behind him. Shane ducks his head, peering closer, and–

"Oh my god, is that *you*?"

Ilya nods. "My mother and I, we came to almost every one of your games." He sounds wistful as he loses himself in the memory. "She would buy me a hot dog and popcorn, and we would scream and cheer for you every time you scored a goal." He smiles to himself. "She would always make sure that I had a warm hat on."

Shane opens his mouth to speak, but Ilya looks up from the reverie he'd fallen into and beats him to it.

"No air mattress?"

Shane shakes his head. "No. I'll take the floor, I'll just pile some blankets–"

“It’s your bed, Shane, I’m not going to make you sleep on the floor.” Ilya frowns. “We are adults, yes? We will just… make do.” He stands up, hands pressed to his lower back as he stretches – it pops, and he lets out a soft sigh. “I will be back.”

“Where are you going?”

Ilya lifts a brow. “To piss. Is that okay?”

“Fuck off, go–” Shane swats at Ilya’s shoulder as he walks by, disappearing out the door. He sits on the bed until he hears the bathroom door shut down the hall, then exhales quickly. Shit. Okay. This will be fine.

He has a handful of clothes squirreled away in his old dresser, and he digs through them until he finds a threadbare McGill t-shirt and a pair of loose shorts that might be big enough to fit Ilya. He drops them down on the bed and changes into a pair of old basketball shorts and a tank top, then plugs his phone in on the desk and crawls into bed up against the wall, tucking himself under the covers.

Ilya is yawning as he walks back into the room, scratching at his chest. He’s shirtless, his pants low enough around his hips that it shows off the lines that lead Shane’s eyes lower, *lower*… low enough that he averts his gaze quickly once he realizes that he’s staring. He isn’t looking at Ilya anymore, his gaze fixed on the sheets gripped tightly in his hands, and he thinks he hears Ilya chuckle but he’s not sure. He *is* sure that his face is bright red; it *has* to be, with the way it feels like it’s on fire.

“I set you out some clothes,” Shane says after a moment, finally daring to glance back at Ilya just in time to see him turn away from Shane and pull down his pants to change. The sight of his bare ass nearly makes Shane launch backwards into the wall, and *really*, what did he think Ilya was going to do, go into the bathroom again just to change? He’s seen plenty of men naked before – it comes with the territory when you play professional hockey, after all – but this feels different. More intimate. Probably because they’re in Shane’s room, in Shane’s house, about to be in Shane’s bed…

But he doesn’t look away. He should *really* look away. But he doesn’t.

The shorts are a bit too loose, but Ilya makes it work. The t-shirt, however, is too tight. Shane watches Ilya pull it on, shift his shoulders uncomfortably, and then tug it up and over his head with a frown. He folds it loosely and sets it aside on the nightstand, then reaches out and flicks off the lamp, plunging the room into darkness.

Shane feels, rather than sees, Ilya slide into the bed next to him, trying to find a comfortable spot. Their bodies touch from their shoulders all the way down to their toes, and Shane lets out a startled yelp when Ilya’s bare feet (that are, somehow, the temperature of icebergs) come into contact with his legs. He can feel every inch of Ilya’s body next to him – the way his chest rises and falls as he breathes, the tickle of Ilya’s leg hair against his own legs, the puffs of warmth from Ilya’s lips…

Oh Shane is *so* fucked.

Ilya laughs softly. “You’re taking up too much room,” he says, his voice loud in the otherwise quiet room. “Turn on your side.”

“Um. Facing you or away from you–” It comes out awkwardly, and he feels his face heat up again, but Ilya doesn’t seem to mind.

“Facing me,” he says, as though he has a plan, and so Shane does just that. He rolls over onto his side, and Ilya efficiently slots their legs together, pulling Shane down so that he’s laying halfway on top of Ilya. It’s an echo of their nap on the couch on Ilya's first night in town, and Shane’s body adjusts automatically, like it was made to do this. It feels natural, comfortable, and he settles in. They fit together perfectly.

He can hear Ilya’s heart beating beneath his ear, slow and steady. And then, a little louder, he hears words rumble through Ilya’s chest.

“This is nice,” Ilya says. “I like this.”

“...I like it too.”

Ilya’s hand rests on his back, fingers moving lightly. Shane feels them dance across the ribbing of the tank top, lower and lower until they’re playing with the hem of the shirt, dipping beneath it.

“... is this okay?” Ilya sounds hesitant, and Shane knows that if he says no, that Ilya will stop immediately.

“Yes.” Shane’s voice is whisper-quiet, his lips brushing against Ilya’s bare chest as he speaks. He wants to press kisses to every single one of the moles that form constellations across Ilya’s skin. He has to bite his lower lip to stop himself, instead shutting his eyes to focus on the slide of Ilya’s palm up beneath his shirt, pressed to his lower back. His hand is warm, grounding and steady, pulling Shane closer.

His breath hitches, lashes fluttering as he closes his eyes. He’s getting hard, and he *knows* Ilya can feel it against his leg. His cheeks burn, and he tries to think of literally anything else other than Ilya, but…

But Ilya shifts his hips, almost like he’s trying to make himself more comfortable, and Shane feels where Ilya is hard against his thigh, and *oh*. He chances a look up, a slow lift of his eyes, only to meet Ilya’s gaze where he’s staring at Shane, lips parted, breath ghosting across Shane’s face.

It would be *so easy* to lean forward and close the gap between them, so easy to press his lips to Ilya’s in the dark. His body is strung tight like a live wire, acutely aware of every single touchpoint between his body and Ilya’s, and he swallows. The tension between them thickens, the air heavy as their eyes lock together through the darkness. Shane wonders if this is how he’ll die, frozen in this exact spot.

Ilya’s tongue flicks out to wet his lips, the motion just enough to spring the tripwire between them. They’ve been orbiting each other for days, and now it’s as though gravity

fundamentally shifts, pulling them together.

Their lips connect, warm heat flooding through Shane's body. He shuts his eyes, losing himself in the feeling of Ilya's lips, soft and insistent as he sucks Shane's lower lip into his mouth. He's not sure which one of them is moaning, making quiet noises that sound so, *so* loud.

The kiss deepens, and oh, it's *him* making the noises, he realizes, when Ilya slides his tongue between Shane's lips, licking into his mouth in a way that should be obscene. Shane tangles a hand in Ilya's curls and tugs, his fist tightening in order to draw a gasp from Ilya in response. He groans something in Russian, the words pulled from his throat as though Shane has reached down and yanked them out himself.

Distantly, Shane realizes that they're both rutting their hips against the other's thigh, chasing their pleasure. He shifts his leg where it rests in between Ilya's, adjusting so that he can offer more pressure, reveling in the rough, strained way that Ilya breathes into Shane's mouth.

"*Fuck*, Shane…" Ilya's fingers dig into Shane's skin, grinding his hips down against him. At the back of his mind, Shane wonders if he'll have bruises there tomorrow, tiny pinpricks of purpling marks leaving echoes of where Ilya's fingers have been.

Shane's eyes open, his vision adjusted now to the darkness of the room. He pulls back just enough that he can meet Ilya's gaze, the tips of their noses still touching. "Can I–" He wants to make Ilya feel good, *needs* to – and while he doesn't want to have sex in his childhood bedroom, he can do the next best thing.

"*Da*," Ilya breathes with a nod, the movement quick and fleeting. He inhales sharply as Shane slides beneath the covers, pulling Ilya's shorts down with him. Their skin is already slick with sweat, the heat only building as Shane presses his lips to the head of Ilya's cock.

He takes Ilya apart with his mouth, losing himself in the sensation. Ilya's fingers find purchase in his hair, and Shane's free hand trails up blindly to grab at Ilya's chest, his fingertips finding one of his nipples, drawing a shuddering groan from Ilya's lips. He feels Ilya let go of his hair with one hand, the next moan sounding much more muffled.

Well, Shane thinks, *at least he's* trying *to be quiet*.

He returns to his task with a single-minded focus; he never does anything halfway, *especially* not this. He sucks harder, hand stroking what his mouth cannot reach, only pulling off when Ilya tugs at his hair just past the point of pain. It makes Shane stop, lifting his head up and off of Ilya, pausing.

"I'm close–" Ilya gasps out, pushing the blankets off, a blast of cooler air wafting over Shane and drying the sweat beading on his skin. He looks up at Ilya through lowered lashes, Ilya with his head turned to one side, arm flung across his face, mouth buried against his shoulder, looking *wrecked*.

Shane hesitates only for a moment before lowering his head and doubling his pace; if it was any other time, he'd likely take advantage of the advanced warning. But now, here in this

bed… he wants to taste Ilya.

Ilya doesn't last much longer – he spills into Shane's mouth, a ragged gasp torn from his throat, muffled by his skin. He barely gives Shane a second to swallow before he's tugging him up, their lips connecting in a sloppy kiss. Shane is sure Ilya can taste himself on Shane's tongue, but he doesn't seem to mind. His hand slides down Shane's chest and into his shorts to wrap around his dick, arm around Shane's shoulders to hold him close.

Their foreheads knock together, and as Ilya's hand begins to move, Shane sees *stars*.

It's like the entire world fades away, narrowing down to that point of connection. The friction, the heat of Ilya's palm as it slides against him… at some point, Ilya lifts his hand and spits in his palm, bringing it back down again, and *oh*. Shane's head drops forward, against Ilya's shoulder, lips parted and eyes squeezed shut tight. He can hear sounds being pulled from him, quiet guttural noises that he's never heard himself make before.

"I want to fuck you," Ilya breathes into Shane's ear. "When we are at the cottage. I want to–" He twists his wrist, and Shane has to press his face against Ilya's skin to muffle the whine that the movement coaxes out of him. He thinks about it, about Ilya taking him apart piece by piece, about how it would *feel*…

Galaxies explode across his vision, purples and blues and violets swirling together as his orgasm hits. Ilya works him through it, saying something in Russian that Shane can't even pretend to understand. His body goes lax, limbs loose. He vaguely registers Ilya moving him around, readjusting both of them to a more comfortable position in the twin bed. Shane is back on Ilya's chest again, but this time he gives in and lets himself kiss the warm skin beneath his lips.

The room is silent except for their breathing, Ilya's arm around Shane again. This time, he doesn't ask, just slides his palm up the back of Shane's shirt and rests it against his back like it belongs there.

They don't talk about it – they're too tired, too sated for real conversation. Shane's eyelids are heavy, blinks that slow with each one he takes. There is a gentle kiss on his forehead, the press of soft lips curling in a smile. It's the last thing he feels before he slips into what will be the most comfortable sleep he's had in a very, very long time.

Chapter 4: four.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It’s nice to wake up in bed with someone.

Shane’s eyelids feel heavy when he cracks them open, the bedroom still mostly dark around him. It could be two in the morning or it could be ten, he’s not sure – the blackout shades on the windows are doing their job, keeping sunlight (or moonlight) out of the room. He’s warm, almost too warm, and he starts to try and kick the blanket off of himself when an arm shifts around him from behind, muscles tensing, preventing him from moving.

Oh. Right.

Ilya makes a noise, displeased, holding Shane close to him. “No,” he mumbles, voice gravelly. “Stay.” His grip tightens even more, nose burrowing into the nape of Shane’s neck. Goosebumps break out over the sensitive skin there, and Shane’s eyes flutter shut. The memories of last night, of what they’d done before going to sleep, come rushing back, and he feels himself flush with a different sort of heat.

So Shane stays. He lays there, sweating, taking a mental stock of himself.

He’s naked, and he thinks Ilya is too, based on the bare legs he can feel between his own. He’s not sure how they got there, because he remembers them both being relatively clothed

when they'd fallen asleep. He *also* remembers having pulled Ilya's pants down in order to suck him off, and that Ilya had made him finish in his shorts, two things that would, he supposes, lead to the removal of the offending garments. Shane wiggles his toes, feeling something that's not the blanket all bunched up at the foot of the bed – *ah*. There are their clothes.

Okay.

Ilya inhales deeply behind him, in a way that says he's not asleep anymore. He adjusts himself, as though he's getting more comfortable, and Shane can feel the press of him where he's hard against Shane's back. He feels a slow shift, an almost imperceptible rocking, as Ilya chases the friction.

"If you want me to help get you off," he whispers to Ilya, turning his head just enough, "all you have to do is ask." It's easy enough to roll over in Ilya's arms so that they're face to face. They're close enough that their entire bodies touch from the tops of their foreheads to the tips of their toes, and Ilya slips an arm down in between them to wrap one big, eager hand around both of their cocks.

Ilya mouths at the juncture of Shane's shoulder and his neck, tongue laving over the skin there as his hand moves where it's sandwiched between their bodies. It's hot and it's dry and it's fast, over quicker than it should be, gasping into each others' mouths as they come within seconds of each other.

"It didn't get on the sheets, did it?" Shane ducks his head to look between them, wincing. "I need to clean that, otherwise my mom will know–"

Ilya's chuckles follow him as he reluctantly pulls on the pajama pants that Ilya had gone to sleep in, and ducks out the bedroom door to grab a wet towel from the bathroom.

When they eventually come downstairs, Yuna makes them breakfast, pancakes and bacon and eggs, then sends the two of them back to Montreal with a cooler full of snacks. She hugs Shane first, and then Ilya, holding him extra tightly. "I'm so happy you're home," she tells him, her thumbs swiping away at the dampness that has gathered beneath his eyes.

In the car, they put on some playlist that Shane had found, but they keep the volume low, quiet enough to talk over. They don't speak much, but Ilya holds Shane's hand the entire way back, his thumb tracing circles against Shane's skin.

They pack quickly when they get back to Shane's apartment, all but throwing things into duffel bags in their eagerness to get on the road. Shane keeps the basics at the cottage already, along with plenty of clothes, but he tucks his laptop and his phone charger into a backpack along with a few other miscellaneous things he knows they'll need. He can hear Ilya in the guest room doing the same, humming to himself just slightly off-key.

Shane can't fucking believe this. Any of it. He takes a minute, while Ilya is busy, to sink down and sit on the edge of his bed, processing the last twenty-four hours of his life.

They kissed. They got each other off. Twice. They kissed some more. They held hands.

Shane shuts his eyes. This is fine. Everything is *fine*. Friends kiss, right?

No. They don't. He's never once wanted to kiss Hayden, or JJ. He *barely* wanted to kiss Rose.

He is careful, meticulous, even. He doesn't hook up with random guys, doesn't follow anyone on social media other than his professional contacts, family, and friends... it's not like he can get outed if there's no evidence.

But there in the other room, now loudly singing something in Russian… evidence.

He hates thinking about Ilya in that way, after everything. But in a clinical sort of way, that's what he is. He, and what they did last night, is proof of what *Shane* is, at his core. And while Shane is more sure than anything that Ilya would never do anything to hurt him, including out him… he also knows what the internet is like. He knows that there are people who over-analyze everything, who study five second video clips for hours looking for clues to things that don't actually exist, who keep a log of who hockey players follow and unfollow on social media. He's had a Twitter account since he started playing hockey, although he rarely goes on it except when he's contractually obligated to… but that doesn't mean he's completely blind to it.

And it's not like this can be something public, anyways. He's not out to anyone, and he's not sure if he wants to be. He hears what it's like in the locker room, the way that homophobia is casually tossed around like it's just another word. He's had it spat at him across the ice at face-offs, players trying to get under his skin before he can wipe the ice with them. He tapes his stick for pride month, ignoring the way that some of his teammates watch him with a curl to their lips that make the hair on the back of his neck stand up.

Just the thought of sitting his team down and telling them that he's gay is enough to make his stomach twist violently, panic bubbling deep in his gut as though his body is preparing for war. He can feel his heart start to flutter, the fight or flight reflex start to kick in, and with a quick shake of his head he tamps it down firmly with a frown, not allowing it to surface. It's pointless to worry about it when it's not something that will happen.

At the same time, though…

The idea of one day being able to say that Ilya is his boyfriend is fucking *intoxicating*. He wants to be able to go places with him and do domestic shit like hold his hand and not feel like he wants to sink down into the concrete because someone might see. He wants to thank him in his acceptance speech when he wins an award, wants to kiss him as he hoists the cup over his head (or *fuck*, wants to stand there on the ice under Ilya's arm when it's his turn to win the cup), wants to be able to go out with him after games and not have to worry about what other people might think – not because they won't be talking, but because he won't *care*.

For a minute, he puts his anxiety aside. He pretends like it doesn't exist, and he lets himself imagine what it could be like if he does come out. He shuts his eyes, takes a slow and steady breath, and pictures a perfect world, cut straight from a fantasy. His parents are proud of him, and they're thrilled he's with Ilya; they already see him as a second son, and so the revelation

doesn't change much for them. His team crowds around him in a giant huddle when he comes out to them, every single one of them voicing their support. Coach shakes his hand and tells the team that they'll be traded faster than they can blink if there's any sort of homophobia in the locker room moving forward. Hayden and JJ hug him tightly; they tell him that they're happy for him, and that they're looking forward to meeting Ilya.

"Fuck."

Shane squeezes his eyes shut, letting the fantasy fall away, evaporating like mist. Because that's all it is. It's a fantasy, a delusion that he knows he needs to let go of. His parents, he's sure, won't react badly. They love him, they want what's best for him, and while his mother may have some managerial concerns, he knows that ultimately she'll be fine with it. (*Fine with it*, his brain spits at him, *what a great way to word it*.) But his team… he knows that any hopes of a positive reception from his team would be a miracle. If anything, he'll be lucky if Hayden is happy for him, let alone JJ. He doesn't want to even think about what would happen if either of them decided that this was enough to draw the line, using it as an excuse to step back from their friendship with him.

"Fuck."

All this, and he doesn't even know if Ilya is here just for hockey, or if he's here for *him*. He doesn't know if Ilya would *want* to be in a relationship in the first place. They only kissed a little, they only got each other off (twice), they only held hands...

And that doesn't even take into account the conversation on the swings from when they were twelve.

It's been living in the back of Shane's mind ever since he'd laid eyes on Ilya, although he hasn't really allowed himself to think about it too much. But since he's already spiraling, might as well go all the way.

It's quite possible that that moment in Shane's backyard had been such a significant memory for him because it was the last conversation he had with Ilya, contents of the conversation notwithstanding. Maybe that's the only reason the memory had come back to him with such clarity, so much so that he can picture the exact way Ilya had looked at him when he'd said that it would be easy to marry Shane, the way Ilya had hugged him afterwards, the way Shane had thought about that conversation for weeks when he was missing Ilya and trying to desperately hold on to their last moments together.

They'd get married when they're thirty. That was the ask, and Shane had said yes. He knows it hadn't been much of a promise, because when you're twelve nothing is really set in stone. What if Ilya *had* been serious, though? What if he remembers, what if all he's thought about for the past eighteen years was getting back to Shane so that they could get married? What if that's the only reason he's here now?

Or, more than likely, Ilya probably has forgotten it – and honestly, Shane wouldn't blame him, especially after what must have been an extraordinarily tumultuous few weeks following it. If Shane brings up the topic, and Ilya stares at him with blankness in his eyes, no

memory of the conversation that has been scratching at Shane's brain with needle-sharp claws… well.

It's going to be fine. *He's* going to be fine.

He has two weeks to figure it out, after all.

—

"You *built* this?" Ilya stares up at the cottage, lips parted as he takes it in, standing there with his bag slung over his shoulder. It's so much larger than Shane's parents' cottage is. Their cottage looks like a small house, nestled amongst trees on the bank of the lake as though it's part of nature. It feels like it was meant to be there all along, as though someone had built the world around the house instead of the other way around.

Shane's cottage… is not like that, at all. His is much bigger, a multi-million dollar monstrosity, all giant glass windows and gleaming hardwood floors, a designer's touch on every single inch of the build. It manages to make itself fit with the landscape, but it stands out at the same time. It's less of a place to be one with the surrounding nature and more of a place to exist alongside of it – separate, appreciative… but still separate.

"Well, I mean, not *me*, but yeah. I worked with an architect to design it, and then I had it built."

Ilya's head is on a swivel, taking in every inch of the cottage like he's trying to memorize it. And maybe he is. If his time spent up here as a child had been so special to him, well. Maybe he's trying to make some new memories.

Shane wants to ask him what he's thinking, but he stays silent instead, content to watch Ilya's eyes trace over the long, sleek lines of the roof. He wonders if Ilya is disappointed, maybe, that they're not exactly at the same place as before. Like maybe his memories had hinged on that small, cozy cabin that he remembered from his youth, and maybe now he's disappointed that what he's seeing is completely different. Shane's brain helpfully conjures up the thought of Ilya's expectations shattering like glass, raining down in shards onto the ground.

"Is it… is it okay?" The words are out of his mouth before he can stop them.

"Is what okay?" Ilya adjusts his duffel bag over his shoulder.

Shane waves a hand towards the house. "This. I know it's not the same as before, but it's–"

"Shane." Ilya turns to face him, looking as serious as he has since he's arrived. "Is not the building that is important. It is…" He lifts a hand, waving it in a circle as though he's trying to capture everything around him–the trees rustling faintly, the water lapping against the shore, the fresh breeze ruffling his curls–but can't find the words. "All of this. All of this is what I wanted, okay? The house… what it looks like… does not matter to me."

A smile finds its way onto Shane's mouth as relief washes over him. "Okay. Cool. Let me give you the tour."

He shows Ilya the house, getting into way too much detail when he talks about each room. He's sure Ilya doesn't care about any of it, whether it's about the way he chose the kitchen counters or why he put the master bedroom where he did. He brings Ilya through each room, pointing out the way there are enough outlets along the walls so that cords don't need to trail through the room in order to power everything, and the way that the wooden accents of the house flow seamlessly from one room to another making the space feel like it's all connected even though it's multiple rooms.

Ilya listens, quietly taking in all of the information that Shane dumps on him, a small smile on his lips as he does so. "Okay, so you are quitting hockey to build houses now?" His brows lift up into his hairline as he looks over his shoulder from where he stands at the window, taking in the view of the lake out back, his lips curled, teasing. "You are Mr. Real Estate, yes?"

Shane rolls his eyes fondly. "Fuck *off*, Ilya." There's no heat behind the words, and he steps up next to Ilya, their arms brushing. There is a family of loons bobbing out on the water, their black heads sharp against the blues of the water where it reflects the sunlight.

Ilya's body is warm next to him, steady, and Shane can't help but lean into him, just a little.

"This view…" The words slip from Ilya's mouth on an exhale. "I saw this view so much after we left."

"What do you mean?" Shane watches as the loons take off, flapping further out into the lake.

"We had so much *fun* here. It was peaceful." There's a long pause, long enough that Shane thinks Ilya is done talking, but then he continues. "After I went back to Russia, I was sad. I missed my old life. I missed *you*."

Shane's heart flip-flops in his chest.

"I closed my eyes and pretended I was here. It made everything easier."

Ilya sounds far away, Shane realizes. His mind seems like it's somewhere else, as though it has gotten on a plane and flown back to Russia. Or more likely, it has left out the front door, climbed in Shane's car, and driven back to Ottawa. It has traced the path up to Ilya's old front door, taken a step inside, and stopped right there, unsure as to what to do next.

"Now you don't have to pretend," Shane says quietly. He looks down, to where Ilya's hand rests loosely at his side, and then slips his fingers between Ilya's, squeezing gently. He doesn't need to say the words, but he wants Ilya to know that he's here, and he's not going anywhere.

A squeeze back tells him that Ilya does know.

—

Their time at the cottage might be the best two weeks of Shane's life.

He lets himself buy into the delusion that this could be forever. They go for canoe rides on the lake, fuck around with a soccer ball on the back lawn, grill burgers and hot dogs for dinner every night… and have sex. They have a *lot* of sex.

It's nice just *existing* with Ilya, even better than it had been in his Montreal apartment. They wake up next to each other, cook together, relax together… it's the pinnacle of domestic bliss, and it's everything Shane has ever wanted.

He lets himself slip into the fantasy of it all, probably a little bit too much. He should be keeping himself restrained, should be focusing on the logic – they should not, *can not* do this, because Shane knows he will only get hurt in the end if they don't both want the same thing. But with every passing hour, his logic dissipates more and more, evolving from 'I should not allow myself to give in to my hopes' all the way to 'It's just two weeks, what does it matter?' and by the end of the first day, he is all in.

So he allows himself to initiate casual touch almost absentmindedly, whether it's a gentle hand on Ilya's back as they stand at the grill while Ilya flips burgers, or brushing their ankles together when they lay out on the dock. And he decidedly does not think too much about Ilya doing the same thing back – about how he'll play with Shane's hair when they're sprawled out on the couch together watching a movie, how he'll set a cold ginger ale fresh from the fridge in front of Shane before he even realizes he's thirsty, how he'll fiddle with the tips of Shane's fingers as though he's trying to memorize the way they feel against his skin.

And Shane allows himself just the barest glimmer of hope. What that might look like moving forward, he's not sure. But he can at least foster the small flame that's burning in his chest, keeping his hands cupped close around it so that the summer wind doesn't blow it out.

—

"I wish my mother was here to see us together like this."

When Ilya speaks, his voice is soft, only barely audible above the sounds of the fire, of the gentle lapping of the water where it meets the shore, of the loons in the distance crying out for their mates. He's laying on the outdoor rattan couch with his head in Shane's lap, eyes fixed on the crackling bonfire. They'd had some s'mores, but only a couple – the bag of marshmallows lays open on the side table, almost totally forgotten.

Shane's not sure what to say in response – he's never been the kind of person who has been good at knowing the right thing to say to comfort someone, always worried that he'll say the wrong thing and make them even more upset. Instead, he threads his fingers through Ilya's curls, hoping that the point of contact will be enough.

"She loved you."

Shane isn't expecting those words to come from Ilya's mouth. "Wh-what?"

"She loved you and your family. She was *so* happy you were my friend. She would talk about you at dinner, annoy my father and Alexei with 'Shane told us a story about his hockey camp today' or 'You should see what Yuna baked us, it is delicious'... she loved you. Very much."

Shane swallows around the lump in his throat, the buried grief from losing someone he cared about rising to the surface. He never got to say goodbye to Irina – she had been there, and then suddenly she had been gone. And while it had hurt to lose Ilya, Shane thinks that some of that hurt had also come from losing someone else who had cared about him in a way that only a mother could.

"She was…" He stops to clear his throat, blinking quickly through wet lashes. "She was always so kind to me. And I know my mom loved to spend time with her. She sat out on the porch alone sometimes after you left, and I think she probably was thinking of your mom."

Shane remembers it, how his mother would pour two glasses of water and carry them out to the porch. She'd set one in front of the empty chair next to her, and would sit there for a long time, until the sun had gone down and she'd finished her drink. He would watch from the windows as Yuna would stand up, carry the full glass over to the neighbor's house, and use it to water the roses by the front door, not making eye contact with the 'For Sale' sign out front.

Ilya says nothing, but then again, Shane doesn't expect him to.

"I know I said this before, but I should have… I should have tried harder to come see you. I just… didn't know you would be gone in a few days." Regret curls around Shane's heart, squeezing tightly.

"My father *hated* it in Canada." Ilya exhales shakily, as though he's remembering how his father had been. "He never wanted to leave Russia in the first place, but my mother… moving here was her idea. Russia is not… she was never happy in Russia. I think she thought maybe Canada would make her happier."

"Did it?" Shane isn't sure if he wants to know the answer.

"For a time, yes." Ilya reaches one hand out and fumbles for a marshmallow, the bag crinkling. "And then it got bad with my father again, and…" He pops the marshmallow in his mouth without bothering to toast it over the fire.

"He didn't…" Shane's stomach twists at the implication that squirms into his head.

"No," Ilya says around the marshmallow in his mouth, shaking his head. "He did not ever hit *her*. But he yelled, a lot. I would say they argued, but it was never her. She was always quiet when he would shout. Was only him yelling."

Shane sits with Ilya's words. He never hit *her*. The way Ilya had said it, the emphasis… somewhere, in Shane's gut, he knows. Irina had been spared from her husband's physical violence, but her son… he had not been safe.

"I'm sorry." Shane isn't proud of how shaky his voice is when he speaks. He wishes he could say more, but he doesn't trust his words.

Ilya squeezes Shane's thigh, next to where his head rests, his hand lingering as his thumb traces patterns on Shane's shorts. "Is okay."

It's not okay. It's not okay at all.

"Can I ask… how she died?" He shouldn't ask, but he does anyway. He asked before, and if Ilya gives the same answer, he won't pry any further. But now, this conversation… it's deeper than the one they'd already had.

"By accident." The words, an echo of what Ilya had told him before, sound bitter in his mouth. "She accidentally swallowed a bottle of pills."

"Oh my *god*, Ilya…"

"I found her."

Shane's entire body goes ice cold.

"She was in her bed," Ilya continues, eyes locked on the fire as it flickers and pops in the firepit. "I came in from outside and thought she was sleeping, and went to touch her hand and it was… she was gone." He sounds lost, as though he's back in his twelve-year-old body. Shane can picture it, can remember how Ilya had looked that day on the swing set, so young and hopeful and full of life. To picture him walking into a room and seeing something that had shattered his entire world… it makes Shane feel like he wants to duck his head against Ilya's shoulder and weep.

He should say something, *anything*… but the words won't come. They're stuck in his throat, pinned there with what feels like a goddamn hunting knife, and so he does the next best thing. He bends at the waist, wrapping his free arm around Ilya, hugging him tightly. It's a bit of an awkward position, and he finds his forehead smushed against Ilya's shoulder, but one of Ilya's hands tangles with Shane's and squeezes just as tight.

"I'm so sorry," Shane whispers. "Ilya, I'm *so sorry*."

"You said that already." The words are teasing, but Shane can hear the tremor in Ilya's voice, the way his accent is a little thicker. So he doesn't let go, keeps holding Ilya close, keeps running his fingers through Ilya's hair as though that action will do something, *anything*, to help make it better. He can't take away the hurt, but maybe he can ease it somewhat.

"I know." Shane lets the words hang in the quiet night air, feeling the way that Ilya's body relaxes, the tension fading slowly from him. "And I'll keep saying it, as many times as I need to."

"I wish she were here to see this place," Ilya says again, as he lifts his free hand, thumb and forefinger twisting the cross that he wears around his neck. "She never got to come to the cottage. Your mother asked her to come but my father would not let her go."

"I didn't know that."

It would have been nice to have spent some time with just Ilya and his mother, although he's not sure if he would have appreciated it as much as a kid. Now though, he'd have liked to have had those memories to look back on. He imagines that Yuna and Irina would have spent

time in the kayak on the lake, or would have lounged on chairs by a fire just like this one while Shane and Ilya had kicked around a ball or played knee hockey on the lawn.

“I wish I had known her more,” Shane says, trying to keep his voice from wavering. “Not just as a kid… as an adult. To have been able to have a conversation with her that’s not just like, ‘can I have some more dumplings please’ or whatever.”

Ilya is silent, except for a very, very quiet sniffle. He squeezes Shane’s hand again, and then turns to press his lips to the back of Shane’s knuckles. “She would have been glad that we have found each other again,” he says, his voice thick.

Shane moves without thinking, tilting his head up to reciprocate the gentle kiss, his lips against Ilya’s shoulder. His skin is warm from the fire, a light sheen of sweat glistening there despite the cooler night air surrounding them.

Tomorrow he’ll ask about the conversation that they had on the swings, he decides. And if Ilya doesn’t remember… that will be okay. It will have to be. Shane will take whatever he can get, whatever Ilya will give him. If all he can give is his friendship, well. Shane will have to be okay with it.

It’s quiet for a long time, until Ilya laughs, very softly.

“What?” Shane ducks so he can look at Ilya’s face.

“Not ‘dumplings’, *solnyshko*. *Pelmeni*.”

—

“Do you remember the days before you left?”

It’s midday, the sky bright blue and full of fluffy white clouds, and they’re out by the lake stretched out on the grass. The wind blows gently, ruffling Ilya’s curls as they dry off from his latest dip in the water.

“I remember those days more clearly than I should.” Ilya sighs. “My therapist says I might have forgotten a bit, but I feel like she is wrong. I have seen it in my nightmares enough to know it well enough.”

Shane watches as a bead of water trails its way from Ilya’s temple down to his jawline. He feels almost selfish for asking, knowing that Ilya had so many other *worse* things happening in his life at that time. The likelihood that he remembers a quick conversation that happened immediately before an extraordinarily traumatizing event, quite possibly the worst day of Ilya’s life? Slim.

“Do you remember the last time we talked?”

Ilya turns to look at him. He’s silent for a long time, and suddenly Shane’s not sure if he wants Ilya to remember or not. He tries to come up with an excuse of what he could say if Ilya says no.

“A bit.” Ilya shakes his head. “That part is… not as clear.”

Shane nods, more to himself, as he looks out over the water.

“Why?” Curiosity is written all over Ilya’s face.

“It’s– it’s nothing, really.” Shane shifts, lowering himself from where he’d been holding himself up on his elbows so that he’s flat on his back, staring up at the sky. “I didn’t really remember it either until right before I followed you back on Instagram. But then I was thinking about it, and everything kind of came rushing right back.”

“Now I am wondering.” Ilya rolls over onto his side, propping up his head in one hand, leaning on his elbow. “I remember we were together, and then I went home, but… I don’t remember what we did, or what we said.”

Shane shrugs one shoulder. “You asked me to marry you.”

“I did *what*?!” Ilya’s eyes widen.

“We were on the swings in my backyard. You told me that you wanted a good marriage, and that when we turned thirty we’d get married because it would be easy and I was nice.” Shane’s eyes follow the path of a flock of geese, tracing the lopsided checkmark as it soars through the air. He can tell Ilya is staring at him, boring a hole into the side of his face with his gaze, but he doesn’t know if he can make eye contact with him right now.

“So you mean to tell me,” Ilya says, “we are supposed to be *married*?” Shane thinks it’s supposed to be meant in a teasing way, lighthearted. But with the way his mind is already taking the words and running with them, it falls flat in his head.

“I mean, it’s just something you said as a kid–” First deflect, then redirect. He’s got no idea where he can redirect this conversation to, though.

“Yes, *obviously*.” Ilya rolls his eyes. “But– so you are telling me that all this started because you were sad and lonely and drunk and you remembered me telling you that I would marry you when we turned thirty and– what, now you are coming to collect?”

“Well I mean, when you put it like that–” Shane feels his cheeks flush; he focuses on the clouds, on the way that there’s one that could be an elephant if he squints. He traces the fluffy outlines of it, follows the part of it that could be the trunk… anything to keep his eyes from watering.

“I am not putting it like anything, I am just asking.”

The words burst out of Shane before he can stop them. “Look,” he says, lifting a hand. “I didn’t follow you back on Instagram just because of it, I’m just saying I remembered it. Your comment made me remember the conversation, and I thought– *fuck*, I don’t know what I thought.”

Silence. Or rather, not complete silence. The leaves rustle in the trees as the wind blows through them, a bird chirps where it’s perched on a branch somewhere, and cicadas buzz

from their hiding spots. But Ilya doesn't say anything in response.

"I thought… I thought it would be nice to have you back in my life. In whatever way. If you don't– if you don't feel the same way, if you don't like me like that, and you just want to, I don't know, fuck every once in a while, then whatever. Fine. We can be friends. I don't care. I'll deal with it–"

"Shane."

"--and I just thought, I don't know, I saw your Instagram and looked through the pictures and remembered you and was like 'yeah, it would be great to have my childhood best friend back in my life again'. I wasn't looking at your pictures like a fucking creep who just wanted in your pants–"

"Shane."

"--and yeah, I was sad, I was lonely, and yes I was drunk, but that doesn't mean the way I was feeling was any less valid, okay? I didn't plan on this, on *us*, and I'm not mad about it, to be clear, but it wasn't like I was masterminding some grand relationship in my head–"

"Fucking– *Shane*–"

"What??" Shane whirls on his heel, stopping where he's been all but pacing, practically wearing away a patch in the grass – when the fuck did he stand up? He doesn't remember doing that. His chest heaves as he tries to catch his breath.

"Don't put words into my mouth. I *never* said that I do not feel the same way you do. You think we have been having sex this whole time just because?? You think I signed with Ottawa because– what, I want to help a team I do not know win a cup??"

"I–"

"I came here for you Shane– I could have signed with Boston, they would have paid me more. But I am here for *you*, in whatever way you will have me. And now you tell me that I said this when I was twelve and I do not *remember*?"

"I mean– it makes sense, that day was probably really hard for you, so it makes sense that you didn't remember."

"It was."

"And I don't… I don't want you to think I've had the wrong intentions this whole time, I just…" Shane's mind finally, *finally* catches up with what Ilya had said. "Wait, you came here for *me*?"

"Yes. I may not have remembered our last conversation but I did not forget you. What you meant to me." Ilya gets up, walking over to where Shane stands in the grass, hands dangling limp by his sides, and leans in to kiss him deeply. "This… this is extra. This is bonus. This is more than I could have hoped for." He lifts a hand, cupping Shane's cheek in his palm. "I just wanted to be close to you, and now I have all of you."

Shane drops his head forward, forehead thunking against Ilya's shoulder heavily. His arms slide around Ilya's waist, holding him tightly, grounding himself. He can feel Ilya's chest moving as he breathes, and Shane focuses on syncing his own inhales and exhales with Ilya's until they're matching, Shane's mind feeling steady once more.

"So yes. If you are asking me to marry you because of what I said when we were twelve, yes. I will have you like this, if you will have me." Ilya's fingers are in Shane's hair, carding through the strands at the nape of his neck. "Perhaps we should wait a bit, do things the proper way… maybe we try and be boyfriends first. Then if you still like me after a year we get married."

Shane laughs wetly against Ilya's shoulder, because *oh*, there are happy tears running down his cheeks, hidden from view. He's sure Ilya can feel them, dripping hot against his bare skin. "I'm not out yet," he says lamely.

"Is okay," Ilya says. "We have all the time in the world."

—

It's their last night at the cottage, and Ilya isn't in the house when Shane gets out of the shower.

He looks around for him, but the house is far too quiet for him to be inside. He checks the guest rooms anyway, despite the fact that they've been sleeping in Shane's bed together the entire time and there'd be no need for Ilya to be in any of the other rooms. He's not downstairs in the gym working out, he's not studying the trophies in the spare room that Shane had converted to house all of his awards, and he's not spread out on the couch flipping idly through one of Shane's hockey books.

Shane chances a glance outside through the kitchen window, and finds Ilya. He can see where he's perched on the big rock out by the lake, a cigarette dangling loosely between his fingers. Shane can see the haze of smoke as it curls towards the sky, backlit by the sunset that lights Ilya up in shades of vivid orange and red.

He's reminded, suddenly, almost breathtakingly, of the photo he'd seen on Ilya's Instagram. It had been the first time he'd seen Ilya since they'd been twelve, and he remembers the way his breath had caught in his throat when he'd looked at it, his eyes tracing the shape of Ilya's body while his mind had tried to catch up.

Without thinking much of it, he reaches for his phone, and carefully, quietly, steps out through the back patio door. He makes his way towards the water, walking through the grass as silently as he can manage. He lifts his phone, and at the perfect moment, hits the shutter button.

His sound is on, and the jig is up, Ilya turning to look over his shoulder with a small smile.

"I saw a photo like this on your Instagram," Shane says by way of explanation, lips curling up in return. "That, and you look… you look beautiful." The honesty spills from him

unbidden, and his cheeks flush, but Ilya's grin widens more and he holds out his hand for Shane.

They sit together, there on the rock overlooking the water, watching the sun set, for a long time. In the distance, a loon calls out, the sound echoing across the water.

Later, when the sky is dark and Ilya is asleep next to him, snoring softly with his head buried against the back of Shane's neck, Shane pulls out his phone to catch up on all of the notifications that he missed during the day. He ignores most of them, eye catching on an Instagram post notification – an hour ago, Ilya posted a new photo.

Shane clicks on the notification, looking down at the photo he'd taken of Ilya earlier, cropped to fit Ilya's Instagram page.

Tomorrow, they'll drive back to Montreal. Ilya will start to look for a place to live in Ottawa. The team will post his signing announcement, and his life will change forever. Eventually he'll move out of Shane's apartment, and instead of sharing a bed each night they'll have to drive two hours each way just to see each other, if they're not meeting across the face-off circle.

But they'll have their off days, and their long weekends. They'll have family dinners with Shane's parents, and they'll have off-season trips to the cottage. They'll have stolen kisses in

bathrooms at award ceremonies, and they'll have secret glances over the shoulders of oblivious teammates.

Maybe one day they'll hoist a cup *together*, wearing matching jerseys instead of opposing ones. Maybe one day they'll hand the cup off to their teammates, and Ilya will press his lips to Shane's there in front of a crowd of roaring fans, cheers and celebration raining down on them. Maybe one day they'll hold hands as they skate off the ice, matching rings on their fingers.

But above all, no matter what comes their way, Shane will *always* be Ilya's home.

Chapter End Notes

Ilya's Instagram caption reads "I am home."

This fic has been a labor of love, the longest fic I've written thus far, and I'm very proud of it. Thank you to everyone who's read and commented and left kudos, y'all are amazing!

And as always, go Sabres!

End Notes

Go Sabres :)

I can be found on twitter at foxriverblues and on tumblr at warrenmike.

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!