

the hand on the back of your neck

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the hand on the back of your neck

by Anonymous

Summary

Ilya hadn't known the video existed. If he had known, he would have paid someone to have it destroyed. Would have paid someone to murder Kuznetsov, maybe, just for redundancy's sake. But it was peak stupidity, to keep evidence of your homosexual perversion around in a country where that crime could get you sent to jail for several decades, and Ilya hadn't thought that Kuznetsov would be that dumb.

Now here Ilya was, watching a video of his fourteen-year-old self on Twitter getting fucked by his former hockey coach.

So. There go the plans for the rest of his life.

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Or: in 2018, during Ilya's last year with the Raiders, an old video is leaked on Twitter. Ilya reacts, or overreacts. Shane does, too.

Notes

this fic revolves around a leaked video of fourteen-year-old ilya having sex with a former coach. obviously, this is statutory rape and child sexual abuse, though ilya doesn't recognize it as that himself. please take care when reading.

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

- Inspired by [work with what is left](#) by Anonymous

Chapter 1

The video is seven minutes and forty-two seconds long. It opens on an empty bedroom. Ugly floral bedspread, ugly floral wallpaper, ugly floral curtains. You can't see it in the video, but Ilya remembers the carpet was ugly, too. A hideous, stained mauve that looked like the raw cow tongue Ilya's mother sometimes bought when she was feeling especially sad. She said it reminded her of what she used to eat as a kid, before the fall of the Soviet Union, when standard cuts of meat were sometimes in short supply.

In the video, there's a low voice speaking in Russian. *Come here, you little brat*, it says, and then Ilya appears at the edge of the frame.

He's thirteen or fourteen, but still easily recognizable. Same curls, same big lips, same mole on his left cheek; the nose is even crooked. He had only broken it twice, at that age, but that was enough.

He looks afraid. This is one of the worst parts of the video, for Ilya. It would be easier if he spent the whole thing smirking and laughing, if he pushed back into Kuznetsov's cock instead of shying away from it. Then it would just be the gay thing. But you can see the way Ilya flinches at even the slightest touch, his skinny teenage ribs sucking in and out as the palm on the back of his neck slides down, down, down.

Ilya should probably stop watching when Kuznetsov shoves him face-down into the mattress, but he doesn't. He keeps watching. He keeps listening to his teenage self make these pathetic little simpering noises into the sheets. At least he doesn't say *no*, or anything so stupid. He doesn't say anything at all, actually. Not until the very end of the video, when Kuznetsov had pulled out of him and slapped his ass. *What do you say, boy?* he had asked, showing his yellow teeth.

And Ilya had said *thank you*.

Thank you, coach, he had said, and bent down to pull up his pants.

—

So the video isn't good.

Ilya hadn't known the video existed, before this moment. If he had known, he would have paid someone to have it destroyed. Would have paid someone to murder Kuznetsov, maybe, just for redundancy's sake. But it was peak stupidity, to keep evidence of your homosexual perversion around in a country where that crime could get you sent to jail for several decades, and Ilya hadn't thought that Kuznetsov would be that dumb.

But apparently he was, and apparently the video did exist. And now here was Ilya, waking up to a link in his email inbox, which led him to Twitter, which led him to a video of himself get fucked by his old hockey coach.

And there go the plans for the rest of his life.

So. He spends about ten minutes in the bathroom, heaving into the toilet. There's not much in his stomach but bile, but he stays there a while anyway, because he can't quite make himself stop gagging. He keeps seeing Kuznetsov's hairy fingers wrapped around Ilya's waist. He keeps hearing his voice, *what do you say, boy?*

After a while, he forces himself to his feet. With shaky legs, he goes to the bathroom tap, rinsing his mouth out and then shoving his whole face under the stream of water. He emerges, wet as a fish, and tells himself he feels better. He dries his face off. He gets to work.

His first order of action is logging into his security system and changing all his passcodes. There aren't a lot of people who know his codes, but there are a few. Svetlana, Marly, his coach, Shane. Undoubtedly, some of these people will be demanding explanations, and if they don't like the ones he gives, they'll show up on his doorstep. There's nothing he'd like less.

He calls the security guard for his gated community and has his list of approved visitors updated. "Nobody in but me," Ilya says. "Nobody at all."

The guard hesitates. "Not even Ms. Svetlana?"

"Not even Wayne fucking Gretzky," Ilya says, and hangs up the phone.

Next, he goes into his Find My Friends and turns off his location sharing, so nobody can find him. They'll expect to find him at his house, of course, but Ilya doesn't have to stay here. He could rent an apartment, or a hotel, or he could—

What? What could he do? The list of options available to Ilya has shrunk overnight. Yesterday, he could do anything. Today—

He brushes the thought away. It's not worth thinking about, right now. There are more important things to handle.

Things like Shane. Ilya's phone is blowing up with calls and messages right now, but by far and away the most of them are from Shane. *Jane, Jane, Jane*, his screen says, every time taunting him with the blushing red heart emoji that Ilya had only just added to the contact field. It made him look sappy, maybe, and he usually changed it to an eggplant when he knew he was going to see Shane, but, fuck it, if he couldn't claim Shane as his boyfriend then at least he could claim Jane. At least his friends could know he was taken by someone.

So, Shane. What to do about Shane? Ilya knows how Shane feels about coming out. It's his worst nightmare. *This is my literal fucking nightmare, Ilya*, Shane had said, and that was just when his dad knew. His big, dumb sweetheart of a dad who saw all of two seconds of Ilya groping Shane's ass. By now, half of Twitter has probably seen Ilya doing much more pornographic things. This probably, actually, is the worst thing Shane can imagine happening—or it would be, if Shane was publicly connected to Ilya at all.

This is a small mercy: they haven't started on their plan yet. They haven't announced the charity, or even begun its legal incorporation; they haven't begun soft-launching their friendship to the press; Ilya hasn't made any moves towards Ottawa.

Ilya can't subject Shane to this, not when there's another option.

As soon as he realizes this, he pulls his phone out of his pocket. Best to chop from the shoulder, and best to do it before he chickens out. He pulls up his text stream with Jane, which, even as he watches, is filling up with texts.

Jane: Ilya, I saw the video. Please call me immediately.

Jane: Please please pick up your phone.

Jane: I know this is overwhelming, but I need to know you're safe.

Jane: I'm going to fucking kill whoever released this.

Jane: My mom and your agent are working on takedown requests. I don't want to freak you out, but it's already spread pretty far.

Jane: Ilya, please pick up the phone. Please.

Jane: If you don't let me know you're okay within the next 5 minutes, I am going to call Svetlana and have her come to the house.

Jane: Okay, I called Svetlana and she told me she's in Russia. She was asleep and hadn't seen the news. She knows now.

Jane: Please answer your phone before I have a panic attack.

Jane: Should I be buying a plane ticket right now?

Ilya takes a deep breath, bracing himself.

Ilya: no plane ticket. i am fine

Immediately, three bubbles appear.

Jane: Holy shit, Ilya, I am going to fucking kill you when I see you.

Jane: You scared me so much. I thought you had done something.

Ilya swallows hard, guilt curdling in his stomach. Of course he scared Shane. Shane was the only one who knew about Ilya's mother's history, the full story. Well, Shane and Svetlana, but Svetlana had been there when it happened: she knew him before, and so it didn't change her view of him. Not like Ilya knew it changed Shane's view of him. He could feel it in the way Shane looked at him sometimes, when Ilya was too quiet or smiled less than usual on a night together. And Ilya had noticed—of course he had noticed—the way Shane stocked his

medicine cabinet now. No loose razorblades. Old bottles of half-finished prescriptions suddenly disappeared into the night.

Ilya: i know and i am sorry. sorry to have this conversation over text too but i don't think i
can talk right now

Jane: That's okay. We don't have to plan out a response right now anyway. I'm just glad you're okay.

Ilya: that's not what i meant

Ilya: i meant i think maybe you should not be involved in planning a response to this. or
anything at all

All Shane sends back is a string of question marks, which is fair enough—Ilya is terrible at this.

“рубить с плеча,” he mutters to himself.

Ilya: i do not want you to get dragged into this. i think we should break up

Immediately, the read receipt shows up under the message. Ilya waits for a terrifying two, three beats before the phone in his hand starts ringing.

Call from Jane ❤️, the screen says.

Ilya rejects the call. Shane calls back. Ilya rejects it again. They go through the cycle a couple times before Ilya's phone screen is freed up for just long enough to text Shane again.

Ilya: i do not want to talk. i am sorry. as i said i know it is bad to do over text

Ilya: this will be better for you. my career is going to be very bad for a long time. i may not have career after this. there will be lots of cameras on me, very high risk. it is not fair to you

Jane: Shut up. We're not breaking up. I'm coming to Boston.

Ilya shakes his head. His stubborn boy. But if Shane is an unstoppable force, then Ilya is an immovable object. If anyone can withstand Shane, it's Ilya, especially if Ilya has good reason to do so—and he does.

Ilya: you cannot force me to stay in relationship with you, shane. i am not a bad play you can
fix

Ilya: i'm sorry. i know this isn't what we planned and i know you hate it when plans change.
i wish things were different. but this is what we need to do. you'll see.

Ilya: do not come to boston. i am leaving soon anyway, there is nothing here for you

He hesitates for a second, but, fuck it, in for a penny. He adds:

Ilya: i love you very much. thank you for everything. you were so good to me, even when i was very bad boyfriend. i did not deserve it, but you are the love of my life.

Then—because it's the best option, because Ilya needs to be able to use his phone without constantly visiting this text stream—he blocks Shane, and deletes their past texts and Shane's number from his phone.

In less than a minute, it's done. Shane is gone from Ilya's life.

Ilya sets his phone down on the kitchen countertop and takes a deep breath. He should probably feel more terrible about this. He should probably be crying. But his chest feels hollow as a balloon animal. He feels very little of anything at all.

—

Ilya's not sure what to do, after that. He *should* spend some time online, researching his path to American citizenship if his work visa is rescinded, or, maybe more usefully, searching for countries in which you can buy residency. He heard someone say once that for half a million dollars in real estate, you can get residence in Malta. He looked up Malta afterwards. Malta is the gayest country in the European Union, according to Out.com.

But Ilya opens his laptop and mostly just stares at his own reflection in the screen, and eventually he shuts it again. At a loss for what to do, he wanders over to the fridge and stares at its contents for several long minutes until its aggressive beeping becomes impossible to ignore, at which point he closes the fridge and lays down, flat on his back on the kitchen tile, staring up at the ceiling.

As a kid, he had liked doing things like this when he was left home alone—find some strange hallway or corner of his house and lay down so he could examine it from a new angle. He rarely found anything more exciting than a crack on the ceiling he'd never spotted before, or a dusty spiderweb, but it excited him nonetheless. To find new things in a place that he knew completely. It made him feel like there was always something else to discover. Like if he could just chip back the layers of his father's stern face, if he could pry his way into Alexei's chest cavity, he would find the people he remembered from when he was very young. The people who showed up, sometimes, in his dreams at night, smiling when they saw him, saying *Ilyusha* in voices that were more warm than angry.

Ilya's been laying on the floor long enough that both of his legs have gone numb when there is a ferocious banging from the foyer. "Ilya!" the person shouts, and Ilya realizes with some distant recognition that it's Marly. He hadn't really expected Marly to show up, but it wasn't entirely outside the realm of possibility. Ilya is more surprised that he managed to get past the front gate. Well, he had plenty of money for a bribe, or maybe he made some claim about suicide and legal liabilities if the Boston Raiders' nine-million-dollar-a-year captain killed himself under their watch.

Was Ilya still the captain? He hasn't looked at any of his messages from work. It wouldn't shock him if they decided to strip the C after something like this.

“Ilya, I know you’re in there, you fuckwad!” Marly yells, still pounding. “I can see your location on my phone!”

It’s enough for Ilya to grab his phone and check it, but—no, he turned it off. Whatever Marly’s seeing was transmitted hours ago, probably. He’ll realize that soon enough. In the meantime, all Ilya has to stay is to stay very still and quiet on the floor. Eventually, Marly will realize that Ilya isn’t home and he’ll go looking somewhere else. If he wants to keep looking. Maybe he’s just here out of some sense of loyalty, and now that he’s tried he can say he gave it his best effort and wash his hands of the whole thing with a clean conscience, and —

There’s a terribly loud shattering sound, and Ilya’s burglar alarm starts to wail.

“Intruder alert,” the system announces. “Intruder alert. First floor living room window damaged. Police will be notified in twenty seconds. Please enter your security code if this is in error. If this is not in error, please exit the home. Police will be notified in ten seconds. Please exit the house. Police will be notified in—“

Ilya punches his code into the pad by the front door with shaking fingers. “Security code entered,” the system informs him. “Police have not been notified. Alarm ceased.”

Ilya takes a deep breath and twists around. Unrepentant in his living room, Marly stands in a pile of shattered glass. There’s a big rock on the floor by his feet that, up until two minutes ago, Ilya is pretty sure lived in his flowerbeds.

“What the *fuck* is wrong with you?”

“Me?” Marly looks comically surprised. “What’s wrong with *you*? Bro, I’ve been calling you all fucking morning. Jesus, I mean, are you okay?”

“Am I okay?” Ilya demands. He waves his arms in the air. “You just shattered my fucking living room window!”

Marly rolls his eyes. “Chill, bro, it was just a window.”

“*It’s the entire fucking wall!*”

Marly looks around, a confused expression on his face like like he’s only just now noticing that Ilya’s entire fucking house is made of windows. With this one shattered, the whole place is less of a building and more of a massive outdoor pavilion, open to the wilderness. And it looks like it’s going to rain.

“Yeah, you might need to call someone about that,” Marly admits.

Ilya pinches his nose. “*Jesus Christ,*” he says to himself in Russian. “*Why did God give me such an idiot for a friend?*”

“Hey, I might not speak Russian, but I know what you sound like when you’re insulting someone,” Marly says. “And it’s not my fault, anyway. I was worried about you! Maybe next time you should answer your door.”

Ilya glares at him. “Next time? If there is a next time, I do not think we will be friends by then.”

“Ouch, bro,” Marly says. “That hurts. Hey, do you have anything good to drink around here?”

“It’s not even noon.”

“Look,” Marly says. “My best friend’s private parts are all over the internet. I’m traumatized, or something. Also, I’ve missed your vodka. So?”

Ilya closes his eyes.

—

“Okay,” Marly says, when they’re settled in Ilya’s other living room, both of them with a glass of vodka in hand. Ilya picked his shittiest bottle of vodka out of spite, but Marly, who was used to Tito’s and Svedka, didn’t even seem to notice the slight. “So how are you doing? Really?”

“I’m peachy,” Ilya says.

Marly snorts. “Sure.”

He’s got his legs spread apart so far you’d think his cock was the size of a beer can, but his shoulders are tense, his thumb rubbing over the side of his glass. Ilya can’t tell if it’s the conversation he’s uncomfortable with or Ilya himself.

Ilya shrugs, looking down at his own glass. “You are being so dramatic. Is not a big deal. Am not first famous person to have sex tape leaked. Not even first hockey player.”

There’s a long silence, and Ilya thinks maybe Marly has taken his point, but when he looks over Marly is frowning at him, his eyebrows screwed up into an expression that makes him look kind of like he’s shitting.

“Look, if you have problem with me—“

“Woah, bro, no,” Marly interrupts. He even presses a hand to his heart and everything. “Nothing like that, come on man, you know me.”

Yes, Ilya does know him, which means he knows just how often Marly likes to call guys cocksuckers and faggots and sissy little bitches. Less often now than he used to, but it still comes out plenty often on the ice. Marly’s a good guy, but with things like this—it counts for less than one would hope.

“I’m just—I didn’t watch the video. Obviously. But I saw a gif—I didn’t mean to, it was just there on my Twitter and by the time I figured out it was you it was too late, and—“

“Get to the point,” Ilya says.

“I’m just trying to say that what was going on in that video—did not look consensual,” Marly says. “You seemed pretty young and—I don’t think it counts as a sex tape if it’s a video of a crime.”

Ilya clenches his jaw. Technically, yes, it was a crime. Even Russia, with all its stupid fucking laws, has an age of consent, and that age is sixteen. Ilya was, what, fourteen in that video? And Kuznetsov was in his thirties. If it had been reported at the time, if there was evidence—

But it hadn’t been reported, and there wasn’t evidence, and there never would be. Even if the statute of limitations hadn’t long since expired, there would be no desire to prosecute a crime like this in Russia. Last time Ilya checked, Kuznetsov lived in Sweden now, coaching their national youth hockey team, and Russia wouldn’t go to all the effort to extradite him, not when the “victim” was a cocksucking hockey player who left Russia for the NHL. Ilya’s famous, and he has influence in Russia—or he had it, anyway. Because the moment that video leaked, Ilya lost any power he had.

Is a crime a crime if nobody is willing to condemn it? Or is it just something else to be sad about?

Fuck. It really hits Ilya for the first time: he can never go back to Russia.

“I think you’re being dramatic,” Ilya tells Marly, instead of any of this. “I was young, does not mean I did not like cock.”

Marly chokes around his vodka.

“What?” Ilya demands. He has never been able to stop himself from pressing on a bruise. “You say you are okay with the gay but then you make this face. Was that a lie? You want to punch me now?”

“No, man!” Marly says. “Fuck, I’m just trying to figure out what to say. I’m not a therapist, you know, I don’t know what the fuck the right response is here.”

But his shoulders are tight and he’s not looking at Ilya.

“Normally, you would offer to get me drunk,” Ilya says.

Marly huffs. “Yeah, well. We’re clearly already halfway there.”

Ilya tilts his head. “Maybe we should try for all the way.”

Marly shakes his head. “Ilya fucking Rozanov,” he says, and there’s something in his tone, something Ilya is too tired to try to understand. “Yeah. All right. All the fucking way.”

—

An hour later, Ilya is proud to say that they’ve mostly succeeded.

“Is the Russian mafia like really a thing?” Marly asks. He’s four drinks in, and his face is starting to get flushed and sweaty the way it always does when he gets trashed. “Like, do you

think I could really hire someone to commit murder?”

Ilya makes a face at him, tipping back his own fourth glass of vodka. Fifth? He’s starting to lose track in a pleasant, thoughtless way. “Who the fuck do you want to kill, Marly? Caitlyn? If you want the house back so much I bet she just sell it to you.”

“Roz, you are so fucking stupid sometimes,” Marly says, but doesn’t press the issue.

A few minutes later, it’s Marly’s turn to be oblivious when Ilya finds himself breaking the silence by saying, “You know, is funny. This is almost like that arcade game. With the rats.”

Marly and his big, dumb, confused face. “What the fuck are you on about,” he says.

Ilya huffs. “You know, game where they give you hammer, you smack down the rats!”

“Whack-a-Mole?”

“Yes, this,” Ilya says, waving his empty glass through the air. “Is—I spend decade here, in America, playing this game. First my brother wants money for cocaine. Fine! I whack the mole. Then my father dies. Fine! I whack the mole. Then my boyfriend wants me to tell him about how my dead mother killed herself. Fine! I whack the mole. Now this.”

A thought occurs to him, and he tilts his head. “Oh, yes. I have a boyfriend, by the way. Well, I did. We broke up today.”

“Fuck, Roz,” Marly whistles. Behind his head, the sun is starting to get low in the sky. Is it evening already? “Who is it?”

“I can’t say who. Famous. Super secret.” Shane had had rules for them, to keep it that way. The standard stuff—fake names, no telling friends about their relationship, blah blah blah—but other things, too. True CIA shit, like not keeping any photos of each other on their phones, even if they were group shots or advertising pictures. Ilya had been meaning to buy a Polaroid camera, so he could at least get a few snapshots to keep in his safe, but he’d never gotten around to it. Now he never would.

“No hints?” Marly asks, dragging Ilya from his thoughts.

“*Marly*,” Ilya sighs, and Marly laughs.

“Sorry. I think I’m drunk. Maybe cuz Caitlin tried to make me into a teetotaler. Oh my god, am I a lightweight now?”

“What the fuck is teetotaler?”

“Boring little bitch.” Marly lists back on the couch until his head is half-hanging over the arm.

“Maybe my boyfriend is teetotaler, then,” Ilya says. Then he has to correct himself: “*Ex* boyfriend.” It stings more than it should, really, with all the alcohol numbing him up.

“Yeah, what the fuck,” Marly says. “Did that piece of shit break up with you over this? Because I’ll go beat his face in.”

“That is hate crime, Marly,” Ilya says.

“No, it’s a defending your *bro* crime,” Marly says. “Worth it. Okay, gimme his name, I’m gonna Google his address.”

Ilya rolls his eyes. “You cannot Google address of famous person, idiot,” he says. “And no reason to hit him. He did not break up with me. I broke up with him. Is not—cannot date him in secret and be sure we won’t be caught. So cannot date him.”

Marly shakes his head. “That sucks, man. I mean—are you sure you have to do that? Like, not to judge but, I kinda feel like people don’t care who you’re dating right now? Like, that’s kind of the least of your problems?”

Ilya shakes his head morosely into his vodka glass. “You don’t understand,” he says. “Is not me. Is him. He would never come out. Never. Maybe after we retire, he said. I think maybe not. We die in closet.”

Marly nods sympathetically. “Yeah, that’s—that’s a bummer, bro. Well. Maybe it’s for the best, breaking up with him, then. I have a gay cousin, he was showing me Grindr at Thanksgiving and it’s fucking *crazy*. We can get you such good ass—“

Ilya does have a Grindr profile, though he hasn’t used it in a very long time. He redownloads the app, just so he can show Marly what the state of gay dating is in Boston. Marly can’t focus enough to stop gaping at all the abs and asses on display. “How much do you think this guy benches?” he keeps asking, waving a thirst trap in Ilya’s face. “What about this guy? Do you think he builds his quads from Bulgarian split squats or traditional presses?”

Eventually, Ilya steals his phone back, because it’s that or brain Marly with the now-empty vodka bottle. Like he always does when he’s drunk, he clicks into his texts to re-read old messages from Shane. It’s only after he’s scrolled halfway down the page, searching for Shane’s name, that he remembers he deleted those text streams. In fact, he deleted Shane from his life entirely. He’s alone now.

“I need to get out of here,” he decides, shoving himself to his feet.

Marly, sprawled on the floor, blinks out of him. “Like, this room?”

“Like, this house,” Ilya says. “I don’t want to be here when Shane shows up.”

Marly’s brow furrows. “Shane like—Shane Hollander? Your rival?”

Fuck, Ilya thinks. Misstep. Maybe he’s more drunk than he thought. He tries to play it off; classic arrogance. He’s unbothered, because if he’s unbothered, then clearly this isn’t the sore spot it looks like. “Do you know any other Shanes?”

Marly frowns at him a moment longer before his expression suddenly clears. “Oh,” he says. “I get it.” Ilya braces himself to hear *so you’re a faggot with Hollander. He sucks cock too*.

Instead, Marly says, “You think he’s gonna come here to rub it in your face?”

Ilya stares at him.

“I always thought he was kind of holier than thou,” Marly muses. “But damn, you really think he’d show up just to taunt you? That’s fucking cold.”

Good lord, Ilya thinks. Sometimes he really does wonder if Marly is the dumbest man in the entire MLH.

“Look, it doesn’t matter. The point is, I don’t want to risk it,” Ilya says. Marly blinks at him blankly. Ilya huffs. “So, can we go to your place?”

Marly brightens. “Oh, yeah!” he says. “Of course. Let’s go, bro.” Then he pauses. “Shit, I can’t drive like this. Are you sober enough to drive?”

Ilya claps him on the shoulder. “Oh, Marly, my dumb friend,” he says. He means it to sound scornful but mostly it comes across as fond. “We can call a fucking Uber.”

—

Ilya wakes up the next morning more hungover than he has been in years.

He groans, rolling onto his side to bury his face into the spare pillow. He hadn’t shut the curtains last night, and the morning sunlight is like a dagger to his brain. He feels like he was run over by a semi-truck. He feels like he just played an entire hockey game without a single substitution. He feels like someone has died, and he feels like maybe that person was him.

Reluctantly, after a few minutes, he gets up to go to the bathroom. He pisses, then splashes his face with water, then fumbles around in the medicine cabinet until he finds a bottle of Advil. He takes three and then, after a moment’s thought, a fourth. There’s a plastic cup by the sink and he fills it with water that he gulps down before refilling it and tottering back to bed.

He folds himself back under the covers. He glances at his phone screen—more missed texts from Svetlana, more missed calls from Svetlana, a message from Farah telling him to call her at his earliest convenience. Missed messages in the Raiders groupchat, missed calls from Ilya’s coach, missed texts and calls from unknown numbers who are probably journalists, a text from the Raiders’ front office begging him to call today so they can touch base on PR angles, a string of notifications from Yuna Hollander and a singular missed call from David.

It was stupid of Ilya not to block their numbers yesterday, too. Block and delete, that’s what he should have done. He sets his phone down on the bedside table and closes his eyes. *Fuck*, his head is killing him.

Hazily, he finds himself wishing he had Shane’s fingers in his hair, rubbing the headache out of his scalp. Shane was always so good at that, when Ilya had a headache. Even when it was a headache from drinking, and his own damn fault. Shane would roll his eyes and complain that Ilya brought things on himself, but he’d slot himself behind Ilya in bed, kissing the back

of his neck to distract him from his nausea, and slip one hand into his curls. Shane loved messing with Ilya's curls. *It's like petting a very fluffy sheep*, he had said once, and Ilya hadn't known whether to be offended or endeared, so he had sucked Shane's cock instead. The whole while, Shane rubbed his hands through Ilya's hair, fingernails scraping against his scalp.

Ilya wants so badly to be there, right now. In Shane's arms; in Shane's house; in the memories he has with Shane. Fuck, he just wants Shane.

The thought hits him like a freight train. He wants Shane, and he's not going to get him. He's not going to get him ever again, because he and Shane are broken up. Ilya broke up with him.

The first sob that tears its way out of his throat takes him by surprise; by the second, he's plastered his hands over his mouth to muffle the sounds. The last thing he wants is for Marly to hear and come see—this. Tears fall thick and fast down his face and he cocoons himself in the too-warm duvet, burying his face in the fabric.

This is all his fault, he thinks as he cries. He should have known better than to get involved with Shane like this. He should have known better to hope—but that was his flaw, wasn't it? He always wanted more. He was always asking for more. He hadn't appreciated his mother when he had her, and then she had killed herself. He hadn't appreciated the life he had created for himself here in Boston, either, too hung up on a freckled Canadian who could shove him around on the ice, and now he had lost both the Canadian and his life in Boston. And was it worth it? The time they had together, was it worth feeling this, now, knowing he could never get it back?

Ilya's heart feels hollow, like the skin of a mango scraped clean by a metal spoon. He lays in bed crying long enough that eventually he falls asleep.

Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

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

Ilya wakes up again an hour later to someone banging on his door.

“If you don’t come out in the next five minutes, I’m gonna assume you died,” Marly calls through the door. “Time for breakfast.”

There’s a little digital clock on the bedside table, no doubt placed there by whoever Marly hired to furnish the apartment. If the clock is right—which is debatable—then it’s ten in the morning.

Ilya’s dead phone sits on the bedside table. He considers it for a second, but in the end, he leaves it there.

In the kitchen, Marly has made a hangover spread—fried eggs bubbling in way too much oil, greasy bacon, buttered white bread the likes of which Shane would probably rather die than eat.

Stop thinking about Shane, Ilya tells himself, as he sits down at the kitchen island. *There’s no reason to think about Shane. That’s over now.*

“So, LeClaire is kinda blowing up my phone,” Marly says, shaking eggs out of the pan onto Ilya’s plate. “I didn’t tell the team anything, just said you touched base with me and were safe, but he really wants to get in touch with you. I think he wants to make sure you’re still good to play Montreal next week. If we have to play Hollander without you, we’re fucked.”

Ilya fumbles his fork, breaking an egg yolk. He plays it off by mopping it up with a piece of his butter-soggy toast. “I just woke up,” he says. “Give me ten fucking minutes before I have to speak to all the fuckwads.”

Marly raises his hands in the air. “All right, Roz, jeez.” He serves his own eggs and takes a seat at the kitchen island beside Ilya. They eat in silence, Marly tapping away at his phone, Ilya staring at the intricately-patterned tile backsplash behind Marly’s stove and trying to think through contingencies. He needs to find an immigration lawyer. He needs to hire a Russian PR representative, to gauge the opinion of him in Russian media. Almost certainly, Ilya can’t go back there, but there’s a chance—a small chance, but a chance—that the blame will be placed on Kuznetsov’s shoulders. Maybe Ilya can make a statement, poor judgement in his youth, has learned and grown and blah blah blah. His Russian passport has five years left on it, which is plenty of time for the scandal to pass from public memory, and also plenty of time for Ilya to work on those visas, if he can just—

Marly’s phone rings.

He grimaces when he sees the caller ID, tilting it to show Ilya. *COACH* 🍌🔪 it says.

“You woke up enough yet?”

Ilya huffs and snatches the phone from his hand.

“Coach,” he says, as soon as he answers.

There’s a split-second pause, and then LeClaire is saying, “Jesus, Roz, I was starting to think you were dead.”

“*Niet*,” Ilya says. “Just very, very drunk.”

LeClaire sighs. “Well, at least you did in private. Will we see you at practice?”

Ilya had considered taking a day. From a purely logistical perspective, it would probably be ideal to start to get his legalities figured out. But the longer he waits to go back to the rink, the more the whispers will circulate. The more stares he’ll get when he does eventually go back; the more awkward the boys will be about his presence.

“I will be there,” Ilya says.

He gets there early because he’s sure PR will want a meeting, and he’s right. He’s barely inside the building before someone in a buttoned-up pantsuit is appearing and ushering him away to a gleaming conference room with a bunch of people he doesn’t know, all asking him if he wants a lawyer. “We would like to make a statement condemning sexual assault,” one of them says, and Ilya snaps back, “What does sexual assault have to do with anything? I fucked that man of my own free will. Only thing you can condemn is me being a whore.”

So it doesn’t go great.

They make him answer a bunch of dumb questions. How old was he, how old was his partner, was there a power dynamic at play, did he know he was being filmed at the time? Was this a one-time thing or an ongoing sexual relationship? Has this tape or any other ever been used as leverage against him? Is this the first time he’s seen this tape? Does he have any idea who might have leaked it?

Ilya digs his fingernails into his palms under the table. Above it, his face is blank and calm. He answers the questions. He doesn’t break anything, even though he kind of wants to smash this stupid glass conference table to pieces.

By the time he’s allowed to escape to the locker room, the guys are already waiting for him. Most of them are sitting, except for Marly, who’s standing in the corner with his arms in the air like he’s holding court. He shuts up immediately when the door opens, as if Ilya didn’t already know they were talking about him.

“So,” Ilya says. “What’s up? Anything exciting happen this week? I have not been online.”

It draws one or two chuckles out of the most nervous rookies, but for the most part, the room is silent. Ilya scans the boys’ faces as he walks to his stall; mostly anger. A little fear. It could be anger on Ilya’s behalf, but he has no doubt an equal amount of it is fury at Ilya himself for getting into this position, for not telling them about this sooner. And the fear—Ilya watches

as Chesney pulls his feet back before Ilya can pass by, as Davidson leans away from Ilya's stall. Worried that he'll force himself on them? Worried that he'll gawk at them in the showers? Worried that he's done it already?

"I will talk about this once," Ilya says, busying himself at his locker so he doesn't have to look at them. His voice projects around the room anyway. "And then I will never talk about it again, so listen up. I did not know this video existed. I obviously did not share this stupid fucking video. Do not fucking talk to me about it, ever. It does not change anything for me. For you, I don't know, we will see. But so far, I have not been fired, which means I am still your captain. I am still on this fucking team. If that changes, you will be first to know, but until then, I expect you to do exactly what I tell you to fucking do on the ice. Okay?"

He turns, eyes the boys. Most of them have their gazes downturned. Eriksson looks like he's about to start crying; Robins is scowling at Ilya, openly hostile. Ilya makes a mental note.

"Okay," Ilya says again, when the room is quiet. "You have problem and you don't want to talk to me, talk to Marly. Hard to miss. Biggest, ugliest fucker in this room."

"Hey, man," Marly complains, and Ilya slaps him on the back, grinning too-wide.

"Hurry up, fucks," Ilya says. "Practice was supposed to start five minutes ago."

He leaves the locker room first, so they have a chance to gossip about him. The whispers start up before the door has even fully swung shut behind him. He strides quickly down the hall so he doesn't have to hear anything.

—

Practice goes as good as could be expected. Half the guys on the ice start out treating him like he's made of glass, the other half like he's got a contagious disease. Then LeClaire calls a scrimmage, and by the time Ilya has sent three guys careening into the boards, most of the team is treating him almost like normal. The exception is Eriksson, who genuinely seems on the verge of tears the whole afternoon, and Chesney, who tries to throw Ilya off him like they're wrestling when Ilya leans over him to try to get the puck.

"What, you think I try to fuck you?" Ilya snaps as he body-checks Chesney away and snatches up the puck. He sends it careening across the rink to Marly, who's waiting, stick tapping on the ice. "Baby, I only fuck men who can do a proper fucking pivot."

Chesney gapes at him as Ilya skates away. A moment later, Marly sends the puck careening back his way, and with a quick shot, Ilya sends it into the back of the net. Marly skates up and bumps shoulders with Ilya; Eriksson, on Ilya's right wing, just pouts at him.

After, Ilya makes some excuse to talk to LeClaire about gameplays, and when he gets into the locker room half an hour later, it's mostly cleared out, even though the guys usually take a hell of a lot longer to shower and leave after practice. Of the stragglers, only Marly is still in his jersey, and he waits for Ilya to shed his sweaty clothes and grab a towel to follow him into the showers, like he's making a point of it.

“You know, people are going to think we’re fucking,” Ilya points out, slinging his towel over a hook. *Don’t think of Shane, don’t think of Shane, don’t think of Shane.*

Marly just scoffs. “Please. You know I’m a tits man.”

Ilya gapes at him. “What the fuck is wrong with my tits?”

Marly makes a face. “Do those count as tits?”

“Oh my god,” Ilya groans, cranking on the shower and sticking his face right into the spray. “You are so fucking straight.”

—

Ilya goes back to Marly’s after practice, because they carpooled to the rink and because Ilya still doesn’t want to risk seeing anyone and because there’s still a gigantic hole in his own living room wall.

Marly goes to the massive effort of ordering Thai takeout, then disappears to call his mom while they wait for it to arrive. Ilya can hear soft voices through the walls, and thinks he catches his own name, but he doesn’t actually like to be an eavesdropping dick, so he pulls up his phone to distract himself. Before he can think better of it, he opens Twitter, where he finds an overflowing mess of notifications. His own name is trending #1 under the Sports category. Masochistically, he clicks it.

Oh my god this is so fucking sad, says Sara @rozanovsassy. Poor baby ilya being assaulted and now his privacy being violated with the video being leaked? Who has suffered more, ilya Rozanov or Jesus?? FUCK

Rozanov is a cocksucking fag, what else is new?, says Trent B. @metrossupremacy.

seen a lot of speculation that this is not ilya but can confirm from the three moles on his left shoulder that it is indeed him. see the comparison shot from this shirtless pic of him at San Diego all stars last year, says bitch don’t have @reebok.nuff. They’ve attached two pictures, a still from the tape and a screenshot of a paparazzi picture of Ilya on the beach, both with sloppy red circles drawn around the triangle of moles on his left shoulder.

@ilyarozanov Fag fag fag fag FAGGGGGGGGG, says REAL MAN @alphadawgg.

Ok but this has to trigger a morality clause in Rozanov’s contract, right? There’s no way the Raiders will keep him on after this, says Mirabelle @hollandatass.

COCKSUCKING LITTLE BITCH ROZANOV FUCK YOU FAGGOT! says Steven @peanutbrokers.

At that point, Ilya figures he should probably stop reading.

Before he can click out of the tag, though, he sees a post from a name with a checkmark next to it and pauses. Scott Hunter @scotthunternyc has apparently felt the need to weigh in on this debate.

While Rozanov may occasionally drive me crazy (both on and off the ice), nobody deserves the kind of attention he's been receiving online these past few days. The leaked video is a gross invasion of his privacy and just the sort of thing that I feared every day for most of my career. I strongly urge everyone to refrain from watching the video and to report posts containing content from it, including gifs or screenshots. Being in the public eye does not mean giving up your right to privacy, especially when it comes to sensitive topics like this. I'll be refraining from making any assumptions about Rozanov's private life until or unless he makes a statement on the matter, and I encourage you to do the same. Let's all do the right thing.

Ilya reads it through twice, his heart pounding in his chest like a fucking jackhammer. He reads it through a third time. He reads it through a fourth, and then he decides he's going to murder Scott Hunter.

He settles for throwing his phone across the room, where it lands with a loud crack that definitely means Ilya broke something. He doesn't care. He'll care tomorrow, probably, or even in an hour, but right now he is so fucking furious he wants to burn something down. Maybe this apartment, maybe this building, maybe the entirety of Boston, or Moscow, or New York City, or maybe his own stupid, dumb self. Fuck. He should self-immolate like one of those Buddhist fucking monks that Ilya read about in one of David's old New Yorkers. And his dying act should be to wrap himself around Scott Hunter like an octopus so that stupid fucking cocky octogenarian goes down with him.

Nobody deserves the kind of attention he's receiving online nowadays, from the man who got to decide where and when and how he came out. Gross invasion of his privacy from a man who's spent most of the past year parading his smoothie-making grad student boyfriend around to every MLH function and Admirals game, because he can afford to do that without getting investigated for game-fixing and fired from his job. The sort of thing I feared every day for most of my career; when the worst that could conceivably happen to Hunter is that he would lose the support of his locker room, lose the support of his fans, get called a few slurs, while here Ilya is at risk of getting sent back to Russia, where he'll be jumped in the street and murdered or, better yet, arrested for promoting homosexuality and sent to prison in Magadan, where he'll develop scurvy and rickets and iron-deficiency anemia and die in a cell jammed with seventeen other men before he hits the ripe old age of forty.

Scott Hunter, acting like they're fucking equals. Scott Hunter, acting like he understands. Scott Hunter, pitying him.

Ilya has fallen to such depths that Scott fucking Hunter pities him.

Ilya picks up a pillow from the couch, walks out to the balcony, and slides the door shut behind him. He holds the pillow up to his face and screams so loudly for so long that he actually needs to sit down and catch his breath.

When he comes back inside, Marly is standing in the living room, watching him. "I, uh, thought I heard something," he says. "And then the Thai food got here. So."

Ilya tosses the pillow back on the couch. "Great," he says. "Dinner. Good. Fine. Let's eat."

Ilya eats three orders of spring rolls, which Marly hates and presumably bought just for him. He also eats an entire order pad thai, and some curry thing he's never seen before, and two boxes of white rice that were seemingly just thrown in the bag. By that point all the Thai food is gone, but Ilya still feels like he could eat the world, so he goes into Marly's pantry and finds a box of ramen and makes himself two packets with frozen peas added in—a habit Shane had gotten him started on, to get him eating more vegetables; *don't think of Shane, don't think of Shane, don't think of Shane*—which Ilya eats straight out of the pan like he's a spoiled American teenager. Then he discovers Marly's fruit drawer—he hadn't known Marly was capable of eating fruit—and has three apples with peanut butter. Then he has a protein bar. Then he finds he's vaguely satisfied.

“What?” Ilya says, as Marly gawps at him. “I am hungry.”

“Right,” Marly says faintly. “Sure.”

But at least when Ilya is lying awake that night, desperately not thinking of Shane, he's not hungry.

The next day, the Raiders have an optional practice. Ilya had planned to go—he's captain; he always goes to optional practices, unless Shane is in town—but Marly had caught him that morning in the kitchen and told him LeClaire suggested he stay home. “Catch up on your legal stuff, talk to PR, whatever,” Marly says. “I'm sure there's a lot of it.”

Ilya's not dumb—he knows this means LeClaire wants to talk to the guys without Ilya present, and Marly probably does, too. And it's probably smart, as much as Ilya hates it, because Chesney is not going to start being normal all by himself and Ilya is sure Robins has got problems he needs to talk through, too, even if he was willing to set them aside on the ice.

Ilya knows what he should do: he should call his agent. Better yet, he should call Svetlana. At last glance, he had 137 unread texts and god knows how many missed calls from her alone, but he can't even bring himself to click into the text stream and read them. Not a single one.

It's stupid, of course. If there's anyone he can trust not to judge him about this, it's Svetlana. Svetlana who did competitive figure skating until she was sixteen years old and knows the state of Russian athletics better than any non-Russian ever could. Svetlana, who had met Kuznetsov when Ilya trained under him, Svetlana who had gotten meals with him and the team, Svetlana who surely had to at least suspect that something was going on between them. She never said anything about it, but there were all the practices where Ilya alone was kept late, all those meetings with Kuznetsov in his office discussing “captain duties,” even though everyone knew fourteen-year-old captains had no duties other than looking good on the ice.

This is why Ilya should want to talk to her, but maybe it's why he doesn't want to talk to her, too. He doesn't want to see her face when they inevitably discuss this. He doesn't want her to confirm that she knew all along, that she thought this was normal, that she was fine with it. Or, worse, that she didn't know, that it disgusts her, that even she can't understand this. That even in Moscow, he is an aberration. Both options seem equally wrong, and Ilya doesn't know how he'll deal with either eventuality. So he goes for the coward's option and does

neither. He closes out of the text stream, puts his phone on airplane mode, and makes himself unreachable.

Then he changes into athletic clothes, pokes around Marly's apartment until he finds a pair of headphones, and goes for a run. There's a long, looping trail through a park near his house; Ilya does three laps before he even starts to get a little tired. Then he does three more. Eventually, his legs can't carry him any more, but he just finds a hidden spot under a tree trunk to sit and stretch out his legs. It's dark under the canopy of the tree, thick with fresh spring leaves, and it smells of soil. Ilya lays on his back with his hair in the dirt and closes his eyes. Like this, he can pretend he's anywhere. New York, Montreal, Ottawa, Moscow. The little farm in the countryside where his mother grew up. Some forest deep in the wilderness where nobody will find him, a place he will never have to leave. Ilya lays here, and he takes a deep breath, and lets himself pretend, for a few moments, that he never has to go back.

On Friday, the Raiders have an away game in New Jersey. Coach LeClaire gives Ilya an out, in that he pulls him aside sternly at the airport and asks, "Is this going to be a problem?"

Ilya, who knows what LeClaire wants to hear, squares his shoulders and says, "No, sir. No problem."

The locker room is quieter than normal, and Ilya's not dumb enough to think it's for any reason other than his presence, but nobody is stupid enough to say anything to him, either. Ilya's more than proved he's willing to throw a punch when it's warranted, and Marly's hanging around behind him like a particularly gay-friendly ogre.

The game is a shitshow right from the start. Vicious checking, liberally swinging elbows and sticks, and plenty of sneers directed Ilya's way. Five minutes in, Marly gets aggressively checked into the boards in a move that would earn a power play from any competent ref, but these New Jersey fuckwads just turn up their noses and pretend they don't see it. What they *do* see is a nonexistent off-sides from Cohen, one of Boston's third-line forwards, and it takes a video replay for them to revoke the bogus penalty. By then, Boston—who were seconds away from a goal, by Ilya's estimation—have lost their momentum, and any opportunity that had existed is lost.

Just before the end of first period, Ilya takes his first hit, a legal check that sends him slamming down in the neutral zone onto his left shoulderblade. As he pushes himself to his feet, biting back a groan, the player who had hit him—Bourdain, a particularly uninspired left-winger for the Stingers whose forehead takes up half his face—leans over and spits, "You prissy fucking *fag*."

Ilya sets his jaw.

Second period starts faster, with more passing from the Raiders and speedier skating from New Jersey to make up for it. The game is still tied 0-0 when Ilya glides to the center line for a face-off and finds the New Jersey captain, Brown, waiting for him. His expression is neutral, and Ilya makes the mistake of thinking he'll be cordial. Then Brown bends at the

waist, stick outstretched next to Ilya's, and says, "Should we call LeClaire out here? Seems like you like to have a coach behind you."

During the shift, Ilya gets checked again. This time, it's a late hit as he's mid-pass to Marly. It earns the Raiders a powerplay, but it's hard to feel particularly excited about it when it jars Ilya's right knee, the same one he'd nearly crippled during last year's playoffs. He limps off the ice and has to watch as Marly makes the first goal of the game—off an assist from Robins of all people.

"How's that knee, Roz?" LeClaire asks him, as they troop to the locker room for the second intermission. "Do I need to sit you?"

"I tape it, will be fine," Ilya says. He's too tired to think about English grammar. He's too tired to do much of anything. *Seems like you like to have a coach behind you*, he thinks, on loop.

At the start of third period, it's clear the New Jersey Stingers are getting worried. During the face-off, Brown calls Ilya a slutty little whore who's desperate for cock. It's not as good as his last chirp, and Ilya wins the puck this time, though he loses it almost immediately to one of the Stingers' defenders.

He almost gets cross-checked on his next shift, but manages to dodge out of the way just in time. The clock is ticking down and it seems like the Stingers have decided to take out their frustration on Ilya. He gets a "fairy" and a "fag" chucked at him in quick succession, then comes back on for his next shift and immediately gets called a faggot. Someone asks if he fucked his father. Someone else asks if he has a fetish for the elderly.

Three minutes from the end of the game, Ilya is bending to take a face-off near the Stingers' goal—Stevenson had taken a shot which the New Jersey goalie had caught—when Ilya's opponent says, "So, was that old guy just terrible in bed or do you always cry when you're fucked?"

"Oh, that's fucking *it*," Marly says, tossing aside his stick and shedding his gloves in one smooth movement.

Ilya doesn't try to stop him. He's never been able to stop Marly from fighting when he wants to, and anyway, it's too fucking late now. They're going to get a penalty no matter what; might as well let Marly work some frustration out.

What surprises Ilya, though, is that it's not just Marly. Almost as soon as Marly's helmet hits the ice, St. Simon's in the way too, his own gloves off. A moment later, Kalnins is marching into the fray, yelling, "Oh, yes, get out of the *fucking* way, fucking bitch!"

Chesney stays back, which Ilya had expected, and Smirnov doesn't emerge from the goal. But still. Three of them. And most of Ilya's teammates, from the bench, banging their sticks on the boards and hollering.

The refs break up the fight soon enough, but Marly gets a two-minute minor for instigating, and the Raiders play shorthanded for the rest of the game. It's a miracle of incompetence by

the Stingers that the game ends without a further goal: 1-0 to Boston.

“That was stupid,” Ilya tells him, as they troop off the ice at the end of the game. “You might get suspended.” Marly hadn’t even waited for the puck drop.

Marly snorts. “I don’t care. Fucking worth it.”

In the locker room, Ilya is slow to shed his game gear, babying his knee and his shoulder. By the time he’s done, most of the guys are already in the shower. He considers waiting until they’re all out, but he’s fucking exhausted and he’s fucking sore and he just wants to get out of here and get back to the hotel.

A few guys stiffen, when Ilya enters the room. But he takes a shower in the corner, deliberately looking away from everyone else, and after a minute the conversation goes back to normal. Someone is calling Chesney a pussy for not joining the scrum. “Smirnov didn’t join either,” Chesney protests.

“Bro, he’s the fucking *goalie*,” someone says.

Afterwards, Ilya is lacing up his loafers when Connors, watching something on his phone, says, “Come here, Cap, look at this.”

It’s a video of Shane in front of a strum of reporters, hair wet, face still flushed from whatever game he just finished.

“—you have any comment on the matter?” a reporter is saying.

To most people, Shane’s expression probably looks just as impenetrable as always. Shane is very good at the post-game media poker face. Ilya, of course, can see through it. Shane is looking at the reporter like she’s a splat of pigeon shit on the sidewalk that he accidentally stepped into, dirtying his brand-new white Reeboks.

“You want me to comment on Rozanov?” Shane says. “Rozanov, who is not a player on my team?”

Ilya pulls away from the phone, shaking his head. “I do not want to see.”

“No, it’s not like that,” Connors says. “It’s good, actually, he—“

“I do not want to see,” Ilya bites out, and Connors quiets. “What part of I do not ever want to talk about this is confusing? Do not show me this again.”

It’s a bad move, he knows that. Someone being nice to him, someone extending an olive branch, and he snaps like a prissy little diva; it’ll turn away the guys on the fence. Another count in the cons column for Ilya Rozanov. As he walks away, he hears the video, still going on Connors’ phone, Shane’s voice as he says, “—don’t really know what you expect me to say here, this is a matter of—“

Privacy? Personal importance? No importance? Great importance? Whatever it is will remain a mystery to Ilya, because he slips out of the locker room into the hallway, the door swinging

shut behind him and cutting off the sound.

He would breathe a sigh of relief, but down the hallway, just beyond the reaches of the burly security guard, a throng of reporters perk up at the sight of him. “Mr. Rozanov!” they call. “Rozy! Ilya! Care to comment on the recent video leaked online?”

He throws his hood up around his head. He can’t afford to be distracted. He can’t afford to think about Shane, about Svetlana, about Russia, about anything but what’s right in front of him, right here, right now.

Ilya ducks his chin, squares his shoulders, and marches forward.

—

They get back to Boston in the late afternoon. Marly, who had been out until three the night before getting laid, immediately retreats to his room to nap. Ilya decides to be a generous and gregarious houseguest and make dinner.

It makes him feel like a Soviet-era housewife making a homemade meal for her work-weary husband, but he needs something to do to fill his hours that isn’t going online and reading every terrible thing being said about him. Cooking is as good an option as any.

Marly’s got basically nothing in his fridge, so Ilya makes a list and goes to the grocery store. It’s a miscalculation; as soon as he walks through the automatic double doors, he can feel the eyes on him. In the meat section, he spots at least two iPhone cameras trained in his direction, and at the register, the cashier waits until he’s shoving his stuff into a plastic grocery bag to say, “I’m very sorry about what happened to you. It wasn’t fair.”

Ilya is tempted to leave his food and just get the fuck out of there, but that would earn its own headlines if it ever got out, so he manages a tight smile and a, “thanks,” before he bolts. He takes the scenic route back to Marly’s place, tracing long, looping circles around random city blocks until he’s sure there’s nobody following him.

When he gets back, he abandons the food on the counter and goes out to the balcony. Days like these he really regrets quitting smoking. He supposes he could start again now. He did it for Shane, really, and Shane—

Ilya’s not thinking about Shane. He braces his forearms on the railing and looks down on the ground. Marly’s on the eighth or ninth floor—Ilya always gets confused with the American numbering system—which means it’s got to be around thirty meters down.

Ilya had looked it up once, when he was young and very drunk. Twenty-five, thirty meters, that’s the threshold to jump and be sure you’ll die. If Ilya jumped, he’d be sure to die. He might take out someone with him, someone walking their scruffy little poodle or coming home late from work or running out to the convenience store to buy ribbed condoms before their Tinder date. But he’d be dead: it’s not like he’d be worrying about it.

He considers the railing. It’d be easy to vault over. One, two seconds of free fall, and then it’d all be over. He could rest. He wouldn’t have to think anymore about any of this. Nobody

would be let down, because he doesn't owe anybody anything. For the first time in a very long time, he is living only for himself.

He looks at the twinkling black sky. The buildings against it are like cliffs built of mosaic lights; the trees, far below, rustle in the wind.

Ilya goes back inside.

He's not a very good cook at the best of times, and today is not the best of times. Distracted, he chars the outside of the chicken, nearly scalds the cream sauce for the pasta, and cuts the broccoli so unevenly that it's simultaneously over- and under-cooked. Marly, big oaf that he is, douses it in salt and pepper and shoves it in his mouth in massive, elephantine bites. "s good," he says, steam pouring out of his mouth like smoke, as Ilya picks half-heartedly at his own plate.

They eat on the couch, some Netflix docuseries about pro cyclists playing in the background. Ilya barely pays attention to it, and Marly seems distracted, too, tapping away at his phone.

Ilya's just trying to figure out an excuse to escape when Marly startles, dropping his fork on the rug and spraying cream sauce everywhere.

"Holy shit," he says, goggling at his phone. "Hollander's *gay*?"

For the second time in the past week, Ilya's whole world shifts.

Chapter End Notes

ok starting next chapter we are officially on the up-and-up!!

due to personal circumstances I may not be able to post tomorrow and the last chapter may go up the day after. but I will do my best to post tomorrow.

thanks to everyone who is commenting on this fic with lovely things, it makes it so much more fun to post! and if you don't like this fic that's fine but just STOP READING IT

Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

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

The statement is just a single short paragraph. *As many of you know, I am a very private person. That said, there is a difference between protecting your privacy and hiding. I don't want to hide anymore. It is time the public knows that I am a gay man. I hope it goes without saying that this has never affected my hockey. Love is love, and my personal life remains entirely separate to what happens on the ice.*

It's shared on Shane's Twitter. Right under it is a French translation.

"Phone," Ilya says. "I need my phone."

It takes five minutes for Ilya to remember where the fuck he put it after his run, most of which he spends repeating to Marly some version of, *I have been fucking Shane Hollander for almost a decade and he just came out for me because he is dumber than I thought a human being could be. Yes, even dumber than you.*

It's not until Ilya is fumbling into his contacts that he remembers he deleted Shane's number. He wrinkles his nose and considers his options. He doesn't want to talk to Yuna, or David, or Svetlana, doesn't even want to open the can of worms that is clicking into their overflowing text streams. Some of the Raiders might have Shane's number, but Ilya doesn't know who, and anyway, of them, he doesn't know who's going to be an ass about it.

In the end, he gets over his ego and clicks Scott Hunter's name.

He picks up after two rings. "Rozanov?"

"I need Shane Hollander's number," Ilya says. "Right now."

There's a pause. "You don't already have it?"

"I deleted it, it was stupid, just give me number, Hunter!"

Ilya is prepared for Hunter to question his motives, maybe to give him a speech about homophobia, but all he says is, "So he wasn't kidding, then?"

Ilya blinks. "What?"

"Hollander," Hunter says. "He called me yesterday. Said he wanted to give me a head's up before he came out."

Ilya has a hard time following the train of thought of a man as old and scatterbrained as Hunter. "Okay? So?"

"I asked him why he was doing it," Hunter says. "And he said—well. Your name came up."

Ilya pinches his nose. “Jesus Christ.”

“It’s fine! I promise, I’ll keep it to myself, and I kind of already knew anyway, so—“

“Look,” Ilya interrupts. “Are you going to give me the fucking phone number or no?”

Hunter texts it to him. Ilya waits until he’s sure he has it before they hang up. At the last moment, Hunter says, “Look, Rozanov—I know we’re not friends, but I just wanted to say —“

“Not doing this,” Ilya says and hangs up on him.

The first thing he does is save the new phone number. *Jane*, he writes, because it feels wrong to put it under anything else. Then he dials.

“What the fuck were you thinking,” Ilya says, as soon as the line connects.

“Hi to you, too,” Shane says shakily. He sounds like he’s about to start crying, or like maybe he just stopped.

“What the *fuck*,” Ilya says, again.

“It got you to call me, didn’t it?” Shane says. “And you—you said you didn’t want to be with me because of the risk I’d get outed. Now—that’s not a risk.”

“Because you outed yourself,” Ilya says. “Because you fucked *yourself* over. Do you understand how crazy that is?”

“Yeah, well, sue me, my boyfriend just broke up with me, I wasn’t feeling particularly sane,” Shane snaps back.

Ilya stops, takes a deep breath. “I shouldn’t have done that,” he says. “Not the way I did it, anyway.”

“No shit,” Shane says. “Where are you? I want to see you.”

Ilya sighs. “I am with Marly,” he says. “At his stupid penthouse. It is so ugly, Hollander, you would hate it.”

“Send me the address,” Shane says. “I can leave right now.”

Ilya shakes his head. “No, no, is okay. Better if I go to you. Less people expecting me in Montreal.”

“That’d be a pretty stupid move, considering I’m already in Boston,” Shane says. “Now send me Marly’s address before I send a hitman to murder you.”

“How will you send hitman without address?” Ilya snipes on automatic, while his brain is trying to process the fact that Shane apparently came to Boston to languish in a hotel room before Ilya was even taking his calls.

“*Ilya*.”

Shane shows up fifteen minutes later, hefting a brown paper bag. “I brought donuts,” he says, breathlessly—did he run up the stairs? Down the hallway from the elevator? Ilya grabs the bag from his arms and tosses it—on the floor, probably. He doesn’t know. He’s too busy kissing Shane.

Shane’s lips are warm and wet and he licks into Ilya’s mouth right away, like he never left. His arms around Ilya’s waist, Ilya’s arms around Shane’s shoulders and a hand hooked around his jaw, his throat. It feels good to manhandle Shane around again. Better when Shane only gives in for a moment before he’s shoving back, pushing Ilya against the open door.

“I—am—so—mad—at you,” Shane manages between kisses. “I was—so—*worried*.”

“Sorry,” Ilya says. “Didn’t mean to.”

“Oh, you just *accidentally* broke up with me?” Shane says, as Ilya sucks on the spot under his ear that always gets him going.

“Shut up,” Ilya grumbles, and then they’re kissing again, Ilya’s tongue in Shane’s mouth, licking against his molars, right where he always should be. Jesus, Ilya should never fucking leave. He should fuse them together at the hips so they never have to be apart. He could be Shane’s permanent jewelry, his literal trophy husband.

“Wow,” Marly says, from somewhere behind them. “Roz said y’all were fucking, but damn.”

Ilya breaks the kiss, thunking his forehead against Shane’s. “I’m sorry about him,” he tells Shane.

But Shane—Shane who tried to beat Hunter to death when he thought Hunter might know about them, Shane who had a panic attack when his father walked in on them making out in their swimsuits—Shane is smiling. He’s got that look in his eyes, the one he normally gets before he drops to his knees in front of Ilya, and his cheeks are pink with joy.

“I missed you so fucking much,” he says, almost wondering.

“It’s been five days,” Ilya says around the lump in his throat.

Shane laughs. “I *know*.”

Ilya tucks a loose strand of hair behind one of Shane’s ears, taking a moment to look at him, really look at him, behind his flushed cheeks and kiss-bitten lips. “You’re not high, are you?” he asks, and Shane startles gratifyingly.

“What? What the fuck kind of question is that?”

Ilya shrugs. “I don’t know, you’ve been acting pretty weird, I thought I should ask!”

Shane huffs and shoves Ilya back further into Marly’s house so he can swing the door shut behind him. “I’m not high, I’m not having a breakdown, as far as I can tell I am totally

mentally intact,” he says.

“Eh,” Marly says. “If you were totally mentally intact, you wouldn’t be fucking Roz here.”

Ilya whirls around, glaring. “What are you even still *doing* here?”

“Me? It’s my fucking house!”

“Go to a different fucking room!”

“*You* go to a different fucking room!”

“So,” Shane says. “I guess nobody wants donuts?”

—

They eat donuts. Well, Marly eats donuts, because his stomach is a bottomless pit, and Shane got the donuts from the good spot downtown where Marly likes to go before practice. Ilya takes a donut, because it feels like the right move, but then mostly just stares at it on his plate as his stomach twists itself into knots.

Shane, to Ilya’s surprise, is actually eating, slamming down donuts with the type of voracious appetite that suggests he’s part-lion, or maybe hasn’t eaten in several weeks. “It’s been a really long time since I’ve had refined carbs,” Shane explains, his cheeks chipmunked with half-chewed Boston Cream. “I got these to stress eat. And then you called me. So.”

Shane’s decision to break his bird food diet is disorienting enough that Ilya almost pulls out his phone to call Yuna. Then he remembers he hasn’t spoken to her in a week, and probably she’s waiting for an opportunity to chew him out, and so he settles for carefully watching Shane for further signs of madness.

After four donuts, Marly decides he’s sufficiently carb-loaded to go to the gym. Which sounds like the worst idea in the world to Ilya, given that he shoveled down two plates of pasta even before the donuts and that’s a recipe for puking if Ilya has ever heard one, but Marly throws him a wink when Shane’s not looking and whispers in Ilya’s ear, “Condoms in my bedside table, man, have fun!”

It’s hardly necessary, but Ilya appreciates the thought anyway.

He waits a few moments after the door clicks shut behind Marly to rise from the counter, gathering their crumb-covered plates. He dumps his own mostly-untouched donut in the trash can, then throws the plates in the sink. “So,” he says, turning, not sure what he’s going to say.

Luckily, he doesn’t have to figure it out, because Shane has moved like a shark and in two seconds flat, he’s on him, pressing Ilya back against the counter and kissing him ravenously. Jesus, has a black pit of desire opened up in Shane’s soul? Ilya rarely feels like he’s at a disadvantage with Shane, but right now, he feels like they’re a step out of sync, Ilya being dragged along to some unknown destination.

Eventually, Shane stops kissing him long enough for both of them to catch a breath, their foreheads pressed together, chests heaving. “Do you think Marly keeps lube with the condoms?”

Ilya blinks at him. Shane grins. “He’s not very good at subtlety.”

“He’s not good at fucking anything,” Ilya grumbles. “Except hockey.”

“And being a supportive friend,” Shane says, and Ilya makes an indistinct noise.

“Maybe. Anyway, I don’t want to talk about Marly. My room is at the end of the hall, go wait for me, I look for lube.”

God bless Marly, he does indeed have lube—strawberry flavored, but needs must. Ilya half-trots down the hall, and when he steps inside his room he has to pause for a second to catch his breath. Shane has taken this opportunity to shed all of his clothes, and he’s folding his boxers to place them atop the tower of his other clothes, neatly stacked on what Ilya can only imagine is a cuck chair.

Shane turns his head at Ilya and smiles, cheeks still red. “Lots of windows,” he says, and Ilya tackles him into the mattress.

All this skin laid bare for him. Ilya kisses Shane’s neck, his pec, his armpit, the space between his bottom two ribs. Shane makes all these gratifying, pretty little moaning sounds that go straight to Ilya’s cock, curling his toes in the duvet. “Fuck, I missed you,” Shane groans, and Ilya doesn’t know if he’s talking about the two days they were broken up or the three weeks it’s been since they’ve seen each other in person, but he doesn’t particularly care. He sucks a bruise onto Shane’s hipbone, at a spot where he could ostensibly get hit by a puck during practice, then flips him onto his stomach and sucks another one right onto the meat of his ass, where it’ll be a hell of a lot harder to explain.

“God, Ilya,” Shane is saying, rocking his hips against the mattress. Ilya keeps most of his weight on Shane’s back so he doesn’t get much leverage, but Shane doesn’t stop trying to move, just keeps up those maddening little rocking motions. “Come on, come up here, I wanna kiss you.”

So Ilya abandons Shane’s ass and crawls up the mattress to meet Shane’s mouth as Shane rolls back over onto his back. Ilya’s hand splays over Shane’s stomach, gently nudging him down onto the mattress, and both Shane’s hands find their way to Ilya’s neck, twisting into his hair. Shane and his thing with Ilya’s hair. At this point, it might be a fetish. It might even rival Ilya’s own obsession with Shane’s freckles.

They make out for a while, hands wandering, and there’s a moment, when Shane’s hand slips low on Ilya’s back, where he pauses. It’s a sort of full-body flinch, his beautifully glazed expression falling as the usual self-consciousness comes back into his eyes. “Is this—is this okay?”

Ilya hates it, hates it so much that he kind of wants to throw Shane off him and storm out of the room, because this is exactly what—this is exactly why—

And then he meets Shane's eyes, his stupid big cow eyes that have made Ilya seriously reconsider whether it's immoral to eat beef, and he instead finds himself saying, "Yes, is fine. Nothing has changed. I am still me." He doesn't even really know what's coming out of his own mouth, but it must be the right thing to say, because it makes Shane sigh and relax like he's a sex doll deflating. "Then fuck me, please," he says, and Ilya hooks a finger in Shane's mouth like he's a fish and obeys.

Afterwards, the duvet is so wet and wrecked that Ilya tosses it off the bed entirely. He finds a spare blanket in the closet, which he throws over the bed—Shane fucked out and too lazy to go up and get his own damn washcloth, purring like a lazy cat because he was successful in his quest to make Ilya take care of it for him. Ilya slides under the sheets beside him, propping himself up on one elbow to watch Shane, fucked-out and happy, the barest smile on his lips.

"What?" Shane asks, cracking one eye open. "Is there something on my face?"

"You should know, I agreed to it," Ilya says, which is not at all what he was planning to say, but as his mother used to tell him when he was young and nauseous and trying to resist vomiting, *better out than in*.

"Agreed to what?" Shane asks, still addled by his orgasm.

"The sex," Ilya says bluntly, and finally Shane takes notice. Ilya charges forward before Shane can interrupt him, "Everyone keeps saying it was rape, or something. But I agreed to everything. I never said no. So if you—if that's how you rationalized it to yourself. You should know, it's not true."

Shane's expressions can be hard to read, sometimes. When he doesn't focus on trying to make himself understood, it's like he retreats behind a sort of mask. Ilya likes it, for the most part. It's much easier to talk to someone about these kinds of things when they aren't gawping at you with obvious sympathy, rubbing their hands all over you, offering exaggerated condolences. The whole thing feels a lot more steady.

"Did you know about the video?" Shane asks.

Ilya shakes his head. "No. But—" He glances up, Shane's nonjudgemental face—"I wouldn't have stopped it. If I had."

"How old were you?" Shane asks.

Ilya's Shane. Always so many questions. "Fourteen? Maybe thirteen. It's my U-14 coach, so it—narrows the window."

Shane nods. "So, let me just be clear here. You were fourteen years old. Your hockey coach had sex with you, sex which you did not at all seem to be enjoying, by the way, and at some point he recorded you without you knowing it. And then he was I guess stupid enough with the recording to get it leaked online. Do I have that right?"

Ilya thumbs at his nose. Something large and stifling is rising in his chest, burning at his lungs. “Yeah. I guess. That’s—yeah.”

“But you think the fact that you agreed to it makes it okay?”

Ilya’s eyes burn, and he shoves Shane away, rising from the bed. “That’s—don’t twist it.”

“How is that twisting it?” Shane says. “I’m just repeating what you told me.”

Ilya shakes his head, crossing his arms over his bare chest. He suddenly really wishes he were dressed for this conversation. “You’re making it sound—you’re making me sound like some helpless, pathetic little thing. *Aw, baby Ilya, he doesn’t know how to do anything. He needs help.* I was in control, Hollander. I knew what I was doing. After my mama—it was the best move. It was strategic. He gave me more play time, you see? This is how I became captain at thirteen. This is how I got noticed for the national teams, this is how I got here, in the MLH, with everything I ever fucking wanted. I made that happen for myself. I chose it. Is not some—pathetic, abused thing.”

Shane nods, like he really believes him. “Okay,” he says. “So why are you crying?”

I’m not crying, Ilya wants to snap back, but as soon as he has the thought, he realizes Shane is right. There are tears wet on his face, and he raises a hand to swipe them away, but they come back just as fast. Ilya’s mouth falls open, and the tears coat his lips, full of salt.

Shane, propped up against the headboard now, pats the bed next to him. “Come here. Please.”

Ilya would rather run into the living room and jump off the balcony before Shane can stop him, but seeing Ilya pancaked on the sidewalk would probably ruin Shane’s life, or something, so Ilya obeys. He sits gingerly on the edge of the bed, but Shane grabs him around the waist and pulls him back until he’s lying on his side on the pillow, staring through the window at the sky over Boston. Shane plasters himself to Ilya’s back, his nose to the nape of Ilya’s neck, his hand on Ilya’s chest, and sighs against him, his breath gusting over Ilya’s neck.

“*Ya tebya lyublu*,” Shane says, in his terrible Russian accent that makes him sound like a Lithuanian.

Ilya’s crying too hard to say anything, so he doesn’t even try. Outside, thready white clouds ghost across the sky, on their way to visit the Atlantic Ocean, and Ilya watches them go, pressing himself back into Shane’s firm hold.

—

By the time Ilya is done crying, Shane has fallen asleep, his breath gusting out in little puffing sighs against Ilya’s shoulder. Ilya knows him well enough to guess that he’s probably barely slept since the video leaked, so he doesn’t wake him. Instead, he grabs his phone from the bedside table and scrolls through his messages.

Yuna first. He reads the logs from the last few days; it's mostly the same stuff Shane has been sending him, a mix of apologies and half-formed plans for managing the whole shitshow. He considers for a very long moment what to say before he finally settles on, *I am with Shane now. Thank you for the help. I am sorry that he had to come out. I will call you soon.*

David gets a similar message, albeit with a few more heart emojis and a more casual tone. Then Ilya messages Farah, telling her he'll call her tomorrow. He also musters the courage to click into the Boston Raiders chat, which has fewer messages than he expected. Probably someone created a separate chat without Ilya to discuss it; Ilya will worry about that another day. Maybe.

He sorts through emails and messages from people who he hasn't spoken to in years, old hook-ups and random people he partied with for one night in Vegas who ended the night sure they would be long-term best friends. For the most part, he just deletes the messages without reply, or sends a heart-reaction to the ones who want confirmation he's still alive. Paparazzi pictures of him at practice will find their way into the press soon, but in the meantime, he doesn't want to give anyone heart palpitations.

Well. He feels the steady weight of Shane at his back. No one *else*.

Eventually, there's no one left but Svetlana. The number of missed messages have climbed from 137 to 142, which is less than Ilya would have expected. He can see the most recent text on the preview screen of her thread. It begins, *Ilya, you cocksucking motherfucker.*

Ilya clicks into the thread.

Ilya, you cocksucking motherfucker, Svetlana has written in Russian. *I am going to surgically remove your balls from your person when I see you next. I can't believe you had Ronnie remove me from your list of approved visitors. You are extremely lucky your boyfriend is more considerate than you and texted me to tell me you are alive, because when I snuck in through the hedgerows and found your broken window I thought you had been killed. I am camping out in your bedroom until you get home. You should start preparing a very large apology present. Also a large amount of money to pay someone in Sweden for something I cannot discuss in writing. Fuck you. You are so deeply stupid I cannot believe I love you. And yet I do. Call me when you're ready.*

Ilya huffs out a laugh.

It must be a little too loud, because Shane stirs at his back, sleep-warm and slow. "Time is it?" he mumbles, lips moving against Ilya's shoulder.

"You only slept for a little," Ilya says. "Thirty minutes, maybe. Go back to sleep."

"Mmm, no. I don't want to mess up my sleep schedule." Ilya sets down his phone and rolls over in Shane's arms so he can meet his tired eyes. Shane raises a hand to cup Ilya's cheek, rubbing one thumb over his cheekbone, and Ilya leans into it like the needy little baby he is.

"You watched the video," Ilya says. It's not a question, but Shane flinches a little, anyway.

“Yeah,” he says. “Sorry.”

Ilya shrugs. He hadn’t really expected anything different. Shane who loved clarifying questions, Shane who treated tape review like a full-time job, Shane who wanted all of the information before making a decision. Of course he’d watch the video. “We probably have time before Marly gets home, if you want a second round.”

“You know it was kind of the worst moment of my life, when you broke up with me,” Shane says, ignoring him completely. “Not even watching the video, though that sucked, too. Sorry if that makes me a terrible boyfriend.”

Ilya shrugs again. There’s a freckle hidden right in the hollow of Shane’s collarbone that Ilya’s never noticed before. Is it possible that he’s just missed it, or is it new? He had looked it up, once. You can get new freckles all throughout your life. Sun exposure, usually, but also randomly, sometimes. Like a little gift.

“Is there a reason you are telling me this?” Ilya asks.

“Because I want you to know you’re never allowed to break up with me again,” Shane says. “That probably does make me a terrible boyfriend, and I don’t even care. But I just want to make that clear, right now, before there are any misunderstandings.”

Ilya huffs. “So this is the condition of restarting our relationship, yes? I promise to stay with you forever and ever?”

“Basically,” Shane agrees. “Although I wouldn’t stay *restarting*. I never agreed to the break up, so the whole thing never really paused.”

Ilya raises an eyebrow. “Seriously?”

“Look, we’re almost to our one-year anniversary, I am not restarting the clock all over again.”

Ilya laughs. The sound startles out of him, and Ilya is half-convinced it’s going to lead to another crying jag, but he manages to get himself under control. His Shane, his Shane, his Shane. Ilya wants to lick him up like an oyster from its shell.

“Come on,” Ilya says. “Shower.”

Marly’s guest room shower is terrible. There’s a white bathtub like the kind they have in cheap pre-fab houses, a shower curtain flaking and moldy on the bottom. Shane is so obviously horrified that he doesn’t even argue that much when Ilya insists on monopolizing Marly’s master bathroom instead. “What if he comes home?” Shane asks half-heartedly, as Ilya sticks his hand under the spray to test the temperature of the water.

“The door is locked, he can hear the shower running, he is dumb but not *that* dumb,” Ilya says. “Come on, come over here, I missed you.”

Shane doesn’t even tease Ilya about the fact they’ve been separated for all of sixty seconds, which is how Ilya knows Shane really missed him. In the shower, Shane categorically refuses

to let Ilya blow him or to blow Ilya in turn, but he does let Ilya press his body up against Shane's under the spray, and they wash each other's dirty hair. Ilya's is lanky and greasy and sweaty, and Shane's fingers feel pornographic, scraping against his skull.

Marly is still gone when Shane and Ilya get out of the shower, and Ilya groans about how this means they definitely could have had shower blowjobs as Shane thwacks him with a wet towel and forces him into clothes. Ilya pokes and prods Shane into the living room, where they play a few rounds of Chel on Marly's oversized television while Ilya eats the remains of the donuts he hadn't been able to stomach earlier.

"So," Shane says, a good hour later. "Have you settled on a plan with Farah, yet?"

It's very restrained, waiting a whole hour. Ilya is proud of him. He thought Shane would last thirty minutes at most.

"I have been avoiding her," Ilya admits. "But I will call her tomorrow. I know what the options are. I could try to deny it."

Shane nods carefully. "You could."

"But. People are very obsessed with me, online, and they would be able to tell I was lying. Also." Ilya hesitates, but, in for a penny. "He is still coaching teenagers. And I think—well, it would be best, maybe, if he does not do that anymore."

Shane stiffens. "What? I thought—"

"He coaches in Sweden," Ilya says. "You would not have found him, in your Googling." Kuznetsov won't get prosecuted either way, of course, but Sweden is a very liberal country. Would they let a coach who once fucked the underage future star of Russian hockey hang around with fourteen-year-olds? Ilya doesn't think so.

"Anyway," Ilya says, before Shane can say anything else. "I figure best option is to put out boring statement, wait for whole thing to blow over, and in the meantime start working on getting new passport. I should be eligible, to become American. I know we talked about Canada, but—"

"Fuck what we talked about," Shane says. "I want whatever gets you a non-Russian passport as soon as possible. If that means you have to be American, then I guess I can live with that."

Ilya rolls his eyes. "So generous."

Shane smiles. "I mean, it's temporary anyway." Ilya looks at him blankly, and Shane continues, "One day I'm going to marry you and make you Canadian. Then none of this will matter anymore."

Ilya's breath catches in his throat. "You sound very sure."

"Yeah, well." Shane shrugs. "Had to reevaluate some stuff, the last few days. I'm not going to do it now, because I think you'd commit me to the nuthouse. But, uh, yeah. Kind of thinking it'd be smart to lock you down."

Ilya really wants to tackle Shane into the cushions and kiss him for the next twelve years without stopping. Of course, that's when Marly decides it's time to come home, making a big production out of yelling, "Honey, I'm home!" when he throws the door open.

He looks almost furtive, glancing around the apartment, but he visibly relaxes when he sees Shane and Ilya on the couch, a normal distance apart, holding Xbox controllers. "Damn, I really thought you'd be fucking," Marly says. "Do you need me to leave for a while longer?"

"Don't worry, we already finished," Ilya says.

"Ilya!" Shane hisses, smacking him in the arm.

"Nice!" says Marly.

"Now, I am reminding Shane that I am best hockey player on real *and* fake ice," Ilya says. "You can watch, if you want. I will trounce him."

"Uh, also, we used your shower," Shane adds awkwardly. His cheeks are pinking up again. "Sorry."

Marly waves a hand through the air. "Nah man, it's fine, the guest shower sucks. Damn, this seems sick. Is this what being gay is like? You get to hang out with your homies *and* get your dick wet, all in one night?"

"Basically," Ilya says.

"Damn," Marly whistles. "Maybe I need to try being gay. Is there like a starter course, or something?"

"Jesus fucking Christ," Shane mutters, as Ilya dissolves into laughter.

But Shane's hand has snaked its way over the cushions onto Ilya's thigh, and when Ilya looks up from where he's face planted into the back of the couch, Shane is grinning at him around his embarrassed flush.

"Marly," Ilya says, still looking at Shane, his chest warm. "You are the dumbest man alive."

Chapter End Notes

almost certainly I will not write a sequel to this, BUT if I do it'll probably be a social media fic chronicling whatever the fuck happens next in this alternate universe, AND if i do it will be in this series. so you can keep an eye here.

yes marly's comment at the end is a reference to the empty netters podcast. they turned out to be dicks but that line was too fucking funny.

also it didn't make it in here because in the end I decided to stick to just ilya's pov, but in an earlier version you did get to see the conversation between shane and scott including the fact that shane came out to get ilya's attention, yes, but also to try to distract the press. he figured if he could get more people talking about him, at least that'd be fewer people talking about ilya. he is a good egg.

also, an earlier version had a more important scene with erikkson then I ended up cutting for pace, hence why he never went anywhere. believe of him whatever floats your boat :)

finally, people being dicks about how survivors respond to trauma will get blocked in the comments. pls do not be up in here saying ilya is as asshole or w/e for dealing with this how he deals with it. trauma responses be wild

thanks a million to all the lovely commenters!

End Notes

me every time I write a fic where ilya isn't suicidal: hmm this fic is missing something. oh! I know. Ilya needs to be suicidal!!

huge credit to store-bought is fine by Skuldthenorn, which is such an incredible sad!ilya fic and greatly inspired my depiction of marly and ilya's relationship. It also features a scene where marly charges into ilya's house to check on him. that scene was not a conscious inspiration for my fic but undoubtedly did inspire me. hugely recommend checking that fic out if you have not already.

I promise I wrote like 80% of this fic before reading lean on me by slagglass, a fic where a video of 15-year-old ilya fucking 15-year-old sasha goes viral and fucks his life over; however, it was undoubtedly an inspiration for the remaining 20% of the fic, and just in general slaps real hard. if you like this fic, you will like that fic.

the main inspiration for this fic, though, is a short fic called work with what is left by an anonymous author. it has the premise that a picture of ilya getting fucked by a former coach is sent around the MHL. I read that fic, and because it was so short, my head got working on longer versions of the story. and I got to thinking, what if ilya broke up with shane over this? and then I had to write this. so huge credits to that story for the idea, and link here for those interested in reading it: <https://archiveofourown.org/works/80210646>

unrelated, I saw someone bookmarked this series saying 'anon author who likes vicious' and I do in fact overuse that word BUT I only use it once here so!! be proud of me! I think serpentine is also in here too much but let's not talk about that

I had a hard time tagging this, so please let me know if there are additional tags you think should be added on.

biggest of thanks to my anonymous author friend for betaing! you rock.

EDITED TO ADD: I am about two more rude comments from restricting commenting on this fic or deleting it entirely. if there is stuff in this fic you did not like, that is 100% okay, but please, just click away!! my comments section is not the place to dissect the realism of this plot/these characterizations/this premise. comments are not goodreads reviews; they are messages to me directly. if you have negative stuff to say, please just chat about it with your fandom friends in private.

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!