All along the waterfall

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by WhimperSoldier

Summary

After a year with the Bears, Ilya felt like he had a solid rotation in place. Svetlana, when she was in town, a med-student named Kelly who had a sex swing installed in her apartment, Heather, who liked to play hard to get but also had a robust collection of toys.

And then there was Shane. And Shane's daughter.

Notes

I know, I know, another story? But this one is mostly complete so its just editing and posting in the next few weeks! I just need to give Ilya a daughter, it's a compulsion or a sickness I think, but it will get fluffier in the next chapters, so don't panic!

Title is from "Brown Eyed Girl" by Van Morrison.

See the end of the work for more notes

Chapter 1

Ilya didn't have a whole lot of hard and fast rules when it came to the type of people he fucked, but one of the few which he tried to always stick to was not to fuck someone with kids. It wasn't that he didn't like kids, he loved them, but he found that in a Venn diagram of people who wanted casual sex in dark clubs and the people who had kids did not seem to overlap.

At nineteen after his signing and a pregnancy scare which had actually been an attempt at extortion, Ilya had made himself slow down on the sleeping around and had refused to bring people back to his apartment after another fan he'd slept with had tried to make a copy of his key after they'd fucked. All to say, Ilya prided himself on learning a rough life story over a couple of drinks or through half yelled conversations on dancefloors. He was a good judge of character and after a year with the Bears, he felt like he had a solid rotation in place.

It was better than the random hookups. Ilya got to know their bodies, the things they liked, and that got Ilya off more than any quickie in a club bathroom could. Svetlana, when she was in town, a med-student named Kelly who had a sex swing installed in her apartment, Heather, who liked to play hard to get but also had a robust collection of toys. And then there was Shane.

"You're late." Shane hissed the moment the door opened but Ilya was already inside and had pressed the man back against the wall. He lifted Shane up onto the cheap side table and it groaned in warning at holding a two hundred pound man. "Bed."

Ilya lifted him off but couldn't hold him forever. Shane was built, thick thighs he had used more than once to ride Ilya for hours, and a mouth that knew exactly where Ilya's most sensitive places were.

Shane fucked like a fucking champion, Ilya had made sure of it.

Ilya had seen Shane first on the ice in a black compression shirt and skates on, moving faster than some of the players. He held a camera in his hands, large and bulky, but not shaking even after following the team's suicides. He was, Ilya could admit, one of the hottest people he'd ever met.

"Don't think about pissing him off, not if you want to look good on all the socials." Nelson had explained, leaning on his stick.

It had been a new position, some manager of the burgeoning internet footprint that Ilya couldn't really care much about until he saw one of the videos. It was one of the other rookies Ilya knew wouldn't last the year, a grocery stick if he'd ever seen one, but the video on their new Facebook didn't show that. It was sharp, following the kid as he handled the puck, dodging behind him like the camera was an opposing defenseman, looking for an opening. The kid left many, but the camera didn't have a stick and Ilya watched it enough times to imagine.

“I want one.”

Shane had looked up from his lunch, a salmon and rice bowl, and then seemed to realize who was standing in front of him in his shoe box of an office. “One what?”

“The videos. I am much better than Myers.” Ilya was ready to argue more, but Shane had just nodded, cleaned his hand with a disposable wipe, which Ilya shouldn’t have found charming, and then offered his hand.

He’d gotten his video.

“How do you want me?” Ilya had asked and the look Shane had shot him, the blush of his cheeks which looked deeper than just from the cold, gave Ilya the faintest idea that Shane might not have been as sexless as Ilya had first assumed.

They tore through a few standard moves, Shane not only keeping up with him, but moving around him like he knew exactly where Ilya was going to break, where to be to get the best catch of the puck.

Twenty thousand views, more than triple Myers, and Ilya got to suck Hollander off in his small side office. Win-Win.

“This can’t happen again.” Shane had hissed but it had been against Ilya’s lips and his breath still smelled like Ilya’s cum so he'd been reasonably sure Shane was wrong.

Kelly and Heather and Svetlana were nice occasionally, but Shane was always there. He was at practices and at some away games and when he wasn’t, he was tucked away in a little side office with a door and a lock and after three months of fucking on his desk, Shane caved and bought a nice leather couch he swore was not for them but Ilya just nodded and pushed Hollander to his knees.

After six months, Svetlana noticed.

“Who’s caught your attention?” She demanded one night when she was in town for some boring car conferences. They’d had a quick round on the table and then on the balcony off his bedroom and had ended up sprawled on the expensive wicker day bed, passing a cigarette between them. “It’s not like you not to be begging me to come down.”

“I don’t beg.” Ilya muttered.

“No, you just need to beat off all those poor girls with a stick and that stick is usually me.” Svetlana pushed and Ilya knew she wasn’t wrong. Occasionally a hookup would try and push for more, leaving clothes at his house to get invited back, stealing his phone in clubs to get his number, waiting around outside his building looking lost. So every few months he’d hire some photographers to snap some photos of him and Svetlana and post a few vague pictures on his socials and that usually put off most of them.

“You know me, I’m lazy.” Ilya murmured, letting the cigarette burn a bit, the bright cherry itching towards his fingers. “There is someone at the rink.”

“You’re not lazy, and good.” She said. “I’d like to meet her.”

“It’s not like that and you’ll scare her off.”

Ilya knew that even as he also knew that Shane was just as worried about this getting out as Ilya was. It was what allowed Ilya to keep coming back, the knowledge that Shane wouldn’t post a picture for money and he always required a condom, even though Ilya didn’t think he was a carrier, and he was strict with where and when they could hook up.

It was a bit like fucking his manager, which he had done once when he was twenty and which had ended horribly with him being signed to another agency, but Shane organized their fucking schedule like the Navy. They had quickies in his office, those he could be persuaded into during most parts of the day, but anything else required a shower and twenty minutes for prep. At the start this meant swapping phone numbers and coordinating a few stolen hours around practices.

At the year mark of their arrangement, Ilya brought Shane to his apartment and during a rather frantic and also really fucking funny set of prep, managed to rail him over his sectional and have him showered and back in time for a meeting at two.

Outside of work days, Shane was mostly unavailable after work hours and any weekends without a game. Which Ilya was fine with.

“Where does Hollander go after work?” Ilya asked Marley.

“Got a hidden wife?” One of the guys, Travers, joked.

“No ring and I’ve never heard him talk about a wife?” Marley answered. “Why?”

“Wanted to know is all.” Ilya brushed it off but it lingered a bit.

Sure, it was hypocritical, but when he’d come back from Russia and a summer of debauched parties and watching people snort cocaine off stripper’s tits, it was strangely wonderful to Ilya knowing he’d have Steady, Sturdy Shane waiting.

“You’re dating?” Ilya demanded, eyes locked on Shane’s glowing screen where a notification from Taylor, 32 was still visible. Shane pulled himself off Ilya’s cock and grabbed at his phone, clicking off the screen and glaring at him. Ilya was annoyed at the digital woman for interrupting their first fuck in months. “She is too old for you. You are only…”

Shane raised an eyebrow. “Twenty-three. Same age as you.”

“Yes, young and sexy!” Ilya’s hands fell down to rest on Shane’s spread thighs which bracketed his hips. “Too good for Taylor.”

“My parents have been on me to settle down for–” Shane’s eyes shot up to him and then he shook his head. “Nevermind. You want to or not?”

The idea that Shane had options was not unexpected, he was hot, nice, and with a good job, the sorts of things girls looked for in men they wanted to marry and not just fuck.

It was that text which was floating around in his head when Shane came up to him in passing on his way out of the rink's gym the next day, uncharacteristically fidgety.

"So with the long weekend coming up, I was thinking you could come over." He said quietly, flashing a look to double check everyone else was distracted.

"Yes." Ilya said instantly.

The rarest of their hookups, mythical in that the two years he'd been fucking Shane, he'd seen the inside of his house a total of six times. Three of those had been for a few sporadic fucks, always planned on days with long lunch breaks, and the others had been to grab a toy or a change of clothes. They had become nonexistent after Vegas six months ago when a picture of Ilya's face between a woman's tits made front page news and prompted the conversation that followed.

"What is that?" Shane had demanded when he'd opened the door. "Did you bring your gear?"

"No, this is wine, to go with dinner, and this is my overnight bag." Ilya held up the bottle and dropped his bag down into the entryway tile.

"Oh, okay." Shane said uncertainly so Ilya kissed him to get his thoughts off how much of a change this was. They did not really sleep over. Ilya had always roused Shane from whatever dose he'd fallen into and got him a taxi home, and the few times at Shane's had been with a deadline to get back to work.

Ilya tried not to be too self-conscious. He didn't know exactly how this worked but it had felt right when Shane had invited him to come prepared and Ilya didn't want to waste any time driving home only to drive back the next night.

They ended up on the floor, which was somehow really hot, and he could smell the cleaning product Shane had used when the man's sweaty back must have rubbed the scent up off the wood. There was a round on the couch where Ilya had searched up compilations of his best shots and Shane had kicked up a big fuss and then rode him, reverse cowgirl so he could watch, and came so hard it caught on his chin.

They managed a final round after dinner, a protein pasta that Ilya actually liked with the wine he brought, and it was slower than they usually went. Shane was so sensitive that it made him loud, moans and whimpers and these little gasps that somehow made Ilya's dick harder.

"I grab more towels for morning?" Ilya asked after the ones they'd laid down were a sodden pile in the laundry basket and Ilya wanted to be prepared for sleepy morning sex. Shane, even having just cleaned cum off his stomach, somehow blushed at the idea of morning sex.

"Third door on the right." Shane directed, and Ilya took a moment to watch him from the doorway. Shane was sprawled out on his mattress, flawless skin almost glowing against the navy sheets. "Go, Rozanov."

Ilya went, counting loudly and yanking on door handles to be a bit obnoxious and make Shane laugh, but when he finally turned after having grabbed two fluffy towels which

smelled like Shane's fancy fabric softener, Shane was down the hall, panting, like he'd leapt from bed and had run down the hall. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing." Shane said, defensive. "I just thought you were snooping."

"No, no. Should I be?" Ilya asked, pointing to a door at random. "Sex dungeon?"

"Come to bed." Shane said, which wasn't an answer but was too lovely an idea to ignore.

Shane crawled up the bed, and even through the underwear he'd pulled on, Ilya could almost trace the lines of his ass. It really was incredible how built he was for someone whose job to Ilya was mostly *computer*. Even then, he was soft and warm when Ilya pulled him into his arms.

They didn't do this much, cuddle. Aftercare, of course, but just enough. Shane had always been a bit clingy after sex, even when he liked to pretend he wasn't, and the longer this had gone on, the more Ilya had been forced to reconcile that he was too. So it was nice to press his body along the curve of Shane's back, feel his hair against his lips, smell his fancy seaweed shampoo.

When Ilya woke up, Shane was asleep next to him and Ilya looked over at the clock. It was early, too early to get up, but Ilya had the idea to make breakfast in Shane's homey little kitchen, repayment for last night's dinner.

He pulled on his underwear and padded out onto the gray rug near the sink to warm up his toes. Snooping through his pantry and fridge was just sad, lots of healthy snacks and granola and protein powder, but there were also a lot of surprises, like a clear sealed container of a surgery breakfast cereal and frosted gram crackers. He pulled the eggs from the fridge and an opened package of turkey bacon from the freezer. There were English Muffins too, and some fancy cheese slices in the fridge door so he figured a breakfast sandwich would work. If Shane complained, Ilya would just buy him a new car or something.

He had just taken the bacon off the stove and was rooting around for another spatula when a key turned the lock and Ilya stood there like an idiot at the sound of boots stomping snow off at the entrance could be heard over the rattling of the radiator.

"–know it's early, but your dad's car is here."

Ilya's head jumped immediately to an affair, which he'd never considered before because Shane had the lying ability of a rock, and also he'd never been the other woman before.

"But dad said until Sunday."

"Yeah, well, I need to go to work and Gina can't watch you, so I need you to be my brave girl, alright?" The man asked, stepping into the room and tossing a pink backpack onto the couch shoving the pink rolling suitcase against the dining room table. "I'll see you in June sometime, baby. Be good."

The man, handsome in the bland way like bankers or swindlers were, patted the kid's head and then slipped out the door. For a moment, Ilya thought he might be having a stroke because there was no way the man had tossed his kid into the apartment and just left, but as he stood there and watched the small body of what he realized was a young girl, he knew that was exactly what had happened.

He hadn't even said he loved her, this girl who must have been his daughter. A familiar feeling rose up in his chest, tight and painful and twisting, but he pushed it down. His bare feet moved without thinking and he hadn't taken more than a handful of steps before the girl burst into quiet sobs, just standing at the door, looking where her father had left her. In her hand he could see a pair of keys with a familiar logo.

"Do you want a sandwich?"

The girl startled, but didn't scream. She looked at him like he was a ghost, face lit by the hazy grey coming up off the snow. Ilya glanced at the only light he'd turned on, the one under the hood of the stove where his breakfast had been abandoned.

"I was making for your…" Ilya breathed through his teeth. "Dad. I can make one for you too."

"You're…you're Il–ya Roza–nov." She said and it was so soft and tender that Ilya could only nod. He was terrible at guessing kids' ages, but she looked young, maybe five at most. "Daddy's friend?"

"Da. Yes." Ilya nodded and watched as she took one look at the door and then wandered over to him. She had a little stuffed animal in her hands and when she got closer, Ilya realized with pride that it was a bear wearing a familiar miniature jersey. "I like your bear."

"Thanks. I like yours too." She pointed up at his chest and Ilya realized that he hadn't put a shirt on. He didn't want to risk freaking her out or waking Shane up, so he just sort of stood there in a weird limbo. "Whatcha makin?"

"Sandwiches." He explained and froze when he felt a hand grab his sweatpants. They didn't tug, just held on while she pushed up on her tippy toes to try and see over the pan. Moving carefully, he stepped back. "Do you want…?"

Ilya didn't know exactly what he was going to say, but she must have because she shoved her one free hand out in a universal gesture and Ilya was helpless but to lean down and pick her up.

She was warm, heavy in a way his baby niece wasn't yet, and she leaned over the stove with the confidence of a child knowing someone would catch her.

Distracted by the bubbling of the eggs, Ilya thought that a lot of things made a painful amount of sense.

There was a room in the apartment Ilya had never been in despite the fact that they had fucked on nearly every horizontal surface and a good number of the vertical ones too during

their lunch fucks. It would be hers, Shane's–daughter. And there were the marks, the silvery lines along Shane's ass and peaking out of the V of his thighs. Ilya hadn't thought much of them, even when he'd traced them with his eyes with Shane's cock in his mouth. They were stretch marks, from skin pulled too far too fast. He'd thought they might be from Shane's shitty eating habits.

"Eat?" She asked and Ilya nodded. He had to do most of the prep one-handed, the little girl unwilling to be put down and watching him work with the laser focus of a hockey coach pushing out a new play. When he finally plated it, she looked up at him with her dark little eyes, Shane's eyes, and Ilya realized devastatingly, that she also had his freckles along the little bridge of her nose. "Couch?"

"Your father does not seem like the type of man to let you eat on the couch." Ilya muttered and she looked at him with the guileless expression he was sure got her out of a lot of problems at whatever fancy daycare he knew Shane would send her to. "Alright, couch."

She let herself be carried and then sat down in the middle of the large sectional. It was by far the most expensive piece of furniture in the whole apartment and Ilya could see why when she pulled the grey throw off the back and curled up into a small ball with a special flap for reaching a hand out. Not that she used it, instead she stuck her little neck out with her mouth open like a particularly large baby bird and Ilya was helpless but to lift the sandwich into it for a bite.

"It's good!" She said, though it came out more like "ts ood!" with her mouth full.

Ilya turned the TV on and was unsurprised to see it was already on the hockey channel. He went to try and flip it but the girl was focused on whatever game rerun was on and so he left it. He took a bite of his own sandwich, a little bland with the turkey bacon, and watched her.

She looked–healthy. Happy, barring her apparent shit-stain distant father. He realized abruptly that Shane hadn't just not told him, he'd actively hidden her from him and it curdled something in his gut that had nothing to do with his cooking skills.

They hadn't been exactly open with their personal lives, but he trusted the people he slept with. This felt uncomfortably like a betrayal even when they hadn't even been in a relationship. Ilya had made sure of that after Vegas. Still, Ilya wanted to go shake Shane awake, demand to know how they could have been fucking for almost two years and not know he had a child.

"What's your name?" He said finally.

"Emmy." She said, eyes not leaving the screen.

"You like hockey?" He settled on. It seemed a safe enough topic.

"I love hockey." She said, mouth open for another bite but not once tearing her eyes from the game. "I play too."

“No, you are too little!” Ilya said, mostly because he wanted to know just how like her father she was. It turned out incredibly like because her little cheeks puffed up and she turned towards him with her face red with outrage.

“I'm not little!” She huffed. “I checked Donny Doyal last week!”

“Well if you checked Donny…” Ilya muttered and that calmed her enough that she glared at him until he gave her another bite.

“Your father who dropped you off was…” Ilya flipped through his limited English vocabulary when it came to nice words for asshole. He settled on, “Mean.”

“Daddy says he's difficult.”

That was kind. Ilya would have had a few meaner words for the type of father who dropped their kid off at an apartment at five in the morning without even a kiss goodbye.

“He's bad.” Emmy said and Ilya realized she wasn’t talking about her father anymore, but the game. They both watched as the Admirals’ captain tried to slip a puck through the five hole of the Driller's goalie.

“Yes,” Ilya said. “Even for really old Scott Hunter.”

“He is old.” Emmy muttered and Ilya laughed.

“Are you often alone?” Ilya asked. Shane hadn't struck him as an absent parent but then again, he hadn't struck him as a parent-parent until about half an hour ago.

“No, Nana comes by. And I go to the rink on the big days.” She explained.

“Big days?”

“Like Mondays and Tuesdays and the other ones, like Thursdays.” She looked at him like he was stupid and that was also unfortunately copied and pasted over from her dad too.

“Weekdays?” He tried and when she nodded he moved on. “The daycare at the rink?”

Ilya knew they had it, but he hadn't much thought about what exactly that meant. He didn't have kids, he didn't really hang out with the people who had kids and when he did, it was at places where people were highly encouraged to not bring said kids, like clubs and strip joints.

“I get to skate.” She said.

“And check Donny Doyal.”

“Yeah.” She said and then looked over at him. He'd expected something about maybe dating his dad, or why he didn't have a shirt on. It was why he was blind sided when she asked, “Why'd you miss the goal on Toronto?”

Ilya froze. He looked over at her, watching him with dark, knowing eyes.

“Ah, the goalie was too quick?” He said but it came out much closer to a question.

“But you're faster. Daddy said so.”

Ilya was absurdly proud for a second until he realized he was being berated by a toddler.

“You try, is very hard.” Ilya tried not to sound defensive. “Who is better, hm? You have favorite player better than me?”

“No, you're my favorite.” She said without an ounce of care about how he felt a toothache start from how sweet the sentiment was.

“Oh.” He muttered. “That's good.”

They watched the game and Ilya tried to think about what came next.

He'd need to take Shane out of the rotation. He had a rule, and kids always complicated things. There had been–something. Possibility. But not with a kid in the mix. But he liked Shane, like that he had an office where Ilya would occasionally eat his lunch in when their practice ran late, liked that Shane was always hungry for him, liked that he folded his stupid fucking polos and slacks, liked how fast he was on the ice, liked–

Something brushed his arm and Ilya jumped slightly, stilling as he watched Emmy crawl over the cushion between them and worm her way up under his arm. He was painfully aware of the weight and pressure of her head, her knobby knees which she'd folded up against his thigh. He was so aware, that he felt the exact moment that her head gave a little jerk and he instinctively caught it, moving it slowly so that it rested against his ribs. He could feel her warm little breaths over his chest as she slept. When he shifted, her little head jerked up and she glared at him, a familiar expression made miniature.

“I don’t want to sleep.” She said stubbornly.

“You’re tired.”

“No!” She huffed, but her little eyelids drooped tellingly.

It had been a long day for her and the sun hadn't even risen yet. He felt strangely protective of her, this little girl who took one look at his blackening eye and brushed ribs and thought that he was safe even when he was nearly ten times bigger than her.

He must have drifted off at some point because he felt Emmy move and his hand jerked out before he could stop it, coiling around her little blanket burrito. In the low light of the tv, he realized Shane was crouched over him, eyebrows up into his hair as he tried to lift his daughter up into his arms.

There was a long moment where Ilya could read every expression that crossed Shane's face. First was worry and then shame and then something which settled into disappointment around the curves of his mouth.

“Emmy, baby, what happened?” Shane asked, lifting his daughter and slowly moving down the hall to the middle door to the room Ilya had joked was a sex dungeon. It felt like decades ago.

He shouldn't, that wasn't what he came over for, but now he wanted to see. He wanted to know how Shane Hollander was as a dad. Was her room as boring as her father's?

The answer was no. While the whole rest of the apartment was neat and clean, neutral and beige, her room was bright with jewel tones and had a floor just visible under a dusting of toys. Nothing rainbow, but lots of deep, rich greens and dark purples. She had a little canopy over her bed and a whole wall of books. Through the sheer curtain, he could hear Shane talking to her, soft and tender.

“Father had to go to work.” She said. “Gina was there.”

“What?” He hissed and then ran a hand through her hair seemingly to show her he wasn't mad at her. His mother had done the same thing and he felt the ghost of her fingers through his curls. “She wasn't…oh, baby, I'm sorry. I shouldn't have asked him to take you.”

It suddenly made a whole lot of sense why their hookups had almost entirely happened at the rink; you don't need childcare to get fucked in your office or over lunch break. Going home instead of an after party made sense when you had a toddler waiting for you to come tuck them in.

Ilya moved back out to the living room, cleaning up their plates and soaking the pans. He was drying the dishes when Shane picked his way down the hallway and leaned through the doorway at where Ilya was resting near the sink.

“I was going to tell you.”

“Really?” Ilya asked but he knew his voice was cold. “Soon or whenever you got caught?”

“Don’t do this.” Shane huffed and Ilya could feel himself get honestly angry at the righteous indignation that it seemed Shane was putting on.

“I don’t do this?” Ilya asked and then laughed quietly, not wanting to wake Emmy. “You send your daughter off to shit stain father to get your dick sucked.”

That hit Shane, Ilya could see from the way Shane’s mouth dropped open slightly and his breath caught, just a little, like he’d been checked. His eyes were a little misty even in the faint light coming in from the windows. “Fuck, you’re such an asshole.”

The words were almost soft and Ilya almost, almost regretted saying them. Still, he was more than angry, Ilya felt betrayed and mourning in a way, the loss of something. Of their romps and the laughter he could get from Shane’s lips outside of sex and with a dick in his ass. “At least I am honest.”

“Honest?” Shane demanded, laughing without humor. “I was going to introduce you back in May after the awards. But you made it clear what this was and I didn’t want to push. How's

that for honest?”

Ilya hadn’t wanted to think about that night, and with the added context, Ilya felt like he’d been checked against the boards.

The awards had gone great for him. He nabbed an award, ended the season with the second highest point average, but it hadn’t really mattered. Not to his father or his brother, not to his GM who patted him on the back, said “Give me a Cup and then we’ll talk” before ordering him a shot he hadn’t been legal at the time to drink.

“I should go.” Ilya muttered and for a minute it looked like Shane would keep his feet planted and not move out of the way, but then he sighed. His folded arms fell limply to his sides and he stepped aside.

Ilya resolutely ignored the little flash of Emmy’s nightlight on the hallway wall, grabbed his bag and avoided looking at the unmoving shadow Shane made in his dark kitchen before walking towards the door.

Ilya didn’t look back.

Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

> “Where is the daycare?” Ilya tried to slide in casually during practice a week after he’d walked out of Shane’s apartment. His team looked at him like he’d grown a second head. “What?”

Chapter Notes

> Thank you so much for the kind words and being forgiving when I forgot to add that this story has chapters! Expect another update soon, I finally have a break and am looking forward to editing what I've written!
>
> Thanks for reading!

“Where is the daycare?” Ilya tried to slide in casually during practice a week after he’d walked out of Shane’s apartment. His team looked at him like he’d grown a second head. “What?”

“One of those puck bunnies finally baby-trap you?” One guy called out and like the flood gates had been opened, Ilya had to laugh off the increasingly nasty comments. Another guy sneered, “More like looking for paternity. Any of you guys’ kids come out with blonde curls?”

Ilya smiled without humor and before he could tell him where to shove it, Marley saddled up next to him. “What’s this about?”

“Met kid one night tossing pucks, said she went here.” Ilya tried brushing it off. He did hang around after on-ice interviews to toss out pucks to the kids who pressed their little faces to the plexiglass. It was a common enough occurrence.

“On one of the upper floors I think, but it’s only for employees.” Simon explained and Ilya could have kissed him for the first helpful answer. “Brandy sends Kaitlyn there.”

Brandy was Simon’s very skinny, very blonde wife who was nice enough to Ilya but also tracked her husband’s phone and liked to show up unannounced during their bar crawls to drag him away from whatever group of girls he inevitably buried himself in. Not exactly a ringing endorsement.

Ilya hadn't even really thought about what he was doing after practice let out and he puttered around the locker room until it cleared out. Marley hesitated at the door before eventually leaving. For his part, Ilya eventually decided to go on a very normal walk.

It was nearing noon when players and staff took their lunch and migrated from the ice to the gym or whatever cooldown or physical therapy they needed. Ilya felt his body being pulled back into the old configuration, his feet wanting to take the stairwell down in the bowels of the arena, around the corner and past the vending machines back to where Shane's office was tucked away from everything except a truly ridiculous number of pipes and the laundry rooms. It had meant they never had to worry about the noise they made over the industrial machines but now it meant there was no reason for him to happen to pass by.

Instead he went up to the recessed floors over the ice. On the other side were VIP rooms, but up the stairs and behind the thick, brightly painted doors, he found a long hallway drenched in rainbow colors. From a room there was yelling and then the cutest little procession of padded children marched out in a neat line, their faces covered in black cages that they had to tilt their whole heads back to see out of.

Ilya had known he'd wanted children eventually, but something in his chest went tight watching them follow a woman who marched backwards, chanting "keep those knees up! Don't wanna trip!"

The kids echoed her, most looking down at their little skates. Ilya pushed back against the door and the woman turned and jumped. Ilya gave his most winning smile. "Sorry, thought you might need someone to hold the door."

"Oh! Mr. Rozanov!" She smiled back and her cheeks were pink. She abruptly pushed a few flyaway hairs out of her face and then seemed to remember she was holding up the line because she looked down at the kids like she'd never seen them before. "Down to the ice! I'm right behind!"

The kids followed her directions, but without their leader, the line became a little free-for-all as the kids stumbled down the steps, their little blades clacking as they went. She turned to look at him, panting slightly, and Ilya looked down at her name tag. "Hello, Delilah."

"Hi!" She crossed her arm behind her back which shoved her chest forward. "What can I do for you?"

"Ah, well–" Ilya hadn't thought this far and he had the suspicion that his face was not pretty enough to convince a child care worker to let him chat with her charges. So he lied. "I heard your marching and wanted to see the newest draft prospects."

Delilah laughed and Ilya waited for what he knew would happen. The kids started getting bored, shooting looks back at him and he could pinpoint the moment Emmy saw him because she let a gasp and then shot out of her seat and hobbled over to him, throwing her arms around his leg. The teacher seemed like she was going to pull her off, so Ilya just placed his hand over Emmy's shoulder blades and smiled down at her. "Hello, Emmy. How are you?"

“Ilya!” She looked up at him and he realized he hadn't seen her full smile. She was missing a tooth. “You’re here!”

“Is my arena. Of course I’m here.” He said, then knelt to whisper, “So who is Donny Doyal?”

“The big mean kid.” Emmy pointed clearly at a large boy who was watching them with wide eyes.

“Emmy!” Dalilah chided and seemed unsure about what exactly she should do. Ilya gave her a look, as if they were sharing a joke.

“Why don’t I lace up your skates?” Ilya offered. “Then I have to go.”

Because otherwise Shane would kill him. Already this felt like he’d seen a line he shouldn't cross and then he practiced his long jump over it. Still, Dalilah gave a tight smile and let him meet the kids, giving fist bumps and signing their little skates. Emmy though, stayed glued to his side, hand tucked into his and glaring at all the other kids who came to talk to him.

“He’s lacing up *my skates*!” She told the only other girl, Kaitlyn, he thought.

Dalilah watched him carefully as they spoke and Ilya liked her a bit more because of it. She wasn’t blinded by his handsomeness enough to take him at his word.

“I'm really, *really* fast!” Emmy said every time another kid tried to talk to him. “And I actually hit the net.”

“That is very impressive.” Ilya said and then directed her onto the ice. Delilah stayed behind, watching them and listening as if he was some predator. He respected it. “I watch you do one lap and then I go so you can practice.”

His promise seemed to work and she let go of his hand to skate over and grab an adorable little stick and a soft rubber puck. Delilah gave him a tight smile and then followed the kids out, dividing them up into groups and having the six kids practice little drills. Emmy was not included in this because, Ilya realized as she made a quick lap around the rink, she was in a league of her own.

She was fast, more sure on her skates than some of the men Ilya played with, and while her shot was wonky and weak, her aim was perfect on the untended goal. He clapped, honestly more impressed than he'd expected, and he could hear her giggle even over the loud chaos of the other screaming kids.

He gave her a thumbs up and waited until she rejoined the teacher and the other kids who all waved at him as he left the building.

On his drive home, he thought long and hard about his roster. It had grown a bit sparse in the last year. Kelly had gotten a boyfriend, Heather had gotten too clingy, and Sveta had been busy with her new job selling rich assholes expensive cars. That hadn't been a problem when he'd had Shane to pick up the slack, but a week without getting his dick wet was almost unheard of.

So when the group chat said they were meeting up at The Palace and to leave their girls at home, Ilya went. It was still early, but the place was packed for a Friday night. Boston wasn't as bad as some places in Canada, but people still knew when they walked in that they were moneyed and a handful recognized their faces when not under a helmet.

By ten he was on his way to a buzz with two brunettes and a blonde warming the booth beside him. Most of it was fawning and talking about whatever facts they knew about hockey. Ilya put up with it for a while but getting his metaphorical dick jerked didn't really do it for him. Instead he pulled the blonde up and into the throngs of dancers, letting her grind back against him and ignoring the angry huffing of the brunettes leaving.

Ilya felt his phone vibrate in his back pocket and had no urge to get yelled at by his papa or his brother or his coach, or whoever wanted to call him and berate him for all of his failings.

Then the phone rang again and Ilya had the instinctive flash of fear for his father. He had been forgetting things more often, calling at strange times and wandering the grounds until one of the staff found him.

Ilya had been preparing for that when he pushed himself away from the blonde, Amy he thought her name was, and squinted at the caller ID.

Jane-Rotation flashed with the call. He'd thought it was funny when he'd first added it and it had gotten a laugh out of the guys when they'd seen how he tagged his hook-ups, but it felt cruel now.

The phone went black and Ilya shoved his way out of the crowd, pushing towards where someone had shoved a loose brick in the back door to crack it open. Most of the people in the back alley were smoking or fucking or both. Ilya clicked on Shane's contact button and he picked up after only a single ring.

“Did you talk to Emmy today?” Shane started with.

Ilya looked around. He felt like he was about to be ambushed by a camera crew. “Yes?”

“You stalked my daughter?” He said sharply and Ilya sputtered.

“I walked past the door and she saw me!” Ilya defended himself. “I laced up her skates because she asked and then left!”

“And you were just happening to walk past the daycare you've never been to?”

“Yes!”

Shane huffed. “You don't get to do this Ilya.”

“I did nothing!”

“You are giving her ideas! She thinks you're best friends now and I have to be the one to tell her you're not!” Shane explained and he sounded tired all the sudden. “I don't want to be the bad guy here, don't make me.”

“Maybe we are best friends.” Ilya muttered just to be contrary but the sound Shane made was weak and Ilya had a brief worry that the crackling sound he could hear was crying.

“She's just a kid, Ilya.” Shane said softly. “If you're mad at me, please don't take it out on her.”

Ilya gaped. That Shane could think so lowly of him was painful. Then again, he'd built that reputation brick by brick and then launched that brick at Shane during that phone call last June.

“Was not trying to be mean.” Ilya explained and walked closer to the street where the herd of people thinned out. He felt it was important that this wasn't overheard. “She talked about it. I just didn't want her to think I…left her that night.”

That was the soft, fragile heart of it. He'd been worried Emmy had woken the next morning and been sad she hadn't gotten to say goodbye. Ilya had felt that way. So he'd wanted this parting to be clean but not painful.

It felt pretty fucking painful now.

“She's five. She barely remembers to blow her own nose.” Shane huffed, but the bite to his words had faded and instead it had a different, softer edge.

Ilya opened his mouth to say something, maybe the stilted and long overdue apology for what he'd said when Shane had called almost six months ago, drunk and wondering if he'd done something wrong, if that was why Ilya had been splashed across every hockey website with his face in some girl's neck at the Awards afterparty.

The words had claws crawling up his throat, but they stuck behind his teeth, trapped there. Just as he was worried Shane would just hang up on him, the line was filled with a deep, heavy sigh that rattled the speakers.

“What are we doing, Ilya?”

Shane was always the brave one. The one who first dropped to his knees, to buy the couch, to invite him to lunch, who invited Ilya to stay the night. Ilya was a fucking coward.

They were the same words as that night. The reply Ilya had given seemed to rattle around his skull.

You're not my wife, Ilya had hissed, his plane ticket to Russia burning a hole in his pocket and adding a heaviness to his chest. *We are just convenient, yes?*

Then the line had gone quiet and Ilya had hung up and went to vomit in the potted plant outside some swanky nightclub he couldn't remember the name of.

“I don't know.” Ilya forced out. It was as honest as he could get.

“Ilya…” Shane whispered and it made his eyes prick with tears. He felt childish and small, leaning against a grimy alley wall. “I don't think I can be in your rotation anymore. I think we

both know that."

What if there was no rotation? Ilya thought wildly. He felt like a kicked dog begging at the foot of the master who kicked them and it made bile burn at the base of his throat. He was pathetic and needy and wanted to be tucked into Shane's little office where the whirl of computer fans and industrial dryers was loud enough to drown out his thoughts.

"That is what you want?" Ilya said instead.

"It's what Emmy needs." Shane said it like it was hard to get out. "She needs stability. I haven't been giving her that."

Taylor, 32 wouldn't give that to him, Ilya thought a bit spitefully. Not the shitheel of an ex or any of the women he'd seen sniffing around him at their team parties. But it was a cold comfort.

"I will miss us." Ilya regretted every drink leading up to those words. They tasted like shitty flavored vodka from those plastic tubes.

"Yeah, me too." Shane echoed. "Bye, Ilya."

"Have a good night, Shane." Ilya said softly and then leaned against the wall for more minutes than he cared to count listening to the dial tone.

Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

Ilya figured if he had survived losing his mother, he could survive his first real break-up.

What he hadn't accounted for was that he was not constantly faced with his mother every time he went to work.

Chapter Notes

Sorry for the late post! I have the next chapter written, it just needs a bit of polish so expect that soon!

Thank you for all the lovely comments and while we're still in the feels, we're also on the up-and-up soon!

Ilya figured if he had survived losing his mother, he could survive his first real break-up.

What he hadn't accounted for was that he was not constantly faced with his mother every time he went to work.

It seemed like every team meeting featured Shane explaining some new initiative or photos they needed, or plans for community engagement. On the ice, Ilya would be practicing and get a flash of Shane's thick thighs in compression leggings and nearly skate into the boards. Every time he tossed something in the laundry, his only thought was how the fucking hamper would get to be closer to Shane's office than he would.

It was verging into ridiculous and even the other guys had noticed. The ribbing had been an annoyance at first and had grown into an actual problem when they wouldn't fucking drop it.

“Mighty Roz can't lock his girl down!” They laughed and he brushed it off. “Maybe he can't satisfy her, hey Roz, can I get her number?”

Maybe it was just that Ilya was well aware of how jealous some of the other players were even being a decade older. They'd make little jabs and brush it off when someone complained.

“We're just joking, fuck! Can't anyone take a fucking joke anymore?” Roberts, a balding defender, barked from his stall. Ilya wanted to knock his few remaining teeth in.

“Let us enjoy this, Cap, not every day someone of your caliber gets dumped.” A rookie, Tompkins, shouted out. Ilya wished he'd keep his metaphorical and literal dick swinging to a minimum but the boy was more brawn than brain and already had three concussions under his belt so Ilya lowered his expectations.

“I don't get dumped, just needed to start fresh.” Ilya said instead, but maybe they picked up on how close to snapping he was because it mostly died out on the ice after he took out Roberts at the knees during practice.

Ilya had learned young that some people were too cruel to learn any other way than being shoved down.

“Damn, Roz, you didn't need to go so hard.” Marley hissed under his breath as Roberts and his equally old pose all glared daggers at him. Ilya ignored him and instinctively checked his phone before smacking himself for being disappointed that there were no messages waiting for him.

“Maybe the girlfriend found out about the other girlfriend.” Roberts said snidely when he knew Ilya was close enough to hear.

It was, objectively, a weak chirp, but it seemed to set off something in him, the thing which had been growing more and more twisted in the last month since Shane had broken it off.

“Hey, Rob, the broken nose is an improvement! Maybe more women will want to fuck you now.” Ilya yelled and the whole locker room broke out into a shuffle, half pulling Roberts back and the other half hauling Ilya away from where he was trying to swing on him.

The reprimand was almost worth it. Almost.

“I expected better, Rozanov.” Coach LeClaire murmured. “You're primed for the Captaincy once Creek retires, but not if the whole locker room hates you.”

Every excuse he wanted to throw out sounded more and more childish on his tongue so he just huffed out, “Understood, coach.”

The berating meant that he was the last one in the locker room and after allowing himself ten minutes of wallowing under the showerhead, he was leaving the building later than he normally did.

It was a punishment, walking past the rink and peeking around to watch the little collection of children make chaos on the ice. One child was propped up on a bucket, another was laying flat on their back wiggling like a worm to get their miniature skates back under them. Most obvious was Emmy, holding tightly to her stick and making big looping circles to build up speed for her little attack on the net guarded by the smallest kid he'd ever seen made up mostly of pads and a massive helmet.

It took a few rounds for him to realize what she was doing, of watching her jerk her stick out and then in, not fluid enough with her little arms. She never seemed satisfied, even when the puck went sailing over the goalie's body.

Again and again, she grabbed the puck and tried again, even when the teacher, busy pulling up the kid who'd flopped down onto the ice, turned and told her to knock it off. Then he saw it, the switch from backhand to forehand, not smooth but there, and watched her give a little cheer even when the goalie stopped it (the kid hadn't moved, just threw himself down on top of it like a seal beaching itself).

But Emmy cheered because what her busy teacher hadn't noticed was a toddler actually pulling off The Rozanov, a move he'd created solely because he was one of the few players who could accomplish it.

He'd gotten closer to the ice than he'd planned and he almost wanted to step out of the shadows of the stands. He wanted to ask Emmy how many times she'd had to watch his videos to practice that move, ask Shane if he'd watched too.

Ilya's fingers twitched with the urge to correct her, show her how to plant her feet and the way she should not let herself get comfortable until she was grown and could actually move her stick with a range of motion more than a foot.

“Plant your feet, baby!”

Ilya's head jerked around and he spotted Shane in the stands. He was with a few other people, parents he'd guess from the way they all had their phones out and were recording the stumbling kids with the enthusiasm of fans at a real game.

Emmy waved over and shouted out, “Did you see?! I did it!”

“You sure did!” Shane called back. “Better than Rozanov himself.”

“No! Ilya is better!” Emmy defended him, puffing up her little chest and it made something in him melt. “Can you record me doing it again and send it to him?”

Shane hesitated and Ilya watched him take a breath before smiling flatly, “Sure.”

His daughter was too young to know how bad a liar her father was.

Before anyone could spot him and start asking for a signature, Ilya slipped back into the hallway and out to his car, his phone heavy in his palm.

A few texts from old hook-ups, Sveta checking if she could crash at his place next week, a missed call from his father, but no text from Jane.

Still, Ilya waited another week for a text, waited to hear the chime and see the video of Emmy's second Rozanov. It never came and Ilya hated himself for hoping.

“Well this is sad,” Sveta hummed the night she arrived in town for some car convention and he'd spent the evening scrolling through the Bears’ social media and the few photos on Shane's private Instagram. Shane didn't need to know that he'd made up a fake account using an old name from one of Shane's high school yearbooks because Ilya was rapidly descending into stalker territory. It was worth it to see what he'd been missing out on.

Emmy was in a few, mostly alongside an older couple Ilya guessed were Shane's parents.

“So are we killing this man or wanting to get him into bed?” Sveta asked when after dinner, Ilya had dropped onto the couch while Sveta dolled herself up. He hadn't heard her come back into the room.

“He wouldn't have you.” Ilya said rudely.

“From the way you're moping, he won't have you either.” She huffed back, grabbing his phone and tossing her heels at him as a distraction while she snooped. “Who the fuck is Gustav Hennderson? Did you make a fake account to spy on this man?”

“Leave it, Sveta.” He said and then yanked the phone out of her hands. She let him, flopping down next to him and reading over his shoulder.

“Is this about Jane?”

Ilya shot her a warning look. “Drop it.”

“I'm not a dog.” Sveta said sharply. “And I'm not stupid. Are you in love with him, or something?”

Ilya hadn't been able to keep anything from Sveta for longer than ten minutes. He looked down at the photo on his screen, of Emmy posing in front of an aquarium with a little fish hat and a balloon.

“He has a kid.”

“You love kids.” Sveta questioned.

“You know Alexei–”

“Fuck your brother.” Sveta cut in. “He can eat my massive dick. You give him too much money and if he's so worried about you having kids, maybe he could bother to take care of his own.”

It was cutting and it was true. Ilya flinched anyways. Sveta looked at him, yanking his head around so that he couldn't avoid her eyes.

“Ilya, you're not your father.”

He jerked his head out of her hold and stood. “It's not that. Are we going out or what?”

Sveta dropped it and Ilya had never been more thankful because she cut to the heart of the matter with the precision of a surgeon.

He danced that night with more people than he could count, took every drink offered to him, and played up his accent into any girl who leaned her way into his personal space.

By the time he got Sveta back to the apartment, they were both too sloshed to do anything more than pour themselves down onto his mattress. It was nearly three in the morning and he had no desire to move but he managed to kick his shoes off and shimmy down his pants.

Sveta's heels made heavy clunking sounds when they hit his hardwood floors and then he felt her turn towards him, smelt her sweet perfume and the fruity alcohol on her breath. “You wanna?”

“Not tonight.”

She didn't say anything, but he could feel her eyes even in the pitch darkness made by his blackout curtains. There were some universal constants, Ilya Rozanov wanting sex used to be one of them.

But it would be a bandaid on a bullet hole and Ilya would feel bad for using Sveta for it until he'd sorted himself out. Maybe she understood that because she planted a loud, messy, wet kiss on his cheek and then tucked her head up under his chin.

Maybe it was a cosmic reward or there really was something to the power of celibacy because when Ilya woke the next morning with the taste of something dead in his mouth and a headache pounding between his eyes, he also had one text from Jane.

Jane: You have a fan.

Ilya dragged himself up, untangling his arms from Sveta who had migrated to the other side of the bed some time during the night. When he clicked on it, the buffering nearly sent him into hysterics before it cut into the exact scene he'd hoped for.

It must have taken her many more tries to get it again because the other kids were off the ice now, but Emmy wore the same little sweatpants with a small cartoon bear on them that she'd had that day.

“One more time!” She demanded through her helmet and Shane sighed to the camera.

“Alright, one more time then we have to go so Mr. O'Reilly can clear the ice.”

Emmy gave a little roll of her shoulders, adorably hunched in her pads, and then nearly lost her edges around the boards before finding them again and speeding up.

It wasn't as clean as the first, she must have been too tired for that, but there was the same movement, familiar and made in miniature. The puck sailed into the goal and Emmy let out a holler like she'd just made the game winning goal.

The camera dipped and Ilya could hear Shane clapping before the video cut out. Ilya watched it three more times, the wobble, the fix, the shot, the celebration.

Without thinking about it, he clicked on his publicist's number and typed out a quick request before he had to click off his phone for fear the light would somehow kill him via pounding headache.

Ilya spent most of the day in the gym, then in the sauna, and then to shower in an attempt to feel more human. Sveta left somewhere in the mix of that with a sharp glare at him to get his shit together.

“Whatever you decide, I'm behind you.” She murmured and kissed his cheek.

By then his headache had calmed enough that he allowed himself to turn on the television and flick through his feed while he cooked breakfast for dinner. Truly one of the best inventions the West ever created.

In the middle of frying his bacon, he got a response that his package was sent and it made him smile. It must have been delivered some time that next morning because the picture was waiting for him after they'd finished at the rink and were breaking off for more free weights or watching tape together in the viewing room.

Ilya opted out of both. No one had said anything about his shitty mood lifting, but had heard that the consensus was Svetlana had been the cause and the solution. Ilya didn't correct them.

The photo was taken in Shane's living room, Emmy standing on the couch and pulling at the sleeves as if making sure the whole shirt was in frame. The little Bears jersey was adorable on her, big enough that she could wear it over pads but also helped to make the name printed on the back clear. In sharp gold, Shane Hollander's daughter proudly wore Ilya's name and number.

Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

> Thank you for all the lovely comments! You might have noticed the chapter count climb but that only because Ilya's groveling got a little long so I needed to split up the chapters.
>
> I also had a scare with a pet over the weekend, so sorry for the later update and hope you enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Ilya kept looking at the photo the rest of the day.

Something swooped in his gut at her smile, the little missing tooth, how her face was slightly blurry because she'd been talking while Shane had been taking the photo. Mostly he was zooming in to see the standing mirror Shane kept by the door where he could clearly see the reflection of Shane smiling that stunning, bright smile Ilya had only gotten out of him a handful of times.

Jane: *I hate you.*

Jane: *She says she's never going to take it off.*

So he slipped out last after practice that day and turned down a side hallway and watched from the tunnel like a weirdo as Emmy and her class of toddlers marched out onto the ice.

Emmy was obvious. She was almost swimming in the jersey without pads but with them, she looked like an honest player. When she picked up her stick, she held it the way Ilya sometimes did before matches, over his shoulders, casual and completely illegal in a game.

“What are you doing?”

Ilya jumped and would deny ever making a sound even if it was a squeak. He glared at Shane and demanded, “What are you doing here?”

“I'm coming to watch my daughter, what are you doing here?”

“Wanted to watch your daughter too.” He said. The more honest answer was that he had been half hoping to spot Shane in the stands again.

“See the chaos you caused, more like.” Shane huffed. “I already got a call that the other kids were jealous and for Emmy to leave the jersey at home which led to a meltdown I had to come deal with.”

“Oh.” Ilya said stupidly. “I didn't think…”

“Yeah, well, that's sort of your specialty.” Shane said and before Ilya even had time to feel upset about it, Shane's crossed arms dropped and his face softened. “Sorry, that was rude.”

So was telling your situationship you'd been seeing for two years that they were nothing more than a number in a line. Ilya felt Shane earned a few snarky remarks to balance out the scales. Shane obviously didn't because he looked more upset as Ilya was unsure what to say.

“It's okay.” He settled on.

“It's not. You're being nice, I'm being a dick.” Shane stepped up so they were standing next to each other. “She liked it, so thank you. Please don't do it again.”

Ilya was going to say something but Shane stepped out along the board and yelled over the almost impressive cacophony of screaming six under six year olds could produce.

“Come on, Emmy, we need to go!”

Emmy didn't say anything but she did huff and throw herself dramatically onto the ice. Shane huffed back and when that didn't work, he opened up the side door and walked across the ice with the same smooth movements he had when wearing skates. He spoke to her and then knelt next to her and all she did was roll away from him, eventually screaming, “No! I don't want to go!”

Emmy had always seemed like a level-headed kid, but Ilya watched as she had an honest to god meltdown, flailing her arms and kicking her feet in a way which could be dangerous.

“Emiko!” Shane hissed, kneeling next to her and talking softly. Emmy didn't seem to hear. Instead her crying got heavier and Ilya was moving before he realized he'd stepped out onto the ice.

It was different without blades but he kept his footing. The closer he got to the wailing, the more he realized it wasn't a temper tantrum like he'd thought. Emmy was crying in big heaping sobs, the kind that hurt your chest and that you couldn't quite stop even when that was all you wanted to do. She gave a gasping breath, her watery eyes pleading with her father who spoke to her softly, not touching her but hovering around her and forcing her attention just to his face.

“A-a-a.” She whimpered out and Ilya only realized she was trying to say his name when Shane turned to look at him with a frown but held out his hand.

“Is ok, Emmy.” Ilya tried but he felt unsure of what he was supposed to do. He'd faced down men with thirty pounds on him with less trepidation than he did lowering himself down onto the ice and letting Emmy crawl over to him. She was cold, her red nose burying into his arm. It felt right to wrap his arms around her, keeping her skates pointed outwards but letting his hand rest against her head.

The helmet she'd been wearing was abandoned over by Shane and her hair was matted with sweat, but she smelt more of strawberry baby shampoo when he leaned down to talk to her. “What's wrong?”

“I don't want to go!” She cried but it was more hiccupping now and Ilya thought that was a good sign.

“Go where?” He asked and shot a glance up towards Shane.

“Baby, it's just a baby sitter. I can't take you with me.” Ilya noted how Shane didn't answer the question. “You like Jacob.”

“I hate Jacob!” She yelled but even Ilya could see her heart wasn't in it. “Why can't I hang out with Ilya?”

“Ilya has plans, baby.” Shane explained.

Ilya, who had no plans, made the mistake of muttering, “No I don't.”

Shane glared at him right as Emmy's head shot up, nose all snotty but eyes bright and watery from crying. “No, Emmy.”

“But he said!”

“Ilya says a lot of things.” Shane muttered and it was both too close to the truth and also more cutting than he expected.

“Is okay. Jacob sounds nice.” Ilya said softly, rubbing her small back through her jersey, right over where his name was resting. He tried to ignore the way something hot bubbled up in his gut.

“I don't want Jacob!” Emmy screamed and Ilya was startled enough that he moved his hand away and that set her off worse.

She seemed to both want to be touched and not, both leaning into his hands and then shoving them away, letting her head fall onto Shane's chest and also pushing at his face.

This close, Ilya became aware of Shane's cologne. It was the same, umber and musk, woody in a way that had him inhaling even with a squirming lap full of toddler.

Shane looked up and seemed to realize how close their heads were right about the time someone shouted Shane's name from the boards.

“Shane!”

Ilya turned and saw one of the security guards with a man behind him holding a small bouquet of flowers.

Shane's face went pale and he reached out and yanked Emmy into his arms, a feat while in dress shoes and on the ice. “Taylor! What are you doing here?”

Ilya's head snapped around so quickly he was surprised it didn't crack.

Taylor, 32 was a man, older than Shane, with jowls and a receding hairline. Ilya shot a look up at Shane who was avoiding his eyes and then down to Emmy who had pushed herself down out of her father's hold to collapse dramatically and bonelessly onto the ice. Ilya muttered incredulously, "Taylor?"

"What are you doing here, we said we'd meet at six?" Shane hated spontaneity and Ilya watched Shane's smile grow brittle at the edges as all three of them made their way over to the boards. Emmy yanked at her father's hand until he had to let go or topple on top of her, and Ilya was gratified when she threw herself behind Ilya's knees.

Something too primal for Ilya's taste rose up in his chest. He felt a few minutes away from pounding on his chest and huffing out *mate, mine!* in a caveman voice.

"I know, I just thought I could surprise you." First strike, Ilya thought snidely. "And I wanted to meet this little lady!"

He knelt and waved at Emmy who didn't hide, but also didn't seem excited to meet him. Taylor seemed to realize he had an audience because when Emmy proved unproductive, he stood back up and looked at Ilya with a wrinkle in his brow.

"And you are…?"

Shane opened his mouth to speak and Ilya beat him to it. "The babysitter."

Emmy cheered, shaking so hard it nearly sent her sprawling over the ice. Shane shot him a sharp look but Taylor seemed to relax a bit, smiling.

"Oh, cool." He gestured towards the door which had been left open for the kids to get out, gesturing for Shane to take his hand as he stepped up, as if Shane needed it. "We could leave a bit early, maybe grab a drink somewhere before our reservation.

Strike two, Shane hated drinking and the general grimy atmosphere of most local bars.

"Sure." Shane said and it was Ilya's turn to shoot him a look. Shane ignored his eyes and took the offered hand. Something in Ilya seemed to jump, like all his organs were tossed around.

Still, Shane was a poor liar and it was clear he wanted to get a drink about as much as Ilya wanted to do his taxes. It was why when he turned around to hand over his keys, Ilya offered him an out.

"I can fake seizure." Ilya offered.

"I want to go." He said unconvincingly. "Besides, you're not epileptic."

"Is why I fake it."

Shane just pressed his keys into Ilya's palm and gave him a long look. It wasn't angry or upset, just searching. "Nothing too greasy for dinner, bed by nine, and she'll try to convince

you that I read her six books a night, I don't, so don't give in."

"We'll be fine." Ilya promised. "You could come home early."

Shane didn't say anything, just a soft, "Jacob lives just down the hall, call him if you have any problems."

Emmy didn't seem to have any understanding of his internal torture. Instead she seemed to be nearly vibrating with the idea of a night with Ilya Rozanov. That thought alone made the creeping darkness recede the smallest bit. Emmy was excited and hadn't let go of his hand, only when she raced into the changing room and still peeked her head out three times to make sure he was waiting for her.

Her booster seat was waiting near his car and he had to bribe her with getting McDonald's to not tell Shane how long it took him to get it all set up.

"Ilya?" Emmy asked from the backseat. Ilya didn't really feel comfortable answering, he was driving well under the speed limit and still felt like it was too fast with Emmy's little feet pounding out a staccato rhythm against his upholstery.

"Yes, Emmy?" He said softly as another car passed him.

"Why do they honk at you?" She asked as another hand was shoved out a window.

"They like my car." He huffed as another person sped past him and flipped him off. It didn't matter. He had precious cargo.

Ilya was pretty close to a local celebrity. He knew this so it shouldn't have been a surprise that when he opened the doors for Emmy to walk in, a number of people recognized him. The drive through had been around the block and he'd enjoyed the attention when he'd done this before, but now it felt strange to see phones pop up and start recording.

Carefully, without thinking, he turned so that his body blocked their view of Emmy. She went willingly, shifting into him and then tugging on his shirt so that he could lift her up to better see the menu.

"Nuggets!" She demanded and Ilya smiled as he handed the star-struck teenager behind the register a hundred dollar bill.

"Come on, nugget." He said once they had their food. He hadn't felt comfortable leaving her in the car and he sent up a prayer that Shane never saw those posts. Considering he had access to all their accounts, fat fucking chance.

Blow-up behind her, Emmy munched on her apple slices on the drive home and Ilya was surprised at how he didn't even mind it when she smeared her sticky fingers on a leather interior so expensive it could have put her through college.

The apartment was just like Ilya had last seen it. Maybe a little messier, more toys left scattered around on the soft rugs, but familiar enough that it sent an ache behind his ribs.

Emmy and him ate in front of the tv, a PWHL game this time, and she knew all of these players too.

“I'll do that!” She pointed at the center who'd made a frankly nasty goal not ten minutes prior.

“Good. Work hard and then maybe you beat me.” He offered because it made her laugh.

“I'll beat you when I'm grown up because you'll be old!”

Ilya gaped. “I'm not old!”

“Yes you are!” Emmy giggled, the deep belly laugh kind and if it wouldn't have resulted in milk coming out of her nose, Ilya would have tickled her.

The titular Jacob popped up around six and offered to take over, but Ilya sent him home with a fifty and a signed napkin.

Bedtime was a little rough, she did try to convince him that nine chapters was different from nine books, but he eventually flicked on the nightlight at her behest and left the door cracked.

When he finally leaned back against the couch, and allowed himself the time to think about where exactly he was and where exactly Shane was, the fast food seemed to roll in his stomach.

A new game had started and he had the idea to try and get good tickets for Emmy and Shane right as the door clicked open and Shane and Taylor, 32 entered.

“Oh, I thought you'd head home.” Shane said and Ilya realized Jacob's appearance hadn't been accidental.

“No, I didn't want to leave her yet.” Ilya said softly. Taylor, 32 was looking between them with narrowed eyes.

“I know you from somewhere, yeah?” He held out his hand. “Taylor Beckett, Sales with Shoester and Barrow.”

“Only in America you introduce yourself with your job title.” Ilya said and Shane glared while Taylor's smile went strained. Still, Ilya took the offered hand. “Ilya Rozanov, Professional Hockey Player.” Then to be a bit mean, “Should I list my awards?”

“Wow, hockey.” He said. “What's a hockey player doing babysitting?”

“Helping out a friend." He said and then with a smile at Shane. “I mean Emmy. Me and Hollander are rivals.”

“O–oh…” Taylor nodded but didn't seem to understand anything.

“He's joking.” Shane explained and stepped out of the way. “Thank you, Rozanov. Get home safe.”

Ilya would have rather rubbed his bare ass on a hot grill than leave, but Shane's tone didn't offer any disagreement so Ilya nodded and let the door close behind him.

But Taylor didn't come by the rink again and the handful of times he peeked at the stands before he left, Shane was always alone in seats, cheering on his daughter and Ilya forced that to be enough for him.

Chapter End Notes

It's only up from here with a small pitstop at Situationship Town before the end!

Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

> Hey guys, long time no see...
> It's been a weird last month and so thank you for the wait and the lovely comments! One more chapter and it is already planned out and over halfway written so expect that soon.
> A note, the hockey in this chapter is mostly inspired by the PWHL, not the NHL, so if I make any mistakes, know I tried my best but might have gotten distracted from the rules looking at all those strong women.
>
> Send me good vibes to avoid the A03 curse and thank you for sticking with me!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Ilya was desperate and that was why he ended up on the porch of a woman named Mygan with a Y at ten in the morning, armed with a bottle of wine and a list of questions.

As a rule, Ilya stayed away from WAGs. More than a few had made passes at him at parties or team meet-ups but Ilya was good at reading people and all of them might as well had the words BAD NEWS written across their forehead.

But his team wouldn't be any help and would be nosy and rude as fuck so instead he went to the source of their knowledge, their wives and girlfriends.

“Ilya! Come in!” Mygan with a Y was blonde and pretty with pale eyes and perfect skin. Ilya was sure her husband and her had two kids but there wasn't a sign of them in the house and she wore a tight top which showed the toned line of her stomach. For a moment Ilya worried he was being set up before the hallways spilled out into the living room and he spotted a variable sea of blondes with a few brunettes tossed in for variety. They nearly all were conventionally pretty, with perfectly curled hair and the perfect amount of make-up without veering into tacky. They all cheered like he'd scored a goal and he only realized it was because he'd brought wine when one of them, Faith he thought, their goalie's long time girlfriend, took it from him.

“So you sounded serious on the phone, what is this about?” Destiny, Danvers' wife, asked. She had a PHD Ilya was sure, but he couldn't remember what in.

“Ah, well…”

“It's about a girl, isn't it?” Sandra, the only redhead of the bunch, asked excitedly. She wasn't drinking, presumably because she was swollen with Smith's kid and if the baby was anything like its father, was going to come out huge.

“Yes…” Ilya said quickly. “Jane.”

“Jane!” They all said excitedly. “What's she like, why haven't you brought her around?”

“It was casual for a number of years.” Ilya explained and he saw a few girls turn up their noses but their partners were assholes who slipped away at clubs so Ilya tried not to take it too personally. “I was going to try and make it official, make breakfast in bed, have whole *what are we* conversation…”

“And?” Sandra asked.

“Her ex dropped off the kid she never told me about.”

They all gasped and for a moment he felt a little sick sharing his story like this. Yet, Svetlana would have laughed him off the phone if he'd tried to explain how he'd shot himself in the foot and then complained about the bullet hole. Still, the girls were frowning and it didn't seem staged or faked. Mygan was a bit dramatic but he supposed the story sounded rather dramatic when put like that.

“So I tell h–her that I should have known and she tells me she was going to tell me last June.” Ilya explained, feeling more comfort when they all leaned in to listen to him. “Only I–well, I was dealing with family issues in June and…maybe made some questionable decisions.”

“Those pap photos of you with your face in those girls’ cleavage?” Destiny guessed and the other girls all shot her a gaping look and then him for clarification.

“We had been casual for years!” Ilya defended before he lost them. “She knew what I did and was fine with it, I checked every time and was tested regularly. For a span of a few months she was the only one I was seeing. Then…”

“Family things.” Mygan said tactfully and his opinion of her rose exponentially.

“Da, so she sees and calls me, and I am drunk and–not in good space.” Ilya said but couldn't think of the correct term and hated himself a bit for it coming out clunky. “I think I break her heart.”

“What did you say?” Sandra asked and when Destiny elbowed her she hissed, “what? I can't ask?”

“She asked what she had done wrong.” Ilya said and the rolling shame from that night returned in full force. He felt it rolling over him, smothering him, choking him. “I told her nothing, that we were casual and convenient."

“What every girl wants to hear.” Destiny said snidely while sipping on Ilya's wine.

“I apologized after, she accepted it and that's why I felt things had to change.” Ilya had already cracked his ribs open, might as well unspool his guts too. “And her kid is so sweet, just like her, with the same little freckles and attitude. But–I just need to know if…well, what do I do? How do I show her I am ready now?”

“Ilya, keeping an important part of her life from you shows that she was happy to keep things casual too.” Destiny said to him and the gathering of women. “And saying you were going to

do something is not the same as doing it. You were two adults trying your best. Apologize and be open and honest with what you want, none of this pussy-footing around."

Ilya wanted to tell her that Ilya had tried but that Shane had the skull of iron. "So I say, what? I won't be a step father, I'll be the father who steps up?"

"Sure, if that's what she wants." Mygan cut in, but there was a sharpness to her face now. "But I know after Kaeydn all I wanted was to be seen as Mygan again. Not Mom, or Mama, just Me. Maybe Jane liked that you liked *her*. Show her that."

"Okey." Ilya said and then felt uncomfortable as they all looked at him like they expected him to say more. "I'm going to go."

They whined and made little gestures but Ilya wanted to be alone to think and maybe plan a little. He was in his car and driving home when his cell rang and his car automatically connected.

"Ilya?"

Ilya nearly crashed into the highway rails and he quickly slid off to the side of the road. "Shane?"

"Sorry, is this a bad time?" He sounded nervous and Ilya didn't want him to hang up.

"No, no. Good time." Ilya played it casual and immediately failed. "What's up?"

"Do you have your stadium tickets?" Shane asked and then laughed without humor. "I mean, of course you have them, but do you like…have you given them away for Sunday's game?"

"You want them?" Ilya jerked forward and nearly choked himself with his seatbelt. He coughed out, "They're yours. I could drop them off at your office tomorrow."

They were digital, Shane knew that, but the line crackled a bit before Shane said softly, "Sure, lunch time?"

"Yes. I'll be there."

The next day he sped through practice and then a quick workout that everyone ignored he half-assed, and he was early with physical tickets in one hand that he'd asked for from the office. He touched them a few times as he descended into the bowels of the building, making sure they were still there.

"You didn't bring lunch." Shane said when he saw Ilya and then flushed, "I just mean–"

"I didn't want to assume." Ilya offered and then handed over the tickets. "Good seats."

"You gave me three?" Shane asked and Ilya's throat felt tight.

"If you wanted–" He blinked and forced himself to say it. "If you wanted to bring someone. I wanted you to–" A lie, he tried again. "I want you happy."

Shane's mouth dropped open and he looked down at the tickets for a long time before holding one back out to him. “I only need the two.”

“For you and…?” Ilya dragged it out and Shane smiled.

“Emmy. My daughter.” Shane said with a snark no one seemed to believe him capable of.

“Of course.” Ilya hummed. “I think I know her. Freckles. Good choice in hockey teams.”

“Terrible choice in hockey players.” Shane shot back and Ilya smiled.

“I’m sorry.” Ilya blurted out and then, because he was in too deep, “For Vegas.”

The smile Shane wore curled up and flacked at the edges, brittle. Ilya knew he shouldn’t say anything, but Mygen had been so sure—

“It’s fine.” Shane said, tone telling Ilya it was not fine. “I know your dad had died, Ilya, you were dealing with a lot.”

Always kind, Shane, giving Ilya an out. He was determined not to take it.

“No excuse.” He said firmly. “I’m grown man, I knew what I was doing, running from my problems, and I did it anyway. I hurt you. I’m sorry.”

Shane gaped at him a bit and then swallowed. Ilya could see the way his Adam’s apple bobbed. “I forgive you.”

“Oh.” It was Ilya’s turn to gape. He felt wrong footed, turned to look behind him to see if there was someone else that Shane could be talking to because it made no sense for it to be him. “I mean…okay. I’ll make it up to you. And Emmy.”

“Ah, what? Why Emmy…?” Shane leaned forward but Ilya was already nodding.

“Yes, I will prove myself. Give me—three games.” Ilya figured that might be enough time to work out a plan.

“I—Ilya I already forgave you.”

“Sure.” Ilya nodded but in Ilya’s experience forgiveness was earned, not given and Shane was too soft on Ilya. Always had been. “I have to go. I will see you at the game!”

Shane might have called a goodbye but Ilya was already focused on tomorrow, on crushing Toronto into the ice and scoring a hat trick and maybe stealing a stick or puck or something for Emmy.

“Are you on something?” Marley hissed during practice when Ilya didn't chirp anyone and focused on practicing plays.

“No, I just need us to win.” Ilya could picture the Toronto goalie and nailed the puck right up above his imaginary shoulder. Ilya corrected, “Destroy them.”

“Yeah, sure man.” Marley waved off a few others and Ilya enjoyed a few moments of peace. His hand shifted on his grip, shifted down and then up, puck stuck to the blade of his stick as he transitioned from front hand to back hand like Emmy had done.

The sound of the puck hitting the net seemed to rattle around his brain.

By the time the game started, Ilya was nearly vibrating with the type of energy he usually only reserved for playoffs. Teammates had noticed and he was dismissing looks and snapping at friends until they all fell into the same mindset, that they needed to fucking *crush* Toronto.

The Guardians seemed confused at the tone and Ilya ignored the confused looks from both teams’ coaches in favor of scanning the seats.

The family and friends sections were higher up and featured more polished WAGs with their designer handbags and their nosy children, so Ilya had asked for rink-side tickets and then paid a scalper when that didn't work.

“Look, Cap, you got a fan.”

Ilya spotted her immediately, and realized Emmy and Shane had been hidden behind a truly ridiculous sign with his name and number on it in sparkly glitter. She had little earmuffs on, noise canceling if he had to guess, and she was already standing on her seat, little arms moving so quickly that it rattled the paper and almost made it unreadable.

The jumbotron had spotted them and Emmy started bouncing in her seat and waving while Shane looked like he wanted to sink into his chair but was too busy holding the back of his daughter's jacket to keep her upright.

He didn't get to give them more than a cursory wave during practice, the sins of being a captain, but when the game proper started, Ilya was already on a tear.

Ten minutes into the first period and Ilya got a good angle on a rebound in front of the net. The goalie had sprawled to save and Ilya, just like he'd practiced, fell to one knee and buried it into the top shelf. The buzzer sounded and Ilya, still sliding from the momentum, kept it going until he threw himself against the boards right where Emmy was sitting.

He had a moment that he'd worried that she might be frightened about being shadowed by a six three man, but when he turned over his shoulder, she was nearly horizontal, little mitten covered hands banging on the glass and her whole face lit up with a smile as she chanted his name with the crowd.

The Boston lead didn't last, a scrum gave Kent an opening he used and even Ilya shoving him into the boards at the start of the second didn't get Ilya anything more than a laugh.

The second period was scoreless, neither team able to keep any momentum and their goalies doing too well at blocking shots.

Ilya nearly got an assist in the opening minutes of the third but a fucking icing call cut off their push and sent them back to their defensive zone. Ilya kept looking towards the seats

where Emmy's round freckled face watched with awe, but Ilya's eyes also drifted over to where Shane was just as enthralled as his daughter. Any performance of disinterest was gone and when Ilya got a particularly messy goal at the end of the third by just slipping the loose puck in behind the goalie's pads, Shane was on his feet. When Ilya threw his shoulder against the partition again, he swore he could feel the heat of Shane's palm as they rattled the plexiglass.

Not pretty, but it did the job.

When their second line, tired and not trading off the way they should have, let Barrett snap a puck unimpeded into the crease, Ilya nearly strangled them.

The locker room was tense and Ilya was almost grateful when his coach waved him out to the hall to talk to the local reporter about how the game was going before overtime. The question were quick and routine, *how are you playing? What can you do to win? How have the other team been playing?*

“How do you see this final OT playing out?” The question was simple, the answer routine. Ilya should have said: “we're going to try our best to put pucks in deep”–or in net, or any of the other six euphemisms hockey players used to avoid just strangling the reporters who ask stupid questions.

Instead, Ilya leaned into the microphone and explained, “I will be getting a hat trick tonight using my move, The Rozanov.”

“Oh.” The reporter seemed as confused about the shift in script as Ilya was but he'd said it so now he needed to make it a reality.

“There is little girl out there with my sign who wants a good game.” Ilya pointed behind the zamboni to where Emmy had slumped back against Shane but her little sign was still visible, clutched tightly in her hand like she was afraid of letting it go. “I'll give her a *great* game.”

That Shane was just as obsessed with hockey as his daughter was an added bonus and totally not why he pushed for the first face-off and mocked Kent's shitty edges Ilya knew he was sensitive about and then flicked the puck back neatly to where Marley was waiting for him.

Maybe it was because he'd fucking announced it, but Ilya was swarmed when he so much as looked at the puck. It had the added bonus of putting Toronto off their game, the strong diamond pattern they always fell into to guard their goalie fell to pieces when Ilya made a move, like they expected him to phase through players or something.

It would have been funny if he didn't want to really fucking get this goal.

Attempts on goal rocked up, their goalie bending over backwards to stop him and then the rebounds and Ilya kept pushing for his line to play to the point that his coach snapped at him to sit his ass down.

When the opening came, Ilya's whole body seemed to feel it. Shane did too, Ilya could just see under the cut of his visor, Shane rising up, not having to say a thing but tilting his body.

He'd have missed it if he wasn't so locked in, and when he finally made a run at the net where already one player was sprawled, he made like he would wrap around, the goalie fell to one knee, throwing his body to the side a second too late for the little nip and tuck of Ilya's back hand.

The sound of the arena seemed to rattle the roof. Ilya's hands were up and instinctively, his eyes found Shane's. Both Hollander's were on their feet and cheering, Shane tearing his beanie off and tossing it over the plexiglass where the nets had been pulled up. It started out a chain reaction that had him raising his arms and giving the arena a bow which had them clearing, screaming, chanting his name and his hat trick.

There were only two instances that Ilya felt like a god. One was here, on the rink, standing at the epicenter of so much raw obsession that it nearly sent him into orbit. The second was when Shane got to that hazy brainless head space that had him nonverbal besides making hurt little noises with each thrust and whimpers of Ilya's name.

He'd already gotten the first tonight and if the way Shane was looking at him across the rink was any indication, Ilya might also be getting the second if he played his cards right.

As he skated closer to find that knit monstrosity that Shane called a beanie (Shane actually called it a torque but Ilya refused to give into that apparent Canadian psychosis) Shane was standing, hands against the plexiglass, mouth pulled into a wide smile, breathing heavy like he'd been the one one the ice.

When Ilya threw himself this time, it was forward facing and Emmy threw herself too, their arms spread out like they were caught mid-hug. She laughed and he saw little stains on her cheeks from tears and a pit dropped in his stomach, even as she started jumping and cheering for him.

When Ilya got a glimpse of Shane, the pit only spread larger. He was smiling, the soft genuine kind that pulled at a small scar on his upper lip that Ilya had liked to bite at.

Ilya had opened his mouth but they were in the middle of a stadium and his team was swarming him from all sides, pulling him off the ice and into the locker room.

He found his phone and immediately opened their stagnant chat.

Ilya*: good game?*

Shane responded immediately.

Shane: *Yeah, but the center's an asshole.*

Ilya of ten months ago would have said something like *no, the center wants your asshole* but the truth was the center wanted apparently to do the domestic things he'd always joked he'd never do. He just knew his teammates would be insufferable when they found out.

All thoughts vanished when Shane double-texted.

Shane: *Do you want us to wait for you?*

Ilya knew, even without looking, that his name was written on the board and that press would be a nightmare and he'd be lucky to get out of the arena by eleven. Emmy was already tired, keeping her up this late–

With a resolve he didn't think himself capable of, Ilya texted:

Ilya: *already past bedtime. tomorrow?*

The jumping blue dots made Ilya want to throw himself into a cold shower or inside an industrial washing machines, something to not think about all the ways Shane could let him down kindly while breaking Ilya's fucking heart.

"Rozy! Press wants you now!" The AC called and Ilya wanted to hiss for some reason. Instead he dressed quickly and marched out to face the press with the joy of a man walking out to his execution. It wasn't far off, even if most of the comments were praise, Ilya just nodded and repeated the tired phrases to get them finished faster. Lots of "good team effort" and "got pucks in net" and "good push."

Maybe because they were picking up on his lack of enthusiasm, or just getting bored too, the questions wrapped up and Ilya tried to sprint back to the lockers in slides which meant he nearly brained himself on the door. When he flipped his phone over, he nearly choked when he saw Shane's number pop up.

Shane: *Em is out. I'll wait on the bench near your car.*

After a shower that was a whore's bath if he ever had one, he nearly sprinted down the hall and out the door. Most of the lot was already empty, guys gone home to family or out to the clubs. Shane was near Ilya's car, holding a lump covered in a poufy pink jacket. Ilya moved quickly, and just as Shane looked up, Ilya slid the hat over his dark hair.

"Thought you'd want your hat back." He said with a smile.

"Figured you'd go for the neon green snapback so you could match your ridiculous car." Shane jerked his chin at the car and Ilya gestured for Shane to get in considering he'd already started it.

Ilya expected Shane to make his excuses or say he had a ride coming. He didn't, instead climbing in but still holding a sleeping Emmy to his chest. She shifted and moved when the heat started pouring over her. Ilya would burn through his whole tank of gas just to be able to sit in the dark and watch Shane and his daughter warm up.

"I can drive you to your car?" Ilya offered.

"Sure, but not on the roads. Not without a booster seat." Shane said softly and Ilya didn't complain. He wanted to drive them home but seeing as he had neither a booster seat nor a back seat in which to put a booster seat in, he settled for taking the turns at ten miles per hour and indicating a turn to an empty parking lot. Partly for safety and mostly because it got a soft giggle out of Shane each time he did it. "Up here on the right."

“Goodnight.” Ilya said when they came to a stop next to Shane’s practical car.

“Goodnight.” Shane said and then, before Emmy could wake up, levered himself up with an impressive amount of core strength for someone holding a toddler. He waited as Shane turned on the car and then buckled her in.

Shane kept glancing back, smiling, and Ilya was nearly vibrating as Shane finally shut the door and walked over, leaning down to the lip of the window. It was unbearably attractive even in a puffy jacket and ugly beanie.

“So I was thinking breakfast?”

“What?” Ilya asked.

“You said tomorrow.” Shane explained. “I was thinking you could come for breakfast. Emmy didn’t get to explain her thoughts on every minute of the game and I’ve already heard it live, so she’ll need another sacrifice–I mean listener.”

“I can do breakfast.” Ilya smirked and when Shane leaned down, Ilya let his mouth drop open to almost taste the musky aftershave Shane used.

“It might be early.” Shane whispered. “Might be best for you to just follow me back to the apartment now.”

“Would be smart, yes.”

“Better for the environment.” Shane muttered but smiled too. It made his eyes shine even in the lowlight. As much as Ilya wanted to leave it there, something in his stomach clenched.

Ilya opened his mouth to say something but Shane stopped him.

“This is me saying you’re forgiven, by the way, since you didn’t seem to get that yesterday." Shane said firmly, that confidence he only seemed to have on the ice and when saying something that might lead to Ilya putting his cock in him. It was unreasonably hot. Ilya’s brain skipped over the words, not trusting them but unsure considering who said them. He’d listen to Shane but had at least ten orgasms to make up for and knew it would be his pleasure, and Shane’s, to knock three of those out tonight.

“Are you sure, Shane?”

“Yes.” Shane turned and shoving his hands in his pockets, showcasing his truly spectacular ass. “But ask me again in the morning if you’re still not sure?”

Ilya was many things and a saint was not one of them. Shane didn’t have to ask twice. He did throw up a quick prayer to which ever of all those saints might help with second chances as he turned out of the parking lot and into the route which was becoming achingly, wonderfully, familiar.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading and please consider leaving a comment, they really helped pushed me to finish this and I'm trying to get better at answering them. Just know I read every one and they mean the world. Thank you!

Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

> Hello and welcome to the final chapter! I did actually have plans for dividing this chapter up and the last part to be the epilogue, but I figure you waited long enough and to just post it all together.
>
> Thank you for the patience and the love, everyone has been so kind and all of your comments have been so motivating and lovely!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Ilya woke early to the sun slinking in under the blinds in Shane's room. In their haste last night after finally getting a wired Emmy to go to sleep so they could get behind a door that locked, they must have forgotten to pull it.

Standing on shaky legs, he moved quietly across the hardwood and clicked the blinds down. Even then, there was still enough light to see Shane, curled up in the warm divot Ilya left behind, hands shoved up under his chin and face soft with sleep. He was unfairly handsome and something painful poked at Ilya under his breastbone. Instead of ruminating on that, he moved to the door, clicked open the lock and slid out into the dark living room, making sure the door clicked closed behind him.

Shane had all the same ingredients as before down to the same brand of English muffins. The pans were in the same place and it was easy to fry the bacon and toast the muffins and maybe it was some memory that woke her up but he heard the soft rustle of a blanket being dragged and the slap of tiny bare feet slapping across the wooden floor right about the time he felt a tug at his pants.

Emmy was leaning her face tiredly into his hip, other hand holding a little puck-shaped stuffed animal and Boston branded blanket.

"Good morning, little bear." Ilya whispered. Emmy didn't say anything, just blinked blearily up at him as her jaw cracked open in a bonebreaking yawn.

"Orning, Yaya." She murmured and Ilya melted about as fast as the cheese over their sandwiches. "Hungry."

"Hello, hungry, I'm Yaya." Ilya hummed and ignored the annoyed glare Emmy directed his way. He only won her back over when he plated up her breakfast and made his way over to the couch by dragging her on his leg.

She let out a giggle that built until it seemed to burn away whatever mood she was in, leaving her still a bit blurry-eyed but happy enough to climb onto the couch and click masterfully

through the tv menus until she found what she wanted.

It was not a game, instead a cartoon Ilya had never seen before with a big blue house and an unsettling bear puppet. Emmy didn't seem bothered and even used her own hands to chew this time which meant Ilya could eat his own breakfast too instead of feeding her.

Eventually Emmy tired of being a normal child and asked Ilya to navigate to Youtube and find a PWHL game to watch instead and Ilya found a championship game he hadn't known Boston hosted, and felt slightly bad as it loaded.

"So who is your favorite team?"

"All of them." Emmy explained simply.

"Mhm, smart. Then you always win." Ilya nodded sagely.

"You should do that."

"Yes, I should just win. Is very stupid of me to lose so much." Ilya explained and Emmy, proving she was too smart for him, turned her whole body so that Ilya could get the full brunt of her glare. He lowered his shoulder so she could see his face too. "I will try very hard."

"Daddy says trying is half the battle."

Ilya smiled, he could imagine Shane saying that. "Your daddy is smart."

"I liked your game. I liked the goals." She jumped to a new topic as the game on the screen drifted into its second period. "I liked when you jumped against the glass."

"I liked the goals too." Ilya took a bite. "You had fun?"

"Yes. But it was loud." Emmy chewed meditatively. "I didn't like all the lights." Then, looking at him as if she was worried he would laugh at her, she whispered, "I got scared at the booms."

The little celebration after the second period, Ilya realized, where the t-shirt cannons were launching folded shirts into the crowd. Emmy looked away, shoving a big bite into her mouth and avoiding Ilya's eyes. Something rose up in him, a bitter honesty which felt like tar climbing up his throat.

But Emmy's eyes were wet with unshed tears, an un earned shame which she was too young to already feel.

"Can I tell you a secret?" Ilya leaned down to whisper. Emmy nodded vigorously, even with her little cheeks pushed out with eggs and bacon. "Sometimes, I get very sad. And I don't tell people because I get scared too."

"*You* get scared?" She said it like it was a revelation, maybe that was what made it easier to tell her this, the secret he'd hidden from everyone. Emmy would understand. Emmy deserved the truth.

“All the time.” He bumped their shoulders and when she chewed and swallowed, it was so big a bite that it forced the tears hanging around her waterline to spill down her cheeks. Ilya had already rubbed them away before he realized Emmy had moved.

Twig-thin arms were around his shoulders and Ilya couldn’t move for a moment, long enough for Emmy to move away before he pulled her forward and hugged her back. He wasn’t good at it, but Emmy didn’t seem to care. He’d learn, Ilya promised himself, with lots and lots of practice.

Maybe it was a displacement of air, but when Ilya looked up, Shane was standing in the hallway, tucked along the edge and gnawing at his lip. He was just like his daughter, misty-eyed and refusing to let them fall. But he was smiling, Shane was smiling, and the tight clench of his heart gave a painful twist and relaxed like a sore muscle stretched to release. Ilya had gotten so used to the tension that he’d forgotten what it was like not to carry that knot around.

Shane had moved forward and Emmy pulled back and stood on the couch so Shane could hug her too. “Baby, would you go grab another blanket for us?”

Emmy looked back at Ilya and then nodded, jumping down and racing to her bedroom. Ilya watched her for a moment and then felt Shane’s warm palms cup his face and turn it so they could lock eyes.

“You’re crying.” Shane said, no real inflection, just like he was realizing it for the first time.

“No, Russians do not do this.” Ilya promised and before he could rub his face dry on his shirt, Shane rubbed the tears away with the pads of his thumbs.

“Well, Hollanders do.”

Ilya’s throat was so thick that he couldn't get a word out before Emmy came racing back out dragging a blanket with a Disney princess on it and holding it out in her tiny hands for their approval.

“Perfect.” Shane nodded and lifted her up and laid her on his lap. “Move over.”

Ilya scooted over but Shane didn't sit next to him, a fact which hurt until he saw the faint dusting of a blush across his cheeks as he grabbed Ilya's arm and gestured for him to lay his head on Shane's thigh like Emmy was.

“Are you trying to seduce me, Mr Hollander?” Ilya tried to joke but it came out with a pleading undertone he allowed only because Shane responded the same.

“Is it working?” It was shy and pretty and Shane was still wearing his glasses which he always tried to take off during their hookups.

“I'll make an exception this time.” Ilya shrugged. “Maybe next time too.”

“Humble of you.”

“What can I say, I'm a nice guy.” Ilya murmured, looking up and noticing Emmy's valiant attempt to stay awake on a full stomach had failed so he added, “Big dick too, good with kids. Total package.”

“Ilya!” Shane chided but he was smiling and hiding it behind his hand and tugging lightly on Ilya's curls. “How would I know you're good with kids, you don't sleep with people who have kids.”

Point-blank. Ilya turned to look at him. Fuck him, he even looked attractive from below. “Exception. Besides, this is not just fucking, I don't think.”

“No?” Shane asked and then bit his lip, doing the same thing as his daughter and avoiding Ilya's eyes. “Because…with Emmy, you can't just change your mind, Ilya.”

“Sure, but her dad has a big dick and is also good with children. Not as good as me but..." Ilya hummed. “He's a total package.” And when it looked like Shane might really start pulling his hair in a less sexy way, Ilya admitted, “There is nowhere else I want to be.”

“Good, good.” Shane looked up but this time he was looser and his hands ran along the crowns of the two heads in his lap thoughtlessly. “Then you'll stay for breakfast?”

“Already made.” Ilya jerked his chin in the direction of the kitchen. “I am very domestic when I want to be.”

“And you want to be.” Shane said it not as a question but a statement.

“Yes. Yes, I think so.”

Shane looked down at him and Ilya had to close his eyes as Shane's fingers drifted from his hair to drift over Ilya's eyelids.

“Then stay for lunch.”

Another statement. Ilya didn't open his eyes, he didn't have to in order to picture Shane's soft smile he knew he was wearing, and instead allowed himself to drift off to the smell of Shane's body wash, the heavy sweetness of bacon and syrup, and strawberry baby shampoo.

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“Yaya, I don't wanna go!” Emmy whined. She'd tried to do the lip thing which used to always work but Ilya had gotten stronger in the last few months and it didn't work all the time anymore. Switching tactics, she moaned, “All of them are mean to me!”

“They’re your cousins.” Ilya said patiently. Emmy was so annoyed she kicked his seat a bunch until he shot her a look through the mirror. “I see, princess wants to go back to castle without cake.”

“No!” Emmy yelled and dropped her feet in favor of whimpering and wriggling in her booster seat. Everything was terrible and she hated him and Daddy for making her come and her other dad for bothering to invite her at all.

Her cousin's house rose up in front of them and she remembered when she thought it was the fanciest place on earth because it had a pool and a fridge in the garage full of soda and popsicles.

“Their house isn't as cool as yours, Yaya.” Emmy whispered like a secret when he came to unbelt her. She could do it herself, Daddy was teaching her, but Ilya liked doing it so she let him. “Can we go there instead?”

“Good negotiator, should work for KGB.” Yaya hummed. “We go in, say hi, eat cake, and then go to practice. That is all I promised your daddy. Sound good?”

“Ice cream later?”

“No, you will have cake.”

“It's better with ice cream.”

“Tyrant.” Ilya huffed affectionately. “Be good, then maybe ice cream. But no telling daddy.”

Ilya did the mouth locking that just meant he told Daddy about it later at night after Emmy went to bed so she didn't get a talking to so Emmy locked her lips and climbed out of the car. Ilya grabbed the large box from the trunk and any excitement about the ice cream died. “Why give Gavin anything? He's so mean all he deserves is being pushed into his stupid pool.”

Yaya didn't try and chide her the way Daddy did and Emmy liked it a lot. He was more strict about other things but not that. She was happy about that now.

“What did Gavin do?” Ilya asked.

“He called me mean names and told all the kids at school that I eat dogs.” She kept walking up their stupid long driveway (Ilya's was longer though!) When she realized Ilya had stopped. “Yaya?”

“Maybe we push Gavin into pool. Is he big for his age? How deep is the pool?” Emmy shrugged her shoulders and when they walked through the garage through the door to the backyard, Emmy pointed people out and their names because Yaya didn't know them.

It seemed like everyone knew Ilya. They all pointed back and whispered like people did at the rink sometimes. Emmy tugged at his sleeve to confirm. “Say hi, eat cake, go home.”

“Well, let's go say hi.” Ilya smiled and marched off to where his dad was standing next to Gina who had spotted Yaya and started fanning herself.

“Gregory.”

“Ilya.” Dad huffed and then opened his arms to Emmy. “Where’s Shane?”

She didn't let go of Yaya's hand, leaning in with one arm like daddy did when he didn't want people to touch him.

Ilya lifted the gift up farther onto his shoulder and smirked. “Busy. I *volunteered*.”

Gina made like she might try for a hug too, but Emmy buried her face into Ilya's arm, a fool-proof way to stop people from trying to touch her.

“Hi.” Emmy said and then looked up at Ilya so that he could see that she's held up her side of the bargain. “Can I get cake now?”

“Emiko, be polite, it's your cousin's birthday, you can wait.” Dad chided and then immediately seemed to try and introduce Ilya to all the other parents who had been hovering around them. “Jennifer, this is Ilya Rozanov!”

“Oh! Gavin, get over here!” Aunt Jennifer ran over and waved Emmy's cousin to stand next to her. “This is my son, Gavin, he plays hockey too!”

Her stupid cousin had his stupid mouth open, looking up at Ilya with that stupid star struck expression people always wore around him.

“Hi Aunt Jenny.” Emmy said loudly. “Hi Gavin.”

She looked up at Ilya making sure that he counted them. Yaya did his little half smile and nodded. She did have to throw off his hand which landed on her head because he would ruin the braids Daddy spent the morning creating with the purple rubber bands.

“No, Yaya, not my hair!”

“Emiko, don't yell at him!” Gina said, scooting in to push Jennifer back and get closer to Ilya.

“Jennifer, you have a beautiful house.” Ilya cut into the conversation. “Where is the cake?”

“Oh, thank you!” She gestured through the patio doors. “We're going to wait until after presents. It was so nice of you to bring him something!”

“Drum kit.” Ilya said with a smile, but he might not have meant it because he was wearing what daddy called his *naughty smile.*

“Sounds loud.” Dad muttered.

“Is it?” Yaya said, his smile now showing his teeth.

“*Yaya! I said hi!”* Emmy grumbled in Russian. It didn't come naturally the way French or English did, instead it was the kind she had to think really hard about like the Japanese she and her dad tried to learn together.

“*You did, good job.”* Ilya patted her shoulder this time, not her hair. “I'll put this down.”

“You don't have to.” Gina giggled and twirled a strand of her curled hair and made an abortive grab at Ilya's flexed arm.

“Yaya, cake!”

Ilya looked down at her with a raised eyebrow. He knew she spoke more, but she hated to talk around people she didn't know.

“You can let go of him, Emiko, why not go play with your cousins?” Aunt Jenny grabbed her arm and Emmy couldn't help but make a flinch and a sound of fear.

Ilya dropped the box down on one of the deck chairs and reached down to pick Emmy up under her legs and lift her up to his shoulder. She liked it because he was so tall and no one could reach her and her Yaya’s head was right there to grab. Ilya gave her a smile even when she tried to cover his eyes with her hands.

“I don’t want to swim.” She eventually said quickly, cutting off whatever Gina was trying to start saying. “I want to eat a slice of cake and go home. Ilya has a pool if I want to swim.”

“You and Daddy staying with Ilya?” Dad asked sharply. He had stepped forward and Emmy kicked her feet because the holes in her water shoes made a little noise.

“Sometimes.”

Dad grunted. “Sometimes?”

“Yeah.” Emmy hummed and looked at all the little shoe charms Ilya had gotten her. The little hockey stick was her favorite. Then, because her daddy always said honesty was the best policy, “But sometimes Yaya comes and stays with us!”

“Oh does he?” Gina asked.

“Yes?” Emmy answered. She didn’t know why that was so surprising.

“And here he said you were a babysitter.” Dad muttered.

“I’m good at multitasking, ask Shane, he's seen it first hand.” Ilya smiled, the naughty one again. “Cake?”

They got their cake, it was not very good and Ilya leaned down to whisper "*grocery store sheet cake*” to her in enunciated Russian so she could follow along. He also used her to lie a lot, which Emmy would tell Daddy about if it hadn’t gotten them closer to the door. Near the exit, he lifted her up and dipped her feet into the pool and she screamed in excitement as the wet plastic sandals slapped against the concrete.

“She’ll ruin your nice car!” Gina moaned as Emmy made as many slapping sounds as she could. She stopped though when Aunt Jenny shook her head, the disappointed shake which some of her coaches gave her when she knew something and they wouldn't listen to her.

“Somehow I think I can afford it.”

“Yaya!” Emmy groaned. The door was *right there*! She wanted to go to practice, out of the heat and away from her cousins who were splashing in the pool and her aunt who kept trying to touch Ilya and even her Dad whose eyes were locked on where Emmy had gripped Ilya's t-shirt so she didn't lose him in the gathering crowd.

“Come on, little bear, back to your cave.” Ilya grabbed her and carried her under his arm and she screamed so he knew she was having fun and it gave her a good view of everyone watching her go with that look she sometimes saw on other people. It was mostly frown with crinkled eyebrows that her daddy told her to ignore so Emmy did.

Maybe Dad wouldn’t invite her to stupid Gavin’s house anymore.

“Yaya.” She said as he buckled her into her big girl seat. She’d tried to get him to let her sit up front because she was big enough for a booster seat but Ilya said no. Trying her luck, she whined “Yaya!”

“No, little tyrant.” Ilya murmured as he checked the buckles. “Don’t flash those brown eyes, you little bolshevik.”

“I don’t know what that means.” Emmy kicked her feet against his seat again, watching the way her wet shoes left little dark stains on the leather. Ilya watched her so she tried to make a smiley face but it came out lumpy. Ilya knew anyways. “Yaya…I want ice cream.”

“It means you’re spoiled.”

“Not rotten!” She defended. “Yaya, ice cream?”

“I know you only call me that when you want something.” Ilya slid into the seat in front of her. Looking forward to continue wearing him down, she noticed that the smiley face hadn’t faded like the water on the cement had. It had in fact stained and her feet slid down to dangle loosely as the car backed down the long, but not as long as Ilya’s, driveway. Gina’s words drifted in through a window and hung around her painted toes. “Emmy, what? Stopped your ice cream offensive?”

“Yaya, did I…” Emmy looked at the little marks, commanding them to fade. “Do I ruin things?”

She jerked as the car came to a complete stop. Ilya’s head popped round the seat and he looked at her with sharp eyes. “Did someone say something?”

“I ruined your car.” She kicked a foot at the smiley face and a few droplets launched themselves from her little charms to darken the fabric. Suddenly, Emmy felt something in her grow tight, her heart pounding and her throat tightening up so quickly that she choked a bit, then she was crying. “I’m sorry, Yaya, I’m so sorry.”

Yaya didn’t say anything, and it only made her cry harder when he climbed over his seat to sit down next to her and his shoes smeared gravel over the console. Then hands were on her shoulders, grounding her, and Yaya was whispering in a mix of English and Russian she only half understood. She got it though, the idea, because Yaya was saying the things her daddy did when she got overwhelmed and those were familiar. Slowly, she followed Yaya’s breath until it was deep and rhythmic, and her cries were more sniffles and it didn’t look like Yaya might cry too. “Sorr-”

“No sorries.” Yaya chided. “You’re too Canadian. Be more Russian.”

“Do Russians get ice cream?” She asked softly and Yaya laughed.

“Yes, national dessert, eaten for breakfast, lunch, and dinner.”

“I like being Russian.”

Yaya looked at her with soft eyes and a smile. “You didn’t ruin anything. Never. Not possible. Too perfect. A perfect, perfect princess–”

Ilya went on until Emmy laughed so hard her belly hurt and her tears had dried on her cheeks. He pulled wipes from his center console and cleaned her up. “I miss daddy.”

“Me too.” Ilya awkwardly climbed back up into the front seat and through the rear view mirror, shot her a look. “Should we bring him ice cream?”

"Yes!" Emmy cheered and made sure that her feet didn't touch the seat. Maybe it was that distraction which had her saying, "I'm glad you broke into our house, Yaya."

The car didn't stop completely but it did slow as Ilya shot her a strange look. "I did what?"

"Daddy said that was why you were in our house that morning, because you didn't have a house and wanted to borrow ours." Emmy explained. "It's okay, you have a good house now!"

"Yes, your Daddy was a saint and let me sleep with him in his bed too." Ilya muttered but he was smiling so Emmy figured he wasn't too mad that Daddy had told her the truth. "I do have a great house now, Emmy."

Ilya was quiet for most of the drive, and spent most of her practice on his phone with Daddy, but he was smiling when he picked her up and chanted with her when they slid up to the drive through of the only ice cream shop nearby which allowed for a mobile order. Emmy got three scoops, which was two more than Daddy normally got her, and they were already melting the moment Ilya passed them back to her. The mint chip mixed with the cotton candy and the chocolate and even Daddy's gross banana kale smoothie was mostly goo by the time the left the parking lot. She licked fast and then faster, but the ice cream dripped down her fingers and she made a noise when a blob landed on her shirt.

"Yaya!" She made hands for one of the napkins. "I'm making a mess!"

"Just enjoy it. I can always get the car cleaned. Is it good?"

"The best!" Emmy ended up wearing more of the ice cream than eating it, but Ilya had his mint chocolate chip all over his mouth too so Emmy felt it was alright. When they got home, Ilya led her around the back of the house and let her wash herself off with his hose, which was more fun than Gavin's stupid pool. Sopping wet, she raced towards the back doors because she knew Ilya would try tickling her if she waited too long. Daddy was already home making dinner and he yelped when she tore around the fireplace and aiming for her bedroom which had a door. But he'd expect that, so she instead crouched down behind the island.

"Emmy! You're dripping wet!" He yelled but Emmy could hear the heavy wet slaps of Ilya's feet coming after her. "You shouldn't encourage her, all that water could ruin your floors."

"I bring home kid, sparkling clean and this is the thanks I get?" Ilya asked, handing over the warm banana goo smoothie.

"Thank you, I'm glad she's not covered in ice cream. Ice cream, eaten, may I remind you, right before dinner time. Yes, hello. I love you." Emmy made a silent gagging face when she heard them kissing. "Welcome home."

Emmy peaked over the island, realizing Ilya had gotten distracted. Daddy was leaning over the table and she could see the soft look Ilya only gave her and Daddy. His voice was quiet and his eyes were locked on Daddy's face, a half smile already pulling up his cheeks.

"It's good to be home."

Chapter End Notes

I might come back to this universe, I love these three too much, so if you have any thoughts, please comment them, I'd love to hear your ideas!

Thank you for reading!

End Notes

Thank you for reading! If you want to talk all things HR, hit me up on tumblr @ whimper-soldier

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