

we want to be free, we want to be

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by [justhockey](#)

Summary

“You are my friend, Hayden, but he is the man I am going to spend the rest of my life with - he is the man that I love. I *will* choose him over you, every fucking time.”

Over anything and everything, Shane would choose Ilya. Even over hockey, if it came to that. There's no doubt in his mind, no question about it.

Losing hockey would hurt, and Shane would grieve it, but it wouldn't kill him. It would be an ache he could live with. Losing Ilya is not something that Shane could ever survive. They're so tangled together - so intertwined - that to lose Ilya would be to lose himself.

Notes

Title from *Pale Sweet Healing* by The Irrepressibles.

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

Chapter 1

It still feels weird, over a year into this, that they don't have to hide it from *everyone* now. Most people, of course - their teams, and management, and the world - but not *all* of them. Not his parents, or Rose, or Hayden and Jackie. Around them, Shane and Ilya get to just *be*. No secrets, or hiding, or pretences; just a freedom he never expected to be allowed.

And that means everything to Shane.

It means everything to him that he gets to sit here in his home, with his best friend *and* the love of his life, and he doesn't have to pretend.

Even if it's clear that Hayden wishes he would sometimes.

The Centaurs are in Montreal for a game tomorrow. And while there's nothing Shane wants more than to spend a full day alone with his boyfriend, after far too many weeks apart, he also wants Ilya and Hayden to get along. He wants for them to be in a room together without actively plotting each other's demise. It might be wishful thinking, but...he has to try.

Ilya tries - has *been* trying, since the very first time Shane properly introduced them. He's a menace, obviously, and he chirps Hayden like there's no tomorrow, but that's all it is: chirping. With Hayden, it's different. It's hatred, and vitriol, and biting remarks that aren't even disguised as jokes.

Shane hates it. Shane wants to *fix* it.

He's sitting between them on the couch, an ankle tucked beneath his thigh and his bent knee pressing into Ilya's leg, as they battle through a game of *chel*.

"You're still only Montreal's fifteenth best player in a video game, Pike," Ilya taunts, as he scores on the animated version of *Drapeau*.

"Suck my dick, Rozanov," Hayden scoffs.

Ilya hums noncommittally. "No thank you," he says. "I only suck Shane's-"

"Ew, shut the fuck up, man."

Ilya laughs, and Shane rolls his eyes, but he can feel the crackle of tension in the air. It's been there since the moment Hayden walked through the door. He'd agreed to come - it's not like Shane blindsided him with Ilya's presence - but it's like he showed up ready to argue. Showed up completely unwilling to even try.

It hurts.

Shane tries to pretend that it doesn't, but it's fucking hard sometimes. Hard to act like it doesn't feel like a knife to his chest every time someone - namely Hayden - questions his

relationship with Ilya. It's hard to overlook the snide comments about the man who makes Shane feel alive, like a whole person, not some half-hidden secret of a man.

"Knock it off," Shane warns, bumping his elbow into Hayden.

"He started it," he whines petulantly, and Shane has to fight the urge to roll his eyes.

It's kind of insane, how different this version of Hayden is. How he turns into this obnoxious, bitchy person whenever Ilya is around. He's usually the most laidback, funny, *decent* guy that Shane knows, but he barely even recognises him like this.

And he knows that Ilya taunts him, but Ilya is *joking*. It's never personal, and he's never mean with it. He's trying to lighten the mood, loosen Hayden up, and all he does in return is snap.

"Hey, Pike," Ilya begins, "what's it like for Jackie, having five kids?"

Hayden frowns. "We don't have five kids, we have - *oh*," he pauses, realising Ilya's meaning. "Fuck you, Rozanov."

"I'm just saying, you are acting like a child."

"You're acting like a fucking--"

"Stop it!" Shane interrupts them. "Can you just - shut the fuck up, please? For five damn minutes."

He's starting to regret this. Starting to wish he was alone with his boyfriend, making the best of the little time they get to steal together, instead of playing mediator between two people who might never get along.

Shane shuffles ever so slightly towards Ilya, his knee pressing harder into his leg as their shoulders bump. He feels Ilya's body relax at the contact, like Shane makes everything easier for him. Makes everything better. Then there's a large, warm hand on his thigh, squeezing gently.

"Sorry, sweetheart," Ilya says softly. "We will behave. Right, Pike?"

Hayden scoffs again, but when Shane fixes him with a glare he lets out a resigned, full-body sigh. "Right," he agrees, begrudgingly.

They play for a while longer, Shane sitting between them, just watching the game unfold as the mostly one-sided chirps gradually get more intense. Ilya is relaxed, his tongue sticking out in concentration as his fingers fly across the controller, and Shane aches a little bit with how much he loves him.

Hayden, however, is growing more tense with every second that passes. He's grumbling, and huffing, and getting meaner with every word that he spits out.

Just as Shane feels like something is about to give, Ilya's phone rings out from where it's sitting on the coffee table. He pauses the game and reaches for it, smiling when he sees whoever is calling.

"It's Haas," he says. "It's okay if I take it?"

"Of course," Shane says. "Take your time."

Ilya stands, but before he leaves he bends back down, curling a hand around the back of Shane's neck as he presses a kiss to his forehead. Ilya whispers, "Ya tebya lyublyu," so quietly Shane barely even hears it, then he disappears into the kitchen.

The tenderness of Ilya's gesture isn't lost on Shane. The way that he is sweet, and affectionate, and loving, even in front of Hayden - someone who not only doesn't like him, but who doesn't like that he's with Shane. Ilya doesn't care, though. He doesn't hide when he doesn't have to, and he refuses to be shy about loving Shane. He refuses to shrink.

It makes Shane love him back even more. It makes him wish, desperately, that he could be braver for Ilya.

Hayden sighs, then he turns slightly towards Shane and grins at him.

"You know it's not too late to get rid of him, right? Jackie has plenty of gay friends I could--"

"Are you fucking joking me right now?"

Shane is...he's *exhausted*.

He's spent close to a decade hiding this part of himself - hiding *Ilya* - and all it did was make him more awkward, and withdrawn, and lonely. After all, it's hard to be yourself when a huge part of that is something that no one else is allowed to know. It's hard to let people truly see you when you have to hold pieces back.

And now, finally, this is the one fucking place where Shane *doesn't* have to hide, where he doesn't have to pretend to be something he's not, and Hayden still makes him feel like he's not allowed.

Like he's wrong for loving Ilya.

He makes Shane feel like he's wrong for wanting this life that he is building for himself.

Hayden laughs. "Come on, man--"

"No," Shane says, voice soft but certain. "No, I'm sick of this. I'm sick of the way you treat him, the way you talk about him."

"Shane, bud, it's *Rozanov*. He's--"

"You don't *know* him!" Shane exclaims.

He jumps up from his position on the couch.

He needs to stand for this, needs to be able to move. He needs to not be so close to Hayden, because he might actually hit him.

Shane has let so much slide these past few months. He got it, at the beginning. The only version of Ilya that Hayden knew was the one on the ice, the terror who lived to make everyone miserable by outshining them in every single capacity, and running his mouth while doing so. Shane knows Ilya better than anyone in the world, so he knows that he can be an asshole.

It's hard to see past that, at first.

It's why he'd given Hayden the benefit of the doubt - why he'd let the comments, and the insults, and the not-quite-jokes go unchecked, because Shane figured Hayden would come around. He figured he would get to know the real Ilya, get to see the version of him that Shane knows and loves, and he would understand.

But-

"You don't know *anything* about him, because you refuse to even try."

"I know that he's a dick," Hayden says, as if it's a fact. "That he's slept with half of Boston, and probably half of Ottawa, too."

"Fuck you."

Shane doesn't shout it; his voice is low and rumbling, like the thunder rolling in right as a storm hits. It's a threat wrapped in barbed wire. It makes Hayden's eyes widen, surprised because he's never heard Shane like this before. Never *seen* him like this before, either.

But disrespecting the man Shane loves brings out a whole different side of him.

If Hayden thinks he gets to say that about Ilya - that he's a bad person, that's he's a fucking *cheat* - then he's about to have a rude awakening. One that's a long, *long* time in the making.

"Don't you ever talk about him like that again. I mean it, Hayden."

"Shane, buddy. Why can't you see what he's like?" Hayden asks, as if he knows a goddamn thing about Ilya.

Shane has known Ilya since they were teenagers. He has seen every version of him.

He knew the frightened kid who moved halfway around the world all by himself, and he knew the rookie who hid his insecurities behind arrogance. He even knew the barely-a-man-yet who was so patient, and gentle, and tender with Shane - who checked, over and over again, if Shane was okay, if he felt good, if he still wanted it.

He saw the man who tried so fucking hard to not need anybody, to not rely on anyone but himself because that's all he's ever known how to do. And he also saw the man who broke

down in Shane's arms as he grieved a father who wasn't even gone yet - as he grieved a version of him that never even existed.

He's ran his hands through Ilya's hair as he talked about his mother, and then held him tightly as he confessed that he was scared of becoming like her.

That he was scared of becoming like his father, too.

Shane has seen Ilya posturing, and he's seen him vulnerable. He's seen him laugh, and seen him cry. He's seen him angry, and embarrassed, and hurt, and happy, and he has loved - and will continue to love - every single version of him.

There is no one on this earth who sees Ilya more clearly than Shane does, which is why there is no one on this earth who could possibly love him more.

"It's you who doesn't see what he's like," Shane insists. "You who refuses to look past a few chirps to see who he really is."

"We know who he is, Shane. We've *always* known, because he never stops fucking showing us! Always parading around, acting like he's god's gift to humanity."

Shane laughs in disbelief. He digs the heels of his palms into his eyes and rubs until he can see kaleidoscopes, just to give himself a moment - to borrow a few seconds of time so he can compose himself.

He doesn't want to send Jackie's husband home with a black eye, but he's so fucking close.

His eyes flicker towards the kitchen, just to check Ilya isn't back yet - to make sure he isn't being forced to listen to any of this bullshit - then he fixes his gaze on his so-called best friend.

"Do you get what it costs him to keep showing up here, knowing you're going to treat him like this every time?" Shane asks, breathless with poorly contained rage. "But he still does it. Every fucking time. Because I ask him to, and because he loves me."

Hayden rolls his eyes at that, and Shane wants to fucking scream. Wants to the flip the coffee table. Wants to make Hayden fucking *hurt* for this.

Because there's a lot that Shane will bite his tongue for, a lot that he will tolerate for the sake of keeping the peace, but he will not *ever* allow anyone to doubt how much Ilya loves him. It's almost laughable, anyone daring to question Ilya's complete and utter devotion to Shane.

"Do you even know how much he loves me? Like, do you get it? What he gave up so we could have a chance? What he's risking?"

"Shane--"

"He gave up Boston to play on the worst team in the league for me," Shane continues, voice shaking. "And don't even get me *started* on the risks if we are outed."

Even the thought of that makes Shane nauseous.

They'd talked it through one night, fully and thoroughly, because they both needed to understand what was at stake. It had ended with both of them crying. Because Shane had thought he understood how bad it could be in Russia for people like them, but he hadn't. Not really. Not until Ilya had explained exactly what was on the line.

"It's a risk for you, too!" Hayden argues. "If you're outed it could end your career. He's selfish, Shane. It's not all about him."

Selfish?

"You don't get it!" Shane whisper-yells. "If we get outed, the absolute best case scenario for Ilya is that he doesn't get to go home again, Hayden. The place he was raised, the place his family is from, the place his mother is *buried*...he *never* gets to go there again."

Shane swallows, the anger and the fear and the grief thick in his throat, like a weight he can't quite breathe around. Hayden's eyebrows twitch.

"And *worst* case? He gets forced out of the league, loses his work visa, and is deported to a country who would throw him in prison - or fucking *kill him* - for loving me. And he's still here, Hayden! He's *here*."

"Shane..."

Shane silences him with a wave of his hand. He has to turn his back on Hayden because he can feel the tears flooding his eyes, feel the sorrow etched into the lines of his face. No one gets to see him like this, not even his parents. No one except Ilya, who's somewhere in the kitchen or back garden, completely unaware of what's transpiring just a few rooms away from him.

Ilya - his sweet, kind, *good* Ilya - who loves Shane so very much.

He would do anything and everything for Shane. He gives and gives and gives, and sometimes it feels like all Shane does is take. He takes his love, and his honesty, and his trust, and he hoards them like the gifts that they are - curls himself around them like a dragon protecting its treasure.

But what does Shane give back, except secrecy, and ten-year plans, and people who doubt their relationship?

But Ilya still stays.

And it's insane that Hayden doesn't think Ilya is good enough for Shane, when Shane is absolutely certain it's the other way around.

He takes a breath to steady himself, and then another, and he turns back around to face Hayden. He's still sitting on the couch that Ilya helped pick out, with his socked-feet buried in the rug that Ilya bought for Shane after they spilled orange juice on the last one.

Ilya is all over this house; he is the reason that it's a home.

Shane's voice is low and venomous as he says, "You don't get to come into the one place we get to be ourselves, and make him feel uncomfortable."

Hayden's brows furrow, and for the first time since the argument began he actually looks concerned. Good. He should be.

Shane isn't soft; he never has been. He's 6ft tall, and 200lbs of pure muscle, and he knows exactly how to use his body on the ice. Just because he chooses to be gentle, it does not mean that he is weak. And when someone - *anyone* - comes for the man that he loves, he has no problem putting them in their place. Even if it's Hayden.

Especially if it's Hayden, because he knows Shane, and he should trust him, but instead... *this*.

"So, I need you to leave our home," Shane says. "And I don't want you to come back until you *get a fucking grip* and start treating him with respect."

Hayden almost chokes.

He finally stands up, taking a step towards Shane, but Shane holds a hand out to stop him. He steps backwards. He doesn't want to be near him, doesn't trust himself not to lash out if he says one more fucking word about the man that he loves.

"Shane, come on," he laughs nervously. "It's not that big of a deal, is it? I mean - we've spent years ragging on Rozanov."

"That's not the same thing, Hayden."

Hockey is one thing. It's fine on the ice, where the animosity belongs, but here - in their home - Shane won't tolerate it for a single second longer. Honestly, he kind of hates himself for letting it get this far, and for forcing Ilya to endure it while Shane waited for Hayden to rein it in.

"It's *Rozanov*," Hayden says again, like that is supposed to justify it. "He's been a fucking dick to us for years. You can't just expect me to--"

"If I treated Jackie the way you treat Ilya, would that be okay?"

Hayden scowls, pointing a finger at Shane as he says, "That's different and you know it."

Shane wants to scoff, wants to laugh at the absurdity of it, but he doesn't. He won't disrespect Jackie or their relationship like that. He's not that kind of person, and he refuses to sink to Hayden's level.

"Why?" Shane asks. "I've loved him longer than you've *known* Jackie, so what is so *different*, Hayden? Please, enlighten me."

Hayden blanches, recoiling as he takes a step backwards like he's just been dealt a physical blow.

Maybe it puts things into perspective, hearing it spelled out so plainly.

Shane was seventeen years old when he shook Ilya's hand for the first time, and he didn't know it then - he didn't know it until years later - but, looking back, that's the exact moment that he started to fall. And by the time Ilya walked out of that hotel room in Toronto - before they'd even played a single NHL game - Shane was done for.

While Hayden was drinking and partying and sleeping around, Shane was waiting for a text from Ilya. While Hayden was falling in love with Jackie, Shane was already holding everything he felt for Ilya behind clenched teeth and a rattling ribcage.

The only reason Hayden has a marriage and children, and Shane doesn't, is because Hayden is *allowed* to - because Hayden has never had to hide.

He doesn't get to make their relationship seem like *less*, not when Ilya is everything and more to Shane. When he's the whole entire universe.

"Just get out, Hayden."

"Come on, buddy. It doesn't have to be like this," Hayden argues. "Listen..."

"I've listened enough, now it's your turn," Shane tells him. "You are my friend, Hayden, but he is the man I am going to spend the rest of my life with - he is the man that I love. I *will* choose him over you, every fucking time."

Over anything and everything, Shane would choose Ilya. Even over hockey, if it came to that. There's no doubt in his mind, no question about it.

Losing hockey would hurt, and Shane would grieve it, but it wouldn't kill him. It would be an ache he could live with. Losing Ilya is not something that Shane could ever survive. They're so tangled together - so intertwined - that to lose Ilya would be to lose himself.

You can't live without a heart, and if he lost Ilya it would be like having his torn from his chest.

"I'm just trying to look out for you, Shane," Hayden says, and Shane hates that he is being honest. That he actually believes what he is saying.

Shane hates that his best friend is so determined to hate his boyfriend, that he can't see how good Ilya is for him. He can't see that, right now, the only thing Shane needs protecting from is Hayden.

"I'm not a child. I can take care of myself," Shane tells him. Then, with a weary sigh, he gestures towards the front door. "Now leave."

"I don't want to fight with you."

“Too late. Get out.”

“Shane, man, c’mon-“

“He asked you to leave,” Ilya says, his voice startling them both.

Shane and Hayden both turn to where Ilya is standing in the doorway to the kitchen. He has a blank expression on his face, one that Shane knows well enough by now; it’s to conceal his hurt, and his anger, and all the other too-big things he doesn’t let anyone but Shane see.

“You don’t get to fucking tell me what to do, Rozanov. This is all your-“

“Do *not* finish that sentence,” Shane warns him.

He steps in front of Hayden to block Ilya from his line of sight, and when Hayden meets Shane’s eyes he has the audacity to look hurt. But Shane won’t have Hayden pin this on anyone other than himself, *especially* not Ilya.

“Get the fuck out.”

“He’ll only end up hurting you,” Hayden says.

He talks about Ilya like he is empty space, the words not even bending to go around him. They hit him full force, and Shane watches as Ilya flinches at the impact of the remark.

It makes him want to weep.

“The only person hurting me is you.”

Hayden looks at Shane, then at Ilya, and then he shakes his head and walks away. He stops in the entryway to slip his shoes on and grab his jacket, but he doesn’t look back as he leaves through the door and slams it closed behind him.

The tension follows him out of the house, and silence settles in the emptiness that’s left behind.

Shane turns around to face Ilya, only to find that he hasn’t moved. It’s like he’s frozen in the doorway, fingers melding into the wooden frame because he’s gripping it so tightly. And the expression on his face...it makes Shane want to chase after Hayden, just so he can punch him. So he can make him pay for causing Ilya to look like that.

He heard the argument. More than just the end of it. Of that, Shane is certain.

“Baby?” He says, voice quiet and steady.

“Sorry,” Ilya says, his eyes finally flickering to Shane.

He removes his hands from the doorframe, blood rushing back into his lily-white knuckles. Oddly, Shane wants to kiss them. He wants to kiss every part of Ilya, until he’s laughing and happy and not even a little bit hurt. He wants to take all of that pain away from him.

Shane frowns. "Why are you sorry? You didn't do anything wrong."

"You fought with him because of me," Ilya says. "I didn't want that."

"I didn't fight with him because of you, Ilya. I fought with him because of *him*."

He wouldn't let Hayden pin the blame on the Ilya, so he's sure as shit not going to let Ilya pin it on himself.

He hasn't done a single thing wrong.

From the very beginning, Ilya has tried. He gets along great with Jackie, and even the kids love him, but Hayden refuses to give him a chance - refuses to accept that what he thought he knew about him wasn't the whole truth. And no matter how much effort Ilya puts in, no matter how hard he tries for Shane's sake, he can't do it all by himself.

Shane should have stepped in sooner, should have put an end to this before it could even begin. He just - he thought it would work itself out because you can't know Ilya and not love him.

But if Hayden refuses to even try, well.

"I should have said something sooner," Shane says. "I'm so sorry that I didn't, Ilya."

Ilya looks at him, eyes wide and wet, and he smiles sadly. Shane knows that face; Shane *hates* that face. It's the one Ilya wears when he's shutting down, when he's putting up walls, when he's trying to pull back.

"Baby, tell me what you're thinking." It's not a request, and Ilya knows it.

"I am thinking that I am costing you too much," he begins, and then, gesturing at the door Hayden just walked out of, he continues, "This - it's too high a price to pay. I'm not worth it."

It feels like Shane's heart falls from his chest and shatters into a million pieces on the floor at his feet.

There's no world in which Ilya wouldn't be worth everything, no price that Shane wouldn't gladly pay for the chance to build this life with him. He hates, hates, hates that Ilya could ever doubt that - that Shane hasn't made it so abundantly clear to him.

Shane knows that his fears around coming out are hard for Ilya, especially when he's willing to take the same - if not *bigger* - risks, far more easily than Shane is. But they've talked about it. Shane thought that he knew. He thought Ilya understood that, while Shane hopes he doesn't ever *have* to choose between Ilya and hockey, he would pick Ilya every time if it came down to it.

He'd choose him over Hayden, and the Voyageurs, and hockey, and the whole goddamn world.

Suddenly it feels like there is too much space between them, an aching, endless cavern that Shane can't bear to be on the other side of. He lets out a quiet, wounded sound as he crosses the floor towards his love, his life.

The moment Shane reaches him, he presses himself into Ilya's space and burrows his face in Ilya's neck. He winds his arms tightly around his waist, and Shane shudders in relief when Ilya's own arms wrap around Shane's shoulders.

He smells like Shane's shower gel, and like ginger ale, and like home.

"You're worth everything, Ilya," Shane promises, his lips brushing against Ilya's throat.

"He's your best friend."

"He's an asshole."

"He's looking out for you," Ilya argues, and Shane scoffs.

He pulls back, not far enough to leave the circle of Ilya's arms, but enough to look him in the eyes while they have a conversation that is clearly long overdue.

"He's not looking out for me, Ilya. He's trying to control me because he thinks he knows me better than I know myself."

Shane doesn't like saying it - doesn't even like thinking it about someone who has always been so loyal to him - but that doesn't make it any less true.

"He doesn't want to be wrong about you, so he refuses to see what you're really like."

"*Shane.*"

"But *I* see what you're really like. I know you, baby, and I know your heart. And I love you more than anything."

"More than Pike?" Ilya asks.

He's trying to lighten the mood, but Shane thinks the weight of it is important. This moment deserves to be heavy.

"More than Pike, more than hockey, more than *anything*, Ilya."

Ilya isn't used to being chosen. Not really.

Shane knows that Irina loved him so much, and Shane loves her for giving him Ilya, but he hates her a little bit, too.

He hates her for leaving Ilya alone in that house, for choosing to go instead of stay. And he knows it's not her fault, of course he does, but he looks at Ilya - his halo of curls, and his hazel eyes, and the heart he wears so plainly on his sleeve if you know just what to look for - and Shane's heart breaks for the little boy inside of Ilya who still thinks he wasn't enough to

make his mama stay. He can't imagine having any part of Ilya, and then choosing to leave him behind.

Ilya's father chose power, and hockey, and hatred over his own child. And his brother chose money, and drugs, and corruption.

The Bears chose him, and the Centaurs, too, but they chose him for hockey. They chose Rozanov, not Ilya. For his hands, not his heart. And though Shane knows how dearly Svetlana loves Ilya, between Moscow and Boston, she has her own life that Ilya is not a part of.

Ilya deserves to always know how much he matters. He deserves to have someone who always puts him first.

"I choose *you*, Ilya," Shane promises him. "In any and every universe."

"Even if we were worms?" Ilya asks, his voice wobbly and broken.

Shane chuckles, leaning forward to bump their noses together. He can feel Ilya's soft breath of laughter fan out across his skin, and it feels good to hear him laugh again. It feels right. He doesn't deserve to feel sad in their home.

"Even if we were worms, baby," Shane confirms, a smile playing at the corners of his lips.

And then Ilya closes the distance between them and kisses him.

It's soft, and chaste, and as slow and sweet as honey. Every press of their lips is intentional, a confession and a promise and a vow, all without words. Shane puts every ounce of love he feels for Ilya into the kiss, makes sure he feels it down to his toes, his blood, his soul.

He wants his love imprinted onto Ilya, wants it etched into his very bones.

"Thank you, Shane," Ilya whispers. His voice is so shrouded in emotion that his accent sounds thick, and heavy, and perfect. So much like the seventeen year old boy that Shane fell in love with, that it almost makes him cry.

"What for?" Shane asks.

He brushes Ilya's curls back from his face, and kisses the mole on his cheek. It makes Ilya smile and lean into the touch, his eyes fluttering closed again. Shane sees the opportunity and takes it: he rolls up onto his tiptoes and presses featherlight kisses to both of Ilya's eyelids.

Ilya hums softly, a sweet smile curving the corners of his mouth upwards. "For being on my side. For defending me."

"Oh, Ilya," Shane sighs. "Me and you? We're on the *same* side. I'll always defend you."

He feels Ilya melt into him, like any lingering tension just seeps out of his body. He bumps their foreheads together and Shane just laughs, tilting his head so he can kiss Ilya wherever he can reach - above his top lip, the corner of his mouth, the spot just above his jaw.

“I love you so much, Shane,” Ilya whispers into the millimetre of space between them.

“I love you, too. More than anything.”

Ilya holds him so gently, his hands on Shane’s waist, then his arms, and his neck, and tangled in his hair. Sometimes he still touches Shane like he can’t believe he’s allowed to, like this is all a dream he’ll have to wake up from.

Shane thinks, maybe, that Ilya still struggles to believe that this is for keeps. He worries that one day Shane will wake up and decide none of this is worth the effort of protecting it. But Shane vows - secretly, just to himself - that he will spend the rest of their lives proving those worries wrong.

“My baby,” Shane murmurs.

Ilya hums, burrowing in closer and pressing his face into Shane’s neck, where he just breathes him in. Slow and steady and certain.

He’s always so impossibly sweet in moments like these, where the rest of the world has faded away and there is no one around they have to perform for. Ilya doesn’t have to be Rozanov, and Shane doesn’t have to be Hollander, and instead they just get to be two people in love.

Shane thinks, perhaps, that’s his very favourite thing to be.

Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

“What did you do?” She interrupts him.

“It was a joke.”

She takes a breath, in through her nose and out through her mouth, then says, “*What* was a joke?”

Chapter Notes

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

Jackie startles when the front door clicks open and immediately slams closed again.

The kids are with her parents, and Hayden was *supposed* to be over at Shane’s. Jackie was very much looking forward to a few child-free, husband-free hours, to do absolutely nothing except curl up and read a good book. That is, of course, until the aforementioned husband rolls into the house like a thunderstorm.

Jackie sighs, tipping her head back for a moment and looking up to the ceiling, like that might grant her the patience she’s about to need. She can already hear Hayden grumbling under his breath as he kicks off his shoes in the entryway, and hangs up his jacket in the closet. He’s loud and unselfconscious with his frustration, and she’s just thankful the little ones aren’t napping upstairs, because he would have definitely woken them up.

By the time he marches into the living room, Jackie is already waiting with her arms crossed and her eyebrows raised. Her book is abandoned on the coffee table, only one chapter into it; she’ll probably never get to finish it now.

Hayden’s cheeks are flushed, and he keeps clenching and unclenching his hands as he paces back and forth, wearing a hole into the rug beneath the coffee table. Jackie immediately knows that - whatever this is - she isn’t going to like it. Her husband isn’t the type to get pissed off unless he’s on the ice, but if anyone can get under his skin it’s Ilya.

Now, Jackie *adores* Ilya.

He’s funny, and sarcastic, and a little bitchy if the moment calls for it, but he’s endlessly patient with her children, and impossibly in love with Shane. She finds it hard to find any real faults with him, though she knows her husband vehemently disagrees.

“Well are you going to say anything, or are you just going to pace until you ruin my \$5000 rug?” She finally asks, when it becomes clear that Hayden isn’t going to start the

conversation.

He pauses mid-stride, turning 90° to face Jackie, where she's still sitting on the couch.

"I'm trying to calm down," he says.

"Well it's not working," she tells him.

He rolls his eyes at her, but a slight smile ticks up at the left corner of his mouth. She watches as some of the tension leaks out of his body, just from the way she teases him.

Hayden loves her; he'd chased her for months before she officially agreed to date him, and he's never once stopped putting the work in - never once let their marriage fall to the back burner so hockey can take precedence. Her husband is a good man, of that she is absolutely certain.

But Jackie also knows that he is stubborn, and slow to change his mind, and he can be arrogant, too, like all pro athletes are capable of from time to time.

He's not perfect, but he's a wonderful dad and a great husband, and she loves him anyway. And she'll love him through whatever drama this is, too, even though she has an unfortunate feeling that Hayden might be in the wrong here. He usually is when it comes to Shane and Ilya's relationship.

"I hate him, Jack," he grumbles.

He's got one hand on his hip, the other running through his hair, and he's looking at Jackie like he wants her to solve all of his problems for him.

"What did he do?" She asks, almost afraid to hear the answer.

Hayden merely scoffs. "Exist."

She fixes him with the glare she uses on the kids when they're being stubborn little demons. "Hayden."

"Me and Shane fought because of him," Hayden confesses. "He kicked me out."

Jackie bites back a surprised gasp.

Shane is more likely to ignore something and avoid conflict, than he is to pick an argument or kick someone out of his home. Whatever Hayden did, it must have been bad.

He worries his bottom lip, tugging it between his teeth and biting down on it. She can see the stress written all over his face - the real, raw kind, that she doesn't see her husband wearing very often. But clearly this is serious. He and Shane don't fight, ever. They rarely even disagree. At least, not about anything serious.

"Did you fight because of Ilya, or did you fight because of *you*?" Jackie asks, even though she thinks she already knows the answer.

“He started it! He was fucking chirping at me!”

“Like you do with all the guys on the team? And your brothers? And *Shane*?”

“It’s different with him! He’s fucking...*Rozanov*.”

Jackie sighs, and runs a hand through her hair. She doesn’t get why Hayden hates him so much. Or, she *did*, before they had a chance to get to know him off the ice, as Shane’s boyfriend. But now they’ve seen what he’s really like. They’ve seen the way he treats Shane like he’s the most precious thing on earth, and the way he treats their children like they’re his family, especially shy, sweet Arthur, who seeks out Ilya for company whenever he gets the chance.

So she just doesn’t get why Hayden still hates him. She doesn’t get why he refuses to change his opinion.

“Why do you insist on antagonising him?” She asks. “He jokes around with you, but you always have to turn it into something it’s not. He’s *trying*, Hayden.”

“This is all so fucked up.”

“Shane loves him, Hayden. And Ilya loves Shane.”

He scoffs again, rolling his eyes dismissively. “Allegedly.”

Jackie goes very, very still.

There’s a lot that could be said about Ilya Rozanov - or, a lot that could be said about the facade he puts on. But for all the things you could say about him, no one could ever see the way he treats Shane - the way he looks at him like he’s Ilya’s reason for breathing - and ever doubt his love for him.

He moved to Ottawa to be closer to Shane. Jackie is pretty sure Ilya would give up hockey altogether, if Shane asked him to. Ilya absolutely devoted to him, and if Hayden dared to question that, well.

He probably deserved whatever the hell went down today.

“What the fuck is that supposed to mean?”

“God, Rozanov doesn’t *love* him, Jackie! Everyone knows what he’s like. He’s just-“

“What did you do?” She interrupts him.

“It was a joke.”

She takes a breath, in through her nose and out through her mouth, then says, “*What* was a joke?”

“I offered to let you to set him up with one of your gay friends.”

God, give her strength.

Jackie is a patient woman, she has to be with four young children and a husband who regularly disappears on road trips for nine months out of the year. But right now Hayden is testing every last shred of that patience - he is pushing every goddamn one of her buttons.

“You’ve got to be fucking kidding me.”

Hayden throws his hands up in the air, then instantly starts pacing again. He won’t look her directly in the eyes, which is how they both know he’s fucked up.

“Rozanov was being an ass, and then he left to take a call, and look - it was - I just told Shane it wasn’t too late to get rid of him.”

“Hayden.”

“It was a fucking joke!” He exclaims. “*Mostly.*”

“*Hayden,*” she repeats, not angry this time, just...sad, honestly. Disappointed.

Shane was so unbelievably, incomprehensibly brave to share his truth with Hayden and Jackie. First about being gay in a league that doesn’t even *tolerate* that kind of thing, let alone *welcome* it. And then second, when he admitted to being in a relationship with Ilya, even though he knew how Hayden might react.

He shared those things because he trusted Hayden to have his back, to not turn on him, to fucking *support him* through it all. He revealed a huge, fragile part of himself, and all Hayden has done since is throw it back in his face.

“Shane can do better, alright? Rozanov is a fucking-“

“Stop it!” Jackie finally raises her voice, unable to take a second more of his hero complex.

She stands up from her spot on the couch and rounds the coffee table, blocking Hayden from his continued pacing. When he stops in front of her she pokes him hard in the chest, and he rocks backwards on his heels.

“What the fuck is wrong with you?”

“*Me?* I’m not the one in the wrong here,” Hayden insists. “Rozanov is manipulating him, or brainwashing him, or *something!*”

“Why are you treating Shane like he’s a fucking child?” She asks. “He’s not one of our kids, Hayden, he’s a grown man.”

“With terrible fucking taste, apparently.”

Jackie folds her arms over her chest and looks up at her husband. He’s close to half a foot taller than her so he towers above her, but she knows what her glare can do...she knows it

can shrink grown men down until they feel two feet tall. Good. She thinks he needs to be brought down a peg or two, because that horse he's sitting on right now is mighty damn high.

She doesn't say anything and neither does he. Jackie simply looks at him, letting the silence stretch out between them, forcing him to stand in the awkwardness of it so he can feel her disappointment. Her fury.

She loves her husband so much, but she has never been so disgusted with him.

"You have no idea what you're doing to him, do you?" She questions.

"What do you mean?"

"You are one of a handful of people in the entire world that Shane can just be himself around," Jackie reminds him, "except he can't, can he? Because every time he tries, you have some bullshit to say about the man that he loves!"

Hayden brings his hands up to his face, digging the heels of his palms into his eyes and rubbing them forcefully. Jackie doesn't know whether to slap him round the ear, scream at him, or walk out the door and slam it in his face.

She's furious at her husband, and devastated for Shane and Ilya, and while part of her wants to fix this, she knows it's not her job to. She'll reach out to Shane later, of course, but she can't make this better for them.

She's worried that maybe nothing can. Not if Hayden can't see that he is wrong.

"Their home is the one place they don't have to hide, and you keep making it unsafe for them."

Hayden recoils at that, his stony expression cracking and giving way to something small, and sad, and maybe even ashamed. He stumbles backwards a few steps, then collapses into the armchair by the window. He slumps forwards, his elbows on his knees and his head in his hands.

Jackie's heart aches for him, a little. Because, no matter what, Hayden is her husband. She knows his heart, and she knows that it's a good one. However badly he's fucked up, however disastrously wrong he's gotten all of this, she knows it was never his intention to hurt Shane.

But the fact of the matter is: he *has* hurt him, enough that Shane - gentle, friendly Shane - kicked Hayden out of his house.

"I implied that Rozanov was probably cheating on him," Hayden confesses. Then, "I called him selfish."

Jackie doesn't know what to do but shake her head. She moves back over to the couch and sits down, sad and angry and a dozen other emotions she can't put a name to right now.

God, poor Shane. Poor *Ilya*.

“Shane trusted you with his heart, and you just keep stamping all over it.” It’s brutal, but it needs to be said.

And clearly, it’s effective.

“Fuck,” Hayden huffs. He leans back in the chair, and his eyes are red and glassy like he’s holding back tears.

He’s never been a particularly confrontational man. He’s got no problem with it on the ice - he’s an absolute menace, honestly - but off it he’s laidback, and chill, and lets most things roll off him like water off a duck’s back.

She knows this is already starting to eat away at him. She might have even felt sorry for him, had he not brought it upon himself.

“Do you know how many of my friends’ boyfriends I have hated? But you fucking grin and bear it, and you support them because that is what you do when you love someone.”

“I’m trying to look out for him,” Hayden says.

“No, you’re trying to control him,” Jackie corrects him. “You don’t treat someone that you care about like this. He’s not an idiot, Hayd. He can make his own choices.”

Jackie knew from the moment she met Shane that he was a little bit different from most people, and a *lot* different from most athletes. It’s why Hayden has always felt so protective of him - why he’s always tried so hard to look out for him. Because Shane is kinder, and far more polite, than just about anyone. But he’s more rigid, too. More reserved and restrained than almost anyone she’s ever met.

For so long, it felt like he was holding something back - like he would never allow them to see all of him.

The first time Jackie saw Ilya make Shane laugh, it was like watching the sun rise.

He lit up, all bright and sparkly and glistening - his heart stitched plainly on his sleeve, for the first time in all the years Jackie has known him.

She had never seen him like that before - so relaxed, and carefree, and so entirely himself. It was like looking at a stranger, like looking at a version of Shane that she had never been allowed to see before. That *no one* had been allowed to see before.

It’s a version of him that she’s only *ever* seen around Ilya, like he’s the only person who can bring that part of Shane out into the light.

Ilya is Shane’s safe place - his home - and Hayden keeps trying to take that away from him.

And Jackie knows that he is genuinely just trying to look out for Shane, but he isn’t some damsel in distress and he doesn’t need saving. Shane is exactly where he wants to be. He can take care of himself - and when he can’t, Ilya has got him. Of that, Jackie is certain.

Hayden just needs to open his eyes and see what is right in front of him: Shane and Ilya love each other desperately, and they would never dream of hurting each other.

“I just want what’s best for him,” Hayden says, and she knows that it’s true even if he is going about it all wrong.

“I know. But have you ever considered that what’s best for Shane, is Ilya?”

Hayden frowns, his brows pinching together, but it’s a far cry from the look of disgust that he normally wears when Ilya is mentioned.

“Look, you have to understand that the Shane you know isn’t the Shane that Ilya knows, okay? He knows him differently than you do. He probably knows him *better*.”

“I’ve known him since we were rookies.”

“Ilya has known him longer than that,” Jackie points out. “Just because this is new for you, it doesn’t make it new for them.”

While Hayden was chasing Jackie around, begging her for a chance, Shane and Ilya were already head over heels for each other. They said they were eighteen the first time they felt sparks - just babies, really. Babies who had to keep it all buried, because they were convinced they couldn’t have anything more than a few evenings a year.

It had never been casual, though, not really. Ilya had confessed to her one night, over a few glasses of wine, that the moment he saw Shane’s freckles he was done for. So this life they’re building - this chance for something real - has been a decade in the making.

She isn’t going to let her pig-headed husband spoil it for them again.

“You either learn to accept to Ilya, Hayden, or you will lose Shane.”

“Shane said he’d choose him over me.”

Jackie shrugs. “Well of course he would. You’d pick me over Shane.”

“That’s different.”

“No, babe, it’s not.”

She observes a million different emotions flicker across Hayden’s face, none of them sticking for longer than a second. It’s almost like watching him fast-track the stages of grief in realtime.

He’s stubborn, but he’s not stupid. Or, he’s not stupid *all* the time, at least. He’s weighing this up: the cost of accepting Ilya, versus the cost of losing Shane. And maybe, just maybe, he’s starting to understand that if Shane is prepared to lose Hayden over this, that Ilya might just be worth it. He might be deserving of that kind of sacrifice.

Shane is smart, and fair, and has an almost unwavering sense of justice. If this is a hill he's willing to die on, the view from the top must be pretty damn special.

Jackie holds her breath, waiting for the moment that, finally, her husband lands on acceptance.

"No. No, it's not any different," he admits with a heavy sigh. "They love each other."

"Yes."

"And I fucked up, didn't I?"

"Catastrophically," Jackie confirms.

"I have to fix it."

"Yeah, you fucking better," she tells him. "But not until you're ready to mean it, until you're ready to respect Ilya and their relationship. And you can't just apologise and expect everything to be fine. He won't forgive you right away - you don't deserve it."

"I'll grovel."

"Well, you've had plenty of practice."

Hayden smiles a little at that, but he still looks worn out. Guilty, and ashamed, and a little nauseous too. Good. He deserves to suffer a little for this, even though Jackie won't take any pleasure in it.

"Are you mad at me?" Hayden asks, his big eyes all wide and pathetic and sweet.

She could lie and say *no*, tell him that she understands and she forgives him. But she *doesn't* understand, and she's not quite ready to forgive him yet, either.

Just because Shane is Hayden's best friend, it doesn't mean he's not incredibly important to Jackie, too. She loves him dearly, and she's been warning Hayden for months that he's on thin ice with all of this. That he's fucking up an amazing friendship because he refuses to look past his own preconceptions, and his own giant ego.

So yes, she's mad at him.

"I'm furious," she says. "And I'm also really disappointed. This isn't you. This isn't how the man I love treats people."

Hayden winces at that, chewing nervously on his bottom lip as he frantically nods like a bobblehead. He looks like he's trying desperately hard not to cry.

"I know. That's fair," he accepts. Then, "I'll fix it soon, I promise. I just - I think I need to figure out what to say, first. I want to do it right."

"Good," Jackie says. "You can sleep on the couch until you do."

She knows he'll figure it out sooner rather than later; their marriage hasn't survived this long without Hayden learning how to say sorry.

And she'll forgive him, just like she's sure that Shane will, eventually. But she thinks Shane might take a little bit longer to come around than she will; he doesn't fuck around when it comes to Ilya, and things might never quite be the same between him and Hayden after this. He needs to be prepared for that.

But, he has to try anyway. Jackie won't accept anything else.

"I'm sorry."

"I know you are," Jackie says. "But it's not me you need to say that to."

"I know," Hayden acknowledges. "I know."

Chapter End Notes

you guys wanted a follow up :)

Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

“And even worse, you hurt Ilya,” Shane says, his voice wavering. “That’s - I won’t let you do that, Hayden. I won’t let *anyone* do that to him.”

Chapter Notes

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

Hayden feels sick as he raises his hand and knocks on Shane’s front door.

It’s been over a week since they fought - since Hayden was an awful friend, and Shane rightfully kicked him out of his house. He’s barely even glanced in Hayden’s direction since then, and while the guys in the locker room have noticed, they haven’t said anything. Shane’s hockey isn’t suffering, after all, but Hayden can’t say the same.

He’s a mess.

He’d wanted to show up on Shane’s door step and beg for forgiveness the day after, once everything had sunken in and Jackie’s words had really taken hold of him.

But he would have been apologising just for the sake of it - apologising just to stop Shane from being mad at him - and that wouldn’t have been good enough. It wouldn’t be what Shane, or Rozanov, deserved.

He knew that he needed to really mean it, that he needed understand where he went wrong and be prepared to fix things, not only with Shane, but with Rozanov too. Shane and his relationship deserve respect, and Hayden wanted to give it to him, he had just needed a few more days to sort everything out inside his head - to reconcile the Rozanov he thought he knew, with the Rozanov that is in love with his best friend.

It had taken him over a week, in the end. But last night he’d managed to get a hold of Rozanov’s number through Jackie’s WAG network, and had finally worked up the courage to text him.

Hayden: *It’s Pike.*

Hayden: *I’m sorry.*

Hayden: *I’m going to put things right with Shane.*

Rozanov: *You better.*

Rozanov: *Thank you. It’s important to him.*

He'd been far more gracious than Hayden had expected or deserved, and it felt like another kick in the teeth - another painfully stark reminder that he'd monumentally fucked things up. Because while he was holding onto the past, acting like petty, on-ice grudges made a person, Rozanov had been trying his damn hardest to put their differences aside for Shane's sake.

While Hayden had been up on his high horse, acting like he had Shane's best interests at heart, Rozanov had been proving it. He had been putting Shane first, over and over again, even to his own detriment - even when it hurt him. Hayden couldn't say the same.

His intentions had been pure, but they had been misplaced.

Both Shane and Jackie had told him that he was treating Shane like a kid who couldn't make his own decisions, and unfortunately they were right.

When he first met Shane all those years ago, he had noticed he was a bit different from most people - a bit more literal, and a bit more awkward - and he had instantly felt the need to take him under his wing. But that doesn't mean he's stupid, or that he can't make his own decisions. And it doesn't mean that he's incapable of knowing what's good for him.

As much as Hayden may never fully understand it, he has to accept that Rozanov does seem to be good for him.

In quiet moments, when Hayden wasn't making things difficult for them, he would sometimes catch the way that they looked at each other, or the way that they laughed together. He would see how Shane opened up with Rozanov in a way that he never truly has done with Hayden. It was like watching Shane breathe properly for the first time, and Hayden had tried to ruin that.

Even if Shane does find a way to forgive him for this, Hayden isn't entirely sure if he will forgive himself.

If someone had tried to undermine his relationship with Jackie - if someone had dared to belittle, or bully her - he would have been far less patient about it than Shane has been. They would have been gone from his life in an instant, without a moment of hesitation.

Hayden has already been afforded far more grace than he deserves.

The front door finally swings open, and Shane immediately sighs when he sees who's standing there.

Hayden watches as he visibly tenses, like he's building the wall up between them, brick by brick. Like he's bracing for impact, as if Hayden is someone he needs to protect himself against. And it's awful, and it hurts, but it's true. The only person to blame is himself. When they argued, Shane had told him, "*The only person hurting me is you,*" and he was right. It was never Rozanov; it was always him.

He's felt like a stranger in his own body for the past week and a half; this isn't the person he wants to be.

Now Hayden has to put the work in to change that. He has to prove that he's someone safe again.

"Hey."

"What are you doing here?" Shane asks, as cold as Hayden has ever heard him.

"Can we talk?"

"I don't think I have anything left to say to you," Shane tells him.

It hurts like hell, but he gets it. He really does. It's painfully ironic that, out of everyone, Rozanov is the one who took it the easiest on Hayden. And it's not lost on him that his forgiveness is entirely for Shane's sake, because Rozanov loves him and wants him to be happy.

God, how had Hayden been so blind? How had he managed to miss that?

"Yeah, that's entirely understandable," Hayden says. "But maybe - maybe I could talk? I think there's a lot I need to say to you."

Shane sighs, slumping against the doorframe like he's exhausted. "I don't know if I can do this right now."

"Please?" Hayden all but begs. "I'll leave as soon as you ask me to."

Shane contemplates his request for so long that Hayden thinks he's about to deny him, about to send him packing from his home for a second time. But eventually Shane rolls his eyes and steps to the side, gesturing for Hayden to come inside.

He hurries in, half expecting Shane to change his mind and shuffle him back out again. But he doesn't. Hayden closes the door behind himself, kicks his shoes off in the entryway, then follows Shane as he meanders throughout the house. They don't stop until they reach the kitchen, where Shane has clearly just finished making himself a smoothie.

"You want one?" He offers, ever the perfectly polite Canadian.

"Sure, yeah. Thanks."

He sits down on a stool at the breakfast bar, watching as Shane fills two tall glasses with the oddly coloured concoction. He usually hates Shane's smoothies - they're far too healthy tasting for his liking - but Hayden wouldn't dream of refusing the offer this time. Not when he knows that doesn't deserve it.

Shane slides one of the glasses across the countertop, and Hayden wraps his hand around the cool base of it. He takes a sip when Shane does, then places it back down and keeps hold of it, just for something to do with hands.

Shane leans back against the cupboards opposite Hayden, crossing his legs at the ankles and his arms over his chest.

“Well?”

“I’m sorry,” Hayden says, and he hates that Shane looks surprised.

It shouldn’t be a shock to him, that Hayden would show up and apologise for being a colossal jerk. But clearly Shane wasn’t expecting it - clearly he was expecting more of the same from last time.

Fuck, Hayden has really done a number on him.

It used to be that he was the one person Shane could trust. When they were rookies, Hayden was the only person from the team that was allowed in Shane’s apartment for *months*. He used to trust Hayden enough to share a room on the road with him, even though Shane is particular about almost everything, including his space and his routine and his privacy.

He came out to him as gay before he told anyone else on the team. He even trusted him with truth about Rozanov, the person Shane has been keeping secret - been keeping *safe* - for a decade.

And now Shane is fucking *surprised* that Hayden isn’t being a dick. Shit.

“I know that’s not enough - not even close - but I want you to know that it’s true.”

“If you’re here because Jackie sent you-“

“No!” Hayden interrupts. “I mean, she massively laid in to me after what happened the other week, but. She didn’t tell me to come here. I’m here because I want to be. Because I *need* to be.”

He doesn’t want to make this about him - about earning an apology in order to wash away his guilt. He doesn’t want to put that on Shane, doesn’t want to make him feel responsible for Hayden’s feelings. He’d get down on his knees and beg if he thought that’s what Shane needed, but it’s not.

Hayden needs to apologise even if Shane doesn’t forgive him, not to absolve himself of guilt, but because it’s what his friend deserves to hear.

“You really hurt me.”

“I know.”

“And even worse, you hurt Ilya,” Shane says, his voice wavering. “That’s - I won’t let you do that, Hayden. I won’t let *anyone* do that to him.”

“I’m so sorry.”

“When you left he-“

Shane’s voice breaks, and he turns his face away for a moment to try and compose himself. Hayden kind of wants to throw up.

“He felt guilty. Said he was *costing me too much*. He said he wasn’t fucking worth it, Hayden, and - and you don’t ever, *ever* get to make him feel like that. He is worth *everything*.”

Hayden feels so small, and so ashamed.

The devastation and the fury is written plainly on Shane’s usually impassive face. He’s hurting not for himself, but for Rozanov. Because Hayden caused him pain. And god, does he hate himself for it.

For hurting Shane, obviously, but for hurting Rozanov, too. Because Hayden knows that the guy loves Shane - of course he does - he’d just spent too long refusing to see it, or acknowledge it. And the fact that after everything went down, *Rozanov* was the one who ended up feeling guilty, even when he was *still* putting Shane’s feelings ahead of his own, is just unacceptable.

“I know. I was completely out of order,” Hayden acknowledges. “Everything I said...it was just bullshit, Shane. Of course he loves you. Of course he isn’t selfish, especially when it comes to you.”

In fact, he might just be one of the least selfish people Hayden has ever met.

Rozanov willingly left a cup contender to go to a bottom feeder team, just to be closer to Shane. He’s risking losing his homeland because of how much he loves him. He keeps showing up when Shane asks him to, even though Hayden has made every meet-up hell for him.

“You don’t know him, Hayden.”

Hayden nods his head. “I know that. And look - I’m probably never gonna love the guy, but. I know I haven’t given him a fair shot. I refused to see past the person he is on the ice.”

“He’s so *good*. Patient with me even when I’m being impossible. Kind, funny. How can you watch him with your kids and not see that?” Shane asks.

“Because I was being a dick,” Hayden answers, plainly.

There isn’t really any other explanation for it. Or - that’s not entirely true.

There *is* another explanation, one he’s been thinking about over and over again, growing more and more uncomfortable at the thought of with every passing day. It makes his stomach turn over, makes his spine prickle with shame, but he thinks, maybe, that it’s true. Even though he really, *really* wishes it wasn’t.

“I think...I think I was being homophobic, maybe?”

Shane winces, his brows pinching inwards as he shifts uncomfortably. Hayden immediately wants to take the words back, but that wouldn’t be fair - he has to be honest if they’re going to find a way past this, if Shane is going to find a way to forgive him.

“Not - I mean. I obviously don’t have a problem with you being gay, bud, you know that. Right?”

Hayden pauses, waiting for a response - waiting for an affirmative from Shane. But when he doesn’t give him one, Hayden forges on anyway, even though it stings.

“I just - I think I kind of refused to see Rozanov as, like, a legit partner for you. Which - that’s probably homophobia, or something. So. I’m sorry for that, too. Seriously.”

“Oh. Um - thank you?”

Shane sounds half baffled, half touched, and Hayden can’t help the small laugh that slips out of him. Of course, *of course* he would thank Hayden for saying that. Sure, why not.

“You’re thanking me for being homophobic?” Hayden asked, a single eyebrow raised in disbelief.

“Fuck off.” Shane chuckles. “I’m thanking you for, I don’t know, being honest? For apologising?”

“You don’t have to thank me,” Hayden tells him. “We both know it’s the bare fucking minimum.”

He’s never gonna be best friends, holding hands, grabbing lunch with Ilya goddamn Rozanov, but Hayden can sure as shit do better than the bare minimum - better than petty insults, and cruel, unfounded remarks.

“I’ve been treating you like you can’t make your own decisions.”

“Yes.”

“And like you don’t know what’s good for you.”

“You have.”

“I honestly did think I was looking out for you, but...I wasn’t. Not really.”

“No. You weren’t,” Shane agrees.

“And that’s fucking bullshit, man. I’m so sorry,” Hayden says, apologising for the millionth time. “I can see that he’s good for you, y’know?”

He watches as Shane sucks in a breath. His whole body seems to relax, and his eyes light up, and he looks like he’s on cloud nine just at the fucking *thought* of Rozanov.

Hayden has been robbing Shane of that euphoria.

Every scoff, or rude remark, or roll of his eyes - every snide comment, and tasteless joke, and offer to set him up with someone else - was stealing more and more light from Shane’s eyes.

Rozanov is the biggest source of Shane's happiness, and Hayden has been denying him that for months.

He remembers when he first started dating Jackie, and how he couldn't shut the fuck up about her. Then it was the wedding, and the kids, and every little milestone that they reached as a family, and Shane sat back and listened to all of it. He supported Hayden when things were hard, and celebrated with him when things were great, and he never once made Hayden feel like he was talking too much about them.

Hayden is one of the *only* people Shane can talk to freely about Ilya, and he's denied him that opportunity for months. He's been shrinking Shane's world without even realising it.

"Really?" Shane ask, quiet and disbelieving.

"Really," Hayden replies honestly. "You're more yourself around him - more open, y'know? Like he makes you feel free."

"He does. He makes me happy, Hayden."

"I know. I can see that. And I'm so sorry it took me this long to get here - that it took a fight like the one we had to make me wake the fuck up."

"I'm not asking you to be his best friend, I just - it already feels like my life is being split in two. I don't want you to be another person I have to hide in front of."

Hayden doesn't want that either.

He loves Shane. So fucking much. He's the best friend he's ever had, he's good to Jackie, and he absolutely adores their children. He's been there for Hayden right from the start - through every high and low, every slump, every new baby - and now it's Hayden's turn to return the favour.

Shane quite literally never asks for anything. If the one thing he needs from Hayden is for him to be civil with Rozanov, well. It's the least he can do.

"You don't have to. Not anymore. I promise."

"You're sure?"

Hayden nods. "I'm sure. I even texted Rozanov."

Shane chokes on his smoothie. His face turns red, and his eyes start to water, and he coughs so violently that Hayden briefly cycles through what he remembers from the first aid course Jackie made them both take before the twins were born.

Thankfully - because Hayden can't seem to remember a fucking thing - Shane stops choking and sucks in a ragged breath.

"You did *what*?"

“I texted your boyfriend. Apologised. Told him I was going to make things right with you,” Hayden elaborates.

Shane looks a little bit like a fish, the way his mouth keeps opening and closing. Hayden had thought Rozanov might have mentioned it to him, but clearly not.

“Oh. Well. Thank you,” Shane finally says, still a little breathless. “Did he reply?”

Hayden nods. “He thanked me. Said it was important to you that we worked things out.”

Shane smiles, like he knew Rozanov would have said something like that. Like he knows just how far he’d go to ensure Shane’s happiness.

But then he looks down at his shoes, his brow furrowed again like he’s thinking too hard about something. Hayden just decides to wait him out, not pushing for a response before he’s ready to give one. This is already going much better than Hayden deserves, so Shane can take all the time he needs to process all of this.

Hayden would wait a lifetime, if that’s what it took.

“I meant what I said, you know? That if it came down to it, I would choose him over you,” Shane explains. “So yeah, it is important that we work things out. But not more important than him.”

“I get that. I’d feel the same if we were talking about Jackie.”

Shane smiles then, and Hayden understands exactly why.

When they had fought, Hayden had told Shane that what he had with Rozanov wasn’t the same as what Hayden had with Jackie. It had been mean, and unfair, and untrue. He’d undermined their relationship - acted like it was less than - and that was so callous of him. Especially because he knows what it costs Shane to have to hide it.

Hayden sees the way he looks at Rozanov; Shane would marry and have a family with him in a heartbeat, if only it were possible.

He hopes, one day, he’ll get to see that happen. He thinks they’d make pretty great dads, if the way they treat his and Jackie’s kids is anything to go by.

“She really yelled at you, eh?” Shane asks, a small grin playing at the edges of his mouth.

“Man, she’s been making me sleep on the couch in the office since it happened.”

“It’s a pull-out bed,” Shane scoffs.

“Yeah. Still sucks though.”

“Good.”

Hayden snorts. “Yeah, I deserve that.”

He deserves that, and so much worse. But Shane is unfailingly kind, and so Hayden knows - as Shane teases and smiles at him - that they're going to be okay.

They might not instantly bounce back to the way they were before, but he's determined to prove himself over time. He's determined to show Shane - and Rozanov - that they don't have to hide in front of him. He won't be like the guys in the locker room, who say they don't have a problem with Shane being gay but then treat him differently anyway.

"Hey - the next time Rozanov is in Montreal, why don't you guys come over for dinner?"

Shane raises a single, somehow painfully judgmental eyebrow. "Did Jack make you invite us?"

Hayden rolls his eyes. "No. She doesn't even know I'm asking. She'll be thrilled, though. She loves Rozanov."

"And me."

"Well yes, that's a given."

Shane smiles, small but honest. It makes Hayden realise just how often Shane has faked smiles around him, lately.

"Okay," Shane agrees. "That sounds good. We'd like that."

We, Shane says, like it's the easiest thing in the world. Like he and Rozanov are a unit, now. A package deal.

And Hayden thinks, suddenly, that he might have been jealous of Ilya Rozanov.

He's never had to share Shane before, at least not knowingly. Shane has been *his* best friend, *his* confidant, *his* person. And it's jealous and unfair - because Hayden also has his wife - but he thinks, perhaps, he'd felt threatened by Rozanov. Like his place in Shane's life became uncertain once Rozanov entered the picture.

But the truth is, Rozanov has been around longer than Hayden has; they've been loving each other this whole damn time. It's selfish and arrogant for Hayden to think he should take the number one spot in Shane's life.

It belongs to Rozanov, now. Maybe it always has done.

And Hayden's okay with that, he thinks, as long as Rozanov - *Ilya* - keeps making Shane as happy as he is right now.

"Shane?"

"Yeah?"

"I love you, man. You know that, right?"

“Yeah, Hayden. I know,” Shane says. “I love you, too.”

Chapter End Notes

love u

Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

“I’m an asshole,” Ilya acknowledges. “But off ice, I am different. With *Shane*, I am different.”

Chapter Notes

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

Ilya feels...not nervous, Russians don't get nervous. Not unless they're knocking on the door of a pretty Canadian boy's hotel room for the very first time. But he feels - something. Tense, perhaps.

Like he's waiting for the other shoe to drop and for everything to go wrong.

He desperately wants this evening to go well for Shane. He'd carve out his heart and hand it over still beating, if his boyfriend asked him too, so an evening with Shane's friends should be no problem at all. It's just - he doesn't want to fuck things up this time. Doesn't want to ever put Shane into the same position he was in last time, where he's forced to choose between Hayden and Ilya.

And it's not because he's worried - he knows with absolute certainty that Shane would choose him - it's because he should never have to pick. He should get to have both of them.

It's Jackie who opens the door, and Ilya feels himself relax a little as she smiles at them.

“Hi boys,” she greets them both, as Ilya steps forward for a hug.

“You look beautiful,” he says. “Now. Where is my favourite Pike?”

Ilya looks over her shoulder as the house that is suspiciously tidy given that four children live there. He pulls back, raising an eyebrow in question. Jackie winces.

“The kids are with Hayden's oldest brother,” she confesses.

Ilya gasps all loud and dramatic, clutching his chest in agony. Jackie rolls her eyes at him and Shane snorts, gently elbowing him in the side of his ribs that aren't bruised.

He drapes his arm over Shane's shoulder, leaning his weight onto him in a way that forces Shane to wind his arm around Ilya's waist. He laughs at the dramatics, light and easy, and it settles something inside of Ilya to watch Shane smile. He knows he was nervous about tonight as well, so it feels good to make him laugh.

“How could you do this to me, Jackie? I wanted to see my best friend!” Ilya insists, and though he’s being mostly hyperbolic he genuinely *is* sad that little Arthur isn’t here.

“Don’t worry, Rozanov, I’m here,” Pike says, appearing behind Jackie with a tentative expression on his face.

Ilya startles. He didn’t know Pike could be funny?

He’s trying, though. Ilya knows he is. And as long as Shane is happy, as long as he feels comfortable and like he doesn’t have to shrink himself in front of Pike, then that’s all that matters to Ilya.

“Thank god,” Ilya says. “I was almost worried we were going to have fun for a moment.”

Ilya can feel Shane hold his breath, his body going tense like he’s considering pulling out of Ilya’s arms. But then Pike snorts out a laugh, rolls his eye, and flips Ilya off.

It had felt like the room was holding its breath, but now suddenly it can breathe again. They all laugh, easier than it’s ever felt between them before, and Ilya knows that it’s going to be okay. He and Pike aren’t ever going to be best friends, but they don’t need to be, and Shane would never ask it of them. All they need to be is *this*: cordial, friendly, themselves. Two people who love Shane and would do anything to keep him smiling.

“Thanks for having us, Jackie,” Shane says as they head through the house and into the dining room.

“Bro, I’m the one who invited you,” Pike chokes out.

“Yes, but we came for Jackie,” Ilya teases.

“I can still *un*invite you,” Pike threatens, but he’s smirking.

It feels a little bit like they’re both putting on a show, none of this exactly coming naturally to them. But, Ilya finds, it’s a lot more comfortable than the alternative. He’d rather perform friendship for everyone’s sake, than be at each other’s throats and making everyone feel uncomfortable.

Plus, Ilya finds that he doesn’t hate Pike. Not really. Not since he apologised to both of them - but especially Shane - in a way that felt earnest and genuine.

At the end of the day, they both want what’s best for the same person. And while they’d been divided over what that was for a while there in the beginning, Ilya is pretty sure they’re no longer at odds about it now. He watches Pike fight a smile as Shane leans into Ilya naturally, like he doesn’t have to think about the movement, and Ilya knows he’s on their side now.

He’s dreadful on the ice, but off it he might not be so bad.

“Come on kids,” Jackie says. “Dinner is on the table.”

“Please tell me you cooked?” Shane all but begs her.

“Hey! What’s that supposed to mean?” Pike whines. “I can cook.”

“Yeah, you can cook poison,” Shane chirps, and Ilya laughs.

He loves when he gets to see this side of Shane - the mouthy, playful side of him, that is usually reserved for private moments where he doesn’t feel like he has to perform. Ilya is glad he gets to be like that here, now. That he isn’t masking for the sake of anyone else’s comfort.

Ilya presses a kiss to Shane’s temple, and he doesn’t flinch. He doesn’t pull away. He just turns to smile at Ilya like there’s no one else in the room.

They take their places at the dining table, the couples sat beside each other, with Pike across from Shane, and Jackie opposite Ilya. The placements feel intentional - like they were preparing for any possible altercations - but Ilya feels confident they don’t have to worry about that anymore. Or, at least not tonight.

(He could easily take Pike in a fight, anyway.)

Conversation flows surprisingly naturally as they eat. There’s something about Jackie that just draws you in and makes you want to listen to her; she’s smart in a way that doesn’t feel intimidating, and she carries attention like she’s used to being the center of it. It makes everyone else feel more relaxed, and Ilya appreciates her for that, more than he could possibly put into words.

It feels nice, too, to witness Shane’s dynamic with Pike, when his and Ilya’s animosity isn’t getting in the way of it.

Ilya finds himself almost feeling a little bit jealous of the way they are together. His place in Shane’s life is certain, and he doesn’t feel threatened, but it’s clear just how long and how well the two of them know each other. And while Ilya is - smugly - aware that he has known Shane longer, there’s a familiarity between him and Pike that kind of makes him ache.

It’s the kind of comfort that comes with never having to hide or tame your interactions with someone, and that’s something that Ilya doesn’t often get to have with Shane.

He gets to have it now, though, Ilya reminds himself. They don’t have to hide tonight.

Ilya covers Shane’s hand where it’s resting on top of the table. Shane doesn’t falter as he tells Jackie and Pike about Yuna’s latest ventures, he just turns his hand over and laces their fingers together without missing a single beat.

Ilya feels so happy he could explode.

And when he catches Pike watching them from across the table, his eyes flicker to their joined hands and then back up to Ilya, and he nods his head. Quick, almost imperceptible, but an acknowledgment nonetheless.

“Wait - so she wants you to do *Calvin Klein*?” Jackie asks, stunned. “*You*?”

Shane groans, covering his face with his free hand. “I know. It’s awful.”

“It’s fantastic,” Ilya argues.

Even just the thought of a *Calvin Klein* ad with his boyfriend in it has Ilya reciting the rules of goaltender interference, trying to calm his overly-invested dick.

“It is *not*,” Shane vehemently disagrees. “I’m not - I can’t do...*that*.” He gesticulate wildly, and all of them can’t help but laugh.

“Oh trust me, sweetheart, you absolutely *can*,” Ilya says, wiggling his eyebrows obnoxiously.

It makes Shane blush a devastating shade of pink, and makes Jackie giggle, and Pike rolls his eyes at the absurdity of it all, but even he smiles too, albeit reluctantly.

“You sure you could handle everyone thirsting after your man, Rozanov?” Pike asks.

“Oh my god,” Shane whispers.

Ilya merely scoffs. “Please. No one else could handle him like I can.”

“Oh my *god*, Ilya,” Shane repeats, more distressed this time as he holds his head in his hand.

Pike almost chokes on his red wine. “Oh, nope. No thanks. Don’t need to hear any more than that, actually.”

“Well *I* do,” Jackie insists. “Come on, Shane. Come tell me all about it while we go and get dessert.”

Shane grimaces, but Jackie waves her hand at him, beckoning her to follow. Ilya brings their joined hands up to his lips to kiss Shane’s knuckles, then he releases him, encouraging him to join her in the kitchen.

Shane sighs, but - never wanting to disappoint - he pushes his chair back and stands up. Before following her, though, he curls his hand around the back of Ilya’s neck and leans back down to press a kiss to the top of his curls. Ilya can’t help but smile, even as he hears the whispered, “*Behave*,” just as Shane departs.

Ilya intently watches his boyfriend’s perfect ass as he walks away, and tries very hard not to imagine it spread across a billboard in Times Square.

Then he and Pike are alone, completely, for the first time since *The Incident*.

Silence lingers like a bruise that Ilya wants to press against, just to get a reaction. But he doesn’t quite know what to say, now that they’re alone. He knows that they’ve exchanged a few stilted texts, but he’s hesitant to rock the boat too much, or cause a scene when they’re both trying so hard to play nice.

Ilya knows exactly what Jackie was trying to do by giving them space, and he’d wanted to cling onto Shane’s hand and plead for him to stay. But, whether they like it or not, Ilya and

Pike are in each other's lives for the long haul, now. They better find a way to make it work.

Thankfully, it's Pike who breaks the silence first.

"I'm sorry," he blurts out, then winces like maybe he feels just as unsure as Ilya does. "Just - for all of it. For that day at Shane's house, for the things that I said."

"Oh, well. Thank you," Ilya says, feeling a little bit lost for words.

"You don't have to thank me," Pike laughs awkwardly. "It's quite literally the bare minimum."

Ilya nods in agreement. He's right, it *is* the bare minimum. But Ilya has spent most of his life around arrogant men who refuse to admit when they're wrong, and who aren't particularly adept at being emotionally intelligent. Himself included, sometimes.

So, the bare minimum still matters. It counts for something.

"I was being a dick," Pike admits. "I don't know if Shane told you anything about our conversation...?"

Ilya nods his head. Shane had given him the condensed version of Pike's apology, and even Ilya had to admit that it had been a decent one. Authentic, and honest, and intentional, like he understood exactly what he'd done wrong and what he was apologising for.

"I was totally in the wrong. With all of it," Pike continues. "I had this idea of you in my head, and I was unwilling to let you prove me wrong."

"I'm an asshole," Ilya acknowledges. "But off ice, I am different. With *Shane*, I am different."

"I know. I know that, now. I should have trusted Shane - trusted his judgment of you, instead of treating him like another one of my kids."

For all his faults - and there are so many that Ilya couldn't even begin to count them - Pike loves Shane. Ilya has never once doubted that.

Pike was controlling, and unkind, and weirdly jealous, too, but - deep down - Ilya knows that he thought he was doing right by Shane. He wasn't, of course. He missed the mark completely on that one. But the intention was there, regardless of how poorly it was executed, and Ilya is willing to give him a sliver of credit for that.

"Shane is smart," Ilya says.

Hayden laughs quietly. "Yeah, he is."

"And Yuna and David love me, you know? So I can't be completely terrible."

"I know, Rozanov. *Ilya*."

Hayden's nose wrinkles, like Ilya's name leaves a bad taste in his mouth, and it makes Ilya smirk.

"I love him," Ilya states plainly. "You know this, too. Yes?"

Hayden nods his head. "Yeah," he says. "I know. I see it in the way you look at him. The way you look at each other."

Ilya feels proud to hear that - proud to know that their love for each other is so big that it shines out of them, even when they're not trying to show it off.

"Good," Ilya says. "Because if you ever hurt him like that again, I will not be so nice about it."

He doesn't want to cause another argument, doesn't want to risk the tenuous threads of respect that are perhaps *just* starting to form between them, but it has to be said. Shane defended Ilya against Hayden, and now it's Ilya's job to do the same for Shane.

He has to know that hurting Shane is off the cards. A line that Ilya won't ever let him cross again.

He watches as a spark of anger flickers to life behind Hayden's eyes. His hand curls into a fist on top of the table, and his shoulders ripple with tension, like a rubber band pulled taut. He opens his mouth, and it's twisted like he's going to say something cruel - something designed to hurt.

But then... Ilya watches in real time as Hayden collects himself. He takes a slow, deep breath, his hand unfurls, and he nods his head in resignation.

"Yeah. That's fair enough," he acknowledges. "I won't fuck this up again."

"Good."

It feels like a start.

Just as the silence between them begins to feel awkward, the door swings open and Shane and Jackie saunter into the dining room.

They're both smiling as they carry two plates each, and Shane has a carton of ice cream trapped precariously between the inside of his arm and his ribs. He's grimacing, no doubt at the damp cold of it pressed against his skin and clothes.

Ilya reaches out to take it before it falls, and Shane smiles at him in gratitude.

"Thanks baby," he says. "Fuck, that was cold."

Ilya wants to kiss him until they're both gasping for breath.

"Who wants cherry pie?" Jackie asks.

“Me!” Ilya and Hayden both call out at the same time, then smirk at each other as they yell, “Jinx!”

Jackie rolls her eyes, and Shane places his hand on Ilya’s thigh and laughs. And Ilya feels... good. He feels like things are going to be okay. Better than okay, even.

Later, when they’re at home in bed, Ilya collapses down on top of Shane.

He grunts as the air is knocked out of him, but he doesn’t push Ilya away. Their warm, bare chests press together, and their hearts beat in sync against each other. Ilya burrows his nose into Shane’s neck, and nips gently at the scar above his collarbone. Then he wiggles his body like a worm, until Shane snorts and winds his arms around Ilya’s back.

“Come here, you big softie.” Shane squeezes him tightly, and Ilya hums.

“I had a good time tonight.”

“Yeah?” Shane asks, hopeful. “You’re not just saying that, right?”

Ilya shakes his head, his nose brushing against Shane’s throat in a way that makes him squirm. Ilya kisses the spot instead, then says, “No. I really did enjoy it.”

Jackie is a delight, and Pike - *Hayden*, Ilya reminds himself - is almost funny, when he’s not performing the role of *Ultimate Dickhead*. Ilya and Shane had even gotten to say hello to the kids when they FaceTimed their parents to say goodnight.

The evening had been a complete success.

Shane lets out a long, deep breath, and Ilya feels him melting beneath him. Any lingering tension that he’d been carrying seeps into the mattress, and Ilya is left with a boneless, smiling Shane. When he’s like this - soft, and pliant, and happy - it is one of Ilya’s very favourite versions of his boyfriend.

He can’t help but kiss his throat again, then his jaw, and his cheek, and the corner of his mouth.

Ilya looks down at Shane - at his wide, brown eyes, and his constellation of freckles, and his deliciously flushed cheeks - and he feels so in love that he kind of wants to cry.

Sometimes, Ilya still finds it hard to believe that this is real. He’ll be lying in bed beside a sleeping Shane, or watching him cook a ridiculously healthy meal, or listening to him ramble about Toronto’s penalty kill, and Ilya has to pinch himself to make sure he isn’t dreaming.

He’s not sure what he did to deserve this kind of bliss, but he’s going to spend the rest of his life making sure he gets to keep it.

“I love you so much,” Ilya whispers, his voice thick as tears spring to his eyes.

Shane looks up at him so tenderly, a hand coming up to caress the apple of Ilya's cheek and the curve of his jaw. Then Shane tilts his chin up in search of Ilya's mouth, and Ilya meets him with an impossibly gentle kiss.

He can feel all the love that lives inside of them passing between their lips.

"Oh my baby," Shane murmurs softly. "I love you, too."

His hand trails away from Ilya's cheek, around the back of his neck, and tangles loosely in the curls at the base of his head. Shane's fingers scratch gently over Ilya's scalp, and he feels himself shudder at the touch. He leans into it like a cat, and Shane chuckles quietly.

He guides Ilya down carefully, so his head is laid on Shane's shoulder, and his nose is once again buried in the crook of Shane's neck. Ilya inhales the scent of his boyfriend, and Shane kisses his forehead sweetly.

This is Ilya's very favourite place to be.

Chapter End Notes

this was supposed to be a oneshot and ended up being 4 chapters!! thanks for all the love on it :)

End Notes

for the record, i don't hate hayden. i think he loves shane and does try to be a good friend to him, but he absolutely misses the mark when it comes to ilya. hating your friend's boyfriend is a rite of passage, we've all been there, but hayden was unnecessarily cruel to ilya and i think shane should have put a stop to it.

i imagine this takes place before the long game, during ilya's first season in ottawa, and that jackie obliterates hayden over this when she finds out & they eventually work it all out and make up.

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