

One Hope Then Another

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One Hope Then Another

by [CorgiQueen14](#)

Summary

Shane Hollander knew that this thing he had with Ilya Rozanov couldn't last. There were a thousand reasons why he should walk away and never look back. But maybe hope was enough of a reason to stay. And maybe he wasn't the only one hoping they could be something more than what they were.

Notes

Big thanks to penumbria for the incredible art!!!

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

Chapter 1: cover and cast page

Cover



Cast Page:



**ILYA
ROZANOV**



**SHANE
HOLLANDER**



**HAYDEN
PIKE**



**SVETLANA
VETROVA**



**ROSE
LANDRY**

**THE
CAST**



**YUNA
HOLLANDER**



**DAVID
HOLLANDER**



**JJ
BOIZIAU**



**CLIFF
MARLEAU**

Chapter 2



Shane slumped against the wall of the elevator, shivers racking his body.

This had been a mistake.

He never should have gone up to Ilya's room that night.

He never should have let him into his room that day in 2010. Hell, he never should have shaken his hand in 2009.

He should have known it was always going to end this way.

~~

Shane knew that Ilya Rozanov was trouble from the moment he first saw him at the World Juniors. Everyone knew of him; the Russian prodigy whose tongue was sharper than the blade of his skates. And yet, Shane had still gone over and introduced himself.

He remembered the guarded look in the other boy's eyes, the ghost of a smirk on his face when he taunted Shane on the ice. He remembered those ice-blue eyes staring at him from his perch at the top of the arena as Team Canada practiced. But more than that, what he remembered was the sting

of defeat when Russia had beaten Canada in the finals. Everything that he had worked for, all the hours spent practicing, and he lost.

He'd thought that had been the end of it, and yet something kept pulling them towards each other. The year they were both drafted to the MLB, Ilya was a first-round pick, and Shane was a second-round pick. Part of him wondered if he was doomed to spend the rest of his career chasing after Ilya. Always two seconds too slow or two inches behind.

In the gym the night of the draft, he'd felt a spark as their fingers brushed, Shane handing back Ilya's water bottle, but he tried to ignore it. Shane had never been interested in a man before. He'd only dated women, and that was the way it was going to stay. Besides, Ilya had just been drafted to Boston, Montreal's biggest rival. Nothing good would come from them being friendly, let alone more.

And then the CCM shoot happened. When Shane heard Ilya admit that he had been the one to set it up, something in his gut clenched. And when their eyes met in the showers that evening? Shane couldn't have pretended that nothing had happened even if he had wanted to. And he did want to. Ilya Rozanov was everything that he had never thought himself capable of having. And he still couldn't have him. There was not a single MLH player who was out of the closet. Shane was already one of the only Asian hockey players in the league. He couldn't be the first gay player, too.

He thought that it would be a one-time thing. That Ilya just wanted to mess around with him. But then they met again at the All-Star game, with Scott Hunter in the next room. They'd exchanged numbers, hiding behind fake names so no one would grow suspicious. And then Shane followed Ilya out onto the roof in Vegas the night he won his Rookie of the Year award.

Shane had wanted nothing more than to kiss him on that roof, but he knew he couldn't. Scott Hunter was looking for Ilya. They had to be careful. It was bad enough that they had nearly been caught at the All-Star Game. They couldn't do this now, with the entire league a hundred feet away. It would have been a mistake.

But Shane was sure of one thing. If they had done it, it would have been the best mistake he ever made.

It took years for them to plan their next meetup. Every time they planned to be together, something happened to derail their plans. After the third cancellation, Shane expected Ilya to tell him to delete his number. Rozanov was all over the internet with models and beautiful women. Shane could not be the only person that Rozanov was able to sleep with, after all.

But he never did.

And then, on the night they were finally going to have sex, Ilya did something Shane never expected him to do. He sexted him right before the fucking game.

Shane was livid, shoving him into the wall of his building's stairwell. But as he saw the glimmer of amusement in Rozanov's eyes, he realized that that was exactly what the other man had wanted him to do.

The two of them chased each other up the stairs, shoving at each other as they ran.

Shane had never invited anyone over to his place before, apart from Hayden and JJ coming over to watch a game. Part of him wondered if Rozanov would like his place. Another part of him wondered why he cared.

Rozanov had been his usual self, poking fun at the number of pillows on his bed. And then he looked at Shane, and everything had changed in an instant.

The two of them were naked on the bed, Rozanov pulling back from a kiss to look Shane in the eyes with an intensity that left him breathless.

"You still want?" He asked softly, Shane managing to nod in response.

"I still want." He said, glancing down at Rozanov's cock.

"Don't worry. It will fit." Rozanov told him, smirking as he kissed Shane again. Shane leaned into the kiss, pulling away after a long moment to grab the lube and condoms out of his bedside drawer.

Rozanov snatched the condoms from his hands, holding up the long strip of packets with a false look of concern. "You think this will be enough?"

“Fuck off.” Shane shoved at him lightly, the other man laughing in response as he leaned back in. Rozanov trailed kissed from Shane’s lips down to his chest, his teeth lightly grazing one of Shane’s nipples. Shane’s breath hitched, and he could feel the other man smirking against his skin as he repeated the action on the other side.

Shane moaned as Rozanov paid attention to his cock, reaching for his hand where he was still caressing Shane’s chest.

Before too long, Rozanov began to prep him, pushing Shane’s legs towards his chest. Shane held them there, moaning with every press of Rozanov’s fingers opening him up.

Before long, Ilya was lining himself up, entering Shane with a pace that bordered on glacial. Shane was grateful for it: He knew that Rozanov was big, but he underestimated how it would feel when he pressed in.

Shane focused on catching his breath, Rozanov’s concerned eyes boring into him. “Is okay?” Shane managed a nod. “Hmm?”

“I’m okay,” Shane reassured him, the other man relaxing as he started to move. He started slow, the pace increasing until Shane thought he would break apart from the force of the momentum. Shane’s hands gripped Rozanov’s arms, moving to his shoulders as the pace increased. He could feel his nails digging into the other man’s skin, and he tried to release his grip.

“Do not worry. I like it.”

“Holy shit, Rozy.” He groaned, the other man capturing his lips in a desperate, bruising kiss.

“You still ok?” Rozanov asked, Shane, nodding again.

“I’m okay.” Shane could feel himself getting close, the sensation building in his gut. Rozanov must have been able to read something in his face because the next thing Shane knew, the other man brought a hand down to tug at his cock. It only took a few strokes before Shane felt himself release, nearly sagging in Rozanov’s grip.

“You didn’t—” Shane started, only for Rozanov to cut him off.

“Do not worry, Hollander. I am not done with you yet.” Rozanov pulled out, Shane immediately feeling empty. He moved backward on the bed, motioning for Shane to flip over.

Shane did as he asked, his heart racing. He felt the other man’s hands settle onto his hips, the other man entering Shane again. Shane felt his breath catch in his throat as his hands scrabbled to grab the sheets in front of him. Shane moaned as Rozanov started to move again. He could feel the other man bending over him, pressing a kiss between his shoulder blades as his cross necklace brushed against his skin. Every touch felt like it was setting all of Shane’s nerves on fire at once, and Shane wasn’t sure if he would survive the blaze. He wasn’t sure if he wasn’t supposed to.

“It’s still okay?” Rozanov asked, and Shane nodded as he gasped.

“More than okay. Jesus Christ.”

“You can just call me Rozanov.”

Shane reached back to swat at him, only for the other man to pin his wrist to the small of his back. Shane’s heart raced as he reached back with his other hand, only for Rozanov to hold that one too.

“Be nice, Hollander.” Shane felt himself get hard as Rozanov tightened his grip. “Are you going to be good for me?”

Shane nodded, his mind too flooded with sensation to respond properly. Rozanov let go of his wrists, Shane gripping the sheets beneath him like they were about to be ripped away from him. He moaned into the pillow, knowing he was close to coming again.

“Are you...” Rozanov started to say before he moaned. “Oh God, Hollander!”

Rozanov increased his speed, Shane finding his release for a second time that night. He’d never been able to do that without touching his cock before.

Rozanov found his release shortly after, their heavy breathing filling the quiet apartment. Rozanov pulled out as Shane collapsed boneless onto the bed. She felt the other man brush a kiss across his shoulder and his neck, a hand brushing the sweat-soaked hair off of his brow.

Rozanov moved Shane onto his back, maneuvering him with sure, gentle hands. He collapsed next to him, laying his head on Shane's chest. The two of them lay there for a long moment, Shane finally speaking as Rozanov pressed a kiss into the skin over his heart.

"Now the bed's all dirty."

"What?" Ilya looked up at him before rolling his eyes. "Shut up."

Shane let out a laugh as Rozanov pulled him into another kiss.

"I will shower now, ok?" He asked when they pulled apart, Shane nodding.

He probably should shower, but part of him couldn't be bothered to move.

He lay there, floating on a sea of quiet satisfaction as he heard the water running. He'd had sex with women before, but it had never felt like this. He had never felt like this before.

Rozanov came back before Shane knew it, flopping back onto the bed and curling against Shane's body.

"You killed me, Hollander." He said with a sigh. "I am dead."

Shane grinned at him. "That was so fucking hot."

Rozanov moved so that he was looking up at Shane. "Worth the wait?"

Shane pulled him into a kiss in response, their lips moving slowly, sweetly. When he pulled away, he brushed a kiss across Rozanov's forehead, the other man giving him a look that he didn't know how to read.

"I should go." The other man said after a long moment.

Shane almost asked him to stay longer, but he knew he wouldn't. It was better if he left now, before anyone wondered what was taking him so long.

Shane got dressed and walked down the stairs with Rozanov. He held his jacket in his arms, sitting on the steps as Rozanov checked outside for his cab.

"So, obviously we won't see each other during the Olympics, right?" Shane asked, the other man giving a brusque nod.

"Right."

"Your family must be happy they're in Russia."

"Mmm. Yes."

"My parents are pretty psyched for me," Shane told him. "They're pissed they can't come, but my mom's threatening to wake up at 4:00 a.m. to watch every game." He paused for a second. "I bet your parents will be there, right?"

Rozanov shrugged. "My father, yes. Maybe my brother, but who knows?"

Shane wondered about Rozanov's mother, but figured there must have been a reason why he didn't mention her.

“Anyways, I’m psyched.” Shane knew he was probably talking too much, but he couldn’t make himself stop. “I’ve been dreaming about it my whole life.”

Ilya raised an eyebrow. “Dreaming of what? Bronze medal?”

Shane scoffed. “You fucking wish, dude.”

Rozanov rolled his eyes, moving closer to Shane. “Hey, uh, remember when I made you come hands-free?”

Shane felt his face heat up. “Go fuck yourself, Rozanov.” He meant it to come out harsh, but instead it sounded soft.

Rozanov reached his step and leaned in, his face inches from Shane’s.

“Such a good trick.” He purred, his voice low.

“Your cab is definitely here.” Shane reminded him. Rozanov gave him a slight smirk before leaning in and kissing him. It was a soft, almost sweet kiss as he pulled away before brushing his lips against Shane’s one more time.

“Bye.” He whispered against Shane’s lips, pulling his jacket out of Shane’s arms as he went to the door.

Shane watched him leave and ended up staying in the stairwell for almost an hour after Rozanov had left. Part of him hoped that the other man would come back and finish what he started, even though he knew he couldn’t.

Another part of him wished that he had been brave enough to ask him to stay the night. It would have been a mistake, Shane knew that. But it would have been the best mistake he could have ever made.

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Shane had been flying high for weeks off that one night with Rozanov. Something had just clicked for him in a way that he had never had before. Something felt different.

And then Russia happened.

Shane knew that Rozanov must have been taking the loss hard. Losing so early in the Olympics, on his home soil, to fucking Latvia? Shane would have been furious.

He agonized for an hour over whether to text him. He knew the risks; he knew that they shouldn't be in contact, especially in Russia. But he would have appreciated it if Rozanov had been the one to reach out, so perhaps it was okay.

And then Ilya hadn't responded. Shane knew he probably wouldn't respond, but it stung. So, when he saw Ilya watching the figure skating from an empty box at the top of the stadium where no one was looking, Shane couldn't resist going up to check on him.

He'd slipped into the box Ilya was in, the other man not even turning around as he approached.

"Hey." He said softly. Ilya's frame stiffened ever so slightly. "I saw you up here. I wanted to see how you're doing."

"Fine." Rozanov's voice was colder than he had ever heard it before. "Go sit down."

Shane looked down at his feet. "I know that it must have been hard for you."

"You do not know anything."

Shane scoffed at that. "Come on, Rozanov, we—"

Rozanov turned around, his eyes blazing with a fire Shane had never seen before.

“We are not anything.” He spat, Shane almost flinching at the intensity. “Go away, Hollander.”

Shane frowned. Something was wrong; he could feel it. “Are you okay?”

“Please, go.”

“You didn’t answer my text.”

Rozanov scoffed, rolling his eyes. “No, I did not answer your boring text. Now will you go?”

Shane reared back as if stung. “Fine.”

He left and went back to his seat, his cheeks burning.

Carter didn’t seem to notice that he’d left, but Scott gave him a knowing look as he sat back down. Scott knew more than he was willing to divulge; that was for sure. Though, that didn’t stop him from chirping at Shane about Rozanov at a game the season before.

Shane tried to focus on the figure skating, ready to support his friend Joe. But part of him kept stealing glances at the top of the arena, where a familiar figure loomed like a dark omen.

He tried to put what had happened with Rozanov out of his mind, focusing on what he was here to do.

Winning his medal at the Olympics was supposed to be the best moment of his life. And in many ways, it was. But part of him was still in that room at the top of the arena, Rozanov’s angry eyes boring into him.

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Things didn't get better after leaving Sochi.

Shane messaged Ilya for six months without a response. Little things at first, desperately trying to get back on track. They played against each other a few weeks later, and Ilya didn't even look twice at him.

And then the Boston Raiders won the Stanley Cup.

Shane watched as Ilya held the cup over his head, shouting something that was lost in the roar of the crowd.

Shane felt his lip quiver for a moment. If he couldn't win the cup, part of him, however small a part it was, was glad that Rozanov could.

Even if the man was being a monumental asshole at the moment.

And then they were presenting together at the awards in Vegas. Shane barely remembered getting ready for the awards, only how nervous he felt backstage waiting for Rozanov. And how furious he'd been when Rozanov showed up late.

Shane knew that he shouldn't have cared. He knew that whatever Rozanov did or didn't do with other people was none of his business. But his jealousy was nearly choking him as he made his way off the stage and into a nearby bathroom. And then Rozanov followed him into the bathroom.

When Shane went to his room late that night, he wasn't sure what he'd been expecting the other man to do. He hadn't expected to be sitting on the bed with Rozanov in a nearby chair, watching as Shane touched himself. Things between them remained as hot as ever, but when he walked out the door of Rozanov's room that night? He felt empty, like something was missing.

The two of them had been sitting next to each other on the bed, and yet Shane had never felt so far away from the other man. The vodka he was given stung as it slid down his throat, Rozanov barely

looking at him.

Shane barely remembered to press the button for his floor, the elevator moving as he dug his phone out of his pocket.

He started a new text to Rozanov, the phone shaking ever so slightly in his grip.

Shane: Have a good summer.

He shook his head, deleting the text as his head started to droop.

Shane: We didn't even kiss.

Fuck.

Shane barely remembered getting back to his room, his hands shaking so badly that it took three tries to get the card into the reader. He stripped off his clothes, stumbled into the shower, and turned the water up as hot as it would go. He needed to do something, anything, to chase the cold from his bones.

He wished that he could say he was surprised at how things had turned out. Ilya hadn't messaged him in months. What had Shane been thinking about confronting him tonight?

He didn't expect Rozanov to be like that, though. He had always been so... different before. Gentle. Caring, even.

Shane huffed out a laugh, clumsy fingers knocking over the shampoo bottle. Caring was not a word many would use to describe Ilya Rozanov. And they'd be right not to.

But part of him couldn't forget how Ilya had checked in on him when they first had sex. How he went slow, waiting until Shane was comfortable. How he kissed him in the stairwell after teasing him about Shane coming hands-free. He had no reason to do it: the hookup had long been over at

that point, and the meter was definitely running on the cab. And yet he kissed him in the stairwell as if they had all the time in the world, like Shane was something precious.

That was what hurt the most about that night. They didn't kiss at all when they were having sex. It was wild, passionate, but detached. It was as though Shane could have been anyone in the room that night.

Maybe it was just another night for Rozanov. Shane knew that he was nothing special in the long run.

He burrowed under the blankets, his hands still shaking. What was wrong with him? Why was he letting this one asshole have this effect on him?

But as Shane went to bed that night, he knew the truth. It wasn't just anyone who could have that effect on him. It was only Ilya Rozanov.

~~

He'd been back at his cottage for a week, finally feeling back to normal after that night in Vegas, before he got a text from Rozanov.

Shane would have liked to claim that he was calm and collected about the whole thing, but in truth, he pounced on his phone the second it rang.

Lily: Have a boring summer.

Shane scoffed, wanting to throw his phone away, but something made him stop.

In all the years they'd been doing whatever they were doing, Ilya had never texted him over the summer.

Maybe it was nothing. Or maybe, just maybe, Rozanov was thinking about him too after what happened in Las Vegas.

Shane thought for a second before tapping out a slightly snarky response.

Shane: Enjoy friendly Russia!

He put down his phone and went back to his yoga, determined to put Ilya Rozanov out of his mind for the rest of the day.

Even if a part of him was hoping that Rozanov was thinking about him as much as Shane was.

Chapter 3



Ilya knew from the start that Shane Hollander would be his undoing.

From the moment that he saw him out of that rink in Regina on the day of the prospect cup, a lighter in his hands that refused to spark until he heard a voice behind him, he knew that he would be trouble.

It was not the first time that a young man had caught Ilya's eye. There had been several over the years, starting with his coach's son back in Moscow. But something about this earnest Canadian with dark eyes and a constellation of freckles upon both cheeks captivated him from the moment their hands touched.

Ilya felt those dark eyes upon him everywhere he went for the rest of the World Juniors. He'd look up from the rink during practice and see Hollander in the stands, studying him like a cat observing a mouse.

Not that it did him any good. Ilya won, relishing in the indignant look on the young boy's face.

Ilya had tried to put it out of his mind as best he could, but then he and Hollander had been called up one after the other in the MLH draft and drafted to rival teams. He remembered looking over the balcony at the draft party, seeing Hollander with his parents. His mother had said something with a bright smile on her face, his father holding her hand as though it were the most precious thing in the world.

Ilya had felt the stirrings of envy deep inside him. He wanted a family like that. Instead, he had his father tell his new coach that Ilya was lazy and unmotivated on the night of the fucking draft. Even when Ilya accomplished everything that he had dreamed about, his father could not wait to be the one to tear him down.

Hollander had looked up at him for a moment, and Ilya had looked away. He did not need the pity of the number two draft pick. He could handle things on his own.

And then their paths crossed again in the gym that night, Hollander rising from the exercise bikes though he was chasing someone who owed him money. He couldn't resist teasing him in the gym that night, something in his gut clenching at the challenge in those dark eyes and the way Shane bristled like an angry kitten while taking his instruction to drink more water. Then there was the way his eyes lingered when Ilya stood up.

Had it all been in his head? There was only one way to know for sure.

When CCM contacted him about a commercial, it was all too easy to suggest that Hollander join him. The MLH had been marketing their rivalry since before the draft, ever since Ilya's first victory in the prospect cup. All he had to do was dangle the possibility of that rivalry in front of them, and they jumped at the chance to have them both in the commercial.

And then the two of them went into the shower after the commercial, and he noticed Shane's eyes upon him.

He knew that he shouldn't do it. There were a million reasons not to. But Ilya had never shied away from a bit of trouble, and Shane seemed like the kind of mistake he'd regret not making.

So, he asked for Shane's room number after the shower, the other man giving it to him without hesitation.

Ilya hadn't been that nervous about a hookup in years. It wasn't helped by the fact that he ran into Hollander's mother in the elevator on the way to his room. He regretted closing the elevator door in her face, but he was pretty sure he would regret it more if she had figured out where he was going and what he was planning to do when he got there.

And then he was there in Shane's room, backing him against the wall and holding his chin as he kissed him. The other man was obviously inexperienced, Ilya could tell that from the first moment he kissed him. But something about him made Ilya want to spend more time with him. To teach him the way he wished someone had taught him.

The next time he came across Hollander, the smug Canadian had shattered the record he had just set at the All-Star game. And then that night, when Ilya thought he'd finally be able to get him out of his system, he was once again delayed by Scott Fucking Hunter in the next room.

Ilya was fairly certain that the last time a dinosaur had cockblocked this well was in Jurassic Park.

He should have stopped it all then. He was young, attractive, and popular. He could have had anyone else he wanted, anyone else in the world.

And yet instead, he gave Hollander his number. And their identities as "Lily" and "Jane" were born.

It took years before he was able to have Hollander the way he wanted him. Missed connections, canceled games, and more delays than he could count. There were dozens of women he could spend his time with. He didn't have to wait for a boring Canadian hockey player with a weak backhand. And yet, he persisted. He kept messaging him, teasing him. Part of him enjoyed seeing Shane bristle like a kitten spritzed with water, the way he'd gotten in Ilya's face after Ilya sexted him before a game.

Part of him also liked how Hollander understood him. The two of them were two sides of the same coin, stuck in their paths.

Being with Shane was exactly like he had pictured it. Shane was so responsive under him, and Ilya was entranced by every noise that had fallen from his lips as he made Shane come without even using his hands.

And then Shane had pressed a kiss to his forehead. The last person who had kissed him like that, with pure affection and tenderness, had been his mother before she passed away.

Ilya made an excuse to leave soon after, Hollander insisting on walking him down the stairs as they had just finished a date.

In the stairwell before he left Shane's apartment that night, he knew he was being foolish. Kissing Hollander like that, sweetly, romantically? It was a step too far. But, for a single moment, Ilya couldn't understand why it was that he was not allowed to have this. To have him.

~~

Sochi clarified things for him. Russia was knocked out of the Olympics by fucking Latvia, the hopes and dreams of his motherland crushed beneath his skates. The prime minister had been disappointed. His father and brother...furious was too kind a word for how they felt.

He only had to make it through a few more days, and then he could get back to his life in Boston. He could forget about his brother demanding money, or the sinking feeling that something was wrong with his father. He could forget about all that Russia had cost him in blood, sweat, and bones in the earth.

And then Hollander found him watching the figure skating event, and Ilya knew one thing for certain.

He could not allow himself to have Shane Hollander. Hollander was kind, earnest, and good. He was everything that Ilya could not allow himself to be. And Ilya would break him. Being with Ilya would destroy everything that made Hollander special. He would hold onto Hollander so tight that he would shatter him with the force of his grip. Hollander didn't deserve that. He deserved better than Ilya.

So he pushed him away, telling him that they were not anything. He saw the way Hollander flinched back as if stung, but he forced himself not to react. He kept his gaze on the skaters until he heard him walk away, every step echoing. He ignored his texts. He played the game he knew as best as he could, following Svetlana's careful plan to lead him to victory a year before she had thought possible.

They crushed Montreal in the playoffs. Svetlana's prediction about their injured goalie was correct. He didn't give Shane a single glance as he skated off the ice. And then they faced San Francisco.

And then he'd done it. He won the cup. He held it aloft, screaming with the rest of his team, thinking that everything was finally the way it should be. And yet, one thought continued to plague him.

He hoped that Shane Hollander was watching. He hoped that he was seeing what Ilya was truly capable of.

~~

The MLH awards in Vegas came before long, and he and Hollander were both nominated for MVP. What was more, they were both co-presenters of the sportsmanship award.

Ilya tried not to think about how this would be the first time he saw Hollander in months off the ice. Instead, he played it cool, walking up to Hollander right before they were meant to go out on stage. Hollander had been so angry when Ilya had shown up late, though Ilya had tried not to care.

Ilya had sworn that the night in Montreal had been the last time, but he had not been able to get Hollander out of his mind for months. Perhaps what he needed was a true last time, one where he could decide what happened. Where he could decide how far he went and how much of himself he would let Hollander see.

So they went to his room after he'd won the award.

Ilya had thought that Hollander would have shied away from putting on the display that Ilya had asked of him, from having to touch himself while Ilya watched like a king on a throne. But he had risen to the challenge in a way that Ilya had not expected.

Ilya couldn't resist teasing him about the cup, knowing that it would anger his beautiful boy. Not that Hollander was his. He could never be his, after all.

Things were different afterward. When they had sex in Montreal, they had joked and laughed together in bed. Hollander had leaned over and kissed Ilya on the forehead, the move so tender that it stirred emotions in his heart. But in Vegas, after the award? They sat two feet apart, barely looking at each other. He watched out of the corner of his eye as Shane took a sip of the vodka, wincing at the taste.

And then Hollander asked about Russia and whether he had to go back. And Ilya knew that if he did not stop him, he would tell Hollander all of it. How his father was starting to forget himself. How his brother cared only about how many dollars Ilya could deposit into his account that week. How Ilya had found his mother dead on the floor of her bedroom when he was twelve years old, the stench of vomit filling the air.

How, on his darkest days, Ilya wondered if he would end up just like her. If it was a self-fulfilling prophecy that he follow in her footsteps, the way Alexei had so closely followed in their father's shadow.

But Ilya could not tell him. So instead, he made up a lie about having to catch an early flight, kicking out Hollander before he gave in to the urge to bare his soul.

The day after the MLH award, Ilya knew that he had made a mistake. He had Hollander in his bed, all to himself, and instead, he kicked him out. He did not even kiss the other man. It shouldn't have bothered him as much as it did. He had had many encounters with beautiful women before that did not involve kissing them. But something about the way Shane had looked at him, startled and then sad? It haunted him.

What if Shane never wanted to meet up with him again? What if that was truly the last time?

That had been what Ilya had wanted after all. One last time, to get Hollander out of his system so he could go back to being what he was meant to be. Russia's perfect son, who would one day settle down and marry a good Russian girl and carry on his family legacy.

As he boarded his flight to Moscow three days later, one thought kept rattling around in his brain: if what happened with Shane was what he had wanted to happen...why did he feel empty?

~~

Even in the heat of summer, Moscow was cold. His father's home, so full of life when his mother was alive, felt more and more like a prison with every passing year. Or perhaps it was a tomb. Perhaps Ilya would enter this home one day and never emerge.

After a week of silence from Hollander, Ilya decided to make the first move. It was what he deserved. He had made Hollander chase him for months, after all.

He briefly considered typing out that he missed him, but he shook that thought away as soon as it crossed his mind.

Lily: Have a boring summer.

Satisfied, he sent the text and tried not to think about it.

And then his phone vibrated, and Ilya barely resisted the urge to pounce on it.

He picked it up, flipping it over to see that Shane had texted back.

Jane: Enjoy friendly Russia!

Ilya snorted, putting the phone back down. Maybe things would turn out okay between them.

~~

His summer in Moscow passed slowly, and yet not slow enough. Before he knew it, it was back in Boston, training for the first preseason game against Montreal.

The first game after what happened in Vegas was...difficult to say the least. Ilya knew that it would be. He had tried so hard to create some sort of distance between the two of them the night of the awards, some kind of disconnect to fool himself into thinking that what the two of them had was nothing more than physical. But as soon as the door had closed behind Shane, Ilya wanted to run into the hallway and beg him to come back. But he couldn't. He knew that they couldn't be anything more than what they already were, and even that was too risky. Hollander had been so perfect for him that entire night, and Ilya hadn't even been able to bring himself to kiss him. He'd convinced himself that it was better. He did not need to kiss Hollander if Hollander was just a meaningless hookup, after all.

But even knowing that he should stop, that things would go badly for him if he did not stop, he couldn't keep himself from looking forward to the next time they played against Montreal. So much so that he couldn't resist teasing Hollander when they met up for the faceoff in the third period.

"Having a good night?" He asked, grinning as Hollander tried to ignore him. "That's nice. I think there's still time for a hat trick. Should I do now or wait till last second? 'Cause I don't know. Last second is more fun, but..."

Shane stayed focused on the puck, but Ilya still managed to win the face-off.

The Raiders won the game overall, though Hollander and the Metros put up quite a fight. He would expect nothing less from Hollander. When he made his way to Hollander's apartment after the game, he could feel the anticipation buzzing under his skin. As much as he liked to pretend that what happened between them was nothing special, Ilya knew he would not want to stop whatever they were doing.

Shane opened the door, rolling his eyes at Ilya's smug grin.

"Don't gloat." Shane let him into the apartment. "It's not attractive."

Ilya scoffed. "Lies and slander, Hollander. Everything I do is attractive."

Ilya leaned in to kiss Shane, the other man making as if to dodge the action. Ilya was persistent, though, and moved Shane back until his back hit the wall. He lightly grabbed Shane's chin with his hand, holding him still as he leaned in and pressed a kiss to Shane's lips. He felt the other man freeze under his touch for a moment, Ilya wondering what that was about, before suddenly responding to the kiss. Shane's hands reached for Ilya's shirt, scrabbing underneath it to touch his skin.

"Slow down, Hollander." Ilya laughed into the kiss, his lips moving to where Shane's neck met his shoulder, his teeth scraping against the skin. "I do not have to be at hotel for hours, we can take our time."

“I just- I need you,” Shane murmured, his breath hitching as Ilya’s teeth grazed his neck.

“I know.” Ilya pulled away, holding Shane’s chin as the other man breathed heavily. “Do not worry: I will take care of you.”

Something in Shane’s expression relaxed at that, and the other man pushed Ilya towards the stairs.

Ilya couldn’t resist the urge to smirk as Hollander led him upstairs. He was in a spirited mood tonight, which would only make this more fun for him.

And that night, when he fucked him into the mattress and made him come hands free? Ilya made sure to kiss him every chance he got.

~~

Things changed after that night. Shane wasn’t sure how to explain it. Rozanov had made it clear in Vegas: this was just sex, nothing else.

Shane had adhered to that as best as he could, even attempting to avoid kissing him during their next hookup.

But then Rozanov had kissed him instead, his hand holding Shane’s face as though he were something precious.

Maybe it was crazy. Maybe it was all in his head.

But then after that? Rozanov started texting him more. Usually, their texts revolved around when they would next meet, or Rozanov would sext him when he least expected it. Shane had gotten used to that. He expected it.

This was something different.

After a game where Drapeau had flung himself on top of the puck to keep it from going in the goal? Rozanov sent a picture of the moment with the message “your goalie is sleeping on job. Will make winning the cup easier this year.”

After Shane had scored a hat trick and the fans had thrown hats onto the ice? “Is good that none of the hats hit your head. Would hate to damage your pretty face.”

Shane didn’t know what to make of any of it. He also didn’t know what to do with the idea that Rozanov was watching his games.

And through it all, Shane kept meeting up with him every time they were in the same city. And every time they met, Rozanov would kiss him the way Shane wished he had in Las Vegas.

~~

Shane had never felt more awkward than he did the day that he did the Calvin Klein ad campaign. He couldn’t believe that he had let his mother talk him into it.

And then he saw the massive ad in downtown Montreal.

His team gave him a hard time about it at first, but after a week, Shane had all but forgotten about it. And then he got a text from Rozanov the next time that Boston played in Montreal.

Lily: So Montreal needs psychological warfare to win now?

Shane: ? What are you talking about?

Lily sent back a picture of Shane’s ad in downtown Montreal, Shane rolling his eyes at the fifty-foot version of him stretched out on the side of a building.

Lily: This is the view from my hotel window.

Shane smirked, tapping out a reply.

“Shane: At least it’s a good view. Gives you something to look forward to after the game.

Lily: So now you are good at sexting and mind games? Tonight should be interesting.

Shane grinned. It was nice to know that he was the one driving Rozanov crazy, for once.

~~

One day. Shane received a text as soon as he arrived home from practice.

Lily: So, you are cheater now?

Shane frowned in confusion, tapping out a response.

Shane: What do you mean?

Rozanov sent Shane a picture in response, Shane groaning when he realized what it was. His mother had arranged for him to be the face of a new energy drink company, the commercial having been filmed over the summer.

He’d hated that day. They insisted on spraying him with water, leaving his shirt see-through, expecting him to be happy about being soaked to the skin. And yet, somehow that was easier than actually drinking the overly sweet energy drink.

Shane: How does my doing a commercial make me a cheater?

Lily: You are cheating on ginger ale!

Shane laughed a little before his brow furrowed.

Shane: How do you even know I like ginger ale?

There was silence for a long moment before Rozanov replied.

Lily: Even people who do not know anything about you know that you like ginger ale. Is open secret.

Shane frowned. That wasn't the case at all. His own team barely knew that he liked ginger ale.

His phone buzzed with another text.

Lily: Does not matter. You can have ginger ale as consolation when I beat you next week.

Shane rolled his eyes as he tapped out a response.

Shane: In your dreams.

~~

Shane knew he was going to hear from Rozanov as soon as the new campaign dropped. Rolex had wanted him to do a new advertisement after his second Stanley Cup win.

Sure enough, mere hours after the ad started to play, he got a text.

Lily: So you are model now?

Shane rolled his eyes before tapping out a response.

Shane: fuck off, it's not like I asked to do it.

Lily: No, its good. Maybe is sign you should give up hockey and go into modeling full-time. Might make you less boring.

Shane huffed out a breath of annoyance before smirking.

Shane: Sounds like you just don't want any competition.

Lily: like you are competition for me? You are second-best player in MLH.

Shane grinned to himself as he typed out a response.

Shane: Why don't you get back to me after you've won back-to-back Cups?

There was silence for a long moment, and Shane worried that he had gone too far. And then he got a response.

Lily: Wow, someone has improved their chirping. Perhaps I can get demonstration next time you are in town?

Shane laughed, rolling his eyes and putting down his phone.

~~

“She’s what?” Shane asked, sure that he had heard that wrong.

He was out with Hayden and his kids when his best friend dropped a bomb on him.

“Pregnant,” Hayden repeated. “Jackie’s pregnant.”

“Again?” Shane said without thinking, Hayden laughing in response.

“Jesus Christ, man, you have got to work on your lying. Say something like ‘Hayden, what great news!’ or ‘Hayden, I’m so happy for you!’”

“No, I mean, a fourth kid, that’s awesome, man. Really.” Shane ran a hand through his hair. “Holy shit, dude.”

“You can’t find me!” one of Hayden’s girls shouted, and Hayden sighed.

“Ruby! Emma! Slow down!” he called out, one of his girls nearly running into another aquarium goer. “Ruby!”

“How do you know it’s Ruby?” Shane asked.

“Because she’s a beast,” Hayden told him before giving Shane a look. “So?”

Shane gave him a confused look in return. “So what?”

“So, when are you going to join me in this nightmare?” Hayden waved his hand around at his kids.

Shane froze for a second before flashing Hayden a grin. “You want to get me pregnant, too?” he let out a dramatic sigh. “I don’t think I’m ready. I think I still have some

good hockey left in me.”

“How does no one else realize how much of an asshole you are?”

“I have a very good agent.”

Hayden rolled his eyes. “You ever talk to that ex of yours? What was it, Jennifer?”

“Uh, Jessica.” Shane corrected.

“You ever hit that?”

Shane made a disgusted face. “Don’t say ‘hit that.’”

“Sorry, Virgin Mary.” Hayden scoffed before handing Shane the baby. “Here, tag! You are it.” He watched as Shane adjusted Arthur in his arms, a soft look crossing his face. “Look, I’m just saying, man, if you ever do, you could bring her around, you know? We’d do couple stuff. It’d be fun.”

Shane shook his head. “I don’t see her anymore. I think she’s

engaged or something.”

“Fair enough. So, um...Jackie has this friend, right?”

Shane fucking knew this was coming. “Hayd...come on.”

“Dude, she’s fucking hot,” Hayden told him. “She teaches, like, mommy yoga or something.” He paused, thinking. Maybe it’s just stretching, but she’s fucking hot. And she’s funny.”

“Swear jar, two times.” Shane pointed out.

“Oh, fuck.”

“That’s three.”

“ok, come on, man. Why not?”

Shane wished he had a good answer for him. It wasn’t like he could say “Because I’ve been fucking Ilya Rozanov since my rookie season and he’s kind of ruined me for anyone else.” Hayden would think he was insane if he said that, and maybe he was.

“Can I just show you her Insta?” Hayden asked, Shane knowing that Hayden wouldn’t let it go unless he said yes.

“Fine.” Shane sighed. He could at least look at the woman Hayden was talking about, even if he knew deep down that she would fall short of what he had with Rozanov.

“Yes!” Hayden pumped the air. “ok, good. Jackie will be happy.”

Shane raised an eyebrow. “We both have to make your wife happy now?”

“Yeah, damn right we do if you want her to make your gross food and keep my house stocked with ginger ale.”

“Ginger ale is a great soda.”

“And you are literally the only person who drinks it.”

Before Shane could retort, the girls started chasing each other and shouting, Hayden suddenly on high alert.

“Oh, Jesus Christ.” He started off after his kids. “Ruby, you’re going to kill her.”

Shane sighed, looking down at the baby in his arms as small fussing noises reached his ears.

“Tell your dad to leave me alone.” He said softly. “I’m fine.”

Arthur gurgled in his arms, not believing him either.

Chapter 4

“But this is Shane Hollander’s fortress of solitude,” the female voice-over said, panning to shots of a lake and a glass-walled mansion.

Ilya was sitting on the couch, watching this program on Shane Hollander and trying to act as though he wasn’t absorbing every small detail about Shane’s summer home.

It wasn’t the first time that he had sat on this couch and watched Hollander on his screen. This was where he had been sitting each time that Hollander had won the cup, tapping out a congratulatory message as he watched him skate around the rink in victory.

He wondered if that was how Hollander had felt when he had watched Ilya win. At least he had responded to Ilya’s messages. He hadn’t given him that same courtesy when he had won the Cup. he would have to do better next time. Hollander deserved better than that.

“Here in Eastern Quebec is the house he had built on a private lake.” The voice-over continued as it switched to a shot of Shane doing yoga by the lakeside. Ilya tried to ignore his cock hardening at the sight of Shane’s flexibility. It made him wonder if he’d be able to fold Hollander in half when he fucked him. Perhaps they should give that a try next time.

“It’s my favorite place on Earth.” The camera panned to Shane sitting on the edge of the lake. “My parents’ cottage, where I spent summers growing up, is 10 minutes away.”

“I’m ready.” Svetlana came into the living room, adjusting her earrings. She raised an eyebrow at what Ilya was watching, Ilya resisting the urge to jump and change the channel like he’d been caught watching porn. He supposed that in a way, he had. Everything that Shane Hollander did was arousing to him.

“Unless you’ve decided we should stay in and watch...” she snorted. “...whatever this is.”

“Sorry.” Ilya feigned blinking back to awareness. “It’s so fucking boring I almost fell into a coma.”

“Mmm.” Svetlana leaned in, the camera panning to yet another shot of Shane doing yoga. “He’s fucking hot, though.”

Ilya hummed, trying not to react. Shane was hot; he knew that, but he couldn’t admit it. Not even to his oldest friend.

Ilya grabbed his coat, turned off the TV and followed Svetlana out of his house.

“Are you seeing anyone these days?” Svetlana asked, glancing over at him as they rode to their destination.

“Are you jealous?” he raised an eyebrow, and she scoffed, giving him a look.

“No. I think you know me better than that.”

“Perhaps. Or perhaps I make you crazy with jealousy.”

“You wish,” she said, picking up her phone. “So there’s no one serious?”

“Nope.”

“Not even Jane?” she asked, her tone all too casual as Ilya resisted the urge to stiffen.

“What?” he asked, trying to stay casual.

From the look she shot him, he had utterly failed.

“You’ve been texting Jane for years,” she pointed out. “I thought maybe it was serious,” she paused for a moment, wrinkling her nose. “Or something.”

“It’s not serious,” Ilya told her. “Or anything.”

“Okay.” She didn’t sound as though she believed him, but she let it go. “Sasha says hi. He wants to know if you’d like him to visit.”

Ilya looked back at the TV screen, where Shane was sitting on a rock overlooking the lake at sunset. He wished he could step through the TV screen and be there with him. That he could have Hollander in the daylight instead of skulking in the shadows.

“No.” Ilya finally said, not taking his eyes off the screen. “I do not think that is a good idea.”

~~

Later that night, as Svetlana slept beside him, Ilya had a thought. A way for him to have Shane in the daylight for a moment, even if that was all he could have.

The next day, he texted Hollander after practice.

Lily: Come over to my house the day before the game in Boston. You get in early that day. Come by once you check in.

“Roz, you still seeing that Montreal girl?” Cliff asked as they changed after practice.

“Yes, when we are in same city.” Ilya responded, eyes on his phone. He’d long given up hiding the existence of Jane from Marley. He was not stupid, despite what the rest of the league thought, and he was Ilya’s best friend on the team.

“Damn, must be getting serious,” Marley said, Ilya finally seeing Hollander respond.

Jane: Okay.

Ilya grinned, fidgeting with his mother’s cross.

“What’s with the grin?” Marley asked, Ilya looking up at him.

“Jane is going to come to my house next time she is in Boston.” Ilya finally admitted. “This is first time we have ever done this.”

Marley clapped him on the back, grinning. “All right! Good job, Roz.”

“It’s nothing, just—”

“Ilya.” Marley gave him a look. “I’m not going to pry. I’m just happy for you. If you need anything, let me know, okay?” he grabbed his bag and started to leave. “You deserve to be happy. I hope she can help with that.”

He left, and Ilya was left alone in the locker room.

“Yeah,” Ilya said out loud, his voice echoing in the empty room. “I hope so too.”

Ilya grabbed his bag, typing with one hand as he made a list of everything he needed to do to make Hollander feel comfortable in his home.

If this was going to be his one chance, if this was all he was ever going to be able to have with Shane...he had to do it right.

~~

Shane could barely keep the anticipation from bubbling up through check-in. This was the first time he and Rozanov had met up before a game. And it was the first time that Shane was going to his house instead of a hotel room.

Part of him worried that something might be wrong. They never met before a game, only after. What if this was Ilya telling him that they were through, and he had found someone else?

No, that couldn’t be it. Ilya would have just ghosted him again if he didn’t want to see him, after all. Shane had nothing to worry about.

He made it to the room he was sharing with Hayden, Ilya texting him his address. He managed to wait a few minutes before getting to his feet and grabbing his jacket.

“I’m, uh, heading out for a bit.” He mentioned as he headed to the door.

“Cool.”

“I’m just going to meet a friend.” He tried to sound casual. “I’ll be back later.”

Based on the look Hayden gave him, he failed at being casual. “I won’t wait up.”

“It’s not like that.” Shane argued, knowing that it was, in fact, exactly like that. “It’s just a... a friend. We’re just going to hang out. Like friends do.”

Hayden raised an eyebrow. “So Lily’s just a buddy?”

The blood in Shane’s veins turned to ice. “What?”

“Chill.” Hayden rolled his eyes. “I know you text a Lily. You’ve been doing it for years, and you are not subtle.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

Hayden snorted. “Okay, go get laid, weirdo.” He paused. “Or don’t. I don’t care.”

“Good.”

“I hope you do get laid, though. You always play better after seeing her.”

Shane bristled. “Go fuck yourself.”

“Oh, I plan to.” Hayden waggled his eyebrows. “Probably more than once. Gotta love having private time in a hotel room.”

“Gross.” Shane made a face and ran for the door before Hayden could give him any more details. “Bye!”

He could hear Hayden cackling as the door shut behind him and Shane closed his eyes tight. Maybe if he concentrated he could forget the last few moments had ever happened.

He knew that Hayden had sex, because there was no other way to explain the sheer number of kids that the other man had, but that didn’t mean he ever needed to hear anything about it.

Shane shuddered as he went to the elevator, taking out his phone to call an Uber.

~~

Shane walked through the streets of Rozanov’s neighborhood, head down with his hood up. He’d asked the Uber driver to drop him off a few blocks away, just in case someone saw him being dropped off at Rozanov’s house.

As he reached the address Rozanov had sent him, Shane was surprised to see a house that looked a bit like his cottage. Shane wasn’t sure what he was expecting Rozanov’s house to look like, but somehow it still surprised him,

Shane knocked on the door, and Rozanov opened it after what felt like an eternity. He was shirtless, wearing only a pair of black sweatpants that hung almost tantalizingly low on his hips.

“Are you going to stand out here all day, or are you going to come in?” Rozanov asked with a raised eyebrow. Shane flushed as he realized that he’d been staring at Ilya’s bare chest for longer than he should have.

“Sorry.” He shouldered past him, the other man letting out an amused chuckle.

“Do not apologize. Is good that you want to look. Is a good sight, no?”

Shane rolled his eyes, pausing just inside the door.

“Do I take my shoes off?” Shane asked, already ready to toe them off and place them just inside the door

“No, you’re good.” Rozanov told him as Shane got a good look at the house.

“Wow.” he took a step inside, taking off his jacket and hanging it on a hook. His house was modern, with large glass windows and clean edges. It reminded Shane a bit of his cottage, if he were being honest, but he knew that was just a coincidence.

“Wow!” he said again, entering the open plan kitchen. “This place is great. “Did you get this built, or do you know who did?”

Rozanov, who had trailed behind him, gave a light snort. “Mr. Real Estate.”

Shane rolled his eyes at him. “That’s not what I meant. I just...” Rozanov moved towards him, Shane swallowing hard. “You think we need to talk?”

“No, after.”

“Okay.”

Rozanov moved towards Shane, claiming his mouth in a kiss that left them both breathless. Shane was dimly aware of them moving backward, his hip letting the edge of the kitchen island. Before he could move away, Ilya had lifted him onto the island in one fell swoop, Shane laughing into his mouth. He’d only ever been with women before: he’d never had a partner who could manhandle him and lift him like he weighed nothing. He’d be lying if he said that he didn’t enjoy it.

~~

Ilya glanced over at Shane after they’d finished, not believing that they were there together. Shane had never come to his house before. They’d never been to each other’s houses before at all: Ilya was not stupid, he knew that the condo they met at in Montreal was not where Shane lived.

But now Shane was here, in his bed, stretched out in his dark blue sheets like he had been there a million times before. Like he belonged there.

“I should go,” Shane admitted, starting to pull away.

“Or you could stay,” Ilya suggested, trying to keep his voice calm. His feet shifted underneath the blanket as he waited for Shane to respond.

“Stay?” Shane asked, something in his eyes that Ilya feared reading into. “Here? With you?”

“Well, I am not going to leave Hollander. It’s my house.”

Shane flushed a deep red, his freckles standing out more. “Right. I just meant—”

“Hollander, stay here tonight.” Ilya pressed a kiss to Shane’s shoulder, feeling the other man relax into his touch. “I am not done with you,” he pulled away, forcing his tone to be more nonchalant. “And we have afternoon game tomorrow, so no morning practice.”

Shane’s eyes darkened for a moment before he pulled away. “I told Hayden I’d be back tonight.”

“Is Hayden your mother?” Ilya asked, eyebrow raised.

“No.”

“No, he’s not?”

“Fuck off.” Shane made a face at him

“Who cares what you told Hayden?” Ilya knew that he was close to overplaying his hand, but he did not care. He wanted more time with Hollander. He wanted everything he could get with him.

“Stay.” He said one final time, hoping that it would be enough.

Shane was quiet for a long moment, and then he finally nodded. “Okay.”

Ilya couldn’t believe it. “Okay?”

“Okay.” Shane paused. “I just have to be back in time—”

“Yes, Hollander. I will get you back in plenty of time for you to lose to me on the ice. Just stay with me for now.”

“Fuck you.” Shane shoved him. “But yes, I’ll stay.”

“Good.” Ilya pulled Shane close, moving them so they were lying down. “And now we sleep.”

“And people say I’m bossy.”

Ilya nipped at Shane’s ear, the other man letting out a yelp.

“Come now, Hollander. You need all the rest you can get before tomorrow’s game if I am to feel good about beating you.”

“In that case, maybe I should leave.” Shane made no effort to move from Ilya’s arms, but Ilya let out an annoyed huff anyway.

“No, I think you are stuck with me now.”

Shane yawned, his eyes already drifting closed. “Okay.”

Ilya watched him for a moment longer, not able to believe that Shane had actually stayed. And then his eyelids began to grow heavy, and he joined Shane in his rest.

~~

Ilya woke first, his arms wrapped around Shane. He blinked awake, taking in the sight before him. Earlier, he’d thought that there wasn’t a more beautiful sight than Shane on top of him, riding his cock like he had been born to do so.

But this moment, with Shane curled up in his bed, in Ilya’s arms? That was the most beautiful thing he could have ever imagined.

He couldn’t see Shane’s face from his current position. He wondered what it looked like when Shane was asleep, with none of the pressures of his day-to-day life weighing upon him.

Ilya wanted to see that. He wanted to see Shane at peace with himself, as if nothing else mattered. He wanted Shane to wake up in his bed, in his arms, for the rest of his life.

But he couldn’t have that. He knew it was impossible. If the league found out, if his family got word of what he was doing with his supposed rival? He would never be able to go home again. He would not be able to say goodbye to his father before he passed, or see his mother’s grave one last time.

And yet, some part of him thought that having Shane might be worth all of that.

But he knew better. Instead, he would focus on this one day. He would let himself have Shane Hollander the way that he wanted to for a single day.

And maybe, just maybe, that would be enough.

He felt Shane start to stir, and Ilya closed his eyes, pretending to be asleep. He felt Shane twist around in his arms, and he remained still until he felt Shane brush a kiss across his brow.

It was different than the first time Shane had kissed him like that in Montreal. That time felt almost absentminded, as if Shane was operating on instinct.

This...this felt like a choice that Shane made.

"Mmm." Shane leaned into Ilya's arm, curling against him like a sleepy cat.

Ilya yawned. "I'm hungry."

"For what?" He could hear the smile in Shane's voice, and Ilya squeezed his chest playfully.

"For food, pervert." Ilya untangled himself from Shane, grabbed clothes for the two of them, and got dressed. Shane followed suit, and soon he was sitting at Ilya's kitchen island as Ilya slid a can of ginger ale over to him.

He hoped he wouldn't ask why Ilya just happened to have ginger ale in his apartment. Maybe he could pass it off as something a teammate enjoyed.

"You like tuna melt?" He asked, looking at Shane from across the island. He tried not to think about how good Shane looked in his clothes. How right all of this felt.

A strange expression crossed Shane's face. "You want to make me a tuna melt?"

Ilya shrugged, trying to act like it was nothing and that he hadn't bought the ingredients for a tuna melt because Shane mentioned liking them in an interview after his first Cup win. "I was going to make one for me. I can make two."

Shane nodded, that strange expression still on his face. "Yeah. that-that would be nice."

Ilya turned to get the ingredients from the fridge, jumping for joy on the inside.

"You head to Florida after this, right?" he asked as he grabbed the ingredients.

"Yeah, right after the game," Shane said as Ilya placed the ingredients on the island. "We go to Tampa, then Sunrise, then Dallas, and St. Louis."

"Ah, all the hot spots," he quipped, Shane snorting in response.

Ilya quickly assembled the tuna melts, putting them in the panini press to cook. "Ginger ale cold enough?"

"Yeah, it's great." Shane took another sip.

"Good." Ilya let himself give Shane a small smile. "Food will be ready soon."

Shane let out a breath, shifting in his seat. “What do you want to do until it’s ready? I think the Buffalo game is on.”

Ilya let out a small laugh. “Even when relaxing, you are thinking about hockey, huh?”

Shane looked down, a light flush obscuring his freckles. “I guess I’m a little obsessed.”

Ilya shook his head. “Do not misunderstand, I like it. You would have been a Russian hockey coach’s dream player: all about the game, all the time.”

Shane looked up, his expression a little lighter. “So does that mean you want to watch the game?”

Ilya let out a sigh, pretending to give in. He couldn’t let Hollander know that he would do anything he asked. “Fine. Maybe watching a terrible team lose will prepare you for Montreal losing tomorrow.”

“Fuck you, Rozanov, we’re going to wipe the floor with you.”

“If you say so, Hollander.”

The two of them moved to the living room where Shane immediately took a seat on the couch. Ilya stayed standing, switching on the game just in time for them to see Ryan Price lay out a defenseman with one punch.

“Jesus Christ!” Ilya swore, looking at the TV. Even for hockey, that was a brutal hit.

“You know this guy, Ryan Price?” Ilya asked, pointing at the TV.

“Yeah, from playing against him and not wanting to fight him,” Shane snorted. “You did a season with him, right?”

“Mmm.” Ilya nodded, looking at Shane as he took a seat on the couch. He crossed his arms over his chest as he leaned back, as if trying to stop himself from reaching out and pulling Shane close. “He is not what you would think.”

“How so?”

Ilya frowned to himself, trying to figure out the best way to phrase it. Sometimes he hated that English was his second language. Things were so much easier in Russian. “Like, he’s quiet.” He finally said. Doesn’t talk. Keeps to himself. Not bad guy. But doesn’t make friends.”

“Well, he gets traded every season.” Shane pointed out, and Ilya nodded. “Tough to make friends that way.”

“Probably he wants to get traded again,” Ilya suggested. “Buffalo is terrible.”

“Yeah, and their team sucks too.” Shane quipped, Ilya snorting in surprise. Shane made jokes so rarely that it took Ilya by surprise every time.

“And people say you’re not funny.” Ilya chuckled, Shane giving him an offended look.

“They do?”

“Yeah. They say you’re boring, too.” Ilya told him, chuckling at the offended kitten look on Shane’s face.

“Who says that?”

“Me.” Ilya let out a wink, and Shane laughed.

“What’s your favorite city to play in?” Shane asked, Ilya blinking at the change in subject.

“On the road?”

Shane nodded and Ilya thought for a moment. No one had asked him that in a while, if they had ever asked him that at all. That was what made Shane so different: he asked questions and genuinely wanted to know the answers. Ilya had never met someone like him before.

“I like New York, ’cause it’s New York,” he snorted. “They fucking hate me there.”

“They hate you everywhere.”

“No, not Florida.” Ilya corrected him. “It’s full of Boston people,” Shane nodded at that, and Ilya turned to him. “And you?”

“Uh, I like Ottawa, ’cause it’s my hometown,” Shane told him, Ilya unsurprised “Toronto, Winnipeg...I’m happy they have a team again.”

Ilyas couldn’t help but laugh as Shane listed the most boring cities in North America to play hockey in.

“What, are those boring answers?” Shane frowned at him, and Ilya let out a laugh.

“Yes!”

“Well, I like the hot places too,” Shane defended Ilya raising an eyebrow at him. “Hot, like weather hot.”

“Ah, okay.” Ilya did not believe him for a second, but that was okay. He could be exciting enough for both of them.

“LA is hot,” he offered after a long moment, wanting to test a theory he had about Shane Hollander. “Hot women.”

He saw Shane tense out of the corner of his eye, the moment over in an instant. “Yeah, sure. I mean, there are hot women everywhere.”

Ilya hummed, trying to think of what else he could say.

“There is a girl I like here very much, Svetlana.”

“Oh?” Shane’s voice was almost too casual, and Ilya couldn’t help but steal a glance at him. He seemed fixated on the TV in front of him.

“She’s old friend, from Russia.” Ilya explained, seeing Shane’s jaw twitch ever so slightly. “Her father was famous goaltender of Soviet team. She knows everything about hockey.” Ilya could hear

himself bragging a little, but he could not help it. Svetlana was his best friend in addition to being his lover. He would sing her praises from the rooftop if he could.

“Cool.” Shane took another bite of his sandwich

“And she likes you very much,” Ilya told him, seeing Shane freeze.

“Oh.” He said, Ilya watching as he took a long drink, the muscles in his throat working. “That’s nice.”

Ilya knew he should stop pushing, but part of him wanted to see Shane’s reaction. “Maybe I give her your number, if you ever decide you want an actual Boston girl.”

He watched as Shane’s eyes went wide, the other man giving him a strange look. “Why are you offering me your girlfriend’s number, Rozanov?”

Ilya chuckled. “Oh no, you misunderstand me. Svetlana is not my girlfriend.”

“She’s not?”

“No. She’s old friend.” Ilya paused for a moment before elaborating. “Sometimes we fuck, but...” he shrugged. “She’s busy these days, you know, new business selling fancy cars.”

“Wow.” Shane’s face was hard for Ilya to read. “So she’s the one behind your massive sports car collection. Sounds perfect for you.”

“Yes, it’s close to that, but...” Ilya trailed off, and he could see Shane giving him an impatient look.

“But what?”

“But it’s nothing more than that for either of us.” Ilya shrugged. “But it’s nice to have regular woman like that around.

Shane raised an eyebrow at him. “You think she’s the only woman in Boston who’d sleep with you?”

“Mmm.” Ilya took a sip of his drink before answering. “I think I could find someone else. An actress, or a model.” He gave Shane a cheeky grin. But you know me. I’m lazy, so...”

Shane shook his head, an intensity in his eyes that took Ilya’s breath away. “I don’t know that side of you at all.”

Ilya froze, pinned by Shane’s stare. He could feel himself lean in, ever so slightly.

And then the timer went off for the oven. Shane went as if to get up, but Ilya waved him off.

“No, stay, stay. I’ll get it.”

“Are you sure?”

“You are my guest, Hollander. Let me take care of you.”

Ilya retreated to the kitchen, placing his hand on the counter and taking a deep breath. Maybe this was a mistake. He had never spent so much time alone with Hollander before. With every passing second, he could feel his resolve slipping. But he would remain strong. He could do this. He could be here with Hollander and now let on how he felt.

He plated up the sandwiches and brought them to the living room. Shane took the plate from him with a smile, and Ilya sat on the couch next to him.

“You like them?” Ilya asked, trying to get the conversation from earlier back on track as they ate.

“Yeah.” Shane wiped his mouth, nodding at Ilya as he chewed. “I love tuna melts.”

Ilya tried to forget the hour he spent formulating a grocery list based on Hollander’s food preferences, rolling his eyes. “Not the sandwich, Hollander.”

Shane gave him a confused look.

“Girls.” Ilya clarified, raising an eyebrow at Shane. “I never hear about you with girls.”

“I mean, it’s private.” Shane flushed a deep red and Ilya couldn’t resist the urge to tease him.

“Right, private.” Ilya snorted. “Like who you fuck in your spare time is so scandalous. Other than me, of course.”

Shane flushed a deeper red. “I keep a lot of things private. Obviously.”

Ilya shrugged, figuring there was more to the story but knowing Hollander wouldn’t appreciate him pushing.

“I like girls.” Ilya volunteered.

Shane huffed out a laugh. “Yeah, no shit.”

“But I also like you.” Ilya set, Shane letting out a laugh.

“Lucky me.”

Ilya thought he was showing too much, so he tried to pull back. “Not as person, of course.”

“Of course not, I’m boring.”

Ilya leaned in close, catching a bit of sauce from the corner of Hollander’s mouth with his thumb. “But you have a good mouth.” He could feel Shane’s eyes on him as he licked the sauce off his thumb, the other man’s face turning pink.

Ilya loved making his kotik blush. It made his constellations of freckles all the more prominent.

And then Ilya’s phone rang, and Ilya pulled away with a sigh. He checked his phone, stiffening when he saw his father’s number flashing across the screen. His father rarely called him, and it was never for good reasons.

“Sorry. I have to take this.” He stepped away, answering his phone.

“Hello, Father.” He said before his father cut him off.

“Didn’t you get my message?”

“Yes, I got your message.”

“Well, you didn’t answer me.” Something in his father’s voice sounded off, and Ilya’s blood ran cold.

“I did answer you, Father.” he tried to keep his voice calm, knowing that anger would no go over well when his father was like this. “We spoke yesterday.”

“Liar!”

“Father...” Ilya ran a hand through his hair. He tried to keep his voice down, knowing that Shane was on the couch nearby watching him. “Father, where is Alexei?”

“Who?”

“My brother Alexei.” Ilya reminded him. “Is he there with you?”

“No!”

“Are you alone?” Ilya tried to keep from panicking. “Is Polina there?”

“Who is that?”

“Polina, she is your wife.”

“My wife is your mother, Irina.”

Ilya let out a breath. “Father, stay calm. I will call Alexei. I will call him.

Ilya quickly dialed Alexei’s number, his voice dropping into a furious hiss when his brother’s drowsy voice answered the phone.

“Where the fuck are you?” He hissed. “Dad is alone, and he’s freaking out.”

“Relax, Ilya. I’ll swing by later when I get some coffee.”

Ilya could barely keep his voice low. “I fucking pay you to be there with him, you asshole!”

“If you cared so much, why aren’t you here with him?”

“You smug piece of—”

“I’d stop now, Ilya.”

Alexei hung up the phone, Ilya’s blood boiling at his dismissive attitude.

This was the man whom he trusted with his father. How could Alexei care so little about their own father?

He made his way back over to the couch, flopping down next to Shane. He could tell that the other man was giving him a look, but he tried to ignore it. He picked up his sandwich, finished what remained, and then turned to Shane.

“You still hungry?” He asked.

Shane shook his head. “No, but thank you. That was great.”

“Good.” Ilya nodded. “I am glad you enjoyed it.”

There was silence for a moment and then—

“How is your father?” Shane asked, and Ilya froze. Trying to remain casual, he turned to Shane.

“Ah, you speak Russian now?” Ilya asked, eyebrow raised.

Shane gave him a look. “I know the word for father.”

Ilya shrugged. “Family is complicated.”

Ilya leaned back against the couch cushions, pulling Shane with him. He maneuvered the other man until his head was resting on Ilya’s chest, just above his heart. Ilya carded hand through Shane’s hair, inky tendrils twisting around his fingers. He pressed a kiss to Shane’s head, hoping that Shane would mistake it as his hand moving through his hair.

Ilya could not offer his heart to Shane Hollander. He knew that would never be possible. But he could give Shane this moment between them. A movement that Ilya would carry in his heart for the rest of his days, a constant reminder of the man he could not allow himself to love.

They stayed like that for a moment, suspended in time like a bug in amber, when Ilya suddenly felt Shane’s hand on his cock through his sweatpants. Shane turned his head, pressing a kiss to Ilya’s heart before trailing his lips down his stomach. Ilya arched into the touch, his movements slow and unhurried.

This wasn’t like every other time they had been together. They did not only have a few stolen hours. They had all day and all night. There was no need to rush.

Shane started to nose at Ilya’s cock, Ilya slipping his hands under Shane’s borrowed t-shirt to caress him. And then Shane lifted his head, moving to straddle Ilya. He pulled off his shirt, leaning in to kiss Ilya even as his hands went to the waistband of the other man’s sweats. Ilya lifted the two of them off the couch for a moment, just long enough for him to push his sweatpants down to his ankles, before groaning into Shane’s mouth as the other man reached for his cock.

Shane barely lifted from his lap long enough to take off his own pants, sinking down onto Ilya’s cock before he could blink.

“Oh, fuck.” Ilya groaned, Shane pressing his lips to Ilya’s brow.

The two moved together as if they had become one, Ilya groaning with every move of Shane’s body against him.

“Oh, fuck, Hollander!” he said, feeling Shane’s grin where his lips were pressed against his neck.

Ilya pulled Shane's lips to his, giving him a hungry kiss.

"You gonna come for me, Rozanov?" Shane asked as they broke away, Ilya growling in response.

"Fucking make me," Ilya said before keening high in his throat.

He could feel his release coming, his gut clenching as the sensations spiraled higher and harder.

"Oh, fuck, Shane!" Ilya called out, sagging against the couch cushions as he came.

"Ilya." Shane sighed in response, coming right after him.

The two of them stayed locked together, frozen in the heat of the moment, before Ilya realized something that made his heart stop.

He'd called Shane by his first name. They never did that in all the years that they'd been doing this. How could he have been so stupid? Hollander was going to overthink this and run.

Just then, he heard Shane swear and start to move away from him.

"What is wrong?" Ilya asked, a part of him knowing the answer.

He had been too much, like he always was, and now Hollander was going to leave the way everyone did.

"Fuck. I am so sorry." Shane kept saying as he pulled away from Ilya, starting to get dressed. "I need to fix this."

Ilya felt his heart drop, and then—

"Where do you keep your cleaning supplies?"

Ilya blinked at him in confusion. "My what?"

"I messed up your couch. I have to clean it!"

Ilya looked to his side, and he could see white drops against his couch. He burst out laughing, Shane glaring at him.

"This is not a laughing matter, Rozanov!"

"No, I know." Ilya got up, grabbing Shane around the waist and throwing him over his shoulder.

"But maybe we should get clean before we worry about the couch. Hmm?"

"Put me down!" Shane pounded against his back, Ilya barely noticing. "We are the same size. How are you able to do this?"

Ilya rolled his eyes. "Hollander, you were drowning in my shirt. We are not the same size."

"That shirt is oversized!"

"Not that oversized." He put Shane down when he reached the bathroom, the other man shooting him a glare. "Now, how about we shower and then worry about the couch later?"

Shane rolled his eyes. "Fine, but we clean it right after we're done."

"Absolutely." Ilya hustled him into the shower, part of him amused at how indignant he could get.

~~

Shane knew he should have left. A part of him had wanted to run the second Ilya had looked at him like he was something precious. Something cherished. But he managed to keep himself from running, instead focusing on the mess he'd made of the couch.

Even then, he could have found an excuse to leave. He could have pretended that there was a team dinner instead of eating sushi at Ilya's kitchen island, or said that he wanted to sleep in his own bed.

Instead, he was here, Ilya pressed against him as his hands made their way down Shane's body.

Ilya nipped at his skin, Shane breathless with anticipation. His eyes gleamed as he grabbed the lube from the bedside table, slicking up his fingers.

Shane leaned forward to help, but Ilya pushed him back down.

"Stay there," Ilya told him, his eyes darkening as he took in Shane. "Let me do this."

Shane nodded as Ilya surged forward, capturing Shane's lips again. His lips soon left Shane's, and Shane watched as Ilya kissed down his chest.

His breath hitched in his chest as Ilya teased his nipples with his teeth, the slightest touch setting him aflame.

"Ilya." Shane reached for him, only for Ilya to bat his hands away. "Don't tease me."

Ilya winked at Shane as he kissed lower, finally reaching Shane's cock.

Just as Ilya took his cock into his mouth, Shane jerked as he felt one of Ilya's fingers circling his hole, pressing inside.

Shane knew he could move, that he could guide Ilya's head or do something. But Ilya told him not to move, and a part of him craved the peace that came with following Ilya.

Before Shane knew it, Ilya was tracing the slit of his cock with his tongue while a second finger was getting pushed in.

"Ilya, please," Shane begged as his hips bucked, the other man easily holding him down. He could feel Ilya smirking around him as he started to scissor his fingers. Shane moaned loudly as he tried to keep himself from coming. Not that it was easy. Ilya could take him apart with his touch alone.

Time passed slowly but also raced by at the speed of light. Before Shane knew it, Ilya was pulling back and removing his fingers. Shane keened slightly at the loss before Ilya pulled him into a kiss. Shane moaned into the kiss, tasting himself on Ilya's tongue.

When Ilya pulled away, his eyes glinted as he pushed himself into Shane. The two of them panted, their breaths heavy as they adjusted to the sensations. Soon, all too soon, Ilya pulled out, snapping his hips slightly as he pushed back in. Shane groaned at the slow pace, reaching to hold onto Ilya's hips. Before he could, Ilya grabbed both of his wrists and pinned them between the two of them.

“Not yet.” Ilya breathed as he kept up the torturously slow pace. “I want to take my time with you.” Ilya leaned in, his lips grazing a spot on Shane’s neck. “Let me. Please.”

Shane nodded, and Ilya smirked against him as the pace slightly quickened. Shane tried to free his wrists, but Ilya held firm. Propping himself up on one arm, Ilya continued to move as he spoke to Shane.

“If I could have you here all the time, in my bed like this? I would die happy man.”

“I know.” Shane groaned as he felt himself getting closer and closer. “Ilya, I’m—”

“I know.” Ilya kissed Shane hard. “Come for me.”

Shane screamed as he came, his release splattering across both their chests. Ilya’s hips stuttered, once, twice, until he finally came with a long groan.

The two of them collapsed against each other, breathless.

Later that night, as they curled up together, Shane realized something important.

He had been lying before when he told Ilya that he liked girls. He didn’t. Maybe he never had. All he knew was that he liked Ilya, and something in that terrified him.



Chapter 5

Shane had no clue what the hell he was doing at this party.

JJ had called him after practice and all but insisted that he come to his friend's restaurant, telling him that the place was full of movie stars. Shane didn't really care about any of that. He just wanted to relax at home and not have to deal with people giving him strange looks for ordering ginger ale at a party.

Ginger ale was a common soda. Why did people act like ordering that was so odd? It wasn't like he was ordering milk or something strange.

At least this party, as loud as it was, was a distraction from staring at his phone, wondering if Ilya would call. Things hadn't changed between them since that day that Shane spent at his house, but Shane couldn't stop wishing that they had. Something had felt different about that day. The way Ilya had looked with him, the easy domesticity of sharing a meal together. The way that Ilya had sighed out his name, looking at him as though he were the only person on earth. It was everything that Shane had wanted, and everything he never thought he'd be able to have.

Shane shook himself slightly as he walked through the restaurant. He had to try to get Ilya Rozanov out of his head, even just for a little while. After all, he was sure that Rozanov was not spending his time worrying about Shane. He was probably busy fucking pretty, perfect Svetlana.

"Are you here to help me finish these fries?" a woman asked him as he neared a table. Shane turned, his mouth opening slightly when he realized he was staring at Rose Landry. He'd been a big fan of hers for a while. He knew that some of the cast of her new movie were at the restaurant, but he had never expected her to be there.

"The chef gave them to me, and they are really good," she kept talking, not seeming to notice him staring at her. "I'm not going to fit in my costume if I eat them all."

Shane almost never ate fries during the season, but sitting with her would probably be better than wandering through the restaurant, so he took a seat. She pushed the plate towards him, and he grabbed a fry, groaning as the salty taste filled his mouth.

"Oh, Jesus Christ, these are so good!" he groaned, rose laughing.

"Right? I'm Rose, by the way," she held out a hand, Shane shaking it.

"I'm Shane." he shook his head, unable to believe that he was sitting across from one of his favorite movie stars. "I'm... Wow, I'm a big fan."

"You're very sweet," she told him. "Would you be surprised to know that I'm a fan of yours?"

Shane blinked in surprise. "Really?"

"Mm-hmm."

The two of them settled into an easy conversation. Rose had grown up in Michigan with three brothers who loved hockey, so she knew plenty about the sport. She asked him questions about

what it was like to play professionally, and Shane asked her about some of the movies that he's seen.

Talking with her was nice, easy even. It was refreshing to talk to someone who didn't want anything from him.

"So, um, are you going to be in town a little while this time?" Shane asked as the night started to wind down.

Rose gave him a grin as she reached for his hand. "Why, are you offering to be my tour guide this time?"

Shane flushed a deep red. "Sorry, I think I might have—"

"Oh." Rose looked down, red filling her cheeks. "Sorry, I guess I thought you were—"

"You're really pretty," Shane rushed to assure her. And she was. She was gorgeous. She was everything that he should want in a girlfriend, everything that anyone else would want in a girlfriend, and yet... when he looked into her blue eyes, he wished that they belonged to someone else. "I'm just—I don't think we'd be compatible."

Rose raised her eyebrows, giving him a curious look. "Not compatible."

"Yeah." Shane was looking at the empty plate of fries like it was the most interesting thing in the world. "Not compatible."

Silence stretched between them, so thick Shane could feel it pressing against his skin. And then—

"Okay."

Shane blinked, looking up at her. "Okay?"

"Yeah," Rose told him. "Okay. We aren't compatible. But maybe we can at least be friends?"

Shane stared at her, not believing how easy that was. "You aren't curious as to why I think we aren't compatible?"

"Not really." Rose gave Shane a slight smirk. "I've known plenty of guys who told me we weren't compatible, and they were all right. But they also all made excellent friends. So at least this way we skipped the awkward middle part."

Shane laughed, holding out his hand. "Friends."

She took it, the two of them grinning and not noticing the person snapping their picture.

~~

The next morning, Shane was putting together his morning smoothie when his phone buzzed with a text.

Lily: So, you are dating Rose Landry now?

Shane frowned at the text he saw when he woke up the next morning.

Shane: No? Why do you ask?

Ilya sent him a picture of Shane and Rose from the night before, the angle making it look like they were holding hands. It was from a gossip Twitter account, speculating whether or not they were dating.

Shane: Jesus, that's not what happened. We met up at a restaurant thing, and we chatted for a while. That picture was me shaking her hand after we decided to be friends.

It took Ilya a long time to respond, and then Shane's phone buzzed with an incoming call.

Shane picked it up, Ilya's amused voice filling his ears.

"You are sitting across from famous movie star, and you decide to shake her hand and say, 'Let's be friends?'"

Shane flushed a deep red. "It seemed like a good idea at the time!"

"Hollander, you are hopeless with women. How do you fumble a date with Rose Landry?"

"I didn't fumble her!" Shane insisted. "I just- I didn't think we were compatible."

There was silence on the line for a long moment, and then Ilya scoffed. "That is what someone who fumbled movie star would say."

Shane groaned. "You're hopeless."

"I could say the same about you."

"Well at least we have that in common."

"True." Ilya paused. "Though there is one way we differ."

Shane tensed. "Oh? And what would that be?"

"Well, I am going to win at Montreal game next month, and you are not."

"Fuck you! You're not beating me at center ice."

"Watch me, Hollander."

Shane was suddenly reminded of a dream he had where Ilya had fucked in the middle of center ice, and his face grew hot.

"I should probably go, I have to get ready for practice," he said, wishing he didn't have to go.

"See you next month, Hollander."

The line went dead, and Shane started to get ready for the day. But in the back of his mind, he wondered what it meant that Ilya had seen that picture and immediately texted Shane.

If Ilya was fucking other people, going to clubs and bringing someone home nearly every night, why did he care whether or not Shane was dating a movie star? Was it just because he didn't think Shane would sleep with him anymore if he was in a relationship?

Shane figured that had to be it, and refused to let himself consider that maybe, maybe, Ilya wanted more out of their current arrangement.

~~

Shane had barely made it to the locker room before JJ came across him.

“Capitaine, you dog!” He clapped a hand around Shane’s shoulder, the other man jumping in surprise. “I invite you to a party and you get a date with Rose Landry? Well done.”

“It’s not like that,” Shaner told him. “Rose and I are just friends.”

JJ rolled his eyes. “Capitaine, you don’t have to lie to me, I am happy for you!”

JJ went into the locker room before Shane could correct him, Shane groaning. He was going to get that a lot; he could just tell.

It didn’t stop there.

“Nice pass, Hollander. Rose’ll be impressed at the next game!

“Okay, everyone who didn’t hook up with a movie star, take shots on goal!

“Think Rose could hook me up with one of her co-stars?”

They said cruder things too after they found out what really happened, Shane’s face almost permanently red under his helmet for the rest of practice.

He weathered his team’s comments during practice as best he could, finally sagging back onto the locker room bench after most of the team had left.

“Everything okay?” Hayden asked, hanging back for a second.

Shane let out a frustrated noise. “It’s just the jokes about me dating Rose Landry kind of got to me today. And then, if I had to listen to one more person say I fumbled dating a movie star—”

“So why not actually date her?” Hayden leaned against the locker as Shane finished getting changed. “JJ said it seemed like you hit it off with her.”

“As friends!”

“But why not let it be more? Don’t you want to have an actual relationship?”

“I thought we tabled this discussion after the aquarium trip.”

“You tabled it, I lay in wait until it could be brought up again.”

“Of course you did.” Shane grabbed his bag, and the two of them walked out of the locker room. “She’s nice, and I liked talking to her, but..” he shrugged. “I’m just not interested.”

Hayden stopped walking for a second. “Please tell me that you didn’t turn down Rose Landry because of your thing with Boston Lily.”

Shane didn't answer, and Hayden groaned. "Shane, are you kidding me? You turned down a celebrity because of your fuckbuddy?"

"It's not like that!"

"Isn't it?" Hayden turned to face Shane, concern etched into every line of his face. "Shane. You've been seeing this woman for years. No one has ever met her. You don't bring her around; you've never been seen in public with her. Have you ever even been on a date with her? Shane looked down, and Hayden kept going. "You're not dating her, you're just convenient to her."

Shane flushed a deep red. "It isn't like that. Lily cares about me."

Hayden seemed to sense that Shane wasn't willing to budge. "Shane. I care about you, you know this." He put a hand on Shane's shoulder. "I just worry about you."

"I know."

"Maybe I'm wrong, and Lily cares about you. Maybe what you have is real." Hayden sighed as they got to their cars. "I hope I am wrong, because I want you to be happy, Shane."

"That's all I want."

Hayden gave him a look. "I hope you and Lily can be as happy as Jackie and me someday. I just don't want your hope of things working out with her to keep you from finding something real."

Hayden got into his car, leaving Shane standing in the parking lot.

The entire drive home, Shane kept thinking about what Hayden had said. The worst part? He was probably right.

What was he doing with Ilya Rozanov? The two of them had been fucking for years, and the last time in Boston was the first time that they'd even done anything other than fuck.

Maybe Hayden was right to be worried about him. Hell, his own parents were worried about him. His mom had texted him again, asking if he wanted to go to Wimbledon and sit next to that Swedish princess. He'd turned her down, and now she was texting him about whether or not the rumors about him and Rose were true. He wondered if she'd be disappointed to learn the truth.

He wished that he could tell his parents and Hayden not to worry, that he was happy. He wished that he could be honest with them about who he loved. But if he was. Being honest? He wasn't happy. And he didn't think he would be until he finally told Ilya how he felt. And maybe one day, Shane could be honest with them and let everyone in his life know that he was in love with Ilya Rozanov.

He could only hope that one day, he would get the chance.

~~

Ilya was sitting on the couch, watching hockey with Svetlana. Which really meant listening to her lambast the various teams' poor choices.

"Matheson on the power play while Petrov warms the bench." Svetlana let out an annoyed huff. "Jesus Christ. It's like Colorado doesn't want to make the playoffs."

“Since when do you care what Colorado does?” Ilya fussed with a lighter, rolling his eyes at Svetlana.

“Since when did you start smoking again?” She pointed out, his face shuttering.

“I haven’t started again.” He deflected, thinking of a disapproving look from a face full of freckles. “I just smoke every once in a while.”

Svetlana narrowed her eyes but seemed to accept that. “I care about all hockey teams, as you well know.”

“Of course.”

She crossed her arms and leaned back in her seat. “Especially ones that put good Russian players on the second shift of the power play so mediocre Canadian players can waste a minute and a half with the man advantage.”

“Mediocre?” Ilya asked, raising an eyebrow. “You think Matheson is mediocre?”

“Yes.” She looked at him, eyebrow raised, “You can quote me on that the next time you see him.”

“I’ll be sure to tell him that when I see him at the All-Star Game.” Ilya scoffed. “I’m sure getting my teeth knocked out before I even get on the ice is exactly what the MLH wants to see that weekend.”

“It might be worth it.”

Ilya gave her an offended look. “You would have me risk my perfect smile to get a jab in at Matheson?”

“It’s not that pretty a smile.”

“You wound me, Svetlana. And here I thought you were my friend.

Svetlana laughed, turning back to the game. “It’s so embarrassing that Matheson is even playing.”

“The people voted.” Ilya reminded her. “They love him.”

“The people are wrong.” She retorted before pausing. “You’re playing on the same team as Hollander this year, right?”

“Is he also mediocre?” Ilya asked, trying not to react to Shane’s name.

“No, he’s amazing.” Svetlana sighed. “Those hands.” She bit her lip. “And he’s gorgeous.” She gave him a teasing look, “Now that is a smile that I would not risk under any circumstances.”

Ilya tried to ignore the swirling jealousy in his stomach. “If you say so.”

“What?” Svetlana seemed to think that there was something wrong with his reaction. “You know he’s gorgeous. And you know he’s good.”

“He’s very good.” Ilya agreed. “Probably why he is my captain for the weekend.”

“If you didn’t piss off 99 percent of the players, it could have been you being captain.”

“I do not piss off 99 percent of the players!” Ilya gave her an offended look.

Svetlana narrowed her eyes. “Do not play innocent with me, Ilyusha.” She turned back to the TV, watching the game unfold.

“I would love to see you on a line with Hollander.” She finally said after a long moment.

“Ilya scoffed. “It’s a nice idea, but I am not sure he can play wing.”

She shrugged, her tone almost too casual. “But you can.”

Ilya stared at Svetlana, turning to face her. He had never experienced betrayal like this before in his life.

“You would have him center me?” He demanded, poking a finger into his own chest as she laughed. “Me?!”

“The people would love it.” Svetlana archly pointed out, and Ilya snapped.

“The people are wrong!” He roared as he tackled Svetlana into the couch, his hands roaming over her body, finding where she was most ticklish. Svetlana screamed in laughter as she tried to push him off, but she was no match for a massive hockey player on a mission. “The people are so wrong!”

~~

Later that night, Ilya lay in bed thinking about the upcoming All-Star Game.

Playing on the same team as Hollander was something that he had never dared to hope for. The league had pitted them against each other for so long and made it seem like the two of them hated each other. He was sure that everyone expected them to butt heads during the weekend. He was sure that they’d be disappointed when they didn’t.

What he wasn’t sure about was what would happen between him and Hollander during that weekend. They hadn’t talked much since the last time they met up after a game in Montreal. It seemed as though Shane had wanted to say something the entire time that they had been together, but when asked, he had just shaken his head and acted like nothing was wrong. Ilya knew better, though: he could tell that Shane was hiding something. And then during the next Montreal game, Rose Landry was seated in a VIP box. Shana had said if they were just friends, but perhaps things had changed.

As selfish as it was, Ilya hoped that they were just friends and that Shane was still his. Even if it was unfair, he did not want to lose Shane yet.

Chapter 6

Ilya was sitting at the bar in Tampa during the opening party of All-Star weekend when the bartender looked over his shoulder.

“Can I offer you something to drink?”

He felt a familiar touch on his shoulder and saw Shane taking the seat next to him out of the corner of his eye.

“I’ll have the same as my teammate, please.”

“Of course.”

Ilya raised an eyebrow at Shane. “So, what, are they out of ginger ale, Captain?”

“I’m feeling a bit wild.” Shane leaned in closer, grinning. “So this should be fun, huh? I’ve always wondered what it would be like to play on the same team. Have you?”

“Yeah, I have.” Ilya sighed. “If only salary caps did not exist. Otherwise, I would have tempted you away from Montreal years ago.”

Shane snorted. “Or I could have stolen you away from Boston.”

Ilya looked around, lowering his voice. “I think we both know that you would not have been able to resist my charms, Hollander.”

Shane’s cheeks went pink, and he looked away, coughing.

“It’s nice that it’s in Florida this year, right?”

“Yes.”

The bartender slid Shane’s beer over to him. “Here you go.”

“Thanks.” Shane took a sip, Ilya amused to see him make a face at the taste.

“Did you bring anyone with you?” Ilya asked.

“Nope.” Shane shook his head. “My parents thought about coming, but they’re going to Mexico in, like, two weeks, and they’ve been to these before, so...Also, I didn’t feel like being managed this weekend.

Ah. So, no Rose Landry?”

Shane rolled his eyes. “As I’ve told you a thousand times, we are just friends.”

“Okay.”

“I’m serious.”

“I believe you.” Ilya rolled his eyes, dropping the subject.

“Did you, uh, bring anybody?” Shane asked, and Ilya shook his head.

“Nope.”

“Good.” Shane flushed when Ilya raised an eyebrow at him. “Not that it’s good that you don’t have anyone.” Shane trailed off, then coughed and changed the subject. “Nice shirt.”

“Thanks. Ilya pulled at the fabric, admiring it. “I like to, you know, get into the spirit.”

“You’re pulling it off.” Shane took a sip of his drink, avoiding eye contact with Ilya.

Ilya wanted to tell Shane that he could pull it off later if he wanted, but then Carter Vaughn slammed into both of them from behind.

“Cats and dogs!” He bellowed, putting a hand on each of their shoulders. “Look at this! fucking beauties!

“Yeah, should be a fun time.” Shane was as polite as ever, but Ilya could tell that he was resisting the urge to glare at Vaughn for running the moment. After all these years, Ilya could read Shane like a book.

“Careful with this guy, though.” Vaughn pointed at Ilya. “You can never trust him.”

Ilya tried to ignore Vaughn, catching the bartender’s eye. “One black coffee, please.”

“I’m just fucking with you, Rozy.” Vaughn laughed it off. “It’ll be a hell of a time. Let’s go, East boys! Woo-hoo!”

He rushed off to another area of the room, Ilya and Shane rolling their eyes as he left.

“I feel like we’re going to get a lot of that sort of thing this weekend,” Shane told him, and Ilya shrugged.

“Yes. Probably.”

“It’s nice. It should give us a chance to get to know each other.” Shane lowered his voice. “Who knows what we might have in common.

“You’re looking very pretty today.” Ilya changed the subject, raising an eyebrow as Shane blushed. “Hmm? Different, maybe? Did Someone take you shopping?”

Deep down, Ilya still wondered if there was any truth to the rumors about Shane having a girlfriend. Perhaps Rose had introduced him to another celebrity who could give him what Ilya couldn’t.

Shane leaned in close. “If I, um...If I tell you something, will you promise not to tell anyone or make fun of me?”

Ilya clicked his teeth, pretending to think about it. “Well, it depends.”

“Seriously.” Shane fixed him with those dark eyes, and Ilya could barely keep himself from staring at his freckles.

“Yeah, sure.” He finally said, tearing his gaze away from Shane’s cheeks to look into his eyes. “I can be good.”

Shane gave him a look. “You have never been good a day in your life.”

“Just tell me, Hollander.” Ilya groaned

Shane bit his lip, leaning in. “I hired a stylist.”

Ilya stared at him for a moment before letting out a surprised laugh.

Shane glared at him, Ilya unable to take his angry kitten face seriously. “Fuck you.”

“Sorry.” Ilya scrubbed a hand over his face, relieved. Shane did not have a girlfriend. Ilya had not lost him. “Wow. Of course you did.”

Shane rolled his eyes. “I shouldn’t have told you.”

“No, no.” Ilya waved him off, taking a sip of his beer. “I love it. I love it. You got, what, tired of looking like shit?”

“I didn’t look like shit.” Shane scoffed, Ilya giving him a look. “I just wore, like, athletic stuff.”

“Mmm.” Ilya resisted the urge to waggle his brows. “I know what you wore.”

“And some of the guys in the league are so fashionable,” Shane admitted, and Ilya couldn’t help but preen.

“Yeah, so very.”

Shane rolled his eyes. “Not you. Other players.”

“Okay.” Ilya did not believe him for a second.

The two of them stayed locked in that moment, staring at each other, until Shane stepped away. “I should circulate, I guess.”

“Yeah.” Ilya agreed. “You have new clothes to show off.”

Shane flipped him off as he started to walk away, and Ilya sent up a prayer to the stylist who had gotten Shane pants that showed off his beautiful ass.

~~

The next day after practice, Shane was lying out by the pool. His sunglasses perched on his nose, Shane tipped his head back to the sun and tried to ignore the fact that Ilya was in the pool with a pack of children.

Ilya had been racing them in the pool for the last half hour, each time conveniently having some sort of attack so that the kids came in first.

God, that man would be such a good father one day. Shane could already see it.

Part of him, a small, traitorous part, wished that Ilya would be the father to his children, but he shoved that out of his head.

The kids in the pool were clamoring for Ilya to race again, begging and pleading.

“Okay, okay,” Ilya announced to the elated children. “ok, and I will not

be losing this time.” The kids started clamoring in protest, and Ilya raised his hands. “But if I lose, I will buy you all candy bars from machine inside, okay?” The children cheered, and Ilya looked over to see Shane.

“Hey, Hollander!” He called out, Shane raising his hand as he tried to pretend that he had not been staring at Ilya like a slab of meat the entire time. “Hollander, make sure none of these cheaters cheat, ok?”

“ok.” Shane gave Ilya a thumbs up, the other man giving an exaggerated wink in response.

“You know that guy?” Ilya asked, and the kids cheered again. He didn’t seek to believe them, so he asked again. “Who’s this guy?”

“That’s Shane Hollander.” One little girl piped up, and Ilya nodded in agreement.

“Okay, so you know this guy.” He said, and she excitedly nodded as the rest of the children cheered.

“He’s the best player in the league.” She told Ilya, Shane barking out a laugh as Ilya pretended to be offended

“Oh, no, no. That’s not true.” Ilya turned to the other children. “Splash her! Boo!”

All the other kids started passing the girl as Ilya looked on. “No, you get out of the pool. Who is your dad? Show me your dad.”

“Be nice to my fan, Rozanov!” Shane called out, Ilya rolling his eyes.

“I suppose I can be.” He smirked, his wet curls shining in the sun. “After all, her life is already hard enough if you’re her favorite hockey player.”

Shane was two seconds away from flipping him off before he realized there were children present, and that smug asshole knew it.

“Okay, I forgive you.” Ilya patted the girl on the shoulder. “You can stay.”

Ilya made the kids line up at the other end of the pool and joined them.

“On your mark, get set...” he called out, getting ready to swim. “Go!”

The kids took off, Shane watching as Ilya cut through the water like a warm knife through butter. For a moment, it looked like he was going to win. And then...

“There is a shark in the water!” Ilya stopped swimming, splashing around as if something was attacking him. “There is a shark!”

Shane fought back a laugh as Ilya started dramatically sinking, gurgling water, and acting as though he was being dragged underneath the pool’s surface.

God, this man was a dumbass. Why was Shane in love with him?

Ilya miraculously recovered, paddling to the end of the pool just to come in dead last. The kids surrounded him, begging him for the candy he had promised them.

“Okay, you guys won fair and square.” Ilya held up his hands to the children cheering as he made his way to the edge of the pool.

Shane watched as Ilya put his hands on the edge of the pool, grateful that his sunglasses hid how he watched his abs contract as he pulled himself out of the pool. From the smirk that Ilya gave him, he was more than aware of what Shane was looking at. He sauntered over, Shane unabashedly eyeing how his trunks were plastered to his skin.

“Hey, Hollander.” Ilya greeted, finally reaching Shane. “Can you give these kids some money? I don’t have my wallet.”

“Wow. Cheaping out on the kids?” Shane joked. “Do the Raiders not pay you enough to buy some candy bars?”

Ilya gave him an impish grin in response, shaking his head over Shane.

“Ugh!” Shane tried to shield himself from the flying droplets. “What are you, a dog?”

Ilya stuck out his tongue in response, leaning in close. Shane’s breath hitched as Ilya drew ever closer.

Was he about to kiss Shane in the middle of the pool area at All Stars? No, that would be crazy, right? Ilya would never do that

But what if he did?

Shane felt his breath catch in his throat as Ilya got close enough for Shane to see the small drop of water on the bridge of his upper lip. His heart started beating faster and faster...as Ilya reached across him to where Shane had left his wallet.

“Thank you.” He grinned, walking off with his prize.

Shane recovered just enough to shout, “You better bring my wallet to practice later!” receiving a wave of the hand in response as Ilya left, pursued by a pack of children.

He slumped into his chair, his face feeling like it was on fire.

~~

Ilya waved the wallet in front of him like a banner in a parade as he entered the locker room.

“As requested, my Captain.” He bowed, presenting it to Shane on an outstretched palm.

Shane snatched it back, rolling his eyes.

“Uh, why did Rozanov have your wallet?” Scott Hunter asked, giving the two of them a confused look.

“Because someone promised a bunch of children in the pool candy and then didn’t have the cash to back it up,” Shane told him. “Rozanov literally could not put his money where his mouth was.”

“Or maybe I just wanted to see if you’d spend some of that fancy Rolex money.” Ilya shrugged as the rest of the team snickered. “Is very nice wallet by the way. I may buy one for myself.”

Shane took advantage of the fact that there were no kids around and flipped him off. Ilya was delighted by the action.

“How about we just go out and practice and not worry about what’s in each other’s wallets,” Shane suggested, the rest of the team agreeing and filing out.

Ilya moved closer to Shane, his breath hitting his ear.

“I was surprised to see no condom in your wallet.” Ilya mused. “Do not worry, I have plenty.”

“You’re not actually supposed to keep a condom in your wallet—”

“And you are missing the point.” Ilya cut him off, giving Shane a meaningful glance as he left the locker room.

~~

The next day was the first All-Star Game, and the first game Shane would ever play on the same line as Ilya Rozanov.

Shane had been playing hockey since he was a child. But he was sure that he had never clicked with a first line the way he and Ilya clicked together. Not even with Hayden and JJ. The two of them had been lethal against each other for years, pushing each other to the breaking point on the ice. But on the same team, for the All-Star game, against a common enemy? It was as though they had always played hockey just like this. When Shane made his way towards the goal, he didn’t even have to look to see where Ilya was. It was as though he could sense him, like some part of him was linked to Ilya in a way that science could never have explained.

Shane didn’t even have to stop. He expertly picked up the pass from Ilya, slamming it into the goal without a second’s hesitation.

The crowd went wild, and the next thing Shane knew, Ilya was pulling him into a bear hug on the ice. He smacked a kiss to the side of Shane’s helmet, Shane ducking his head. To anyone else, it looked like two incredible hockey players joking around after an incredible goal. But Shane knew the truth.

“Great pass.” He told Ilya, the other man grinning.

“Great goal, captain,” He said, his eyes darkening.

Shane pushed away from Ilya and skated back into position, grateful that the helmet obscured his flushed skin from the audience.

~~

After the finals, Shane spent ninety minutes at the afterparty before making his way to the beach for some peace and quiet.

“Found you.” He jumped, Ilya coming up from behind him.

“So you were looking for me?” Shane grinned, the other man scoffing and rolling his eyes.

“Of course not.” he sat down next to Shane, Shane watching as Ilya’s toes dug into the sand in front of them. “I just noticed that the party was less boring than expected, so I knew you had left.”

“Funny.”

“I am very funny guy.”

“Just keep telling yourself that, Rozanov.” Shane paused for a moment. He knew they needed to talk, but this was not the moment to do it. Anyone could come across them out in the open like this.

“When do you fly out?”

“Early.”

“Same. Columbus.” Shane shrugged.

“Toronto.”

Shane let out a chuckle. “We’re always going in opposite directions.”

“Way of the world, Hollander.”

Shane let out a deep breath. “What room are you in? Can I meet you there?”

Ilya seemed confused but nodded. “Meet me at room 1217 in thirty minutes.”

Shane got up and left the beach, his mind swirling.

~~

Ilya let Shane into the room as soon as he knocked. Shane immediately started to pace as soon as the door closed behind him.

“This looks serious,” Ilya remarked, standing near the door and watching Shane.

“It’s not.” Shane paused. “I mean, yeah, I guess.” He looked at Ilya as he took a spot on the bed.

“Can you just sit down or something?”

Ilya rolled his eyes, leaning against the dresser. “Better?”

“A little.” Shane paused, trying to figure out how best to say what was on his mind.

“Just spit it out, Hollander, for fuck’s sake.”

Shane shot Ilya a dirty look before deciding to just go for it. “It’s not just me, right?”

“Not just you, what?”

“You feel it too, don’t you?”

Ilya gave him a look. “Feel what?”

Shane looked up at Ilya. “Last time we were together, it was different.”

“What was different? That I got to hear you snore?”

“I don’t snore!”

“How would you know? Honestly, it was very effective form of sabotage. Make your rival lose sleep before the game so he doesn’t play as well.”

“You scored a hat trick in that game, asshole!”

“Maybe I would have scored two if you had not kept me up with your snoring.”

Shane let out an annoyed groan. “This is hard enough without you being an asshole.”

“What do you want, Hollander?” Ilya rolled his eyes, sighing. “We get together, we fuck. It’s simple.”

“Simple?” Shane scoffed. “Are you kidding me?”

Ilya shrugged from where he was leaning against the dresser. “It’s simple for me.”

“Bullshit!” Shane raised his voice for a moment before realizing where they were. He took a deep breath, hands on his thighs as he tried to calm his racing heart.

He could do this. He knew he could do this. He just had to say it.

“I think...” Shane started, then frowned and started over. “I know...I’m gay.”

Ilya stared at him for a moment before chuckling hand coming up to cover his mouth.

“Oh yeah?” he forced out between giggles. “What... what makes you think that?”

“Could you try to take this seriously?”

“You’ve been sucking my dick for nearly a decade. Is this supposed to be surprise?”

“Fuck you, you’re not gay.” Shane snapped, and Ilya shrugged.

“No, not completely.”

“Well, I am. Completely.”

“ok, so you’re gay, so what?” Ilya let out an annoyed huff.

“Well, it’s kind of a big deal.” Shane gave him an annoyed look. “To me, at least. Sorry if I’m being boring again.”

Ilya groaned, looking at Shane, after a long moment.

“Why are you telling me this?” He finally asked, and Shane let out an incredulous laugh.

“Who else am I going to tell?” He let out a bitter laugh, Ilya finally moving towards him. He sat down next to Shane, and Shane collected his words before continuing to speak.

“It’s... not just being gay.” Shane finally said. His stomach was all in knots, but he knew he had to tell him now. If he didn’t, he wouldn’t ever be able to. “It’s you. It’s this,” he let out a sigh. Being gay is one thing, but this- fucking your arch-rival is another thing.”

“That’s why it is a secret.” Ilya reminded him, and Shane gave him a look.

“I know that, but last time...” Shane shrugged. “It was nice.”

“It was.” Ilya shrugged, Shane not buying his nonchalant act. “I do not see why it had to be discussed. We had a nice time, leave it at that.”

“I can’t.”

“Try.”

Shane huffed out a breath. “I never expected that something like that could be so normal, especially between us. It was...different.”

“If you say so.”

“And it felt like we were...something.”

Ilya didn’t look at him, keeping his eyes on the carpet with its stupid shell pattern. Shane idly wondered when that carpet had last been cleaned. “We can’t be something, Hollander.”

Shane tried not to react, though he felt like he’d been slapped.

“Would you want to be, if we could?” Shane finally asked.

“We can’t.”

Shane gave Ilya a look. “That’s not what I asked, and you know it.”

“What does it fucking matter?” Ilya burst out. “Fuck, why are you making this complicated?”

“I’m not trying to!” Shane realized he was on the verge of shouting and lowered his voice. The last thing either of them needed was a player in a nearby room hearing what was going on and checking on them.

“I just.” Shane clasped his hands together, trying to hide that they were shaking. “I don’t think I can keep pretending I don’t like you anymore.

Ilya scoffed. “You don’t like me.”

Yeah, I do.” Shane took a deep breath. “I-I love you, Ilya.”

Ilya froze for a moment before he turned to face Shane.

“No, you don’t.”

Shane felt like he’d been slapped when Ilya spoke, but he soldiered on.

“Yes, I do. I love you, Ilya.”

“Don’t.” Ilya held up a hand, stopping Shane from moving closer. “Don’t fucking do this, Hollander.”

Shane froze. Of course. Of course, Ilya didn’t feel the same way. Why would he? Ilya could have anyone that he wanted. It wasn’t his fault that Shane only wanted him.

“It’s okay.” Shane forced a smile. “I get it. You don’t feel the same way.”

Ilya’s eyes locked onto Shane’s face. “Hollander.”

“I’m just going to go. See you around, Rozanov.”

Shane started to get off the bed, but Ilya’s arm shot out and stopped him.

“Hollander. Don’t run from this.”

“Why not?”

“How do you not get this!” Ilya raised his voice, shocking Shane. “You have highest IQ in league, how do you not understand this?” He let Shane go, scrubbing his hand over his face. “I’m not...” Ilya didn’t look at him. “I wouldn’t be able to go home again. Ever.” He finally looked back at Shane, Shane taken aback by the intensity in his eyes. “Do you get that? If I say what you want me to say... I would never be able to go home.”

“Because your family?” Shane asked, and Ilya let out an annoyed groan.

“Because Russia!” he practically spat out the words. “I would not be able to go back to Russia!”

The silence between them was as thick as the ice on the All-Star rink. Ilya sat back down on the bed, Shane following him as he shot Ilya a nervous glance.

“What would happen to you?” Shane finally asked, breaking the silence.

“I don’t want to find out.”

“But would your parents...” Shane trailed off, not sure how to finish that sentence. How do you ask the man you loved if his parents would turn him in for being with a man? He could never imagine his parents doing anything like that. Even if he wasn’t sure how they would respond, he knew they would never do that to him.

“My father is police.” Ilya told him. “My brother is police.” He scrubbed a hand over his face, Shane noticing the faintest tremble in his limbs. “I do not have to be psychic to know it would go bad if they found out.”

“And your mother?”

Ilya flinched slightly, still not looking at Shane. “Dead.”

Shane moved closer, putting a hand on Ilya’s shoulder. “I’m sorry.”

Ilya looked at Shane, shrugging. “I was young.” He sighed, the corners of his mouth downturned. “My father is very old-fashioned,” he pushed for a moment. “And sick.”

“Sick like crazy?” Shane asked, wincing at how he phrased it.

At least his phrasing seemed to amuse Ilya, the other man’s mouth twitching for a moment. “That too, a little, but no, sick more like...” he trailed off.

“Oh, like cancer?”

Ilya shook his head. “Dementia.”

“That’s awful.”

Shane saw Ilya turn his head away from him, and he heard a light sniffing noise.

“Hey.” Shane moved to see Ilya’s face, his heart breaking to see tears welling up in his eyes. Acting on instinct, he climbed into Ilya’s lap, wrapping his arms around the other man’s frame.

“Hey...” He soothed him, Ilya clutching his shoulders as they held each other. “It’s all going to be okay.”

“Sorry.” Ilya choked out.

“You don’t have anything to apologize for.” Shane soothed him, the other man shaking his head.

“No, I do.” He pulled away, looking into Shane’s eyes. “I am sorry that I cannot say what you want me to say. You opened your heart to me, and I cannot do the same.”

“Ilya.” Shane cut him off, pressing their foreheads together. “You don’t have to apologize. I get it. I want you to stay safe. I want you to stay happy.” he took a deep breath. “I want you to stay mine, in whatever way I can have you.”

Ilya swallowed hard. “You have me, Shane. Always.”

Shane grinned at that, pressing his lips to Ilya’s. It wasn’t the confession of love that he had hoped for, but it was something. And Shane could live with that as long as it meant he didn’t have to lose Ilya.

Ilya moved, twisting his body and pushing Shane onto the bed. Shane aoid there on his back, Ilya hovering over him as hands reached for the bottom of his shirt.

“Ilya, we don’t have to—”

“I want to.” Ilya told him, tracks of tears still visible on his face. “I want you. Can I do this?”

Shane nodded, and Ilya grinned, peeling off his own shirt before reaching for Shane’s.

What happened next was desperate, as if both of them were trying to prove something to themselves. When it was over, Ilya pressed a kiss to Shane's lips before pausing.

"What is it?" Shane asked.

"Nothing." Ilya shook his head, Shane unconvinced.

"I should go." Shane finally said, part of him wanting Ilya to task him to stay. He knew he couldn't: if someone caught Shane coming out of Ilya's room in the morning, it would be over for both of them.

Ilya pressed another kiss to Shane's temple, Shane arching into the touch like a cat.

Shane got ready to leave, wishing he could stay even a little longer,

He paused near the door, looking back at Ilya splayed out across the messed-up bed like he was posing for a magazine.

"Good night, Shane." Ilya finally said, his eyes filled with an emotion that Shane was no longer scared to read.

"Good night, Ilya." Shane told him, the other man giving him one last smile before Shane left the room.

Shane flopped back onto the bed when he got back to his room, his hands scrubbing across his face.

Chapter 7

Shane gasped, arching up into Ilya's mouth as he nibbled along the edge of Shane's jaw. Shane could feel Ilya's tongue tracing every dip and curve in his skin, the sensation being almost too much at times.

Ilya made his way down Shane's body, licking and sucking at various points until Shane could have connected the dots between love bites. Finally, Ilya sat up, a bottle of lube in hand.

Shane wasn't sure when Ilya had had time to grab the lube, but as Ilya slicked up his fingers, Shane couldn't find it in himself to care.

Shane sat up as Ilya started to open him up, wrapping his arms around the other man to hold him in place. Shane gently nipped at the area where Ilya's shoulder met his neck, the other man gasping at the action. Shane lavished the spot with attention, delighting in watching the skin darken under his actions.

Before long, Ilya pushed Shane back onto the bed, Shane watching as the other man lined himself up and pushed inside Shane. Shane sighed, a light sheen of sweat beading on his forehead as he adjusted to the stretch. Finally, Ilya reached for both of Shane's hands, and Shane willingly gave them. After gathering them into one of his, Ilya finally started to move.

Shane groaned at the feeling of Ilya moving inside him, his skin brushing against his. He desperately wanted to hold onto the other man's hips, but Ilya was keeping a firm grasp on Shane's wrists, which he had pinned to the bed above Shane's head. Ilya grinned, the action almost feral as he captured Shane's lips in a kiss. It wasn't as heated as their kiss earlier, but the intensity was still there as their mouths moved against each other in a crescendo of motion.

"Definitely," Shane said as their lips parted. He felt the tightening in his gut and knew he was close. "Ilya—"

"I know." Ilya moaned. "Me too. Come whenever you want."

Shane tried to hold off for as long as he could, but before long, he felt himself tumbling over the edge, spurting all over Ilya's chest. Shane's release seemed to trigger Ilya's, the other man coming in an instant. Ilya pulled himself out of Shane, collapsing on the bed next to him.

"okay, that was.." Shane trailed off. "Intense."

"Wow, what a compliment."

Shane shoved him. "Shut up."

Ilya sighed. "We should take shower. Unless you want to show up to the game smelling like sex."

"Would that distract you on the ice? Because it might be worth a shot."

Ilya rolled his eyes, pulling Shane to his feet and leading him to the bathroom. "Sorry, Hollander. You will have to find other way to beat me."

“I think I can manage that.”

The two of them washed quickly, keeping the wandering hands to a minimum. When they were back in bed, Ilya’s phone buzzed on the nightstand. Ilya picked it up, cursed, and put it down.

“Bad news?” Shane asked, looking at him.

“My brother.”

“You can take it if you want to.” Shane told him. “It’s not like I would be able to understand you.”

“No, I don’t want to.”

Shane frowned. “Is everything ok at home? Your father?”

Ilya let out an annoyed groan. “Enough, ok?”

“Enough what?”

“Questions.” Ilya waved him off. “You have too many of them.”

Shane sighed. “I’m sorry.”

Ilya softened after a moment. “It’s ok. i know you are just trying to care for me.”

Shane let that sit for a moment and then spoke. “I wasn’t clear. I’m sorry in advance for tonight’s game. We’re going to destroy you guys.”

Ilya raised his eyebrows at Shane, an incredulous look on his face. “Oh. So you are the asshole.”

Shane shook his head. “No, it’s still you.”

“No, not me,” Ilya argued. “You are the asshole. Everyone must know this.” Ilya cupped his hands around his mouth and shouted. “Everyone, Shane Hollander is an asshole.”

Shane pretended to be offended. “Well, if I’m such an asshole, maybe I won’t suck your dick before we leave for the game.”

“...did I say asshole? I meant ‘lovely, wonderful, not asshole person. With a weak backhand.’”

“You’re on thin ice, Rozanov.”

~~

At the game later, Ilya tried to keep his mind off of how good it felt to have Shane in his bed once again, and how much he wished he could have that every day.

Instead, he tried to motivate his team with the one thing he knew they loved more than beating Montreal.

He and Shane had a deal that they would put in their best effort against each other. However, they said nothing against giving your teammates a financial incentive to beat the Metros.

“ok, listen up.” Ilya clapped his hands, the locker room snapping to attention. “The rumors are true! \$1,000 for every goal scored tonight.” The Rom erupted into cheers, Ilya continuing to speak. “ok, boys? Montreal goes home crying. Please, please!”

“You fucking heard him, boys.” Marley grabbed his helmet and started toward the rink. “Roll out!”

~~

They slaughtered Montreal at the end of the three periods. It only took Ilya sixty seconds to walk back his deal form before the game.

“No, no, no, is not true.” Ilya argued as they reentered the locker room. “I said you fuckers owe me \$1,000 for every goal I score. You each owe me \$3,000.00.”

“Fuck off, Rozy.” Marley shoved him lightly.

“You all agreed, huh?” Ilya argued, grinning at the boos from his team. His phone buzzed and he pulled it out of his pocket, groaning when he saw that his brother was calling again. He wanted to send him to voicemail like he had the previous seven times, but he knew things would only get worse the longer he waited.

“What the fuck do you want?” He snapped into the phone.

“I’ve been trying to reach you all day!” His brother hissed into the phone and Ilya rolled his eyes,

“Excuse me for not wanting to deal with you begging for money.”

“Father is dead.”

Ilya felt the blood rush from his face, sitting down on the bench. “Oh.”

Marley turned to him, sensing something wrong with the tone in his voice. Ilya ignored his concerned look and focused on his call.

“He died this morning. The funeral will be in four days.” His brother’s voice was softer but still full of venom. “You need to be here for it. It’s the least you can do for Father, given that you weren’t here for him when he died.”

Ilya wanted to argue that his father deserved a lot less, but instead he nodded.

“I’ll be there.”

“At least you’re capable of that.” Alexei hung up the phone, and Ilya stared at the floor.

“Roz?” Marley put a hand on his shoulder, startling Ilya. “Are you okay?”

Ilya looked up at him, suddenly aware of the tracks of tears running down his face.

“My...” Ilya swallowed hard. “My father is dead. My brother just let me know.”

“Fuck.” Marley dropped down onto the bench next to him.

“I have to go home to Moscow for the funeral.”

“okay.” Marley nodded. “Let us help,” he turned to the rest of the locker room, the team silent. “St. Simon, let coach know,” he turned back to Ilya. “I’ll look up flights while you drive home and pack. I’ll send you whatever I find.”

Ilya nodded, starting to get dressed. “Thank you, Marley.”

Marley gave him a small smile. “What are teammates for?”

Ilya couldn’t remember a single moment of the drive home. He felt like he was sleepwalking through packing his suitcase, buying his ticket, and getting on the plane.

The only thing going through his head the entire time was something he refused to admit to himself until he was in his seat on the plane, heading back to his homeland.

He wished Shane was coming with him. He wished that Shane could be by his side, supporting him through the difficult next few days.

But he couldn’t be. So Ilya would have to figure out how to do this by himself.

~~

The next day, Shane was getting changed after practice when JJ let out a low whistle next to him.

“Hey, did you hear about Rozanov?”

Shane went on high alert, turning to him. “What about Rozanov?”

JJ didn’t look up from his phone. “Well, he did not fly with the rest of the team to Nashville.”

“He flew separately?”

JJ finally looked up. “He did not go to Nashville at all.”

“That’s weird,” Hayden said, leaning forward. “He didn’t get hurt last night, did he?”

“Not as far as I saw.”

“I wish I had gotten a chance to wipe that smirk off his face by slamming him into the boards.” Comeau joked, Shane resisting the urge to snap at him.

“Maybe he’s sick,” Hayden suggested.

“He’s not,” Shane said before freezing, feeling everyone’s eyes upon him. “I mean, he didn’t seem sick.”

“Who gives a shit?” Hayden finished getting dressed. “If he’s out, it means Boston might not make it into the playoffs, and we have a better chance at a third cup in a row.”

“ESPN is just saying he did not go to Nashville.” JJ reminded him. “Calm down.”

“Yeah, Hayden, you still have to actually put in the effort at practice if you want us to get a third cup.” Shane forced a smile on his face, and the locker room laughed at the look on Hayden’s face.

~~

Shane made an excuse not to go out to dinner with the rest of the team, then made his way home. He opened a can of ginger ale, leaning against the counter as he dialed Rozanov's number.

"Hi. This is Ilya. Shane heard Ilya's voicemail greeting. "I will never listen to your voicemail."

Shane hung up without leaving a message and started pacing.

It was fine. Everything was fine. The fact that Ilya didn't make it to Nashville didn't mean something was wrong. If he'd been admitted to a hospital, it would be all over social media. Maybe he was just taking personal time, or sprained his ankle in practice.

Even as Shane tried to convince himself, he knew one thing for sure. He was not going to stop worrying until he heard from Ilya. Hopefully, that will be soon.

~~

Hours later, Shane was reading the news for any mention of Ilya's name when a call came in from the man himself.

It was a FaceTime, so Shane picked up.

"Hey," he asked, scanning Ilya's image for any signs of injury. "Are you ok?"

"You wear glasses?" Ilya said.

Shane flushed, taking them off. "Just for reading. Where are you? I heard you didn't go to Nashville."

"Were you worried?"

Shane glanced away. "Maybe. Where are you?"

"Home." Shane saw the image moving as if Ilya were walking around. "Put them back on, please."

Shane frowned. What little he could see of the background didn't look like Ilya's home in Boston. "You're in Boston?"

Ilya shook his head. "Moscow."

"Oh." Shane's mind was racing with why Ilya would have gone to Russia in the middle of the season, but he tried to put that out of his head. "Are you ok?"

Ilya's gaze locked onto Shane, raising an eyebrow. "I will be better when I see you in your glasses again."

Shane scoffed, picking up the glasses from where he dropped them on the couch and jamming them back onto his face.

"Happy?" He asked, eyebrow raised.

A ghost of a smile crossed Ilya's face. "Happier."

It then hit Shane why Ilya had gone to Russia.

“Is your father...”

“Yes.” Shane saw Ilya sit down, a bedframe visible behind him. “He is dead. Alexei called me after the game. Is why we didn’t meet.”

Shane hated how relieved he felt in that moment. Ilya hadn’t been with someone else, and he hadn’t been avoiding Shane. He had been dealing with something horrible.

“Ilya...” he shook his head. “I’m so sorry.”

“Is okay, you didn’t know.” Ilya paused for a moment. “What are people saying about me?”

“Nothing.” Shane shook his head. “People know you didn’t go to Nashville with the rest of your team, but no one knows why. The media is being super secretive, and the Raiders haven’t...they haven’t said anything.”

“Good.” Ilya scrubbed a hand over his face. “I will not be here for long anyway. “My flight is on Monday. I will be back on the ice by the end of the week.”

Shane frowned, leaning in closer. “You should take more time than that.”

Ilya chuckled, a small smile crossing his face. “Why? So you can catch up to me in the scoring race?”

“That would happen regardless of whether or not you’re on the ice, and you know it.” Shane retorted. “I’m being serious, though. This must be hard for you.”

“Is not like I didn’t know he was dying.”

Shane gave Ilya a look. “You know, you don’t have to be a stoic Russian right now.”

“I am stoic Russian all the time.

“Ilya. Seriously, you can talk to me about whatever.” Shane shrugged. “I want to help if I can.”

Ilya stared at him for a moment, considering.

“Take off your clothes.”

Shane blinked at Ilya on his screen. “What?”

“I am also being serious, Hollander. If you want to help me, take your clothes off.”

Shane snorted, taking off his glasses and pulling his crewneck off over his head.

“Ah,” Ilya said, Shane stopping before he could shimmy off his sweatpants. Ilya tapped the side of his face, his gaze as piercing as ever, even when halfway across the world.

“Glasses back on.”

Shane rolled his eyes, jamming them back on his face as Ilya smirked.

“Good boy.”

~~

The funeral was dignified, ostentatious, and far more than a man like his father deserved.

His mother’s funeral had been small, painfully so. His father had not wanted to draw attention to the way she had died, so he had refused to celebrate his late wife the way she deserved.

His mother deserved so much more, and his father deserved so much less. Such was the way of the world.

Ilya’s back was against the wall, the black bread and vodka stinging as it slid down his throat. It was all he could do not to leave this place. Leave this city, and go back to America. But he couldn’t. He had to send his father off one last time.

He thought he had found a place to stand where no one would bother him. Where he could mourn the fact that he was an orphan. And then he heard a voice from beside him.

“Stop fucking avoiding me.” His brother hissed in his ear.

“If only I could.” Ilya downed the rest of his vodka.

Alexei grabbed his shoulder, pulling him into a back room. He stepped away from Ilya, sniffing and rubbing at his nose.

“Don’t fucking touch me.” Ilya hissed, the venom he’d been bottling up all day slipping through.

“Then tell me the fucking plan.” Alexei glared at him, and Ilya rolled his eyes.

“Jesus Christ,” he muttered under his breath before turning back to his brother. “I don’t know yet, Alexei!” he scrubbed a hand over his face. “He just died. Can I get a minute to breathe?”

“Of course, because this is all about you.” Alexei spat at him. “What about me? Do I get to breathe too?” An ugly look crossed his face, and he sneered. “Or is that just something reserved for rich disappointments who abandon their families?”

Ilya’s hackles rose as he stepped towards Alexei, hands clenching into fists. “Abandoned?” he said, his voice dark. “Whose money do you live on, you piece of shit? Who puts food in your mouth and coke up your nose?”

“I have a child, Ilya!” Alexei raised his voice, the sound deafening in the empty room. “And a fucking wife!” he stepped closer, pointing a finger at Ilya. “And me, I’ve spent the last five months taking care of our dying father every fucking day while you partied in America!”

The door to the room opened, and Svetlana slinked inside.

“I thought I heard singing.” She said, the tension in her frame betraying her playful tone.

“Great.” Alexei scoffed. “Now we have to listen to this whore run her mouth.”

Ilya lunged forward, slamming his fist into his brother’s face before he could even blink. Alexei crumpled to the ground, Ilya following him as he punched him again and again. Alexei dissolved

into screams, and Ilya felt a hand on his shoulder.

“Stop, Ilya! Stop.” Ilya turned to look at her, her eyes filled with understanding. “He’s not worth it. He’s not worth anything.”

Ilya let out a low breath, releasing his hold on Alexei’s collar. He stood up, straightening his suit jacket as he looked at his crumpled form. This was his brother, the one he looked up to as a child, his only blood family left in this world. And Ilya felt nothing for him.

“You can have my apartment.” Ilya finally said, his voice low as Alexei glared at him. “And there will be a trust for my niece.” Alexei’s eyes gleamed, and Ilya gave him a look. She can have it when she’s 18.”

“You useless little—”

“And you will never, ever contact me again.” Ilya acted as though Alexei had not spoken. “If you do, I will use every piece of my fame and money and notoriety to make sure

that you can’t show your face in this fucking city without someone

wanting to break it open.” he moved to leave before pausing and looking back at Alexei. “So take what I offer, shut your fucking mouth, and walk away.”

Ilya left the room, Svetlana following. The two of them walked to an abandoned hallway, Ilya collapsing against the wall.

Fuck.” He said, looking at the splatters of blood on his knuckles.

“You need to get cleaned up if you want to go back out there,” Svetlana told him, pulling him into a nearby bathroom.

Ilya gave her a look as she wet a towel and started cleaning the blood off his hands. “It is my father’s funeral. I think I have to go back out there.”

She shrugged. “Or I could make an exercise for you so you can leave.”

Ilya let out a low breath. Thank you, Svetlana. I don’t deserve you.”

“Yes, you do,” she winked before her face turned serious. “But you don’t want me.”

“You know I love you.”

“I know you do.” She reassured him, a soft smile on her face. “But it’s not the same

as it is with Jane, is it?” She seemed to read the answer on his face, and she patted his cheek. “I love you too. And whatever you need, I’ll be here. I’m not going anywhere.”

She went to leave the bathroom, pausing for a moment with her hand on the door. “I just hope Jane knows how lucky he is.”

Ilya froze, letting out a bitter laugh as the door closed behind her. Of course, she knew. She might have known for years.

Ilya didn't remember leaving the building or even grabbing his coat. But all of a sudden, he was outside, walking in the cold Moscow evening. He grabbed his phone before he knew what he was doing. He knew it was risky, but he didn't care. He needed to hear Shane's voice. Everyone would be okay if he could just talk to Shane.

"How are you?" Shane asked, Ilya leaning against the wall in the tunnel where he was hiding.

"ok." Ilya started to say the familiar lie on the tip of his tongue before he stopped himself. "Not good," he sighed. "Probably bad."

"How's your... family?"

Ilya rested the back of his head against the wall. "At their worst. My brother is..." Ilya struggled to find the word for a moment. I don't know. Scared. It makes him terrible," he bit his lip before admitting, "And it makes me terrible back."

"Is it very upsetting?" Shane asked, and Ilya could practically hear him wincing over the phone. "I mean, obviously it's terrible—"

"Yes." Ilya cut him off. "But maybe I'm upset about the wrong thing."

There was a moment of silence. "You mean not your father?"

"Maybe..." Ilya let out a breath, feeling the tension start to drain away from him. "I do not know. I wish...I wish it could be different," he finally admitted. "I wish he could know me, or..." he took a deep breath through his nose and let it out through his mouth. "I don't know. I don't know. English is too hard right now."

"I wish I spoke Russian."

Ilya couldn't help but snort at that. "Yeah, you could probably learn it in a week. No accent. Perfect. Bonjour."

"That's French, Ilya."

"Yeah, I know, Shane."

Shane paused. "Where are you? Are you with your family?"

"No. I'm just walking. I needed to get out." Ilya sniffed. Blyat, he hated how weak he was being right now. This was not how he was raised. But if there was one person he could trust not to judge him, it would be Shane.

"Hey, uh, I have an idea," Shane said after a long moment. "How about you tell me everything that's on your mind, but in Russian? I won't understand, but maybe it'll help."

Ilya let out a long sigh. "ok," he took a deep breath, trying to figure out exactly what to say.

"I never want to come back here again," he confessed, his voice low. "I fucking hate it here. And they all fucking hate me." he ran a hand through his hair, pulling at his blond curls. His father always hated them, but now he had no father to hate them. He had no one. "I pay for everything. I make sure everyone has clothes they like. I make sure the food is perfect, that Father is buried next to his parents, that the tomb is perfect." he turned and thumped his fist against the wall. And the

only fucking word I ever hear is: ‘I want more, Ilya. I need more, Ilya, more, more, more!’ he could hear himself starting to raise his voice, and he forced himself to stay quiet, screaming wouldn’t help him. It would only draw attention.

“And I have nothing for these people! I give them everything... but I feel fucking empty,” he scoffed. “They don’t care. They look at me, and they see a bank. Or an enemy. Or I don’t even know what.” he turned, his back against the wall as he slid down towards the ground.

“My brother, he always hated me. And I know why, but...” his voice broke, but he made himself keep it together. He had to keep it together. “...it kills me. And it kills me that he took care of my father, and I didn’t. But I couldn’t! I wasn’t here. I still paid for it all. And he will never forgive me. For any of it.” he could feel the venom in his words, and he was so glad that Shane couldn’t understand him. “For existing. “And it means that I have no one now,” he paused. “Well, not no one. I have...Svetlana. She loves me. And I love her. But not like...” he cut himself off, catching police lights out of the corner of his eye. He pressed his head against the wall, breathing as quietly as possible, and waited until they turned the corner before speaking again. “Fuck. But not like I love you.”

He hated that he couldn’t say these words to Shane at the All-Star Game. He hated that the only way he could bring himself to say them was when Shane couldn’t understand him. “That’s the worst fucking part of all this...that all I want is you. It’s always you. I’m so in love with you, and I don’t know what to do about it.” he rubbed his free hand over his face, wiping away the tears that had formed while he was speaking. “ok, I’m done.”

“Do you feel better?” Shane asked, his voice soft.

“Yes,” Ilya admitted, wiping his face. He always felt better when talking to Shane, though he could never admit it. “Thank you.”

“Maybe you could teach me Russian someday,” Shane suggested, and Ilya snorted.

“Yeah. ok,” he thought for a moment. “Only useful phrases.”

“Like what?”

“I don’t know, like: “Harder, please. Yes, sir.”

Shane sounded like he was trying to keep from laughing. “fuck you.”

Ilya shook his head. “No, more like: “fuck me, please.”

Shane laughed and then went quiet. “How about...” “I wish you were here right now”?”

Ilya sighed, getting up from the ground as he looked back over the empty street. “I wish you were too, Hollander.”

~~

It had taken hours, but Ilya had finally sorted the last of his belongings from his apartment. He was leaving some behind, but Svetlana had promised to ship whatever he couldn’t fit in his suitcase.

It was strange to think that this would be the last time he was here. This apartment had been bought right after his rookie season, when he needed a place to escape to after dealing with his father’s

disappointment over losing the rookie of the year award to Shane. It had been close enough to his father's house that Ilya could keep an eye on him when his illness had worsened.

But all of that was over now.

His father was gone. His brother could care less if he ever saw him again. Ilya had no reason to return to Russia again.

Realizing that was harder than he had expected it to be.

Russia was all he had known for so long. He had been raised here. He had lost both of his parents, now buried in the earth here. But the Russia of today was not the kind of place that Ilya could build a future in. Even if the future did not involve Shane Hollander.

Ilya locked the door for the last time. Svetlana was waiting in the car downstairs, seeming to sense that Ilya needed a moment alone.

He slid into the passenger seat, looking over at her.

"I have a few hours before my flight. Can we make two stops?"

Svetlana nodded. "Where are we stopping?"

~~

They pulled up in front of the cemetery, Svetlana giving Ilya an understanding look.

"Would you like me to come with you?"

Ilya shook his head. "No, thank you. I think it is best if I go alone."

Svetlana nodded. "I'll be here when you're done."

Ilya got out of the car with the bouquet of lilies that he'd picked up in his hands. They'd always been her favorite. When he was a child, he remembered seeing the lily clip in her hair when she'd go to parties.

He made his way through the rows of headstones without hesitation, the well-worn path all too familiar to him.

He was at his destination before too long, the letters still legible on the weathered stone.

Irina Rozanova.

Beloved mother and wife.

Ilya placed the lilies at the base of the headstone and fell to his knees.

He didn't spare a glance towards his father's grave next to his mother's. He was not here for him.

"Hello, mama." He said after a long moment. "I am sorry that I have not been here in so long." He took a deep breath. "And I am sorry that this may be my last time coming to see you."

He clasped his hands together to hide the shaking.

“I do not want to leave you. I love you, mama. I will always love you.” He let out a low breath.

“But Russia is not safe for someone like me. I am only safe if I hide who I am, and I do not want to do that anymore. The only thing keeping me here was father, and now he is gone.”

Ilya looked down for a moment before looking back at the headstone. “I want a life that is not possible if I stay here. But just because I am no longer able to visit does not mean that I do not care for you. I will carry you in my heart for the rest of my life, mama. I love you.”

He stands up, pausing before turning to leave. “I hope that you can be happy for me. Even if the life I want is not one that you expected me to have.”

Ilya walked back through the cemetery, his heart feeling lighter than it had in years.

Svetlana gave him a look as he got back into the car.

“Are you ready to go?”

Ilya nodded, looking out the window as she started the car. He watched the city pass him by as they drove, one thought rattling through his mind.

He might not know what the future held for him, but he knew it would not be found trapped in his past.

Chapter 8

Shane was jumping out of his skin the morning before their next game. Ilya had been back from Russia for nearly a week, and this was the first time that they had seen each other in person.

When the metros got onto the ice for warmups, Shane scanned the rink until he saw Ilya stretching at the center line. Trying to act casual, like this was just another day, Shane skated to the center line.

“Are we still on for tonight? After?” Ilya gave him a nod, and Shane pressed onward. “1919. That’s the code for the front door,” he swallowed, smoothing a hand over the blade of his stick as he checked to see if anyone was watching. “I’ll text it to you.”

“Front door. Brave.” Ilya said, giving him a teasing glance.

“Fuck you.”

“Later.”

Shane hid his grin as he skated back to Montreal’s bench.

“What was that about?” Hayden asked as he skated close.

Shane shrugged, trying to act casual. “Oh, I just offered my condolences.”

“That’s nice. Fuck, I should have done that. What did he say?”

“Told me to fuck off.” Shane lied, Hayden barking out a laugh as he shook his head.

“Jesus, what a dick.”

“He’s not that bad.” Shane defended Ilya, unable to stop himself. Hayden gave him an odd look, and Shane tried to cover himself. “It’s mostly an act.”

“A pretty convincing one,” Hayden argued, and Shane rolled his eyes.

“Yeah, well, let’s make sure we win this one, right?” he said, raising his voice.

His team cheered, and they took to the ice, Shane getting ready for the face-off.

He glanced up once to see Ilya’s grin and let out a grin of his own when he stole the puck away from him.

Shane dashed down the ice, knowing that he should keep his eyes on the path in front of him. But unable to help himself, like Orpheus ascending from the Underworld, he looked back to cast a smug grin over his shoulder at Ilya.

Ilya grinned in response, before something in this expression shifted. Shane watched as his eyes tightened, as he closed the distance between them until they were mere inches from each other. And then something hit them both.

Shane didn't remember anything after that.

~

Ilya groaned, pulling himself to a seated position from where he had landed on top of Shane.

He wasn't sure what possessed him to do that. He should've been focused on getting the puck away from Shane and scoring. But when he saw his teammate about to hit Shane, and he knew Shane didn't see it coming, something in him had to act.

He looked over at Shane, expecting the other man to be glaring at him with his angry kitten face.

But he wasn't. He was lying on the ice, his eyes closed as his chest barely rose.

"Marleau, you motherfucker!" he heard one of Shane's teammates scream in the background, but he didn't care. He just kept looking at Shane, the other man not moving.

"Hollander." he reached out to the other man, hissing when he moved his wrist.

Before he can make contact, the referees got in between them. The medical team swarmed the ice, one member going to him while the rest went to Shane.

"Rozanov, let me check you out." The medic reached for his wrist, and Ilya hissed in pain.

Is he okay? Fucking tell me!"

"Focus on yourself, Rozanov."

He barely heard a word the medic said, his gaze fixed on Shane's prone form as he was lifted onto a stretcher.

"Rozanov!" He turned to the medic, the woman raising an eyebrow at him.

"What did you say?" He asked, and the medic exchanged a worried look with his coach.

"I'm worried about head trauma. I think he needs to go to the hospital with Hollander."

Someone helped Ilya to his feet, leading him towards the end of the rink. He barely had time to take off his skates before following Shane down the hallway.

"I need you to stay awake, ok, Shane?" One of the medics said. "Eyes open, buddy."

"ok," he heard Shane mumble. "My parents..."

"Your coach is calling them, ok?"

"ok." He hears Shane pause. "Tell him I'm fine, I'm ok. He's going to worry."

"Your coach is calling your dad now."

"Not him." Shane's voice dropped to a whisper, Ilya barely able to hear his own name falling from Shane's lips.

Ilya's heart broke a little as he heard those words. Shane was injured, perhaps badly, and he was worried about Ilya.

"Who?" One of the medics asked as they put Shane in the back of the ambulance. Ilya followed, sitting mere inches from Shane. He could have reached out to hold his hand if he wanted to, and he did. But he knew that he couldn't.

"Hey, Shane, you really need to keep your eyes open, ok?" one of the paramedics said, Shane's breathing becoming more and more labored.

All of a sudden Shane started to wheeze, his body jerking from where he was stepped to the gurney.

"What is going on?" Ilya leaned forward despite himself.

"Stay back, Rozanov," one of the paramedics barked, moving to examine Shane. As they put a stethoscope to Shane's chest, Shane started to cough. A bloody foam emerged from his lips, staining his skin red as Ilya watched in horror.

He was taken back to that day when he was twelve, when he found his mother on the floor of her bedroom. She had been lying in a pool of her own vomit, blood staining her lips. His father had made him scrub the carpet for hours to get rid of the stain.

"Shit." One of the paramedics cursed. "He's got a collapsed lung. He must have broken a rib when he got hit."

The paramedics worked on Shane as Ilya pressed himself into the wall of the ambulance, giving them room to work. His eyes never left Shane's prone, struggling form.

When they reached the hospital, they took Shane in another direction and steered Ilya towards one of the doctors.

Ilya trailed behind him, his mind still stuck on Shane and what the paramedic had said. The hit had punctured Shane's rib. How much of his injuries had been worsened by Ilya falling onto him?

He'd thought from the start that he would break Shane Hollander. And now it appeared that he was right. That thought swirled around in his head for what felt like hours, Ilya spiraling more and more.

"Mr. Rozanov!" He snapped back to attention, dimly aware of the fact that he was sitting on a hospital bed with a doctor staring at him.

"Hm?" He looked up. "I am sorry, what did you say?"

The doctor gave him a concerned look. "I said that you had a sprained wrist and we were keeping you for observation."

"That is not necessary. I am fine."

The doctor gave him a look. "Mr. Rozanov, you have been failing to respond to any questions or directions since you came into the emergency room." She shone a light in his eyes, continuing to check him for a concussion. She made a note on her notepad before continuing. "You don't have any obvious signs of a concussion, but I'd rather be overcautious."

Ilya let out an annoyed groan. “Fine.” He paused. “Can you tell me if Hollander is all right? We came in together. The hit was...very bad. As another captain, I would like to check on him.”

“I’m sorry, I cannot give you information about another patient.”

“You cannot even tell me if he is okay?”

“It’s against the law,” she began to walk away. “Someone will take you to your room for the night.”

Ilya was left alone, the bustle of the emergency room barely registering to him as he sat there.

He could not find out if Hollander was okay, or even if he was alive. Why would they tell him anything? As far as the rest of the world knew, he and Hollander were nothing to each other.

~~

Ilya had been in his room for nearly two hours, wondering what was happening to Shane, when Marleau walked through the door.

“Did we win?” Ilya sked, trying to distract himself.

“Of course,” Marley scoffed, dropping Ilya’s bag on the dresser and handing him his phone. “Montreal put up a hell of a fight, though, even with Hollander out.”

“Is that shiner their work?”

Marleau touched the skin around his eye, wincing slightly. “Yeah. Not like I didn’t deserve it, though.” He took a look around the room. “When are you getting out of here?”

“Not until the morning.”

“Jesus, Roz, they’re keeping you overnight because of a sprained wrist?”

Ilya shrugged, trying to be nonchalant. “Is more because they are worried about concussion. I probably do not have one, but still.”

Marleau let out a breath, running a hand through his hair. “That’s a relief. We’d be sunk for the playoffs if you were out.”

“Yeah.” Ilya looked down, trying not to let the anger seep into his voice. “I was lucky.”

Marley was his friend, perhaps his best friend in Montreal. And yet, when he thought about how Marley played a role in landing Shane in the hospital? Ilya wanted to kill him.

Marleau went quiet. “Yeah. Hollander looked like he was in rough shape.”

“He coughed up blood in the ambulance.” Ilya kept his gaze on the bed. “They said he had a collapsed lung, and maybe a broken rib from the hit.”

“Wow.” Marleau paused for a moment. “Is he going to be okay?”

Ilya shook his head, the movement killing him. “I do not know. They would not tell me.”

Marleau was silent for a long moment, and then he moved forward, sitting in the chair next to Ilya's bed.

"I'm going to ask you something, but you don't have to answer if you don't want to." he paused. "Though, not answering is sort of answering--"

"Spit it out, Marley, Jesus Christ."

"Is Shane Hollander your Montreal Jane?"

Ilya froze, his eyes darting up to Marley's face. How had he found them out? They had been so careful.

Marleau saw the panic in his eyes and leaned forward, putting out his hands. "Roz, relax. I'm not going to tell anyone. I just-I just had to ask."

Ilya took a deep breath, trying to center himself.

"How did you--" he started to ask, Marleau snorting in response.

"I've been on a team with you for years, Roz. I'd like to think I know you pretty well." He let out a low breath, leaning back in his chair. "There was always something about the way you and Hollander were with each other. At first, I thought it was nothing, but as Montreal Jane became more important to you, I realized something. She always texted you around games with the Metros. When we were in Montreal, or the Metros came to Boston, you'd disappear." He closed his eyes for a second, a pained expression crossing his face. "But the pieces didn't fall into place until tonight, when you skated between me and Hollander." his eyes were intent, locked onto Ilya. "I've checked hundreds of people like that, and you've never done anything like that."

"He was looking back at me." Ilya's voice was almost too quiet to be heard. "He didn't see you coming."

Cliff let out a low breath. "So you tried to take the hit instead."

Ilya let out a bitter laugh. "And I made it so much worse. If I had not landed on him, his rib would not have punctured his lung."

"That's not on you," Marley told him, shaking his head. "That hit was so much harder than I thought it was going to be." He sighed. "I'm so sorry, Roz. I didn't mean for anything of this to happen."

"I know Marley."

Marleau let out a bitter laugh. "You should hate me for hurting him."

"Not even Hollander would hate you."

"His team does." Marley ran a hand over his jaw. "Pike has one hell of a swing."

"Well, to be fair, you did deserve it a little."

Cliff looked like he wanted to argue, but sighed. "That's fair," he paused for a moment. "So, how long have you and Hollander been together? And how did it even start?"

“We’re not. Is casual.”

Marley stared at him. “Are you sure I didn’t hit you on the head?”

“Marley—”

“You got hurt for him, Roz. How is any of this casual?”

“Is way it has to be. We cannot be together, not the way we want to be.”

Marley shook his head. “I don’t even know what to say to that.”

“Say nothing. Please.”

“Roz, of course I’m going to keep this to myself. But if you can’t be honest with me, at least be honest with yourself.

Ilya wished he could say that he was being honest, but he knew he couldn’t. Not that it would have mattered. Being honest didn’t stop him from hurting Shane.

Marleau looked down at his watch and cursed. “I have to get back to the hotel. I’ll come by in the morning to get you, okay?”

“Okay.”

Marley paused as he got up. “And maybe someday soon, you can tell me the whole story of you and Jane.”

Ilya let out a small grin. “I think that could be arranged.”

Marleau left the room, and Ilya sighed, looking up at the ceiling. Before too long had passed, his phone buzzed with a message from Marley.

Marley: he’s down the hall from you, fifth door on the left. Go check on him later.

Ilya let out a small smile, thinking of a way to do just that.

~~

For the record, Ilya knew this was a stupid plan.

Getting kept for observation was one thing, but sneaking around the hospital in the middle of the night? If he were caught by the doctors, if a single patient saw him sneaking into Shane’s room and took a picture, if any one of a thousand things happened, Ilya would be done for. But he had to take the chance. He had to risk it. After seeing Shane gasping for air in the ambulance, his chest heaving as bloody foam stained his lips, he had to see that he was okay.

He knew he had to plan this out precisely. So, after they came into his room for the thousandth time that night to do a neuro check, Ilya knew it was his time to strike.

Grateful that they had let him change into his sweats, he slipped out of his room and made his way down the hall to Shane’s room.

He wondered if Shane would be asleep, if it was better o just to wait until the morning to talk to him. But as he peered into Shane's room, he saw the other man blinking his eyes in the dim light.

He opened the door slowly, Shane's eyes lighting up as he saw who was coming in.

"Ilya!" he said, his hushed voice almost deafening in the stillness of the night.

Ilya shushed him, slipping inside and closing the door. For someone who had been gasping for air a few hours ago, Shane looked better than expected. His right arm was in a sling, with slight bruising already forming across his face.

Ilya stayed by the door, unsure whether he should get closer. If Shane would even want him to get closer. It was partly his fault that Shane was like this, after all.

"I, um, I just wanted to..." Ilya swallowed hard, scanning Shane's figure for a sign of something wrong. "Are you ok?"

Shane shrugged, the action causing him to grimace. "Concussion, two broken ribs, and a fractured collarbone. Also, a collapsed lung, but they took the chest tube out, so that's all good."

"But you are okay?"

"I'm out for the playoffs, but..." Shane shrugged again, Ilya wanting to snap at him to stop causing himself pain.

"Could have been worse." Ilya finally said, his voice low.

"Could have been worse." Shane agreed, shaking his head. He still had a trace of a smile on his face.

"Marleau feels terrible," Ilya told him. "He did not mean to hurt you." He paused, shifting his feet. "I did not mean to hurt you."

"I know you didn't."

"And yet I did."

There was something in Shane's eyes that Ilya did not want to know how to read. "Look." Shane finally said, his voice gentle. "I forgive both of you. Part of the game. We all get our bell rung eventually, right?"

Ilya fought the urge to retort. "Right."

Shane frowned at Ilya, as if just realizing that he was so far away from him.

"Hey." He wiggled his fingers at Ilya, raising his voice. "Hey!"

"ok, ok..." Ilya rushed towards him, trying to keep Shane quiet. The last thing they needed was for some well-meaning night-shift nurse to come see what the commotion was in the hockey star's room.

"Shhh, shhh." Ilya stepped closer, Shane giving him an indignant stare as he wiggled his fingers. Even in the hospital with tubes and monitors, Shaun looked like an angry kitten when annoyed.

Sighing, Ilya took Shane's hand, the other man immediately settling.

"Yes!" Shane said, closing his eyes for a moment as he nodded to himself. "Better."

Ilya cracked a small smile. "How many drugs are you on right now, Hollander?"

Shane looked up at him. "I don't know."

Ilya felt his heart soften slightly as he stood there holding Shane's hand. He let his hand rise to Shane's face, stroking his cheekbone with his knuckles. Shane leaned into the touch with a satisfied hum, and Ilya's composure cracked the slightest amount.

"You scared me." He finally admitted. "When I saw you in the ambulance—the way you were gasping for air—I thought I was going to lose you."

"Never." Shane opened his eyes, staring up at Ilya. The dim light made his eyes appear nearly black. "You could never lose me, Ilya. You couldn't even lose me when you were a dick at the Olympics."

Ilya frowned at him. "I was not a dick—"

"You were a dick." Shane chuckled, grimacing as he jostled his shoulder. "But it's okay. I still love you."

What did Ilya do to deserve this level of torture? The kindest, most perfect man was here, with Ilya, and he couldn't tell him he loved him in a way that he would understand. Even after almost losing him. What the hell was wrong with Ilya?

"I'm sorry I didn't text you after the game," Shane said after a moment of silence.

"No, it's ok," Ilya told him, Shane ignoring him and continuing to speak.

"I was excited about seeing you after the game," Hollander said, his eyes wide as he looked up at Ilya. "I'm mostly mad at Marleau for fucking that up. I really missed you."

Ilya tried to ignore the fluttering he felt in his gut at Hollander's words. "He feels really bad. He wanted me to say that he was sorry."

"You know, I had a whole plan to ask you something," Shane mused. Ilya's eyes widening. He wanted to take a step back, but Hollander held onto his hand.

"Maybe it's better if you just rest now." He suggested, while praying to every saint in the Russian Orthodox canon, that Hollander was not about to ask him to fucking marry him while drugged out of his mind on painkillers."

"I was going to ask you..."

"Hollander..."

"Will you come to my cottage this summer?" Shane grinned, and Ilya felt himself relax. Hollander's cottage. Not a marriage proposal. But then Ilya's gut twisted as he realized there was no way they could risk it. It was bad enough if anyone had caught them together over the years, but weeks together in the same house? Ilya would not be able to hold back his feelings forever.

“Your cottage?”

“Yes.” Shane nodded, determined as a wheedling note entered his voice. “Don’t go to Russia. Come to my house. We’ll have so much fun, it’s so private. No one would know.”

Ilya hated every moment of this. He wanted nothing more than to say yes, to spend two weeks with Shane. To spend a life with Shane if he could. But he couldn’t, and they both knew it. To pretend otherwise would be cruel. “Hollander, you know I can’t do that. If I were caught—”

Shane kept speaking, looking up at Ilya with his dark eyes that always made Ilya turn to jelly. “We could have a week or even two. We’d be completely alone.” Shane squeezed Ilya’s hand once, twice, three times. “We’d finally be together.”

Ilya had to get out of that room, away from this sweet, silly man who wanted to give Ilya the world.

“Maybe. Maybe.” He finally said, forcing a small smile to his face.

“Okay.” Shane leaned back against his pillows, satisfied. “It’s a really nice cottage. It has its own well, so the water is really good.”

Why the fuck was Ilya in love with his idiot? The effect that Shane Hollander’s stupidly pretty face had on his nervous system should be studied by scientists in a lab.

“Okay. I will think about it.” Ilya checked his phone, cursing at the time. “I need to get back to my room.”

“Wait.” Shane tightened his grip. “Can I have a good night kiss?”

Ilya sighed. “Hollander—”

“Just a little one. To make me feel better. I’ll go to sleep right after, I promise.” Shane’s eyes were now impossibly wide. How the fuck was he doing this? Hollander was a grown man, not the cartoon cat from Shrek.

Ilya knew there was no getting out of this. And, if he was being honest with himself, he did not want to get out of his.

“Very well.” He leaned in and kissed Shane softly on the mouth, pulling back before Shane could deepen the kiss. Shane whined a little, Ilya rolling his eyes. “A promise is a promise. Go to sleep, you naughty kotik.”

“Okay.” Shane waved at Ilya, finally letting go of his hand. “Bye bye.”

Ilya paused at the door, looking back to see Shane finally drifting off to sleep. He looked so peaceful, even with all the medical equipment.

He wished he could have this. That he could see Shane fall asleep at night and wake up with him every morning. But that would never happen. He could never have that, and he knew it. There was no point in pretending.

Ilya sighed as he slipped out of Shane’s room, making his way back to his room before anyone knew he was gone.

~~

The next morning, after he was discharged, Ilya paused as he passed the door to Shane's room. Part of him wished that he could go in there and be with him in the light of day. He wished more than anything that he could take Hollander up on his offer to go to his precious cottage and spend weeks with him in the sunlight. But he knew better. He could never have someone like Shane in the light of day. That was more than he ever deserved. He would only be permitted to have them in the shadows. That was how it had always been, and that was how it was always going to be as long as he was playing hockey.

It would take a miracle for anything to change between them.

~~

Jane: I can't believe New York is finally going to win the cup.

Ilya couldn't believe it either. Scott fucking Hunter was going to be a Stanley Cup champion in about forty seconds.

Ilya: I hate Hunter.

Jane: No you don't.

Ilya: I do.

"Ilyusha, can you focus?" Ilya looked up from where he was sitting on the couch, Svetlana packing a suitcase to take home to Russia. "I am bringing your niece's presents. Can you at least help me pack?"

"Fine." Ilya groaned. "Anything would be better than watching a dinosaur win the cup."

"Scott Hunter is still in his prime."

"That's what the dinosaurs thought, too, before the asteroid took them out."

Svetlana rolled her eyes. "Give me two minutes, and then you can go back to hating Scott Hunter."

"I can multitask."

The tow of the packed quickly, Ilya sitting down on the couch before long.

"And there you have it!" the announcer said, Ilya rolling his eyes. "82 regular season games, and the New York Admirals have won the Cup for the first time in 28 years! Your 2017 champions!"

"I cannot believe what I am witnessing right now!" Ilya groaned as he helped Sveta pack. "This should have been our year."

"Maybe," Svetlana shrugged. "If you had not bruised your ribs and sprained your wrist, perhaps you could have won it all."

Ilya's hand went to his wrist, lost, I thought. As much as he wanted to win, he didn't regret injuring his wrist. Not when it might have helped protect Shane.

Thinking of Shane brought his thoughts back to his invitation for Ilya to spend time with him at his cottage this summer. Ilya knew that he could never go, that there would be no explanation if they were discovered that would protect them, but that did not stop him from wanting to. Instead, he would be spending his summer alone in Boston while Svetlana went back to Russia. Some people from his team would be sticking around, but it would not be the same, and Ilya knew it.

Ilya could have gone with her, but Russia was not a place he ever wanted to visit again. His desire to return had died with his father.

Instead, he was trapped between a city he did not wish to return to and a place he could not risk going to.

“Hey.” Svetlana put a hand on his shoulder, Ilya shrugging it off.

“I’m not sad.”

“You’re allowed to be.”

“Well, I’m not.”

Ilya sighed, frowning at the screen.

Shane texted him about the Admirals winning. Ilya tapped out a response as he continued to watch.

“Hunter seems to be looking out to the fans,” an announcer said. “No doubt a recognition of their sticking with him.

But Ilya wasn’t sure that was it at all. Something in Hunter’s gaze as he looked out into the crowds told him that he was doing something else.

“Hunter is now trying to get someone’s attention, apparently inviting someone from the crowd down to the rink.”

Ilya sat, transfixed, as a young man hopped the boards, Scott Hunter bringing him into the center of the ice before kissing him.

Scott Hunter had just come out, in front of the entire world, after winning the cup. Scott Hunter had done what Ilya and Shane were too scared to do, and he did it in front of the entire world.

And if he could do it, then what the hell was Ilya doing staying in Boston when he could be with Shane? What was Ilya doing holding out on admitting how he felt to Shane?

Svetlana seemed to read something in his expression and smiled, handing him his phone. “Go get him.”

Ilya took it, rushing into the hallway as he dialed.

~~

Shane was still staring at the TV in disbelief, Scott Hunter’s grinning face filling the screen as he embraced who Shane could only assume was his friend, when his phone rang. Shane pulled it out of his pocket, stiffening when he saw Lily flashing across the screen.

He rose to his feet, moving into the hallway as he answered.

“What the...” he started to say before Ilya cut him off.

“I am coming to the cottage.”

Shane froze, hope filling his heart.

“I-Are you sure?”

“I am sure, Shane.”

Shane grinned into the phone.

“Okay. Good. Let me know when you book your flight. And send me your flight information.”

“Why?”

Shane rolled his eyes at his phone. “So I can pick you up from the airport, obviously.”

“I do not need you to pick me up.”

How the fuck else are you going to get to my cottage?”

“Rental car? Uber? There are options.”

“Ilya Gregorovich Rozanov—”

“So intimidating. Did you have to Google my middle name?”

Shane acted as though he hadn’t spoken. “I am picking you up from the airport. Send me your goddamn flight information.”

Ilya sighed. “You are very pushy. Did anyone ever tell you that?”

Shane grinned into the phone. “Actually, no. I usually just get called boring by some asshole I know.”

“That sounds like very smart man. Perhaps you should listen to him.”

“I’d listen to him a lot more if he sent me his flight information.

Ilya groaned. “You are very stubborn, do you know that?”

“Yes, it’s one of my more redeeming qualities.”

“...very well. I will send you flights when I book them. Now I have to go and pack. Goodbye, Hollander.”

The line went dead, Shane still smiling to himself as he went back to the couch.

His mom gave him a look. “You seem pretty happy for the Admirals winning.”

Shane tried to brush it off. “I mean, if it couldn’t be the Metros, I’m glad it was the Admirals,” he paused, glancing at his parents out of the corner of his eye. “And what Scott did was pretty brave. I’m proud of him.”

His mom nodded. “What he did took guts. And who knows? Maybe he’ll inspire other people.”

Shane looked down, fiddling with his glass of water. “Yeah. Maybe.”

He picked up his phone again, shooting off a text to Scott.

Shane: Hey Scott. That was a brave thing you did. I admire you for being so open about who you are and who you love.

He read the text over before sending it, part of his heart aching. Scott being so open about who he loved just reminded Shane that he could never be. Even if he and Ilya were willing to try being together, they would be on different teams, forced to be rivals. They wouldn’t be able to have their moment in the sun like Scott could with the man he loved, no matter how much Shane might hope otherwise.

Chapter 9

Shane parked in the passenger lot of the Ottawa airport a week later, texting Ilya what kind of car to look out for. With some time to kill, he pulled out his phone and started scrolling. He paused on the Metro's group chat. He usually kept it muted in the off-season, but perhaps now was as good a time as any to get caught up on what everyone's summer plans were."

He opened the chat, freezing at a message.

Comeau: I can't believe the MLH is going to let him play.

Pike: Don't be an ass. Being gay isn't against the MLH rules, and Hunter just won the Cup.

Drapeau: Yeah, but since when do we give awards to fairies instead of real players?

Wait... what?

Shane scrolled up, finding the beginning of the conversation.

Drapeau: Are you guys seeing this shit?

Mitka: Don't be jealous that the admirals won, dude.

JJ: Drapeau means the guy Scott Hunter is bringing onto the ice.

Mitka: OH SHIT.

Pike: Oh. Wow. Did not see that coming.

Drapeau: I can't believe the admirals have a fucking fairy as captain.

Shane's blood ran cold.

JJ: WHOA

Mitka: Are you serious dude?

Comeau: It's not like he's wrong, guys.

Drapeau: I wonder if this was why Hollander kicked his ass that one time. Did Hunter hit on him on the ice?

Shane froze. Was this what people were going to think of him? That he was homophobic? It wasn't like he could clear the air and say what the fight was about. Not when it would put Ilya in danger.

JJ: No way would Shane hit someone for that.

Pike: Are we all remembering the same fight? Shane just shoved him and yelled that he was 45.

Drapeau: then why isn't our captain saying anything?

Pike: He had a concussion, you know how strict he is about staying off his phone while he's recovering.

Drapeau: okay, fine. Getting back to the point: Are we supposed to play against the Admirals as if nothing happened?

Pike: Why would Scott Hutton's coming out keep us from playing against the Admirals?

Comeau: Drapeau's right. How are we supposed to play against this guy? I'm always going to be wondering if he likes getting slammed into the boards a little too much.

Dillon: I doubt that's what Hunter is thinking about on the ice. He's an amazing player.

Comeau: Why don't you go suck his dick if you like him so much?

Pike: Comeau. Knock it off.

Comeau: Kiss my ass, Pike.

Drapeau: I'm just glad we don't have one of them in our locker room. I'd never be able to shower in peace again.

Shane closed the chat, his breath coming harder and faster.

He'd never seen this side of the team before. He knew the MLH wasn't the most accepting place, that was why he hadn't come out. He could only assume that was why Scott didn't come out either. But he had no idea his team felt this way. He'd known them for years. He'd been to their kid's birthday parties, and he was a groomsman in some of their weddings. How could he not have known that they felt like this?

At least it wasn't all of them. Hayden, JJ, Mitka, Dillon... they hadn't said anything bad. But the rest of the team, aside from Comeau and Drapeau, had stayed silent. Were they the exception or the rule when it came to the metros?

He wasn't sure. And that terrified him more than he cared to admit.

And if they were willing to say all that shit about Scott Hunter, one of the greatest players in recent history... would they be better or worse if they found out about Shane?

Shane was jolted out of his thoughts by movement out of the corner of his eye. He spotted Ilya in his side mirror, strolling up to the car like a lion on the p[rowl. Shane tried not to let his jaw drop at the sight of Ilya in a sleeveless shirt, his biceps glowing in the midday sun. He popped the trunk, Ilya stowing his suitcase before making his way to the passenger door.

"Hey," Shane said, suddenly nervous, as Ilya closed the door.

"Is this a Jeep?" Ilya looked around, nose wrinkled at Shane's car.

Shane bristled. "No, it's British."

"Jeeps cannot be British?"

"No, they're American."

“So you have boring car for fun? You are millionaire hockey player with Rolex money. Why is your car so boring?”

Shane gave him a look. “It’s practical. Good in the snow.”

Ilya gave him a look before nodding. “ok.”

Shane took a deep breath, started the car, and backed out of the spot. Part of him kept eyeing the pedestrians around him, waiting for someone to realize two of the most popular MLH stars were in a car together and take a photo of them. But no one seemed to notice. And he felt his shoulders relax a little as they got out of the airport.

Shane cleared his throat, trying to keep from looking at Ilya. He couldn’t believe that he was here. That he could have Ilya for the next two weeks uninterrupted.

Part of him wished it could be longer, but he knew he had to be happy with what he had.

“Are you hungry?” Shane asked, glancing at Ilya. “It’s about a two-hour drive, but we can stop for something if you want.”

“No, I’m ok,” Ilya told him. “I ate something at the airport.”

Shane inwardly cringed at the idea of airport food, but he knew Ilya wasn’t as restrictive with his diet as Shane was.

Cool.” Shane was silent for a moment. “I think you’re going to like the cottage.”

“Oh, really? Why are you so sure?”

Shane flushed a little. “It’s, uh, relaxing.”

He spotted Ilya grinning out of the corner of his eye. “Ah, is that what we are going to do? Relax?”

“I hope so.” Shane shrugged, eyes on the road. “I would like to relax with you for once.”

Ilya nodded at that, and Shane kept talking, his nerves filling the silence in the car. “I bought groceries, so we don’t need to leave. Or not leave much. If we don’t want to.”

Ilya turned to look at him, eyes soft. “Thank you for inviting me.”

Shane paused at a red light and gave him a soft smile in return. “I’m glad you’re here.”

“Me too, but...” Ilya snorted. “Also, like, terrified, yeah?”

“Yeah.” Shane chuckled at that, Ilya taking his hand and pressing a kiss to his palm.

“Did anyone recognize you?” Shane asked, a nervous energy thrumming through his limbs. “At the airport or anything?”

“No, no.” Ilya shook his head. “Not that I noticed.”

Shane didn’t know how it was possible for anyone not to notice Ilya when he walked through the room, but he should be grateful that not everyone was as obsessed with him as he was.

“Cool.” Shane nodded. “The cottage is super private, so we don’t need to worry about anything.”

“Not even your parents?”

“No,” Shane assured him. “I told them I was on a silent retreat, like a meditation thing.”

Ilya stared at him and burst out laughing.

“What? Does that sound fake?” Shane asked.

“Yes!” Ilya laughed, wiping a tear from the corner of his eye before leaning against the back of his seat, grinning at Shane. “Ah! “It would if it were anyone but you.”

“Because I’m so boring?” Shane snorted.

“Exactly. Is your sexiest quality to be sure.”

Shane took one hand off the steering wheel, blindly reaching for Ilya’s. Ilya grabbed his hand, interlacing their fingers.

Two weeks. He could have this for the next two weeks. He could have this time with him and pretend that they could be together. Who knew when they would get this chance again?

The rest of the drive passed quickly, the two of them talking about nothing in particular as they drove. Shane noticed Ilya’s lack of surprise when they reached the cottage, and he frowned in confusion. Most people had no problem reminding him that his cottage was actually a mansion. Even his mother pointed out that the term cottage was inaccurate. But Ilya just accepted it and moved on.

Shane parked the car, going to the trunk to get Ilya’s bag, only for the other man to beat him to it.

“Ilya, give me the suitcase.”

“No.”

Shane huffed out a breath of annoyance. “Ilya-”

“How are your ribs?”

“They’re fine, you know that. The doctor gave me the all clear last week.” Shane gave Ilya a pointed look. “I’m not the one with injured ribs right now. Or a sprained wrist.”

Ilya snorted. “The wrist healed weeks ago.”

“And the ribs?”

“Mine are just bruised. I played through playoffs on them.”

“A fact that is deeply concerning.” Shane made one last grab for the suitcase before Ilya twisted away from him.

Shan raised an eyebrow as the other man hissed at the movement, the Russian shooting him a dirty look.

“Not a word, Hollander.”

“Back to last names? How disappointing.” Shane went to open the door.

“I can’t believe you played with those bruised ribs.”

“Whoa, you can’t?” Ilya raised his eyebrows, Shane flushing under his gaze.

“ok, maybe I can.” Shane led Ilya into the main part of the house, glancing back to see Ilya’s expression.

“Wow!” Ilya looked around at the house. “Your real estate fetish really paid off, huh?”

“I didn’t buy this. I had it built.”

“Oh, I know.” Ilya looked around.

Shane frowned, wondering how he knew that before putting it out of his head.

“I can give you a tour, if you’d like, or I could make us some lunch.” Shane started to walk to the kitchen. “There’s plenty of food.”

“Hollander.”

“Also, I bought you Cokes, though the water here is really good. I have my own well. You can see it.” Shane turned around and found Ilya standing just inches away from him.

“In case you’re thirsty.” Shane finished, trailing off as Ilya smirked at him.

“There is only one thing I want.” Ilya pulled Shane into a kiss, his mouth moving against Shane’s with a frantic urgency. Shane moaned, winding his fingers into Ilya’s hair as the other man started to walk him back. The two of them crashed onto the couch, nearly knocking a lamp off a nearby table.

Shane pulled away from Ilya’s lips, the two of them laughing as they lay on the couch together. Ilya’s hand started to wander down Shane’s body, and Shane stopped him after a minute.

“Wait,” Shane flushed, looking away from Ilya. “It’s been a while, so I might not last long.”

“Yes, same, but we have two weeks.”

“Yeah, cool.” Shane nodded before pausing and looking back at Ilya. “Wait, same?”

Ilya nodded, and Shane frowned. “You said ‘same.’”

“I did.”

Shane sat up slightly, looking down at Ilya splayed against the couch cushions. “You haven’t been with anyone lately?”

“No.”

“Not since...” Shane didn’t want to remind Ilya that the last time was before Ilya’s father passed.

“No, not since, so can we...” Ilya made a motion with his hand, but Shane couldn’t wrap his mind around it.

“Really?”

Ilya sighed. “Hollander, it’s not a big deal, ok?”

“Yeah, but it’s been...” Shane started before Ilya cut him off.

“Months, yes, I know. So can we fuck now, please?”

“I haven’t either,” Shane told him. Not since the last time. He paused, an idea forming in his brain. “I have an idea.” Ilya looked at him, motioning for him to go on. “For the next two weeks, let’s just be honest with each other... about what we actually think and... maybe how we really feel?”

Ilya let out a low breath before giving Shane a nod. “I will try.”

“Really?” Shane grinned, unable to believe it.”

“Yes,” Ilya told him. “I will do anything if it will make you touch my dick right now.”

“Well, at least you have your priorities straight.” Shane kissed Ilya one more time, the other man groaning into the kiss.

“Should I show you to your room?” Shane asked, pulling away with a teasing look in his eyes. “There are two guest rooms downstairs, so plenty to choose from.”

“Mmm.” Ilya grinned, playing along. “I will need a king-size bed.

“They all have a king-size bed,” Shane told him.

“And a view.”

“They all have a view.” Shane rolled his eyes.

“And I will need a... What do you call it? An en-suite bedroom.”

“En suite bathroom,” Shane corrected him, and playfully frowned. “Well, that might be a problem.”

“Oh?” Ilya raised his eyebrows. “And why is that?”

“There’s only one with an en-suite,” Shane started to pull Ilya towards the stairs. “And it’s mine.”

In the back of his mind, he wondered how Ilya had known he had an en suite bathroom. Was it just a guess? If so, it was a really good one.

Shane pulled Ilya into his bedroom, the other man grinning as Shane turned to face him.

“This is awkward,” Shane said, adopting a formal tone and holding his hands behind his back. “This room isn’t available to the guests.”

“Mmm.” Ilya played along, stepping closer. “Disappointing.”

“I’m sorry, sir,” Shane said, raising his chin. “We’d really like to accommodate you, but...”

Before Shane could say anything else, Ilya pounced. He threw Shane onto the bed, climbing on top of him and pinning him by his wrists. Ilya's knees landed on either side of Shane's hips, Shane noticing how Ilya didn't put any pressure on his chest.

"Sir, I'm just a bellboy!" Shane giggled, struggling to break free from Ilya's grip on his wrists. "You can't treat the staff like this."

Ilya leaned, his voice dropping to a husky growl. "Oh, I think I know how the staff likes to be treated after all these years, hmm?" Shane saw Ilya grin before leaning in, their lips meeting. Shane moaned into the kiss, writhing in Ilya's hold. He could have stayed in that moment for the rest of his life. And then he remembered something he forgot.

"Wait." He broke away from Ilya's lips, the other man confused as he let go of Shane. "Sorry, just let me—" Shane grabbed the remote for the automatic shutters. He stood up from the bed, pointed it at the windows, and watched the shutters descend.

"No, no, Shane." Ilya moved towards him, rising from the bed and pulling Shane into another kiss before pulling away. He reached for the remote, Shane relinquishing it with a confused look. Ilya clicked the button, retracting the blinds before tossing the remote over his shoulder with a wink. He put his hands on Shane's ribs, walking them backward until Shane's back hit the glass. Shane had a flashback to the first time they kissed as Ilya stepped closer, his pupils so large that his eyes appeared almost black.

"Let me have you in the daylight." He murmured, his hand coming up to grasp Shane's chin, leaning in for another kiss.

~~

Shane stared at the contents of Ilya's suitcase with a raised eyebrow, Ilya watching him with amusement.

They'd barely managed to get dressed, and Shane had decided that now was the perfect time to unpack Ilya's suitcase. Ilya had told him he was fine with living out of it for two weeks, but Shane had stared at him like he had shot his puppy.

"How did you think this was enough clothes for two weeks?"

Ilya snorted, content to lie on the bed and watch Shane unpack for him. "You have washing machine, no?"

Ilya, you brought like three days of clothes." Shane rolled his eyes. "You're lucky we wear a similar size. You can easily borrow some of my clothes."

Ilya crawled across the bed, pulling Shane into his arms and making a kiss on his cheek. "Or we could just not wear clothes at all."

Shane squirmed. "I'm not cooking naked. That sounds like an excellent way to get burned in uncomfortable places."

Ilya pushed Shane onto the bed, climbing on top of him and pressing their lips together. Shane immediately responded, the two of them moving as one.

This was all Ilya had ever wanted for them. To be together, and get to exist without the rest of the world saying that they had to be enemies. In that moment, his heart was full, and his life was complete.

And then, when he pulled away from the kiss, their foreheads pressed together, he opened his mouth and ruined it.

“I love you. Marry me.”

He froze, Shane pulling back to look him in the eyes.

He didn’t mean to say that. He wanted it more than anything, but he did not mean to actually say it. Fuck, he had ruined everything. Shane would never want to be with him. What had he been thinking?

“Holy shit,” Shane said, Ilya starting to panic.

“I mean...”

“Yes. I’ll marry you.”

Ilya stared at Shane, the other man’s eyes shining in the dim light with unshed tears.

“You are serious?” He checked, Shane grinning in response. “You want to marry me?”

“I want everything with you.” Shane pressed his hand to Ilya’s heart, Ilya’s heart racing faster at the touch. “I love you, Ilya.”

Ilya pressed his lips to Shane’s again, the tension evaporating from his frame.

“Fuck, Hollander.” he collapsed onto Shane’s chest, feeling the other man press a kiss to his hair.

“Oh my God, I love you so much,” he heard Shane say as Ilya rested his head on the other man’s chest. “Does it...Does it fucking kill you too?”

“Not anymore,” Ilya mumbled into his chest. “I...I did not mean to say it like that.”

He felt Shane freeze. “You don’t want to marry me?”

“I do!” He shut up, looking into Shane’s eyes. “I do more than anything. But...” He struggled to find the words in English. “You deserve better than that. You deserve better than me.”

Shane’s eyes blazed with a fire he’d never seen before. “I decide what I deserve. I love you, Ilya Rozanov. I will always want you, no matter what. And it would be my honor to marry you.”

Ilya felt his face crumple as he fell back into Shane’s arms, the two of them silent for a long moment as they listened to the sounds of birds outside the window.

“How did we let this happen?” Shane said softly, Ilya knowing what he meant. This was just supposed to be a simple hookup that day in Toronto.

“We were both very stupid and irresponsible.” Ilya sighed, carding a hand through Shane’s hair. “And maybe we both hoped that things could be different.”

“This is real, though, right?” Shane looked at him. “I’m not going to wake up and find that this had all been a dream?”

“This is real Hollander.” Ilya paused. “I do not know how we move forward from where, but I know we will do it together.”

“Together.” Shane sighed. “I like the sound of that.”

Ilya paused for a moment, snaking his hand down Shane’s chest. “And I liek the thought of making love to my fiancé. What do you think?”

He saw Shane grin. “I think I can get behind that idea.”

Ilya pulled Shane into a kiss, his hand already pushing down both of their pants. He kicked them off the bed, breaking away from the kiss long enough to peel off his shirt. He reached for Shane’s next, the other man laughing at his speed.

Shane grabbed the lube and was about to start opening himself up, not wanting to wait.

“Let me,” Ilya said, taking the lube from Shane and kissing him deeply as he slipped his first finger inside.

He felt Shane’s back arch as he used a second finger, the other man biting back a groan.

“So eager,” Ilya murmured, moving his lips to Shane’s neck.

“Don’t be a tease.” Shane groaned as Ilya sucked and bit at his neck, gasping when Ilya slipped a third finger in and scissored them.

“But you are so fun to tease.” Ilya chuckled as he ran his free hand down Shane’s side, somehow hitting all the areas Shane was sensitive.

After nearly ten years, he knew his fiancé’s body as well as he knew his own.

Ilya still couldn’t believe that Shane was his fiancé. He kept expecting to wake up in the hospital after the Boston game, the last few weeks, having been in a dream.

But it wasn’t a dream. This was real, and he was going to savor every moment.

Before long, Ilya could tell that Shane was ready for him.

Ilya reached for a condom before Shane stopped him.

“I’m clean,” he said, his cheeks flushing a deep red. “If you want, we can—”

Ilya cut him off with a kiss. “I want.”

Ilya lined his cock up and pressed in, Shane clenching around him. Ilya started to move after a moment, the pace slow as he teased Shane.

Shane reached for Ilya, but Ilya caught his hands and pinned them above his head.

“No, we are going to take our time with this,” Ilya said, cutting off Shane’s complaints with a harsh kiss as he sped up.

“Ilya, please.” Shane moaned as Ilya’s lips returned to Shane’s neck.

“Be patient.” Ilya punctuated each word with a nip to Shane’s collarbone.

He knew Shane was getting close, the tension in his frame building. He reached a hand down to tug at Shane’s cock as he sped up his pace.

Shane gave a strangled shout as he came, spilling all over his stomach.

With a final groan, Ilya finished and pulled out of Shane.

He collapsed on the bed next to him, the two of them just lying there for a minute.

Shane nudged him after a long moment, Ilya groaning.

“I do not want to clean up. You have killed me, Hollander. I am dead.”

“You’ll complain later when you’re all sticky.” Shane rolled his eyes, pulling Ilya to his feet.

“You are the worst fiancé.” Ilya grumbled, Shane laughing.

“Just keep telling yourself that, Rozanov.”

~~

“I’m glad you came,” Shane told Ilya as they lay in bed together after their shower.

“We both did, Hollander.”

Shane slapped his chest. “Don’t be an asshole.”

“But you love me being an asshole.”

Shane rolled his eyes, getting back on track. “I mean that I’m glad you came to the cottage instead of going back to Russia. Even if the proposal hadn’t happened, I would be happy that you were here.”

“I am glad too.” Ilya paused. “I was not going to go back to Russia. I sold my apartment there.”

Shane turned around to look at Ilya. “What?”

“When I was there for my father’s funeral, my brother and I fought.” Ilya shook his head. “Russia is not good place for me. I made my space with no going back.”

“I’m sorry.”

“Is okay, Hollander.” Ilya pressed a kiss to his cheekbone. “At least I have you.”

“Yeah.” Shane leaned into his touch. “I’m glad I have you, too.”

“And i am glad I am here too. I suppose I have Old Man Hunter to thank for that.

“Maybe you can thank him by not calling him ‘Old Man Hunter.’”

“I do not think I have the strength to do that.” Shane laughed, and Nadilya kept going. “Watching Scott Hunter have his moment on the ice...” Ilya trailed off for a moment, Shane enjoying the feeling of being held. “It made me hope that I could have the same with you one day.”

Shane started to smile, but then paused. “With you kissing me on the ice after winning?”

“Of course.”

Shane twisted his head and narrowed his eyes. “So in this scenario, you just beat me for the Cup?”

“Da.”

“Why couldn’t I be the one to beat you?”

“Because is my fantasy, Hollander.”

Shane snorted, turning back around.

“There’s only one problem.”

“Oh?”

“I’m not going to be in the mood to kiss you if I just lost the Cup to you.”

“Really?”

“Really.”

Shane felt Ilya’s arms tighten around him, one of his hands wandering down his chest.

“You do not think you would be proud of me?” Ilya’s voice dropped to a sinful purr, nipping at Shane’s neck between words.”

Shane resisted the urge to bury his face into his pillow. “No.”

He felt Ilya smile against his skin. “Really, Hollander?” He nipped again, harder, as one of his hands lightly grazed Shane’s cock. “You would be bad sport? How disappointing.”

Shane bit back a moan, his body coming alive under Ilya’s touch. He tried to move his arms, but Ilya’s grip kept them pinned to his sides. He writhed in his lover’s iron grip, Ilya’s light touches tormenting him. “Maybe I could-I could be a little bit of a good sport.”

Ilya gasped into Shane’s ear, one hand plucking at Shane’s nipple as the other firmly grasped his cock. “You would do that? For me? Hollander, you make me blush.”

Shane growled, jerking his head in frustration at Ilya’s torturous touches. “I’ll do a lot more than that if you don’t-”

“Hush, Hollander.” Ilya’s hands began to move, a new purpose to his actions. “Let me take care of you.” His voice dropped even lower, the growl going straight to Shane’s cock. “It would be the sportsmanlike thing to do, no?”

“You’re such an asshole.”

“Yes, but I am your asshole. Do not forget.”

Chapter 10

The next morning, Ilya woke before Shane. He watched the other man's face in the dim morning light, marveling at how peaceful he looked. Shane looked surprisingly young when he wasn't carrying the weight of the world on his shoulders.

After a moment, he slipped out of bed. Making his way out of the house, he ended up sitting on a rock overlooking the lake as the sun came up. Moscow was seven hours ahead. Sveta was probably awake.

"Ilyusha?" She picked up immediately. "Are you okay?"

"I asked Jane to marry me." He said, jumping right into it.

He heard her let out a sound of surprise. "Wow. I'd say you jumped right in, but we both know it's been years at this point."

Ilya let out a laugh, remembering the first time that she had caught him texting Shane. They had been supposed to meet after the Montreal game, but the snowstorm had canceled all flights.

"I did not mean to ask; it just slipped out." He paused, realizing how that sounded. "I am not sad that I asked, though. I want to be with Jane."

"So, what is the problem?"

"Who said there's a problem?"

He could practically hear her roll her eyes. "You would not have called me at dawn in Ottawa if you were not worried about something."

"Who said I was in Ottawa?"

Ilyusha, it took me all of two minutes to figure out who Jane was. Give me some credit."

That should have filled Ilya with panic, but he knew his secret was safe with her. And with Marley, whom he still had not told Shane about.

Ilya sighed, cutting to the chase. "What if I am not a good husband?" his voice was small. "It isn't like I've had much in the way of good role models in that department. My father was terrible, and my brother ignores his wife and child to get high."

"You are not either of them." Sveta's voice was soft. "You are going to be a good husband because you are a good person. You love Jane. You would not do anything that could hurt them."

"But what if that is not enough?"

"Then the two of you will work through it together, the way all couples do. And you will work through it."

“Okay,” he finally said after a long moment. “Thank you.”

“Of course. And Ilyusha? If you do not invite me to the wedding, I will hunt you for sport.”

Ilya let out a laugh. “Of course you will be invited. I need my family by my side.”

“And I will be happy to support you.”

She hung up after that, and Ilya was alone once more

Ilya sighed. Her words helped, but part of him still worried. He stayed there for a while, staring at the sun rising over the lake, before a light touch to his shoulder jolted him out of his reverie.

Shane stood next to the boulder with two cups of coffee and a blanket draped around his shoulders.

“I saw you out here and figured I’d join you,” he said by way of explanation. He handed Ilya one of the cups, climbing onto the rock and draping the blanket around both of them.

“I was talking to Svetlana,” Ilya told him, biting his lip and coming out with it. “She knows about us. I did not tell her, but she is smart. She figured it out.”

He felt Shane stiffen for a moment before answering. “Oh. And you trust her?”

“I do.” Ilya decided to be honest. “And Marleau figured it out after the hit during the last game. But he won’t say anything, I’m sure of that.” He let out a breath. “I am sorry, I know you wanted it kept secret.”

Shane seemed tense, but he gave Ilya a small smile. “It’s okay, Ilya.”

Ilya blinked. “It is?”

“We’re engaged,” Shane pointed out. “Eventually we’re going to get married. I want us to tell people eventually.”

Ilya relaxed. “I guess that’s true.”

Shane leaned his head against Ilya’s shoulder. “I don’t want to hide you. One day, I want everyone to know how happy I am.”

Ilya smiled, taking a sip of his coffee as he and Shane watched the sun rise over the water.

It was perhaps the most perfect morning he had had in years.

~~

After breakfast, Ilya sat in front of Shane with his laptop.

“Hollander.”

“Is that my laptop?”

“Is not important, but yes.”

“It feels a little important.”

“Is not.”

“How did you get onto it? It had a password.”

“Your password is Metros24. Is not exactly rocket science. Also, is terrible password. You should change it. Now, can we talk about something?”

“Yes?”

“We are engaged now.”

“I know, I was there.”

Ilya rolled his eyes. “Yes, but now we need rings. We cannot be engaged without rings.”

Shane leaned forward, reaching for Ilya’s hand. “Mon cœur. We can’t wear engagement rings.”

“Why not?”

Shane tried to think of the best way to phrase this. “Because we aren’t out, and if we have engagement rings on our left hands?” he gave a small shrug. “People will figure it out. Maybe not that we’re together, but they’d figure out something.”

Ilya furrowed his brow. “Why would we wear rings on our left hands?”

Shane stared at him. “Because engagement rings are always worn on the left hand.”

Ilya snorted. “This must be Western tradition.”

“Actually, the belief comes from ancient Rome. They thought there was a vein that went straight from the ring finger to the heart. It was meant to be romantic.”

“Why do you know this off top of your head?”

“Who do you think helped Hayden pick out Jackie’s ring?”

“You helped him pick that ring? Is probably the only reason why it looks nice.”

“How the fuck do you know what Jackie’s ring looks like?”

“I saw it at MLH event once.” Ilya brushed him off. The point is that the ring was very elegant, you clearly had a hand in the decision. I bet if Pike had picked it himself, it would have been an emerald cut solitaire diamond. Boring and ugly.”

Shane looked away, Ilya crowing in triumph. “Was I right? Is that what Pike would have picked?”

“Fuck off.”

“Hm. But see? Stupid Western tradition. Russia is much more simple with this. We wear rings on the right hand for honor and virtue. The right hand is correct hand.”

“What if you’re left-handed?”

Ilya stared before throwing up his hands. “What does that matter, Hollander? The point is, if Western culture says left hand, we can wear rings on the right hand. Or on a chain when we play. So, we look at rings now?”

Shane knew there were more reasons why they shouldn’t. All it would take was one person who knew about Russian wedding ring tradition to figure out that Ilya was engaged. But he also knew that he had spent nearly ten years pretending that he didn’t want the man in front of him, and he wasn’t willing to do that any longer.

“Okay.”

Ilya started to grin. “Yes? We can look for rings?”

“Yeah, I mean, it shouldn’t be that hard. We could pick up gold bands from any jewelry store—”

Ilya cut him off with a groan. “I knew you would be boring about this, Hollander. Plain bands? We will not have rings you could get at Walmart—”

“No one said we’d get the rings from Walmart!”

Ilya kept speaking as if he didn’t hear Shane. “Where is your sense of romance? Of whimsy? A ring should be important, and say something about person wearing it. No, you will have a ring that you cannot get at mall.” Ilya patted the couch next to him. “Come and sit. We look together.”

Shane obediently moved to sit next to Ilya. “I didn’t even know you could buy engagement rings over the internet.”

Ilya snorted, giving him a look. “You can buy everything over the internet. Even sex toys.” Shane’s cheeks flamed, and Ilya raised his eyebrows. “Maybe we look at that later, da?”

“Fuck you.”

“No, I fuck you after we pick rings. Consider it incentive.”

Shane rolled his eyes and settled in. “What website are we looking at?”

“I found this one.” Ilya moved the laptop so that it’s sitting in front of both of them. “The rings look unique.”

“Okay, are there any other Russian wedding ring traditions?” Shane asked.

Ilya shrugged. “I’ve only ever seen plain gold bands or three interlocking bands. And even if they are on the other hand, plain gold bands would be...” he thought for a second. “Red flag.”

“I guess that makes sense. And you don’t just want to do three interlocking bands?”

Ilya looked away for a moment. “If I were marrying Svetlana, I probably would.” Shane frowned at that, but Ilya kept speaking. “But...there is not much left for me in Russia. My father

is dead, my brother is...difficult. I do not want to be stuck in the past. I want to be in the future with you.”

Shane leaned his head on Ilyas’s shoulder. “That’s very sweet.”

“Yes, I am adorable. Now, we pick engagement rings so I prove I am best at this too.”

“Who says you’re going to pick the best one?”

Ilya gave Shane a look. “Lyubimiy moy. I will obviously pick best one. You are cute to think so, though. Wrong, but cute. Like Scott Hunter winning the Stanley Cup.”

“You have to let that go.”

“You’re right. After all, who knows how many more good years the dinosaur has in him?”

“He’s not that old!”

“His first date was to watch the pyramids get built.”

“Shane shoved Ilya. “Shut up and let me pick your engagement ring.”

“Fine. You are right. There is nothing less sexy than talking about old man Hunter when picking out rings.”

“Picking out rings is not asexy activity, Ilya.”

“Have you seen us? Everything is a sexy activity when we do it, Hollander.”

Shane grabbed the laptop and ignored Ilya, scrolling through the various options. All the rings on the site had interesting inlays: meteorite, koa wood, dinosaur inlay, stag bone. He could see why Ilya had chosen this device: the rings were unique. If he didn’t know any better, he would assume any man wearing a ring from this site on their right hand was just wearing a ring for fashion, not for engagement. This was the perfect way to hide in plain sight. But how was he supposed to pick the perfect ring for Ilya on this site? There were too many options.

“Do you give up, Hollander?”

Ilya leaned in, his breath hitting Shane’s ear. “There is no harm in admitting defeat. Not everyone can be good at everything.”

Shane elbowed him. “No. I’ve got this.”

As he scrolled, he realized that he did indeed have this. He had known Ilya for nearly a decade. Apart from Svetlana, whom Shane tried not to think about, he was perhaps the person who knew Ilya best. Ilya had given up so much for Shane. The last he could do was pick out a ring for the man he loved.

And just as he was searching, he found it. Inlays of meteorite and dinosaur bone, the ring was yellow gold with a single yellow colored sone in the top band.

“Okay, I think I have it.” Shane showed the screen to Ilya, scanning his face for a reaction.

Ilya looked and nodded once, his face giving nothing away. “Good. Why this one?”

“What do you mean?”

“Did you pick it because it looked nice, or was there purpose behind it?”

Shane scoffed. “What is this, a test?”

“Yes.” Ilya’s eyes twinkled with mischief. “I want to see how well my fiancé knows me.”

Shane sighed. “I mean...it does look nice. The gold reminds me of your hair. But I guess if I had to decipher why this was the ring for you...” Shane paused to collect his thoughts.

“The ring has meteorite and dinosaur bone. The dinosaur bone matches you because

your past is set in stone, but you are not defined by it. You are more than what your past has made you. And the meteorite? You’re leaving Russia to forge your own path, and neither of us knows how the next few years are going to go. But the one thing you know for sure is that we are going to get through this together. Because the only thing I know for sure is that I want to spend every moment I can with you by my side.”

Shane looked at Ilya when he finished, surprised to find the other man wiping his eyes.

“Hollander, that was beautiful. If your vows are half as nice, I will be lucky man.” Ilya smirked. “Even if you came up with that on the spot.”

Fuck you, I did not!”

“You clearly did. Is okay. Because even if you did not consciously think of it when you picked the ring, all of that was already in your head. And that means everything.” Ilya paused. “But when we eventually get married, do us both a favor and prepare your vows ahead of time, da?”

Shane shoved him. Fuck off.”

“Hm, maybe later.”

Shane rolled his eyes and leaned into him. “And as an added bonus, the dinosaur bone is a similar color to my eyes. So even though we can’t be together right now, you’ll always have a little piece of me with you.”

Ilya grinned. “I like that. Now move. I pick for you now.”

“So romantic.” Shane handed Ilya the laptop. “I think I’m falling in love with you all over again.”

“I know, I am catch. Now let me focus. I am not losing.”

“Ilya, you can’t lose at picking engagement rings; this is not a competition.”

“Of course, this is competition. And I will win, because I am best at everything.”

“You are not the best at everything.”

Yes, I am Hollander.”

“I broke your record at the All-Star Game during our rookie season.”

“Beginner’s luck.”

“I’m sorry, which of us has more Stanley Cups?”

“That was fluke. I will lead Raiders to the cup next year, and then i will do it again. Because I am the best hockey player in the world.”

“You’re not even the best hockey player in this house.”

Ilya put a hand over Shane’s mouth. “Do not insult your fiancé, Hollander. Now let me pick your ring. My honor is on the line.”

Shane rolled his eyes, moving Ilya’s hand. “Fine.”

Ilya tapped on the keys for a moment, his brow furrowed. Shane wanted to kiss the wrinkle from his brow, but knew Ilya would not appreciate Shane distracting him.

“Done,” Ilya announced.

Shane scoffed. “No, you are not.”

“Yes. I have picked your ring.”

“You’ve been looking for five minutes!”

“I do not need more time to do good job.”

“That is such bullshit.” Shane narrowed his eyes. “Were you looking at rings before now?”

Ilya’s eyes widened, and he tried to look innocent. “No, of course not.”

Shane rolled his eyes. “You are such a cheater.”

“I thought you said this was not competition. So how could I cheat?”

Shane let out an annoyed huff when he realized Ilya had a point. “Fine. So, let me see the ring.”

“Maybe I do not want to show it now. Maybe it should be surprise.”

“I showed you yours! Now show me mine.”

“Dirty, Hollander! I am impressed.” Ilya shrugged. “But fine. I will show you.”

Ilya flipped the computer around, and Shane’s breath caught in his throat. Ilya picked a ring with two meteorite inlays. They were bracketing a band of blue stone with small flecks

of gold. It was the most beautiful ring he had ever seen, and he wanted it on his finger at that moment.

So, uh, what made you pick this one for me?” Shane asked, trying to keep his voice calm.

“Ilya shrugged. “Is blue for Metros.”

Shane stared at him. “That’s your answer? After all that crap you gave me about symbolism?”

Ilya took one look at Shane’s indignant face and burst out laughing.

“Oh, fuck you, asshole.”

Shane started to get off the couch, but Ilya wrapped his arms around his waist before he could move.

“Hollander, schast’ye moyo.” Ilya easily lifted Shane onto his lap, his arms around him like a vise. “Let me tell you real reason.

Shane huffed, settling in. “I’m listening.”

“Okay, so I like what you said about the meteorite. I think is true for you as well: you have had this plan for your whole life, and now you are stepping off it with me. We are both on a new course.” Ilya paused. “And the blue stone is Lapis Lazuli. There is entire room in the Hermitage in Russia made with this stone. My mother took me there before she died on a trip without my father and brother. Her mother had taken her to see the same museum when she had been my age, and she wanted to continue family tradition.” Shane reached for Ilya’s hand as he kept speaking. “Is a very important stone, the Egyptians used it too. It symbolizes intellect, truth, and inner power. All three things I associate with you.” Ilya grabbed Shane’s chin, turning him to face him. “And I like that it is blue because, like with you and the dinosaur bone being brown, you get to carry a little piece of me with you as well.”

Shane leaned in and kissed Ilya softly, pulling away after a heartbeat. “You definitely cheated and looked up rings earlier, didn’t you?” Ilya shrugged. “Prove it.”

“I could check the history on my laptop.”

“You could, or we could place the order and go upstairs so I can fuck my pretty fiancé who is going to have a pretty ring with fancy inlays.”

“Your ring had inlays too!”

“Yes, but mine is not pretty like yours is.”

Shane laughed, thinking of something. “Can I get something engraved on the inside of my ring?”

Ilya shrugged. “Da. What do you want?”

“1410.”

Ilya looked at Shane, confused. “Why do you want random number inside your engagement ring?”

“It’s not random.” Shane insisted. “It’s the number of the hotel room I was in for the CCM shoot before our rookie season.”

A slow smile spread across Ilya’s face. “You remember room number after all these years?”

“Of course I do.”

“Good.” Ilya smacked a kiss on Shane’s cheek. “I do too. That’s why I will get 1221 on the inside of my ring.”

Shane grinned as they placed the order. They had to quickly pause to measure each other’s fingers with a string, but soon enough, their rings would be on their way to them courtesy of expedited

shipping.

“I don’t think I’ll ever want to take mine off,” Shane told Ilya.

“That is why we also get a chain for your ring,” Ilya reminded him. “So even when we have to take them off for games, we still have them.”

Shane smiled at that and then smirked. “So, is there a special place to get the chain from? Or is that okay to get at any jewelry store?”

“Hollander—”

“I just don’t want to offend you with my pretty ring being on a chain from Walmart.”

Ilya stood up suddenly, picking up Shane and throwing him over his shoulder.

“Ilya! Put me down.” Shane felt Ilya smack his ass and barely kept in a yelp.

“Not until we get to the bedroom.”



~~

“Okay, but seriously.” Ilya turned to Shane as they laid in bed together after sex. “How did you not know you could order sex toys online? You have a dildo.”

Shane’s cheeks turned red. “I am not having this discussion with you.”

“Come on, Hollander. Married couples should not have secrets.” Ilya rolled on top of him, pinning Shane to the bed. “Tell me.”

“Fine.” Shane was sure his cheeks were bright red at this point. “I bought it at a store when I was a teenager, before the draft.”

“Makes sense.” Ilya nodded. “I did not think you were exciting enough to look up sex things on the internet.”

“Oh, fuck you!”

“No, no, is okay.” Ilya leaned in, brushing his nose against Shane’s as his voice lowered. “I can introduce you to all sorts of fun things now.”

Shane knew that the grin on Ilya’s face should have terrified him, but for some reason it didn’t.

“Like what?” he found himself asking, tilting his head just a little to expose his throat.

Ilya shifted, collecting Shane’s wrists in one hand while the free hand came down to graze the side of Shane’s face.

“Like, for example, something to hold down your wrists so I can take my time with you,” Ilya said, his eyes dark.

“Like what? Fuzzy handcuffs?” Shane meant to laugh, but instead his voice came out breathy as he looked up at his fiancé.

“No, no.” Ilya shook his head. “Nothing so cheap for you. But some leather cuffs would hold you fast without risking damage to your perfect skin the way rope would.” Ilya’s hand moved to Shane’s mouth, his thumb pressing on the center of Shane’s bottom lip. “Or maybe something to keep your perfect mouth occupied while I took my time with the rest of you.”

Shane’s eyes widened at the thought of Ilya silencing him, occupying his mouth while cuffs held him fast, unable to do anything but lie there and take whatever Ilya was willing to give

him. The loss of control should have seemed horrifying to him. Instead, something about it seemed...intriguing.

Ilya’s hand left his face entirely, moving to grab his cock. “Or maybe something to keep you hard for as long as I wanted, so I could have all the time in the world to play with you.”

Shane moaned, leaning into his touch. His arms flexed, his wrists pushing against Ilya’s hand.

“Do you want that?” Ilya asked, a teasing smirk on his face. “Are you interested in me showing you just how much I want you?”

Shane nodded, his need for Ilya overwhelming him.

~~

Shane was whistling as he cooked the burgers for dinner the next day, grinning in the sunlight. He always enjoyed coming out to his cottage, his little piece of paradise. But there was something about this trip that was completely different for him. And that something was inside, grabbing the drinks and plates.

He’d happily called his cottage his fortress of solitude, a place where he could just be alone with himself, and way from all the expectations other people had for him. But for the first time, he found that having company wasn’t a bad thing. He and Ilya finally understood each other, and they were happy. And nothing would be able to take away from that.

“Why are you making so many burgers?” Ilya asked, coming up behind him.

Shane frowned, looking at the grill in front of him. “The recipe was for eight, so...”

Ilya stepped closer, gesturing at the grill. “ok, you cut it in half. What, you can’t do math?”

Shane scoffed, rolling his eyes. “Leave me alone.”

Ilya stepped closer, his arms bracketing Shane as they wound around his waist. Ilya pressed a kiss to Shane’s neck where his skin met his shirt, resting his chin on Shane’s shoulder.

“No,” he growled, Shane, trying not to react to his fiancé’s voice.

“Oh, so I’m stuck with you now?” Shane turned, catching a glimpse of Ilya out of the corner of his eye.

“Yes, is like Beyoncé said. You liked it, and you put a ring on it.”

“Technically I haven’t put a ring on it yet.”

Ilya scoffed. “You ordered one, is same thing. Now you are never getting rid of me.”

Shane grinned, turning his head to press a kiss to the corner of Ilya’s mouth. “Fine by me.”

Ilya turned to Shane, kissing him deeply.

“Stop, or I’ll burn the burgers.” Shane pulled away, glancing back at the grill.

“Good, then we will finally have the right amount of burgers.”

“Fuck you, I didn’t make that many extra!”

~~

“ok, fine. I should have cut it in half.” Shane admitted, looking at the four extra burgers once they finished eating.

“Told you so.”

“No one likes a know-it-all, Ilya.”

“I like you very much, and you are often know-it-all.”

Shane rolled his eyes at Ilya. “I guess we have leftovers for later.”

“Is no problem.” Ilya winked at Shane. “I’m sure I can think of many things we can do to burn the calories.”

Shane felt his cheeks go red, and he coughed, shifting in his seat. “Well, ordinarily, I would give the rest to my parents, but that would probably ruin my whole silent retreat lie, I guess.”

“Yuna and David, yes?” Ilya asked, Shane mildly surprised that Ilya knew their names.

“Mm-hmm,” he nodded, Ilya giving him a look.

“And?”

He gave Ilya a confused look. “And what?”

Ilya groaned. “Tell me about them.”

Shane laughed, putting down the burger. “What do you want to know?”

“I don’t know.” Ilya shrugged. “I don’t know anything about them. Well, except that your mother is Japanese or something.” He brought a hand up to the side of Shane’s face, brushing a thumb over Shane’s cheekbone as the other man leaned into his touch. “Probably where you get your looks.”

Shane blushed, leaning into Ilya’s touch. “Half of them, yeah.”

Ilya moved his hand away, Shane mourning the loss of contact. “And your dad is, what, boring?” his eyes glimmered with amusement. “Is that where you get your boring from?”

“He’s not boring,” Shane said with a laugh.

“So, he’s exciting, reading the New Yorker?” Ilya raised an eyebrow.

“He’s normal, ok? He works for the Treasury Board of Canada.”

“Crazy!”

Shane lightly shoved Ilya. “Fuck you! He played hockey for McGill.”

“Whoa.” Ilya paused, holding out a hand. “McGill?” Shane rolled his eyes as Ilya laughed. “What the fuck is McGill? Is McGill a town?”

“It’s a really good school.”

“Ah, did he ever think of going pro?”

“No, he didn’t want to.” Shane smiled softly. “He met my mom there, and that was that. My parents are so great together.”

“Do they know?” Ilya asked,

“About you? Of course not.”

Ilya rolled his eyes. “No, about you.”

“Oh.” Shane flushed, looking down at his hands. “No. I never told them.”

“Would they not be good about it?”

Shane shrugged. “I don’t know,” he realized that came out wrong. “I mean, no, they’d be fine. I’m sure they would be, but...” he sighed. “I don’t know. We haven’t talked about it. Sometimes, I think I would have told them already.”

Ilya gave him a look. “Oh, this is my fault.”

“No.” Shane rushed to say, wincing. “Well, I mean, yeah, kind of.”

Ilya sighed, shifting closer. "I think you could have told your parents you were gay without giving them a list of all the guys you were fucking." He looked away for a moment. "I mean, what is your plan here? To not tell them you're engaged?"

"Of course not." Shane bit his lip. "I was going to tell them after our time at the cottage is over...because I also need to discuss with them whether or not I should leave Montreal."

Ilya stared at Shane. "What?"

Shane sighed. "I don't know how your team reacted to Scott Hunter coming out--"

"They didn't really care."

"-But my team handled it badly." Shane shook his head, unlocking his phone and pulling up the team group chat. He handed it to Ilya. "I don't want to be in the closet for my entire career, not anymore. And I don't think they'd react any better if I came out. In fact, I think they'd take it even worse."

Ilya's face darkened as he read, finally looking up from the phone screen. "You think they'd come after you if you came out?"

"I don't think they'd attack me if that's what you mean, but I'm pretty sure they would make it clear how they felt." Shane let out a sigh. "It's just something I've been thinking of."

"But you love Montreal."

"I do." Shane leaned into Ilya, moving closer to him. "I thought I'd retire as a Metro and hang my jersey in the Bell Center rafters. But if it's between living a lie with them and being my true self somewhere else?" Shane shook his head. "There is no question what I would pick."

Ilya pressed his head against Shane's. "I do not deserve you."

"Yes, you do. And you deserve not to be hidden. I promise I am telling my parents about you soon."

"Thank you."

The two of them sat there for a moment longer before Shane got up to bring their dishes inside.

~~

Shane focused, his tongue between his teeth as he stacked the logs exactly as his dad had taught him.

"Hollander, what are you doing? Are you so bored that you have to play with sticks? You have a TV and a PlayStation for crying out loud." Ilya came up behind him, and Shane rolled his eyes.

"I'm not playing with sticks, I'm building a fire."

Ilya stared at him, moving to stand in front of Shane. "A what?"

“A fire.” Shane gave Ilya a look. “You know what fire is, right? It’s that thing that lights your cigarettes? That you should really stop smoking, by the way. I would rather not have my husband die of lung cancer.”

“Yes, very funny, Hollander.” Ilya rolled his eyes. “Why are you building fire? And for the record, I would not die of lung cancer. I am way too stubborn, and I would not want to leave you a rich widow.”

“I’m already rich, I don’t need your money to make me a rich widower.”

Ilya gave him a look. “You are getting off topic. Why are you building fire?”

“I’m building a fire because it’s what you do. You build fires at night in the summer.”

“Summer is hot, why the fuck would you want to build a fire?”

“It’s fun! It’s a nice thing to do outdoors. Haven’t you ever been camping?”

Ilya stared at him.

“Hollander, I know you were in Russia only the one time, but it is cold. And my family was not one for the outdoors.”

Shane grinned. “Then we definitely have to do this.”

“Do we really?”

“Yes! It’s all a part of being in the great outdoors.”

Ilya groaned. “Why am I getting married to an outdoorsman? I thought I was getting a fancy Rolex landlord.”

“I have layers.”

Ilya nodded. “Like an onion.”

Shane stared at him. “Dude, what the fuck?”

“You have layers, like an onion. Like ogre in that kids movie.”

Shane shook his head. “I’m going to ignore the fact that you just compared me to Shrek. Let me build the fire in peace. I promise: you’re going to have fun.”

~~

“Nice, right?” Shane grinned, Ilya giving him a look.

Ilya cocked his head and looked at the fire. “So we just sit here and look at it?”

“Yes. We just sit here and look at it.” Shane paused. “And I have smores stuff for later if we want it.”

Wow, you are willing to break your diet? Impressive.”

“It’s the summer, I can go a little crazy.”

Ilya snorted. “Yes, chocolate and marshmallow is crazy. And Canada is fun.”

“Shut up!” Shane shoved him, and Ilya snorted.

Shane’s phone went off, and he glanced down for a second. He looked back up to see Ilya staring at his phone as though it had mortally offended him.

“It was just Rose.” He said, and Ilya rolled his eyes.

“Mmm.” his eyes glinted in the campfire. “Just Rose?”

“She’s just checking in.” Shane waved it off and Ilya snorted.

“I’m sure. There must be so much to check on in the Canadian wilderness.

Shane frowned before realizing what was wrong with Ilya.

“You’re not jealous, are you?”

Ilya looked at the fire, not making eye contact. “No.”

Shane rolled his eyes. “Ilya, I’m gay.

“I know that. Does she?”

“I don’t know, but we’re just friends.”

Ilya frowned at him. “We were just friends, and now we’re engaged.”

Shane gave him a look.

“Ilya, I’ve only had a few relationships with women, and none of them ever ended well.

“What do you mean by none of them ending well?

“I mean, I’ve had sex with maybe three girls in my entire life, and all of them were complete disasters.

“Oh, disasters like how?” Ilya raised an eyebrow, and Shane flushed.

“I’m not going into details.”

Just then, a loon call sounded across the lake, and Ilya jolted away from Shane.

“What the fuck was that?” Ilya’s eyes scanned the trees, and Shane gave him a confused look.

“A loon?”

Ilya looked at Shane, eyes wide. “A what?”

“A loon.”

“What the fuck is a loon?”

“It’s a Canadian bird.”

Ilya turned back to the water. “It sounds like a fucking wolf.”

“It’s a bird, trust me,” Shane told him, Ilya not looking like he believed him. Another loon call sounded, and Ilya flinched, his eyes not leaving the trees.

“You’re so scared.” Shane tried to pull Ilya into his arms, Ilya’s frame tight with tension.

“What kind of a bird makes a noise like that?” Ilya argued.

“A loon!” Shane lost the battle in laughing, a giggle leaving his throat. “You thought it was a fucking wolf?”

Ilya rolled his eyes. “Stupid Canadian wolf bird.”

Shane laughed before deciding to do something to protect his fiancé from the scary, scary Canadian wolf bird.

Remembering what his dad taught him about bird calls, Shane brought his hands to his lips and warbled out a tremolo. With any luck, the loons in the area would get the warning he sent out and stay away.

And in the meantime, Shane got to deal with his fiancé staring at him as though he had grown a second head.

“Oh, so now you speak bird, too.”

“Fluent.” Shane grinned, and

Ilya snorted, turning back to the fire.

“I hate you.”

“No, you don’t.”

“Well, I am definitely teaching you Russian now.”

“Oh, really?”

“If you can speak bird, you can speak Russian.”

“Are you saying bird is easier than Russian?” Shane raised an eyebrow. “Does that mean you’ll let me teach you bird?”

“Fuck you, Hollander.”

“Maybe later.” Shane pulled

Ilya close. “Right now, let’s just enjoy the fire.”

~~

As the fire died, Ilya found himself lying on the bench, his head in Shane's lap. He'd never let anyone other than Svetlana see him as vulnerable at this. Then again, Shane saw him in ways Svetlana did not. Shane's hands were gently raking through his hair, and Ilya was resisting the urge to purr like a cat.

"Have you talked to your brother lately?" Shane asked after a long moment of silence, his voice soft in the forest's stillness.

"Mm-mmm." Ilya shook his head, not moving from his position. Not even his stupid brother could ruin this moment.

"Is that a good thing?" Shane asked.

"Probably, I don't know." Ilya sighed. "I've always assumed no news was good news when it came to Alexei. He hasn't hit me up for money at least."

Shane stroked his hair again, fingers skimming over his forehead. "I'm sorry about your family. Even if they suck, you must miss them."

Ilya took a deep breath. He'd never thought of telling Shane any of this. But if he was going to build a life with Shane, if he was going to let himself love him, then he should be able to trust him with this.

"My mother didn't suck," he finally said, nearly forcing the words out. "She was great."

"How did she die?" Shane asked quietly, and Ilya curled into Shane's lap.

"By accident," he paused for a long moment. "She accidentally swallowed a whole bottle of pills."

He waited for Shane to ask what happened, to ask about what had led her to that point. He waited for Shane to ask one of the thousands of questions he knew his lover must have had. But instead—

"How old were you?"

Ilya sighed, tension leaving his frame that he didn't even know what was present before then.

"Twelve. I found her." He felt tears welling at the corners of his eyes. "I don't want you to think she was weak."

"I don't," Shane assured him.

"She wasn't." Ilya kept speaking, his voice breaking ever so slightly. "She was so funny and beautiful," he sighed. "She was so sad. And my dad was so hard on her. And..." A loon call cut him off, Ilya jolting. "That motherfucker!"

He felt Shane suppress a laugh, his hands going back to Ilya's hair. "Do you want to go inside?"

Ilya shook his head, pressing a kiss to Shane's cloth-covered leg. "No. I just want you."

Shane's hand paused for a moment before he leaned down and pressed a kiss to Ilya's temple.

"That's all I want, too."

Chapter 11

“You can’t pick Montreal.” Shane glared at Ilya.

“Yes, I can.” Ilya rolled his eyes at his fiancé. “I’ve always wondered what it would be like to be a Metro.” he gave Shane a slight smirk. “You know, historically, they’re the best team in sport.”

“Better than the fucking Yankees.”

“Oh, I know so.” Ilya secretly loved how passionate Shane got about Montreal. Even if he also loves Shane's angry kitten face when he dissed them.

“Well, I’m going to be Boston.” Shane decided.

“Good choice.”

Shane shoved him lightly. “I’m going to fucking kill you.”

Ilya gave him a look. “I am you, Hollander.”

“Well, you’re not anything.” Shane pointed out, and Ilya gave him a dirty look.

Ilya picked up the CD case and held it up to his face. “I’m on the cover of the fucking game.”

Shane laughed at that and then paused, his phone vibrating in his pocket.

“Hollander, ignore them. Let’s just play.”

“Oh, fuck.” Shane groaned when he saw who was calling him. “It’s Hayden.”

“So? Tell him you are on silent retreat and call him back.”

Shane gave Ilya a look. “He just had a baby. I haven’t talked to him in weeks.”

Ilya groaned and dropped the controller. “So you plan to ignore your fiancée to talk to Montreal’s fifteenth best player?”

“Don’t be a baby.” Shane rolled his eyes as he picked up the phone. “Hey, buddy.”

Ilya flopped onto the couch cushions as Shane started to talk to his boring friend. Shane was supposed to be all his for the next two weeks. Why was he having to share him with fucking Pike?

He sat upright again, a devious thought entering his mind. He slowly started inching his hand up Shane’s leg, his fingers skimming his thigh. Shane looked up from the phone call and frowned, slapping his hand away. Ilya reared back, stunned for a moment, before deciding to redouble his efforts. This time, he managed to skim Shane’s crotch before Shane pushed his hand away, shifting uncomfortably in his seat. Ilya leaned in closer, his breath hitting the side of Shane’s face as he made contact with Shane’s cock through his clothes. Shane’s hand grabbed Ilya’s wrist, but he didn’t push him away. Ilya knew that he wouldn’t. His Shane wanted his touch as much as Ilya wanted to touch him. He heard Shane’s breath hitch, and he smirked.

“Uh, sorry, hey, just, um, my mom’s on the other line.” Shane made an excuse to pike, and Ilya fought the urge to snicker. “I’m just going to get rid of her, ok?”

Shane put pike on hold, taking the phone away from his ear and glaring at Ilya.

“What are you doing?” he chased, and Ilya looked at him.

“I think you know.” Ilya kept lightly touching Shane, and his breath hitched again.

“Please stop.”

Ilya leaned in closer. “I don’t think it’s what you want.”

“Later, ok?” Shane tried to bargain, and Ilya knew he had him right where he wanted him.

“ok, I make you a deal.” Ilya shifted back slightly, moving his hand. He resisted the urge to grin at how Shane’s hips bucked slightly, wanting to follow his hand as it moved away. “I won’t touch you, but if you get hard...”

“I won’t get hard.” Shane cut him off.

“ok, so no problem then.”

“Ilya...” Shane gave him a look, and Ilya returned it.

“Shane...”

Shane rolled his eyes and took Pike off hold, and Ilya knew the game had begun. Shane sat on the back of the couch, Ilya’s head now on the same level as his hips. Ilya had such a smart fiancé. He just made the game so much easier for Ilya to win.

“Uh, sorry, man, yeah, my mom is so annoying sometimes.” Shane glared at Ilya, who gave Shane an innocent smile as he leaned his head on Shane’s knee. He pressed a kiss to the side of Shane’s knee, smirking against the skin as Shane’s leg twitched. He started to gently stroke the side of Shane’s thigh with his hand, smirking as he saw Shane growing hard. His responsive little kotik needed no coaxing to respond to his ministrations.

Ilya straightened up, Shane still talking on the phone. He mimed pointing town and gave Shane a big thumbs up

“Got it, right, yeah, from Thanksgiving,” Shane said into the phone, rolling his eyes at Ilya’s pantomiming.

“Yeah, yeah, he’s... he’s great,” Shane said into the phone, shifting in his seat as Ilya reached into his pants and took out his cock.

If Shane wanted to stop, Ilya would have in a heartbeat. But Shane had given him an inch, and Ilya was going to run with it.

Ilya took Shane into his mouth, his fiancé jumping slightly as Ilya licked a stripe down his cock. He gently tongued at the slit, Shane’s breath hitching as Ilya continued to move.

“Uh...” he heard Shane pause, his breath hitching as he tried to maintain composure. Well, that’s nice that he could come and stay.” he could hear Shane bite back a soft moan as Ilya redoubled his efforts.

“Uh, no, nothing much here.” Ilya could tell that Shane was biting his lip to hold back a groan. “The headaches are better. Fuck.” Shane froze, and Ilya heard his voice get higher as he spoke to Hayden. “No, sorry, just a text.”

Ilya rolled his eyes, his hand coming up to slap at Shane’s chest. The other man’s breathing grew heavier and heavier, Ilya sensing he was close.

“Yeah, it’s totally clear, so all’s well there. Sorry, hey, one second.” He heard Shane put his phone on mute before Shane thrust into his mouth with a loud moan.

“Oh, fuck. Oh, fuck!”

It took only another second before Shane found his release, spilling down Ilya’s throat. Ilya pulled off him, watching with a satisfied smirk as Shane pulled himself back together.

Shane glared at him, picking up his phone and taking Hayden off mute.

“Ah. Sorry, man, I just... I have to run,” Shane said, out of breath. “Someone’s at the door.”

Ilya tried to hold back his laugh, Shane glaring at him as he put a foot on Ilya’s chest to hold him in place. Ilya just grinned from where he was pinned to the couch, unrepentant. “No, it’s just... It’s just Amazon. But, um, I’ll call you next week, and... yeah.” Shane paused. “All right, yes, love you, man. And give my best to Jackie and the kids.”

Shane hung up the phone, tossing it to the side as he pounced on Ilya.

“fuck you, fuck you.” Shane couldn’t help but laugh, and Ilya joined him. “Fuck. Why was that so hot?”

“Because you like to be bad.” Ilya winked, pulling Shane close.

“Hey.” Shane held up a hand, stopping Ilya in his tracks. “That’s not what this is. You and me. Maybe it was at first, but not now and not for a long time.”

Ilya put a hand up to cradle Shane’s face, watching the other man lean into his touch.

“So, you love Hayden?” Ilya asked with a raised eyebrow, Shane rolling his eyes.

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That night, Shane lay on the couch while scrolling on his phone. Ilya mirrored him, their feet touching in the middle of the couch.

“So I was thinking I’m a free agent next season,” Ilya said, as if starting a conversation about the weather.

Shane froze, a faint thread of hope working through him.

“Yeah?” He asked, trying to keep his voice casual.

“Yeah.” Ilya didn’t look up from his phone, but Shane could tell he was waiting for his reaction.

“You wouldn’t re-sign with Boston?”

Ilya shrugged. “They are not a bad team, but I wonder if they would be so kind towards me if they knew I was in love with you.”

Shane felt his cheeks go red. “So, if you didn’t sign with Boston...where would you go?”

“I don’t know, I was thinking maybe a Canadian team.” Ilya looked up, raising his eyebrow.

“Not Montreal, huh?” Shane said teasingly.

“No, I mean, I know they would be lucky to have me.” Shane rolled his eyes as Ilya spoke. “But I would love to not have Russian passport.”

Shane frowned. “Ilya, you know you’d become a citizen when we get married, right?”

Ilya snorted. “Hollander, it took us seven years to get engaged. I have no hope of us getting married for at least five.” Shane kicked at him as Ilya snorted. “And besides, with how things are with America, and how things are back home?” He shook his head. “I do not want to risk having Russian passport for any longer than necessary.”

Shane nodded, cringing at the thought of the American president.

Ilya was silent for a moment before speaking once more in a tone that was almost too casual.

“I suppose that if I were staying in Boston, I could have married Svetlana.”

Shane looked up, glaring at his idiot fiancé as he kept speaking as though he was discussing a grocery delivery. “She’s American, so it would be easy citizenship. And she would do it. Her father was the Russian goalie Sergei Vitrov.”

“Yeah, you’ve told me.” Shane bit out, seeing Ilya smirk.

“She would help me. If I were staying in Boston.”

“But you’re not. So it doesn’t matter.”

Ilya gave him a smug look. “DO not be jealous Hollander, I am speaking in hypotheticals.”

Shane sighed, resigning himself to playing along and not throttling Ilya. “Is Svetlana someone you’d want to marry?”

Ilya shrugged. “We are friends. We would have been fine.” He let out a dramatic sigh. “But...”

Shane rolled his eyes. “But what?”

“I have this problem.” Ilya paused, Shane giving him a look.

“What’s the problem?”

“I like women, yes?” Ilya asked, and Shane frowned, trying to ignore the jealousy coiling in his gut.

“Yeah, I know.” Shane finally managed to say.

“And everywhere I go, I’m surrounded by beautiful women,” Ilya said, Shane contemplating strangling him with every word that came out of his mouth. “And they love me.”

“Yeah, that sounds rough.” Shane could barely keep the sarcasm out of his voice, and Ilya frowned at him.

“Yes, it is. Listen.” Shane rolled his eyes but paid attention. And these women, they’re so sexy and fun.” Ilya let out a low breath, resting his chin on his hand. “But I am always thinking about this slow fucking hockey player with beautiful freckles.” Shane started to blush. “And a weak backhand.”

“A weak backhand?” Shane scoffed, eyebrows raised.

“Yes, very weak.” Ilya let out a breath. “And he’s so boring, and he drives this terrible car.”

“It’s a normal car!”

Ilya ignored him, his gaze softening as he looked at Shane. “I am always wishing that these women were him,” he let out a small laugh. “It’s a terrible problem, huh?”

Shane swallowed hard, his eyes never leaving Ilya. “Do you want that problem to go away?”

“Mm-mmm.” Ilya shook his head, a small smile on his face. “I don’t ever want that problem to ever go away.”

Shane grinned. “Good,” he picked up his book, glancing at Ilya over the top of the page. “Because you’re stuck with me.”

He saw Ilya grin as he looked at his phone, the two of them spending their evening in companionable silence.

~~

Even after Ilya curled into him and went to sleep that night. Shane’s mind kept going. He had to figure out a way forward for both of them. There had to be a team that could afford Ilya in Canada, and one that could handle Shane if things got bad and he had to leave Montreal.

And then it hit him. His home team, the Ottawa Centaurs.

They hadn’t even gotten close to the playoffs in over a decade, but they desperately needed star centers. What if one of them went to Ottawa and then the other joined later? Shane could not stop thinking about the way he and Ilya had played at the All-Star Game this year. It had been magic on the ice. If they could do that again, in an actual game? No other team would stand a chance.

Unable to wait until the morning, Shane turned on the lamp and jostled Ilya awake.

“I have another idea,” he said as Ilya’s eyes blinked open.

“What idea? What is happening?” Ilya mumbled as he woke up, but Shane didn’t notice. His mind was moving faster than it had since the concussion.

“What if you played in Ottawa?” Shane asked, Ilya frowning.

“Ottawa is the same division as Boston,” he shook his head. “We’re still rivals.”

“ok, but listen,” Shane nudged Ilya to sit up. “First off, we aren’t even sure I’m staying in Montreal. So if I don’t, then maybe we both move to Ottawa.”

“Or you could move to Boston.”

Shane paused, considering. “I wouldn’t be against that, but Boston is close to their salary cap. It would take a miracle for them to afford both of us. That’s why Ottawa is perfect. It’s a Canadian team like you wanted, and it’s super close by. We wouldn’t even need to buy another place unless you wanted one, because we could just live here at the cottage!” Shane took a breath, running his hands through his hair. “Second, Ottawa needs a star center, and they’re nowhere near their cap, so they could definitely afford you.” he paused. “Maybe even us. And I could play wing, or you could. We saw it work in the All-Star Game! And maybe we could start to change the narrative a bit.”

Ilya looked at him as though his hair was on fire. “Hollander, I just woke up. What is narrative?”

“We can change the story with us! We can make our own story now.” Shane leaned forward.

“Boston and Montreal? That’s intense, everyone knows that.”

“No shit.”

Shane gave him a look. “But Montreal and Ottawa? That’s not a rivalry.”

“Yeah, because Ottawa sucks.”

“Not with you on the team!” Shane reminded him. “And look, lots of guys have

friends on other teams. Why not us?” he ran a hand through his hair. “We’re not rookies anymore. There are younger guys coming in, frothing at the mouth. Let them hate each other. We don’t need to keep this up until we retire, do we? We’re not fucking wrestlers.”

“Hollander, Hollander, ok, it’s very late.” Ilya blinked at him. “And this is so many words. What are you getting at?”

“You play for Ottawa,” Shane told him. “We play on the same team. And then we start a charity. Something that, you know, we both care about.” Shane ran a hand through his hair. “And we come up with a story, like I approached you.”

“Or I approached you.”

Shane gave Ilya a look. “Fine, sure,” he moved closer to Ilya. “And we tell

the press and everyone that, by working on this cause that we both love, we developed a mutual respect for one another and, um...”

“And we like sucking each other’s dicks.” Ilya finished for him, smirking. “Any questions?”

Shane shoved him. “Fuck off. This is a good idea, Rozanov.”

“ok, ok!” Ilya held up his hands. “It’s not bad. So we start the charity. What would it be for?”

“I don’t know. We could figure out something that means a lot to both of us,” Shane told him. “And then if people saw us out in public or whatever, it wouldn’t be so fucking crazy.” Shane looked at Ilya, his eyes soft. “And then...we can be together. For real.”

He saw Ilya swallow, his eyes almost black in the darkness. “You really think that far ahead, Hollander?”

“I do when it’s important.” He took Ilya’s hand. “And this is. You are.”

Ilya pulled him into a kiss, pressing their foreheads together. “You are important to me, too.”

~~

The next morning, Shane looked over at Ilya as they lay in bed together.

“What was your mother’s name?” he asked, his voice soft.

“Irina,” Ilya answered, turning to face him. “Why?”

“I had an idea for our charity.” Shane took a deep breath. “I was thinking we could start a hockey school.” Ilya raised an eyebrow, and Shane elaborated. “Like a summer camp for kids. And give the money away to mental health organizations. Like suicide prevention.” Ilya stayed silent, and Shane started to look away. “It was just an idea.”

Ilya put a hand up to Shane’s face, thumb swiping across his cheekbone. Shane leaned into the touch, Ilya’s eyes soft in the morning light.

“She would have loved you,” Ilya said softly, his hand still on Shane’s cheek. “Like I love you.”

Shane grinned. “Say it again in Russian, please.”

Ilya leaned in closer, their faces inches apart. “Ya tebya lyublyu.”

Shane closed the distance, pressing his lips to Ilya’s.

~~

Ilya ran to the door the next afternoon, Shane raising an eyebrow as he came with two boxes.

“What is all that?”

Ilya picked up the smaller box and opened it with one of Shane’s kitchen knives. “Our rings are here.”

Shane’s eyes widened, eagerly making his way over to the counter. “I thought they’d take longer to arrive.”

“I paid extra for quick service.” Ilya took out the two ring boxes, opened them, and placed them on the counter.

Shane had never seen such beautiful rings in his entire life. The pictures on the website barely did them justice.

“And now it is official,” Ilya grinned, Shane giving him a look.

“It was official before, Ilya.”

“No, but now is extra official. We have rings to prove it.”

“True.” Shane gave him a fond smile. “I guess we’d better put these on.” Shane reached for his ring, only for Ilya to slap his hand away. Shane frowned and slapped Ilya’s hand in response, only for Ilya to give him an offended look.

“What was that for?”

Now it was Shane’s turn to give him a look. “What do you mean? You slapped my hand first.”

Ilya sighed. “Shane, you helped Hayden pick out a ring for his wife. You should know this.”

“Know what?”

“Is bad luck for you to put on your own engagement ring for the first time.”

Shane scoffed. “That’s not a thing.”

“It is a thing,” Ilya disagreed. “You would not want to be unlucky, right?”

Shane frowned at him but agreed. “Okay, let’s do it.” Shane reached for the ring he picked out for Ilya, and he held Ilya’s hand in his other hand. He slowly slid the ring onto Ilya’s finger, pleased to find out it was a perfect fit.

Then it was Ilya’s turn. He reached for Shane’s hand, his thumb sweeping over the back of it in a gentle semicircle. Shane felt his breath catch in his chest at the intensity in Ilya’s eyes. It was as if Ilya was seeing into the depths of his very soul. He felt the ring slowly settle at the base of his finger, and then Ilya let go of his hand.

Shane wished he hadn’t and that they could have just stayed in that moment forever.

“So what’s in the other box?” Shane asked as Ilya dropped his hand.

Ilya grinned, an impish look in his eyes. “Did you forget what else we talked about?”

Shane flushed as he realized what he meant. “So all of those are—”

“Yes.”

“Wow.” Shane gulped. “That’s a big box.”

“Not so big.” Ilya placed a hand where Shane’s shoulder met his neck, squeezing slightly. “Just a few things I thought we might try. But if you do not like, I throw them out.”

Shane let out a breath. “Okay. Let me see what you bought.”

Ilya moved away from Shane and cut open the box with the knife on the counter. He pulled out two wrapped packages, Shane feeling his pulse tick up just by staring at them.

Ilya unwrapped the first, revealing a set of four black leather cuffs with gold hardware.

“I looked up the ones with the best comfort rating,” Ilya explained, seeing the way Shane looked at them. “I wanted them to feel soft against your skin.”

Shane raised an eyebrow at him. “And I’m guessing you also wanted to make sure they came in your team’s colors?”

Ilya rolled his eyes. “What did you expect, Hollander, for me to tie you up in Metros colors? No, could not happen.” he leaned in, dropping his voice. “But maybe if you ever want to return the favor, we can get a set in Metros blue.”

Shane’s mouth went dry at the thought of Ilya spread out for him, held down so Shane could take his time with his gorgeous body.

He blinked, looking at the other package on the counter. “What’s in that box?”

Ilya picked it up, turning it over in his hands as he stepped closer to Shane.

“I noticed that you like to have something in your mouth.” Ilya unwrapped the package, his eyes dark as they met Shane’s. “I thought you might like something to occupy your mouth while I take your time with you.”

Shane’s flush deepened as he saw Ilya raise a black ball attached to two leather straps. He knew what it was before Ilya even said anything.

“Um, how would I-if something went wrong-” Shane asked before Ilya cut him off.

“Do not worry.” He put down the gag and put his hands on either side of Shane’s face.

You can snap your fingers, yes?” Shane nodded, and Ilya smiled. “Good. then we do snaps. You snap once for good, twice to slow down, and three times to end it. And ,I will watch carefully for any signs of distress,” he stroked his thumb over Shane’s cheekbone. “Do not worry, Hollander. I will not let anything happen to you. And we do not have to do anything.”

“I think...” Shane swallowed hard. “I think i’d like to try something.”

Ilya grinned.” Good.” He put down the box, pulling Shane over to the couch. “Let’s talk about what to expect.”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean is good to discuss limits and what you are and are not willing to have happen. Is important whenever power dynamics come into play.”

Shane let out a nervous laugh, rubbing the back of his neck. “Is that really necessary? We’ve never talked about this kind of thing before.”

“We’ve never done anything like this before.” Ilya pointed out. “Well, except maybe in Vegas, but that was not really the same.”

Shane’s blood ran cold, remembering that night after Ilya won MVP. If that was what Shane could expect from this, that terrible feeling afterward? Maybe this wasn’t a good idea after all. “Okay, but--”

“Look, why don’t we take break?” Ilya suggested, Shane quietly relieved. “We can go for swim and discuss this after dinner, da?”

Shane sighed and nodded, wondering how he was going to get out of this.

~~

Later that evening, Ilya made sure not to forget to have that discussion with Shane. The other man huffed as Ilya met him on the couch after dinner, causing him to frown. Shane had seemed excited earlier in the day. What could have changed?

“Shane, if you do not want to do this—”

“I do!” Shane said quickly, Ilya not buying it. “I just don’t see the need to talk about it.”

“Shane, is important that we talk through everything. I do not want you to drop.”

Shane furrowed his brow. “What do you mean?”

Ilya cocked his head as he tried to think of how to explain it. “Sometimes when the sex is intense and you do not take enough time to come back down, the endorphins can cause you to drop. You get shaky, cold, everything out of focus. Is not good. I would not want you to go through that.”

Something in Shane’s expression shifted, and Ilya felt a pit grow in his gut.

“What is wrong?”

“Nothing.” Shane shrugged it off, but Ilya knew better.

“Hollander.”

Shane paused for a moment and sighed. “I don’t want to make this a whole thing. I just....I didn’t know that was what subdrop felt like.”

The pit continued to grow. “Are you saying you’ve felt that before? When with me?”

Shane looked away, and Ilya had his answer.

“Shane.” He thought back over the years, of when things had gotten intense for them. Of when he could have possibly sent Shane into a drop without realizing.

And then it hit him, his heart dropping to his stomach. “It was in Vegas. After I won MVP.”

It had to be. Shane had become so hesitant after he’d mentioned Vegas that morning. That had to be when it happened.

Fuck. He knew that things had been strange that night, that he had been distant with Shane, but how the fuck had he let this happen? How did he let Shane leave his room that night without noticing that he was hurting?

“Ilya.” Shane moved closer, taking him into his arms. “It’s not your fault.”

“I should have taken care of you—“

We were so young.” Shane reminded him. “And it wasn’t so bad. I was feeling better by the morning.”

Ilya closed his eyes in relief, grateful that Shane had not suffered too much from his negligence.

“Okay, okay.” Ilya scrubbed a hand over his face. “Now talking about what we want to do is even more important. I want you to have a good time, not drop again.”

“I guess that makes sense.” Shane paused. “So, what do you want from me?”

Ilya shook his head, laughing slightly. “You have it all wrong Shane. It is me who should ask that of you. All I want from you is for you to enjoy yourself. You have been so tense for so long. I think you might enjoy letting go and letting someone else take care of you.”

Shane’s breath hitched, and Ilya could see his lips part. “That...that sounds nice.”

Ilya motioned for Shane to sit, the other man following. “So, what are you comfortable with?” Ilya moved closer to him, putting a hand on his fiancé’s knee.

Shane didn’t seem to know where to start, and Ilya took pity on him. “Do you want me to bind your wrists and ankles? Tie you to the bed so you can do nothing but lie back and take what I do to you?”

Shane jolted slightly. “Y-yes. I’d like that.”

“Okay. Then we do that.” Ilya moved on. “What about the gag?”

Shane flushed. “I always thought you liked the noises I made.”

“Oh, solnyshko, I do,” Ilya assured him. “But I wonder if you might like not to have to worry about what to say. With a gag, you could just let the sensations wash over you. And it would not silence you completely. I would never do that to you.” Ilya lowered his voice, giving Shane a conspiratorial look. “Because I do like the sounds you make. The gag would more...simplify them than eliminate them.”

Ilya watched as Shane swallowed hard. “Yes, I-I’d like that.”

“Good.” Shane’s cheek darkened at the praise and Ilya filed that away for later.

“Would-” Shane cut himself off for a moment before deciding to keep going. “Would I not be able to touch you the whole time?”

Ilya shook his head. “I do not plan to start this in the bedroom.” One of Ilya’s hands went down to Shane’s wrist, encircling it and holding it fast. “I thought we could start here, on the couch. I’d bind your hands in front of you, so you could touch me and get used to the sensation. Is better than just jumping in, yes?”

“Definitely.” Shane’s expression seemed to relax for a moment. “And...you would still kiss me? Even after my mouth was...occupied? And you wouldn’t leave me alone?”

Ilya’s heart broke at the hesitant questions. “Of course, my Shane.” He pulled Shane in for a hug, kissing his brow. “I will happily kiss you everywhere I can. And I will never leave you alone, not

even for a second. I'll make sure the materials I need for aftercare are in the room with us, so I do not even have to leave to for a moment."

"And how would I be able to let you know if-if you did something that I didn't like? Or if I wanted to stop?"

"We can use the traffic light system to check in. You can tell me green if you want to keep going, yellow if you want to slow down, or red if you want to stop. And when you're unable to speak, you can snap your fingers once to green, twice for yellow, and three times for red. I will check in often, do not worry."

Shane was silent for a moment after pulling away from Ilya's embrace, and then he gave Ilya a small smile. "Okay. I want to try then."

"You do?"

Shane reached for Ilya's hand. "Yes. I trust you."

In that moment, with Shane looking at him like he hung the world, Ilya made a promise to himself that he would never again betray Shane's trust.

~~

Shane sat on the couch, hands clasped in front of him.

Ilya had vanished into the bedroom with some of the items he'd bought, and Shane could not stop thinking about what was going to happen.

If someone had told him after the MLH awards in 2014 that he would willingly let Ilya take control of him, he would have laughed in their faces. Or blushed like a fire engine. Or both.

But he was not the same Shane Hollander who had left Ilya's penthouse feeling like his world was ending. And Ilya was not the same man who had kicked him out in the middle of the night.

Shane trusted him. And he wanted to do this. The end of the season had been rough in more ways than he had ever expected, and Shane needed this. He needed to not have to worry about anything. To not have to be the perfect golden boy of hockey, who always had to stay in control and almost never made a mistake. And Ilya could give him that.

Ilya came back into the room, holding the wrist cuffs in his hands. Shane's pulse jumped seeing them, his heart starting to race.

"Are you ready to begin?" Ilya asked, his voice low.

Shane nodded, and Ilya shook his head. "I need to hear you say it, moy lubov."

Shane took a deep breath, looking up at Ilya. "Green."

Ilya gave him a proud smile, and Shane resisted the urge to duck his head.

"Stand up and take off your shirt," Ilya told him, his eyes darkening.

Shane resisted the urge to snap to attention, instead slowly rising to his feet.

He pulled his shirt off, resisting the urge to cover himself as he folded it and placed it on the coffee table.

“Give me your hands.”

Shane offered his wrists, and Ilya fastened the cuff around his left wrist, then his right. The cuffs felt soft against his skin, their weight reminding Shane of their presence.

Ilya checked the fit of the cuffs, looking at Shane. “How do they feel?”

“They feel good.” Shane swallowed hard. “Different.”

Ilya nodded at that, using the clips on the underside of the cuffs to connect them.

“Let’s go back to the couch.” Ilya hooked a finger around where the cuffs connected, pulling Shane back to the couch. Shane let out a low breath, his hands falling in his lap. He pulled at the cuffs, testing the way they held fast. He couldn’t move his hands more than a few inches away from each other. Shane was surprised at how much he liked that.

“Now what?” Shane asked, trying not to fidget as Ilya leaned against one of the arms of the couch, looking at Shane.

“I thought I might like to suck you off.” Ilya shrugged. “Or you suck me off. Or both.”

Shane’s mouth went dry.

“Um, both work for me.” Shane started to move towards Ilya, the other man seeming completely relaxed.

“Good. Color?”

Shane felt heat rise to his face. “Green.”

“Excellent.” Shane reached from the waistband of Ilya’s sweats, the other man stretched out like a king on a throne.

He fumbled with pulling out Ilya’s cock, his hands not used to being stuck together like this. He ducked his head, hollowing his cheeks as he took Ilya’s cock into his mouth. He heard Ilya groan, one of his hands coming to pull at Shane’s hair. Shane closed his eyes, taking Ilya deeper into his mouth as the other man swore.

“Fuck Hollander, your mouth.”

Shane grinned, redoubling his efforts as he listened to his fiancé fall apart. Before long, Ilya was coming with a shout, Shane swallowing his release before pulling off of him.

Ilya lay back on the couch cushions, panting as if he’d run a mile.

“Had enough?” Shane smirked as Ilya’s eyes darkened.

“Not at all, Hollander. Lay back on the cushions. Is my turn.”

Shane stretched out, Ilya putting his cock away before crawling across the couch to Shane. Shane saw his engagement ring dangling from the chain around his neck, a flare of possessiveness taking hold.

This was his fiancé. No one else would ever see him like this, and there was a part of Shane that absolutely loved that idea.

Ilya reached for the waistband of Shane's shorts, Shane lifting his hips to give him more access. He watched as Ilya took off his shorts and underwear, part of Shane grinning at the sight of Ilya carefully folding them and setting them on the table.

"Color, kotik." Ilya commanded as he closed a hand around Shane's cock.

"Green," Shane told him, groaning at the sensation of Ilya's hand. "So unbelievably green."

"Good boy." Ilya lowered his head, Shane biting back a curse as he felt his fiancé's mouth around his cock. Shane reached his hands down, winding them into Ilya's hair and pulling at the curls.

He moaned as he felt Ilya work, barely able to keep his hips still. Ilya's hands moved to either side of his hips, pinning him against the couch.

He felt Ilya's tongue trace the vein on the underside of his cock, and Shane was immediately close to coming. Ilya had a special way of bringing him to the edge in a matter of moments.

"Ilya, I'm close—" Shane warned, Ilya pulling off his cock and giving him a smirk.

"Then come for me," Ilya swallowed him down, Shane coming with a scream.

Ilya pulled off of him, the other man capturing his lips in a heated kiss.

"And now the fun begins," Ilya said, Shane shivering at the promise in his voice. "Put your arms around my neck."

Shane did as he asked, yelping as Ilya picked him up with an arm under his knees and behind his shoulders. He carried Shane up the stairs to the bedroom, Shane enjoying the feeling of being held by Ilya.

Ilya placed him on the bed, picking up the other pair of cuffs from the bedside table. Shane frowned as he spotted a small cooler on the table next to the gag and a bottle of lube.

"Can I put these on your ankles?" Ilya asked, holding up the cuffs. "I like the idea of you stretched out for me."

"Green," Shane told him, Ilya smiling as he fastened the cuffs around his ankles, Shane expecting them to feel heavy, like the ankle weights he used to wear while running, but instead they were light enough that Shane might forget he was wearing them after a while.

"How are you going to tie me to the bed?" Shane asked, remembering something. "I think I would remember if my bed had attachments for restraints. It probably would have come up when I bought it."

"I think ahead Hollander." Ilya raised an eyebrow at him, holding up a black strap that seemed to go under the bed. "When I ordered the cuffs, I also bought attachment system that goes under the

mattress. Easy to use, easy to remove.”

“Makes sense.”

Ilya chuckled at that, moving closer. He gripped Shane’s chin with one hand, lifting it to meet his gaze.

“Can I tie you to the bed and have my way with you?” Ilya asked, raising an eyebrow. His free hand unfastened Shane’s hands from each other, Shane almost missing the restraint.

Shane swallowed hard. “Green.”

Ilya grinned and raised Shane’s hands above his head, cuffing them to the corners of the bed. The ankles followed, Shane stretched out on the bed. He tugged at each of the cuffs, his limbs barely able to do more than move an inch from where they were held fast.

He was helpless. Ilya could do whatever he wanted with him, as Shane would be unable to stop him. That should have scared him. It didn’t.

Ilya climbed back on top of Shane, running his hands up and down Shane’s arms.

“Look at you,” Ilya said almost to himself as he traced the curve of Shane’s muscles. “Laid out for me like a present.”

“All for you.” Shane tried to lean up to kiss Ilya, but the cuffs made him stop short.

“Shh. Just relax.” Ilya leaned down to kiss him.

Shane whined into the kiss when he realized he couldn’t do anything to deepen it.

He couldn’t do anything except lie there and take it.

He was completely at Ilya’s mercy. And he loved it

“Ilya, Ilya, please.” Shane gasped, desperation in his voice when Ilya finally pulled away from the kiss.

“Please, what?” Ilya asked, kissing down Shane’s throat. His lips were so close to Shane’s throat when he talked that it made Shane’s skin vibrate. “Use your words, daragoy.”

Shane blushed hard at the pet name and then had to struggle to remember what he was begging for in the first place.

“Please, make me come.” He begged, practically pleading with him. “I feel like I’m about to explode.”

“Not yet,” Ilya said before sucking a dark mark at the base of Shane’s neck. “I want to take my time with you. Be good for me.”

“I will Ilya. Please, please just touch me.” Shane wanted so badly to reach out and grab Ilya that it was killing him that he couldn’t.

“It sounds like you need something to fill your mouth.” Ilya shook his head at Shane with a wry smile.

Shane’s cock jumped at the idea, and a grin spread across Ilya’s face. Ilya reached for the gag on the nightstand, holding it to Shane’s lips.

Shane didn’t even have to think about it.

“Green.” He raised his chin, opening his mouth.

“You are perfect,” Ilya whispered, surging forward and kissing him.

Shane responded as best he could, not able to push forward as much as he’d like.

Ilya pulled away, holding the gag to Shane’s mouth again. Shane opened his mouth slowly, Ilya giving him a proud smile as he fastened the buckle behind Shane’s head. He placed both hands on Shane’s face, making the other man look at him.

“You remember your signals?” He asked, Shane nodding in response. “Tell me your color, solnyshko.”

Shane flushed at the pet name, snapping his fingers once. The sound echoed in the room, Ilya giving him a pleased grin.

“You are being so good for me.” Ilya tweaked Shane’s nipple again, smiling at Shane’s squeak in response. “I knew you would be.”

Shane wanted to respond that he wasn’t perfect, not at all.

But he couldn’t. Much like with the kiss, all he could do was lie there and take the praise Ilya was giving him. Which was probably the point, and he’d be lying if he said he didn’t love it

Ilya pressed a kiss behind Shane’s ear, working his hand into his hair and pulling his head back to give himself better access. Shane moaned at that, and Ilya chuckled lightly.

“I love how responsive you are. How you fall apart with a single touch from me.” He kissed his way down Shane’s throat until he got to his chest.

Ilya looked up at Shane, a wicked glint in his eyes as he drew one of Shane’s nipples into his mouth.

Shane jerked his hips, bucking them into the air as Ilya sucked on Shane’s nipple, lightly grabbing it with his teeth.

The bite of his teeth around his already tender flesh drove Shane crazy, and he knew Ilya could tell.

Just as Shane thought he was about to explode, Ilya pulled off of it and moved to the other one.

Shane threw his head back, practically whimpering into the pillow.

He wasn’t going to survive this. Shane finally got himself under control and turned back just in time to see Ilya abandoning his now puffy and red nipples.

Shane hoped that that was the end of that, but Ilya clearly had other ideas. He kissed down his stomach, occasionally sucking dark marks onto the flesh as he went.

Shane keened high in his throat as Ilya completely avoided his groin and instead kissed down his thighs.

He could feel the wetness on his cheeks from his tears.

“You are stunning. Your freckles drive me wild, and your eyes make me crazy.

He climbed back on top of Shane, now straddling his thighs. He pressed a small kiss to the scar on Shane’s chest from his chest tube, Shane shivering from the sensation. “And you are all mine. I am luckiest man alive.”

Before Shane could even try to respond, Ilya lightly grabbed his cock. Ilya started by first rolling a condom onto Shane, Shane keening high in his throat at every touch against his overly sensitive cock. Then Ilya made a show of slicking up his fingers with lube, Shane stiffening with anticipation as he rubbed one against Shane’s hole.

Shane whined as the first finger slipped in and then wanted to cry when a second was added.

Shane tried to relax and breathe through the burn of being opened up.

He howled when Ilya found his prostate, frantically tugging at his cuffs.

By the time Ilya started rolling a condom onto his own cock, Shane was up to four fingers, and he was desperate.

Shane felt more tears spring to his eyes as Ilya pushed in, the burn still there even after being opened up.

“Just relax.” Ilya ran a hand up to Shane’s face, cradling his cheek. “I’ve got you, solnyshko”

Shane nodded, finally relaxing when the burn shifted into a more pleasurable feeling.

Ilya must have read something in Shane’s face because he chose that moment to begin to move.

It was slow at first and then slowly built up speed until Shane was practically desperate to come.

“Does this feel as good to you as it does to me?” Ilya asked, his voice trailing off into a groan. “To belong to me, only me?”

Shane nodded, not even caring what Ilya was saying.

He just wanted this feeling between them to last forever.

“How long do you think you could last without coming?” Ilya asked, his voice bordering on a growl. “Maybe we test it out someday, see how much you can take before you beg for me.”

Shane moaned into the gag at the thought of spending another day at Ilya’s mercy, under his control.

Shane would do that in a heartbeat.

He never wanted to stop feeling this way.

After a few long moments, Ilya started to breathe heavier.

“Oh fuck, Hollander. I will not last long this time.”

Shane keened high in his throat, tossing his head back.

His frame was as tight as a drum, the pressure building with no release.

His hips stuttered once, twice, and then Ilya was coming with a long groan, almost collapsing onto Shane when he was done. Shane came right after, the tension leaving his frame in a rush of sensation.

After a long moment, Ilya pulled out and reached up to Shane’s head, unfastening the gag and uncuffing his wrists. He moved to uncuff Shane’s ankles, the other man curling into him.

Shane sighed as Ilya maneuvered his body, his head eventually resting on Ilya’s chest. He felt good, almost floaty. He’d felt good after sex with Ilya, but nothing like this. This was something else entirely.

Ilya moved slightly, reaching for the cooler Shane had seen earlier. He opened it, pulling out a can of ginger ale. He opened it with one hand, pressing it to Shane’s lips as he cradled him against his chest.

“Take sip, moy kotik.”

Shane did as he asked, the cool liquid flowing down his throat.

“How are you feeling, solnyshko?” Ilya asked, a concerned look in his eye as his free hand stroked Shane’s side.

“What does that mean?” Shane finally asked, his voice soft as he lay in Ilya’s arms.

“It means little sun.” Ilya told him, his voice soft. “Is common term of endearment in Russia.”

Shane smiled, clinging to Ilya’s side. “I like it.”

Ilya’s hand paused for a moment before continuing its motion. “I am glad.” Ilya held the can to Shane’s lips again, Shane taking another drink. Ilya then put down the can and reached into the cooler to grab a bar of chocolate. He broke off a piece and pressed it to Shane’s lips. Shane opened his mouth and took the chocolate, kissing Ilya’s fingers as the other man pulled his hand away.

“You are so good for me.”

Shane leaned up to press a kiss to Ilya’s jaw. “I could say the same to you.”

“You are okay?” Ilya asked, looking into Shane’s eyes. “You are feeling good, not dropping?”

Shane smiled, nuzzling Ilya’s chest. “I’m good, I promise.”

He could feel Ilya relax. “Good. I want you to be okay.”

Shane looked up, pressing a kiss to Ilya's lips. "I'm always okay when I'm with you."

Ilya kissed him back before pulling away. "We should get you into the bath. Is good for aftercare."

"Will my fiancé be joining me in the bath?" Shane asked, hooking his fingers around Ilya's chain.

"I think that can be arranged." Ilya leaned into the touch, kissing Shane once more.



Chapter 12

What is this?" Ilya held up the box, scrutinizing it with a critical eye.

"It's pasta, Ilya." Shane rolled his eyes, already knowing where this was going.

"Why is it orange? Pasta should only be orange if it is Kraft macaroni."

Shane turned and gave his fiancé a horrified stare. "You eat Kraft mac and cheese? That is pure chemicals!"

"It is delicious! And chemicals are good!"

Ilya, that has no nutritional value!"

"Food does not always need to be nutritional!"

Shane scoffed from where he was filling the pot. "I cannot believe that you're my biggest competition in the league." Ilya flicked Shane's ear, causing him to yelp.

"You did not answer my question. Why is the pasta orange?"

"It's chickpea pasta."

Ilya stared at him. "Why do you have chickpea pasta?"

"It's healthier than regular pasta."

"Pasta does not have to be healthy!"

"But now it can be!" Shane put the pot on the stove to boil and grabbed the tomatoes from the fridge. "Do you want to help me make the sauce?"

Ilya looked at the tomatoes in Shane's hands. "You do not just use sauce from a jar?"

Shane stared at him. "You horrify me."

"Your chickpea pasta horrifies me."

Shane rolled his eyes. "Are you going to help me or are you going to judge my food?"

Ilya sighed, taking the tomatoes to the sink to wash them. "Do not worry, Hollander, I can multitask."

The two of them worked quickly and efficiently, Ilya actually being a fairly good cook when he put his mind to it. And when he wasn't poking at the chickpea pasta like a starfish he'd found on the beach.

"Should we make a vegetable to go with it? Shane asked, looking in the fridge.

"Hollander, your pasta is made from vegetables. We are fine." Ilya pointed out.

“You can never have too many vegetables.”

“One day, I am going to get you to eat McDonald’s for breakfast.”

Shane mimed gagging. “Never going to happen.”

“We’ll see.” Ilya brought the plates over to the table, and Shane brought the water glasses. Shane smiled at how domestic they were being. He never thought that he’d be able to have this with Ilya. Even in his wildest dreams, he figured that they’d be resigned to stolen moments in hotel rooms for the next ten years.

“What has you smiling so much?” Ilya asked.

“Nothing.” Shane shook his head as he grabbed his fork. “I’m just really happy you came with me this summer.”

“Ilya gave him a soft smile. “I am too.” He picked up his fork and put a piece of pasta in his mouth, making a face. “But next summer we are getting real pasta.”

Shane flicked him on the ear. “Don’t be an ass.”

“Not everything has to be healthy, Shane.” Ilya took another bite. “Sauce is good, though.”

“See? Making your own pasta sauce is better than jarred sauce.”

“Yes, but chickpea pasta is not better than regular pasta.”

Shane rolled his eyes.

~~

Ilya pushed himself off the lake floor, emerging from his handstand with a triumphant splash. His fiancé sat on a nearby rock, watching him with barely concealed amusement in his eyes as he soaked in the sun.

“Very nice, well done.” Shane pretended to clap for him, and Ilya pretended to bow in response.

Ilya started to paddle through the water, making his way closer to Shane.

“Is this where you do yoga, or up there?”

“No, I do it inside. The producer wanted me...” Shane paused, eyebrows raised. “Wait, you saw that?”

“Yeah, it was very good.” Ilya shrugged, barely hiding his smirk. “I needed help sleeping, so...”

Shane scoffed, narrowing his eyes as Ilya cackled. “You’re an asshole. That’s why you weren’t surprised about what the cottage looked like.”

“I find it adorable how you can make simple word like cottage sound pretentious. Like someone in period drama.”

“I hate you.”

“You love me.” Ilya retorted, his heart warming at Shane’s smile.

“How’s the water?” Ilya swam closer, calculating the distance between him and Shane.

“You’re in it.” Shane pointed out as Ilya edged closer

“Yeah, but I want to know how you like it.”

Just as Shane was about to answer, Ilya attacked. He angled his palm against the water, splashing Shane with the lake water.

Shane sputtered, shaking his head to clear the drops from his face. He glared at Ilya through lashes flecked with droplets.

“Fuck you! What if my phone was in my pocket?”

“Ah, it’s not.” Ilya waved him off. “You left it on the table. It’s been ringing all morning.”

Shane frowned at him. “You’re still an asshole.”

Ilya laughed, effortlessly paddling through the water. He finally reached the rock Shane was sunning himself on like a hockey-obsessed lizard. He raised himself slightly out of the water, moving to kiss Shane’s ankle. In truth, he would kiss every inch of Shane’s body if he could, no matter what else was going on.

He lifted up further, putting his hands on Shane’s knees.

“Give me a kiss.” He puckered his lips, staring up at his Shane.

“You’re cold,” Shane complained before leaning down to kiss him anyway.

As they pulled away, Ilya smirked as an idea came into his head.

Shane seemed to read something in his face, shaking his head. “Ilya, don’t you dare—”

Before Shane could finish his sentence, Ilya had already pulled him into the water. Shane sputtered as he resurfaced, glaring at Ilya.

“I know, I am asshole.” Ilya shrugged before Shane pounced on him, shoving his head under the water.

~~

After they got out of the lake, Ilya and Shane started walking back up to the cottage, towels slung around their shoulders.

“We should probably start thinking about dinner,” Shane said as they neared the cottage. “Do you want more of the pasta from last night or hot dogs?”

“Hot dogs,” Ilya told him. “Maybe we can cook them over the fire for dinner.”

Shane grinned at him, his freckles more prominent after a day in the Ottawa sun. “I knew you liked the campfire.”

“Shut up.”

“Maybe we can make s’mores too.”

“I regret bringing it up.”

Shane chuckled. “The hot dogs are going to have to defrost a bit before dinner.”

“So we have a little time.” Ilya kept his tone casual, sneaking a glance at Shane.

“Maybe. What do you have in mind?”

Ilya grabbed Shane by the waist, pinning him to the glass wall of his cottage. “Nothing that will take too long.”

He grabbed Shane’s chin, pulling the other man into a kiss as his other hand grabbed Shane’s ass. He broke away after a long moment, grinning at his fiancé, when he saw a flicker of movement out of the corner of his eyes.

There was a man in the cottage kitchen, staring at them through the window.

Shane, noticing that Ilya was staring at something, turned around and gasped.

“Fuck, that’s my dad.”

“Oh, fuck.” Ilya’s eyes were wide.

The man left the kitchen, Shane’s eyes wide with panic as he looked back at Ilya.

“Maybe you should...” Ilya gestured at the cottage, and Shane nodded, taking off towards the driveway. Ilya walked inside, starting to pace the living room until Shane came back inside, his eyes wild.

“He left.” Shane’s breath started coming faster and faster. “I tried to talk to him, bt he just-he left.”

“Fuck.”

Shane didn’t seem to hear him, pacing behind the couch. “fuck, this is a fucking nightmare.”

“Shane...” Ilya tried to pull him into his arms, but Shane pulled out of his grip. Shane started to pace, Ilya watching him helplessly. He’d never had to do this, to handle his family finding out he was into men. Even if his father had paid enough attention to him to figure it out, he never would have brought it up.

“Oh, fuck, this is a fucking nightmare.” Shane kept repeating as his hands came up to his head, fisting in his hair. “Oh, what the fuck am I supposed to do?”

“We should go talk to him,” Ilya suggested, Shane freezing mid-stride.

“What if he doesn’t want to talk to me?” Shane’s voice broke. “What if... fuck, my mom!”

Ilya moved forward, pulling Shane into his arms. “Hey, hey, hey, they will talk to you. Your parents are not like my father. This will not be how you lose them. I am sure of it solnyshko.

“Yeah, but I fucking lied to them,” Shane argued, curling into Ilya. “For so many years, I fucking lied to them, and now my dad just walks in on me with my tongue down another guy’s throat.”

“Shane, it was an innocent kiss,” Ilya pointed out, but Shane didn’t seem to hear him.

“This... This is my fucking nightmare. This is my actual fucking nightmare, Ilya!

“ok, ok.” Ilya put his hands on either side of Shane’s face, forcing the other man to look at him.

“Then maybe it’s time to wake up, yes?”

Shane’s face crumpled, and Ilya knew Shane knew he was right. Bit knowing what to do and being able to do it were two very different things.

“Fuck, I’m scared.” Shane admitted, Ilya pulling him into a hug.

“Yes, it’s scary,” he agreed, stroking Shane’s back. “But you’re brave. You can do this.”

“Shut up.” Shane let out a watery laugh, and Ilya held him tighter.

“You are, you’re brave.” Ilya insisted. “I could never do this. You are strong. You will make it through this.”

Shane sighed, pulling wavy and looking at Ilya. “I feel like I’m going to die.” his lips twisted as he let out a bitter chuckle. “So much for easing them into it.”

Ilya tried to think of a bright side. Something that could make Shane feel better. “Maybe... maybe he didn’t even notice,” Ilya suggested, Shane looking at him as though he’d grown two heads.

“Your hand was on my ass, Ilya. I’d be really surprised if he didn’t notice.”

“Well, was he wearing his glasses?”

“He doesn’t wear glasses.”

“Oh.” Ilya paused. “He still might not have noticed, hmm?”

Shane chuckled at that, pulling away.

“ok, I’m going to get changed,” he started to make a plan. “I’m going to drive over. Uh...” Ilya could see him starting to panic. “And then... And then... And then fuck! What am I going to say?”

Do you... Do you want me to come with you?” Ilya offered.

Shane looked at him, eyes wide and wet. “Would you?”

“Of course,” Ilya told him. “I know you would do the same for me.” He paused for a moment.

“And I should probably meet my future in-laws before the wedding. Unless you don’t want to tell them right now?”

Ilya could understand if he didn’t. His father had just caught him with another man. Perhaps it was not the best time to bring up that he was engaged to one.

“No, I want to tell them.” Shane let out a nervous laugh. “Might as well get it all over with at once, right?”

“Okay. So we can get changed and go over.” Ilya put a hand on Shane’s shoulder. “Everything will be okay. Your parents love you. This will not change that.”

Shane nodded, Ilya seeing the nervous energy coursing through his body.

“ok...” Shane sank to the floor, wrapping his arms around Ilya’s legs. Ilya stood there, wishing there was something more he could do to help the man that he loved.

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Shane fiddled with the ring on his finger as he waited for Ilya to leave the house. The rational part of him knew that this wouldn’t be bad. That his parents loved him, and that this was not going to make them stop loving him.

But at the same time, what if it was? What if this was a step too far for them? What if they preferred him to bring home a nice girl like Rose Landry?

Ilya came out, dragging Shane out of his spiral. And into another one when he noticed what Ilya was wearing.

“That... that is not going to help.” Shane sighed, spotting Ilya’s Boston Raiders t-shirt.

Ilya looked down at his chest and back up at Shane with a raised eyebrow. “Oh, they don’t know I play for Boston?”

“Fair point.”

Shane got into the car, and Ilya followed suit.

The drive to his parents’ house only took ten minutes, but it felt like an eternity to Shane. His knuckles were white where he clutched the steering wheel.

After a drive that felt too long and too short all at the same time, they pulled into his parents’ driveway. Shane took a deep breath, about to get out of the car when he turned to Ilya.

“Uh, maybe you should wait in the car.” His fiancé gave him a look, and Shane realized how stupid that was. Telling them wouldn’t be any easier with Ilya out of the room. In fact, it would probably be harder. At least with Ilya there he would have someone in that room who was on his side.

“Fuck, never mind, sorry.” Shane let out a breath, fidgeting in his seat.

“It will be okay, Shane,” Ilya said as they got out of the car.

“Yeah, I really hope so.”

Shane walked to the door, not even bothering to knock. He let himself in, finding his mom and dad in the living room. His dad looked as though he’d seen a ghost, and his mother just looked confused.

“Hey, it’s me, Shane.” He winced as the words came out, feeling awkward.

“Hi, honey. This is a surprise,” his mom said, looking at his dad.

“I left my charger at your place,” his dad said, looking like he wanted to be anywhere else. “It’s the old one that fits into my phone, and all the other chargers we have are newer, so…”

“It’s ok, Dad.” Shane cut him off, trying to keep his voice calm. “I’m sorry. You shouldn’t have found out that way.”

His mom gave him a confused look. “Found out what, exactly?”

“That I’m gay.” He winced as the words left his mouth, a part of him wishing that he could take them back. But he couldn’t. There was no going back from this. “Which I was going to tell you soon. I’m sorry I didn’t tell you sooner.” Shane stepped back, motioning to Ilya as he walked into view. “Yeah, and this is Ilya.” he paused. “Rozanov. But you already know that.”

“Hi.” Shane could see Ilya standing straight as a rod out of the corner of his eyes, and he wished that Ilya’s first time meeting his parents was happening under better circumstances.

“He’s visiting, and we’re, uh…” Shane trailed off, trying to figure out the best way to tell his parents that he was gay, in love with his greatest rival, and engaged to the man they spent a decade thinking he hated. Or at least one of those things to start.

Ilya put a hand on Shane’s shoulder, Shane leaning into the touch. “Lovers.”

Shane made a face. “No, Ilya, that’s gross.”

“Oh.” Ilya paused. “Fiancés is more accurate anyway.”

“Fiancés?” his mom’s eyes went wide, and Shane gave her a small smile.

“Yeah.” He held up his right hand, and Ilya did the same. “We’re engaged.”

“The rings are on your right hand?” she asked.

“It’s the tradition in Russia.”

“Huh. Interesting.” his dad said.

“But you hate him.” His mother looked at Shane.

“No.” He shook his head. “I mean, I get that, but no, I actually, uh…” he looked over at Ilya, taking his hand. “I love him.”

“Oh,” his mom blinked. “Okay then.”

Shane collapsed his hands together, trying to hide the shaking. “I-I did not want this to be how I told you. I’m sorry.”

Shane’s dad stepped forward. “Son, it’s okay.”

Shane felt himself trembling, clasping his shaking hands in front of him. “I’m sorry. Can we just sit down, please?”

“Yeah, let’s go sit at the table.” Shane’s dad said. “Maybe we should all have a drink and talk.”

“I’ll get them.” Shane’s mom disappeared into the kitchen, Shane leading Ilya to the table. He could see Ilya looking around the house, taking it all in.

The two of them took a seat, Ilya looking anywhere but at Shane’s dad sitting across from him.

“So…” Shane finally spoke, breaking the silence. “How’s it been, Dad?”

“It’s been good,” he said, nodding. “We’ve been keeping busy.”

“Us too,” Shane said without thinking, freezing. “I mean, we’ve been swimming a lot. and playing video games, and stuff.”

He could practically feel Ilya trying not to laugh next to him.

His mom came back, handing Shane and Ilya their cups.

“Thanks, Mom.” Shane took a sip, welcoming something to hold.

“Yes, thank you.” Ilya held the cup between his hands, taking a small sip. Shane’s heart broke. This wasn’t how he wanted to introduce Ilya to his parents. Nothing was going according to plan.

“I think we thought maybe you were gay,” his mom said as she took his seat.

Shane stared at them. “You did?”

“I think we thought it was certainly possible,” his dad chimed in.

“For how long?” Shane’s eyes darted between the two of them.

“Mmm, for a while, I guess.” his mom gave him a small smile.

“We both know you pretty well, Shane,” his dad told him before letting out a breath. “I mean, what we did not suspect was that you were so friendly with Rozanov.”

“Ilya.” Ilya said, and Shane’s dad nodded.

“Ilya, sorry.”

“I know.” Shane clasped his hands together in front of him, trying to ground himself. “It’s a long story.”

“When did this happen?” Shane’s dad asked before pausing. “Wait. The All-Star game. You two had so much chemistry.”

Shane shook his head. “No, it was before then.”

“Wow!” His dad said, shaking his head. Wow. Wow.”

Shane’s mom fixed him with an expectant stare. “So, when?”

Shane resisted the urge to duck his head, his fingers tapping out a nervous beat on the table. “Since our, uh, rookie season.”

Her eyebrows shot up. “Since your rookie season?”

“Yep.”

“No, it’s not true.” Ilya insisted. “Since before that.”

“Not helpful,” Shane told Ilya, who shrugged unrepentantly.

“Before?” Yuna asked.

“The summer before,” Ilya told her, Shane wanting to put his head in his hands. “The CCM shoot.”

Shane saw his mom flush a deep red. “So, when I ran into you in the elevator that night...”

“Yeah.” Ilya’s cheeks were red as Shane turned to stare at him.

“You ran into my mother the night we first—?” He wanted to run and hide. “Why didn’t you tell me?”

“It did not seem important at the time!”

Shane was sure he didn’t want to know the answer to this, but he had to ask. “Was it before or after we—”

“Before.”

Shane resisted the urge to bury his head in his hands. “Oh, my god.”

His mom blinked, looking between the two of them. “So you’ve been in love since...”

“No! No, no, no.” He and Ilya insisted at the same time.

“It wasn’t like that, Mom,” Shane told her.

“Then what was it like?” she asked, and Shane looked helpless at Ilya. Maybe he’d have a better idea of what to say to her.

“It was more just...” Ilya trailed off, making a vague hand gesture.

Or he’d do something like that.

“Just what?”

“Uh, just...” Ilya shrugged, and Shane prayed that he’d stop talking. “Just....”

“Ilya.” Shane glared as he knocked his foot against Ilya’s, silently begging him not to explain the concept of fuckbuddies to his parents if he ever wanted Shane to touch his dick again.

“Oh, ok.” his mom looked down, a light blush across her cheeks.

“Just what?” Shane’s dad blinked, confused.

His mom leaned towards his dad, lowering her voice. “Lovers.”

“ok, no one is allowed to use that word again,” Shane burst out, wanting nothing more than to forget this conversation ever happened.

The table was silent for a moment, and then Shane’s mom coughed. “Well, I would love a drink.”

“Me too.” Shane said, his hand coming up to cover his face.

“Yes, thank you.” Ilya agreed.

Shane’s dad went to the kitchen and brought back a bottle of vodka and four glasses.

“And there were no nice men in Montreal?” his dad asked.

“I don’t know.” Shane resisted the urge to snap at his dad. He knew he didn’t mean it like that, but Ilya was already tense enough about meeting his parents. He didn’t want anything to make it worse. “Probably there were.”

“And you both kept this a secret for years?” his mother asked.

“I mean, yeah? We kind of had to.” Shane shrugged, looking at Ilya for help.

Ilya took a sip of his vodka and raised his eyebrows in surprise.

“This is good vodka,” he complimented, Shane’s dad shrugging.

“Thanks. I try to buy the Russian stuff.”

Ilya nodded in agreement, and Shane’s mom got the conversation back on track.

You never...” She trailed off for a moment before deciding to just go for it. “I mean, you never let him win, did you, Shane?”

Shane gave her a flat look. “Do you let Dad win at cards?”

“I’d rather die,” she said, Shane’s dad not even surprised.

“Same here,” Shane said, meeting her gaze. She scrutinized him for a long moment before seeming to let it go.

“ok.” She took a sip, looking between the two of them. “So is your plan to, what, just keep doing this in secret until you both retire, or...”

Shane shook his head. “Maybe that could have been an option once, but not anymore.”

Her eyebrows rose. “Really?”

“No. We want to have a future together.” Shane let out a breath. “But we know it’s going to be hard, especially since the NHL has spent so long building up this rivalry. We just can’t come out and, like, announce it.” He slumped down on his seat. “I want to come out soon, but I think it’s going to mean the end of my time as a Metro.

“What?” Yuna’s gaze sharpened. “Why do you think that? They love you in Montreal. You’re their most valuable player, you got them two cups!”

“Ever since Scott came out, the team group chat has been saying some...horrible things,” he admitted, Ilya putting a reassuring hand on his shoulder. “Things like ‘I’m glad we don’t have one of those in our locker room’ and ‘I could never be on a team with someone like that.’” he clasped his hands together on the table. “They might love me now, but I don’t think that’ll stay the case when the news hits.”

His mom blinked, sitting back in her chair. Seeming to sense that his wife needed a moment to process everything, Shane’s dad turned to Ilya.

“Ilya, I’ve got to say, I’m surprised,” he broke the silence that had fallen over the table. “You have such a reputation as a ladies’ man.”

“Mmm.” Ilya hummed in agreement. “It’s not untrue.”

“Ilya likes both,” Shane chimed in.

“Oh.” His dad nodded as Ilya continued to speak.

“It’s true, I’ve been with many women, but...” he reached for Shane’s hand, stroking his thumb over his knuckles. I have only been in love with one person.”

Shane smiled softly, squeezing Ilya’s hand once. “Same here,” he echoed, staring into Ilya’s eyes. “Only one.”

Shane’s mom looked between the two of them for a long moment. “I just... I need a minute.”

Shane’s heart sank as she went to the back door, letting herself out into the yard. He glanced at Ilya, who motioned for him to follow her.

As he stopped outside, he saw his other standing near the fence with her back to him. Her shoulders were shaking, as if she were crying.

His heart jumped into his throat. He’d never wanted to hurt her. He’d thought that this was something that he could accept, but what if it wasn’t?

“Mom, um...” Shane let out a breath as he broke the silence, shifting his stance. “I need you to know that I did really try.” his voice broke, and he blinked back the tears that were starting to form. “I tried really hard, but, um...I just can’t help it. And I’m sorry.”

His mother turned to him, eyes wide as she moved closer. “Oh, no, you have nothing, nothing to apologize for,” she put her hands up to cradle his face. “Look at me. Look at me. Look at me.” Shane reluctantly dragged his gaze to her face, taken aback by the love and support beaming from her. “I’m sorry that I made you feel like you couldn’t tell me.”

“It wasn’t anything you did,” Shane told her. “It really wasn’t. I think some part of me knew that you and Dad would both accept me.” He felt another tear fall. “But for the longest time, I couldn’t accept myself. I couldn’t even let myself think of a future where I could have him. And even when I did, it seemed like it was impossible to ever get to a point where we could have that.”

“And now?” She asks quietly. “What changed?”

Shane gave her a watery smile. “Now I know that he wants it too. And I’m going to fight for us for as long as I can. I don’t care what it costs me. I only care that it doesn’t cost me him.”

His mom nodded. "Okay." She moved one hand to his shoulder, squeezing it gently. I am so, so proud of you. ok?" She swallowed hard. "Please forgive me."

Shane sighed. "Of course I forgive you, Mom. I love you."

"Oh, I love you too." she pulled him into a hug. "So much."

Shane hugged her back, relief flooding his system.

"Are you okay?" she asked him, pulling back to examine his face.

"Yeah," he let out a breath, giving her a small smile. "I'm okay."

"And Rozanov. He's good to you?"

Shane felt his cheeks grow warm. "Yeah, Mom, he's good to me."

She picked up his right hand. Looking at his engagement ring. Shane held his breath, desperate to know what his mother thought.

"He picked well," she finally said. "This ring is perfect for you."

"I could say the same about him," Shane told her, meeting her gaze.

"Okay," she nodded, as if seeming to decide something. "Then I guess we'd better get inside so I can meet my son's fiancé."

Shane let out a relieved laugh as the two of them went inside.

"Can I see your ring, Ilya?" His mom asked, Ilya holding out his hand. She looked at his ring before giving Shane a smile. "You both picked beautiful rings, very unique."

"Thanks, mom." Shane grinned at her.

"So, who do you think did the better job?" Ilya asked, Shane shooting him a dirty look.

"Let it go, Rozanov."

"Is just a question!"

"You said it wasn't a competition!"

"No, you said that!"

His dad chuckled as his mom seemed to have an idea.

"Why don't you guys stay for lunch?" his mother suggested. "We can talk things over."

Shane looked to Ilya, who gave him a nod.

"Okay. Let's do it." Shane finally said, his mother smiling.

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Before long, his dad was placing a pot of spaghetti on the table as Shane and Ilya grabbed plates and glasses.

“Okay. We need a plan,” his mother said, taking a seat. “Shane, you said you wanted to come out soon, right?”

“Yeah,” he nodded. “I think that if we put something out in the next few weeks, the team ought to have time to adjust before training camp starts. It might help with some of the backlash.”

“And if it doesn’t?”

Shane let out a deep breath. “Then we waive my no-trade clause, and I move to another team, ideally in the Eastern Conference,” he thought for a moment. “New York would be a decent option if nothing else. Or maybe Philadelphia?”

“Or Ottawa.” Ilya pointed out. “That was part of the plan anyway. Maybe we just move it up.”

“Maybe.” Shane shrugged. “It’s definitely an option.”

“Or you could join me in Boston.”

Shane saw his mom’s eyes go wide.

“Maybe we cross that bridge when we get to it. They still don’t have enough room in their cap to afford both of us.”

Ilya shrugged. “Okay, but I think you could like Boston. Just saying.”

“Okay, well, at least you have some ideas of where you can go,” Yuna said. “Keep me up to date on how things go with the team, and I can put feelers if need be.”

“Got it.” Shane hid a smile as his mom kept talking.

“Now, as for the two of you,” she gestured between Shane and Ilya. “We need a statement prepared in case anything leaks. Something classy and simple.”

“That’s fair.” Ilya nodded, Shane agreeing. They could hope that nothing would get out, but all it would take was one slip-up. One picture of them not being careful, or one video of them getting leaked online, would be all it would take for the entire world to find out about them.

Ilya started to eat his pasta, groaning as he took a bite.

“Your pasta is so much better than your son’s,” he said, Shane rolling his eyes.

“There is nothing wrong with chickpea pasta!”

“It does have an odd taste, Shane.” His dad said, ” Shane, huffing.

“At least I don’t eat Kraft mac and cheese!”

Shane’s parents turned to stare at Ilya as he took another bite of pasta.

“Kraft is good.” He said, practically inhaling the bowl in front of him, his shoulders moving in some sort of strange pasta dance. Shane’s dad moved the pot closer to him, and Ilya nodded in thanks.

“Anyway.” Shane’s mom tried to get them back on track. “I’m going to quietly

reach out to the premium brands, or maybe just Reebok, Rolex and Speedo.” She seemed to be doing the calculations in her head. “They’ll be thrilled, I think, once they wrap their minds around this. There’s a world of opportunity here, if they do it right.”

“Mom, can you just take three steps back, please?” Shane gave her a look. “We just want...a future. I know it’ll be a long road, but we don’t need to talk about brand deals right now, right?”

His mom sighed, giving in. “I suppose we don’t.” She turned her attention to Ilya. “And you’d play in Ottawa?”

Ilya swallowed another massive bite of pasta. “Yes. We would be closer, and we’re going to start a hockey camp charity during the summers. It makes sense for us to be close by.”

Shane shook his head. “I still can’t believe I got you to agree to that plan.”

“Why not? Is good plan.”

“Because I came up with it at two in the morning and woke you up like a crazy person!”

His mom laughed. “You did?”

Shane flushed. “I might have been a little overexcited.”

You woke me up like passionate person. There is a difference.” Ilya shrugged, taking a bite of pasta and swallowing it before speaking again. “And it was attractive.”

Shane stared at him. “You found me waking you up in the middle of the night to talk hockey attractive?”

“You should not be surprised. You already knew I found your love of hockey attractive.”

Shane paused before shrugging, “...fair point.”

“Getting back to the situation at hand.” Shane’s mom gave them both an amused look before looking at Ilya. “Ilya, you have no loyalty to Boston?”

“Jesus, Mom!” Shane glared at his mom, and she raised her hands.

“What? They drafted him.” She turned to Ilya, Shane watching his fiancée stiffen under his mother’s gaze.

“You would leave Boston for Shane?” She asked, eyebrow raised.

“Yes.”

Shane saw his mom start to frown and he rolled his eyes. “Mom!”

“Loyalty is important.” She defended herself, and Shane scoffed.

“He’s trying to be loyal to me, not Boston,” Shane pointed out. “And it’s not much different than me wanting to leave Montreal to be with him if it comes to that.”

“Well...” Based on her expression, his mom seemed to think there was a big difference in the two, but Shane knew that was just her diehard love of the Metros talking.

Shane sighed, turning to Ilya. “My mom cares a little too much about hockey.”

“Oh, really?” Ilya acted surprised. “I could not tell. Now I see where you get it from.”

Shane shoved him, Ilya not seeming to care as he scooped more spaghetti into his mouth.

“Have you talked to Scott Hunter?” His mom asked, looking between him and Ilya.

“I texted him my support.” Shane took a bite. “He said thanks.”

“I spoke to him briefly.” Ilya chewed and swallowed. “After MLH award in June.”

“And what did he say?” Yuna asked.

“Nothing.” Ilya shrugged, seeing the look Shane was giving him. “I didn’t tell him about Shane and me. But what he did, it was...”

“Yes, it was very brave.” Shane’s mom finished Ilya’s thought.

“It changed things for me at least.” Shane felt Ilya nudge his foot under the table. “Maybe for us.”

Shane felt all the adrenaline that had been coursing through his body reach its peak.

He should be happy. His parents accepted Ilya, and they were helping him make a plan to be together. But something in him told him that this was all too easy. That the finish line was always going to be moved for them, and they’d never stand a chance of getting to actually be together.

Everything was moving so quickly. He was making plans to come out, and he hadn’t even told Hayden and JJ yet. He hoped they’d be okay with it, but what if they weren’t? What if they hated him?

He let out a low breath, resting his head on the table as he tried to remember to breathe.

He heard the conversation around him come to a halt, and felt Ilya place a hand on his shoulder.

“Shane...” Ilya shook his shoulder slightly. “Shane.”

Shane tried to wave him off. “I’m ok. I’m just freaking out,” he let out a low breath. “I’ll be ok in a second.”

“Hey, hey, hey, hey,” he felt Ilya move closer, his cheek barely brushing Shane’s. “We’re good here. Your family is here. Your fiancé is here.” Ilya’s thumb swept a gentle semicircle across Shane’s collarbone. “You’re good here, ok?”

Shane finally looked up, gazing into Ilya’s worried eyes.

“We’re going to be okay, right?” he finally asked, his voice soft. “I don’t- I don’t want to risk losing you.”

Ilya’s eyes softened. “Trust me, solnyshko. After spending so long apart, I am not going to let you go now for any reason.”

Shane let out a relieved smile, pressing his lips to Ilya’s. The other man melted into his touch, Shane dimly aware of his parents talking.

“Since rookie season...” his mother whispered, sounding as though she was near tears.

“The summer before,” his dad corrected, Shane and Ilya laughing into the kiss.

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Soon after he and Ilya left for the cottage, his parents were already planning to come by for dinner later that evening.

“I’ll bring the chicken and some salad stuff.”

“I’ll pick up beer in town.”

“Please text.” Shane reminded them.

“Why? We’ll just be there around 5:00.”

“Please text.” Ilya backed Shane up.

“We’ll text.” Shane’s dad gave them a knowing look. “Pay attention to your phones.”

“Thank you for pasta.” Ilya said, and his mom gave him both a smile.

“Drive safely. I love you,” she told them both.

“Love you!”

Shane let out a breath when they got in the car, grinning at Ilya. “We did it.”

“You did it, Hollander.” Ilya reminded him, and Shane brushed him off

“I never could have done any of that without you.” He drummed his fingers on the steering wheel.

“And now we have a better plan. We can have a real future together, and not just wait until retirement.” He reached for Ilya’s hand. “After so long hoping for this, it’s finally within our reach. I never could have hoped for this before.”

Ilya squeezed Shane’s hand, marveling that he could have this. That he could have the man he loved, and that their love wouldn’t have to be a secret forever. One day, the entire world would know that Ilya Rozanov loved Shane Hollander. And until then, they’d live their lives in the sunlight, no longer confined to the shadows.

“Neither could I.”

Shane kept grinning to himself as he started the car, and Ilya was content to just sit and watch him. After years of separation, one hope then another dashed, he could see a path forward for them.

And that was worth everything to him.

The End

End Notes

This fic is complete and updates will happen every day or so.
Unsolicited Beta comments will be deleted.

Thanks for reading! I hope you like it. Let me know what you think in the comments!

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