

Best Possible Situation

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Best Possible Situation

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Summary

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And when he had been made captain in Boston, he had promised his Bears he would get them a cup. He couldn't just leave without doing that. Didn't want to leave and let people think he was a liar, or that he just gave up when things got hard, lazy, useless, stupid boy.

He tore up the note he'd begun, and began his second plan instead.

Notes

(I've just switched to Ellipsus instead of googledocs, so my formatting is different. In a good way, I think?)

Content warning about some of the details of the suicide attempt in end notes.

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

Chapter 1

NHL AWARDS, VEGAS, SUMMER 2014. SHANE.

Shane had made it back to his hotel room, out of his stupid tux, and into the shower before he'd changed his mind.

He had felt so stupid the entire ride down in the elevator, the walk back to his room. Stupid for going to Ilya's room in the first place, stupid for wanting more, stupid for feeling upset he didn't get more. What had he been expecting after six months of nothing, belittling, and more nothing? He should have gotten the message when Ilya hadn't texted him back after they'd gone all the way for the first time. Should have gotten the message when Ilya had literally said it in Russia; *we are nothing*. He hadn't, and he hadn't, and he'd gone on to send more unanswered texts during the season, not a lot, and not often, but still. He had kept reaching out, ignoring the obvious, because, what? Because he thought maybe there was something else there? That Ilya might want him for more than what he'd already gotten from Shane? Yes. Actually.

That was what Shane changed his mind about, washing his face in the shower for what felt like the sixth time, skin feeling raw from dragging the facecloth over and over it like he could just wipe off his fucking shame from the whole night.

He had been stupid, yes. He had wanted too much, okay. But Ilya had been the one to kiss him in the bathroom after they'd had their presentation. Ilya had been the one to start this up again after Shane had given up. Ilya had followed him. So they were both stupid, which was easier to bear than having it just be him who was stupid. And if Ilya could just come crashing back into Shane's life, following him into bathrooms and reaching right into Shane's fucking rib cage, taking what he wanted, then Shane could do that to.

He got out of the shower with renewed energy, leaving the weird curdled feelings of grief to drip down the drain with the shower water and soap suds. Dried off, redressed in sweats and a hoodie, his comfiest sneakers. It was his plane outfit for tomorrow, but he was only going to wear it for half an hour max. He wasn't as much of an asshole as Ilya was, he knew Ilya needed to sleep to catch his flight. All Shane wanted was a fucking kiss, and he didn't think that was actually too much to ask.

BOSTON, WINTER 2014. ILYA.

The week Ilya arrived back to Boston from Sochi was the week he made his first real plan. He had a fresh pack of painkillers prescribed by the med team in the Russian Olympic village, he'd gone in for a headache and they'd chucked the whole packet at him. Probably they had been hoping he would just take the whole pack then, deliver Russia from the embarrassment of a captain who had let his team lose to Latvia.

He had still been pretending he had it together, then. Putting on a show of the firm jawed, strong will he always wore for his father and the galas he got dragged to.

He'd made the mistake of seeking out Shane, while he had been doing his best to pretend. He had just wanted to be in Shane's proximity, to see him, as if somehow seeing Shane would be enough to remind him that not everything was awful. It might not have been a mistake, because it had been working a little, except that Shane ended up seeing him, and coming over with a face too full of concern like he was allowed to feel anything but mild contempt for Ilya. Despite the fact that Shane could read a single twitch on ice and understand an opposing play, he had always - in Ilya's experience - been truly awful at reading a room without subtitles. Refused to pick up on the fact that Ilya wasn't just being an asshole the way he usually was, but that he needed Shane to stop speaking to him, to go away, refused to pick up on it until Ilya spat out harsher words that couldn't be undercut with a shake of his head, or a roll of his eyes to show that he didn't mean it, not really.

Despite this, he had held it together because that was what he always did, and never more so than while he was in Russia. Maybe it was mostly spite and habit, that did it. He always got through, and then got out. That was what he did.

He got through the Olympics. He got out. He arrived back in Boston. He unpacked his bag. He stared at the box of pills that fell out with his sweatpants. And he thought; who would it even matter to?

It had been a simple, inelegant plan. Barely a plan at all. He would write a quick note, housekeeping really, so there would be no confusion about who his cars went to, an apology to Bears' management for leaving them short handed. He would take all of the pills. He could go lie in his bathtub for an easier clean up. Should he leave another note on the door for his cleaner? *A sorry, don't come in, call 911* kind of thing.

He'd made it halfway through writing the first note before it felt suddenly far too pathetic. Was this seriously the legacy he wanted to leave behind? No one would talk about any of his wins if he killed himself now. He would be the failed Russian team captain of the 2014 Olympics who couldn't handle the job and offed himself about it. His father would probably follow him in death just to yell at him for embarrassing the family, and Russia, and everyone who had ever rooted for him.

And when he had been made captain in Boston, he had promised his Bears he would get them a cup. He couldn't just leave without doing that. Didn't want to leave and let people think he was a liar, or that he just gave up when things got hard, lazy, useless, stupid boy.

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The second plan was a lot more open ended than the first. For one, the last step wasn't necessarily to die, it was only one of the options. He had given himself this season to carry the plan out, didn't think he'd have the wherewithal to try it in a longer time frame.

Step one was to redirect attention away from the Olympics, and towards the Bears.

Step two was to make the Bears worth the redirection. He had ideas on new plays, new workouts, new conditioning. He would work with the coaches to get their team into the best shape they had ever been in.

Step three was to not only get into the play offs, but to go all the way. Win the Stanley Cup.

Step four relied on step three succeeding, and was still only the assumed outcome, but he was pretty sure of it still. Win MVP.

Step five was the clincher. The first option here was reliant on Ilya feeling like he had more to give and do. If he got to step five and had some excitement for the next season, some peace with his failures, then step five was simply to enjoy the win.

The outcome Ilya was, perhaps, leaning closer to, was the second option, in which Ilya fulfilled all the previous steps and still arrived at step five with the same lead feeling in his gut. Step five, die.

It wasn't the most thorough of lists, he knew that. If he was actually writing it down instead of holding it in his head it would be full of little notes, training plans, suicide options, drafts for the letter he should leave. It would probably be very confusing. Safer to keep it in his head, where no one else could stumble over it and get any weird ideas about it.

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By the time he had wrapped up step three, Ilya was pretty sure he knew which step five option he would be taking. He had had a moment of relief, holding the cup up to the camera, screaming out to the world, enjoying the excitement of his team and the crowd. Had thought maybe he could grab onto that relief and stretch it into something bigger. Managed to hold onto it through the night of partying, the first time since Sochi he had let himself fully loose, drinking and dancing. Svetlana in his arms, random women in his arms, Marlow and Connors at his side, cheersing and carousing, laughing.

His father had called the next morning, Ilya hung over, relief and joy still sparking in his blood stream. Svetlana was a snoring lump on one side of him, the Stanley cup a ridiculous lump on the other side. He had thought, fleetingly, that the call would be one of congratulations. Grigori did not make a habit of offering praise, and certainly not lightly, but he did when Ilya had earned it. And surely he had earned it now? The youngest NHL captain to lead his team to a Stanley cup win. The turn around season he had headed. The last game they had played, where the team had moved so well together, oiled machinery.

"Papa," he greeted, speaking low so as not to wake either the lurking headache wrapped around his head, or Svetlana.

"I watched the game," his father said, gruff. *"So you can win for your stupid Americans, but not for your home?"*

"I am sorry," Ilya said, immediate. The pain in his head tightened, throbbing, woken despite his quiet. *"My team here-"*

His father didn't wait for Ilya's excuses, he never did. Always said excuses were worthless when an apology would be quicker. *"I heard what you said at the end of the game,"* he said next. *"Your mama is not the reason you are a name in America. She did not get you where you are now. She would have raised you to be weak, weaker than you already are. As weak as she was."*

Ilya didn't reply. Svetlana stirred against him, not awake, but not fully asleep anymore. He turned his face away from her in case she woke and saw him. Kept his phone pressed to his ear even as he didn't know what he could say here. He wanted to yell, to be so angry at his father for speaking about his mama like this, for bringing her up at all when he never spoke of her. He wanted to say he had come to America in spite of Grigori, not because of him. If his father had had his full way, Ilya would have stayed in the KHL, stayed in Russia, stayed more firmly under his thumb.

"When are you arriving home?" His father asked, then, still stern.

This, at least, Ilya could answer, even if he was surer than ever now that it would be a lie. *"After the awards ceremony. For the summer, as always."*

"What?" his father snapped, *"you should have been home already, it is past your curfew."*

Oh. The confusion had been getting worse all season. Ilya only seeing and hearing it in small bursts, usually brushed aside quickly. Alexei was still refusing to fully acknowledge it. Ilya would need to convince him to take their father to the doctors, to get him treatment. He could put money aside for it. He needed to meet with his lawyer anyway, now he was at step five. He had some things he needed to redo in his will.

"Sorry sir," he said, *"I am on my way home now."*

Svetlana groaned when he hung up the phone, waiting a few seconds after hearing his father end the call, and she batted at his leg.

"Lie back down," she instructed, "It is too early for Stanley cup champion to be awake."

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There was a new kind of relief now that he knew which option he would be taking. Like he'd finally grasped a new play, knew he'd be able to get the puck in the net. He could work on the real plan now, it gave him something to get up in the morning for, setting everything right before he left. He wanted to be able to know he wouldn't be leaving too much of an embarrassment behind. There would of course, be some embarrassment, but he was sure his family would be able to call it in *accident* to avoid most of the shame of it. It would be easy for the world to swallow it as an accident; he was known for partying, it would be as simple as calling it a tragic mistake. A stupid mistake. Who would kill themselves after winning MVP and the Stanley cup? It was a good disguise.

He reworked his will with his lawyer, who didn't even question why. His cars he left to Svetlana, except for the black and gold sporty that Marly really liked, left to him. Clothing to be donated. House and furniture sold. Personal effects to be cleared by Svetlana to give out at her discretion. She would be so mad about him asking for more favours, but he had to hope she'd forgive him for it, that at least the cars would buy him a little goodwill.

There was a part of him that wanted to leave something for Shane, but he thought that would probably be cruel more than anything. And what did he have that Shane would want?

He arranged for a medical trust for his father to be set up, to be paid out as needed, after Ilya's death.

His lawyer had raised his eyebrows at that, saying he doubted that would be necessary, and Ilya had shrugged and said he wanted to be prepared.

He set up another trust for his niece. Two parts, one which would be accessible to her mother for childcare costs, the other which would only be payable to Raisa when she turned eighteen.

All the rest of the money he assigned to a handful of charities, and called it a day.

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To add to the probable eventual story of a young athlete who partied too hard and paid a fatal price for it, Ilya went out with his team to several parties. Wanted to give them a few more

memories of him while he wasn't holding their noses to the grinder to get them to the cup. Selfish, maybe, but he wanted his team to be among the few who would maybe miss him for a while. He wouldn't kid himself that they would continue to hold space in their hearts and minds for too long after he left. There would be a new captain, a new team mate, a new Russian even. Probably no one as talented as him, but maybe close.

He and Marly spent an entire weekend in New York, trying new clubs, drinking only top shelf, spending a ridiculous amount of money.

He accompanied Svetlana to two fundraising events, let her dress him up exactly how she wanted, and then stood like nice furnishing at her arm for the event. Smiled nicely for photos, made sure to be seen laughing. She praised and chirped him evenly for his good behaviour. He ate her out afterwards for so long he was sure his chin would be prune, but also that she would remember it as the best fucking oral she had ever received.

Honestly, if Marly had shown a bit more interest, he'd probably have gone down on him too, leave him another lasting memory to think fondly back on.

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It had taken several phone calls too many to get Alexei into gear enough to get their father seen properly, and then a lot of money and persuading to get him to work with Ilya to arrange the medical treatment and care, but it had been done. He could rest easy knowing he was only abandoning their expectations for him, not his duties.

If he was closer to Raisa - if he saw her more often than just the Summers - maybe he would re-think his decision. It was one thing to leave grown adults who didn't even like him very much, but another to leave a child. He didn't think she would really even notice, though, let alone care. She liked him well enough when he was there, but he didn't think she thought about it him at when he wasn't there. No one was going to tell her what had happened, he was sure. Their family didn't talk about things like that. He just wouldn't turn up this Summer, and it wouldn't be mentioned, and she would forget about him until his money was released to her. And then it wouldn't matter if she had been a little sad about not seeing her uncle, because she would have so much money she wouldn't have any need for sadness.

He wondered what his mama had thought about leaving her children. If she had thought it wouldn't effect them, or that they would get over it quick enough. If she just felt so bad that she had no space left in her brain to think about them. Whether having enough money of her own would have been enough to change her mind, maybe she would have left only her husband, moved away with her children. Maybe it wouldn't have mattered about any of the details being changed, more money, less money, children, no children, maybe it was a fixed point in time. An event as inevitable as the eventual death of the sun. If maybe it was the same for him.

Ilya had agreed to present the award and do the silly little skit with Hollander at the NHL awards only because he thought it would add to the public story of his accidental death in a useful way. Something for people to point at and say, see, not suicidal behaviour, this was clearly a mis-calculation.

Also perhaps because he still, so selfishly, wanted to be near Shane again. Not on ice. Out of their gear, so he could see Shane properly. He'd had a few more texts from Shane since Sochi. They had petered off over the season, stopping fully after he'd ignored Shane on the ice during a Boston/Montreal match up. But then he'd texted his congratulations for the cup win, and Ilya had almost broken his resolve and texted him back.

He had to hope that in the future, Shane would be able to look back on Ilya's silence and see it like a gift, almost. Cutting himself off before any real attachment could form, so it wouldn't hurt him when Ilya left for real. And this was the ideal time to do it, for Shane, if it did still hurt him somehow, because he would have the summer to recoup. His hockey would be fine. Ilya was sure.

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His plan to soak in Shane's presence while keeping his distance was a failed attempt immediately. His father had been right that he was weak, that he folded easily. All it took was Shane's eyes flashing with anger that barely disguised the hurt underneath, and Ilya's body was itching to get closer to Shane's, like just through touch maybe they could both be soothed.

He thought if he could keep himself to a script, aloof, flirtatious, shallow, it would be okay. That he could follow Shane into the bathroom because he could see Shane's own facade collapsing, and pretend he wasn't effected by it. He was effected by it. Didn't know what he was doing except that he so badly wanted to get to be with Shane one more time. Wanted to leave Shane with a better memory than crying in the bathroom. It was only fair. He had made sure to do the same with Svetlana, Marly, his team. Shane meant more to him than half the players on his team, and as self absorbed as it was, Ilya wanted Shane not to hate him. Maybe Shane would hate him afterwards, just for leaving and making the game too easy. He wouldn't like that.

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He had had to revise his plan to get to have Shane in it. His first thought was he needed to be sure Shane wouldn't be the last one to see him, so Shane wouldn't be a...suspect, or need to explain too much what he had been doing in Ilya's room, if the cameras were checked. He wouldn't let Shane stay too late, would hold back from touching him too much, in case he couldn't make himself let go. Would fuck him so good. Send him off, satisfied. Reparations for Ilya treating him so shittily the last few months, years, whatever. Call room service for more vodka. Ask them to bring it in to him so they can make face to face contact. He had been surreptitiously researching pills all season, and had brought the ones he judged to be the best. Most likely to let him take them and drink himself unconscious and then just not wake up afterwards. Least likely to have him vomit them up and lose their effectiveness. He'd leave his note on the table in the front half of the penthouse, hopefully easily seen and noticed.

He'd already left his real letter, for Svetlana, on his kitchen bench at home. He was sure she would find it sooner rather than later. The hotel note was more of a warning for housekeeping that they shouldn't go around into the bedroom, and should just go ahead and call the mortuary.

He'd decided he would prefer to do it on the bed, comfier than the bath for sure, and he would like to just go to sleep. Would like to lie down and drink the good vodka this hotel somehow had, swallow down his pills. He'd already pre-popped them from the blister-pack, stored them in a pill bottle so he could just pour them out and swallow them without having to work for it, or give himself time to chicken out halfway through.

NHL AWARDS, VEGAS, SUMMER 2014. SHANE.

There was no reply to Shane's first knock on Ilya's penthouse room door, and Shane spent a good thirty seconds arguing with himself over knocking again. On one hand, Ilya could literally be asleep already, might not hear Shane knocking even if Shane knocked loudly. And if Shane knocked loudly, he might draw unwanted attention, and then there might be questions, and they might be found out, and then kicked out of the NHL.

On the other hand, Shane had screwed his courage up to the sticking point for this. He didn't think he was on whole a cowardly man, but he found it hard to be brave about this, where he never felt like he was on fully even footing. He wanted to get steadied. He could do this. He didn't give up on things, he didn't back down once he committed. He had come up here to get a proper goodnight like he was a real person, and not just...

He knocked again, a sharper rap.

"Rozanov," he called lowly, "open up."

He heard a muffled, crunching thud from beyond the door, and then very distinctive Russian cursing, rolled his eyes. Knocked again.

"I'm not fucking going away until you open the door and talk to me," he threatened, "so hurry the fuck up."

One of the good things about Ilya having the penthouse was that there was a good gap between room doors, he was unlikely to be directly annoying to anyone except for Ilya, unless of course he had to stay for hours knocking, and then everyone including him would be pissed off.

More swearing, silence, and then heavy footsteps, Ilya opening the door. Shane didn't wait for it to open all the way, had already been standing out in the hallway much longer than his nerves enjoyed, and he slipped in through the gap the moment he could.

Ilya stepped away from the door as Shane stepped in, swaying slightly, Shane noted as he closed the door. The thud from earlier appeared to have been a bottle of vodka being dropped, because there was a still spreading acrid smelling puddle growing from a collection of smashed glass.

He looked from the mess to Ilya, who looked also kind of like a mess. Much more so than he had just over an hour ago directly after they'd fucked.

"Fuck," Shane said, "you okay?"

Ilya blinked at him, forehead pinched. "What is it you come back for?" he asked, his voice oddly tense.

"Uh," Shane glanced back at the smashed bottle. "Do you want me to help you clean this up?"

Ilya also looked back at the bottle, his face doing something unreadable before dropping into familiar frustration.

"Hollander," Ilya said, stepped towards Shane, hands up like he might take Shane by the shoulders. "What is - you forget things?"

How much more had Ilya drank since Shane had left? Just this evening Shane had been impressed by how much Ilya's English had improved in the last six months since they'd talked, and now he sounded like every word was a chore to drag up. The whole room smelled like vodka, and it made Shane want to make Ilya wait for his answer, just clean the fucking mess up now, because if Ilya was drunk he might step in it and shred his feet.

Ilya's hands landed on his shoulders, hot even through the thicker fabric of Shane's hoodie, and one of his thumbs bumped against Shane's neck, wet, like he was sweating. Maybe it was vodka. His hands were shaking, even gripping Shane like he was. Shane dragged his gaze back from the floor vodka to Ilya's face. Up close he looked even more of a mess, eyes reddened and glassy, pupils odd, lips trembling.

"I just -" Shane began, felt so outrageously pathetic all of a sudden, all his certainty of righteousness fading away in the face of Ilya's actual presence. The way just being this close to Ilya was both already calming some upset piece of his brain, but also setting him on high alert. He blinked hard, avoided Ilya's gaze, staring at Ilya's mouth instead. "I just wanted to say, well, that we didn't kiss. And I don't - it feels fucking shit when you don't kiss me at all before you send me away."

That hadn't been quite what he had wanted to say. Okay, maybe it had been what he had been *wanting* to say, just not what he had planned to say.

Ilya exhaled hard, then he leaned in and kissed Shane, hands still gripping Shane's shoulders. Didn't linger, closed mouth, drew back, and shook Shane's shoulders just slightly so Shane would look up and meet his eyes.

"Okay?" Ilya asked, "kissed. Not much time now so you have to go, yes?"

It would probably have been kinder if Ilya had just slapped him instead of this, treating Shane like a whining child refusing to go to bed without a goodnight kiss. So what that that was basically what was happening. He pulled out of Ilya's grip, Ilya stumbling slightly without Shane's shoulders to brace himself against. He looked confused.

"If kissing me is such a fucking chore you didn't have to do it," Shane snapped, "you could have just said something. Not much time before what, anyway? You have another hook up on their way? Someone you'd prefer to fucking kiss?"

Ilya's forehead was creased again, and he shook his head once, then again, less like he was saying no, more like he was a dog trying to shake water out of his ears.

"No, no," he said eventually, one hand up, like he was looking for something to grab on to, and Shane gave in to the fear that Ilya would fall over, and stepped close again. Ilya's hand landing on his upper arm and squeezing. "Shane," Ilya said, slow and calm like he said it often and like it wasn't shocking Shane like paddles to the chest. "Is just, I need way to make clear you were not murdering me, yes? Would look bad."

"What?" Shane asked, was not following whatever drunken joke Ilya had stumbled on.

"Room service already came," Ilya explained, like he was saying something very obvious, "saw me alive still after you. Now I need - I am so very tired, Shane, I have to do calling more of room servings fast, with you gone, yes? Making sense?"

Making zero sense until Shane's brain clamped down hard on *alive*, and put together puzzle pieces he hadn't realised he had been collecting. He hated the picture it made. Reached for Ilya with both hands, one going to his waist to help keep him steady, the other to his neck, searching for his pulse. He wasn't fully sure why, he knew Ilya still had one. What was he looking for? A message in morse code?

"You took something?" Shane asked.

"Calling me thief?" Ilya frowned at him, close enough now he was nearly cross eyed with the effort of keeping his eyes on Shane's voice.

"Pills?" Shane asked, "And alcohol. You took too much of them?"

"Ah," Ilya said. "Yes. This I took." his pulse was, well, a pulse. Shane couldn't tell if it was weak or if he was holding his fingers wrong, or what. Could feel his own pulse speeding along much too fast, so he wasn't a good baseline.

"On purpose?" Shane asked, dropping his hand from Ilya's neck to reach into his sweats' pocket for his phone.

"Da," Ilya said, smiled just slightly. "But is okay, hm? People will be saying is accident."

"Fuck," Shane said, hand shaking as he unlocked his phone one handed, pulling up the call screen.

"Fuck," Ilya agreed, and then in a much more distressed tone, "ah, blyat, Shane, you have to go. This is not good looks for you. Will be - be talk when you are seen on movie. film. video."

"Jesus, Ilya," Shane said, lifting the phone to his ear, listening to it ring, "do you seriously think I'm leaving right now and just - just letting you - fuck -"

He kept his eyes on Ilya's face, trying hard to translate what was going on. Couldn't tell how much of this was general drunkenness and how much was the effect of whatever pills Ilya had taken. He was still upright-ish, and talking, and putting thoughts together.

"For plan, yes," Ilya said, like this should make sense to Shane. "Careful plan, no one hurt."

Someone answered the phone, smooth voice asking for his emergency.

STEP FIVE.2, NIGHT, SLEEP. ILYA.

It was nice that Shane was there. The back of Ilya's brain kept trying to come forwards to say Shane shouldn't be there, that it wasn't the plan, but the rest of him liked it. Shane had his arm around him. His clothes were so soft.

After he had done his best to explain the plan to Shane, and why it would be best for him to go, Shane had not gone, had made a phone call instead. Was still on the phone, voice low and steady. Had steered Ilya into the bathroom and sat him down on the cool floor, sat down next to him, put his arm around Ilya's waist and held him against his side.

It made sense that if Shane was still here after knowing the plan, he was going to fix it. Make sure it went smoothly. Ilya had ruined it by opening the door, but it was going to be okay anyway.

He wanted to put his head on Shane's shoulder and close his eyes, but when he tried to, Shane had lifted him back up, and asked him questions instead. What were the pills he had taken? How many had he ingested? What did ingest mean? That one was a question Ilya's brain was asking him, not Shane asking him. His mouth didn't want to keep doing English now. It was tired like the rest of him. Spoke in his mother's tongue. Had her tongue felt like this? Had she spoken? Told Shane the name of the pills. Heard Shane repeat the word, clumsy with his mouth unused to making the correct shapes. Watched Shane's mouth try. Shane asking more questions. How many, Ilya, how many did you take? Swallow?

All of them. Yes he swallowed. Say Ilya again. He knew Shane couldn't understand him, but there wasn't much he could do about that. Shane said Ilya again, his mouth still not the right shape, but still a nice shape. He hoped they would not arrest Shane for this. He didn't think the league would survive without them. Total collapse. People mourning in the street for Shane Hollander. Shane Hollander's hand on his face, their faces close together, eyes on eyes.

He was here to be kissed. Ilya forgot. He tried to press in to kiss him, but Shane moved back, his hand still on Ilya's face. He didn't want to be kissed? Ilya's stomach hurt.

Shane's phone was on the floor, another voice speaking out of it. English. So much English. Calm even voice. Shane responding. Flat but not calm. His hand was still on Ilya's face, holding the weight of Ilya's head for him now. Nice. His other hand still on Ilya's hip, arm around his waist. Ilya wanted to twist around and see the arm around him. He wished he was in bed like he had planned, so he could be lying down, but maybe then Shane wouldn't be holding him. Had he left his note? He thought he had. He had. He asked Shane. Shane rubbed his thumb over Ilya's cheek. Ilya had forgotten they couldn't speak to each other. That was sad. He forgot again so he could tell Shane it was sad. Shane looked like he agreed. His face was sad. It did that a lot. In small bursts. This was not a small burst of sad. Ilya wanted to touch it. Persuaded his hand to move from his lap to Shane's face, fingers on skin feeling sticky. He could feel Shane's breath on his hand. That was good. It meant Shane was breathing. Shane had wanted a kiss. Ilya should have left him all his kisses in his new will. He could call his lawyer now, maybe. Put it in. Please give Shane Hollander all my kisses. He could give him one now, but he was too tired to make it work. Mouth. Movement. Eyes fixed on Shane's mouth. Saying Ilya again.

Was there a step six? Maybe he was doing it. His stomach hurt.

-

There was a moment in which he called himself Irina in his head. Or maybe he was speaking to her like he had parcelled her up and kept her in a crevice in his brain. He was in her bed. So was she. They were in her bed. He had climbed into it with her. Too old to do that but no one else would be home for hours. Who would know. She wouldn't tell on him. Her body hadn't been stiff yet, so he could worm in under her arm. It meant he got vomit on himself, but there was still a small pocket of warmth left, her heat. He was looking at himself through her eyes, the child she had made, trapped under her unmoving arm. He had his eyes closed, hers had been half open. She could see him. He could see himself through her. He remembered how it felt when her body convulsed when she thought she was already more than half dead, to throw up, pain, more pain when she had thought she was free of it. A hand on his back. On his forehead. Not her child. His hair was being held back.

When the room grew close with bodies and smell of vodka and vomit, he shook his head and felt it dislodge. Watched himself fall out.

HOSPITAL, VEGAS, AFTER. SHANE.

There had been a moment of lucidity in the ambulance that Shane clung to. Was grateful for. Ilya's eyes opening again, skipping over the faces of the EMT's and catching on Shane's. His hand, the one without the port in it, reaching out. The EMT closest to Shane had nodded at him, so he'd slid closer and taken Ilya's hand in his. Ilya had said his name, his first name

again, and then asked, very clearly, for Shane to not try and get in touch with his family. That his mama already knew, anyway. Maybe not fully lucid. Hopefully not, if he could have told his mother his plans and still been left to follow them through.

That moment meant that Shane was allowed to follow Ilya in, and then in further into the hospital. That, and probably also that he was Shane Hollander, (and there was a poster just outside the hospital that had him posing in a pair of speedos he had hated wearing.) meant that not only did they let him in, they found him a room to wait in, away from other people who might think it appropriate to take a photo. He didn't know what story would be spun of a photo of just him, sitting in a waiting room, sweats and a hoodie, vomit still drying on his pant leg. A tiny splash of blood that probably only he would be able to point out on his sleeve. It would be a different story if there was a photo of him at the hotel, following the EMT team and the stretcher that held Ilya. There might be photos of that. It had been a reasonably quiet extraction, he thought. Not many people had been around. He could hope it went un-photographed. More people here to see when they had come in. He could still hope. Did still hope.

Sat in his tiny waiting room with the pack of wet wipes a nurse with heavy stubble and a tired smile had handed him. There was a paper cup of water next to him. They said Ilya would be okay. That they had gotten to him quickly enough. That it was good Shane had kept him conscious for so long, had been there to keep his airways clear. Best possible situation. He didn't think that last statement had been well thought out. Best possible situation. It was pressed into him. Best possible.

He had grabbed Ilya's phone while they were leaving. It sat in the opposite pocket to his own, useless because Shane didn't know his code to get in, and didn't want to try and guess and prove even more firmly that he didn't know Ilya. Had thought he'd known part of him. Had. He just didn't know how much that part was still there, because it had been a part that wanted Shane. Best possible situation. Had that been how Ilya had seen this? And here Shane was, feeling sorry for himself because the man he had hoped wanted him with even a flicker of the same desire Shane had for him, didn't. Feeling sorry for himself because if he hadn't been pathetic in the first place, he wouldn't have gone back to the hotel room, and he wouldn't have been there to call 911, or to hold Ilya's hair back, to turn Ilya's body to keep him from choking. Wouldn't be the best possible situation without his hurt feelings.

Even if he could have gotten into Ilya's phone, he wouldn't know what to do with it. Ilya had said not to contact his family. Would he consider it better or worse if Shane tried to contact one of his friends? Marlow? Connors? The Bears' head coach? The beautiful woman he had been photographed with constantly over the last couple of weeks, Svetlana Vetrova. Daughter of Sergei Vetrov. Rich, beautiful, hockey family, half Russian, perfect. Was she Ilya's girlfriend? If he called her would she be able to tell he had slept with her boyfriend?

Did it matter if Ilya got angry at him for calling Svetlana, or Marlow, or even trying to find the number for one of his parents? Ilya would be angry at him already. Either for stopping him, or being there to see it. Shane was living on borrowed time right now, borrowed good will. Drugged up, delirious good will. Which he would cling to for as long as he could if it meant he could stay here with Ilya, to see he was okay. To help if he could.

He startled when there was a noise at the door, and then someone opened it. An orderly, or a nurse. He wasn't sure.

"Just bringing him in now," they said, voice quiet but cheerful. "He's still sleeping, so we're moving him in his bed. It'll probably be easier if you move to the back end of the room?"

"Okay," Shane said, standing, his body immediately feeling awkward as if anyone was looking at him right now.

Crossed the room briskly, stood probably too stiffly against the wall as the door opened further, and the first person backed in, pulling one of the wheeled hospital beds, a second person helping on the other end. Ilya in the bed. Shane didn't want to look. It felt oddly private, like he'd walked in on Ilya using the toilet, or crying on the phone. Stupid. Shane had been literally holding Ilya's hand when he'd thrown up violently enough that he'd pissed himself. If there was a point Shane should have looked away, it should have been then. Still couldn't make himself look. Stared anywhere but the figure on the bed as the two orderlies (nurses? Attendings? Doctors? Shane should know this), arranged the bed in the middle of the room, head against the wall Shane had been sitting next to. Put the bed brakes on, fiddled with the fence like sides on the bed, hung up a couple of bags, plugged things in. There was a lot to do. He'd never been awake in a room while this sort of thing was happening before, and he pretended he was following the whole routine out of interest rather than avoidance.

"Alright," it was the first person again. "He'll probably be waking up slowly within the next ten or so minutes. A nurse will be in in ten minutes to check on him. If he's awake before that and you're worried, you can press the call button."

Shane nodded. "Thank you," he said, a little belated.

They smiled at him, and then, paused, grabbed a small bag from the foot of the bed, and handed it over to Shane. "His necklace," they said, "probably safer for you to hold onto it then leave it on the bed."

Shane took the bag, felt like his fingers were numb around it. "Thanks," he said.

They left him to it. He looked into the bag at the gold chain and cross. Was pleased to see it looked clean. Folded the bag back up and put it in his hoodies' front pocket.

They'd cleaned Ilya up, which was nice. Although Shane doubted Ilya would appreciate being in the skimpy hospital gown. At least it was piss, vomit, and sweat free? Shane had done his best with the wet wipes on his sweatpants, but there was still a stain. It didn't smell, though, so it was fine. It was fine.

The chair he had been sitting on was now right next to the head of the bed. His cup of water still on the table just beside it. He was allowed to sit back down. No one was waiting to leap into the room and catch him in the act of sitting down next to his rival who obviously he had been having sex with, and had feelings for. It took him several long moments to push away from the wall and actually sit down again. He drank his water. He looked at Ilya's hand on the bed. The one without the tube in it. It had been the one with the tube in on the ambulance, but it was bare now, besides a dark bruise. Had it been knocked? Or put in incorrectly?

People who worked at the hospital weren't allowed to talk about their patients. He was pretty sure that was a rule. If he took Ilya's hand in his, and someone walked in, they wouldn't be allowed to tell anyone. Ilya had wanted to hold his hand in the ambulance, and while he was throwing up. And Shane wanted to hold his hand now. He slid his hand under Ilya's, placed his thumb carefully over Ilya's knuckles so he wouldn't brush against the bruise.

Ilya did not stir at all. His hand was warm and dry. Better.

Best possible situation.

When he fetched his phone out of his pocket, having accidentally pulled Ilya's out first, and then just holding it to look at the lock screen image - a photo of the Bears with the cup -, he saw it wasn't even one in the morning yet. He'd felt like he'd been here for hours, in the bathroom with Ilya for hours, in the ambulance for hours. He didn't remember what time it had been when he'd knocked on Ilya's door. Hadn't looked when he'd called 911.

He called his mum. She always woke for a phone call. His dad slept like a log, had once slept through a fire alarm in a hotel, hadn't realised until the firemen were in the hotel room with him to evacuate him.

The call rang thrice. It was almost three in the morning in Ottawa.

"Shane?" She sounded sleep confused, cleared her throat, spoke sharper. "Is something wrong?"

Yes. He wouldn't be calling this early, even if he was in the same time zone, if nothing was wrong. Probably. He was calling now, and he wasn't sure what to say was wrong. The first emergency was over. Best possible situation.

"Shane? Honey?" His mum tried again. He heard a rustle, and then a little quieter like she was speaking away from the phone; "Davey, wake up, it's Shane."

"I'm not hurt," Shane said, because that felt like the easiest thing to start with. Reassurance. Truth.

"You're not - okay, good, good. What happened? Did something happen to the hotel?"

"No," Shane said. Wished he'd saved some of the water to drink now. Looked at Ilya's hand lying in his. His grip on Ilya too proprietary. He didn't let go. "The hotel is fine."

A pause. He could hear his father making low questioning noises. "Okay," his mum said slowly. "That's good. Tell me what happened, baby?"

"They said it was the best possible situation," Shane said, voice flat. "That I was there."

"Who said?"

"The EMTs," Shane said, shook his head. "It makes me want to - to file a complaint for saying something so stupid."

"The EMTs," his mum repeated, voice tight. "What? Why were there - that you were where?"

"His room," Shane said.

There was something going wrong with his throat. Like he'd swallowed a bite of protein bar without chewing first, and it had lodged itself half way down. Choking, painful. He could still suck breath in around it, but it hurt.

He'd curled over his lap, pressed his face in against the arm of the hand holding Ilya's. Could hear his own breathing loud against the skin of his inner elbow.

More rustling over the phone, low tones and hurried words, and then his dad's voice coming clear over the phone.

"Shaney," he said, voice all gravel still. Shane's mum used to say he went to sleep with a mouthful of rocks every night, and that's why he sounded like that in the mornings. "Where are you?"

"Hospital," Shane wheezed.

"Okay," his dad said. "Are you with someone?"

"Yes."

"Who are you with?"

"Ilya," Shane said. Was sure he'd said Ilya's first name more today than he ever had before.

A very short pause. "Rozanov?" His dad asked.

"Yes."

"Okay. Is he hurt?"

"He was. He is. I don't - he's still asleep," Shane mumbled.

Had no idea how hurt Ilya was. The nurse, when she came in, would probably be able to tell him some of the physical hurt, if there was some, but that wasn't what had brought them here.

"Okay," his dad said, his voice warm, like maybe it really was okay. "You called 911?"

"Yes."

"What did you call them for?"

Shane hadn't been able to say it outright on the 911 call. He'd said it was an overdose, and then he said it had been purposeful. She had been the one to ask about suicide. Depression. History.

"He took a whole bottle of pills," Shane said, lifted his head enough that he could peer over his arm at Ilya. Eyes still closed, face slack. "And I don't know how much vodka. A lot. On

purpose."

Unlike the 911 lady, his dad didn't immediately say it. Instead he said; "Oh. I see." and then; "but you got the ambulance to him in time?"

"I guess," Shane said. "Feels too late."

"Too late?"

"If I'd - if I'd pushed in Sochi," Shane mumbled, "or, fuck, at our last game, even. If I didn't just leave before, before he did it, he wouldn't have - there wouldn't have - he wouldn't have needed an ambulance."

"Shaney," his dad said, heavy, confused. "This isn't something that - this kind of thing doesn't work like that."

Shane thought that actually this was exactly how this kind of thing worked. He had read it somewhere. Maybe in one of the hockey biographies he'd read that veered a little more into post retirement self help literature rather than hockey. The best way to beat depression was to get in early. Build the support at the first sign of it.

"I don't know what to do," Shane said instead of talking about it. "He said not to call his family. I don't know - I don't know how to help."

He heard his dad inhale and the knock on the door at the same time. Spoke before his dad could.

"I have to go," he said, "the nurse is here. Bye." Hung up. Spoke to the door. "Come in."

The woman who came in was very short, smiling cautiously. She had a clipboard in her hand, that she attached to the end of the bed first thing.

"I'm Miranda," she said to Shane, her eyes flicking from Shane, to Shane and Ilya's hands, to Ilya. "I'm Ilya's nurse for this shift, so you'll be mostly seeing me. Has he woken at all?"

"Um," Shane said, "no. I'm Shane. Is he - is it okay he's not woken?"

"Hi Shane," Miranda said, already moving around the bed, hands moving in fluid automatic looking movements, checking the fluids hanging over his bed, pressing two gloved fingers in against his wrist. "It's perfectly fine that he's still sleeping," she said as she leaned further over Ilya, checking for Shane didn't know what. "His body's had a rough go of it, and it's still the small hours, it'd make perfect sense if he tried to sleep through. Have you slept at all?"

"Uh," Shane said. "No. I've - no. He might sleep all morning?"

"Maybe," Miranda shrugged. "He probably won't, but I can't say for sure. His breathing looks and sounds fine, his pulse is steady, his colour is good. I'm not worried."

"When would you be worried?" Shane asked, worried.

"Well," Miranda stood up straight, "I would be worried if his breathing became laboured, or his colour changed, or if he appeared in pain. But I'll be coming in to check him regularly, and will come in if you are worried as well. Most likely what will happen, though, is that he will wake up soon, probably a little disoriented and thirsty, and we'll have a check, and then he'll want to go to sleep again."

"Okay," Shane nodded. "What if he wants to kill himself again?"

Miranda didn't wince. Shane was impressed slightly by this, because he had flinched saying it, hadn't realised he was asking until he had asked. Maybe this was all par for the course in this kind of situation. Even when it was the best possible.

"He has no access to any medication in here," Miranda said calmly. "There are no sharps kept in here, either. The windows don't open enough to fit even a hand out, which makes it tough for our sneaky smokers. And we have our on ward counsellors if he needs to talk to someone."

Shane nodded.

"Is it just the two of you?" Miranda asked, then. "Any family?"

"Uh," Shane said. Didn't know how to say it wasn't even the two of them. "His family lives in Russia."

"Oh, that's tough," she grimaced at him. "Do you need anything? I could grab you a blanket if you want to try and catch some zees on the chair. I know it's tiny for you, but it's doable, I've seen it."

"No, I'm good. Not good. I'm. Yeah," Shane stuttered, closed his eyes briefly. "Can I have some water?"

"I'll bring in a jug," she said, kindly ignoring his verbal glitch out. "If I'm not back before Ilya wakes up, after, say, half an hour, press the call button. I should be, but there's always the chance of an accidental side quest."

He thanked her. Eyed the call button up to double check it was literally as easy as it should be. A button to press. Good. Nothing he couldn't handle. It would have been embarrassing to have to ask how to do it now, after it had been mentioned multiple times. She left.

His phone had been buzzing in his hand on and off this entire time. Texts from his mum. Asking him to call back when he could. Asking what they could do to help. One text just saying *Ilya Rozanov from the Boston Bears?* like there was somehow another Ilya Rozanov that Shane could end up at a hospital with. Maybe that would have made more sense to most people. A text asking what Ilya needed, did he need someone to call people for him, did he need someone to talk to the hospital for him, did he need someone to call his agent, his coach, his parents.

Shane had no idea where to even start in answering any of the questions. Not even the one clarifying the Ilya.

He looked from his phone to Ilya, halfheartedly considering taking a photo to just send to his mum as proof, knowing he was not doing that, because that wasn't the part that was hard to explain. Ilya was looking back at him, lids half open, fluttering like he was working hard to keep them open, or open them fully.

Miranda had said he might be disoriented. How far could that go? Did he know who Shane was?

"Hi," Shane tried, awkward. Should he introduce himself?

Ilya grimaced slightly, the corners of his mouth stretching. He blinked. Swallowed. Lifted the hand not in Shane's, offered a small wave.

"Sore throat?" Shane asked. He was pretty sure they'd put a tube down it. For something. Stomach pump? Was that how that worked?

Ilya nodded.

"Um," Shane said. "Miranda - uh, your nurse - is gonna be back soon with a jug of water. And if she's not, in like, half an hour, I'm supposed to press the call button for her."

Ilya blinked at him again, nodded very slightly.

"I can also press it now," Shane added, "if you want me to. Or like, um, if something feels wrong?" He winced as he said that bit. He was sure everything felt wrong right now.

Ilya was rolling his eyes at him. Fair. A little hurtful but very fair. Shane blinked rapidly, trying to clear the stinging in his eyes that this tiny and fair action had pulled out of him. Wanted to tell Ilya to look away, because Shane wasn't trying to make this about himself. Remembered their first awards when he'd found Ilya on the roof, and Ilya had snapped at him that it wasn't always about him. On the roof. Had that also been? Was it Vegas? Was it awards? Was it the end of the season and the beginning of a summer in Russia?

Ilya's hand moved in his, and he let go quickly so Ilya could pull away, began to pull away himself, but then Ilya's hand was just shifting and retaking Shane's hand, his wrist crossing over Shane's, fingers pushing between his.

"S'time?"

His voice was raspy, but it was a relief to hear it, especially speaking English. There had been a few panic filled moments in which Shane was sure he was going to hear Ilya's fucking last words and he wouldn't know what they were. He had tried to remember the sound of them, commit everything to memory so if he needed to he could write them down phonetically or something and try to get someone to translate it.

He looked at his phone again, sniffing hard, cleared his throat. "Ten to one," he said, "Still early."

Ilya made a noise that might have been a laugh in another life.

"Early," he repeated, eyes closing again, not resting lax behind his lids like earlier, though. Shane could see them twitching side to side, his brows furrowing. "Fuck."

Shane agreed with that sentiment wholeheartedly. "Yeah," he said.

There was a light knock on the door, and then Miranda was opening it and coming in, a jug of water in one hand, a couple of plastic cups in the other. She smiled when she saw Shane, and then smiled a little wider when Ilya opened his eyes again to look at her.

"Morning," she said to him, and then to Shane. "I did not get very delayed," she held the jug up as if in proof, before circling the bed to put it down on the table beside Shane. "How long have you been awake for?" She asked, directing this back to Ilya.

Ilya looked to Shane.

"A couple of minutes," Shane offered, then, "um, his throat hurts. Is he okay to drink out of a cup? Or does he need, like, I don't know. A straw?"

"I am not statue," Ilya rasped, "I have hands."

They all three of them looked at Ilya's hand in Shane's, like a knee jerk response, and then away again.

"So long as you're feeling up to it," Miranda said to Ilya, "absolutely you can drink out of a cup. How about Shane pours you a glass while I just check your vitals?"

Shane nodded. Ilya made a vague nod-esque gesture. Miranda also nodded. She came up alongside the not-Shane's side of the bed, moving her hand to Ilya's wrist like she had before.

"I'm Miranda," she told him, "I'm your nurse for this shift. How is your head feeling?"

Shane half turned away to pour the water, a little difficult to do one handed, but he would not be the one letting go first.

"Little sore," Ilya said after a long pause.

"A bit like a hangover?" Miranda asked, sounded sympathetic.

"Little."

"Makes sense," Miranda said. Shane saw she was nodding, when he turned back to the bed, water in hand. She was writing something down on the clipboard she'd at some point nabbed from the end of the bed. "And how are you feeling in general, emotionally?"

Shane cut his gaze to their hands.

"Ah," Ilya said, paused, "probably not good."

"Also makes sense," Miranda offered. "Have some water, yeah? I'll prop the bed upright for you."

She fiddled with something on the side of the bed, and it began to sit up very slowly, Ilya wincing once, and then staying expressionless. She only brought it into a half upright position, Ilya still lying back, but probably not in danger of choking on his water.

Shane handed the cup over, keeping hold of it until he was sure Ilya had it. Ilya didn't even glare at him for his caution, just took the cup and brought it slowly to his mouth. Took a couple of sips.

"No one's going to grill you right now," Miranda told him while he continued to sip slowly at the water. "But if you did want to talk to someone, we can get one of our counsellors over here quick snap, okay?"

Ilya nodded. Drank some more.

"Your vitals are good," she added, "and all your notes indicate that, physically, you should be completely fine. You were brought in quick enough to make all the difference."

This felt so much like best possible situation it made Shane's stomach roil. Ilya's eyes darted to Shane, and then away again.

"I'm going to be coming in pretty regularly to check your vitals," Miranda continued, when no one said anything else. "If you feel like you can, I'd advise getting some more sleep. If you need anything, press the call button anytime. Can I get you anything right now?"

Ilya shook his head.

"Shane?" Miranda asked. "That blanket is still on offer."

Shane shook his head. "I'm okay."

She nodded. "Okay. Buzz if you need me. I'll see you both soon."

They stayed silent until she had left the room again. Ilya finished his cup of water, and then frowned, the cup resting against his chest. He moved it a little, frowned harder, and then held the cup out to Shane. Shane took it. Watched as Ilya's hand moved immediately back to his chest, to his throat, and realised what he was looking for.

"I have it," Shane said quickly, put the cup down on the table, and dug into his pocket for the small bag. Retrieved it, and then the necklace from inside it, and handed it over. "Sorry, I forgot they gave it to me to hold on to."

Ilya's eyes closed, his head falling back against the pillow. Shane put it into his hand, and Ilya's hand closed tight around it, brought it to his mouth first, and then pressed his fist to his heaving chest.

"It's important?" Shane asked.

"Was my mama's," Ilya replied, eyes still closed. Shane hadn't really expected an answer. "Gave to me when she died."

"Oh," Shane said, something in his brain twinging. "Sorry. It's beautiful."

"Mm," Ilya opened his eyes again, then flexed his fingers against Shane's, "Need two hands for putting on."

"Oh," Shane said again, wiggled his hand out of Ilya's grip, and then held his hand out. "I'll do it for you, if you want."

Ilya hesitated, and then seemed to consider how annoying it might be to fiddle with the clasp right now, because he handed the necklace back over. Leaned forwards a little to give Shane room to put it around his neck. Shane did so, pulling the chain around carefully, watching as Ilya's hand moved almost as if he didn't realise, to press the crucifix against his neck as Shane worked the clasp. He finished, pulled back, and then quickly turned to pour himself a cup of water because his mouth was dry as fuck.

"Do you want more water?" He asked.

"No," Ilya replied.

Shane nodded, drank his entire cup in one go, poured another, and drank half before turning back to Ilya to see Ilya watching him, expression inscrutable.

"I am tired," Ilya said.

"Okay," Shane replied. "Want me to put your bed back down?"

"Yes."

It turned out there was a little remote thing attached to the side of the bed, and it only took a couple of tries for Shane to figure it out. Put the bed back to rights. Put the remote back on its little clip. Put himself back in his chair. Firm.

"You are tired?" Ilya asked.

Shane shrugged. "Yeah. Are you going to try to sleep?"

Ilya stared at him for a long moment, like he was waiting for Shane to say something else, to offer to leave, maybe. Then he nodded. Waited. Spoke.

"You do not have to stay. You can go sleep in hotel."

"No," Shane said. "I can leave the room if you want, but I'm - I'm not leaving you here alone."

Ilya looked away from him. "Whole hospital full of other people," he said.

"I'm not leaving you here without a person here specifically for you, that is not a medical professional," Shane revised, trying to cover any loopholes Ilya might come up with. "If you want to call someone else, or for me to call someone for you, I will, but I - fuck, Ilya. Please don't make me go."

He'd been watching Ilya watch him, and look away from him, but now he needed to look away as well. Squeezed his eyes shut, ran his hands over his face.

"No one to call," Ilya said eventually, voice tight. "You should sleep."

Shane managed to look back at him, dropping his hands to his lap. Ilya was still looking away from Shane, face turned so much he was basically hiding in his own shoulder. Shane had never been good with knowing what to say when people were upset. He knew he often said things too bluntly, or missed something. He'd already tried using his words with Ilya tonight, not tonight now, last night. Asking him about Russia, about going home for the Summer. And now they were here.

He reached out, hesitant, pressed his fingertips to Ilya's wrist. Waited. Ilya lifted his hand and Shane wrapped his own around it again.

STILL HERE, STILL EARLY, TOO LATE. ILYA.

Ilya had not really expected to go to sleep even though he was tired. Couldn't imagine closing his eyes and drifting off instead of lying there in the pit of his mind cataloguing his mistakes. Waiting for Shane to fall asleep. Waiting for the nurse to come back and prod at him. He couldn't believe he hadn't realised right away that he had been missing his necklace, his mama hung heavy around his neck now.

-

He woke up to Miranda's fingers on his wrist. The room was still dim. Shane's hand was sweaty and lax in his. He blinked at Miranda, hazy, and she smiled at him. She looked tired, still cheerful.

"Time?" He asked, his voice croaky again, throat dry.

She didn't even need to check. "Just gone half past seven," she whispered, then jerked her head slightly at Shane. "He's been asleep for about three hours now."

Ilya nodded. His head didn't hurt so much anymore, not physically. Hotel check out wasn't technically until ten, but if not for his other plans, he would have already been at the airport now. His plane began boarding at eight. He wondered if anyone was trying to get in touch with him. If his phone was still at the hotel, or if Shane had it. Didn't matter.

"What now?" Ilya asked.

"Some breakfast will be brought around at eight," Miranda told him, scribbling something down on a board with paper clipped to it. "Shift change at eight thirty, I'll be going home, but your new nurse will come introduce themselves to you, and will be able to give you a firmer timeline on when the psych team will come in and see you."

"Do I have to?"

"See the psych team?" he nodded, and Miranda continued. "Yes."

Great and awesome, cool, even. He nodded again. Closed his eyes. She asked him a few more questions, which he replied with only nods or shakes of his head, and eventually she left again.

He opened his eyes when he heard the door close. Turned his head on the pillow to look at Shane. His head was dropped forwards, chin to his chest. He would be sore when he woke up, Ilya was sure. He was already sleeping with a line between his eyebrows, frowning like he was in pain, or having a bad dream. What time was Shane's flight out? Shane said he was staying, wasn't leaving without someone taking his place by Ilya's side. How long would he stick to that? Until he realised Ilya wasn't going to ask anyone else to come? He wouldn't have asked it of Shane, either. He wasn't that much of an asshole.

Except for when he was.

He didn't know what was worse; that Shane had seen him, his attempt, all of it, or that it had now only been an attempt, a failed attempt. Another instance of Ilya failing at something he should have been able to pull off. This wasn't even like failing in Sochi, because he didn't have an entire team that failed with him. Just him. Didn't have time to ponder that for long, because the stifled hum of hospital quiet was interrupted by a shrill ring of a phone, and then Shane jolting in his seat, his hand clenching around Ilya's.

"Fuck," Shane said blearily, free hand digging in his hoodie for a moment before retrieving his phone, glancing at it, and answering the call with a swipe of his thumb and his face creased further into a frown. "Mum?"

Ilya watched Shane look back at him, his eyes darting over Ilya's face, like he was checking all of it was still there, blinking heavily. To wake his eyes up, or in response to what his mama was saying to him. Ilya thought her name was Yuna. Or Muna, maybe. Definitely not Luna.

"You're where?" Shane asked, hoarse, eyes scrunching closed for a moment before opening and staring at Ilya with wide eyes. "Why? No - uh - I don't know. Yes. Fuck, I - yes. Sorry. I'll ask. I'll call you back. Bye."

He ended the call, pulling the phone from his ear and continuing to frown down at it for long seconds after the screen had gone dark again.

"Comfy sleep?" Ilya asked.

Shane grimaced, "sure," he said. "You?"

"Sure," Ilya echoed. "You swear at your mama?"

Shane groaned a little, finally looked up from his phone and back to Ilya. "I said sorry," he said, "I was just. Listen, I - she and my dad flew to Vegas, and then drove to the hospital.

They're outside."

Ilya waited for whatever punchline this strange joke could be, and then frowned back at Shane. "Outside this hospital?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Because I - I panicked and called them a few hours ago," Shane shrugged. "Said I didn't know what to do, because, well, fuck. I don't know what to do. Do you?"

Ilya hadn't bothered to plan for this possibility. He shook his head.

"Right," Shane said, like there had been a point made somewhere. "I didn't ask them to come, I texted them when you were asleep again and just. Said things were, uh, kind of stable and I was going to get some sleep, and I only just woke up and they're *here*-"

"Why?" Ilya repeated, "for picking you up?"

Shane paused, and then squinted at Ilya like he had just realised something. "No," he said. "To like, help you. If you want."

That didn't make much sense. "If I want?"

Shane shrugged. "I don't know. With - with hospital talk, maybe? To make sure you're being treated right, and the media is kept out? She's, uh, my mum, Yuna. She's good at managing things."

He was right. Yuna.

"She asked me to ask you," Shane continued, when Ilya didn't say anything, "if she can come up and see you."

Ilya was supposed to be comfortably dead right now, not being asked to make decisions about meeting the mother of the man he was in - the man whose life he had made much harder just with his presence. He shrugged. Whatever. Sure. Nodded.

"Yes?" Shane asked. Ilya nodded again. "Okay," Shane said, slow, "I'll call her back?"

Ilya nodded again. Watched as Shane fiddled with his phone for a moment, and then called Yuna back. Listened to Shane speaking without bothering to really translate anything, just listening to the cadence, the familiar flatness. Only blinked back into the front of his brain when Shane put the phone back down on his lap.

"Visiting hours aren't until nine," he said, "so they're going to get breakfast first - well, morning tea for them, I guess - and then come up. I've sent them your room number and stuff."

"Your papa too?"

"Um," one corner of Shane's mouth quirked to the side. "He's with mum, yeah. He won't come in here unless you're okay with it. Uh, his name's David."

"Hm," Ilya said. David was a boring name. He had seen photos of Shane with his parents before, seen them in person a few times, always from a distance. Always thought David and Shane stood the same way. Solid. Kind of awkward. "He is, mm. Good?"

Shane looked confused, his head tilting to one side. "Yes? He's a good dad, if that's what you're asking?"

Basically what Ilya had been asking. He shrugged one shoulder. "He can come in if he wants. Why he would want is bigger question."

Shane's mouth quirked in the opposite direction this time, and he fiddled with his phone, turning it restlessly in one hand. His other hand also restless, thumb moving against Ilya's knuckles, running back and forward over them. Ilya didn't think he was aware he was doing it.

"Probably the same reason as my mum," Shane said, "he's worried."

-

Breakfast was brought in not long after that. Food for Shane too, though it was obvious Shane found it as appetising as Ilya did. They both ate their fruit cups, and their pieces of dry toast. Ilya drank the little cup of fruit juice. Shane had one sip of the milk, and then frowned, and put it back down.

"Get your parents to bring you real food," Ilya said, giving up on any thought of eating the congealed looking scrambled egg. "So you do not waste away."

"What do you want?" Shane asked, already slipping his phone out of his pocket, looking up at Ilya.

Ilya frowned at him. The table his tray of food was on was one of the ones that could be swung over a bed. He liked them. Pushed it away from himself.

"I said for you."

"Yeah," Shane raised his eyebrows, "you're not eating this either, I'm not going to eat something nicer in front of you. What do you want."

Stupid. "I do not care."

"Okay," Shane's eyebrows stayed raised, "I hope you enjoy green smoothies, then," he added, fingers tapping out a text message.

Ilya did not enjoy green smoothies. He didn't bother saying this.

-

Miranda came in before the shift change, introduced them to Ilya's new nurse, Jorge, and said her goodbyes. Jorge had a nice smile but also an incredulous expression, like he knew who

Ilya and Shane were and was doing a bad job of pretending he didn't. He told them he would let them know when psych could see them, and if they needed anything, to press the call button. Ilya needed a fucking piss. This was where he was informed he would be accompanied to the bathroom, just to keep him safe, and yes, for now he did need to keep the cannula in his hand in, but Jorge would unhook it from the bags and tubing for now because he shouldn't need anything else, it was just in case.

Shane offered to be his bathroom companion, and Ilya watched as Jorge's eyes darted from where he was focused on unhooking Ilya's cannula from the tubes, to where Shane's sweaty hand was still in Ilya's also sweaty hand. It was so fucking rude that this was something Ilya needed to worry about again. Had to be here, thinking about reputation, and about secrets, and all this stupid shit he had wanted to leave behind. It made him so angry, a wave of rage cresting in his chest and stinging bitter on the back of his tongue. It tasted like grief. Always hand in hand.

There was a very small en suite attached to the room they were in. Ilya had had no idea it was there. All hospital bathrooms looked like they could double in horror films, just add blood and grime. At least his body was working. At least if he had to be here right now he wasn't fully at the mercy of someone else. Could walk himself to the bathroom even if he had to leave the door open, Shane standing awkward in the gap. Ilya was pretty sure there wasn't really anything in here he could kill himself with. What did they think he would do? Try and drown himself by sticking his head in the toilet bowl and flushing it? He had tried to kill himself with pills and vodka in a plush hotel room, and if he'd had his way, he would have been in the comfortable bed that still smelled like Shane and sex. He didn't want to die uncomfortable, it wasn't meant as a punishment.

"Ilya?" Shane said, while Ilya was still contemplating the absurdity of finding a way to die in this box of a room.

Shane wasn't looking into the bathroom, his back very stiff.

"What?"

He watched as Shane's shoulders dropped a little, his back un-spooling. "Nothing," Shane said, shaking his head. "Just. Panicked."

"I can not hang myself with toilet paper," Ilya offered. "Is very thin. Cheapest."

Shane flinched. Ilya flushed the toilet. Washed his hands as Shane turned around to face him, his face pinched. He waited for Shane to say something sort of stiff, tell him off, but no scolding came.

"I need to pee too," Shane said instead, when Ilya turned the tap off and dried his hands on a paper towel.

"Be my guest," Ilya said, waved his still damp hand at the toilet. "I will be pervert in door, hm? Fair?"

Again he waited for the glare, the *fuck off*. Instead, Shane sort of winced, and then nodded.

"Fair," he agreed. "But you have to turn around as well."

"Is not like I have not seen all before," Ilya pointed out, but did turn his back on the room as they swapped positions.

"Not like this," Shane replied.

He started to pee, and Ilya was struck with the irritating thought that this was probably a weird thing to be relieved by. This, being Shane wanting to keep Ilya in eyesight even if it meant giving up his own privacy as well as Ilya's.

He chose not to think about it. Shane finished, flushed, washed his hands. They returned to the bed. Ilya considered sitting in a chair, but they did not look comfortable, and he still felt so bone tired. Besides, he was wearing some paper thin robe that had half his back and ass sticking out, and it would probably feel gross against the chair.

"Oh," Shane said, once he'd sat back down in his too small chair, a phone in hand. Ilya's phone. "You've got a couple of missed calls."

"Oh," Ilya said.

"Um," Shane added, "and the same number is calling again. It's an unknown."

Probably it was the airport people. Or maybe reporters? Probably if he was already in the news, Shane would be looking more freaked out.

"Okay."

"Do you want to answer it?" Shane asked, "Or me to answer it?"

"You can if you want," Ilya said. Didn't care very much. "Probably is about missing flight." He closed his eyes.

His phone vibrated a few more times, dull, and then Shane was answering it. Short, clipped responses like he was answering questions from an annoying interviewer but was too well media trained to let slip anything real. He said goodbye. Cleared his throat. Ilya opened one eye, and then the other.

"I said you had an emergency," Shane said, as if Ilya hadn't been right here when Shane had said it. "They said you aren't likely to be able to get a refund."

"Okay," Ilya shrugged.

"Yeah, that's what I said," Shane nodded. "Um, do you want me to call the hotel for you? Your stuff is still there. I know checkout isn't until ten, so there's a little bit of time, but it might be a good idea to call sooner rather than later?"

"I do not care if they throw away everything there," Ilya said, truthful. "I had nothing important with me."

Well. He had the pills, but they were gone now.

Shane pulled an expression, something tight and painful. "Might be nice," he said, "to have some real clothes to wear?"

Yeah, the hospital smock wasn't comfortable, but it didn't exactly matter. He shrugged. Shane looked a little lost. It was weird how far away his chair seemed when they weren't holding hands.

"I have to call anyway," Shane said, "I might as well get your room sorted out, too."

"Fuck, whatever, Hollander," Ilya sighed, "I do not care." He looked away from Shane, wanted to not care if Shane's face was doing some tragic thing, if his eyes were wet.

"I care," Shane said, voice very small. "I'll care for you. Until you care again."

That fucking wave of rage was back. Grief this time. Both burned and bit at him in the same way.

He reached out blind and Shane took his hand in his again.

Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

yes there are now three chapters, what can i say except that i think we probably all saw this coming

SOMEHOW ILYA ROZANOV'S HOSPITAL ROOM, VEGAS. DAVID.

Despite the hours David had to prepare, and to brace for the situation he and Yuna were walking in to, he still had a hard time wrapping his mind around it when they actually arrived and entered the room.

Yuna was already speaking, stepping closer to the single bed in the room, tone calm and even. She had braced herself better than he had, evidently. He was still stuck in the entrance way, looking at his boy.

His kid who had been for years perfecting the art of hiding himself, ducking behind his own face and only peering out of his own eyes every so often, despite David and Yuna's attempts to persuade him out. Shaney, whose face looked like it had back when he was young enough he hadn't been aware his emotions spilled over his face, so never tried to hide them. His kid who wasn't hiding anything now.

He looked tired, which was in itself not unusual, half the time David saw his son now was in between long roadies, after hard games. It was unusual for Shane to let it sit so bare on his face, though. Like how he had let his voice go so raw on the phone that morning, hyperventilating and stuttering David's heart into overdrive. Right now, Shane's face was fully open, and the main emotion broadcast over his features seemed to be fear and... something he couldn't quite place. It took a moment more for him to realise Shane was holding hands with the man in the bed.

The man who he and Yuna hadn't even been able to talk about much on their way here for fear of being overheard. Ilya Rozanov, who David had never paid a lot of attention to outside of his wife and son mentioning him. He knew the basics. It was hard not to know the basics about Rozanov if you were in anyway into hockey, and David was not only the husband and father of two hockey fanatics,(and an actual NHL player and his manager,) but also into hockey on his own time. Just not in the same way the rest of his family was. He didn't get into the details, he liked to watch the game, didn't want to know about the politics.

The basics about Rozanov were as followed; captain of the Boston Bears, number one first draft pick even though that should have been Shane, chirper, impressive player, sleazy *player*.

Right now David wasn't looking at Rozanov. He was looking at his son holding hands with a boy he was looking at with such open affection his eyes were glittering in the pale morning light filtering through the window blinds. A boy who Shane had been in the right place at the right time to call 911 for, to take him back from a bottle of pills washed down with vodka. Hadn't Rozanov just won the cup? And MVP? Yuna had been talking about it just last night, begrudgingly impressed, talking about a *come back*, and how she hated to see Boston win, and especially to see Rozanov get something before Shane, but -

"Dad?" Shane's voice broke through, hoarse, but stronger than it had been on the phone. "You coming in?"

"Yes," David replied. Yuna had appeared two chairs by the bedside, was already sitting in one, close to the head of the bed. "How are you boys doing?" he asked, walking around the bed to Shane, instead of to the open chair.

He put his hand on Shane's shoulder, and then leaned in and pressed a quick kiss to Shane's forehead before standing back up straight. Wanted to hug Shane properly, hold his kid tight to him like that could make everything better. It never had been able to fix everything, but he would keep trying every opportunity he got.

"Um," Shane replied, looking the way he did when he was trying to answer a question he thought was dumb.

David got that, he asked a lot of dumb questions to his son, hoped that maybe one day Shane would see he wasn't just asking for the obvious.

"He is hungry," Ilya Rozanov replied, voice rougher than Shane's, quieter too. David hadn't been expecting that. "Too picky for hospital breakfast."

"You weren't any better," Shane shot back immediately, "I heard your stomach growl just before."

Looking across the bed, he could see Yuna was as surprised as he felt. Not really about the chirping, or the... competitiveness, they were used to that. It was more about his level of comfort. Not that he didn't think Shane could get along, goof off, chirp with his fellow hockey players, it was just that this was, well. Not the type of person or situation that David would expect it from him.

"Well," Yuna said, eyebrows high, "we did bring your smoothies. David?"

That's right, he had the take away bag in his hand. He held it up, and then because Shane seemed reluctant to let go of Ilya Rozanov's hand, and it would be a little awkward to pull it out of the carrier one handed, let alone to put the straw in, David put the bag down on the small table behind Shane, and then straw-ed both drinks, and took them out. Handed one to Shane, and then held the second one out to Ilya Ro- Ilya. This hollow eyed boy clinging to his son's hand.

It had been easy to see which drink was for who. Shane's had been the disturbingly green one with... bits in it. He was pretty sure they were flax seeds? The one he was holding out to Ilya

had something that looked like whipped cream but was actually somehow whipped yogurt, with sprinkled chocolate and strawberry chunks on it.

Ilya looked surprised to see it, his hand hesitating before reaching across himself to take the drink from David's hand, his eyes glancing up to meet David's, and then flicking immediately away to Shane instead. David also looked to Shane. Shane's cheeks were tinging slightly pink.

"This is not disgusting green smoothie," Ilya said flatly.

"Oh," Yuna frowned, "did you want one of the green drinks too, Ilya? Shane said you wanted that one, when I sent him the drink menu."

"No," Ilya said, blinked. He turned his head slowly from Shane to Yuna, his movements a little jerky like he was working on a couple of seconds delay. "Strawberries. I like."

"The point was to get you something you'd actually eat. Well, drink," Shane said, sounded slightly mulish. "Obviously I wouldn't have asked for a green drink for you, because you wouldn't have drunk even half of it."

"Oh," Ilya said.

David and Yuna met each others' eyes again. Both boys drank. Yuna took the reins.

"So, you haven't heard yet about when the psych team will come through, correct?" She asked. "Would you like me to go to the nurses' station and ask? It might be easier to pin down a schedule while they're at their computers."

Ilya licked a chocolate flake off the top of his drink before answering. "If you think is good idea," he said. Didn't look away from the drink in his hand. "You do not need to, ah. Bother self with me."

"I do think it's a good idea," Yuna said, standing up as she spoke. "I'll go talk to them now, with your permission?"

Ilya glanced at her, and then away again. Nodded. Impassive.

"Okay. I'll be back soon, then. Is there anything else you want me to ask about, or check in about while I'm there?"

Ilya shook his head.

"Can you ask if he can have the port removed?" Shane asked. "It's annoying him."

"Ilya?" Yuna prompted.

Ilya nodded.

Yuna gave them all a moment more to chip in with anything, and then turned and left.

"I was thinking about your hotel rooms," David said, when the room stayed quiet without Yuna. The boys were drinking again, eyes down. "Shaney, have you been in touch with the hotel?"

Shane nodded. Swallowed. "They agreed to a late check out. I just - someone just has to go pick everything up before three. And then, I don't know."

"We can go do that," David said easily. "We've rented a car, so it'll be easy. Maybe you and me could do it, Shaney, leave your mum here with you, Ilya?" He added, looking to Ilya. "She's very good at dealing with hospital talk."

"Okay," Ilya said.

Shane twitched. "Is it?" he asked, "Okay?"

David felt a little like he ought to be at the very least looking away from the two of them, or maybe leaving the room, not standing by Ilya's bedside, hovering over them. He stayed where he was. Watched Ilya nod again, and then shrug. His face flat and expressionless until it wasn't. Like a flash of lightning, the break in composure, the intensity of emotion, and then gone. David waited for the thunder to roll in.

"I don't have to go," Shane said.

"I do not care," Ilya replied. His hand in Shane's was clutching so tight his knuckles were standing out starkly.

Shane didn't point this out. Instead, in a much softer tone, he said; "I'll come back."

"Fuck, Shane," Ilya snapped, loud, sudden. "You are allowed to leave. I am not stopping you. Stop saying you will stay when we fucking know this will not happen."

Thunder.

Yeah, David should definitely have left the room. Or maybe not. He might need to say something, calm the two of them down, because Shane's face had twisted, and he looked for a startling moment like he was about to snap something cutting back. Instead, Shane took a heaving breath, and looked up sharply at David. Shane and Ilya were still holding hands, like that was a separate thing to this anger coursing between them.

Ilya drew in a shuddering breath, and Shane was moving suddenly, handing his nearly empty drink to David, taking Ilya's drink as well, passing it back. He crawled onto the bed, despite the protesting creak of it and the absolute lack of room. He straddled Ilya's lap with what looked like practiced ease. Their white knuckled grip on each others' hands dropped now, arms going around Shane's waist, Ilya's shoulders.

Ah. Thunder and lightning didn't necessarily mean rain, but it shouldn't surprise anyone when the rain did come. David didn't mean to be surprised by it, and he couldn't tell if it was the sobbing tears that shocked him, or Shane's response, so quick that David hadn't even realised

there were tears at all until Ilya's face was hiding in against Shane's neck and he caught a glimpse of wet cheeks.

Moving as quietly as he could, he put both the drinks down on the small table beside Shane's empty chair, and crept out of the room. Closed the door behind himself, but didn't go further. Leaned against the wall beside the door, covered his damp eyes with his hand.

Over the years, he and Yuna had often wondered if Shane might be gay. They didn't really talk about it, one of them might bring it up in response to something, and then they would look at each other and wordlessly agree to drop it. They didn't want to speculate. That's how they put it to themselves. But now he was wondering if they should have actually had some real conversations. Not just the few raised eyebrows, and confirmations between them that of course they loved Shane, gay or straight. What if they had talked about it, and then found a way to talk to Shane about it. To let him in on their assurances of continued love and affection.

Because, sure, some people might offer comfort to their friends the way Shane was comforting Ilya now, but that had never been Shane's style.

He'd seen Shane at the rink, age nine, patting a friend on the shoulder carefully after they'd taken a hard fall. Seen Shane with his girlfriend at fifteen, his arm awkward around her, patting her back as she cried about her cat dying. Shane at eighteen, standing behind David at the side of David's mother's hospice bed, his hand on David's shoulder, every so often adding a little pat.

He got that from Yuna. That was how she would soothe Shane when he was little. He'd climb into her lap, teary eyed, and she would pat his back. When he would come to David for comfort, his tiny little Shanebug, David would hold him and squeeze him tight, rock him until Shane got wriggly again.

Shane hadn't come to him for a real squeeze for years now. He still let his parents hug him, but he never came to them for comfort, and that was a stinging thought. Was it because he felt he always needed to be self contained and independent? Always camera and rink ready. Was it because they had let him keep his sexuality a secret for so long that he didn't think they would accept him? Had he and Yuna made him feel so unsafe?

Yuna was walking towards David now, he could hear the clean click of her low heeled shoes. He wiped his hand across his eyes, his cheeks, and lowered it. Looked at his wife, the concern on her face, the way she was so beautifully put together even now, after an early, scary wake up, almost five hours on a plane, and an unknown situation laid out ahead of them.

She had let him learn her, let him in under the smooth, certain persona she presented. He wondered if Shane let Ilya in like that. If Shane let anyone in like that.

"What's going on?" Yuna asked, voice low, when she reached him, her hand coming to touch first his cheek, and then his shoulder. "Has something happened?"

"No," David shook his head, touched her fingers on his shoulder, and then took her hand in his, squeezed it. "Ilya was feeling a little overwhelmed, I think. I wanted to give them some privacy."

She frowned at him, her eyes darting up as she thought. Nodded. "So Shane's just, sitting there holding his hand while he cries?" She sounded like she felt it would be an unlikely scenario. "Or did he let go so he could pat his shoulder?"

David allowed himself a small smile in reply to her own, small, sad smile. Then he shook his head.

"No. He's, well. He got onto the bed with Ilya. They're hugging."

It wasn't quite accurate, but he didn't know how to say that their son had climbed into his famous rivals lap like he'd been there many times before, and Ilya had pulled him in closer.

"Oh," Yuna said, eyes wide.

"Yuna," David cleared his throat. "Do we think-?"

"Yes, I think so," she replied. "Shane would do this for a lot of people, but he wouldn't do it while looking at them the way he has been looking at Ilya."

"We should have talked to him," David said, blinked hard, wiped at his face again. "A long time ago. Made him feel safer."

Yuna's chin quivered, and she nodded tightly, glancing away, and then stepping forwards, pressing in under David's chin, her hands coming up to rest against his chest as he wrapped his arms around her and squeezed her tight.

"Nurse Jorge will be in in about ten minutes," Yuna said, after a few long moments of shared commiseration. "And the psych team in about half an hour. Today's been busy, apparently. I'm not surprised, it's Vegas."

"Well," David said. "I suppose Vegas does have a reputation for hosting crises."

She patted his chest, once, twice, and then pushed back, wiped at her face, putting herself back in order easily. "As much as I don't want to...disrupt them," she said, "I think we should probably go back in and update them on the timeline."

"Yeah," David agreed. "I think Shane and I are going to the hotel together to collect their things, but we didn't quite get to the end of that discussion before things got a little...much."

-

When they knocked on the door, it was Shane who called out a quiet *come in*. He was still on the bed, but no longer in Ilya's lap. They had somehow managed to fit the both of them, side by side (or really, sideinside), on the bed. Ilya's right shoulder was trapped behind Shane's left shoulder, their arms entwined, hands held. This grip didn't look quite as desperate as the last hand hold he'd seen.

They both had pink eyes, but otherwise looked composed. Or as composed as one can while squished into a small bed, and/or dressed in what looked nothing more than a spotted napkin. They both had their drinks in hand again. David thought that in any other situation he would want to take a photo of them, looking so cosy together with their brightly coloured drinks. He wanted Shane to get to have photos like that.

Yuna relayed the same information she'd just given David outside, along with the fact that Jorge would remove the cannula, right after he took a couple of blood samples to send off to the lab. Ilya winced a little at that, but nodded.

David had sat down this time, next to Yuna. Felt it was probably better than continuing to loom over the bed.

"Now," Yuna said, "about the psych team meeting, how do you want to handle this, Ilya? You're allowed to have someone with you, I checked. I know you don't know me, really, but I would be happy to sit in with you if you would like."

Ilya frowned at his drink. "What will you sitting in with me...do?" He asked.

"Well, it could mean just that I'm there as emotional support, or I could be there to help you ask questions, or to follow up on things. I know that even when doctors are trying to speak simply it can still end up in a lot of difficult jargon. I can let you know if I think they're giving you bad advice. I could simply be someone to listen so you don't have to try to remember everything yourself."

Ilya nodded. Everyone stayed quiet for a long moment. "You will stay with me?" He asked Yuna, "While Shane and David are at hotel?"

"Yes," she said. "The whole time."

Shane's thumb was rubbing over Ilya's knuckles, slow and steady.

"Okay," Ilya said. "I think yes. I do not-" he paused, his mouth pressing into a deep grimace for a moment before he pressed on, voice taut. "I do not know what I am...supposed to do now."

"That's okay, " Yuna said, soft. "You don't need to know right now, okay? We can all work it out together. We can help you work it out. You're not doing this alone."

Ilya nodded, jaw clenched so tight that David's teeth hurt. Then he turned his head away from them, necessarily into the side of Shane's face instead. Looked like he was trying to hide, and knew Shane would cover him.

Shane did cover him. He put his now empty drink on the table, and then shifted minutely in the bed, curving in towards Ilya's body. The bed protested the movement, but gave no signs of imminent danger, and was ignored. Shane lifted his hand to Ilya's face, cupped his jaw, thumb running across Ilya's cheek.

"Hey," he murmured, "hey. S'okay."

HOTEL THAT SHANE HOLLANDER NOW HATES, FIFTEEN MINUTES AWAY FROM ILYA. SHANE.

They had stayed at the hospital for long enough to be there when Jorge came in again, Shane thankfully off the bed at this point, and for him to leave with a couple of vials of Ilya's blood, and the port as well. Shane also remembered, before they left, to take Ilya's phone out of his pocket, had handed it to Ilya, Ilya handed it back, Shane left it on the bedside table. He and his dad had said their goodbyes, their, *be back soon*s, and Shane had resisted the urge to climb back onto the bed with Ilya and hug him and maybe kiss him a little, just in case.

Now, a mere fifteen minutes gone from the hospital, walking up from the hotel carpark to the lobby, Shane was pretty sure he had made the wrong decision. Either in coming back here, or in leaving Ilya without first grabbing back onto him and demanding he promise he'd be okay. Which was stupid, because of course he'd be okay. He was in hospital, with watchful nurses, and an even more watchful Yuna. And it made sense for him to come to the hotel with his dad because he knew where things were, and what things would need to be packed, and other practical things like that which of course his father could have done, but it was just easier if Shane did it.

They went up to the penthouse first, because Shane wanted a shower, and thought it would be a better idea to have one after doing the majority of the work. He had taken into consideration the fact that the penthouse was a bit of a mess. He had also forgotten to take into consideration that the way the penthouse was a mess was actually very fucking upsetting.

When he had collected a key card from the front desk, having explained everything over the phone earlier already, and then once more at the desk, he had to listen to the slightly gawking receptionist tell him that most likely, seeing as the room had EMTs go through it, Ilya would not be getting his damages deposit back. Shane had told him through gritted teeth that that was fine.

The front room smelled so strongly still of vodka. Shane wondered how much it would have sunk into the flooring, how much had evaporated. Stupid thoughts. He avoided looking at the smashed glass. Hadn't realised he had been just standing in the doorway, stock still, staring at nothing, until his dad touched his shoulder.

"Shaney," he said, "hey. Do you want me to do this room myself?"

"No," Shane said. "Just. Don't judge him."

He didn't look back at his dad as he stepped into the room, shoulders squared, chest tight. He skirted the mess on the floor, walking through the EMT cleared path, furniture pushed aside to make room for the stretcher, into the bedroom area. The chair Ilya had dragged to the foot of the bed was still there. It had been there when Shane had moved through the space to and from the bathroom with Ilya, but he hadn't seen it in his panicked focus. He knew there was

no way for his dad to see the chair and know what had happened, but it still made his neck prickle and burn with embarrassment. Somehow the bed was less embarrassment inducing.

Ilya hadn't bothered unpacking his bag properly, so there was very little re-packing to do. Perhaps if Shane had noticed, last night, before, that Ilya only had one bag with him when he was supposed to be flying to Moscow the next day, perhaps -

He grabbed the bag, shaking his head to try and clear the less than useful thoughts from his mind.

"What should I do?" his dad asked.

"Um," Shane stared at the bag in his hands. "His suit. The - the suit bag is hanging over there, I think the jacket and trousers are...somewhere. He wasn't wearing them by the time I - by the time I called."

"Got it," his dad nodded, "suit scavenger hunt. How many pieces? Just the two?"

"Yeah," Shane said, "maybe his button up shirt too. Probably it'd be better to go in that bag than screwed up in here."

David began moving in search of Ilya's most likely very crumpled, and very expensive clothing, and Shane moved around the bed to Ilya's side. The side Ilya seemed to prefer. Unplugged his phone charger, put it in the bag. Left the near empty bottle of vodka where it was. Had he not even opened the smashed one yet? Or had he been drinking two bottles at the same time? There was a watch on the bedside as well, into the bag. There was an empty, unlabelled, pill bottle on the bedside table. Shane's stomach twisted painfully. He turned away. Ilya's shoes, in the corner of the room, bag pocket so as not to dirty the clothes. He didn't see anything else...personal in the room, so he moved on to the bathroom.

He was so stupid. Stupid to have somehow forgotten between avoiding the smashed bottle in the entrance to now, that he was fucking terrified of seeing the bathroom. Maybe he hadn't known he was terrified of seeing the bathroom until right now, seeing it. The puddles of vomit. Partly dried. He figured the contents had probably been mostly vodka and bile. Ilya's lips had started to go blue. He had been touching Shane's face, his hand so, so clammy, before he had spasmed with pain, and begun vomiting. Begun fully fading from consciousness. Shane hadn't been able to help himself then, he could still remember how his sobbing had echoed in the bathroom, discordant and awful around the retching, and the voice on his phone telling him the EMTs were close, to stay calm, to breathe, to make sure Ilya's airways were clear, Shane, it's okay, Shane -

"Shane," his dad said, hand on Shane's shoulder.

Shane snapped back into the present, the echo of a sob so loud and clear in his ringing ears that he couldn't tell if it was memory or reality. He had his arms wound tight around himself.

"Shaney, hey," his dad continued, and he was moving Shane now, a hand on each shoulder, turning him around, leading him away from the bathroom, tugging Shane in against his chest, arms tight around him.

Shane choked on his next breath, because his next breath had been another sob and he hadn't been ready for it. He dropped his weight against his dad. Didn't want to hold himself up anymore. Wanted to put his arms over his head and curl up into a ball and burrow and disappear. Didn't want to be thinking about how just hours ago he had been in the other room certain he was holding a body that would be dead soon. He could still remember the unknown words he had done his best to commit to memory. His dad squeezed him tighter, and Shane pressed his face in hard against his shoulder, like he could somehow hide better. Like if he tried hard enough he could be a version of himself that wasn't scared, wasn't stressed, wasn't so fucking sad. When had he last been hugged by his dad like this? He couldn't remember, and that made him even sadder. He was getting snot on his dad's shirt, like he was a child.

"Hey," his dad was repeating, "it's okay, bug. I've got you. Breathe, okay?"

It was the *bug* of it all that broke through, slicing through the panic gripping his brain, and registering as absurd and nostalgic at the same time.

"I'm too big for that," he mumbled wetly, and his dad laughed lightly, squeezed Shane tighter.

"Not too big," he told Shane, "you're always my little Shanebug, even if you could bench me."

It struck Shane then that his parents, or at the very least, his dad was very frightened. It wasn't that he had thought they would be unmoved by an emergency phone call, or by the situation, it just hadn't occurred to him, fully, that it could scare them. He was aware he was an adult, but his parents were the real adults, the ones who knew how to navigate this sort of thing. They wouldn't have immediately gotten on a long flight if they hadn't been scared.

"Sorry," Shane mumbled, "for scaring you guys this morning."

"No," he could feel his dad shaking his head. "We're so glad you called us, okay? Like your mum said to your - to Ilya, we want to be here, to help. We don't want you guys doing this alone."

Shane sniffed. All the parts of himself that he'd trained to be put together and to push himself further down were trying to persuade him to pack it up. To pull out of his dad's arms, and shake his own arms out. Clean his face. Deal with it. He ignored them.

"I don't - I don't know if he even wants me here," he mumbled. "Ilya. I mean. Fuck, dad - he - *he* doesn't want to be here, so, *fuck* -" he broke off, unable to keep himself from the fresh wave of tears breaking out of him, taking his mouth over with ragged heaves.

"I know, I know," David said. Hadn't loosened his grip on Shane at all, kept holding him tight, one hand rubbing Shane's back every so often. Didn't try and get Shane to look at him, or to unfurl. Just held him, rocked him through it. "It's scary. You can be scared, bug."

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It was easier in Shane's hotel room. Shane had packed everything except his immediate necessities last night, before he'd gone to Ilya's for the second time. He unpacked the spare set of casual clothes he always brought on trips, the just in case outfit. Took a shower.

David had been the one in the penthouse to go into the bathroom to collect Ilya's toothbrush and razor set. Hadn't said a word to Shane about the mess in there, or the mess of Shane. Had put the items in Ilya's bag, zipped it up, and slung it over his shoulder. Left two fifties in the front room as a tip and an apology for the cleaners.

Once Shane had showered, redressed, and stared at himself in the mirror in an attempt to see if some obvious part of his facial makeup had changed overnight, they left.

"Your mum texted," his dad said, as they put the bags in the boot of the rental car. "She suggested we go pick up some lunch. Paninis?"

"Okay," Shane said.

He felt a lot less like he was a bubble filled with poisonous gas now. Less likely to be easily popped and awful. Still felt rubbed raw. Skin, emotions, eyeballs. Like his organs had been removed and sanded down before being put back inside him, all out of place. He'd read at some point that guts knew where they were supposed to be, and would wiggle back into place if removed and then put back inside the body cavity. It felt like that was happening inside of him now. All his guts writhing around trying to find where they were supposed to be, unable to get it right.

They got into the car. Belts on. David started the car. Turned it off again. Turned to look at Shane.

"Hey," he said.

Shane swallowed hard. A simple *hey* should not have his eyes burning with tears. Maybe he was still bubble membrane thin. "Hey," he repeated.

"You don't need to say anything," his dad said, "but I just wanted to say - to make sure you know. Shaney. I love you. Your mum loves you. So much."

Shane nodded, but down on his tongue. Unfortunately his dad was not finished.

"And I want you to know that we will - we *do* - love you, no matter your sexuality. Gay, straight, bisexual, pot, whatever. We're not going to stop loving and supporting you if you wanted to tell us something like this, or if you wanted to tell us more about someone."

For some reason Shane had truly not considered this as something his dad might bring up. The anxiety of being *found out* had been a constant this entire time, but it hadn't quite translated to the realisation that his parents were also people who might find out. He was too tired from lack of sleep and previous panicking to really panic about this now, though. He nodded.

"I don't know," he said. Tears were leaking annoyingly down his face, but he ignored them. "I don't know what I am. I try not to think about it."

"Oh," his dad said, "Shaney."

Shane shook his head. "We're not - we're not *together*. Not like. He's not my boyfriend. We meet up sometimes. That's why I - how I was - I went back to his room last night because I was pissed off he didn't - fuck. It's stupid. I was stupid. I don't know - I don't want to talk about it right now."

David, very kindly, did not point out that Shane had been the one to begin the topic he didn't want to talk about. Just nodded. Then reached across to cup the back of Shane's head, pulled him closer, kissed his forehead.

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When they got back to Ilya's hospital room, Ilya was sitting with the bed propped upright, his phone in hand. Yuna was sitting in the chair next to him, leaning onto the bed. Only she looked up when Shane and David walked back in, her smile tight. Ilya continued to stare at his phone screen, one hand poised like he was working up the courage or energy to type something.

"We got toasted paninis and blueberry muffins," David announced, cheerful but keeping his voice quiet. "Some ginger beer and cokes, too."

"And clothes," Shane added, "if you want to get into something that actually fits you, Ilya."

Ilya still did not look up, but he nodded.

"Thank you, honey," Yuna said to David, smiled at Shane. "How about you two unpack the food onto the swinging table? We're in the middle of writing a text right now."

"To who?" Shane couldn't stop himself from asking. "Svetlana?"

Now Ilya looked up, eyebrows raised, stared at Shane. "Da," he said. "Yes."

Shane nodded. His mum was looking at him questioningly, and Shane wondered what his own face was doing, because Ilya was also looking at him oddly.

"D'you, uh, need more help with it? Or does mum have it handled?"

Ilya's mouth hitched up in the corner in a very small imitation of a smile. "Yuna is being, ah, enforcer."

Yuna snorted at this, shook her head. "I'm simply encouraging him to actually write and send the text," she explained to Shane and David. "More like a ref, I think."

"Mum would be a scary ref," Shane said. He left his dad to unpack the lunch, and circled around the bed to sit back in his chair, Ilya's clothes clutched in his arms. "Would never change her mind about any call."

"Hm," Ilya nodded, "I saw for myself in doctor meeting."

"How did it go?" Shane asked. Had told himself he would wait to be told, to give Ilya time, and then had let the question burst out of him anyway.

Ilya was back to looking at his phone. "Is hard to say."

"I could say it for you, if you want?" Yuna offered, her hand rested momentarily on Ilya's wrist, and Shane stared at it.

Ilya nodded.

"The psych team has advised Ilya that they cannot release him yet, unless he is returning somewhere he will have constant supervision for at least the next two weeks. They have also prescribed some medication which they strongly suggest he begins taking, and also left a page of therapist referrals, which are a little useless because none of them are based in Boston, or Russia."

"Svetlana is in Paris for next two days," Ilya said to his phone. "She is, ah, returning to Boston for a week, and then to Moscow for some of Summer."

"Oh," Shane nodded. "You're, um, asking her to stay with you? Or, like, you'll go to her?"

"No," Ilya shook his head just slightly. "I am texting to say I am not on my way to Moscow. And she is not to panic, because I am alive still."

"We got a little stuck on how to word the *don't panic* bit," Yuna said, one eyebrow raised, "because Ilya and I disagree on whether or not he should tell what happened, and if he should ask her to come stay."

Ilya shook his head, a little stronger this time. "She is - she would come. If I ask. And stay. But she has little time for holiday, little time and many responsibilities in Moscow. I do not want her to - to give up for me."

"Sorry," David said, "who's Svetlana?"

"Ilya's friend, from childhood," Yuna replied. "He said she's his most responsible friend, and also the one most likely to panic when he's not in Moscow in a few hours."

"Yuna and psych team said I should reach out to friends," Ilya gritted out. "For. Support. Not to make friends panic. I cannot - Yuna, I cannot text her and say how you want me to say. I type out anything like why I am here and she will be here so quick, very upset."

"Would it be easier to call?" Shane asked. "Or, like. Have someone else call for you? I could, if you wanted."

Oh god did he hope that Ilya did not want Shane to call Svetlana for him. What the hell was he thinking saying that?

"Svetlana would be so..." Ilya paused, frowned, looked up at Shane. "Ah, she would be so surprised to hear from her favourite hockey player Shane Hollander maybe she would forget to be panic attack."

Well shit.

"You're not her favourite hockey player?" Yuna asked, "I mean, I get it, but surely -"

Ilya shrugged. "Is probably really me and she is only chirping. She thinks he is...mm, easy on eyes, too. So."

Yuna snorted, and Shane blushed.

"Maybe, ah," Ilya began, glanced from Yuna, to David, and then to Shane. "Maybe I put on clothes. And then, maybe. You and me. Give call?"

He swallowed hard, like he was expecting Shane to say no, or for someone to chip in with why this wasn't a good plan.

"Sounds good," Yuna said briskly.

"Okay," Shane said. "Yeah."

Ilya paused, his nose twitched. "I am still not... mm. Allowed. To be alone. Like I am boiling pot. You will come to bathroom with me?"

"Yeah," Shane nodded, "'course."

It was weird sitting here and not holding Ilya's hand. He was glad for the bundle of clothes he was clutching.

Ilya got off the bed, a little unsteady, like he kept expecting his body to be perfectly normal, and then finding it still tired. Both David and Yuna turned politely away, so Ilya could leave without his naked butt being seen. Shane stood up, did look at his butt, but only briefly. They made their way to the bathroom. Door closed behind them. They were still close enough to Shane's parents that there was really no pretence of speaking privately.

Ilya had strode into the small room, put down his phone on the edge of the sink, and then stalled. Head down. Shane could see his face in the mirror, the drawn tight expression, closed eyes. He put the stack of clothes down on a small shelf by the sink, on top of the small stack of towels it held, and stepped closer, looking at the strip of Ilya's back between the two sides of the smock. Put his hand gently over the ridge of exposed spine, felt Ilya's breath push in and out, skin warm and dry.

After several breaths, Ilya leaned back into Shane's hand, and Shane stepped forwards again, replacing his hand with his chest, took Ilya's weight against him, slid his arms around Ilya's waist and held him, his forehead dropping to press against Ilya's nape, his mouth smearing a dry kiss into his skin. Ilya's breath shuddering, evening out.

"Okay," Ilya said eventually, voice low. "Are you getting me naked or what?"

"Asshole, Shane murmured, but drew his arms back and began to untie the strings above Ilya's ass, and then the one at the neckline. Kept his forehead against Ilya's nape as he worked. "Hope you don't mind I brought you my underwear," he said, as he untied the knot at the top of the smock. "You didn't have any clean ones."

"Ew," Ilya said, tone light. "How disgusting, how gay, Hollander."

"Shut up," Shane said, rolling his eyes.

He stepped back now he'd untied the strings, and he expected Ilya to shrug out of it immediately. Instead, Ilya turned around to face him.

"I only packed as many as I thought I needed," Ilya said, shrugged one shoulder, the smock slipping down his shoulder now it wasn't tethered back. "So do not think I am just gross."

Shane didn't know how to respond, so he didn't at first. Just reached out and began helping Ilya out of the smock, Ilya letting him.

"Come stay with me," Shane said, folded the smock in half. "Or, I could come stay with you. Either way. For the two weeks. For longer. If you want. If you're not going to go back to Russia."

Ilya didn't respond this time. He stared at Shane's hands, folding, and then putting the smock down on the shelf by the sink before grabbing the first item of the fresh clothing. Shane rucked the shirt up in his hands, so the hem and the neckline were level, and then held it up, and Ilya ducked, let Shane pull it over his head, and then the sleeves over his shoulders, arms. Shook the t-shirt out so it fell over his torso.

Underwear next. Shane should probably just let Ilya do this. He offered one leg hole to Ilya, and his shoulder for balance, and Ilya put his hand heavy on Shane's shoulder, put his foot and leg through the hole. Repeated with the other side. Let Shane pull the underwear up, let Shane untwist the hem where it got twisted over his hip, running his fingers around the waistband to make sure everything else was sitting smoothly. Sweatpants put on the same way. Hoodie rucked up like the t-shirt. Ilya pliable under Shane's hands, neither of them needing words of direction.

"You would be sick of me," Ilya said, once he was fully dressed, except for his socks because Shane had apparently dropped them. Hopefully in the hospital room and not somewhere on the way. "You would regret. Then be, ah, I do not know right English word. Mad with me."

Shane considered it. "Resentful?"

"I don't know," Ilya said, "probably that."

"I wouldn't," Shane said. "Get sick of you. Or resent you."

Ilya smiled, though it made him look more sick than anything. Shook his head. "I get sick of me, you will as well. You forget how just yesterday you were so angry with me?"

Shane had not forgotten. He shook his head as well. "That was the opposite of getting sick of you," he countered. "I was angry because I - because I wanted more of you."

An odd expression flickered over Ilya's face, and he narrowed his eyes at Shane. "More sex."

Shane sighed. Hoped the walls weren't so thin that his parents would be able to hear every word they were saying. "Yeah," he admitted. "Of course. But also, just more of you."

If he wasn't so thoroughly wrung out with exhaustion, with the still buzzing current of fear, with the recent sobbing in his father's arms, he didn't think he would have been able to say this. It wasn't bravery pushing him here, just a different flavour of fear. The threat of borrowed grief.

"I'm not asking you to come stay for like, a two week sex marathon," Shane continued, voice low. "We don't have to have sex, or kiss, or anything. That isn't - I like you. Ilya. Maybe more than I should."

Ilya looked at him for another long moment, his face still odd, his eyes flicking back and forth between Shane's, like he thought one of Shane's eyes might be telling the truth, and one might be lying.

"Will you call Sveta for me?"

"Oh," Shane said. "Yes. Do you seriously want me to?"

"I do not think I have. Um. Bravery for it right now. But your mama is right that I should. Warn her. She is like, mm. Not sister, because sometimes we fuck. But close like family."

Shane reminded himself to not be hurt by any of this. He nodded. "What do you want me to tell her?"

"Ah," Ilya scratched his head, and then his chin. Shoved his hands into the pockets of his hoodie. "Truth. And that. Um. You will come stay in Boston with me. If you meant this."

"I did, I do," Shane said, nodding hard. "Of course. Okay. Speakerphone?"

Ilya shook his head, and then his shoulders drooped, and he nodded. "Yes," he said. "In case she is, ah, disbelieving of who you are and thinks maybe I am kidnapped."

Shane nodded. Neither of them moved, though Ilya looked at him expectantly. "Um," Shane said, "gonna need you to unlock your phone, and bring up her number? I'm assuming it's in Cyrillic?"

Ilya grimaced, and then reached for his phone. Held it out flat so Shane could see it, and tapped in his pass code, slow. 8169. Shane rolled his eyes. Watched as Ilya navigated to contacts, and then pressed one, which was indeed labelled in Cyrillic, so Shane felt vindicated. He passed the phone to Shane, and then hesitated, both of them holding the phone.

"All good?" Shane asked.

"Is just I so do not want to be doing this," Ilya said, dull. "I keep remembering what is happening. Over and over I am remembering. I am so tired, Shane."

Shane nodded. gritted his teeth to stop his jaw from wobbling. Closed the small gap between them again, the phone and their hands pressing between their chests as they hugged.

"Okay, enough," Ilya said after a few shallow breaths, voice choked. "I will not - I just want this done, yes?"

Shane loosened his grip enough for Ilya to pull away if he wanted to, and when he didn't, he just rearranged his grip, and pulled the phone out from between them. Called Svetlana. Hit speakerphone.

The phone rang twice, loud in the small bathroom, and then was answered, in Russian, which wasn't a surprise, but meant that Shane hesitated for a moment, unsure how to respond.

Svetlana said something else, questioning sounding, and Shane cleared his throat. Did his best.

"Hi," he said, "is this Svetlana?"

Ilya lifted his head and rolled his eyes at Shane. Shane rolled his eyes right back.

"What?" Svetlana switched to English and suspicion. "Who is this?"

"Sorry," Shane said. "Um, this is Shane Hollander. I'm, uh, Ilya and I were at the NHL awards in Vegas together this year. We presented the Lord Talon award?"

"Shane Hollander," Svetlana repeated, voice flat and disbelieving. "Yes, okay. Why is it you are with Ilya's phone calling me, Shane Hollander?"

"Because," Shane hesitated, glanced at Ilya again. Ilya had asked him to tell the truth. God. "Because I'm at the hospital with him," he said. "Last night I found him, um, attempting to - having taken a bottle of pills with a bottle of vodka, and I called an ambulance. He's - he's physically fine. Just exhausted. A headache. Needs to not eat spicy food for a little while. I'm - I'm going to take him back home to Boston, and stay with him at his house while he, um, recuperates. So. Yeah. He wanted you to know. And he wanted to, uh, tell you to stay on your holiday, but I disagree, so if you'd like to come join us in Boston, we'll be heading there probably tomorrow?"

A short silence. A burst of muffled Russian.

"Shane Hollander," Svetlana said, low and slow. "If this is some terrible, stupid, prank, I will _"

"It isn't," Shane butted in. "I wouldn't do that. And I also don't know what the prank part of that would be. Make you come back to Boston a couple of days earlier? Not very funny. I don't even know you."

Another short silence. Ilya looked amused slightly, which was happier than Shane had seen him be all day.

"Fuck," Svetlana said, passionately. "Oh god. Fuck. Fuck. Okay. Fuck. Shane Hollander, I am buying fucking ticket now. I will meet you at Ilya's house. Ilya, if you are listening, fuck! Ya tebya lyublyu."

The call ended. Shane sniffed, felt like he recognised her parting words. Looked down at Ilya, whose head had fallen against Shane's shoulder, face pressed into his neck.

"Okay?"

"I do not deserve her," Ilya said. "or you."

IDK, A HOTEL, WHATEVER. ILYA.

The day had both dragged and disappeared, and Ilya didn't know which was worse. Wading through seconds that felt like minutes, minutes like hours, movements and words boring and hard. Blinking and realising the light from the windows had changed, the hour moved on. His mind snagging on the fact that he was still there. He remembered most of what had happened throughout the day, he thought, at least. If he tried to think about it, he could recall, it was just if he tried to think, tried to recall, he would keep spiralling back further into further memories and thoughts, and the gravity of it all would pull him down again and he would blink and the light would be different.

He let them give him medication. It made him nauseous and they gave him anti-nausea as well, told him hopefully the side effect of feeling sick would go away. If it didn't, he could talk with his doctor at home. He just had to wait, give it time. Too many steps.

He signed discharge papers that both Yuna and Shane Hollander signed as well. Promises to the hospital that they were accepting the hospital was not at fault for releasing him into their care. Ilya wasn't sure if he paid or not. If he was going to get a bill in the mail. If at some point his insurance had been asked for, given, handled. He didn't ask.

Shane's parents had booked a couple of adjoining rooms in a hotel near the hospital. Not the one they had been at yesterday. There were two beds in the room he and Shane were to share.

He wanted to shower. Felt greasy and grimy. Shane was sitting on the end of one of the neatly made hotel beds. Ilya on the other. Shane with his shoulders drawn in, his focus taken up on whatever it was he was tapping furiously on his phone about. Ilya's phone was on the bedside table, vibrating every so often. He ignored it. Didn't have anything left in him to say to

Svetlana. Couldn't bear to try anyone else. Didn't want to see any text or message that might remind him of why he had tried to leave.

Yuna and David were in the next room, just through the door on the opposite wall to the bathroom. Every so often Ilya could hear their voices, never very loud, just one raising slightly and then the other in conversation. Ilya could imagine them discussing him. Sharing notes. He didn't know what they thought, or knew, or thought they knew about him and Shane. He wished he hated their obvious pity.

"Okay," Shane said, as if they had just been talking. "I've cancelled my services, postponed a meeting, and let Hayden know I can't do dinner tomorrow."

Ilya tried to make sense of this by himself for a few seconds, and then gave up. Made a face at Shane. "Okay?"

Shane made a face back. "Just," he said, shrugged his shoulders expansively. "Making sure everything in Montreal is wrapped up while I'm in Boston with you."

"Oh."

"Um," Shane said. "Is there anything... or anyone, uh, else, you want me to call? Let people know you're not going to be in Russia? Did you already have return tickets home that you need cancelled?"

"I did not buy return tickets," Ilya said. "Only tickets to Russia."

"In case you changed your mind?" Shane asked, tentative.

"No," Ilya tried to smirk, failed possibly horrifically. "So I could send screenshots to Sveta and Alexei when they asked."

"Oh."

Ilya doesn't want to be angry. He doesn't know if it really is anger he's feeling. It spills out of him like anger anyway.

"This is already too much for you," he snapped at Shane, could feel his face contorting, brow furrowing down. "You cannot even say what I did. Was suicide, Shane. What I wanted. To die. Kill my self. Say the fucking words! You are not - not making facts change by being fucking delicate with word you use. I can not fucking be here and also have to be careful over how I tried and fucking failed suicide."

Shane had winced, when Ilya began, voice raised and harsh, and his eyes had welled up. When he stood up, Ilya expected, hoped, feared, that he would go to the adjoining door. Would send his mama or his papa to babysit Ilya instead.

Shane waited for Ilya to finish speaking, and then stepped across the little distance between the two beds. Got down on his knees in front of Ilya, pressing forwards until his torso was caught between Ilya's thighs, and they were having to look up and down to see each other. Ilya still mostly the thing that might be anger, and confusion, and Shane with his eyes

dripping tears and a face full of determination. His hands moved to sit on Ilya's waist, wrapping warm around him. Ilya waited, frozen with unknowing.

"You tried to kill yourself," Shane said, his voice hard like he had put all of himself into keeping it unwavering. "I found you mid-suicide attempt. You're right. I'm fucking scared just saying the words. I am so scared. Ilya, I am so scared of you dying. I'm not leaving. I'm staying. I'll say the words if you need me to say them."

This was so much less fun than what Shane usually got down on his knees for. Ilya was so sick and tired of emotions, of the way they were coursing through him like he was nothing but an empty vessel for them to crash through. He folded himself down around Shane, reaching, and grabbing, needing. Like if he could get the right grip he could pull out of the fucking waves of rage and fear and grief and nothingness.

Shane let himself be pulled up. Let Ilya squeeze and cling him closer. Dragging him onto the bed with Ilya, letting himself be moved and arranged until Shane was on his back on the bed with Ilya slung over and around him, face buried against Shane's jaw. One of Shane's legs hiked up to hook over Ilya's, both of them pinning the other down. Shane had one hand in Ilya's hair, a tight grip, the dull sharp dull pain of it a relief, a reprieve. He pressed his head down, pulling at the tug, bit Shane's shoulder, locking his teeth around him, biting down. Shane grunted, didn't push him off.

When Ilya's lungs felt like they were lungs again, he released his grip on Shane's shoulder, turning his head again so his cheek pressed into the damp fabric, his nose squishing into Shane's jaw.

"I need shower," he said.

"Yeah," Shane agreed. "You smell so gross."

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Shane came into the bathroom with him. Sat up on the counter, taking each piece of clothing as Ilya took it off, folding it, putting it down beside him in a little stack.

There was a bruise Ilya hadn't noticed before, a dark smudge on his hip. He caught a glimpse of it as he turned to the shower, seeing his reflection in the huge mirror. Avoided looking at his face. Pressed his fingers to the bruise and pressed down on it. He was so used to having bruises, you couldn't play hockey and not come away looking like an apple used for juggling practice. His mama had said that to him. To make him laugh.

"You lost your balance," Shane said. "When we went to the bathroom. You knocked into a chest of drawers, I think it was."

"Ah," Ilya said. He reached into the shower, turned it on. Watched the water fall. "I do not remember."

"No," Shane said. "I wouldn't expect you to."

Putting his hand out under the water, finding it still cold, Ilya shook his head, turned to look at Shane. "I remember some," he said. "What is, uh, *ingest*?"

Shane blinked at him, "ingest? Like, to eat, or swallow?"

"Mm," Ilya nodded and looked back to his hand under the water. It was warm now. He could step in. He didn't yet. "I remember my mama."

Shane paused. One of his hands was on the pile of Ilya's clothing, stroking a finger against the fabric. "You said, um, a lot of things I didn't understand. In Russian. But you said mama a few times."

"She killed herself," Ilya said. Thought it was the first time he had ever said it out loud. Maybe the first time he'd let himself think it straight like that. "When I was twelve. I found her. Not like you found me. I was too late."

Shane's eyes were wide. Ilya looked away from him. Dropped his hand from the water, back to his side, hot water rolling down his palm, dripping off his fingertips. Smearing on his bare thigh.

"I was her," Ilya told the shower, the steam, the running heat. "Dead. Looking at myself through her eyes. He was very little. I was, ah, sorry for him."

He stepped into the shower. Stood right under the head, own head ducked so the water pounded over his scalp, rushed down his face, his neck. He could still breathe, slow and shallow so as not to inhale the water sucked into his nostrils with each pull of his lungs. Eyes closed.

He felt the change of air before he felt Shane's hand. Shane's body moving in behind his. Shane wrapping his body around Ilya's body like a suit of armour, an exoskeleton. Shane speaking through the shudder of water, loud enough to be heard, low enough not to hurt.

"I am so sorry, too, for little Ilya," he said.

Ilya swallowed. "Ilyushenka," he said, "is how my mama would call me. Is like a little name."

"Ilyushenka," Shane repeated. "I'm sorry Ilyushenka had that happen to him. I'm sorry he lost his mama. That must have been so hard."

Shane's voice was coming out so flat and smooth, the way it sometimes did when he was feeling too much to remember to modulate. Soothing in its low rumble.

"I'm sorry for your mama, too," Shane added. "She must have been feeling so sad, so bad."

Ilya nodded. Felt like he was choking. Drowning even though he hadn't inhaled any water. His throat hurt, ragged, and grasping. Hard salty pressure behind his face, sinuses flooding with pain and grief and memories. Shane's arms shifted around him, moving Ilya until he was able to bury his face once more in Shane's neck, chest to chest, stomach to stomach.

"She did not -" he began, each word a gasp, his mouth wet with water and tears, pressing against Shane's skin like he needed to speak directly into him or risk his words floating away. "Did not have - did not have a Shane."

It wasn't fully what he wanted to say, but it would have to do, because Ilya didn't think he had any words left now. His mama didn't have someone who would come back to her room to talk, who would stay, who would stay and stay. Who would ask her to stay.

Shane was mumbling *sorries* back, pressing them in against Ilya's cheek, lips moving like shallow kisses, dragging.

Eventually, Shane moved again, not letting go of Ilya. Began rubbing his hands over Ilya's back, soaping him up. Rinsing him off. Did his back, his arms, his ass, hands slow and careful over his skin. His nape. Scratched his fingers gentle into Ilya's hair, and followed the scratch with a rub of suds. Let Ilya stay buried where he was until his hands smoothed over Ilya's shoulders, palms dragging down the front of them, Shane's arms between them, pushing their chests apart. He propped Ilya up against the shower wall, washed his chest, his armpits. Took Ilya's dick in hand and washed it with carefully casual touches. Neither of them mentioning how it began to harden in Shane's hand, force of habit. Neither of them mentioning Shane's chub either.

If Shane wanted, there was no indication in the way he was washing Ilya. No lingering hands over cock or ass, no groping of tits or thighs. If Shane wanted, Ilya would let him. Was glad Shane did not.

Shane wrapped him in a towel while still standing dripping on the bath mat. Sat him down on the closed toilet and wrapped another towel around Ilya's head, scrubbing at his wet hair. Towelled himself off brusquely while Ilya sat there, be-towelled, and watched.

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The Hollander parents went out to get dinner, brought it back to Shane and Ilya's hotel room, and the four of them ate together. Yuna ran down the plan for everyone. Plane tickets, leaving time, the appointment she had somehow already booked for him in Boston with a doctor. Not his team doctor, she had said it was up to him how he wanted to handle sharing any of this with his team or the organisation. He had said he had tried to make it up to him already and been stopped, so maybe someone else should make a decision. Evidently Yuna had taken that to heart. They didn't say how long they would stay in Boston with him and Shane, and Ilya didn't ask. Didn't know how to. Didn't know how long he wanted them, or if he didn't want them.

Shane got into bed first, after brushing his teeth, his parents safely back behind the adjoining door. Ilya got in beside him, ignoring the second bed he had sat on earlier. Shane put his arm around him, and then held his phone so they could both see it. Pressed play on a compilation video of unlikely animal friends.

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In the morning, Ilya ignored the missed calls on his phone. Mostly his brother. He put on the cap Yuna gave him, as did Shane. It probably wouldn't stop them from being recognised at some point, but it was worth a shot.

Yuna told him he probably shouldn't hold hands with Shane while they were in public, just so they could get through to Ilya's home with the least possible media noise. An embarrassing thing to have to be told. An even more embarrassing thing to cry about. He didn't know if he could blame the stupid pill he took again that morning. The people at the hospital had said it wouldn't really start being effective for maybe two weeks, even though the bad side effects could kick in immediately apparently. He had to have another anti-nausea. Maybe constant crying was one of the side effects. There was a list of them on the pill box, but Yuna had all the pills in her bag. Had been handing them out as needed. She gave him sunglasses as well. For the crying.

The trip was a blank in Ilya's head. If he tried he knew what had happened. Not much. He was just tired, and upset, and his brain was fuzzy. He'd torn his cuticles up by the time they arrived back in Boston. He turned aeroplane mode off and found he had missed calls from Svetlana, more from his brother, from his father, from Polina. Messages from Marly, his coach, some more team mates. He turned aeroplane mode back on. Thought about the capybara and crocodile friends with their little babies. Thought about the letter he'd left for Svetlana in his house. What he had said in it. Sat in the back of the boring black car the Hollander's had rented at the airport. Boston moving on like normal outside the car windows.

Yuna was saying something about tweets, or chirps, or something. Photos. Nothing to worry about. Could she get in touch with his agent? Shane taking his hand again, first time since before they left the hotel. Not quite a circuit connection, but something. Ilya's brain a little less fuzz. Blinkered. Had his mama left a note. A letter. None that Ilya knew about. Would it have made anything easier? Was Svetlana at his Boston house right now, having read the letter, waiting for him to turn up so she could kill him herself? Shane would probably stop her.

"I fired my agent," Ilya said. Was pretty sure that was a response to a question he'd been asked. Shane's hand around his, squeezed. "Did not want him in charge of, ah, statements?"

"Ah," Yuna said. "Well. In lieu of an agent, or... PR handler?" He shook his head. "I could step in for you, until you find someone else?"

He nodded.

"We don't need to deal with it right now," she said, leaning further into the backseat to look at him. "We'll get back to yours and get you settled first."

He nodded again. Yuna settled back in her seat, facing forwards.

David was driving. Had been quiet mostly, occasionally glancing back at him and Shane. Ilya didn't know what he thought of him. Didn't want to know, because it couldn't be good.

Shane reached over Ilya's lap for his other hand. Held both of them in his, examining.

"This one's bleeding," he said to Ilya, low voiced, rubbing his thumb over Ilya's middle finger's knuckle, the one where'd he'd accidentally torn a strip of flesh down the side of his finger rather than having it come off at the base of his nail. "Do you have plasters at home?"

Ilya shrugged. He didn't know. All he knew was that he had gotten rid of all the perishables in his fridge.

"Probably one of us has some somewhere if you don't," Shane said, a thought said out loud. Ilya didn't bother replying to it. "Have you heard from Svetlana?"

"She has called," Ilya said. "I put my phone on aeroplane mode again."

"Oh," Shane's face shuffled quickly through a grimace. "Okay. Do you want me to - to call her back?"

"She will be at my house already," Ilya said. "I left her letter there. She will be. Mm. Angry."

A pause. Ilya could see in the way Yuna was holding very still, that she was listening intently.

"Okay," Shane said. "So we'll deal with that when we get there."

Yuna twitched, and Ilya wondered if she was wanting to turn around and say that Svetlana wasn't going to be angry, and it would be fine. Or if she wanted to ask why Svetlana would be angry.

Or maybe he was reading into things that weren't there.

"Um," Shane said then, when Ilya couldn't work up anything to say in reply. "Will she - are you okay with her seeing...this?" He squeezed Ilya's hands in his. "Or do you want me to keep my hands to myself?"

"I don't care," Ilya said.

That wasn't true. He wished he hadn't taken off the sunglasses when they'd gotten into the car. His lips twisted, and he tipped his head up to blink at the ceiling of the car. It wasn't... wise maybe, to let himself feel just that much more tethered to reality when Shane touched him, but what was he supposed to do? It was just a fact right now.

"Don't," he gritted out, "don't let go. "

"Okay," Shane nodded. He moved their hands again, passing himself Ilya's left hand into the hand already holding his right, and reached up with his now free hand to cup Ilya's cheek briefly, brushing away errant tears with his fingertips. "I won't."

Ilya should ask if Shane was okay with that. He didn't. Tried to believe it was because he trusted Shane to not offer if he wasn't willing. Knew it was because he was scared to hear him say no. Scared to lose this. Stupid and small in retrospect, because he had been willing to lose it all in a much more real, permanent way, just the other night. Had felt calm about it as he'd

swallowed the pills, six at a time with a swig of vodka to wash it down easier. He couldn't make sense of it. There was no sense.

His driveway. The car slowed. He told David the gate code. Lips felt numb. Shane's hands were on his hands. Shane's shoulder against his shoulder. His house. Front door opening. Svetlana standing in the doorway, hair tied back, face taut.

"Svetlana?" Yuna asked, glancing over her shoulder at Ilya.

"Yes," Ilya said.

"She has a key to your house?"

"Yes. Always has."

Yuna nodded. David parked. Svetlana stayed where she was, watching from the doorway.

ILYA ROZANOV'S HOUSE, BOSTON, DAY TWO OF SEVERAL NEW WHITE HAIRS.
YUNA.

Introductions were made hastily, but politely. Yuna annoyed with herself for having only just realised who Svetlana Vetrova's father was and that this was not a good time to bring it up.

Once Svetlana had shaken hands with her and David, and smiled tightly at Shane, she had released a burst of Russian at Ilya, her hands in the air. Ilya had replied very briefly, and whatever it was he said Svetlana did not appear to approve. She took his hand, the one not still clutching so tightly to Shane that Yuna was slightly worried about grip damage, and dragged him out of the entrance they were all standing around in, and up the stairs.

Ilya had allowed this, but he had kept his hold on Shane, which meant Shane was dragged away as well. Yuna and David watched this happen, and then, once the three were out of sight, turned to each other.

"Bring the bags in?" David suggested.

"Good idea," Yuna agreed.

She checked the door wouldn't swing shut and lock them out, and followed David back to the car.

She couldn't believe she'd not realised Sergei Vetrov was Svetlana's father until now. She had seen the photos and articles from only a couple of weeks previous; *Svetlana Vetrova and Ilya Rozanov spotted together at blah blah*, and, *Rozanov seen with long term girl 'friend' Svetlana*, are the two finally going official? She had seen them and rolled her eyes at how much attention Rozanov got, always hogging the limelight.

She should have put it together. It was one of the things she prided herself on, her ability to match pieces up and make connections quicker than most. Usually laser focused on hockey, and the behind the games' politics and marketing, but still. That should have been an easy get.

She covered her mouth with her hand so the gasp that came with the rush of tears didn't escape, but David noticed anyway. She hadn't been hiding it from him. Leaned into his chest as he put his arms around her.

"I didn't see any of it," she said, her voice feeling tight and high. "I thought I was so - so on the mark, and it turns out I have no idea. David - fuck - how did I forget they were so young?"

It was possible he had seen her impending crash sooner than she had, because he didn't look at all surprised when she looked up at him, just held her tightly to him and swayed them on the spot.

"You didn't know you needed to be looking for it, honey," he said.

Last night at the hotel she had stayed firmly practical conversations only. She and David had discussed how much time they had to offer here, how much help they could really be, next steps.

David told her Shane had not quite come out but kind of come out to him. That Shane had said he didn't even let himself think about what he was. That he had frozen and then cried in David's arms at the sight of Ilya's hotel bathroom.

Yuna told David that over the short meeting with the psych team she had learned more about Ilya than she had after hearing about him constantly for years on years. His mother dead. His father sick. His brother hard. A boy who believed himself intrinsically selfish, lazy, difficult, leave-able. A boy who did not make eye contact with anyone during the meeting, but held her hand with shaking fingers when she reached out to him.

Then she had shaken her head and steered them back into practicalities.

Now, she couldn't hold on to her practicalities at all, couldn't even get a bag out of the car boot before the emotions crashed over her. Always like this. Piling on top of each other like a game of jenga, her putting them off, and off, piling the same old emotion on top again, structural integrity crumbling. When there were too many, too many shoddily placed, the tower would crash. At least it was efficient, saving them all up to experience at once. She was too busy to deal with them as they came up.

"I talked about him in front of Shane," she whispered into David's chest. "I sounded like I hated him. And I did, partly, just for - for beating Shane out a couple of times."

David didn't say to her that she wasn't to know, or that it would be fine. He pressed a kiss to the crown of her head. Waited for it to get it all out.

"She is the only person Ilya was willing to even consider reaching out to," Yuna continued. "Svetlana. I asked about family, family friends, team mates, and he kept shaking his head and

saying - saying he was too ashamed. He said he didn't know if his brother would be more ashamed and revolted with him for trying to kill himself or for failing. And that his father would never forgive him for it. He's younger than Shane by a month, David."

"We are here now," David offered, in some small offer of consolation. "And we have to take what he believes right now with a grain of salt. He's in a bad enough head space to try and take his own life, it doesn't surprise me that he doesn't think anyone will be on his side. Hopefully it's not true, just the - the depression telling him it is."

Yuna laughed wetly. "When they left," she said, cleared her throat. "The psych team. After we'd been talking about how he likely had depression, and which medications might help, and so on, he turned to me - still no eye contact - and said; *is not depression, Russians do not have this*. And I still can't tell if it was a joke."

-

They brought the bags in, leaving them by the entrance, explored a little further in, and found the lounge, dining room, and then the kitchen. David immediately going in search of coffee making ingredients. They could hear voices upstairs, though Yuna couldn't tell through the house muffling them, if it was in English or Russian.

She sat at the kitchen island, and David paused his coffee mission to get her a glass of water and a kiss.

He put the glass down next to a piece of folded paper. Handwritten Cyrillic on the front in big letters. Picking it up tentatively, she turned it over to see the full other side covered in writing. She was both glad and sad she could not read a single word of it. Knew somehow it had to be the letter he had mentioned leaving. Something Svetlana had obviously sat right here and read.

"Do we adopt him?" She found herself asking out loud.

"What?" David asked, snorting slightly as he turned back around to look at her. "Ilya?"

"I know we don't," Yuna hurried to say, shaking her head, closing her hands around the water glass. "I don't mean it like that. Mostly. It's just - if he lets us, do we?"

"Might be awkward for Shane," David said, "if the guy he's into is suddenly his brother."

"Oh, ew, David," Yuna groaned, and David smiled at her, pleased. "Seriously, though," she added, after a sip of water. "I am going to take over as his agent and PR handler until he gets new ones. I'm not letting him dangle."

Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

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

NOT PARIS, THIRD WORST DAY EVER. SVETLANA.

Svetlana hadn't known what to expect from Shane Hollander, but it hadn't been for him to turn up with his parents. Three Hollanders and Ilya all getting out of a car together like they had been on the world's weirdest road trip that somehow ended in Ilya clinging to Shane like he was the long awaited replacement to his Cheburashka toy Ushi. Ushi had gone into retirement when Ilya was seven, but Svetlana still remembered how he had been a constant companion whenever she and Ilya played together, and any photo she had of Ilya while he was still so young was also a photo of Ushi.

Just like with Ushi, Ilya dragged Shane Hollander behind him as she took him upstairs, away from two out of the three strangers. Shane hadn't said a word yet, also a trait he shared with Ushi.

She had only arrived this morning, which had given her ample time to comb through Ilya's house and remove every single pill, no matter what strength (a container of tik-taks had fallen victim to the sweep), and pour what was probably thousands of dollars of vodka and other alcohol down the drain, only taking a few swigs herself.

It also gave her too much time to sit in her best friend's kitchen and read a letter he had written for her detailing how much he loved her, and he was sorry he was asking for more from her, and he knew she hated his brother as much as he did, but could she please keep an eye on him, and on Raisa, and on Ana. Here was the run down of his will, so it wouldn't come as a surprise, here was the location of various codes and passwords she might need, here was his apology for not having the courage to keep going.

She wished she were the type of person who could release emotion through something as simple as screaming and yelling. She would scream so loud right now that even fish in the ocean would be trying to cover their ears, if she thought it would help. Ilya was not answering his phone anymore, and all she could do for now was to hope it was because he was an asshole and was choosing not to. She shouldn't have hung up on Shane Hollander so quickly, not without getting his number first. But she had been panicking, and scared, and needed to buy tickets immediately, and hadn't been thinking about any other practical details.

Upstairs, in Ilya's bedroom because it was the most familiar path to drag Ilya down, she shut the door behind the three of them after only a second of considering attempting to shut Shane Hollander out, and pulled Ilya into a hug.

"I am so angry with you," she told him, tears pricking in her eyes again, even though she had told herself she wouldn't cry, and usually when she had told herself, she didn't. "And so fucking relieved, god, Ilyushka! I read your letter. Fuck you. Fuck. I'm so sorry."

Ilya wrapped only one arm around her, though he held her tight with it. Shook his head.

"I should have said not to read it. I forgot it was here until it was too late. It is not fair you had to see that."

She pulled out of the hug, her hands on his shoulders, staring at him with a frown. *"Not fair? Not fair would be me reading it after you were dead! When there would be no chance to help in any real way."*

"Raisa and Ana would have appreciated your help," Ilya mumbled, looking away from her and from Shane Hollander.

"I don't care," Svetlana spat, shook him, not hard because he was far too heavy and solid for her to do more than make him quiver. *"I would do it for you. I would. I would even keep an eye on your asshole brother. But I would much prefer to look after you. To make a difference to you."*

She had seen Ilya cry before, of course, she had known him since before they could walk. He used to cry easily as a small boy, easier than her. After Irina died though, the tears had dried up. They still came occasionally. Usually only the ones that slip out with a bad hit, not crying so much as leaking. Sometimes when they were both drunk and maudlin, and she would cry, he would cry with her. She had known he must have cried at some point recently, because his eyes were limned in pink, the whites starburst with blood, but it hadn't fully sunk in yet that he might cry again. As if, because now he was home and alive and she could see him for herself, things were miraculously cured. There had been a mistake, and her Ilya would come home and grin and say he was sorry for worrying her but she didn't need to worry anymore.

The tears slipped down his face soundlessly, and all she could think was they should be noisy like the rush of the ocean, with how heavy the tear fall was.

"Shit," she said, one hand fluttering from his shoulder to his cheek, and he let his head rest heavy in her palm. *"Ilya -"*

"Svetchka I am so tired," Ilya said, eyes closed. *"And I keep having so many emotions smothering me, and tears keep pouring out of me like I am going to make a new sea, and I know you are angry with me, you should be, you can be, but I just - I cannot do it yet. Can we - I do not have the brain for anything except for how I am failing everyone including myself."*

Shane Hollander, she realised, had been standing here silent at Ilya's side this whole time (which was sort of awkward), like he was waiting to be tapped back into the conversation, but at the sound of Ilya's voice cracking mid word, he had reached for Ilya's face. Which led to both her and Shane Hollander cupping Ilya's face between them. And also for her to come to a startling realisation that she might have put together a little sooner if not for all the horror and trauma of the last two days.

"*Holy fuck, Ilyushka,*" she said, her tone different enough that his eyes opened again and met hers. "*This is your Jane?*"

Shane Hollander twitched at the name, which was confirmation enough for Svetlana.

She'd known about the existence of *Jane* for years now. Knew Ilya would see her in Montreal and in Boston, and that he had a particular smile whenever he was texting her, and an extra layer of excitement in the days leading up to and from Boston/Montreal games. Svetlana had assumed Jane was a trainer, or a medic, or even a Montreal player's wife. Had wondered occasionally if the secrecy he kept around Jane was maybe because Jane was a man, or if it was just that his feelings for Jane were too much, and it scared him.

Both.

"I did not tell her," Ilya said, his head lifting from Svetlana's hand, turning further into Shane's as he looked to him. "I did not -"

"It's fine," Shane said, his eyes flicking briefly, wide, to Svetlana, and then going back to Ilya, his thumb rubbing over the wet slide of Ilya's cheekbones. "It's okay. It's okay if she knows, and it would be okay if you told her. She's your... best friend. You trust her."

"Yes," Ilya said, his eyes closing again as Shane's thumb swiped slow under one eye, wiping away freshly pooled tears. "I do. Yes. He is Jane."

Shane glanced at her again, and she stared back at him, her hand drifting back to Ilya's shoulder now he was no longer leaning on it. Took it all in, reeling.

It was unfair of her, she knew this, she asked it anyway. "Where were you?" She snapped at Shane. "All season? All season he has been unhappy, and strange, and I know he was not seeing his Jane. What? You break things off with him and only come back now?"

She didn't expect her words to come out as angry as they did, as desperate to hurt someone. Didn't know if Shane was prone to tears, or if she had hit so deep, or if he was simply just as on edge as she felt. His tears weren't as silent as Ilya's, because he drew in a shuddering breath as they fell.

"Was not like that," Ilya said, voice odd, like he was trying to have it come out loud and sure but he'd fallen short. "Fuck, Sveta, this is not - he is only reason I am still here. When I say be angry at me later I do not mean find new person to be angry with."

For a moment she wondered what would happen if she tried to pull Ilya away from Shane. Like trying to tug Ushi away when they were children and she was mad with Ilya for hurting her feelings, or for wanting to run around not skate, or for having Ushi clutched in his arms even when he knew his papa would hit him if he saw it. Ilya had always clung so tightly, she barely ever got the Cheburashka from him, and also, it had never looked so determined to cling back to Ilya as Shane Hollander did.

"I should have noticed," Shane Hollander said to her. "I know. I knew something was wrong and I didn't know how to help."

Svetlana knew she was lashing out here because she had also known something was wrong, and had done what she had thought was her best, and had since realised that it might not have been even close. What if she'd paid more attention? What if she'd dug deeper? What if she had made Ilya tell her what was really wrong.

"You were with him earlier in the day," she shot at Shane, "at the award show. You must have talked to him. You didn't -" she cut herself off, because she was going in circles, and she was upsetting Ilya, and herself, and also Shane. Bit the inside of her cheek hard, mouth flooding with saliva, and blinked back tears.

Three of them standing in this stupid lopsided triangle with wet cheeks. Ridiculous.

"*Sorry. Sorry,*" she said to Ilya, put her hand back to his cheek just briefly. "Sorry," she added, just for Shane, her eyes on him. "What is the plan?"

ILYA'S MUCH NICER THAN EXPECTED HOUSE, GO BIG OR GO HOME. SHANE.

Ilya's house had two guest rooms, three bathrooms (if you counted the tiny toilet and sink upstairs as a bathroom), and a dining table that still sat half empty even with all five of them seated around it.

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After they had filled Svetlana in on some of the basics of their plan for the next few days, they had all gone downstairs following the smell of coffee, and sat and drunk coffee in Ilya's lounge while Yuna filled in the gaps in the plan, and brought up new ones as well. He thought there was a good chance his mum and Svetlana would get on well, once the shock of just being in this situation (the best possible situation, the best, the fucking best possible goddamn shut up -) wore off a little. He knew his mum would be dying to ask about Sergei Vetrov. he was kind of dying to ask some questions as well, but he would keep that to himself for now.

His mum had brought up a list of things she thought they needed to get done today, first on the list being to make the house safe for Ilya, and Svetlana had nodded and said what she had already cleared from the house. Shane was so thankful for her at that moment that his heart had stuttered. He hadn't even thought that far ahead, and to think about it now sent a thrill of fear into his fingertips. He didn't know Ilya's house, didn't know where things might be snuck away. What if he had been the one tasked with clearing medications, alcohol, whatever, and he'd missed some?

The next thing on the list had been groceries, and Yuna had freed them from that one easily, saying she and David would do it, just write down essentials they wanted or needed, and she would add it to the list. She had paused, and then added that she wouldn't buy any alcohol,

not now, but if Ilya *really wanted*, she would get his cigarettes, but she could also get him some nicotine gum, maybe?

The third thing had been dinner, which Shane's parents brought home with them along with the groceries.

When his parents were leaving for the shop, Yuna had spoken to the three of them remaining, though it was only Ilya she reached out to touch, squeezing his shoulder gently. Instructing that they needed to get some rest, because all three of them looked like plague victims, and to avoid the internet for now, because they would talk about that after dinner. Then she had kissed Ilya on the forehead, and waved goodbye to Shane and Svetlana.

When the door had closed behind her and his dad, Svetlana had looked at Shane with raised eyebrows and said; "So he is already her favourite son?"

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Shane had only stayed off the social media aspect of the internet because Ilya had requested more animal videos, specifically ones with dogs in, and then dropped himself against Shane's shoulder on the couch, Svetlana on his other side, and said and did nothing else the entire time Shane's parents were out, except to say; *another*, after every video ended. Svetlana did not stay off the internet at all, and every so often he glanced over Ilya's head at her phone, screen turned only enough away for Ilya to not be able to see it without sitting up, and glimpsed blurry photos, and tweets with a million exclamation marks, or Svetlana swiping away a sixth call from a contact saved in Cyrillic, but who Shane was ready to bet was Ilya's brother.

He would not normally even really want to look up what the media was choosing to go feral about over him. It tended to be something stupid, like standing too close to and smiling at a woman, resulting in speculation over their relationship, or something racist. Last time it had been about Shane being seen with three other Asian people at once, and he hadn't read them, but his mum said the think pieces on it were insane.

He didn't care right now what they were saying about him, but he did care what they might be saying about Ilya. Had they got photos at the hospital? Leaving it? Had someone overheard something? Were they being cruel about him?

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Dinner came from a Russian restaurant that Svetlana had instructed Yuna how to get to, and had written out a list of food to order. It was good food, and Shane had been relieved that there was a wide variety of it, and a good portion of it didn't veer too wildly from his performance diet. It might be the Summer break, but he couldn't afford to slack off too much. It would have been worth it though, for the food to be far too fatty, or taste gross, just for the way Ilya seemed to actually be happy eating it. He had been eating, this whole time, but it had looked so much a chore that Shane had been almost worried Ilya had burned his tongue on the pills he'd taken. Had them sitting in his mouth for too long, or they'd hurt him on the way back up maybe. It was just nice. Seeing him smile a little, even if only over pelmeni.

The five of them sat clustered around one end of the dining table, Svetlana sitting at the head, her chair shunted as close to the corner of the table as possible so she was nearer Ilya, on her left. Shane on Ilya's left, his right hand clasped in Ilya's left, because he could eat perfectly well with his non-dominant hand, and maybe, just maybe, he felt a bit selfishly pleased Ilya chose to hold his hand rather than Svetlana's over dinner. It wasn't a competition (if it was, Shane would have won this round), Svetlana had known about Shane - as Jane - and had obviously never been worried about her position with Ilya.

Yuna and David sat opposite him and Ilya, and it felt...normal. Shane was pretty sure that if it wasn't for the circumstance leading up to this, just sitting with Ilya at a table with his parents would probably be sending him into a panic attack. There was no space in his body for that particular panic, right now. He hadn't even managed to work up more than a cold sweat about his dad telling him nearly outright that they knew he was some type of gay. More importantly, that he was some type of gay with Ilya Rozanov. And the way David had phrased it hadn't sounded like any of that was a problem for them. These were things to freak out about at a later date.

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The photos weren't as bad as they could have been. Just some fan shots from the airport, Vegas and Boston. Ilya and Shane walking side by side, heads down, shoulders brushing. Ilya's hands buried in his hoodie pocket. None of the photos got a clear shot of Ilya's face, or at least, without his sunglasses on. Shane was so thankful for his mum. Some of the photos had her and David in them as well, and the rumour mill was going wild, and mostly in very wrong directions.

They had managed, so far, to get away with the only public knowledge being that Ilya and the Hollanders were in Boston together. For what? Unknown. Several people were suggesting he was in a relationship with Shane's parents, as some twisted move in their rivalry. Other people were saying maybe Ilya and Shane had some advertising shoots together, or were working on some hockey related league project together. There were a few people saying that this was obviously a soft to medium launch of Ilya and Shane getting married. Yuna was quick to point out that those suggestions were not being taken seriously by the general populace.

"So, over all," Yuna said, once she'd run them through the havoc living online, "we can choose to simply ignore, not put out any statement, and hope this dies down. Or, we come up with a reason for us to have been seen together, and post about that. It can be as simple as just saying that you and Shane are friends, Ilya, we don't need to get complicated."

They had cleared the dinner away, and then retaken their spots at the table, Ilya's hand safe in Shane's again. He had been leaning in heavily against Shane's side, his eyes on the table, but he lifted his head at his name.

"I am not so...good," he said lowly, "right now, with knowing, maybe, what is okay ideas?" He paused, glanced around the table, shrugged. "No danger alert in my brain, only, ah, like. Big long noise when car is bumped. Nothing wrong, still wailing."

"You have always had a fucked up sense of risk," Svetlana said. She was leaning forwards, elbows on the table, head in her hands. She looked a lot more relaxed now, sounded almost fond as she spoke. "Too big and too small all at once."

"Worse now," Ilya said.

"Okay," Yuna nodded. She reached across the table, put her hand in front of Ilya. "That's okay, honey. We can all brainstorm, and we'll make sure you're in the loop, but we won't make you make any decisions you don't want to. We've got this."

He nodded. Shane attempted to shift his chair closer, only to find they were already pressed together. Ilya leaned back into him. Better.

"Uh," Shane said, "I had kind of an idea? It's maybe too big."

Svetlana opened her mouth, and then shut it again, like she had had a thought and then remembered who else was in the room.

"Let's hear it then," David said, "we always say go big, don't we?"

"I don't know if we always say that," Yuna replied with a slight frown. "But I suppose between go big and go home, we do tend to choose to go big."

"Even when some of us would prefer to go home," David said with a nod, and then shook his head. "Sorry, Shaney, tell us this idea."

"We could say Ilya and I want to, um, start a charity together. That we talked at the awards, and realised that we - that we have a lot in common, and we have a lot of - of ideals in common, and wanted to make it a reality. I was thinking it could be a hockey scholarship or something? And people already know you're my manager, mum, so. Yeah."

"It is a very nice idea, but it only explains one part of the problem. What if photos of Ilya from the hospital appear?" Svetlana asked, "Or photos of you both at the hospital? How will this play into it?"

Shane bit his lip, he had thought a little about this but not so much that he thought he would be able to fill in all the gaps himself. "I thought we could say, maybe like, food poisoning? I was with him, talking about the charity when he got sick, so, went with him."

"Explains how I threw up on you," Ilya mumbled.

"You threw up on him?" Svetlana asked, nose crinkled.

"Mostly not on me," Shane corrected, really didn't want to think about it. "Would you be okay with that, Ilya? I mean, if we say we're talking about a charity, we'd have to actually then start one. Kind of a big commitment for a - an excuse."

"Not as big as killing yourself," Svetlana said, and then held both her hands up. "Sorry. Mne zhal'."

Ilya snorted into Shane's shoulder. "Svetochka," he said, "ya tebya lyublyu."

"Ya tohze lyublyu tebya," she shot back, and then to Yuna, "sorry. But, I also go big, not home, and if it's laugh or cry, I always choose laugh."

"There are worse ways to cope," Yuna replied, calm.

"Mm, like killing self," Ilya added.

Svetlana made a choking noise, her face went back into her hands. Shane appreciated the ability for humour, could not find it in himself to feel any of his own right now. He wanted to drag Ilya onto his lap and burrow under his shirt so he could press his face into Ilya's warm chest, skin to skin, and feel his heart beat. Wanted to know what the words he had recognised meant.

Ilya's hand squeezed in his. "I would start charity with you, yes," he said. "I will. I think is nice idea."

"I agree," David chipped in, "food poisoning is a good idea as well. Nice and vague, doesn't have to implicate the hotel, marks you two down as good buddies."

"It is a very friendship affirming situation," Yuna said, "taking your friend to the hospital and staying with them."

Friendship affirming was good. Was great for the media. Shane nodded.

"Okay," Svetlana said, her voice and face composed again. "I also agree. Will be fun to see the media fall around about the rivals joining forces. What do we tell Ilya's family? This is a much less public relations problem, but it will get out eventually that Ilya was meant to go home, and then didn't. His brother will complain loudly."

Ilya made a small noise, and then simply turned his head to hide in Shane's neck. Shane, again, resisted the urge to pull Ilya into his lap. Hide them both away.

"The food poisoning excuse could be a good start," Yuna said, eyes narrowed as she thought. "For how and why he had to miss his flight. I suppose from there we can see he was still feeling to sick to travel. And then - hm - that his good friend Shane Hollander was in Boston for the Summer?"

Svetlana's eyes were also narrowed, lips pursed. She nodded along with Yuna's words. "I think I can make it work," she said slowly. "Alexei will be angry, but he'll be normal angry rather than vindictive angry, I think."

"Raisa?" Ilya asked, mostly muffled in Shane's neck. Svetlana must have understood what he meant though, because she replied briskly.

"I know you worry he is maybe like your papa with her," she said, "but I do not think so. Maybe if she was a boy."

"Isa?" Yuna asked.

"Raisa," Svetlana corrected, "Ilya's niece. His brother Alexei and his sister in law Ana's daughter. She is four. He worries if Alexei is angry it will be taken out on her."

Turning his head and peering down at Ilya, Shane could only really see the side of his face, the sharp jut of cheek and jaw. Pressed a kiss to the top of his head, and then rested his face against it. Could not stand the fact that he lived in a world where not only did Ilya try and kill himself, but that every hour Shane spent with him seemed to uncover a new, horrible thing Ilya had been dealing with.

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The small part of Shane that was still available for emotions and thoughts not entirely centred around the fact that Ilya had tried to kill himself, was currently very pleased and also relieved that Ilya had dragged him to his bedroom that night, and that Svetlana had disappeared into one of the spare rooms after hugging Ilya goodnight. He tried to tamp that part of him down, but it was difficult to ignore.

Ilya hadn't gotten sick and tired of him yet. Ilya had chosen Shane to be the one following him in to bathrooms, and holding his hand, and getting in to bed with him. He could have swapped Shane out for Svetlana, just for the novelty, and hadn't.

This wasn't to say that Shane didn't think Ilya also needed Svetlana. He had melted into her hugs every time she'd given them, and she had made Ilya smile multiple times, and also, she could understand and speak with him in Russian.

"Would you teach me?" Shane asked, once he and Ilya were in bed together again, teeth brushed (begrudgingly by Ilya). pyjamas on, water on bedside tables, phones on chargers. Ilya's phone was still on aeroplane mode, but, good to have it charged. "Russian, that is."

"Hm?" Ilya lifted his head from where he'd propped it on Shane's shoulder, his body warm around Shane's back. "Why?"

"I don't know," Shane said, "so you don't have to always speak English to me?"

"I already speak it," Ilya said, "you do not need to learn new language for me."

"I want to," Shane protested, squirmed a little under the blanket of weight of Ilya until he could see him a little better. "I want to be able to understand you when you're too tired to translate, or, or you can't think of the right English word."

Ilya didn't reply for a moment, just breathed slow against Shane's clavicles where he'd tugged the buttons of Shane's pyjama top undone to get to skin. "I will teach you all the important words," he said eventually. "Mm, like, da, ser. Trakhni menya sil'neye. Fuck me harder."

For a moment Shane let his body respond to the words, the lowered rasp of Ilya's voice as he said them, and then he shut it down. He knew it was easier for Ilya this way, to joke, and Shane found it easier too. But he didn't fucking get to where he was by taking the easy option.

"I was thinking more, like -" he paused, knowing his pronunciation would be off, even though he had heard the phrase a few times since Ilya had slurred it in the bathroom of the penthouse. "Ya tebya lyublyu?"

Ilya was very still against him suddenly, his breathing stopped, no longer warming Shane's chest.

"Why this one?" Ilya asked, voice tight. He hadn't pulled away from Shane, even as he froze, didn't let go.

"You said it," Shane explained, felt awkward and maybe a bit mean. "Before you became unconscious. One of the last things you said."

"And you remembered? Even though you do not know these words?"

"Yeah," Shane cleared his throat, the fucking lump there again, like a stupid bump in the ice the zamboni somehow keeps missing. "Of course. I didn't - I didn't want to - I thought maybe that would be it. Your last words. And I didn't want them to go unheard. Unknown."

"Bohze moy, Shanya," Ilya grumbled, Shane's chest suddenly wet. "Blyat, how - you are saying so many things that I - blyat. What else. Did I say more words you have memorised in your crazy storage head?"

Shane didn't think his storage head was that crazy, he had a normal amount of categories and boxes.

"Uh," he said, "you said *Mne zhal'*, and, well I know now one of the words was your name. Your little name. Ilyushenka. And you said mama, too. I'm sorry I - I did my best to remember everything, but it's mixed up in my head, and - yeah. I couldn't make out the other words, not enough to - to remember them."

"Mne zhal'," Ilya said, rubbed his face against Shane's chest, and then his neck. Hauled Shane further over fully onto his back so he could sprawl over him, one leg hitched up over Shane's hip. "Is I am sorry."

"Oh," Shane said, wrapped one arm around Ilya's waist to hold him closer, lifted his other hand to cup Ilya's face. "Mne zhal'," he repeated, not quite getting it out the way Ilya had. He'd get it eventually.

"Ya tebya lyublyu," Ilya said then, hesitated, pushed his face into Shane's hand until Shane began rubbing his thumb over his cheek. "Is I love you."

That made sense, for Svetlana to have been saying it, and for Ilya to have said it back to her. It made sense as well for it to have been the last thing Ilya wanted to say to the hallucination of his mother. Or perhaps as the hallucination of his mother to his child self. Shane couldn't think about either of those options for too long without crying, so he dragged his mind from it.

"Ya tebya lyublyu," he repeated, like he had with *Mne zhal'*. Ilya lifted his head, eyes wide, and Shane remembered and realised at once. "Did I say it right?" he asked, trying to smooth it over, to erase its meaning.

Ilya shook his head a little, licked his lips, looked Shane dead on. "Ya tebya," he said slowly, "lyublyu."

Shane repeated it again, under his breath, could feel his cheeks heating up under Ilya's gaze. Knew he shouldn't say it again, even if he was feeling it, because how could he? Ilya wanted him right now, found comfort in him right now, was willing to be publicly friends, but. Well. They weren't anything. No. They were *something*, but not something enough that telling Ilya that he loved him could feel anything more than a trap. Like he was telling Ilya that this was what he wanted in exchange for looking after him.

"Are you really okay with the charity thing?" Shane asked, Ilya's eyes still intense on him. "I know it's a big thing."

"Mm, yes," Ilya's eyes flickered over Shane's face, and then he ducked in and pressed a light kiss to Shane's mouth before dropping back down against Shane's pillow and shoulder. "Is not so big, really, your mama is saying we are only posting how we are *talking* about starting charity together. We will do, yes, but we have time."

"Yeah," Shane turned his head so he could keep looking at Ilya, who was looking back at him. They were close enough that Shane's vision kept fuzzing Ilya's face slightly, and he had to blink to clear it. "Um. Thanks for letting me come."

He watched Ilya's face do something complicated that Shane was almost certain was him deciding not to make it a joke, and then Ilya moved his head forwards just enough to be pressing his forehead into Shane's cheek, hiding his expression.

"Spasibo, for not letting go."

BOSTON, YET MORE DAYS TO BE SO FUCKING BRAVE ABOUT. ILYA.

Ilya's new housemates allowed him exactly one full day of being home in Boston and doing little more than lying on the couch with his head in Shane or Svetlana's laps while occasionally answering a question or being given food or drink. Social media statements went up on both Shane and Ilya's accounts, courtesy of Yuna. Svetlana made sure his family was informed he was throwing up chunks still, and stopped trying to call him every two seconds.

Then, the people who had pretending to be very nice to him ganged up on him like evil pirates and made him leave the house and go to appointments. With a doctor, and then, because Yuna could apparently do anything, in the same clinic, which had agreed to be closed

for three hours so that Ilya wouldn't be so easily seen, also a therapist. A talk one. Which was dumb.

Svetlana said talk therapists were basically like gossip sessions, and that definitely was not what he needed. If it was, he would be fucking fine, because he and Svetlana and he and Marly gossiped all the fucking time.

Shane said therapy was more like physical therapy than gossiping, where the therapist is basically showing you ways to support a sprain, or exercises to build back a muscle, but for your mind instead. Svetlana said that Shane was such a jock and Shane had looked confused and said that yeah he was, and Svetlana had raised her eyebrows and so on so forth.

It would have been funnier if his brain was more open to things being funny. Mostly he could only find a thing funny right now if it was shocking enough to dart through the fug of him.

Anyway. All of these people who were in his house were now evil betrayers. Even Yuna, who kept calling him honey in a way that made him both very, very sad, and also like maybe he was okay. Even David, who was mostly quite quiet, but made nice coffee, and hugged his son and wife in a way that Ilya could see visibly calmed the both of them. He always expected betrayal from Svetlana, because she had been micro-dosing him with betrayal their entire lives, usually by eating his left over pastry, or kissing the girl he had been kissing, or telling him that if he ever did drugs like that again she would drag him by his hair into the NHL office herself and make them put him in rehab. It was rude of Shane to also betray him, because it was difficult to tell someone you fucking hated them and then also request that they please, please keep holding your hand.

Worse, because the doctor wanted to speak with Ilya alone, as did the therapist, and it was so easy to believe someone who you said to their face that you fucking hated them might also hate you back when they weren't literally holding your hand still and rolling their eyes and saying *Ilyushenka*.

He asked the doctor if he could try new medication because the ones he were on made him feel nauseous and also he was crying all the time, which was not a thing he did, so obviously that was a bad side effect. The doctor told him that those were mild side effects in comparison to some others, and that Ilya should keep taking the anti-nausea and stick it out until the two weeks were up, and then they could talk about it again, which was putting a lot of faith in Ilya not becoming a dried out husk from how much liquid he was losing on a daily basis. The Hollanders and Svetlana were keeping him very hydrated, but the doctor didn't know that.

He only talked to the therapist for ten minutes - and he knew it was ten minutes because there was a cat shaped clock on the wall opposite his chair, and he had been watching the minute whisker - before the crying started again. He didn't even think he had been that upset. Upset, yes, not enough to warrant this level of leakage. He should march right back into the doctor's office and demand she measure the tear diameter or something.

The good news of his face becoming a leaky faucet, was that the therapist suggested that maybe he could have a support person in with them, now she'd asked the first few questions. The second good news, was that Shane probably didn't fucking hate him, because the

moment he sat down next to Ilya, he was leaning in and drying his face, and holding Ilya's hand in his.

No more leaky face faucet related good news. All the rest bad. Stinging eyes. Runny nose. Raw nostrils. Swollen cheeks. Stupid.

It was easier with Shane in there. Maybe more embarrassing. But surely nothing he said to the therapist could be more embarrassing than trying to explain to the man you were kind of in - like - with that he had to leave so he wouldn't be implicated in your death because you had purposefully overdosed, and then collapsing on him, vomiting on him, hallucinating your dead mother and your child self. Telling this woman with her hair in a nice long braid that yes, he did feel worthless a lot of the time, and yes, he did think he wasn't deserving of love, and yes, he was a little glad he was still alive but it would have been easier if he wasn't - well. It was not the hardest thing he'd done that week.

David had driven them, which Ilya was pretty sure was just so he could get to sit in the backseat with Shane and hold his hand. He wondered what Yuna and David thought of him clinging to their son like he might literally die with prolonged loss of contact. Nothing bad enough that they were leaving about it.

On the way home from the appointments, feeling wrung out and still honestly a little mad about everyone agreeing for him that it was in his best interests to go to said appointments, David glanced into the backseat and asked if they would like to get ice creams.

It would have been easier for everyone if he had just been told upfront about the ice cream factor.

Because the internet had already been informed that Shane Hollander and Ilya Rozanov were hanging out, they braved an actual parlour, rather than some drive-thru with sub-par ice creamishs. David must have made a good goalie in his youth, because even without gear he was a wide and tall surface to hide behind, which he and Shane both did. Not very well, considering they were also hockey players, current ones, and also two people despite Ilya trying to stand close enough to Shane that maybe their shoulders could merge.

Caps, sunglasses, David shield. They ordered ice creams (Shane got a cup of lychee sorbet, which was not ice cream but at least he looked like he liked it), and then took them back to the car, and David drove them to a dog park so they could sit on a bench and eat their ice creams while watching dogs run around and not being watched back. Hopefully not being watched back because Ilya cried into his ice cream when David produced tissues after Ilya got ice cream on his knee. Even with David there, it felt like one of those dates kids went on. Maybe especially with David there. He hadn't gone on dates like that, but he'd heard about them. Twelve year olds asking out their crushes, being escorted by a parent to go get ice cream, or a milkshake, or a movie.

When he'd finished crying enough to go back to his ice cream - which Shane had very, very kindly licked the edges of so it wouldn't be all messy for him - he stared out at the dog park, the trees in the distance.

"You liked hockey when you were twelve, yes?" He asked Shane.

David had a sudoku app on his phone that he very suddenly now whipped out.

"Yeah," Shane said. "Of course. Did you?"

"Of course," Ilya echoed. "I liked it very much."

"Cool."

Ilya licked his ice cream. Shane licked some sorbet off his spoon. Frog like.

"I also really liked, um, digging," Shane said. Quiet.

"What?" Ilya turned to look better at Shane. "Digging?"

"I mean, mum was more into gardening when I was a kid, and she'd get me to dig her holes for her, like, just with a trowel. Small ones for small plants. I did it for a lot of the older ladies in our neighbour hood."

Ilya grinned, couldn't help himself. "Did you ever get to dig big holes?"

"Occasionally," Shane shrugged. "Sometimes someone was planting a tree, or re-doing a fence. I know it's weird."

"Yes, is weird," Ilya agreed. "I like it so much."

Shane laughed, light, shook his head. "And I had a stone collection."

"Hm, stones that looked like pucks?" Ilya asked, and heard David attempt to stifle a snort.

Shane looked offended for maybe one second, and then he rolled his eyes. "Maybe some of them because they looked like pucks. I just thought it was cool how that happened sometimes. Mostly I was looking for, like, interesting stones."

"Ah, like crystals?" Ilya asked, squinted into the distance like the distance would answer. Licked his ice cream. "Gems?"

"No, although I guess some of them probably were. Interesting like, ones that felt really nice to hold in my hand. Or had cool speckles. Most people were not very impressed with my collection."

"I am," Ilya said. He wanted to hold one of Shane's nice to hold stones. "Why were you doing it? Just for fun?"

"Yeah. And because, so, um. Some species of penguins. Adelie and Gentoo, they like. Collect pebbles or stones to give to their...mates. I liked it. I thought it was, like, cute, I guess?"

"So you were collecting in case you found special penguin mate?" Ilya smiled around the slurp of ice cream he was executing, attempting to prevent an ice creamslide disaster.

"I guess, maybe," Shane shrugged. "I never did give any of them away, though. What about you?"

"Did I collect penguin rocks?" Ilya asked, raising his eyebrows.

Shane rolled his eyes, snagged the tissue from where Ilya had tucked it under his thigh, and used it to wipe ice cream off the tip of Ilya's nose.

"No. What else did you like? As a twelve year old. Um. Before -"

"Mama was teaching me stitching. To fix my hockey gear. She said I needed to know in case she was not there." Ilya shrugged. "I liked it. Making little stitches, thin little thread holding so tight and strong."

Shane blinked at him, smiled soft and slow, like the sun slowly sliding out from behind a cloud. "I've seen your little sewing kit in your dopp before," he said. "I thought it was so... practical. I liked seeing that part of you."

"I would have wanted to - to go to a park with you when we were twelve," Ilya said, made sure to say it through a mouthful of ice cream. "To dig holes. Or look for stones. Maybe we could have biked together, I liked biking."

He watched Shane glance around, his neck stretching, and then Shane was taking Ilya's ice cream sticky hand in his somehow not even a little sticky hand.

"I would have liked that too."

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On the fourth day of being back in Boston, he and Svetlana had an argument. The kind where they were not yelling at each other but their voices very much would have liked to be yelling.

She wanted to cancel her trip to Moscow. He wanted her to keep her trip. She wanted to know if he was stupid. He said she knew he was, and why would she want to stay here in Boston with someone as stupid as him. She had replied that maybe it was because she preferred her stupid idiots alive and not dead and seriously Ilya. He pointed out that he could hardly kill himself while surrounded on all sides by Hollanders like he was a naughty dog with a habit of peeing on carpets. Her response to that was to say that he was still saying *couldn't* rather than *wouldn't* which made it sound far too much like he would throw himself off the nearest cliff if he managed to slip the Hollanders' leash.

He locked himself in the bathroom. A stupid idea, because even now Shane had been coming with him, or standing outside the unlocked door, even when it was embarrassing, or smelly, and he wasn't supposed to lock doors because he was unreliable. He was the badly trained dog. He would pee on the carpets. He would kill himself and make a mess, even though everyone had been trying so hard to train him up and make him into something again.

The moment the lock had clicked, Svetlana had called for Shane, and even locked in the ensuite, Ilya had heard the thud of Shane responding. Leaping off the couch? He didn't know. Shane and Svetlana outside the bathroom door.

"He locked himself in. I was mean," he heard Svetlana say, her voice tight and aching.

"Probably you both were," Shane replied, "this is about Moscow?"

"No, this is about not wanting to leave him," Svetlana said, "I can go to Moscow whenever, it will be there. He can't promise the same of himself."

Ilya wasn't listening at the door. He had grabbed his towel and wrapped himself up in it and lay down on the floor. His head was nearish the door, but not purposefully so. It meant he could hear Shane perfectly easily, even when Shane spoke with his voice low.

"Ilya," he said.

Ilya waited. Shane waited. Ilya cleared his throat. Proof of life.

"I'm going to be here for at least another ten days," Shane said, "preferably more. All of Summer if you'll keep me."

Obviously he would keep Shane. "Mhm."

"And it'd, well, it'd really fucking suck if you killed yourself while I was here," Shane said. "Living in your house. I would definitely be the prime suspect."

This was true. Even if Ilya had left a long and detailed note, or even a video maybe, he was sure there'd be some people convinced Shane had murdered him, and some of the people convinced might be police or lawyers or stuff.

"Would not be good," Ilya allowed.

"So you're not going to, right?" Shane asked, his low, casual voice tightening here, like he was losing a little control over it. "For at least, like, a couple of weeks you're definitely going to *not* kill yourself?"

"At least," Ilya said.

Svetlana swore quietly. "Will you please unlock the door?" She asked. "I will stop being mean."

Ilya wormed his way upright, stayed wrapped in his towel, sitting on the floor, and reached up to unlock the door. Shuffled back. The door opened, Svetlana and Shane both looking in at him.

One day soon he would very much like the stupid pills he was on to stop giving him the bad effects and start giving him for real the good effects. Svetlana had tears on her face, and it made him cry in response, and it was just silly. Sitting on the bathroom floor, fully dressed, wrapped in a bath towel and a Svetlana.

Shane stepped away, out of view, but Ilya could hear him speaking, probably to Yuna. "Tell dad we won't need the screw drivers. It's okay."

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He had therapy again, it hadn't even been a week since his first session, and he had thought they were a sort of weekly, or monthly kind of thing. Yuna drove him this time. He had managed not to call anyone a traitor. Had not managed to get into the car without his emotional support Shane Hollander. Svetlana was threatening to order him a stuffed toy Shane Hollander, which was a stupid threat because; a. he had the real Shane Hollander right here, and, b. don't threaten him with a good time. He still thought there was a good chance she would order him one, have it arrive while she was in Moscow so he couldn't roll his eyes at her. It'd probably be secretly one of those creepy nanny cam things, so she could keep an eye on him.

They were going in the evening this time, so the clinic didn't have to close especially for him, his therapist agreeing to stay a little later. He didn't know what strings Yuna was pulling, but he thought she would probably do well in some sort of mafia if she wanted to switch careers.

His therapist had two plaits this time, one over either shoulder, and she said that yes, Shane could come in, and Ilya could of course ask him to leave whenever he wanted.

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Svetlana left, and he hugged her goodbye, and promised he would not kill himself while she was in Moscow, and that he would be alive when she came back, and yes, no loopholes, would not even attempt anything, would be sober and hale and healthy the next time they saw each other. He had told his therapist about this promise he had made to Svetlana and Shane from the bathroom floor, and she had shrugged and said it was a start. That if you can't find one big thing to stay alive for in general, little things for a little while would do for now.

He cried the moment her car had left, and he felt like a stupid child, and like he couldn't believe how much salt was in his body, and he and Yuna sat around the back of his house while he smoked a cigarette and she showed him photos of baby Shane Hollander, hockey player.

-

He texted Marly and Connors and Vic back. They had all sent him several messages with multiple exclamation and question marks, and the emojis that looked like they were having their head explode. Wanting to know about what he was doing with Hollander, and a charity, really? You went to get ice cream and Molly's without me??? And was there any proof in the rumour that he was cucking Shane Hollander's dad? He replied that he and Shane were hanging out, and yes a charity, Molly's ice cream is for everyone, and wouldn't they fucking like to know.

He knew Shane was fielding several confused messages from his friends and teammates as well, but Shane hadn't brought it up. Had only mentioned it in reply to Yuna asking about it. Yuna was the one talking to the league for both of them, responding to requests for

comments, interviews, etc. Ilya had tried to say he would pay her for all her work, and she had frowned at him until David had put his arm around her shoulders and led her out of the room. When she came back in she told him she didn't want him to pay her anything because she didn't have a contract with him, but if he wanted a contract, then once he was feeling more settled on his medication, and with himself, they could talk about it. David made them soup that night.

He invited Marly over, the day after his third therapy appointment. Had been encouraged to reach out to more people. To widen his support system. That support systems couldn't work properly if the system didn't know what they were meant to be supporting. He was sure Yuna and his therapist must be working in cahoots. In other news, he liked the word cahoots. David had used it about him and Ilya in regards to doing a jigsaw puzzle together, the way they were both bent over the table, heads down. Like they were in cahoots. Good word.

Yuna and David went out for the day, said they had plenty of things they liked about Boston, even if they absolutely hated the hockey team, save for one particular captain. They thought it might be more comfortable for Ilya and also Shane to have Marly over without it looking like they were under supervision.

It was a good idea, because even if Marly didn't really believe the cucking rumours, he might start to if he saw Yuna call Ilya honey, or cup his cheek.

Marly turned up with a six pack, a grin, and a ready rolled joint. He was lucky Shane didn't just shut the door in his face. Usually Ilya would be pleased with all three of these things, but he already didn't trust his brain and his body to deal with normal food and emotions while on his new medication, and he was absolutely not going to trust it on beer or weed.

Shane didn't say anything until after he had received a fist bump and a bro slap hug, and Ilya had received a hug with less slap and bro, and then he had bitten his lip, squared his shoulders, and said; "Put the beer and weed back in your car, come back in, and sit down. We're having coffee and talking."

Marly blinked, looked slow from Shane to Ilya to Shane again, and when Ilya didn't say anything, laughed one bark of a laugh. "Okay, sure," he said. "Wow. I see who's going to be running this charity."

For now at least, probably Yuna, so actually Marly did not see.

"Sorry," Shane said, while Marly did as he was told. "I know I shouldn't've -"

"I like it when you do," Ilya said.

Didn't look at Shane, because then he might have emotions about it. About Shane speaking up on his behalf even when it came off as rude, or weird. About Shane caring, and acting on that care.

Marly came back in. They all went to the kitchen, sat around the counter. Shane poured the coffees. David had made cookies, and Ilya had put some on a plate. He felt a little bit like he was in a picture book his mama had read him. Something simple and a little old fashioned,

about hosting a guest for tea. Of course, they were having coffee and macadamia chocolate chunk cookies, not delicate cups of strong brewed tea and pastries, but still. Hosting.

"Okay," Marly said, half the biscuit in his mouth still being actively swallowed. "I thought it was weird you guys were suddenly hanging out before, but now I am officially weirded out-er. Why do I feel like I've been called to the principals office? Or, actually, nah it's more like, why do I feel like my next door neighbours have asked me over to see if I want to have a threesome with them?"

Shane sipped his coffee, glanced at Ilya. Probably yes Ilya should start. Should talk. Should explain. It wasn't fair to introduce having Shane in his life to his friends by having Shane explain how Ilya had tried to kill himself, not for every friend at least. Probably only for Svetlana. Hopefully.

"Shane and I have been friends since before rookies," Ilya said, just to get that bit out of the way. "Is weird right now because I am weird right now. If Shane was principal I do not think you would be getting coffee and nice cookies, and if this was threesome invitation, again, I do not think these are the snacks I would put out for it."

Shane choked, just slightly, on his coffee, but otherwise didn't intervene, so Ilya reached over the counter to pat his hand.

"Uh," Marly said, "okay, so like, now I'm curious, what snacks would you put out for a threesome invite?"

Ilya ran his thumb over Shane's knuckles, remembered that was a non normal thing for Ilya Rozanov to do, and pulled his hand back, too late for Marly to have not seen it, judging by his eyebrows.

"Actually," Marly said, before Ilya could try and distract him with some outrageous lie about sour candy spiders being the perfect threesome snack. "Since before rookies? That's before I even knew you, bro."

"Yeah," Ilya said. "Yes. We were, ah, lock keyed."

Marly stared at him.

"Low key," Shane suggested. His cheeks were pink, but otherwise he still looked calm and collected.

"Yes, this," Ilya nodded. Resisted the urge to reach out again. "Because of uh, so much noise about rivalry."

"Right," Marly said. "Okay. What's going on, Roz, you're acting fucking weird in a... a weird way. Hollander too, no offence, man."

The problem with explaining himself was that he would have to explain himself. A little. Shane had been there for it. He had told his parents, and Svetlana. Svetlana already knew so many of his secrets and ways he was fucked up. And sure, Marly knew some of them, knew

Ilya had problems, but not like this. With the doctors and the therapist, they were all coming in knowing already that Ilya had tried to kill himself, so, hard part done. Where was he supposed to start? With his mama? With the fact that he was going to cry at some point? With when he decided he would give himself the season to make up his mind? When he made up his mind? How he didn't know yet how to fully unmake it?

"I did not get food poisoning in Vegas," he said. "A little, ah, alcohol poisoning, but this was not main problem, so." he paused, because the main problem was, well, the main problem.

Marly was frowning at him, "brother, what?" he asked, glanced somewhat suspiciously at Shane, "is this like, I dunno, are you kidnapped right now? Am I being kidnapped right now?"

"No, what?" Ilya groaned, rubbed his hand over his face. "Marly, fuck. Fuck. Listen. I needed - I needed help. Shane gave to me. His parents also gave to me."

Marly was still frowning, still looking confused, and the near omnipresent prick of tears had begun behind Ilya's eyeballs. Opposite of fantastic.

"Help?" Marly asked, "Is this about, like, drugs, man? Or did you get in deep at a casino?"

"I wanted to go on good note," Ilya snapped, "there was going to be no better night than award after winning cup. Best player, best team. What next? I lose again, I am not enough again. So I leave first, yes? Before world forgets how good I was. Before they see I am - am just this. I was leaving you my green car, in my will. Sveta would have let you have my TV too, probably. I would be gone, already, except I had been bitch to Shane and he came to tell me off, and then would not let me leave. Die. He was, ah, very against it."

He waited a moment as Marly stared open mouthed at him. How many concussions was he up to now? Had this been too much all at once. He was being mean, but he felt like he needed to be a little mean right now to counteract the stupid stinging tears dripping down his face. He was probably going to get some permanent damage on his cheeks, salt water erosion. This time Shane reached over the counter, and Ilya gripped on tightly.

"Okay, uh," Marly said, sounding suddenly congested, he blinked hard. "You've gotta, gotta let me know if I have this wrong. Roz. You tried to off yourself?"

"Yes," Ilya said. Swiped impatiently at his cheeks.

"Oh," Marly said. Another hard blink. "Fuck, Jesus," he added, one hand coming up to press over his eyes, stayed there. "Ilya. I had no fucking idea."

"I did not want you to have an idea," Ilya said, as clear as he could. "I worked hard to keep to myself."

"You put me in your will?" Marly sniffed, dropped his hand from his face, eyes wet, brow furrowed. "Fuck. Bro. Come here, fuck."

Ilya leaned in, keeping his grip on Shane in case Marly accidentally yanked him off his stool. Marly usually hugged huge and tight, a yank in kind of thing. This time he leaned in, and yes, hugged huge and tight, but no yanking. One hand coming momentarily to cup the back of Ilya's head, and then just wrapping around him, standing up to fully avoid yanking Ilya off balance, and to tighten the hug. Ilya grabbed back at him, one handed because even when Shane loosened his grip on his hand, Ilya didn't.

"Is fine, Marly," he tried, after Marly had been holding on for much longer than they ever hugged for. He patted Marly's back, once, twice. Perhaps crying was catching, like yawning. "I did not end up killing myself, yes? I am still here, I am sorry you will not be getting pretty green car yet."

"Oh fuck you, you asshole," Marly gritted out, still didn't let go. "This was - you said the awards - it's been over a week, Roz! I would have been here," he pulled back, his hands on Ilya's shoulders, his face a wet, pink mess. "I would have fucking flown to Vegas."

"I know," Ilya sniffed.

Shane pushed a box of tissues that someone - Ilya suspected David or Yuna - had surreptitiously left on the counter, over towards Marly. Marly glanced at them, then grabbed a couple, scrunching them against his face, and then looked at Shane again.

"You've been with him this whole time?" He asked Shane, "you and your parents? Just - you all just dropped everything?"

"Yes," Shane said. "I wasn't going to leave him, Marlow. Of course I stayed."

"And your parents? They -"

"Came for me, stayed for him," Shane cut in.

"So, wait," Marly shook his head, still looked absolutely lost, like he'd gone on a bender and ended up somewhere with signs in a language he didn't understand. "The charity? Is that fake?"

"It won't be," Ilya said. "It was cover, for being papped on our way here, but we will actually start it. This way, ah, we have more excuse. To be seen together."

Now Marly for real looked at their hands. At the way Ilya was clutching to Shane, Shane to Ilya. He didn't seem to process it very quickly, which was probably fair, seeing as Ilya had just chucked several buckets of shit at him.

Shane cleared his throat before Marly could work anything out enough to say anything, and Marly and Ilya both looked at him.

"Do you guys want to, uh, talk just the two of you?" Shane asked, looking only at Ilya. "I can give you some space?"

Ilya thought that the counter between them was already enough space, but, he probably should speak to Marly one on one. Now the hard part was done and he hadn't chickened out,

and Marly hadn't freaked out too badly.

"Yes?" Ilya tried, looking to Marly. Marly nodded. "Da, Shanya. Spasibo."

Shane squeezed his hand, and then pulled away, which was a big downside to this. Circled the counter, his hand coming back to briefly brush over Ilya's back.

"Thanks for coming, Marlow," he said, "sorry I was so...strict at the door. I'm just gonna be in the bedroom, Ilya," he added, looking from Marly to Ilya, "yell or whatever if want me. I, uh, promised Hayd I'd call him today."

He left the room, both Ilya and Marly staring after him.

Marly waited until the sound of footsteps on the stairs had faded, and then turned to look at Ilya, face still blotchy, but less fully distressed and confused.

"Fuck," he said, "I brought beer and weed. How did you - fuck I shouldn't ask that, right?"

Ilya shrugged. "Pills and vodka," he answered, twitched his nose. "Probably beer and weed would be maybe fine if I was not on medication. And if I did not care about worrying Shane."

Marly blinked at him, then blew a gust of breath out of pursed lips. "Fuck," he said again. "I just keep - seriously - I don't know what to say."

"I also did not know what to say," Ilya said, "this is why I did not message or call you back for a while."

"Yeah," Marly nodded, rubbed his hand over his face hard. "I guess it's kind of a hard thing to like, cold call someone about."

"Yes, I made Shane do it for telling Svetlana," Ilya admitted, "I was too scared."

"Where is she?" Marly asked, swivelling his head around suddenly as if he expected Sveta to pop up from behind the toaster.

"Left the other day, for Moscow," Ilya said, "you have again missed your chance to seduce her."

Marly laughed, and then he made a weird noise somewhere between a laugh and a gasp, and clapped his hand over his mouth. Screwed his eyes up and shook his head. Took a few deep breaths. "So she - she trusts Hollander with you?"

Ilya wanted to laugh at that. So backwards to the question people should be asking. "Yes," he said instead of laughing. "She does. I do. Also, ah, his parents? Very impressive."

"Impressive how?" Marly asked, sounded a little wary, "bro, if you tell me right now that you really are sleeping with Hollander's mum, I honestly don't know if I'm gonna cope."

"No, this is stupid idea. Yuna and David are very happy with each other and also I think she would probably rather never watch hockey ever again than give me kiss on mouth. No. Yuna

is - she gets things done. She is being my agent and my PR, because I maybe fired my agent before Vegas. She is being very nice to me. David is making a lot of food that is very nice to eat, and teaching me best ways to do puzzles, and he is, um," Ilya paused to clear his throat, and then let the rest out in a voice that came out much smaller than he intended. "He is very good papa."

More tears. Well. At least Marly was crying as well.

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Just Yuna and Ilya drove out to his next doctor appointment. Ilya was practicing what his therapist was calling *weaning the crutch*, and he called cruelty and also mean, and was going places without Shane. Still not alone, because no one trusted him enough yet for *that*, but without Shane's hand to hold. He kind of wished Sveta had already followed through on her threat and sent him a Shane toy or something.

He wasn't feeling nauseous taking the medicine anymore, but he was still crying a lot. Maybe less than he had in the first week, but still more than he wanted to be. He also still felt like being dead might solve things a lot quicker than taking his pills every day for the next who knows how long, and he had been taking them for two weeks now, so obviously they weren't working. His doctor disagreed with him, and let him know that anti-depressants were not a miracle cure, and could take some time to work as effectively as desired, but they could try upping the dose a little, and then in a couple more weeks if he didn't feel any better, they could up the dose again, or maybe talk about trying a different one. Annoying.

Yuna didn't take him out for ice cream like David had, instead she drove them to the little cafe/bakery Ilya frequented with Svetlana, something Svetlana must have told Yuna, and they went in and she told him to order whatever sounded good, for the both of them. So he told her what he knew about the various Russian pastries, cakes, and breads, and he ordered a smattering of his favourites, and also a take away specifically for Shane because he thought Shane would like it, so long as Ilya ate it with him.

They sat together at one of the small tables that were not built for hockey players, so he always sat with both legs out to one side and Svetlana called side saddle, leaning against the wall.

They had been talking about hockey, and then about which hockey pundits were the most annoying, and then about that ad shoot Shane had done last Summer where he looked so good, when Yuna brought it up.

She put down her mug, dabbed her mouth with her napkin, and said; "Tell me to stop if I'm overstepping."

Ilya waited to see how big the step was going to be. Because so far, Yuna Hollander had come into his life and taken several very large steps, and he had greatly appreciated all of them. He nodded at her.

"I know you care about Shane," she said, and his stomach lurched. "And I know he cares about you," she continued, which made his stomach lurch again.

She paused, giving him this moment to tell her to stop. He felt like maybe he would throw up if he opened his mouth, because. Because he had only just convinced himself that Shane's parents didn't think he was only a fuck up, not good enough for Shane, not good for Shane. That they were, maybe not ecstatic, but happy enough with their son settling for Ilya, because at least Ilya was very good at hockey, and getting better at doing puzzles.

"And I know this is a very hard, and confusing time for you," Yuna carried on when Ilya didn't tell her to stop. "A lot of shit, and emotions, so I can understand not wanting to rush into things, or make promises you don't know if you can keep. I know it's difficult, honey, I don't want you to think I'm mad at you about this, because I'm not. I'm just... wondering if you and Shane have said what you are to each other?"

Ilya blinked at her. He felt like he had gotten on an upsetting rollercoaster, and then been asked to solve a riddle mid way.

"What?" he asked, "What did Shane say?"

"It's more what he won't say," Yuna said, took a delicate bite from the last pastry, and then put it on Ilya's plate for him to finish. "I don't think he feels he can ... ask you."

Ilya felt his lip wobble, so he bit it, and then thought very seriously about the video he liked the best of the big floppy dog and the teeny tiny kitten. Vanquished the wobble. Nodded. "Oh," he said, voice much smaller than him.

Yuna smiled very softly at him, "oh," she agreed. "Just something to...think about," she added. "Not to worry about, because I know he's staying with you until you ask him to leave, or until hockey starts back up, maybe. It just might help make the both of you feel, hm, safer."

"Okay," he said, "I will. I do want. For him to feel safe. With me." He paused to glare at his plate, a tactic that worked almost as well as picturing the dog and kitten at keeping the tears at bay. "Is just. Yuna."

He had to pause to re-up his glaring, and also to add thoughts of the animals. Yuna took his hand. If anyone papped them now, the media would have another field/cuck day. He took a deep breath.

"You were with me at doctor," Ilya said, nearly a whisper. "You know I am not even safe for me right now. I do not know how he could feel...safe. Is like, all eggs in one nest?"

She shrugged a little at him, squeezed his hand. It was a comforting hand to hold, but no Shane. "All your eggs in one basket," she said, and then, "Shane wouldn't be doing that. He has eggs in other baskets. Me and his dad. Hayden and Jackie, their girls. JJ. His team. He has a lot of eggs in your basket, yes, but not all of them."

"I think maybe we are taking eggs too far," Ilya said, "I am stressed thinking about how delicate and many they are."

Ushi arrived via express shipping, wrapped in a shawl Ilya vaguely recognised and very much had missed. It smelled in a very particular way that he couldn't quite place. It reminded him of helping his mama with chores. He had to sign for it at the door, Svetlana had gone all out in getting it there in speed and safety. He called her with the box open in front of him on the floor, Ushi still wrapped in the shawl in Ilya's hand.

"I thought he was gone," Ilya said, when she picked up. "Thrown out. Is this my Ushi?"

"He was in storage with old jumpers and shawls. Your mama must have stored him there for safe keeping, and no one has bothered with unpacking musty boxes with moth balls."

Ah, moth balls. He had tried to eat one once. Not good.

"If no one was looking, how did you find it?" Ilya demanded, "You snuck into the house and just started looking on a whim?"

Svetlana laughed. She had snuck into his house many times, though it was more often Ilya sneaking out.

"I was looking for some things of your mama's," she said. "I told Alexei and Ana my mama gave me silly task to try and find a shawl she loaned to your mama, and I said I knew it was a long shot, but could I look in the attic? Raisa helped me."

Ilya looked at the shawl in his hand and frowned. *"This is your mama's shawl?"*

"Keep up, Ilyushka, there was no shawl for my mama. It was a very clever lie, stupid. That is your mama's shawl, she wrapped Ushi in it. Put him to bed all cosy with the woollens."

She had probably given Ushi a kiss on his silly little face, too, the way she always had when she was saying goodnight to Ilya. She would kiss Ilya's silly little face, and then Ushi's. Tuck the blanket up around their ears.

"Thank you, Svetochka," he said, throat raw. "Tell Raisa thank you too. How is she?"

"She is good. I gave her the books you gave me for her. She likes them very much. She says she misses her uncle Ilya, and will you call her to read her books to her."

"I will do this," Ilya promised, cleared his throat. "Did you say I miss her too?"

"Yes, of course. I said her uncle Ilya was so sorry to be throwing up and not here stealing her to pack into his suitcase and take to America to train her up as a hockey player, and she thought it was very funny. I think she will want to talk to you about skating when you call."

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"Svetlana said you reminded her of Ushi," Ilya told Shane, after he had shown all the Hollanders Ushi, and then they had streamed Cheburashka videos for education, and Yuna had examined the shawl and said it was still in good condition, and then they all made it through another day to bedtime, and Ilya had gotten into bed right into Shane's arms and found Ushi sitting there in the bed as well.

Shane hummed, readjusted his arms around Ilya so he could take Ushi from Ilya's hand, held him up so they could both see him. "Because of the eyes?" He guessed.

"No," Ilya snorted, and then reconsidered. "Maybe a little. But no. Because of how I am so clingy of you. I was like this with Ushi. She would tease me so much when we were little. I took Ushi with me everywhere."

Shane huffed in amusement, the breath right against Ilya's ear. "It's in really good condition for a toy you took everywhere," he said, "I mean, obviously like, um, well loved. But all in one piece, and clean."

"Mama took good care of him for me," Ilya said, turned his head so he could nuzzle at Shane's neck slightly, and Shane brought his hand and Ushi down, tucking Ushi in between them before wrapping his arm back around Ilya. "Would give him careful wash and dry when I dirtied him. Showed me how to sew up little tears. She did for me until I could make my stitches tight enough. I only did one mending."

"It sounds like she loved Ushi as much as you did," Shane said, and then, holding Ilya tighter, "and that she loved her Ilyushenka so much."

It had been easier, in the last few days, to feel normal-ish feelings again. There was less of the constant rush of grief and anger in the background of all of his thoughts. He had worried, very vaguely, when he first started taking the anti-depressants, that he would just lose the ability to feel anything, because that was what he had heard about taking them. That they made you flat and emotionless. They had dampened his more intense feelings, at first, and by dampened, he meant that they had been both less intense and more wet with tears. His therapist had told him that it was normal to feel flat at the beginning, because his brain was getting used to a new chemical balance. Because when his brain wasn't entirely taken up with feelings of worthlessness, and despair, it had trouble remembering how to handle all the other feelings.

He had thought his brain was getting its grip back, a bit. Could manage to hold amusement, and affection. Gratitude and guilt were easy ones. Hope and love had been the hardest. To have hope for anything felt too much like making a longer term promise than he thought he could keep. To think about love in anyway other than the casual way he could say it to Sveta because they had been saying and doing it for their whole lives, was immense and heavy, and tripped the wires in his brain that pulled out the tears again. Instant reaction to any feeling too big for his stupid brain still trying to pull itself together. He imagined it a little like he had simply let it lie around all season and it had gotten weak and lazy, and now he was putting it through conditioning, and training, and every so often he added too much weight and failed.

Shane always held him tight when Ilya cried, kissed his forehead, rocked them slightly. Ilya's face was smushed against Shane's, so his words came out a little smushed as well. "She would have loved you," he said. "My mama."

Shane pulled their faces apart slightly, his eyes fixing on Ilya's, "yeah?"

"Yes," Ilya sniffed. "Like I love you."

"Holy shit," Shane said, his face frozen.

Ilya's brain was still on board with feeling fear, and it worked in tandem with his guts to begin filling his body with a cold, tingling dread, his mouth opening again, trying to think what he could say here to smooth it over. Like a son. Love you like a son. Love you like a soft toy. I love you.

"I mean -" he began.

"I love you too," Shane cut in.

"Fuck," Ilya exhaled, "fuck, Shane," he groaned, pressed back in against Shane's neck, clutching to him tightly.

Shane had one hand in Ilya's hair, tight, possessive. Was kissing Ilya's cheek.

Ilya remembered Yuna's words from the bakery, and buried his face in harder against Shane's, like he could burrow into him.

"Different," Ilya rasped out. "I do not mean as - like with Sveta. I mean it as - ah - lovers."

Shane made an odd sort of noise, and then was using his grip on Ilya's hair to pull them apart again, so they could look at each other, and Ilya tried immediately to drop in closer so he could kiss Shane properly. Couldn't believe how long it had been since they had kissed. A real kiss. In the bathroom at the Vegas awards. So stupid. Why hadn't they kissed? All this time? Wrapped up in Shane's arms, holding his hand, keeping Shane so close. Shane forestalled him from kissing now, as well.

"Wait," Shane breathed, his hand coming to rest on Ilya's face, fingers on his cheek, thumb over his chin. "Just - Ilya - I don't know if this is a - a good idea -"

Right. Yes. Ilya had forgotten that his risk assessment part of his brain was still not working properly. Was still on the fence on what was really risky, because what did consequences really matter when you could be dead? He was working on it. But there would be consequences, and not just for Ilya. For Shane. And they couldn't be erased by being dead, because he didn't want Shane to be dead, and also if he was dead, then he wouldn't get to be held by Shane, and confused by Shane. The league. Hockey. Russia. All those things.

"You're still - still - it's only been a few weeks," Shane continued, voice low. "And I - I read a lot about how you're not supposed to make, like, big life decisions, or even, um, get a partner, for a while after something like this - a suicide attempt - because - I don't remember exactly what the article said. Just that it isn't the best idea for recovery, um, and I don't want to make this harder for you with how I feel, especially if you change your mind about - about -"

Ilya did not know what articles Shane had been reading, but he would like to have a few words with the authors.

"Ah, wait," he said, had to move back a little so he could think better. Ushi slid into the crook of Shane's shoulder. "Not a good idea because - because you think maybe I do not know how

I am feeling? Not about hockey?"

Shane made a scrunched up sort of expression. His hand was still on Ilya's face. "Not exactly," he said. "More like, like. How you can see like, a collision on ice and be sure it's a clean hit, and willing to fight over it being a clean hit, but then you see, um, video from the other side and see it was dirty."

"You think I will see game tape of you and realise you are dirty? I already know you are dirty, Shane."

"Shut up," Shane said, weak. His thumb was rubbing under Ilya's lower lip. "I just don't want to - to trap you. Or make you feel. Indebted."

"This is why you have not been kissing me for whole time?" Ilya asked, eyebrows raised. "Because you think, somehow, maybe, I would not like?"

"Yes," Shane closed his eyes briefly, looked away when he opened them again. "And you didn't kiss me either. I was following your lead on how you wanted to be... comforted."

Ilya had wanted whatever comfort Shane was willing to give to him. It was true he hadn't pushed for more than what amounted to some intimate cuddling. His libido had been weird before he tried to kill himself, flagging and then raging back to life along with the dips and highs of his mood. And since he started the meds, his brain hadn't been the only flattened thing. The internet said that was normal. To give it some time to balance out, and then if he was still worried, to talk to his doctor about it. He wasn't worried yet.

"Shanya," Ilya said. "I did not talk to you for so many months before Vegas. Not because I did not want to, but I did not think I deserved to. When we last - in Sochi I was cruel to you because I was so scared you would see me so weak. That everyone would see how much I wanted you, loved you. I could not have that. Not in Russia. Not in my brain. I did not deserve you. So I took myself away. I thought it would be easier, yes, for us both? For when I was dead, if I had not, ah, spent whole season talking to you as if I was coming back next season." He stopped here to draw in a deep breath.

Felt like he'd said a whole lot of nothing. Didn't know how to say what he wanted how he wanted.

"I lied to myself," Ilya continued, his eyes on Shane's confused expression. "At awards nights. Said to myself that seeing you one last time was like, ahh, goodbye gift for you. I could not think of how else to leave you with - with proof you were important to me. It was for me. I wanted - I wanted so badly to hold you one more time. I was selfish, trying to take as much as I could like I could take feeling of you with me. I do not know. What I am trying to say, is, this is not new feeling. Yes? Not new want. Not new love. Is it not more likely I am trapping you? Nice Canadian boy lured in by sad Russian?"

"You're a fucking idiot," Shane murmured, kissed him anyway, drew back again, "It's not new for me, either, okay? Just. I was going to ignore it, because it was safer."

"You do not want to ignore anymore?" Ilya asked, snuck another quick kiss.

Shane laughed once, breathless, unamused. "I almost fucking lost you," he said. "And I didn't, because I decided I wanted more. I came back so I could tell you I wanted a kiss, that I always wanted you to kiss me. I'm never fucking ignoring that again."

SUMMER 2015.

MONTREAL AND BOSTON HOCKEY CAPTAINS, SHANE HOLLANDER AND ILYA ROZANOV FINALLY ANNOUNCE LONG AWAITED JOINT CHARITY

THE IRINA FOUNDATION

ILYA ROZANOV - CO-FOUNDER OF THE IRINA FOUNDATION - OPENS UP ABOUT THE STIGMA SURROUNDING MENTAL HEALTH IN SPORTS, FAMILY HISTORY, AND WHY HIS FB PROFILE PICTURE IS A CHEBURASHKA WITH A PEBBLE

HOLLANDERS (AND ILYA ROZANOV) ON HOLIDAY, AN EXCLUSIVE LOOK AT SHANE HOLLANDER'S PRIVATE RETREAT, AND HOW A HOCKEY LEGEND SPENDS HIS SUMMER OFF.

(SPOILERS; HE WORKS OUT A LOT, AND ALSO, ILYA ROZANOV IS THERE TELLING US WE NEED TO GET A SHOT OF SHANE DOING YOGA BY THE LAKE, SO, THANK YOU FOR THAT, ILYA, AND VIEWERS, YOU'RE WELCOME)

LANAUDIÈRE, CANADA, SUMMER 2015. ILYA.

The week Ilya and Shane got to Shane's cottage, coming straight there from the NHL Awards, they made their next plan. Shane had won his first cup with Montreal, won MVP this year as well, and cemented himself in hockey history as a fucking amazing player who any team would be lucky to have.

Which was why both he and Shane were reasonably certain they could find a team who would be willing to take both of them, under the proviso that they would be coming out as a couple at their first cup win on said new team.

It was a gamble, yes, and Ilya was pretty sure his and Shane's risk assessment capabilities had both been thrown out of wack from the previous Summer, but they weren't the only ones who thought they could pull it off.

It was a little difficult making their plan surrounding an as of yet unknown team, but they did their best anyway. Shane writing it down on his laptop, the both of them wrapped around each other on the couch in front of the big windows, from which you could see the well Shane was so proud of.

Step one was always the same step for every plan they made together. Ilya knew Shane liked to write it, liked to see it sitting there in plain text. Ilya liked it too. He didn't need the reminder so much now, but it still helped.

Step one was to stay alive.

Their first *step one stay alive* had had to have the amendment *at least until the end of this plan* for Ilya to commit to it, and Shane had tacked it on to the second plan's step one as well, but not since then. Not since Ilya, his therapist, and his doctor had finally worked out the winning combination of medication and talking, and Ilya had stopped counting down days in the calendar like funeral bells tolling. Not since he'd called Shane, and after they'd talked each other through orgasms, and were pink faced, still breathing hard, and Ilya had said he was looking forward to next Summer. Looking forward to their next plan. Looking forward to one day in the future getting to be on the same team with Shane. And Shane had repeated *one day in the future?* and Ilya had nodded and said yes, in the future, where we will both be, together, yes?



Chapter End Notes

Cheburashka!!

Thank you all for your encouragement and lovely comments! I had a bit of trouble deciding how I wanted to finish this story, mostly because I wanted to land somewhere happy and hopeful, but still... realistic-ish, in the way that depression lingers, and comes back, like a web of mycelium lurking underground. So, open ended, happy, on their way to happier. I hope you enjoyed it! Thank you for reading! I love you, I'm proud of you!

-

My wife and I were talking about depression and suicide attempts recently, and I tried to explain the way the idea of killing myself feels to me, and I'm going to try and recreate my explanation here, even though I just spent over 40k words talking about it haha.

Once you've opened the door - tried, or thought seriously about killing yourself -you always know the door is still there, and can be opened, and even when you know you want to live, have things to live for, want to see the world and yourself become better, the door is always a temptation. Sometimes you find yourself very happily heading towards something, and then you catch a glimpse of the door and just want to have a peek through it, like a guilty pleasure, and you know you don't want to step through, but... just a glimpse wouldn't hurt? And you have to keep making the choice, over and over again, to turn away from the door.

End Notes

The attempt is made with pills and alcohol. This is not shown. The aftermath is, though in vague terms. Suicide, and the attempt are referenced very bluntly, multiple times.

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