

surfacing

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Summary

Shane did know it was probably not the *smartest* idea he had ever had, but, well. He was learning that maybe the smartest thing was not always the best one. At least, he was beginning to learn it.

"You're sure?" Ilya asked him again, for the millionth time.

"Yes. Ilya. Of course."

Notes

I opened this document today. Blacked out. Wrote the whole thing before lunch. These guys have taken over my brain and I am not responsible for my actions. Anyway, thank you to my friends for being so sweetly encouraging and to my wife, brooklinegirl, who read and beta'ed this TODAY (and talked me through some stuff as dinner was cooking). (And she had to WORK!! HERO.)

Note: I have ONLY seen the show, not read the books, so this is all TV-world.

Fic takes place the December after The Cottage.

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

Shane did know it was probably not the *smartest* idea he had ever had, but, well. He was learning that maybe the smartest thing was not always the best one. At least, he was beginning to learn it.

"You're sure?" Ilya asked him again, for the millionth time.

"Yes. Ilya. Of course." Shane took Ilya's hands in his own. They'd had this conversation a million times already. At first, Shane had thought that Ilya was worried for himself—after all, he had as much to lose as Shane. More, actually. He had a country to lose, not just a career. But Ilya had already assured him that he was ready. His country wouldn't want him as he was, and he had nothing left there, anyway, he said. Ilya had done what he could for his family. It was time, he told Shane, eyelashes lowered and jaw set, to start doing things for himself.

And that included, as it turned out, giving Shane what he wanted.

Which was this.

Ilya gave him a soft kiss, a softer smile, and a squeeze to his hands before stepping back and making a show of looking around the dressed-up cottage. "Looks good. You Canadians really love Christmas, ah?"

Shane smiled and went to fix a candle where it was off-center on its shelf. "You never celebrated it?"

Ilya shrugged. "Some people did, but my family had New Year's." Shane did know this already. Ilya had told him matter-of-factly that the last time his family had a New Year's tree was the year before his mother died. His father's new wife Polina, the one who entered Ilya and his brother's lives much too soon for their grief, never bothered. His father, Ilya had added, had never cared about such celebrations.

Shane was determined to give Ilya the best Christmas celebration he could. (Well, second celebration. It was December 27th, and they had already done their little celebration with Shane's parents. This was...this was something else.)

But they had decorated the tree together, classic Christmas songs playing in the background. Shane had hung all the garlands around the place, Ilya had plugged them in. The look on his face had made Shane kiss him again and again: his cheeks, his lips, his soft eyelids.

Now, the house was ready for their guests.

"So. What's the plan?" Ilya asked, straightening out the hem of the hideous Christmas sweater Shane's mom had given him as a gift. "Do I hide in the bedroom until the big, uh...reveal? Jump out of a box?"

Shane laughed, then nudged him with a shoulder. "Whatever you want. This is for us, right?"

The doorbell rang. Shane jumped and turned towards the door. He suddenly hoped it was his parents. His heart pounding tenfold in his chest, he went to get the door. Behind him he felt Ilya melt into the background. They should have gotten their drinks ready. They would need them.

He opened the door.

"Sweetheart!"

Oh, thank God, it was his parents. He didn't think he'd ever been more grateful to them, and there had been a *lot* to be grateful for over the years.

"Mom, dad. Come in, come in!"

Snow was coming down onto their hair and swirling prettily indoors as they made their way inside, his mom thrusting a bottle of Prosecco at him and his dad handing over a tray of whatever it was his mom had decided to make for the party.

Shane accepted the tray, and then Ilya was at his elbow, grabbing the bottle. "Hello," he said, still vaguely formal after all these months. "Please, come in."

Shane's mom straightened up after shucking off her snowboots and opened her arms, smiling. "Ilya!"

It was still weird for his mom to be so loving with Shane's archrival boyfriend. He watched as Ilya's stiff posture melted a bit into the hug and then turned away to bring the tray over to the counter with the rest of the food. He heard his dad and Ilya greeting each other as he revealed what was beneath the tinfoil: some sort of dark bread with...was that anchovies on some kind of a spread? What *was* this? He'd never seen it before.

"Mom?" Shane asked just as she made her way over to him. "What's this?"

"I made a Russian snack!" she told him proudly, then turned to Ilya, who was peering curiously into the tray. "I went to a Russian grocery store and asked around! Ilya, what do you think? Good?"

"But what *is* it?" Shane asked, side-eyeing the spread with some trepidation.

"It's sprats," Ilya told him, his mom making a noise of agreement. "Shpraty, in Russian."

When Shane looked at Ilya, he was looking at the tray with a bemused expression, a softness around his eyes. "Is that a sort of fish?" Shane asked.

"Mmhmm." Ilya nodded, then turned to Yuna. "It looks...wonderful. Perfect."

Yuna gave him a smile and a pat on his cheek. "I did my best. And you," she said to Shane, "try it! It's delicious. Salty and earthy. I'm sure—"

That was when the doorbell went again. Shane met Ilya's gaze and nodded.

Here we go.

He left Ilya standing with his parents and made his way to the door. He took a deep breath. Closed his eyes for a second. Breathed out. And opened the door.

"Hiiiiii!" Rose was already opening her arms, the snow swirling around her. She was holding an expensive-looking bottle with a bow tied around it and bringing Shane for a hug before he could process anything else.

"Rose," he mumbled against her shoulder, the scent of her perfume enveloping him in memories. It once made him nervous, but now it brought a comfort of being known. Not fully known. But known. "So glad you could make it."

"Are you kidding me?" She pulled back and beamed at him. She really was so very beautiful. "I wouldn't have missed it for the world!"

He stepped back to allow her to finally come in and closed the door.

"Oh my God, are those your parents? At least I'm not the first one here!" she babbled, shucking off her shoes. "Okay to be in socks?"

"Of course," he mumbled, feeling flustered, then looked up just as she clocked Ilya standing by the kitchen, looking supremely uncomfortable. "Oh my God, Ilya Rozanov?!" She whirled on Shane. "You guys are *friends*?!"

Shane could feel his parents exchanging a look, then pulled on his big-boy pants and said, "Actually, we're, uh—"

Immediately, she gasped and brought her hands to her mouth, looking between them. She mumbled something that sounded like *oh my God*, then dropped her hands, her mouth still open. "No! Do you mean—?"

Ilya finally cracked up, sideways smile coming out, and came forward, extending a hand to her. "I'm Shane's boyfriend," he said, and Rose literally squealed. Ilya's hand was batted away as she enveloped him in a giant hug. He met Shane's gaze with a slightly panicked look, mouthed, "What the fuck?!" and then shut his eyes, hugging her back. Shane watched until the hug extended a little *too* long, at which point he rolled his eyes, walked up to them, and said, "Please let go of my boyfriend."

Ilya and Rose both laughed, her giggle high, and separated. "What, I can't hug the second hottest hockey player alive today?" she asked.

"Second!"

Shane cracked up and took Ilya's hand. "She's loyal to me, okay? After all, *I'm* the gay ex, not you."

"Ah, it's true," Ilya agreed, then added with a wink at Rose, "I'm also bi, so, you know. The door is, as you say, open?"

"Ilya!" That was Shane. Before he could do anything else, Ilya was grabbing him for a kiss that was pretty inappropriate in front of *anyone*, much less Shane's parents, who had been quietly observing the scene from the sidelines. Flustered, Shane pushed him away, feeling himself flushing all the way down to his toes. "You're an asshole," he mumbled half-heartedly.

"You love it," Ilya said as Rose laughed.

He did. God help him, he really, really did.

"Anyway!" Shane shook himself off. "Rose, these are my parents, Yuna and David. Guys, this is Rose."

"Yes, we recognized her," his mom said with a twinkle. "Rose, it's so nice to meet you. We've heard so much about you!"

"And some of it has probably been from Shane!" Rose said, shaking both their hands. "It's so great to meet you guys, you did a hell of a job with this guy." She pressed Shane close to herself, then turned her head and stage-whispered, "We're gonna need to *talk*." Shane flushed at everybody's laughter.

Once he got them all settled in with drinks and snacks, Shane went to take a breather. More guests were expected. Guests who had no idea at all what they were walking into.

Ilya found him, of course. He always did.

"Okay?" he asked quietly, coming up to Shane in his dark bedroom and wrapping his arms around him from behind. A soft kiss to his nape. Shane smiled.

"Yeah. Just needed a moment, and I figured Rose is safe with my parents."

Ilya huffed out a laugh, the warmth of it dissipating against Shane's neck. "She's amazing."

"Hey now—"

"Shut up, you know I love you," Ilya replied calmly. Then, a moment later, "I wouldn't do this for anybody else."

Shane swallowed and leaned back against him. "I know."

The doorbell went again and they both jumped.

"Okaaaay," Ilya intoned. "Who do you think this is?"

When Shane got back out, his mom was already opening the door to Hayden and Jacki. Warm greetings all around—his parents adored Hayden and Jacki, Shane's mom convinced that it was Hayden who kept Shane safe as he grew into his career. She probably wasn't all wrong.

"Buddy!" "Shane!" they exclaimed in tandem, and then froze, exchanging an incredibly married look. "Uh...Rozanov?" Hayden ventured, looking bewildered.

Ilya raised a hand and gave his most innocent-looking smile. "Hello, Pike!"

Jacki was exchanging a look with Shane's mother, whose expression Shane could *not* see, but *could* very well imagine.

"Yeah," Shane said slowly, his heart suddenly entirely in his throat. What the fuck had he been thinking? Rose was one thing—Rose already knew about him—but this was something else entirely. This was *Hayden*. "So uh...come in, come in. Can I get you guys a drink? What do you feel like? We've got uh...Prosecco, I think, and wine, also beer, vodka, uh...bourbon, I think, right, dad? Or is that whisky?" He was babbling. He was going to die right here, surrounded by the people he loved most in the world, while babbling.

He felt it as Ilya came up next to him and laid a warm hand over the small of his back. Shane took a deep breath. Hayden and Jacki were still staring at him—Hayden fully shocked, Jacki almost calculating.

It was now or never.

"Yeah, so, guys, meet my boyfriend," Shane said. "This is Ilya."

"Hello," Ilya said again.

There was a brief moment of silence, and then Hayden was exploding with, "What?! What about Lily?!" while Jacki was crowing, "I *knew* it!" at no one in particular.

Shane's laughter exploded out of him with no warning at all. He doubled over with it, holding onto his knees, and laughed until he could barely breathe, eyes streaming tears.

"He is...losing it," Ilya commented, while Shane's mom said tentatively, "Honey, you okay?" And Hayden was still sputtering into the chaos.

Finally, Shane got himself together enough to unbend and dry his eyes, laughter hiccupping to a standstill at last. "Yeah, yeah, sorry, I just—fuck." He took a breath. There was a lot of clearing of air that needed to be done. He looked directly at Hayden. "Lily was...Ilya. He was in my phone as Lily."

Hayden looked like he was ready to explode into a thousand pieces of indignant hockey player. Shane sighed and pulled him away from everybody else. "I'm sorry, man," he said once they were out of earshot. "I'm sorry for lying all these years." His heart was back firmly in his throat. This had been a monumentally stupid idea. Why hadn't he just—well, he hadn't.

Hayden softened, grinning, then put both hands on his shoulders. "Hey, man, don't be. This... this couldn't have been easy," he said quietly. "Jacki did wonder...but...Shane..." Shane watched him as he shook his head, looking down.

"Yeah?"

Hayden looked up. "Rozanov?!"

Shane cracked up all over again.

The next few guests arrived in a similar manner: thrilled to have been invited and made it through the snow, giving Shane a big hug, and then stopping dead at the sight of Ilya chatting amiably with Shane's father or mother or Rose Landry.

The reactions went something like:

"Your...boyfriend?! *Rozanov*?! But you hate him!" (Shane glanced over at Ilya, who gave him a wink and then took a shot of vodka.)

Or: "Oh that...does explain things, I guess... But...*Rozanov*?!" (Shane caught Ilya throwing back another shot of vodka out of the corner of his eye before their gazes met and Ilya winked. Again.)

Or: "I did wonder, to be honest, but...*Rozanov*?!?! " (Shane had been expecting it this time, and when Ilya swigged more vodka, cracked up and offered Mike a beer.)

Luckily, by this point, Shane was a couple of beers in himself and much happier for it. Coming out was becoming a little bit easier with each time, and Ilya was clearly taking things well, as well.

Shane had invited the entire team, but not everyone had been able to make it. Those who had, proved themselves to be true teammates.

Soon enough, Shane was circulating easily, restocking drinks and loading the trays of food up with more stuff from the fridge, and only occasionally ducking into his bedroom for a breather. Ilya didn't follow him every time, but somehow knew the times when he should. His read on Shane was, frankly, a little scary. But then, Shane guessed, he'd had enough practice.

And then Ilya's phone buzzed and he turned to Shane, whispering, "She's two minutes away. I'll go meet her, okay?"

Shane nodded, girding himself. He wondered how this particular meeting would go.

He turned away from the front door so it wouldn't feel like spying and got roped into a conversation with Hayden and JJ about predictions for the playoffs when Ilya cleared his throat behind him and said, "Shane, I want to introduce you."

Shane pasted on a neutral expression and turned around.

Svetlana was beautiful, but then again, he had known she would be—and he had seen pictures. She was, unsurprisingly, taller than he was, and was watching him with an expression he couldn't read. She was smiling, but her eyes felt more calculating than welcoming. But he really couldn't blame her.

"Svetlana," he said, extending a hand. "It's so nice to meet you, finally."

"You too," she said with a softer accent than Ilya. She shook his hand as strongly as any of the guys on the team could have. Finally, her smile reached her eyes and she looked almost sly. "I've been dying to meet the guy who stole Ilya's heart."

Shane's face must have had a mind of its own, because he was smiling back before he could even fully process her words. "Oh..." He ducked his head, before looking back up. "He stole mine, so really, it was only fair."

Svetlana turned to Ilya and bumped his hip with her own. "On deistvitel'no ostroumnyi, ty byl prav!"

"Ya zhe tebe govoril!" Ilya said with a smile, then turned to Shane and said, "She agrees with me that you're funny."

Shane laughed again, avoiding her amused gaze. "Well...thanks..."

"Oh no, you are *too* cute," she said, and then turned and gasped, "Is that Rose Landry?!"

Shane looked over at where Rose was being heavily flirted with by JJ. Hearing her name, she laughed and waved. "*Love* your outfit, by the way," she said, and Svetlana actually squealed.

Shane was quickly forgotten, much to his relief. Ilya pulled him aside and said, "Well? What do you think?"

Shane realized that he had been so focused on his own coming out to his own people that he had forgotten that Svetlana wasn't a potential rival: she was someone incredibly important to Ilya. "She's great," he said honestly. "I really hope we can spend more time together."

Ilya's smile was the softest thing in the world.

"Okay, okay, everyone!" Hayden announced, raising his glass. "I have a toast. I hear Russians love giving toasts, can you confirm this for us, Rozanov?" He gave Ilya a questioning glance.

"Oh, yes," Ilya answered easily. "Russians love toasts. But only the alcohol ones, none of this...toaster oven shit."

The room cracked up.

"Well, glad that this is alcohol!" Hayden said. "Anyway." With his glass still raised, Hayden found Shane's gaze and held it. "I just wanted to say that I am so grateful to have been invited tonight. When Shane first told me about this party, he was being so weird about it, I thought, what on earth could this party even be, an orgy?!"

Another smattering of laughter as Shane blushed and ducked his head. Ilya continued to be a warm presence by his side.

"But it turns out, our boy just loves a dramatic reveal!"

More laughter, Shane blushing even deeper.

"It also turns out..." Here, Hayden lowered his gaze, turning thoughtful. Shane's belly writhed with nerves. "It also turns out," Hayden continued, raising his eyes back up to meet Shane's, "that our Shane has been hiding a most terrible secret."

The room turned deadly quiet.

"Oh no, not *that*," Hayden said quickly, eyes growing big. "The gay thing's not the problem!"

Tension seeped out as quickly as it had come, in a sweep of knowing laughter.

"It just turned out that our boy had been, uh, spending time, let's say, with his biggest archrival? Right under all our noses?!"

Cheers and laughter greeted this pronouncement, with Shane's dad loudly adding, "Since the summer before their rookie season!" More laughter, of course, Shane catching the eyes of all of his teammates and feeling himself burning with embarrassment. He wished his dad hadn't just come out with it, but...well, it *was* the truth.

"Anyway, what I am trying to say very, very badly," Hayden went on, smiling easily at Shane, "is that I am so glad that he finally felt good about telling us. Good for you, my brother. It's about time."

"Hear, hear!" rang all around the room, with people clinking glasses, and then Hayden added, "Oh, but! I now owe my wife a hundred bucks, you little punk—she'd been betting on you being gay for years now!"

"What!" Shane swiveled to look at Jacki, who simply shrugged her shoulders at him. "I never bought the Lily story, sorry, babe." Shane laughed and shook his head.

Svetlana caught up with Shane a little while later. He was busy restocking the beer fridge, ducked behind the kitchen counter. She must have been waiting just for that opportunity.

"Hello," she said, crouching down next to him. "Would you like help?"

Caught off-guard, he froze with a beer in his hand, Svetlana lit up by the blue glow of the fridge. It made her look otherworldly. "Uh...I'm okay...thank you..."

She looked at him with a tilt to her head, and then she smiled. She looked a lot less intimidating that way. "Are you afraid of me, Shane Hollander? Me?"

Flustered, he sort of half-chuckled, half-snorted, but nodded. "Yeah, I, uh...I guess I am."

"Well, don't be, I'm a pussycat," she told him, looking like anything but. "I just...listen." She looked down and Shane noticed that she was fidgeting with her nails, as though *she* was the one who was nervous. "I just wanted to say...thank you."

"Thank you?" he repeated, finally shoving the beer in his hand into the fridge. "For what?"

She looked up at him with a soft smile. "For loving my Ilya. He's very important, you know."

For a moment, Shane felt like he might cry, for some reason. He couldn't explain it. Luckily, the tears didn't actually form. "Important?" he repeated, his voice cracking.

She shrugged a little. "Yes. To me. And also...as a man. As a person." She held his gaze. "He's the best guy I know. I'm glad that he has you taking care of him."

Okay, the tears were actually forming. Fuck. He was *not* going to cry right now. He *wasn't*. His throat tightening, Shane softly shut the fridge door and turned fully towards her. He wondered, for a moment, what they must have looked like, crouched on the floor of his kitchen while the party raged on without them. "I do. I do care for him." Oh, might as well. It wasn't as if she didn't already know. "I love him. So much."

She smiled at him softly. "I know."

"I will always take care of him," Shane went on, feeling like it was important to make everything between them text. "Always. As long as I live."

She reached out slowly and cupped his cheek. "I know this too. And I thank you."

Then, just as abruptly as she had come over, she stood up, leaving him unbalanced, looking up at her endless legs and amused expression. "Now, excuse me, I have to make Rose Landry my new best friend."

Shane huffed out a laugh and watched her as she walked away. Then he shook his head, decided that the beer was restocked enough, and got up. That was when Jacki found him.

"You," she said, tapping his chest with a finger. "Owe me."

"Owe you?" he asked, a little lost. "I thought Hayden owed you."

"Oh, he does," she said, rolling her eyes. "But *you* owe me for actually stopping Hayden from introducing you to every single girlfriend I have. I mean, you know. I did think about it at first, I guess..." She tilted her head and watched him with a scarily perceptive sort of gaze. "But I realized that there was no way that a boy like you was simply unlucky in love. I knew there was more to it."

Shane ducked his head. "I'm sorry for keeping it secret..."

"Babe," she said. "Of course you did. Nobody is blaming you. Trust me, okay? Of course you had to keep it secret."

He looked up and saw her looking somewhere beyond his shoulder. He followed her gaze and saw Ilya taking a glug of beer as he listened to JJ talking animatedly about something. He felt his own lips stretching into a stupid smile.

"I just can't believe *he* kept it secret," Jacki said, pulling Shane's attention back to her. "That is damn impressive."

"Well, you know...Russia," Shane said uncomfortably. It always felt weird to criticize the place that had made Ilya what he was. Ilya's home. "He can't exactly...plus, his father was still alive."

Jacki shook her head and sighed. "It sucks. Poor guy." Then she laughed unexpectedly. "Now Hayden will have to change his mind about him! Do you know how much he will *hate* that?!"

Shane smiled, shaking his head. "I know."

Another sigh from her. "Well, I just wanted to say...I'm so proud of you. Both of you. It's not my place to feel pride, I'm not your mother, but...I just want you guys to be happy. And okay. You know?"

Shane felt a wave of warmth so strong, he didn't know what to do with it. "Thanks, Jacki. You're the best."

"I know," she said with a smile and a shrug. "Now let me go rescue my husband from Rose Landry's clutches." She was off with a wink.

Shane took a deep breath, then slowly made his way to the bathroom so he could take another. It was on his way out that Rose pounced.

"Finally! I've been trying to get you alone *all night*," she said, then took his hand and dragged him off into a darkened hallway. "Now. Tell me *everything*." And before he could even open his mouth, she added, "Since the summer before your rookie season!?" She slapped him on the chest. "Hollander!"

Shane laughed, not knowing where to start. He wished they could do this alone, with no interruptions, but he had made this happen, so he had to deal with it. "Yeah, it was...it wasn't, like...love. At first."

He looked at her in the darkened space, her eyes bright and trained on him in a way that would have probably made him jizz his pants if he'd been straight. She was silently waiting for him to continue. He looked down again.

"But it sort of...was, actually. For me." He closed his eyes and swallowed. "I've loved him for so long, it's honestly hard to remember when I started, but. Yeah." He cleared his throat. "It's been a while."

"Fuck, you're so in love," she whispered, almost reverently. "I'm so jealous, you've no idea. Go on."

He huffed out a laugh. "It just took us a while to, like. Get our shit together, I guess."

"I mean, yeah," she said, "you're hockey players *and* you're boys. Honestly."

Another laugh. "Yeah. But he is...he's the best."

When he looked up at her, she was smiling at him. "I know. He is."

"Yeah?" Shane frowned. "But I thought—"

"I cornered him earlier, too," she said, nonchalant.

"You what?" Shane asked with a huff of laughter. "Why?"

"To get to know your boyfriend, of course! Duh! Plus," she added, taking a sip of her wine, "he's sooooo hot, I had to get close to him. Oh, don't worry!" she said, raising her empty hand at whatever she had seen on Shane's face. "He's so in love with you, he barely even noticed I had tits. I promise."

"I can promise *you* he did," Shane said, his mind still whirring from her words. He shook his head. "This is crazy, right?"

"Oh yeah," she responded immediately. "But in, like...the best way, right? Look at you, living out every girl's romantic dreams!"

"What?" Shane laughed.

"Dude, think about it—you meet a boy when you're, like, seventeen or whatever, and fall for him, and he *falls for you right back*? And you dance around each other for years and fall so deeply in love you don't know what to do with yourselves?! And it's a secret?! Hello! Hollywood is calling! This is prime fantasy material right here!"

"You're insane," he said, shaking his head and laughing softly.

"I'm right, is what I am," she said. "All right, well, I should let you get back to your own party. And your boyfriend, too." Shane began to nod and turn away when she grabbed his shoulder and said, "Wait, wait!" Then she leaned in close enough for him to be enveloped in her perfume once more. "Is he, like, amazing at kissing and sex and stuff?"

"Rose!" Shane felt himself flushing deeply.

"What! It's a fair question! He looks like he could fuck your soul right out of your body! In, like, the *best* way."

Shane sputtered, then looked back in case anyone was nearby and listening. Then he said, "I'm not gonna kiss and tell," but she must have been ready for him, because she immediately responded with, "I'm your best friend. You can't not fucking tell me."

Shane deflated. Honestly, it wasn't as if he could talk about this with *Hayden*. And, well. Nobody had ever asked him before. He hadn't realized how much he had wanted them to.

He looked down and said, "Yeah. He's, like...really fucking amazing. At, like. All of it, I guess."

She squealed. "I knew it!"

"Now can we get back to the party?"

She giggled behind him the whole time.

His parents left first. "Late nights are a young person's game," his mother informed him, picking invisible lint off shoulder. "See you soon, honey. You did good."

"Bye, guys. Tell me when you get home." He hugged them both, inhaling their familiar scents, and let them go.

Soon enough, Hayden and Jacki packed it up, as well—"The hotel is *much* too nice not to make the most of it," Hayden informed him, getting immediately slapped by Jacki. Then she turned to Shane and Ilya and added, "He's right, though. No kids? Sign me up!"

Shane laughed as he shut the door behind them.

One by one, the guests trickled out. Rose held onto Ilya just a little too long, then gave Shane an exaggerated wink and blew them both a kiss before disappearing. Svetlana gave him a tight hug and thumped his chest. "We should hang out, the three of us," she declared. "I need to get to know you more now that you're basically, what, a brother to me? I guess?"

"No," Ilya said, pursing his lips and shaking his head. "No, this is too weird, you take that back. I don't like it."

"Ni za chto!" she trilled before kissing him on the cheek and leaving as well.

And then, they were alone.

"We should clean up, huh?" Shane said, looking around the cottage. Someone—possibly his mom, or maybe Jacki—had gathered all the empty cans and bottles and placed them on the kitchen counter. There were still plates and napkins around every surface, though, and food to be put away.

"No," Ilya said immediately, taking his hand and towing him towards the bedroom. "We leave everything for elves, you have those, right? For Christmas?"

Shane laughed. "Ilya, the food is still out, it'll go bad!"

"Elves!" Ilya said and pulled on him again. Laughing, Shane stumbled behind him.

"Hi," Ilya said as soon as they were through the door. The kiss tasted like beer and spiced cookies. It was a great combination. Shane moaned, allowing Ilya to nudge him closer and closer to the bed.

"Ilya," he whispered. He kind of wanted to ask him how he felt things went, but his head was still in a whirl, and also Ilya was kissing him, which meant he couldn't even really think at all. So he gave up.

Ilya stripped them in short order, clever fingers undoing their zippers, raising up their sweaters, tossing every article of clothing across the room until they were down to their

socks, and then those went, as well.

Ilya dumped Shane onto the bed, climbed in after him, and flipped him over onto his stomach.

His tongue was like warm velvet against Shane's asshole at the very first lick. "Oh, fuck, Ilya...yes..." Shane gasped, dick aching.

Ilya moaned in response and began to eat him out. He was so good at it—Shane suddenly had an image of himself telling Rose this the next time they talked; oh God—and he always knew exactly how Shane needed it. Ilya's hands clutched at Shane's thighs, held him entirely still for the taking. Shane fell apart before Ilya could even enter him.

They fucked slow, for once, slow and hard and mind-numbingly good. Ilya covered him with his body, bestowing kiss after kiss to his neck, his ear, his shoulders. Shane couldn't contain all the noises that Ilya was wringing from him, so much pleasure, he didn't know how it could possibly all stay inside his body. Shane gasped, and gasped, and came hands-free, spasming around Ilya. Ilya cried out, clutched him tighter, fucked him harder, and when he came, Shane could feel every moment of it.

They lay in each other's arms afterwards, Ilya's spunk seeping out of Shane slowly, and breathed.

Finally, after his heart-rate returned to normal, Shane squeezed Ilya to him and said, "What did you think?"

"Ten out of ten, excellent fuck," Ilya said immediately, like he'd been waiting for it.

Shane rolled his eyes. "Not that, you dickhead...the party. What did you think?"

Ilya must have been expecting that as well, but it took him a long moment to answer. When he did, he said, "I think that you have very good friends."

Shane waited, knowing there was more. He had learned, in recent times, to listen to Ilya's silences as much as to his words.

"I think," Ilya continued, "that we will be...okay."

Shane felt himself smiling, feeling a softness take over his entire body. He pressed Ilya closer and said, "You have a very good friend, too."

Ilya hummed happily. "She's the best. Did she trap you for a conversation?"

Shane shook a bit with laughter. "She did. You saw?"

"Of course I saw, I was expecting it."

"Really?" Shane pulled back and Ilya, sensing it, turned towards him. "Why?"

Ilya shrugged. "She's a very good friend. And I know her from childhood. She is... protective."

Shane gave him a smile. "She is. It's good, right?"

"I think so," Ilya said, and Shane got the sense that he was no longer thinking about Svetlana at all. He was proven right when Ilya reached for him. They met in a soft kiss that tasted of their breath and skin.

The kiss grew, and as it did, Shane felt the rest of the world receding entirely away.

They were still largely a secret, their friends promising to not say a word. They were still going to have to climb a steep hill and wait a long time. But they had each other, and now—all of their people. They had this cottage.

They had tonight.

And they would be okay.

End Notes

Svetlana says: "He really is funny, you were right!"

Ilya says: "I told you!"

And then as she leaves, she says, "Not for anything!"

I'm on bsky & tumblr as ziusik, come say hi!!

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