

you know this moment, don't you? (time is strangely calm now)

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you know this moment, don't you? (time is strangely calm now)

by [barnes_romzanov](#)

Summary

It's dark, and Ilya's not quite sure where he is.

His entire body is numb. His shoes are soaking wet from trudging lazily through the snow. His nose is running, and his lips are chapped.

Selfishly, he wishes Shane would fuss over him now. Pull him close, whisper "I forgive you" even though he shouldn't, because Ilya would never change, because something inside him- in his family line, in his soul- was broken.

Ilya wondered how long ago it had clicked- when Shane had realized that Ilya wormed his way into this country and tricked the Hollanders into caring for him, then returned the favor by botching their language and leaving a trail of mess in his wake. He still can't help but wonder if that will be part of his punishment- being doomed to miss him in death, too.

or: Ilya's mostly been able to cope with the fact that he'll never be able to articulate himself fully in this country- but he's also never been good at talking about feelings in the first place.

"I'm tired" is the best he's got. It definitely doesn't capture what's going on in his head, and Shane can't read minds.

Notes

Now with hopefully corrected Russian translations thanks to you guys <33 If anyone knows any resources for proper translations please drop a comment because they are whooping my ass

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

It hasn't gone away.

Ilya would be concerned, if he could find the energy- but that's the whole problem. That strange, heavy feeling that slunk into his chest and made his limbs all heavy has also drained all his brain power, and it hasn't gone away yet.

It takes a few days, sometimes. Ilya knows this. He has to remind himself when he wakes up like this every few months, numb to the world and the kind of bone-tiredness that doesn't come from physical exertion.

Only it's been happening every few weeks now, instead of months, and now it's back, but it's been four days, and it *hasn't gone away*.

"You still tired?" It's Shane's voice. Ilya drags his head up to see his boyfriend standing in the bedroom doorway, covered in sweat, his biking shorts clinging deliciously to his ass.

Ilya waves his hand. "It is cold outside. Is Christmas vacation. You should be tired too."

Shane snorts, leaning down to scratch Anya behind her ear before walking over to Ilya's side of the bed. He leans down and pecks him on the cheek, pink and smiley. "You're always more tired in the winter. Do Russians hibernate?"

Hibernate. Ilya doesn't know the word, and he can't bring himself to ask, so he just nods.

Shane grins and disappears into the bathroom. The sound of the water hitting the tile shower floor starts a moment later. Ilya rolls back over, feeling a brief wave of relief, and then a darker swell of guilt at the fact that relieved him.

Anya is curled up a few feet away against the wall, laying over the heating vent on the floor. The word clicks suddenly. *Зимняя спячка: hibernate*. It's when animals hide away and sleep for the winter, waking up again in the spring.

Maybe Shane is right about him doing it too. Russia was always darker in the winter- sleepier- so it makes sense the people would be. Ilya thinks it might be embedded in his bones- it certainly was in his mother's. Ilya feels like he's back there, sometimes, when he gets like this. He hates that Shane notices. Shane Hollander- who has never been anything less than perfect, who's like sunshine, coming through the window in organized rays, slowly sweeping over and warming the room as it rises- deserves a lot more than having to worry about a grown man who's invaded his space the way Ilya has.

"You still up for dinner with my parents tonight?" The warmth returns, calling through the open bathroom door.

No, Ilya thinks. The tiredness- the *hibernation*- hasn't let up for even a second. He hasn't had any time to collect himself in days. The thought of trying to compose himself and put his charming boyfriend performance sounds fucking impossible. He can't afford to look bad in front of Yuna and David- not tonight, not *ever*.

“Ilya?”

He realizes he hasn’t answered. “Yes!” he calls back, too late and too little. Shane will know he is lying.

But when Shane returns around the corner, swiping his wet hair with a towel and nude as the day he was born, he’s got his usual pleased little smile on his face. “Perfect,” he says. He reaches into their closet and returns with a pair of socks. He sits on his side of the bed, back to Ilya, and pulls them on.

Ilya watches every movement with a quiet affection that almost makes his chest hurt.

“You sure you’re okay?” Shane asks quietly, after a moment of silence. He’s still facing away, giving Ilya room to speak. For someone who has a quiet reputation for misinterpreting social queues, he’s always been so in tune with Ilya without him having to say a word.

“I am okay, sweetheart,” Ilya promises, sitting up for real this time. He’s proud of how strong his voice comes out. He drapes himself over Shane’s back, settling into his neck and wrapping his arms around his boyfriend’s strong chest. “Am just tired.”

Shane hums, reaching up to hold Ilya’s hands with his own.

Ilya knows, deep down, that it’s more than just *‘tired’*. Words are hard this morning, though, so he leaves it at that.

It still hasn’t gone away.

And now Shane is freaking out.

That’s a phrase Ilya has never struggled with: *freaking out*. It’s up there with *panic attack*, and *anxious*, and *relax*, *Hollander*.

It’s like all the energy Ilya is missing has found its way into his boyfriend. It’s too much, though, packed up too tight into too small a frame, and it’s wound Shane up so badly he’s shaking.

“Sweetheart, you need to relax.” Ilya says. It comes out a little bit harsher than he meant it to, but Christ, he’s been like the past *four hours*, and Ilya was already exhausted.

The family dinner prep has quickly spiraled into a fucking nightmare. Ilya’s the stronger cook out of the both of them, but he always uses every dish they own and can’t keep up quickly enough with cleanup, which only stresses Shane out more. Shane, who only knows how to

make a rotation of the same four foods involved in his stupid performance diet. Shane, who's said stupid performance diet definitely doesn't include whatever the fuck *chocolate peppermint pie* is.

Shane scoffs. His eyes are glossy as he slams down his wooden spoon, which makes a much louder noise against the white marble counter than Ilya would have expected.

"It is just pie," Ilya insists. There's a low hum under his skin, poking its ugly head through the blanket of Tired, leaving holes in its wake. He recognizes it as anger, or irritation. Google has been helpful with supplying those words, at least.

"Jesus Christ, Ilya," Shane hisses. "It's not just pie, it's *important*, my mom asked me to make it. She asked me to make one fucking thing, and I can't even do that. And I promised the Pikes' one, too--"

Ilya rolls his eyes. The room is uncomfortably hot. His mother's crucifix feels like it's burning into his chest. "You worry what Hayden Pike will think of your pie- is just *pie*, he does not even deserve pie--"

"Can you not be an asshole for five minutes--"

"Can you *relax*?" Ilya snaps back.

"Well, one of us is already busy doing that right now, so someone else has to pick up the slack!"

Ilya's eyes narrow. "What do you mean?"

"You know what I mean!" Shane's yelling now. The pot behind him is bubbling. There's a steak of white across his forehead, which would be endearing if he wasn't so obviously angry. "That's how this goes lately! The last few months... post-game interviews! You either skip them or do your best to smart mouth whatever reporter we're in front of at the moment and leave me to do damage control. You let the laundry pile up until I finally lose our game of chicken and do it myself. I clean up after you, after your mess. You destroy the kitchen and then it's my job to tidy up while you sleep- and oh, my *God*, Ilya, the sleeping- you're always napping now! You can't stay awake long enough to do anything!"

He's right. Ilya craves sleep like he craves the vodka he's hidden away at the top of the pantry. He's a man with feeble restraint; he lets himself have one so he's not overcompensating with the other. He *does* sleep more now, when the Tired is a little bit too much, and Shane makes it almost bearable. Ilya loves to lay against him, let Shane slide his hands in his hair, loves to lay back and let Shane drape over him like a heavy blanket. He just never realized it bothered Shane so much-

"... home from my workout every day this week to find you *still in bed*! We never get time off like this, and when we finally do, you're just sleeping it away! It's not like you, you're not *like this*!"

Shane's entire face is flushed, his eyes all teary. He's shouting out the words with such conviction that Ilya can hear him over the gradual fog that's settled over the room, making everything sound like it's underwater.

"You could at least *pretend* to care about this pie I've been killing myself over for the last four hours, because it's for my parents, and for Hayden, my fucking *family*- but no, you want me to *relax!*"

And suddenly it's *all* slipped underwater.

The Tired's pretty much nothing but holes now. The pot behind Shane is still bubbling, and the obnoxiously loud ceiling fans aren't doing shit, because the room is still so fucking hot, and Ilya... he's got nothing left but anger.

"Da, Hollander, I want to relax!" He bellows. "It is always panic, panic, panic with you, you can enjoy nothing!"

Shane's scowling like he isn't about to cry. "Sorry that I care, *Rozanov*-"

And yes, Ilya chirped first, but it still feels like Shane has struck him with an iron poker. "You will not even eat this pie! You say you want to spend time together, then you panic about everything we do! You panic, I sleep! I- I am tired!"

He doesn't even know what he's saying now- he thinks, briefly, he knows in *Russian*, but even if that's true, it's not like Shane knows enough to understand him.

Я не знаю, что со мной не так.

I don't know what's wrong with me.

Я не знаю, почему я устраиваю беспорядок и так много сплю.

I don't know why I'm making messes and sleeping so much.

Я ненавижу как я себя чувствую. Я ненавижу как я заставляю тебя себя чувствовать. Я не знаю, как это остановить.

I hate the way I feel. I hate the way I make you feel. I don't know how to stop it.

But Shane can't read his mind. "Sorry that I'm so *tiring*." His voice cracks, but he's got his chin up, pretending to be stoic, which is stupid because Ilya knows Shane like the back of his hand.

And Ilya's come to terms with it, he really has. He knows he will have to settle for sounding stupid and having stunted language to express himself for the rest of his life. He's exiled from the only place in the world where anyone would understand the words he wants to say, exiled from the ground that holds the body of the person who taught him the words in the first place-

And Shane always has a hard time interpreting what people mean. He takes things personally, literally, and internalizes them. Ilya says he's tired, so Shane, with his cute little nose scrunched up and his big, beautiful dark eyes that are so fucking sad, thinks Ilya means it's about him.

But Ilya can't even put his own thoughts into speech right now, let alone Shane's.

So the words don't come.

"Really?" Shane, because he is the most anxious person in the world, takes Ilya's silence as confirmation of what he should have known from the beginning. "Nothing?"

нет, не ничего. Пожалуйста прости меня. Я устал. Я хочу провести с тобой время. Я хочу помочь тебе с пирогом.

No, not nothing. I'm sorry. I'm tired. I want to spend time with you. I want to help you with your pie.

"Fine." Shane's grabbing his half-finished pie, stuffing his phone in his pocket. He shuts off the stove, straightens the kitchen towels hanging off the oven door, angrily swipes at his cheeks. It's not quick enough to stop the tears slipping down. Anya follows his every move, tail still, like she too knows that the world should stop spinning when Shane Hollander is crying.

пожалуйста, не уходи. Мне жаль.

Please don't go. I'm sorry.

"I'm gonna go to family dinner." Shane stops halfway out of the kitchen. He turns back, facing a stunned Ilya, and it feels final.

"You know, you might not care, but *I do*."

Then he's gone. The door slams behind him.

And Ilya goes away for a while.

He doesn't know how long he sat here, but when Ilya comes back to himself, the sun is starting to set. His head pounds with a dull ache. His eyes are sore- dry, like he's had them open for too long. His ass hurts and his legs are asleep.

One glance out the window, at the way the sky has started to paint pink and orange across the clouds, and Ilya knows he hasn't moved in hours.

It's been a very long time since he did this.

Left foot on the ground, then the right. A tiny moan of pain as he does so. It doesn't matter, he realizes numbly. There's no one to hear him. Shane is gone. He took Anya with him. They're at family dinner, and they'll probably stay there until Shane decides to come back and kick Ilya out.

Ilya doesn't belong here. He never did. He never deserved this. *Shane* deserves someone who can show they care. He deserves someone who will get up and go on a run with him. He deserves a man who doesn't sleep all day, who can cook without making a mess. Who can talk to the media without causing trouble. Who can speak in complete fucking sentences, who isn't entirely reliant on him because he has no family of his own.

The top of the pantry isn't hard to reach; it was always a false barrier to indulgence. But Ilya is undeniably large, and he takes up space. He can reach and poke where he shouldn't. It makes it easy to get what he wants.

He unscrews the top. Walks back into the kitchen, doesn't bother getting a glass. Shane doesn't drink, anyway. So Ilya presses it fully against his lips and lets it slide down his throat, burning all the way down.

The kitchen isn't warm anymore. The heater must have turned off. Shane will need to fix the schedule it's on, he thinks distantly.

His phone lights up from across the room. Ilya ignores it. He can't tell if it's Shane.

(He couldn't handle it if it wasn't.)

A long swig. Then another, in quick succession.

Ilya wasn't lying that night in Vegas. Russian Vodka is hard to find in America. He finds it hard to savor it, though, as his reality settles in.

There is no way to fix this with Shane.

Ilya doesn't have anywhere to go, but maybe he doesn't need a destination. He never had one, really, except to get out of Moscow. Away from his family. And by God, he got that- he'll never speak to his brother, or his niece, or his stepmother again. He ruined it, just like he ruins everything else.

He just knows that he can't do this to his boyfriend anymore. He has to leave, before Shane comes back and breaks his own heart trying to be anything other than kind.

The sun has almost finished setting. It's reflecting off the snow outside, starting to make the room glow, but it isn't warm. Sunshine only comes with Shane, and Shane is gone.

He aims to take another swig. He must have drank a lot more than he realized by now, because the bottle is much lighter than he thought.

He miscalculates.

It shatters loudly against the kitchen island.

Ilya stares at the neck of the bottle, still in his hand. The rest is now in shards, scattered across the counter and the floor. There's an alarming red mixed in with the glass. Ilya realizes absently that he must be bleeding.

“Ебать. Глупый.”

Fuck. Stupid.

There's a towel hanging over the oven door handle. Ilya stumbles towards it. He drops to his knees and begins swiping haphazardly at the mess he's made, trying to create a pile.

He's not very coordinated. He still tries, though. The thought of Anya's tiny paws or Shane's socked feet getting cut because of Ilya's carelessness makes him want to throw up.

His hands sting. Fuck, he's getting blood all over the floor now.

His knees ache from crouching. They're still stiff from sitting in the kitchen chair for god knows how long. He lets himself fall back so he's sitting on his ass, legs outstretched, the pile of bloody broken glass and wasted vodka sitting between them.

Ilya's hand is torn to shreds. There's a deeper slice, though, where the bottle had been caught between him and the counter. It sits jaggedly at the top of his forearm, just below his wrist.

The wrist is a dangerous place to bleed from. He's also drunk, and alcohol makes you bleed faster. Ilya knows this.

He should be scared.

But he's so tired, and Shane is gone. He missed Hollander Family Dinner. His kitchen is a giant mess, and if he tried to clean up the dishes right now he'd undoubtedly break them too. It's just one more thing for Shane to clean up. Ilya will probably be spending Christmas alone now.

He lets his head thud against the island stool next to him.

It would be so easy to just let it bleed; to just slip away. He really did spend most of his time sleeping now, it wouldn't be that much of a difference. He hopes it's not; his mother deserved to rest.

But even in his drunkenness, he knows it's probably not deep enough to actually let him die. It's bad, yes, would probably need a few stitches, but not bad *enough*. If Shane walked in right now, it would easily be passed off as an accident. He might even get away with it if he...

Mama's hand, cold and limp, hanging over the edge of her bed. Ilya had just stared at her for a moment, frozen in the doorway like his brain was trying not to register what he was looking at.

His eyes snap open. He quickly sits up, his head spinning as he moves. "Блять". *Fuck*.

He's talking about letting himself *die*.

Here, on his kitchen floor, for his boyfriend to find him like Ilya had found his mother. His sweet, perfect, anxious boyfriend who would never recover from seeing something like that. Ilya certainly never had, and he was carved from stone.

He really is an asshole.

"Not here," Ilya mutters, in English. The sun has fallen below the horizon now, the orange fading. Like it's reminding him that Shane has left, and it's time for Ilya to go too.

He won't leave his mess, though. He wraps the second towel around his wrist to stop from adding to the trail of blood he's trying to clean up. He sweeps the pile as best he can into the trash, throwing the first bloody towel in with it.

Then he stumbles out the front door, barely remembering to pull on his jacket.

A few hours later, Hayden Pike pulls into the Hollander-Rozanov driveway.

He lets out a heavy sigh. He really should have called first.

Yes, Jackie was right, baked goods were usually a welcome surprise. She made them especially for Shane, in adherence to his weird performance diet. But Hayden knows his best friend, and he has to mentally prepare himself as he makes his way up the driveway, plates in hand, praying to god he and Rozanov aren't naked.

He pauses when he realizes the front door is slightly ajar.

“Shane?” He calls.

Silence.

He frowns, using his foot to open the door the rest of the way. “Shane!” He calls again. “Your door is open, man.”

The house is cold. The floor to ceiling windows show him his own reflection in a way that makes him a little bit uneasy. Shane’s got a thing with the windows. He would never leave the blinds open this late at night, and if for some reason he forgot, Rozanov would have closed them for him. They were weirdly in tune with each other.

“Rozanov?” he tries reluctantly. The silence, the front door left open, the windows uncovered. Something’s wrong.

He makes his way to the kitchen, chest thudding, and he sees it.

There’s blood on the floor.

Hayden’s heart drops into his ass.

Tiny droplets lining around the island, leading to the corner by the kitchen table, where there’s a significantly wider patch of red that’s been smeared into a thin sheen.

“Fuck,” he gasps.

He fumbles for his phone, slamming the plate down on the counter, before taking off into a run towards the stairs.

Shane, thank fuck, picks up on the first ring. “Hey, Hayden-”

“Where are you?” Hayden demands. He pauses at the top of the landing, trying to breathe. Shane picked up, which means he’s *fine*.

“I’m... at my parents?” Shane says, confused. His voice is nasally, like he’s been crying. “Family dinner.”

“Are you okay?!”

“Hayden, what? I’m fine-”

“Then what-” Hayden pinches his nose, “You’re crying, man, and the kitchen looks like a *crime* scene. Are you okay? Are you hurt?”

“No, I’m not hurt, why would I-”

“I showed up with cookies and your front door was wide open, and the heater is off, and your blinds are open, and there’s blood all over the kitchen floor! What the fuck happened, man?”

Shane goes silent. There's a rustling, and a low murmur from what Hayden recognizes as Yuna's voice, before Shane's voice is suddenly a lot sharper. "What are you talking about? What do you mean *blood*?"

"Blood! There's only one thing that word means, man. And it's like, a *lot*-"

"Where's Ilya?" Shane demands.

Hayden feels like he's in a fucking fever dream. "I don't- why would *I* know where *your* boyfriend is? Didn't you just say you guys are at family dinner?"

"*I* am," Shane says. "Ilya- we got into a fight a few hours ago, he stayed home. He isn't there?"

Across the room, something lights up. Hayden's head snaps up. His mouth goes dry when he realizes it's a phone, lit up with Yuna's contact picture. She's calling it, and if Shane is calling Hayden on his own phone right, now that means-

"Shane," he says uneasily, eyes flickering between the horror show on the floor and the table. "His phone is still here."

Shane goes silent.

There's a rustling. Then Yuna's speaking, voice clipped. "Hayden. How much blood are we talking about?"

He takes a shaky breath. "It's all over the floor. It looks like someone tried to clean it up. There's broken glass, too. And- the front door was open."

"Did someone kidnap him?" Shane cries. "Stab him and- and leave with him? Who would do that? Nobody knows where we live, how would they-"

"Cameras," Hayden says suddenly, already making his rounds around the house, peeking in closets and rooms as if someone would have just stashed Rozanov away somewhere. "Check your cameras, you have one at the front door, right?"

Yuna's in the background, speaking to someone. She's got the curt tone she uses when she wants her way. The thought that someone could have taken out Rozanov is kind of terrifying, Hayden thinks. The guy is enormous, with an insanely strong build, not to mention he would fight like hell to protect anything that belonged to Shane, *especially* his home.

"They're disabled," Shane moans suddenly, after a minute. "They- we were supposed to be getting new ones installed in a couple weeks, ours went out in the storm a few days ago. Hayden- fuck, Hayden, you have to find him, I'm almost an hour away, I'm too far-"

"I will," Hayden promises, even though he probably shouldn't make promises he almost definitely can't keep, but Shane has that effect on people. "but-"

Suddenly the phone is muffled, hard to hear. Yuna's talking lowly, but Hayden can't quite hear what she's saying. There's a black and forth, and suddenly Shane fucking Hollander is

shouting at his own mother about how *Ilya wouldn't fucking do that-*

“What?” Hayden demands. He’s *never* heard Shane sound like that. “What is it?”

Yuna’s voice, now. Clearly trying to keep herself composed. “Hayden. The police are going to be there soon. Leave the front door unlocked, but I need you to go out and look for Ilya, okay? Head out towards the river, do you know where that is?”

“Yeah, of course,” Hayden says. “But what- what’s happening? Did you see something on the cameras? Is there something I should know?”

Yuna breathes shakily. “It’s... Shane doesn’t think so, but police think it’s possible Ilya could be a suicide risk. It runs in his family.”

Oh.

Hayden peels out of the driveway less than a minute later, feeling like it’s kind of cruel of the universe to expect him to keep calm with his oldest friend sobbing on the other line.

Ilya’s not quite sure where he is. It’s dark, but the moonlight reflecting off the snow is enough that he doesn’t trip. He and Shane spend most of their time out at the lake when they’re at home, off in the other direction. But he’s got a general idea of where he’s headed, and that’s good enough.

Time is just a big, distant blur.

His entire body is numb, shoes soaking wet from trudging lazily through the snow. His nose is running. His lips are chapped.

Shane would fuss over him if he could see Ilya like this- especially in the beginning when he was a new novelty item; deceptively cocky, and brash, and eager to take care of Shane the way he deserved. That was part of the problem. Ilya had wormed his way into this country and the Hollander's lives and tricked them into caring for him, then returned the favor by botching their language and leaving a trail of mess in his wake.

Ilya wondered how long ago it had clicked- when Shane had realized there was nothing more to him aside from hockey and a talent for poisoning everything he touched. How long his Canadian politeness and golden heart had hidden its disdain before Ilya had finally broken him.

Selfishly, he wished Shane would fuss over him now. Pull him close, whisper “I forgive you” even though he *shouldn't*, because Ilya would never change, because something inside him-

in his family line, in his *soul*- was broken.

Christ, *Shane*.

Ilya missed him, even though it had probably only been a few hours. It didn't matter how close he was to him; anything short of being inside Shane's skin felt like torture. He wondered if he would be doomed to miss him like this, even in death.

Maybe that would be part of his punishment.

The bridge came into view soon enough. It's empty, street lights dimly lighting the walkway as Ilya shuffles his feet distantly until he's somewhere near the middle.

He takes his arms out of his pockets, and it's like trying to pry metal apart. They're stiff, and the towel around his forearm is hardened with blood that's either just dried or frozen now- but either way, Ilya can tell he's stopped bleeding.

It's eerie, how calm he is.

Death is supposed to be terrifying. His entire life is full of precautions on the ice- helmets and neck braces and check-ups and concussion protocols. They'd even done CPR training as a team bonding exercise once. Training to defy nature, like it didn't take and take and take anyway.

Everyone dies. His mother. His father. So would Shane one day, although Ilya hoped it would be when he was ancient and gray, long retired, surrounded by his children. Not painful, like it probably was for his parents.

Leaning against the bridge railing, he stares below him. The river is frozen over, with a thick layer of snow on top. His weight would break it, he knew. He could slip under and let the current carry him away.

They probably wouldn't find him until spring.

Mama's grey face, bulging eyes, slack face. Ilya had cried out, cold dread washing over him as he realized what this was.

The image snuck up on him at unexpected moments, leaving him just a bit off-kilter for the next few hours until he could shove it back into its mental box.

Watching Shane go down a few years ago during their match and not get up. Rolling over in the morning, still disoriented with sleep, and seeing Shane's face looking just a bit too pale in the blue-grey light coming through the windows from fresh snowfall. Seeing a napping Yuna's hand hanging over the edge of the sofa after Ilya had quietly covered her with a throw blanket. Knocking on the locked bathroom door last week, when Shane, sitting in the tub

with his earbuds in, hadn't responded to him for just a bit too long, which lead to an admittedly very dramatic attempt on Ilya's part to break the damn door down.

He'd dropped to his knees and grabbed Mama's face in his hands. She was cold, so cold- like metal that had been frozen. He could swear it burned him.

The image had kept him awake for years. It woke him up in the middle of the night, leaving him drenched in a cold sweat. He couldn't do that to someone else- leave his body behind for some poor, unsuspecting Canadian jogger to find in a few months when the river thawed. It was cruel.

Ilya's face scrunched up against his will. A small noise, something incredibly un-manly and bordering on a moan, slipped out of his mouth.

There was no way to do this cleanly.

"I'm sorry," he mutters in Russian. He doubles over onto the bridge railing, gripping it like the lifeline it is. He doesn't know when he started crying. He reaches up to swipe at the tears and snot that have started to trail down his nose.

"I'm sorry. I'm sorry, I'm sorry. I'm so sorry-"

"Sir?" A tentative voice calls out.

Ilya shoots up like a bolt of lightning has struck his spine. He whirls around, nearly falling over in his disorientation.

The woman standing a few feet away flinches forward at the stumble.

Shit. He looks fucking insane, he knows it. Ilya plants both feet firmly on the ground, casually leans against the railing with one arm, bringing the other to rest on his hip- except he misses, and has to try again to actually make contact.

The woman who's caught him looks terrified. She's dressed head to toe in black winter running clothes, nose cherry red from the cold and hair pulled tightly back with a wide blue headband.

Unsuspecting Canadian jogger, he thinks vaguely.

"Yes?" Ilya snaps. He's proud of how steady his voice comes out. Less proud when the furrow between her brows only grows deeper.

He's blown his cover.

"Are you okay?" The woman asks tentatively, her voice high. She slowly holds her hands out in front of her like she's trying to calm a wild animal.

Ilya isn't an idiot. Well- he is, but he at least knows how this looks. He's an abnormally large man, wandering around alone in the dark, in the snow, muttering to himself on a bridge. It's threatening, to say the very least, for a woman who's jogging alone at night.

"You can go," he says, hoping it doesn't come out too harsh. It's not her fault he's standing in her way like some kind of bridge troll from a fairy tale, like he's waiting some kind of tithe for permission to cross. "Sorry."

"No, it's..." The woman shakes her head, eyes flickering over him up and down. "Just- are you okay? Do you need help?"

"I am fine," he said immediately. "I will move, I'm sorry."

Except he's lying, because he's shaking for some reason, and his legs buckle pretty much the second he tries to walk.

The woman gasps and darts forward. She grabs him, trying to catch him before he goes down, and he can't help the hiss that escapes him as her fingers dig into the slice on his forearm.

"Sorry!"

It's so Canadian, so *Shane*, that Ilya almost snorts.

"Is okay."

She's still holding his arm, though, staring at it with an undecipherable expression. Ilya realizes that the sleeve of his jacket is caught, pulled up awkwardly over the towel that's now stained red. There is blood smeared all over his hand.

The woman looks up. She meets his eyes, and Ilya feels a pang of panic as she not-so-subtly tries to school her expression into something casual.

"Accident," Ilya insists, heart thudding. He forces out a shaky laugh, desperately trying to reel back what she's obviously already registered. "Christmas dinner, I broke a plate, these things happen. Is okay."

The woman hasn't let go of his arm.

He feels like he's been cornered, caught in the act, like a small child doing something he's been explicitly told not to do. "You can go, please. I am fine."

"I don't think you are," she says quietly.

"Do you know who I am?!"

The woman looks confused for a moment. "I- no, sir I don't. But I'm worried about you. I just want to help."

“What is there to help?” He demands. It’s loud, and carries over the snow. He’s being an asshole. There’s something frayed and panicked in his nervous system. He gets mean when he’s anxious- Shane has told him so. It’s one of the many things that reminds him of his own father. “Did I ask for your help? Go, I have told you to go!”

The woman lets go, but keeps him pinned with a stare. Ilya feels a sudden wave of déjà-vu, and bizarrely thinks of Yuna, with that same no-nonsense expression and stubbornness.

“You’re bleeding,” the woman says, not unkindly. “And you’ve been crying. You need help.”

Ilya scoffs, looking away.

“Can I take you to a hospital?” She asks. She points behind her, and Ilya realizes her car is parked a few yards away, still running. She’d seen him and *pulled over*.

“I do not need a hospital,” he snarls. “I am not bleeding anymore, and it is not deep- and you should not invite strange men into your car alone at night! You Canadians are too nice, it is ridiculous-”

She interrupts him- which, he’ll give her credit for, is *not* very Canadian. “I found you standing over the edge of a bridge with a very far drop.”

Ilya doesn’t know what to say..

“I would like to help you,” she goes on, like she already knows he’s lost this battle. “I won’t give you a speech, but the whole thing about ‘things get better’ and ‘permanent solutions for temporary problems’ is real. It’s true. You don’t want to stay here.”

There’s a long moment of silence as the words wash over him. He feels his shoulders physically drop, like his body has registered that he’s given up. He can feel the fight draining out of him.

“I am so tired,” his voice breaks.

He doesn’t even know if he’s talking to her or himself.

This is a new low, he thinks. A new kind of pathetic he’s never experienced. Talking about feelings to a complete stranger who’s only here because she’s taken pity on him.

The woman nods. “I get it,” she says. There’s an earnestness in her tone that makes Ilya think that maybe she really does. “Let me give you a ride.”

He’s drunk. Tired. And cold.

And he doesn’t exactly trust himself right now.

The woman clearly doesn’t either. She’s looking at him expectantly. She’ll probably call the police if he declines, and then the media will see, and it’ll get back to the Hollanders, and Shane will have to deal with a PR nightmare that isn’t his fault.

“Okay,” he says weakly.

The woman smiles. She watches him carefully as he stumbles off the sidewalk and then walks slowly, letting him trail behind.

Her car is old. It makes a strange whirring noise. It’s so short Ilya has to practically bend over to climb in, and damn near hits his head when he does. He barely fits into the front seat. The woman grimaces at the way his knees are all shoved up into the dashboard.

“Sorry,” she says, like she means it. “There should be a lever on the other side, you can push it back.”

He does, unsteadily. Miscalculates for the millionth time today and goes flying backwards, his own legs- which have driven his entire career off of being steady and strong- suddenly having no idea what to do with themselves.

“Sorry. It’s old, and it’s a piece of shit, I know. I don’t live around here, obviously. Not in this tax bracket.”

“Is fine,” he says, hoping he sounds like he means it too, because he does. He wishes she’d stop apologizing for *his* own shortcomings; it reminds him of Shane. “It’s nice.”

She shakes her head, pulling off onto the road. “*You’re* nice. Seatbelt, please.”

He buckles it obediently. After a moment, he realizes she couldn’t possibly know his address- which means she’s probably headed to the nearest hospital. He feels a sudden surge of panic. “Wait,” he says quickly. “I can’t- I have to go home, first. No one can see me.”

She looks at him warily. “I’m sorry, Mr... um...”

“Ilya,” he supplies, because he really has nothing left to lose.

“Ilya,” she repeats. There’s no moment of recognition, or widening eyes, or anything. Maybe she really doesn’t know who he is. “I’m sorry, but you need to go to a hospital. I don’t think you’re safe right now.”

“No,” he says, frustrated. “It’s- I will, but is not emergency- I can wait. I have to go to the right one. My boyfriend will know where to go, where we won’t be seen.”

He’s not making any sense. The woman sighs, like she’s already made up her mind. She’s not going to let him out.

“Please,” he begs. “It would be a PR nightmare.” One of Yuna’s favorite phrases. “I am- I am hockey player. On television. Someone would see me. I cannot do that to my boyfriend’s family, he is famous too-”

“Your family would just want you to be safe,” she insists- which isn’t what he said, but at least she’s slowing down now.

Ilya nods fiercely. His head pounds and spins at the gesture. "I will go. They- my boyfriend would make me go. He is scared of everything, he will be-" he swallows hard. "He will be scared. He will make me go. But I cannot be seen. I- you *really* do not know who I am? Are you Canadian?"

He sounds like an arrogant asshole. The woman is kind about it, though.

"I really don't," she says gently. "And I'm not. I was born here, but we moved to the States when I was a kid. My brother-"

It's her turn to swallow now. Ilya watches numbly as her eyes get all glassy and she steals her face, almost scowling, like she's pushing it back. "My big brother always wanted to move back, he was building a house here. He died last August, but his wife and kids moved when the house was done. That's... that's why I'm here. I'm visiting them."

Oh. Ilya doesn't really know what to say. The woman checks her rearview mirror and pulls off to the side of the road.

"What's your address?" she asks. "Where do you need me to take you first?"

Ilya nods quickly, patting his pocket, and *shit*, he left his phone at the house. It takes him a moment to remember, but he rattles it off. She nods and plugs it into her GPS, making a careful u-turn, back towards the bridge.

"Should have assumed you're a celebrity, if you're living out here," the woman says with a small smile.

"I'm sorry," Ilya says quietly. The street lights are an unsettling, ugly yellow. "About your brother. How did he..."

The woman gives him a look so haunted that it almost takes him aback. "Suicide. Shot himself in his barn. He was sick. For a long time."

Oh.

Ilya feels a wave of shame.

"I- My mother, too." It's important to him that she understands, suddenly, that he knows what that's like. That what he was thinking about, on the bridge, wasn't just on a whim. "She overdosed when I was twelve. I... I found her."

Why he's telling her *that* part, he doesn't know, but it almost feels good to say it out loud to someone who understands. Not to mention he's tired, and he's about to spend the night in a hospital, and they'll probably keep him, so maybe he needs to get ready to talk about his stupid fucking feelings for the next few hours.

"I didn't," she says so quietly he almost doesn't hear it. "I didn't find him. But I found you. So maybe that counts for something."

It's a nice sentiment, and one Ilya really doesn't know how to respond to. He looks at the GPS instead- it's just over a 25 minute drive. Christ, how long had he been walking?

"What happened?" the woman asks after a few minutes. "Sorry if that's too invasive, just... what happened tonight to make you..."

Ilya opens his eyes from where he'd slumped off in his seat. Alcohol always made him a bit sleepy. Or horny, but his sex drive had been stuttering for a few weeks, and it only ever really drove for Shane, so that was kind of out the window now.

He frowns. "I... had a fight with my boyfriend. Shane. I've been a shitty partner for long time now. I do not do my laundry, or clean up the kitchen. I sleep too much. He was telling me how he felt and we yelled at each other. We.. we had dinner with his parents, tonight, and he went. I stayed home, got drunk. But I broke the bottle and I started bleeding and..."

He's crying again. Not all loud and messy like he was on the bridge, but enough that his nose is running and he can taste salty tears dripping onto his lips. He wipes them on his sleeve.

"I... it really is not that deep. But I didn't want him to be scared when he came home. He doesn't like blood. I didn't want him... to *find* me. It would be cruel. So I left."

"So he doesn't know where you are right now?"

"He probably doesn't even know I left. But I will call him, or... when he gets home tonight, we will go to hospital. It will need stitches."

The woman is looking at him. Ilya is too tired to look back. "It's almost two in the morning." Ilya blanches at that, because there's no way he's been wandering around that long, but- "he's probably noticed you're gone by now. He's going to be worried."

"He shouldn't be."

"That's not for you to decide," the woman says flatly. Ilya, again, thinks she reminds him of Yuna. "This kind of thing doesn't just happen to you. If your mother... you should know that. It hurts everybody around you, too."

It's a bit accusatory, but it's true. Ilya feels like shit. He's selfish. This is what his father had always talked about; his laziness. He gives up when things get hard- he left Russia, left his brother and his parents graves, left a whole trail of wreckage behind.

I clean up after you, after your mess, Shane had said.

"I'm not saying that to make you feel bad," she says after a moment. "I'm sorry. It's not your fault, either. It's just... triggering."

Ilya doesn't really know what that means. *Triggering. Hibernate.* Stupid English words that were apparently part of everyone else's daily routine, floating around easily in their heads, while Ilya still had to grasp for the basics. It was like the language was rejecting him- like it knew he didn't belong here. He'd dropped everything in Boston, and Russia, moved to Ottawa to insert himself in Shane's life, to have *more*.

He'd made *sure* he was Shane's problem.

"Hey," the woman says. Ilya looks up, blinking. "We're almost there."

The GPS agrees, showing the ETA is only a couple of minutes away from the house now.

Shit.

He must have gone away again.

He swipes at his eyes, runs a hand through his hair and straightens his jacket. His fingers and toes are starting to burn, and his subconscious tries to comb through mental vocabulary to find what it's called when you get too cold, the danger of staying in the snow or ice too long without covering. He can feel the woman looking at him out of the corner of her eye and feels a rush of embarrassment, but- he looks terrible. He knows he does. He doesn't want to see Shane looking like this, if he really is home.

"Thank you," he says as they make what he recognizes as the final turn towards the house. "For driving me all this way. Let me pay you, for the gas-"

The woman shakes her head adamantly. "Don't be silly. It's..." she pauses, her eyes trained ahead.

Ilya frowns and follows her line of sight. His blood goes cold.

His house up ahead is surrounded by police cars, blue and red lights flashing, and there's an ambulance parked in the driveway.

"Shane," he chokes out, his stomach sinking. He reaches for the door handle, barely registering that they're still rolling down the street. Something must have happened, an accident in the snow, or maybe a fire, or someone had broken in, "*Ебать* , Shane-"

"Ilya," the woman says gently. She lays a hand on his uninjured arm. Something about the way she says it makes him turn to look at her. She glances back at him, smiling sadly.

"They're probably here for you."

Fuck.

Ilya feels a wave of self-hatred, unlike anything he's ever felt before.

The woman pulls up to the curb. She rubs his arm through his sleeve soothingly. "It's okay, Ilya."

It's not. It's nowhere near okay.

But he's been cowardly enough already tonight. His boyfriend is in there, probably on the verge of a panic attack, surrounded by uniformed strangers who have been bombarding him with questions in his own home, for God knows how long.

So Ilya opens the car door, doing his best not to slip on the snow-tracked driveway. He hears the woman- Christ, he doesn't even know her *name*- close her own door, clearly intending to follow him.

He walks up the pathway to the front door, which is wide open and tracked with mud, from officers who probably don't fucking care about how hard Shane works to keep them clean.

There's voices inside, beeps and radio chatter, loud and echoing. Ilya feels like he's intruding.

Ilya's heart pounds as he looks for him.

Yuna is standing in the kitchen, talking to one of the officers with a stony, no-nonsense expression and folded arms. More cops mill around the house, having yet to notice him standing there-

David is sitting with his hand gently rubbing the back of a figure Ilya knows all too well, a soft gray Centaurs sweatshirt- the one that had gotten "lost" in the wash last week, and Ilya had playfully pretended he didn't know where it had disappeared to.

Shane is sitting ramrod straight on the edge of the couch, hands curled up into shaking fists. His entire body is ridden with anxiety, shoulders tense, like he hasn't taken a deep breath in hours. His eyes are swollen and red, face splotchy, and he has a 5 o'clock shadow that somehow makes him look younger.

He looks up suddenly, like he's sensed a shift in the cosmos, and their eyes lock a moment later.

"Ilya!" Shane cries out.

Ilya stares at him. He has no idea what to say. He probably looks fucking insane, standing in his own entryway with wet clothes and matted hair and snot all over his face and his sleeve.

Shane doesn't seem to care.

He stumbles to his feet, openly crying. Shane Hollander, showing open, blatant emotion in front of a room of people he doesn't even know.

Ilya fucking broke him.

"Ilya," Shane sobs, nearly knocking him over as he rams into his chest. The room goes silent. His strong arms span all the way across Ilya's back, one of his hands coming up to hold the back of his head.

Ilya sinks into him numbly. It's the most *held* he's felt in a long, long time.

Shane gasps into his shoulder. "Fuck," he says, like it's being ripped out of him. "Fuck, Ilya, where *were* you, what-"

“I am okay,” Ilya says. It’s muffled. “I am okay. I’m sorry I made you worry.”

The cops behind them are starting to flock towards him. Shane ignores them, pulling back, but still holding Ilya’s biceps like he’s trying to keep him in place. His dark eyes are full of tears. “Where were you? We- are you okay? You’re so *cold*-”

“I’m okay.” Ilya’s lips are all numb. His nose burns, finally starting to thaw. The house is uncomfortably warm.

Shane tugs Ilya’s jacket open, like he’s trying to search for something. “Fuck, were you outside this whole time? It’s cold, it’s *snowing*, you could be hypothermic-” He freezes, his eyes narrowing as he looks over Ilya’s shoulder. “Who are you?”

Not very nice, but Shane’s obviously on edge. Ilya realizes he technically doesn't know the saint of a woman who’s now followed him inside.

“I drove him here,” the woman says, placatingly. She looks out of place in their enormous entryway, but so do the cops. Ilya doesn't think they’ve ever had strangers here before. “I found him outside, out... out on the bridge. Alexandra, out on Murphy street. He needs to go to the hospital, but he wanted to come here first. Said he was worried about the press?”

“The press-” Shane shakes his head, like it doesn't make any sense, and goes back to staring at Ilya. “Where were you? Did someone break in? Take you?”

Take him? Ilya’s over six feet fucking tall and almost entirely muscle. “How would someone take me?”

“Where did all the blood come from, then?” Shane demands. Ilya frowns because he checked in the car; he’s hidden the blood on his clothes. Shane’s rambling. Ilya lets him, feeling the anxiety radiating off of him so strongly it’s almost contagious. “Why would you have left if you were bleeding like that? How did that even- and why were you all the way...”

Shane trails off. Ilya realizes there’s something strange about the way he’s staring at him, eyes tracking him, lip trembling.

“You were out on the bridge?”

Ilya nods numbly. It would be useless to deny it.

“Why were you out on the bridge?” Shane lowers his voice like it’s just for the two of them. Like he genuinely can’t fathom it.

Ilya opens his mouth. Closes it again, eyes flickering to their feet. His shoes are covered in snow, melting onto their hardwood floors.

“Sorry,” he mutters. “Making a mess.”

It’s stupid. Meaningless. Ilya feels like he’s underwater, and his brain is grasping at straws. Shane stares at him, then flickers his eyes down to their feet.

“Ilya, what were you-”

“Mr. Ronzanov.”

The deep voice behind them would have usually made Shane startle, but he doesn't, because he's staring at Ilya with an expression Ilya's never seen him make before, like he's trying to crawl inside his brain.

“We got a call at around 6pm with a report that you were missing and possibly injured, We've had a few search cars out looking for you,” the cop says, all professionalism. Ilya can see the recognition in his eyes, though, and wonders briefly if that's why there are so many people here. Maybe everyone wanted to jump at the opportunity to see Stanley Cup winner Ilya Rozanov at his fucking lowest. “If you'll follow me, we can have a paramedic assess you.”

Ilya's heart thuds.

He feels so small, and numb, and tired, and out of place. He *knows* he insisted on coming home first, but he's wishing now more than anything that he was alone. He wishes Shane and his fucking *parents* weren't here to watch this humiliation ritual play out.

“Give us a second,” Shane snaps, not even bothering to look at the cop behind him. He reaches up and clasps his hand around Ilya's cheek, making him look forward. “Ilya. Look at me.”

He does. It doesn't matter what their dynamic looks like from the outside- if anyone is in control here, it's always been Shane, and they both know it. Ilya has never been able to deny him anything.

Especially not now, with that *look* on his face, bordering between angry and desperate.

“Where are you hurt?”

“I'm okay,” Ilya says automatically, even though his arms don't get the memo, because they raise like magnets towards his boyfriend's voice of their own volition.

Shane takes them immediately. His eyes go wide and his eyebrows furrow when he sees Ilya's fingers, which are a deep, swollen, shiny purplish-red. Ilya can't help but wince at the blister that's started to bubble on the pad of his middle finger. Suddenly the burning he'd felt in the car makes a lot more sense.

“Frostbite,” Shane says unnecessarily, but with the tone of someone delivering the news that their childhood pet just died. He moves to pull Ilya's sleeve up the careful manner of someone dressing a china doll. He stops when he sees the blood-soaked towel, tied haphazardly around Ilya's upper wrist. Stares at it the same way he stares at the whiteboard in his locker room, assessing the next move.

Ilya shakes his head. “Was stupid,” he murmurs. “Accident. Shattered a bottle in the kitchen, I was drunk. I'm sorry. Was the good vodka.”

Shane doesn't respond. Just unwraps the towel with an unbearable gentleness and lets it drop to the floor. The cut stopped bleeding, but it's still not pretty- it's mostly just the blood that got smeared all over his skin skin, caught in the hair on his arm. His whole hand is covered in tiny cuts, but none of them are deep. It's really not that bad.

But Ilya doesn't know how to say that in a way that will successfully make this better. Shane's face screws up and a fresh wave of tears fill his eyes as he purses his lips. When he looks up at him, it's like he's begging. "Ilya."

"It was accident," Ilya insists. "Was stupid. Look, was just in bad place, the bottle was stuck on the counter when it shattered. Is okay, is not bleeding anymore-"

Shane looks like he's trying to fucking hard to believe him. Ilya can see the broken resolve in his big, beautiful eyes, looking up at him through wet lashes. The trembling chin.

"Okay." He swallows like it physically hurts him. He's still holding onto Ilya's arm. "Can we talk to that paramedic?"

It's the same thing as the woman on the bridge. The obvious air of, *you can't be trusted with yourself*, like Ilya would run off into traffic if they didn't physically hold onto him. The pity written all over their faces that says, *I know what you did*.

And Ilya really isn't that stupid, he fucking *knows* what this looks like to them: a deep cut on the most vulnerable part of the wrist like an angsty, mopey, attention-seeking character in a teen drama, but that's *not* what he is.

But the officer nods and gestures at the uniformed paramedic hovering at the kitchen counter, like he knows better. The paramedic gives him a kind smile as she opens the ambulance doors and gestures for him to sit, like she knows better. Shane hovers in the doorway of the ambulance like he knows better. The woman from the bridge stands a few feet away, like she's waiting to make sure someone else is taking over before she can leave, like she fucking knows better.

"You'll need stitches," the paramedic says kindly, turning Ilya's forearm in her hands after he's obediently swung his legs up to lay on the stretcher. It's dramatic, and humiliating, and if Ilya had any say, he would have just had Shane drive him to the hospital. "I'm going to start an IV, because you're dehydrated, but we'll let them dress your hands at the hospital. You most likely have frostbite."

"Can't you give him something?" Shane asks, sitting onto the bench next to the gurney, looking so small and out of place. He's probably never been on that side of an ambulance before, Ilya thinks, as his boyfriend's hands immediately come to sit on his knees like he doesn't really know what else to do with them. "For the pain?"

"No pain," Ilya says. He's kind of surprised to find he means it, but he truly can't feel anything. He's still numb.

The paramedic is making herself busy, hooking an IV bag to the pole above them. "We'll wait for doctor's orders on that as well," she says. Ilya thinks she's trying to avoid eye

contact. “Just need to make sure there's nothing else in your system first.”

Ilya doesn't think it would be a good time to mention the vodka, so he keeps his mouth shut.

Outside, Yuna Hollander- who Ilya can see has gone full Momager- is talking to the woman from the bridge. He's too far away to see what they're saying, but-

“She won't tell anyone.”

Shane looks up heavily from the bench next to the gurney, where he's been watching the paramedic insert the needle from the IV. His eyes are so sad. “Hm?”

“The woman, she won't tell anyone,” he repeats, like it will soothe the furrow between Shane's brows. “She is American, she doesn't even watch hockey. She did not know who I was. She does not need... what is it-”

“NDA,” Shane supplies without missing a beat. “That's not what I'm worried about right now, Ilya.”

Yuna must be, though, because she walks up to the ambulance doors with the woman from the bridge, who gives him a soft look.

“You'll be okay, Ilya.” she says. “You've got a lot of people looking out for you, okay?”

Ilya nods. She turns to walk away, her work here done, and he feels like kicking himself. “Wait!”

She does.

“Thank you,” Ilya makes a small, aborted gesture, limited by the IV on one side and the heavy bandaging on the other. “For driving me home. And helping me. I'm... sorry.”

“You're sounding awfully Canadian,” she teases as the paramedic next to him pats his shoulder, indicating she's done wrapping his arm.

“Yes, well...” Ilya leans back. He's not really feeling like himself tonight, sue him for being out of character. “Thank you, then. What is your name?”

The woman looks at him softly, and Ilya gets that feeling again, almost like *deja vu*- the vague similarity to Yuna, like there's something about her he can't quite put his finger on but just feels *familiar*-

“Irina,” the woman says.

And it kind of falls into place.

The emergency room is quiet.

Shane is too. He sits on the chair to Ilya's left, still and drained, staring at the floor. His feet are flat on the floor, hands resting on their respective armrests. Yuna is outside, speaking to the doctor, while David darts around getting things from the vending machine, and offering coffee, and trying to be useful.

"They didn't need to come," Ilya says.

Shane drags his head up. Every time he does it, he stares at Ilya with swollen red eyes like he's terrified he'll disappear. "What?" he croaks.

"David and Yuna," Ilya gestures outside with his good arm. He shouldn't be drunk anymore, it's been hours, but he still kind of feels like it. He doesn't feel any more like himself than he did when he first left the house. "It is late. They should sleep. You should sleep too."

"It's morning," Shane says. And he's right, of course, Ilya thinks through the fog in his head- it's early morning now. "None of us are trying to sleep."

"Sorry." It's all he has to offer.

There's a charged silence. Ilya stares at the two paper cups of coffee on his bedside table that neither of them have touched. He wants to tell Shane to drink it, if he's not going to sleep- to ask if he's at least eaten something, even though he already knows the answer, and the hospital cafeteria definitely won't have anything in line with his diet.

Suddenly Shane speaks, breaking the silence, and his voice breaks with it. "Ilya..."

He watches in horror as he starts crying again. His body shakes weakly, and Ilya can tell by looking at him that Shane probably doesn't even have any more tears left in him. He's got exhaustion written into every inch of his skin, but the anxiety is winning over, like a cruel game of tug of war.

It's one of the most painful things Ilya's ever fucking seen. He reaches out, feeling his own eyes start to burn. "No, *moya lyubov*, please don't cry. I'm sorry-"

"Fuck you," Shane sobs. He reaches both his hands up, swiping at them at the apples of his cheeks, where his freckles sit over the flushed skin. His hands are shaking. "*Fuck*, Ilya..."

Any other day, Ilya would have seized the opportunity to say, “*later*”, or “*you mean the other way around, right*”. But he fucking hates himself today- thinks he’d vomit if he tried touch his boyfriend tonight. So he just lets his own tear slip down his cheek, with no idea how to fix what he’s done.

He watches Shane take a miserable, shuddering breath. “You were missing for *hours*...”

“I know,” Ilya nods. “I’m sorry. I forgot my phone, I did not remember the time it was-”

“We didn’t know where you *were*,” Shane moans. “There was so much blood, it was fucking... *smear*ed all over the floor, and I was too fucking far away, and we couldn’t find you-”

None of that really makes sense to him, except- “I thought the blood was clean. I tried, with the towel, I thought...”

Shane shakes his head like *he’s* confused, like what Ilya’s saying doesn’t make any sense. “You- why would you leave if you were bleeding? You’re so much smarter than that, if you’re hurt, you *stay put*, you at least fucking call for help! Hayden thought someone had been *murdered*-”

Hayden? “Why was Pike at our house?”

Shane looks at him incredulously. “Because he’s my best friend, Jackie made us cookies, he was dropping them off! And then we freaked him out when he showed up and the front door was wide open, and neither of us were home, and there was a bunch of blood on the kitchen floor!”

Well. Ilya can see why that would have been distressing. If he had walked into Sveta’s house and found a pool of his best friend’s blood, and she was nowhere to be found, he probably also would have panicked.

That was exactly what he’d tried *not* to do- leave behind something scary for Shane to find- and evidently, he’d failed spectacularly.

“He thought we’d been stabbed, or kidnapped, or robbed or something. God, Ilya, it was...” he looks pale. “There was so much blood.”

Ilya subconsciously clamps a hand over the bandage wrapped around his arm. “I tried to clean it,” he says quietly. “I promise.”

Shane suddenly pauses, looking like something’s clicked. Ilya thinks he looks like he might throw up. “What- what are you talking about?”

“Before I left. I tried to clean it. I wiped it with the towel in the kitchen. I was drunk, I clearly did not see how much there was. I probably got more on the floor because I kept moving around, I’m sorry. I will try to be clean,” he doesn’t know why he’s pleading. “I know you hate the mess. I’m sorry I haven’t been-”

“Ilya, please stop.”

It comes out breathily. Ilya looks up in alarm. Shane is white as a sheet. He looks like he's about to pass out, like he's just *realized* something.

“Дорогой-” *Sweetheart-*

“Is that what you've been thinking?” Shane asks faintly. “That I'm going to be mad about the blood?”

Ilya wants to nod, but the look on his boyfriend's face is making him think he might have made another terrible miscalculation, so he just sits there stupidly.

Shane looks like all the blood in his face has drained, save the swollen eyes and lips from crying. He's clutching the armrests so tightly that the tips on his fingers have turned white too. “Ilya, did you... you really did hurt yourself, on purpose, didn't you?”

“No,” Ilya insists. “I shattered the bottle, I would not- that is fucking *embarrassing*, I am not sad teenage girl-”

“Stop,” Shane says, so he does. “You were bleeding. Badly. You *knew* you needed stitches, and you left instead of calling for help. That woman- Irina- she found you on the top of a bridge after nearly eight hours.”

Eight hours. Ilya finds it hard to believe he'd been gone that long, but explains the ache in his legs, similar to how he feels after a particularly grueling workout. He *had* kind of gone away, which didn't happen often, but his memory was always hazy when it did.

“What were you doing on that bridge?” Shane asks, pleading.

A stubborn tear makes its way down Ilya's cheek. It sounds like bullshit even to himself when he swears, “I went on walk! Fresh air, and you- you left! I didn't want to scare you, it was fine-”

“My mom,” it's barely understandable through the Shane's sob, through the hand wiping his face feebly, like a small child- “thinks you tried to *kill* yourself.”

The monitor at Ilya's side starts beeping a little bit faster.

“It was the first thing she said, when Hayden said there was blood. She told the police, when they asked about ‘*history of mental illness*’, she said ‘*his mother committed suicide*’. And I- I yelled at her, because there was no way that you'd- you would never-” he can't even finish getting the words out.

Ilya can't do anything but watch.

“You did, didn't you?”

“I didn't *try*,” Ilya says weakly. “I was just... I am so tired, I didn't-”

“You didn't stop it.”

“I am *Tired*.” It’s the only thing he knows how to say.

Shane stands, tears all over his beautiful face, all over Ilya’s sweatshirt. He shoves the side railing of the hospital bed down and grabs Ilya’s face with both hands. His eyes are so swollen and red, and he stares at him like he’s trying to crawl into his mind. “Why wouldn’t you call me?” he whispers.

“You should not have to clean up after me,” Ilya says, jaw clenched.

“Clean up after you,” Shane echoes, like the words are completely foreign to him.

Ilya nods, feeling a flicker of irritation because yes, that’s almost verbatim what he’d said earlier. “We fought, because I was being an asshole, and I am sleeping too much, and am lazy, and I make mess you have to fix. You were angry-”

Shane looks like he’s genuinely trying to understand. “So- you thought you couldn’t call me? Because I was mad?”

It sounds so fucking *stupid* when he says it like that. “Yes, Shane, you were mad. Is not your fault, it was mine, but I cannot-” His eyes burn with humiliation as he grasps at the words- “I come to *your* country, I move into your house, your family dinners, I take your mother!” and fuck, that’s definitely not the right phrasing, but he just has to hope Shane understands, “I have no one, Shane! I have no one! No father, no mother, no home anymore, no friends, it is all yours, and I stole it! You are... *что это за чертovsky*- You are stuck with me! I cannot do that to you anymore!”

Shane’s hands span the sides of Ilya’s head. He’s staring at him with the most devastated look Ilya’s ever seen.

“Ilya, you didn’t-” his eyes fly all over the room, like he’s scrambling for words now, too. “You didn’t ...*intrude*, why would you think... I’m not ‘stuck’ with anything- I *want you*, I *picked you*-”

“*Da*, that is the problem!” Ilya says desperately. “You deserve better than that, you are too nice to say it! I make messes, and I don’t clean them up, I am *lazy*,-”

“What are you talking about?!” Shane cries. “You’re, like, the furthest thing from lazy on the planet, you’ve won a fucking Stanley Cup-”

“You said, in the kitchen!”

“What? I’ve *never* said you were lazy-”

“I don’t do the laundry!” Ilya is shouting now. “I use the kitchen and I don’t clean it up, I can’t even wipe my blood off floor!”

There’s rustling outside. Their arguing has obviously garnered attention; Ilya can see someone in scrubs peering into the doorway out of the corner of his eye, like they’re waiting to intervene. They’re going to keep him, he realizes. He has a sudden flash of his mom, crying as his father threatens to send her away; a flash of the Preobrazhenskaya Mental

Hospital sticking out like a sore thumb in the outskirts of Moscow, the way people spoke of it as if it were a graveyard, what happens to people like *him* who end up in there-

Shane doesn't notice that's where his brain had gone- why would he, when Ilya had always sworn to keep him so far away from Russia he wouldn't even know what it looks like- and he says earnestly, "That is *not* what I meant, when I brought it up."

"Then what, Shane?" Ilya demands. He needs him to realize this, to accept it. His eyes fly back to drive the point home, which is easy with the way Shane is holding his face.

"I brought it up because I'm fucking *worried* about you," Shane's thumbs sweep over Ilya's wet cheeks, seemingly oblivious to the fact people outside are watching them. "Not because I think you're... fucking *lazy*. You've always done those things- I don't ask- it's not like you *have* to do them, you choose to do it because you know it bothers me if they aren't. And then all of the sudden you stopped, and you're tired all the time, and you're sad, and it's like you don't have any energy. You're different, I just wanted you to *talk* to me!"

"Что ты хочешь, чтобы я сказал?!" Ilya yells. *What do you want me to say?*

Shane looks stunned.

His face contorts in obvious frustration at himself before he whispers, "I- I don't-"

"I *know*."

It comes out in a frustrated growl. Ilya looks away, trying to blink away tears. "I know, Shane."

Shane reluctantly lets go as he swipes at his cheeks with thickly bandaged fingertips, smearing the ointment they'd coated his nose and lips and cheeks with for the same reason.

Ilya clenches his jaw, purses his lips, and glares at the wall, trying to salvage whatever semblance of dignity he has. "*That* is problem. I can't explain it. You can not understand, because I can't say it out loud. I... do not even know what I would say. I- I feel like my mother. I get sad like her, sometimes."

Shane looks like Ilya's just taken a sledgehammer to his heart. "The same way she did, when she died? You felt like that today?"

He's so obviously walking on eggshells. Tiptoeing and talking in code, like someone is going to overhear, like he doesn't want to assume. As if everyone else already hasn't come to that conclusion tonight, and there isn't a cop who's doing a shit job of trying to stay hidden posted outside their room in case Ilya tries not to run.

But Shane needs to hear it from his mouth. Not because he isn't smart, or because he can't figure it out on his own- because he probably already has.

But because he sees the best in people. Especially in Ilya.

Ilya fucking *hates* to burst that bubble- to give them the final push off the mountain before they tumble down to face the inevitable. But he owes it to him. He's caused enough pain tonight.

"Yes," Ilya bites out, like it's been forced out of him.

He hears Shane suck in a watery breath, and he knows he can't meet his eyes. "Not a lot. But tonight, it... yes. I'm sorry."

Shaw lets out a strangled noise. "Ilya--"

"You would be okay." Ilya promises, because he needs him to know. Shane is the embodiment of warmth, the definition of a blessing, and it would take nothing for someone to fall in love with him, wholly and deeply. And while the thought of him with another man makes Ilya want to gouge his own eyeballs out, it would be easier next time, for Shane. He wouldn't be dragged around for eight years, kept at arms length, because of fear that it would be worth it.

He'd done the hard part. He was out now. He would have the world at his fingertips. "You would be sad, yes, but you would be okay. You have family, they are here, you have your home. I... kept you back, for a long time. I hate myself for it. Sometimes it's too much."

Without giving them a second to breathe, the door to their room swings open.

Shane hasn't moved an inch, and Ilya wants to shout at the doctor who waltzes in to fucking *give him a second*, because Shane doesn't do well with change, or with bad news-

But the doctor starts speaking before he can. "Your drug test came back clear," she says with a cheery smile, as if she's the second coming of Christ coming to deliver them from what was probably at the very bottom of their list of concerns.

Ilya glares at her. "Yes. I am professional athlete."

He half expects Shane to pipe in in his defense. Drug accusations are no joke in the NHL, it's something he takes seriously (except for the winter olympics in Sochi, way back when, but that was in the past) and it's the kind of accusation that could derail his career.

But Shane just stands at his bedside, still holding Ilya's hand. His thumb traces along the tiny woven pattern of the bandage. "You drank half a bottle of vodka," he says quietly. Robotic. His lips are slightly and his eyes are glassy, like he's still processing. He's got nothing else left in him, Ilya can see it.

"Yes, but I did not do *drugs*," he grumbles anyway.

"Yes, the test was clean," the doctor repeats, with that stupid cheery look on her face, like they were waiting on her input. "So we can start you on some pain medication- but we also need to discuss next steps. You have Mr. Hollander listed as your medical proxy, would you like him to stay in the room?"

Shane blinks at that. "He- what?"

“Is fine,” Ilya waives his hand, but shoulders are already tightening. “You are keeping me, yes?”

“You are not under criminal arrest,” the doctor starts.

Ilya feels his face go stony.

“...but we are concerned about what’s happened tonight. Our initial assessment finds that you may be danger to yourself right now, and we do believe it would be in your best interest to place you on a psychiatric hold for the next 72 hours.”

72 hours. A low, droning buzz starts in the back of Ilya’s mind.

“But that’s Christmas,” Shane says from next to him. His voice is small. Like that means something, like that will make this woman change her mind.

“Yes.” the doctor nods solemnly, “He would be released Christmas morning.”

“We understand the sensitive nature of this, and we want to assure you we don’t take it lightly. Mrs. Hollander expressed that privacy is a concern, with you being...”

“Ilya Rozanov,” he says dully, without even really meaning to.

The doctor just nods, having the gall to look relieved that he’s given her an out. “Yes, with you being a well-recognizable figure. It’s not the first time we’ve had a high profile patient. We’ve arranged for it to be discreet. You will be in a separate location, about five minutes away- still on the campus, but not in the main building. It’s private, and quiet, and we’ll be able to monitor you and keep you safe while we get to the root of what happened and make sure it doesn’t happen again, okay?”

The buzzing is louder now. Ilya suddenly realizes he’s starting to slip away again. *Fuck*, not yet.

The doctor looks at him from across the room, waiting for a response. Ilya doesn’t know what the fucking point of it is when they’ve already decided for him.

Illusion of choice, like the vodka in the pantry. Like the universe has caught up with Ilya’s repetitive over-indulgence and entitlement, and finally dropped the axe.

He shrugs, the fight drained out of him. “As long as it is quiet.”

The doctor nods, turning back to exit the room. Shane’s head snaps up like a sleeper agent, and then suddenly he’s chasing her out of the room, calling “Hold on!”. Ilya barely has time to blink before the door closes behind him.

The room is suddenly silent.

For the second time today, Ilya is completely by himself.

It's palpable, all of the sudden. He can place it immediately, overwhelming the tiredness and the pain.

Одиночество: Loneliness.

He's completely, utterly alone, in more ways than one.

In the literal sense, it only lasts for a minute before the door is being pulled open. The un-subtle officer posted outside his room gives him an awkward smile.

"Sorry," he says. "Door has to stay open."

Of course. Because they think he will jump up and leap out of the nearest window if given the chance. He thinks these people might be thinking too highly of his zeal and determination, here, because he's never felt less motivated to do anything in his life- let alone exert physical energy to end it.

He lays his head back and doesn't open his eyes again for a while.

For the next few hours, people mostly just leave him alone.

Someone comes in at some point and puts something into his IV. They tell him, with a mesmerizingly soft voice, to just rest and let the medicine work. Not even two minutes after, his muscles start to relax, and a headache he didn't even know he had dissipates.

People mill about in the hallways, talking in hushed voices. It's not always about him; he's not that special. He may be in a private room, but it's still an emergency department. The worst day of his life is just another day at work for them.

He recognizes the doctor's voice at some point, but it's hushed, and not directed at him.

Cool, nimble fingers gently lift his hands and replace the bandages around his fingers without a word.

Shane lurks. Ilya can feel the anxiety radiating off of him like a nuclear bomb, from the chair next to his bed, but he never tries to speak to him. Ilya is grateful. He doesn't think he would have it in him, and whatever is in his IV is making him too sleepy anyway.

He thinks he hears Hayden Pike's voice at some point, and decides he must be having a truly shit dream. But Dream-Pike is speaking gently, and keeps explaining to Shane what the nurse is doing, and even somehow convinces him to take a bite of a protein bar he's brought in his diaper bag. He says, *"I know you, buddy."* and, *"Jackie and I have got a few of these stashed away pretty much everywhere,"* and, *"you're scary when you're hangry."*

It makes Shane laugh, so Ilya decides he'll allow it. Dream Pike can take over for a few minutes if it keeps Shane at ease.

It's Yuna that finally wakes him up for good.

It takes a few minutes. Through his sleepy haze, Ilya briefly- *bizarrely*- thinks it's his Mama. But the fingers gently sweeping his hair from his face aren't quite the same- they're softer, uncalloused.

It's nice anyway. It's been so long since someone's done this for him.

When they move from brushing the top of his curls to tucking a short, loose strand behind his ear, he realizes they smell faintly like lavender, and it clicks.

He opens his eyes, blinking rapidly to adjust to the bright overhead light. The hands don't falter, or slow. They gently ease him into consciousness, guiding him up. He turns and sees Yuna sitting in Shane's chair, smiling down at him sadly.

"Hi, honey," she says.

It's so sweet and unexpected that he feels eyes start to burn with tears.

"Are you in pain?" Her brows furrow. Her hair is clipped back, her makeup faded as if she's been here for a while.

Ilya shakes his head in response. His mouth is dry when he tries to speak. Yuna senses it and pauses, reaching for the cup next to her and guiding a straw between his lips.

He didn't realize how thirsty he'd been. He nods to himself as she pulls the cup away, feeling a little more alert now.

"Where is Shane?" he croaks, sitting up.

Yuna lets him, though her hands hover, ready to catch him if he falls. "David took him for a lap. They should be back in a few minutes. He was getting antsy."

Ilya nods, frowning. Yuna's hands slowly resume their gentle combing of his hair. He barely registers it. His thoughts are distant, muddled.

"They have you on medication." Yuna explains softly, like she can sense his confusion. "Diazepam. It's for anxiety, it can make you sleepy. You fell asleep before that, though. You were pretty tired, huh?"

Ilya nods. Then, "They will take me?"

The sentence makes no fucking sense. Yuna tries to answer anyway, because she's kind. "They're keeping you, yes. It will be quiet. You'll have a therapist, they'll start you on medication. We'll get you on the right track, so you don't have to feel like this anymore."

He doesn't remember what life was like when he didn't. He finally meets her eyes, and the confession slips out like a prayer. "I am scared."

An impossibly sad look flashes over Yuna's face before she swallows, straightening and schooling her expression. "I know, honey. It was scary, today. You scared us, when we didn't know when you were. When we realized you had hurt yourself... I haven't felt that kind of fear in a long time."

Ilya's chin wobbles. He feels like a child again, being chastised. It's clearly not Yuna's intention, because she squeezes his hand.

"This, though, going to get treatment, you don't need to be scared of. I swear that to you. It's not the same as in Russia. I've had the place thoroughly vetted. It's only for a few days, but you won't *ever* be hurt. You won't be forced to do anything you don't want to. You will be able to call us at any time, day or night, and we'll answer."

Ilya won't call. Yuna looks like she knows that, too, just like she knew what it was Ilya was worried about.

"A doctor will come by to walk there with you, in about ten minutes," she continues anyway. "That's why you're awake now, they're weaning you off the sedatives for a little bit. But Shane's been waiting to speak to you, I saw him and David walk past a minute ago. He wants to say goodbye. Do you want to talk to him?"

Ilya nods. He couldn't fathom ever not wanting to speak to Shane, especially if he's asked for it.

Yuna runs her hand through his hair one more time. She studies his face for a moment, and Ilya sees in her eyes that she wants to say something else. She decidedly refrains. Pulls back slowly, settling her hands in her lap.

"I'll be back in a minute, okay?"

Ilya nods. She slips out of the room. He rubs his eyes with his bandaged hands and sits up straighter, trying to look lucid. He doesn't want the last image Shane has of him to be looking like shit.

Shane comes in a moment later. He looks exhausted, like the weight of the world has settled onto his shoulders. His thumbs are slipped into the front pockets of his jeans and his eyes are trained on the floor.

It makes Ilya's heart ache.

"Hi," Shane says shyly, finally looking up at him.

"Hi," Ilya echoes. Then, "have you eaten?"

Shane gives him a patented look of annoyance "Yes, asshole. Hayden gave me a protein bar."

The awkwardness melts away. Ilya feels a wave of unbearable fondness. "Good," he says, feeling the corners of his lips poke upwards in a smile. Maybe he's still a bit loopy. "Are you okay?"

Shane doesn't respond for a moment. He settles onto the chair next to Ilya's bed, taking his time to take his hand before responding.

"No, Ilya, I'm not. Because you're not. And after talking it over, you haven't been for a really long time, and I let you down."

Ilya frowns. Shakes his head. "No, *moya lyubov*, it was my-"

"Don't," Shane interrupts. "Don't. Let me talk, okay?"

Ilya closes his mouth.

Shane takes a deep breath, like he's prepping for a round of particularly difficult press interviews. "I've fucked up. Majorly. You've been hurting, for a long time. And I noticed. I know you, Ilya. I knew something was off. I think maybe I was waiting for you to come to me, first. I think I didn't know how to talk to you about it, so I didn't say anything at all, and that wasn't fair. It meant you had to carry all of that by yourself.

But that's not how this works, okay? Ever. You don't just keep this to yourself. I don't care how you have to tell me, but you fucking *tell* to me. I'm going to pick up more Russian classes. I didn't realize you felt like you couldn't even articulate yourself, Ilya, *fuck-*"

Shane huffs out a breath. He takes a moment to swipe at his eyes, before grabbing Ilya's hand again. He squeezes it harder, this time. "That must feel so fucking *lonely*."

Ilya's face crumbles.

His eyes squeeze shut and he feels a tear escape from where it's been sitting precariously in his lashes.

"Yes," he chokes. "Yes, it- is it lonely."

Shane nods quickly. "I know that now. And I- I'm so fucking sorry. And you think... Ilya, I need you to really listen to me. I need you to know this. No more misunderstandings, no

spinning it to turn it against yourself, okay?”

I *love you*. Not because you forced me, or because you - tricked me, or something. I love you all on my own. You have to trust me on that, okay? You didn't just show up one day, and *invade Canada*, or whatever it is you think you did. You came out, knowing you could never go home again. Then you quit the team that you love, and you came to Ottawa, so we could have a life together. *Together*, you *and* me. As a team. Because we're pretty fucking great together, Rozanov.”

“Yes,” Ilya smiles thickly. “We are.”

Shane nods, satisfied. “You did some of the hardest things a person can do. Canada is yours as much as it's mine. As much as it's my mom's, and my grandparents, and you would never say they didn't belong here, would you?”

“Shane,” Ilya says drily, “That is different. I do not know if you can see, but I am a white man.”

But Shane shakes his head. “It's not different. Not in this case. I'm not talking about race, Ilya. Canada is your home. And not because you don't have another one to go back to, but because you fucking earned it, and you're here, and you're kind of a landmark now, anyway. You're famous, you know.”

That earns him a watery smirk that Ilya doesn't bother to push down.

“You've been through all kinds of hell,” Shane leans forward. “And we've never really talked about it. So I need you to promise me we're going to, alright? It doesn't have to be immediately, but I need to know eventually. I need to know what you're thinking, so I can help you, or at least be there. Because this can't *ever* happen again, Ilya. You can't disappear. I know you're in pain, but...”

Shane's face scrunches up in a sob, and he gasps, like his whole body is concentrating on keeping it together.

“You can't die like that, Ilya. I... I wouldn't be able to take it. I'm not that strong.”

And Ilya realizes, as the door opens a moment later and the doctor walks in, that he's not selfish enough to put that to the test.

“For the record,” Shane says quietly just for the two of them, as they gently guide Ilya to his feet and help him pull in his jacket, “I have *never* called you lazy. And I never will.”

They will pick him up on Christmas day.

Ilya reminds himself of that as the doctor leads him down the hallway, where they've closed the hallway doors and sent away the extra staff for the next few minutes, so he can walk away unseen.

He still turns back, though.

Shane stands in the middle of the hallway, crying a little bit, but he's obviously trying to hide it. David is standing behind him, rubbing his back. He has his other arm around Yuna, who's let her hair down, and is staring at Ilya with a knowing, encouraging smile.

Pike- who it turns out wasn't just a figure of Ilya's drugged imagination- is standing on the opposite side with a flowery diaper bag hanging off on one arm. The other hand is resting on Shane's shoulder. It's firm, and steady, and clearly just what Shane needs right now, because he's leaning into it a little bit.

Their eyes meet, and there's a brief moment.

Ilya's eyebrows lower, just the tiniest bit. *Take care of him.*

Across the hallway, Pike gives a subtle nod. *I will.*

An unspoken vow that holds firmly between them- something Ilya doesn't need to try to find the words for to know it's understood. He's unsurprised to find that he trusts it wholeheartedly.

Because while he would gladly kick Pike's ass in the nearest parking lot if given the opportunity, and he was pretty much certain that would never change, he had still earned the title of Shane's best friend. It was Pike that had protected him for years, in quiet ways, every day, when Ilya wasn't around to do it yet.

He'll do it again.

Shane gives Ilya a tiny, devastated wave. Ilya, of course, waves back. Shane is still in Ilya's soft gray centaurs sweatshirt. Beneath it sits Irina Rozanova's crucifix chain. Shane had volunteered to hold onto it when the nurse had reluctantly told them he couldn't bring it with him into treatment.

"I'll take care of it," Shane had promised with wide, dark eyes.

"I know," Ilya had assured him fondly.

He also knows, somehow, that it will take care of him too. Maybe, sitting atop Shane's chest, Mama can get to know the heart of gold that had so wholly won over her son. The heart that Ilya would get to keep forever, while they built their lives together.

Take care of him, Ilya thinks.

He suddenly thinks of the Irina from the bridge, and Yuna. The fleeting feeling of déjà-vu he'd had all day, when he was most ready to follow her.

He thinks, with a warm realization, that maybe she already has been.

Ilya turns, satisfied, and lets the doctor lead him out of view.

End Notes

This is for all everyone who's sleeping in their old childhood bed for the holidays and trying to find some kind of escape *mark ruffalo we are america gif*

My first AO3 fic!!! I've been lurking on here for years, but the last time I actually wrote something was an iron man x captain america fic in middle school, so this is a step up. It's also the first part of this series! The next few will have with rotating POV's. I love getting my hands onto any ounce of angst available and then stretching it out as far as I possibly can.

In the mean time, enjoy my angsty young Ilya edits on my tiktok under the same user ;)

Please leave feedback, I want to hear your thoughts!

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