

It's all winter here, even in August

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](https://archiveofourown.org/works/76196041) at <https://archiveofourown.org/works/76196041>.

Rating:	Mature
Archive Warning:	Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings
Category:	M/M
Fandoms:	Heated Rivalry (TV) , Game Changers Series - Rachel Reid
Relationship:	Shane Hollander/Ilya Rozanov
Characters:	Ilya Rozanov , Shane Hollander , Yuna Hollander , David Hollander
Additional Tags:	Ilya Rozanov Needs A Hug , Mental Health Issues , Shane Hollander Loves Ilya Rozanov , Autistic Shane Hollander , Bipolar Disorder , Ilya Rozanov-centric , Suicidal Thoughts , Angst , Angst with a Happy Ending , Introspection , Erectile Dysfunction , Implied Sexual Content , Light Dom/sub , Bipolar Ilya Rozanov
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2025-12-22 Words: 11,252 Chapters: 1/1

It's all winter here, even in August

by [thecrowtit](#)

Summary

"биполярное расстройство."

Shane was quiet for a moment, ticking through the words he had learned and picked up over the years. As Ilya suspected, this was not one of them.

Inevitably he asked, "what does it mean?"

It was Ilya's turn to be quiet.

Or a continuation of Ilya getting mental health treatment after the Long Game ends that nobody asked for and him coming to terms with being diagnosed with bipolar 2.

Notes

The title is taken from the song "Spring Day" by BTS

This is unbeta'd and written in a crazed state over the course of two days. Bless!

The Long Game Spoilers ahead!

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

It was here again.

Ilya could feel it descending upon him like dark clouds in winter. That familiar chill that settled into him, making him feel cold and hollowed out. Dead like the winter.

He used to like the winter. Although Russia was always bitterly cold in winter, he liked the stillness of it. The way the world seemed to stop, and the street lights would shine their golden light on the piles of snow.

His mother hated the winter. She never said it but he could tell. The way she folded into herself, sighing as she looked out the window. The desire she had to leave the house had been ripped away by the cold and dreary weather.

Inevitably she saw him standing nearby. He was always watching her. He supposed somehow he knew even then that he did not have much time with her. He just wanted to look at her.

The longer the years went on, the more he forgot her face. Even pictures of her never seemed to do her justice. But he could never forget those long pale arms, or the sound of her voice as she asked him, "Ilyushka, when do you think spring will come?"

She was not really asking so Ilya never answered. He brought her tea and she stood by the window and forgot to drink it.

Then a few days later, she was wrapped in her blankets again. All her nervous energy from before had vanished. Those days always passed by quickly, when she'd seem happier than she usually was. But then, as sudden as a storm, she'd be back in bed, staring at the ceiling, tears in her eyes.

Ilya loved his mother. She was the very best parts of him.

Unfortunately, she was also the very worst.

He loved her, he truly did but help him, he did not want to be like her. Not like this.

So as he felt that creeping chill, he turned on his back, looking for the warmth of the man beside him. He was not surprised but he was a little upset to find Shane not beside him.

Usually Shane was up before him, sticking to his morning routine like clockwork. Depending on the minute, his husband was either fixing coffee or reading the New Yorker.

He closed his eyes and listened carefully and heard the flip of a newspaper.

So it was 8:30.

He checked his phone to see it was indeed 8:31.

This brought a smile to his face that warmed him against the cold that threatened to overtake him.

His boring husband was so predictable, and how that made him love him even more.

He should get up, make them breakfast, maybe have a quick fuck on the couch. That could be his morning exercise.

Shane was probably wearing his glasses and that thought turned his warm feelings from before into a small burst of heat.

But it wasn't enough. He stared at the clock as it turned from 8:31 to 8:32.

He should get up.

It wouldn't do him any good to stay in bed like this.

He could hear the voice of his therapist encouraging him to get up even when he didn't feel like it. Even when it was hard.

He had to take his pill soon.

He had to take it so he could be better. So he could be normal. So Shane wouldn't worry.

To take his pill he had to eat something, even if it was a small thing. So he had to make breakfast, a healthy but delicious breakfast. Something he and Shane could eat together.

Shane probably already drank his disgusting smoothie that morning. He didn't have to wait for Ilya to eat breakfast, he was capable of making that disgusting smoothie himself.

Shane did not need him to do that.

Ilya wasn't hungry anyway. Not really.

Not when things were like this, he did not really want to eat as much as he wanted a cigarette.

The thought of one practically made his mouth water despite the fact he had quit awhile ago.

He was getting better. Making healthier choices. He had Shane and Anya, and Yuna and David and a whole fucking team to take care of.

He breathed in a shaky breath, shivering lightly and he pat his fingers against his chest.

That chill settled fully at the center of his chest, and sunk deeper until it collapsed into a black hole, and tears sprang to Ilya's eyes so suddenly it surprised even him.

He pulled the blankets over his face and pressed his hand over his eyes, pleading, praying, not again.

"Ilya?"

Ilya shifted, sniffing slightly as he was pulled from sleep.

"Ilya?" Ilya felt the bed dip and heard Anya's claws tap tap tapping on their wooden floor and he felt her jump onto the bed.

"Il-" he pulled the blankets down quickly, smirking crookedly at Shane. His husband sat next to him, his face settled into its default serious expression. To anyone else he would look a bit stoic, but Ilya could see by the slight crease of his brows he was concerned.

Ah.

That wouldn't do.

"What мой попрыгай?" Ilya teased, to lessen the weight of the Black hole in his chest.

Shane paused in what he was originally going to say, and instead asked, "Is that an animal?"

"Parrot, my brilliant gay husband only bi when is lingual," Shane smirked at that.

"Trilingual," he corrected as Anya crawled up the bed to sit between them, wagging her tail happily. Ilya rolled his eyes at Shane, scratching the dog behind the ears.

"Ah yes, of course, Mr. Language man," he leaned forward and kissed Shane chastely on the lips. He was aware he had yet to brush his teeth, but still he leaned over next to Shane's ear to whisper to him, "your mouth has always been talented." He then kissed his neck and was rewarded with a slight pink blush and a small smile.

Shane had managed to grab Ilya's hand in his own, and he played with his fingers, tracing over his scarred up knuckles. "You feeling okay?"

Ilya looked over at the clock. It was 9:42.

"Yes," he deflected, "some normal people like to sleep late sometimes."

Shane eyed him, and gently said, "you missed your alarm, and the reminder."

The first thing Ilya felt was irritation, and then he felt irritation at himself for being irritated. "Yeah, I know, is my fault, thank you for telling me," even as he spoke he wanted to smack himself. Why did he sound like such an asshole?

Well, sounding like an asshole was not unusual for him but he always meant to sound like an asshole. It was part of his charm.

But these days he was finding himself sounding like an asshole when he didn't mean to.

It was happening a lot more often than he would like to admit. He looked over at Shane whose brows were creased again.

"You will wrinkle early," Ilya reached up to rub at that place.

"Ilya," Shane sighed.

"Just because you are half Asian does not mean you won't get the wrinkles, мой глазированный пончик," Ilya poked Shane's nose and grabbed his chin to lay a sloppy kiss on his cheek. He pulled back to see Shane frowning, but curious.

"Why a glazed doughnut?" Ilya had not really given it much thought as he usually didn't, but he reached down to put his hand over Anya's ears.

"Because is what your ass looks like when I cum in you."

"You're such an asshole," even as he hit Ilya's shoulder, there was a smile on Shane's face and that horrible dark and cold feeling inside Ilya's chest felt a little less overbearing.

He loves Shane so much. He can be better for him.

"Come on, the alarm went off like an hour ago," Shane pushed Ilya's shoulder and then, more tenderly he reached up to rub at the back of Ilya's neck, his fingers stroking through his messy curls.

The touch felt nice.

It felt warm.

"You sure you're okay? You can..." Shane's gaze fell, and then he shrugged, "I know Dr. Molchalina is great to talk to, but I'm here too."

"Oh, sweetheart," Ilya reached up, cupping Shane's face to get him to look at him, "Мой любимый," he emphasized the pet name that Shane knew very well, "is nothing, I just slept in."

He knew Shane was more hyper aware of everything these days, feeling guilty for missing so much before. He often was too hard on himself for missing out on so many social cues.

But just like with everything else, when Shane Hollander put his mind to it, he would become an expert overnight and now he was an expert on Ilya Rozanov's mental health.

Or at least he tried very hard to be.

"Let's go drug me, and take Anya for walk," Ilya poked at Shane's ribs, tickling him slightly and Shane moved away.

"Don't call it that," he chided with no real sincerity, "and you're cleaning the bed, look at all the fur," he said a bit mournfully as Anya jumped down.

"Drugs time! Time for you to drug your husband!" Ilya grinned, despite the ache in his chest growing further.

"Stop saying that!"

Ilya laughed. The cold was overwhelming, and walking to the kitchen was like dragging a weight behind him, but if he kept laughing, he could be okay.

He could be normal.

He could be good enough.

He could be different from his mother.

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Two weeks later

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"No! That is not what I am saying!"

Ilya had not meant to snap.

Not at Yuna of all people.

Over something so stupid too. He really did not even know why he got so frustrated in the first place. Standing in some department store looking at watches for David and Yuna's anniversary.

They weren't even fighting.

They'd just been talking. About Shane, about David, about hockey. The latter being the one the subject that set Ilya off.

He loved Yuna, but she had been acting like a backseat captain all morning. Usually he was thrilled to hear her insight, but today he had woken up already agitated and just wasn't in the mood to hear how his team could be improved.

He thought they were doing fine, especially now that Shane was on the team. They were more than fine. They were great! Heading to be the best!

What Yuna said that set him off had been that he could not get complacent just because he had the two best players on his team.

It was not even a serious statement. Not in the slightest. It was more teasing and taking pride in her sons.

But it struck him where it hurt most.

Complacent. His English was good enough to know that could be another word for lazy.

That's not how Yuna meant it. He breathed in deeply and reminded himself of that but his irritation was scratching painfully inside of him.

She didn't mean it like that. She'd never call him lazy.

Finally his irritation settled and instead shame overtook him as Yuna's brown eyes widened slightly in surprise.

"I'm sorry," he quickly said but it was too late, Yuna's brows were doing that same thing that Shane's did when he was upset or worried. "I'm sorry," he repeated and hoped it would smooth things over.

"Ilya," Yuna rested her hand on his arm, her perceptive eyes watching his carefully, "are you doing okay?"

For some reason that question only served to irritate him more, and then he felt ashamed.

"Fine," he forced a smile, "I just need some air."

He needed a cigarette.

He didn't go back into the department store but he did not smoke a cigarette either.

He waited outside until Yuna came back out and he heard her.

"Just make sure to check on him, okay? Love you too," Ilya felt the anger pierce through him.

That must have been Shane on the phone and Ilya snapping at Yuna and then running off must have sent her into super mom mode. Needing to fix things. Needing to fix him. Normally Ilya loved that about her, but was this really something to worry about!? Why couldn't they just treat him normally?

"Oh, Ilya, you didn't come back inside," Yuna tucked her phone into her purse.

"Apologies," Ilya forced a smile, because he did love his mother in law and he was not going to be an asshole to her.

"It's okay, I decided David doesn't need another watch. He's got three Rolex's. However, he's been getting into model ships lately," Yuna sighed affectionately.

"Another boring Hollander hobby," Ilya smiled for real this time, then frowned as he took Yuna's arm, and leaned over conspiratorially, "Do you think this is genetic too?"

Yuna laughed, "we'll see. Those two are more alike than they think," she said fondly and shook her head, "I should have asked Shane to give me some suggestions when I was on the phone with him."

"Oh?" Ilya's anger burned. So he'd been right.

Yuna had called Shane about him. Shane was going to be upset at him for snapping at his mother.

"Yeah, I asked him to check on our old neighbor while he picks up some things for the barbecue this weekend, Mr. Chen is getting up there," and just like that, Ilya's anger was flooded with shame once again.

"Oh," he spoke in a small voice and nodded, "is nice of you." He grew quiet, his shame building. He just wanted to be home. Fuck.

Why wasn't this scratching irritation going away? He shouldn't be upset, but he couldn't help it. He was so fucking angry, he couldn't stand it and that made him angrier.

Yuna suddenly squeezed his arm, her eyes full of worry. Fuck, he could see Shane's expression of worry like it was copy paste.

He suddenly desperately needed to see Shane again.

"You okay?" Yuna asked and Ilya took a deep breath, counting down from ten before he answered.

"Is shitty weather today, no?" he asked and Yuna looked up at the clouds in the sky.

"Not great for summer," she admitted.

"Luckily Canada is beautiful as you," Ilya smiled and then at the top of his lungs, slightly and purposely out of tune, he sang "oh Canada!"

Yuna's laughter eased his overly agitated body, and he looked back at her with mock hurt.

"Am I singing wrong? No good. I need to know for my citizenship test," he laughed and Yuna smiled.

"Shane has already planned out your path to citizenship with color coded tabs," Yuna smiled and Ilya felt his heart swoop, thinking of his husband.

"You did not help him at all?" He teased his mother in law and Yuna smiled.

"I may have helped some," she admitted. "In a few years you'll be a real Canadian."

Ilya put his hand over his heart, "oh say can you-oof!"

"That's American Ilya," she eyed him with a smirk.

"Oh yeah," Ilya grinned crookedly, "is my fault, silly me, it's so alike- ah!" He dodged another hit and ran ahead giggling.

Yuna shook her head smiling and Ilya thought about how happy it was he annoyed her. At least she wouldn't worry.

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Four days later

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Again?

Ilya rolled onto his back.

He thought he was over this but it came back so soon.

This time colder, heavier, and darker than before.

The weather was beautiful today, he was supposed to get up and run with Shane. He promised to work out with him that morning after the barbecue.

He had a few drinks in him, nothing too extreme. He could not mix them with his medication after all. He was supposed to stay away from alcohol altogether but it was fine.

He could have a drink. He already quit smoking, he did not want to give up another thing that made him happy.

He looked at the clock.

It was 8:07.

His alarm for his medication would go off soon, and if he missed it, Shane would be worried again.

He would be worried and grow wrinkles in that adorable scrunch above his nose. Then he would blame Ilya for causing his wrinkles.

He looked to the side to see Shane had indeed already woken up. He probably already went for a run, not wanting to wake up Ilya.

Things had been a little awkward after the barbecue as they cleaned up the dishes together.

They always bickering and even fought sometimes but this was different. Shane was concerned, he was nagging, and it was sweet but also frustrating.

It all started from a joke. Ilya had said he could get the party going with a trip down to a dispensary. Shane wasn't against weed, although he liked to keep his system clean in the on season. He also was not a huge fan of the way it made him feel sometimes.

He was already very super conscious of everything and instead of making him relax as it did with most people, it could make him more hyper aware. He also hated the smell.

That's why when Ilya indulged, he usually ate gummies. But he had not in a long time.

"I just think if you're going to drink on them, you probably shouldn't mix THC too," Shane said as he dried the dishes and Ilya blew a raspberry.

"Fun police," Ilya handed him another dish, "weed is natural plant, yes? Can be good for mental health."

Shane frowned, "lots of things are natural but not good for everyone. Some people are allergic to peanuts."

"I will watch for swelling neck next time I eat one," Ilya rolled his eyes as he dried off his hands. Shane leaned against the counter, his mouth in a straight line.

"I'm just saying I've been doing some research..."

"Have you Dr. No Fun?"

"Ilya, can you fucking be serious for once?"

This ticked Ilya off and he gripped the counter, turning toward his husband. "Okay, you want serious, I'm fucking serious. I don't need you to worry about me taking my pills. If I forget, I forget! If I drink, I drink! If I want to throw them down the toilet, I will."

Shane's eyebrows flew up at that, "did you?"

Ugh, Ilya wanted to scream. Then he took a breath, wondering why he was so upset. He needed this conversation to end before he said something he'd regret.

"No, Hollander, I did not," he spoke very slowly and it pissed him off the way he saw relief flooding Shane's expression. The worst part is he just didn't know why he was so angry. Maybe because he felt infantilized. Maybe because Shane didn't trust him.

Was he talking to Yuna and David about this? Behind his back? He tried to think back to if there had been any worried glances that night, but it had been a wonderful night until now.

He put his hand through his curls and sighed, his body suddenly feeling heavy.

He was going crazy.

"I should get ready for bed, am tired," he did not look at Shane, but he felt a careful hand touch his side.

Then those strong arms slid around his middle and Shane spoke honestly, as he always did, "I hate fighting."

"Is not fight," Ilya combed back Shane's longer hair and placed a kiss on his forehead, "is only a what did your mother call it?"

"Marital spat?"

"Hmm yes," Ilya kissed his head again and breathed his husband in. His fury was gone now and he was just left feeling empty. He just wanted to be alone.

He pulled away slightly, ready to say goodnight when Shane suddenly said, "go running with me tomorrow. I heard it can help, ya know, with depression."

Ilya finally felt that familiar fondness bloom as Shane showed care for him, "does it now, Dr. No Fun," he teased and he stroked a thumb over Shane's cheek. "Shall we buy you doctor coat and I can pretend I am patient who fucks you?"

As expected, Shane flushed and he actually took Ilya's joke into consideration, "wouldn't it make more sense if you were the doctor and I was the patient."

Ilya gripped his hips suddenly and back his husband against the counter a smirk on his lips. "Oh Mr. Hollander-Rozanov has fantasies, you like men in uniform, yes?"

"Fuck off," even as he said this, Shane still wrapped his arms around Ilya and kissed him. It was a heated kiss, with obvious invitation for more and as much as Ilya wanted to, he was having a certain problem lately.

But he kissed Shane back, dipping him over the counter a bit before pulling back, seeing Shane's eyes blown wide from lust. Forget going to the bedroom, he could take him right there in the kitchen.

Of course Ilya was hard, that was not the problem.

The problem was these pills made it very hard to finish. While it could make him last longer in the bedroom, something he really did not need, he had not had a good orgasm in awhile.

He had tentatively told Shane that after the other man spent over a half hour trying to get him off.

It was like going up on a Rollercoaster. Up, up, up he went and then just as he reached the top, ready to blow, it was like the cart suddenly pulled back and he was left unsatisfied.

So sex was starting to become not as fun anymore. Despite the fact he had a gorgeous husband ready to drop to his knees and suck his cock at a moments notice.

Fuck.

No cigarettes, no booze, no sex. How much more could this shit take from him?

He kissed Shane again, lighter this time, "if we want to go running, lets fuck another time," he regretfully pulled away, feeling the emptiness growing again.

"Yeah," Shane said, "let's just take Anya for her W-A-L-K, and we can go to bed."

Normally that was one of his favorite parts of the evening but tonight he felt that sinking black hole growing wider. He just wanted to be alone and go to bed. Maybe not wake up until the season started.

"Would you mind doing it alone tonight?" he knew Shane would mind. He'd made it abundantly clear that while he loved Anya, she was, primarily, Ilya's responsibility.

Shane frowned but nodded, and Ilya loved him more for not refusing or demanding he come along. "Yeah, uh, sure. You feeling okay?"

"Just tired," he leaned over and kissed Shane softly, and Shane leaned into the kiss. But as quickly as he leaned in, Ilya pulled back. "I'll run with you tomorrow." He promised.

But he broke that promise.

He hated that he could not bring himself to care.

He just wanted to stay in bed but he knew that Shane was going to worry.

He needed to get up.

He needed to get up and take his medication.

That gnawing cold darkness scratched at him leaving him raw and exhausted. It took every ounce of his strength to push himself up in bed.

Last night he could not even stand in the shower, he sat and let the water wash over him.

Some pro athlete he was.

Maybe there was something medically wrong with him. Maybe he had some unknown disease that sapped him of his energy.

He made his way slowly to the kitchen, his legs feeling wobbly, his body on the brink of collapsing. He wanted to lay down.

He just wanted to sleep.

He grabbed a banana and his pill container and ate as quickly as he could manage. Even eating felt like a chore.

"Hey, you're awake," Shane came up behind him, covered in sweat from his morning run. He seemed to be in a rush. He had to be if he was going to take a shower and read the New Yorker by 8:30.

"Sorry," Ilya mumbled and then passed the rest of his banana to Shane. "Hungry?"

"I had a smoothie," Shane was still breathing a little hard, "is that all you're eating?"

"Not hungry," Ilya said and regretted as soon as he did.

"You are not hungry?" his husband looked at him with disbelief and Ilya's jaw clenched. "Ilya, seriously, what's going on, you barely ate last night."

He had eaten. He just was not very hungry lately so he had foregone eating his usual two burgers with extra cheese. He had eaten half of one and given the rest to Anya, without the cheese of course.

"Says man who eats like bird," Ilya shook his head, feeling his irritation return, "maybe I'm sick, just..." his head felt like it was going to explode. That black hole that sat at the center of his chest collapsed inward again, and he just wanted to lay down. "I took pill, I ate banana, I will run later."

"Ilya," Shane reached out to him.

"Later," he snapped at the other man, and then immediately regretted it. A lump formed in his throat and he shook his head, "later, please." His voice was softer this time, and he wanted to touch Shane to reassure him, to reassure himself but he felt like he did not deserve to.

“Okay,” Shane accepted, and then clarified, “but I can’t run with you later, I already ran today.”

Ilya wanted to laugh. “I know,” he nodded. He allowed himself a kiss to Shane’s forehead before he moved away to trudge up the stairs.

He did not run later.

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Three days later

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“It’s really fine, Ilya,” Shane fiddled with the blankets as Ilya stared up at the ceiling. Shane leaned over him, his bare chest radiating warmth that did not reach his husband. He touched his husband’s chest, trying to soothe him but all it did was make Ilya feel even worse. “These things happen.”

Ilya set his jaw, his eyes stinging, embarrassed and ashamed.

He wanted to be swallowed up by the earth.

“You just started, the meds I mean, and I did more research on it, and you know they said sometimes it gets better over time,” Shane tried to encourage him.

“Yes, well, is getting worse, at least before,” he jerked the blanket up to see that soft thing hanging between his legs, “before it could do something.”

“Maybe I could try sucking it again,” Shane suggested, moving his hand over Ilya’s chest, rubbing against his nipple suggestively. It did not feel good. It did not feel like anything. He gripped Shane’s hand.

“Let me do you,” he insisted, though he was not in the mood. He was not going to leave Shane hanging. They had a freer sex life than ever before but the amount that he needed had been halved because of these pills. Now it felt like he did not need it at all. He hated it, but he also could not be bothered to care.

He wanted a cigarette.

“Ilya, it’s fine, I’m good,” Shane insisted.

“My mouth is not useless,” Ilya grumped, and he knew he sounded petulant, “nor is my hand. Do you want my asshole? Is not useless either.”

Shane’s nose wrinkled at that, and asked slowly, “do you want that?” Ilya glared at him in reply and Shane looked relieved. “Never mind, me either,” he then laid down next to Ilya, “I’ve been doing some research.”

“If I had nickel for every time I heard you say that-“

“You’d be the richest man in Canada, next to me,” Shane grinned and Ilya pushed their foreheads together. “Anyway, there are lots of different anti-depressants, maybe there is a better one.”

“One that I can be on and fuck you?” Ilya cocked an eyebrow at him and Shane scowled a bit though he was blushing.

He paused before replying bluntly, “yes, but not just that. You’re not eating well either, and frankly...you’ve been kind of an asshole.”

“Being asshole is part of my charm,” Ilya smirked crookedly and tried not to take what Shane said to heart, because it actually fucking hurt.

Shane’s face dropped, “yeah, but you know what I mean.”

Ilya licked over his teeth, annoyed.

“Is this because I snapped at your mother?”

The look on Shane’s face made it clear this was new information to him.

Well fuck.

“You what?”

“Nothing,” Ilya regretted opening his mouth. He just wanted to be asleep or dead.

That thought struck him hard, suddenly. It was just passing but it was not one he had thought about in a long time.

“You yelled at my mom?” Shane was sitting up fully now, clearly upset. “Ilya, what the fuck?”

“I did not yell!” But now Ilya was yelling, “Fuck Hollander! Am sorry I’m such an asshole, I am bad to your mother, can’t fuck you, can’t have fun, can’t run.”

He wanted to hit himself, but he was too pissed off for reasons he could not explain. Everything felt so raw and near the surface, and he was trembling with rage that he did not understand. One minute he wanted to be alone in bed, and the next he was angry.

His mother was never angry.

His father was.

The lump in his throat felt so large it threatened to take his breath.

Why did he have the worst of them?

“I’m taking a shower,” he muttered as he gathered up his clothes they tossed away earlier before climbing into bed together.

“Ilya, wait-“ Shane called after him and Ilya turned to him, his eyes wide and hands trembling.

He wanted to scream, wanted to kill himself for the words he already said, and he wanted to say worse for reasons he could not explain. Was he always like this? Was he turning into his father? Was this his true self?

He took a shaky breath, combing a hand through his curls in frustration, and he spoke with all the sincerity he could muster, “Я люблю тебя и прошу прощения.”

He did not want to apologize even though he knew he was in the wrong. Would Shane even accept it?

“Ilya,” Shane called again as Ilya turned to leave. Ilya turned back toward him, trying to hold himself together “I love you too, and I’m sorry too.”

Fuck.

“Shut up Hollander,” Ilya whispered fondly.

“Holander-Rozanov,” Shane flashed his ring cheekily and Ilya shook his head before walking back over and pouncing on Shane. The other man took him into his arms as Ilya rested his head against his shoulder, laying naked on top of the blankets. Something he could tell bothered Shane but not enough to interrupt him.

His particular husband really did put up with a lot from him. How long until it was too much.

“I’m sorry,” He whispered in English this time, “I know I am being an asshole lately, but I cannot help it. I feel so angry all the time. Then I...” his words caught in his throat, and he felt like he was choking.

“Hey,” Shane tipped his face up and kissed him, and that broke the dam. Ilya sobbed into his mouth, gripping Shane’s hair as he kissed him messily, brokenly. They pulled apart as Shane rocked him.

They stayed like that for several minutes, until Ilya was all cried out. He could tell that Shane was at a loss of how to comfort him, except holding him. But that was exactly what he needed.

“I don’t want to be this way either,” Ilya finally said, hoarsely, “I don’t want to be like my mother or my father, not in this way,” he gestured to himself.

Shane held him tightly, “I don’t think you’re anything like your dad.”

“He was mean.”

“You’re not mean.”

“I’m an asshole.”

Shane huffed a laugh at that, curling his fingers into Ilya’s hair, “you are an asshole, but you’re not mean. Not usually.”

“I feel mean these days. I feel like I want to kill someone or...” he swallowed hard and Shane looked down at him.

“Or?”

Ilya opened his mouth to answer, and tears sprang to his eyes, “I would not do that to you, Shane.”

It was now Shane’s eyes that turned red and shining, “do not fucking dare,” he said and Ilya moved them so he was laying down and Shane was like a weighted blanket on top of him.

He pushed his nose into Shane’s hair and breathed for a long a time, trying to warm that icy chill that had taken over him. He pulled the blankets over them now, and Shane laced their fingers together.

“Maybe...” Shane’s voice came out thick, “maybe you should consider new medication, or a stronger dose.”

He knew it was good advice, but it still made him feel like shit. Like he was weak. Like not even medication could fix him.

“Maybe,” Ilya whispered.

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Two days later

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“Rozy! What the fuck was that!?” Wiebe followed Ilya into the locker room, “this is a practice match, not a fight club.”

“What fighting did I do?” Ilya turned around to the coach.

“You checked Haas into the board for one, that was totally unnecessary for a friendly match,” Wiebe waved his clipboard at Ilya, “not to mention, you’ve had something up your ass since you’ve come in. You want to tell me what’s wrong?”

“Luca is fine,” Ilya had not realized how aggressive he had gotten until Luca did not get up immediately after being checked. He was fine and Ilya had apologized. What more did Wiebe want? “I have had nothing up my ass, ask Hollander.”

“Rozanov,” Wiebe stood with his hands on his hips, “seriously, you’ve been off all day. You’ve been acting like -“

“Asshole?” Ilya interrupted.

“Like you’d rather be anywhere than here,” Wiebe finished with a withering glare, “you need to get it together. The season starts in less than a month,” he pointed his finger at Ilya, “and we need you at the top of your game.”

“Maybe we need a coach who does not rely on only one or two players,” Ilya stood up, throwing off his shirt and Wiebe blinked a few times.

“Go home, Ilya,” but Ilya wasn’t done. His pent up frustration began to unravel.

“Do you think just because you have the best means you can be complacent? Why is it always me you rely on? Or Shane? You are coach, yes? You maybe coach whole team, not just two players.”

Coach Wiebe’s eyes widened, his jaw dropping, “okay, you think I should depend on other players? Fine, you’re benched for the first three games.”

The words hit Ilya like a slap in the face, “you can’t do that! We will lose! You will lose!” he exclaimed.

“I just did, now go home, I don’t want to see you back here until you’ve changed that attitude of yours,” with that Wiebe turned around and left the locker room.

Anger exploded in Ilya’s chest unlike he had ever felt before and he turned around and punched the locker hard, making a dent. Blood spilled from freshly opened wounds and he moved his fingers to check if anything was broken.

“What the hell?” He turned to see Shane standing there, a look of confusion and anger on his face. “Ilya, what the fuck? Wiebe just told us you’re out for three games.”

Ilya’s hands shook with anger. He needed to go.

That horrible ache was overwhelming, his head was pounding and the medication was doing nothing!

“I’m leaving,” he took his captain shirt and tossed it at Shane. “You be the captain, I quit.”

And he stormed out of the locker room, his blood dripping from his hand.

He wanted to crumble. He wanted to sit down. He wanted to die.

He couldn’t breathe. He had too much air.

His head was spinning as he made it to the car. He and Shane drove separately that morning with Ilya arriving late.

He hadn’t wanted to get out of bed that morning. He just wanted to sleep and never wake up.

Maybe he could die. Maybe that would make things better.

A flood of peace came over him at the thought of finally ending all of this and then that was replaced with a colder darker terror.

He needed help.

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The next day

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“It’s been awhile,” Dr. Galina Molchalina smiled at Ilya from her chair and Ilya nodded once, “you came in two weeks early for your appointment.”

“Yes, I know we set it to once a month but-“

“But you missed our last appointment,” Galina smiled gently, “I am always happy to find time for you. I do enjoy our talks.”

“It’s nice to talk in Russian,” Ilya nodded with a small smile.

“But when a patient asks me for an emergency appointment, I do tend to worry. Especially when they are on new medication and they missed their last appointment,” Galina’s eyes moved to Ilya’s bandaged hand. “How is the medication?”

“Fine,” Ilya replied, but he did not know if he was telling the truth or not. Was it the medication making him feel worse or was it just revealing how bad of a person he always was?

“Did you injure yourself in a game?” She nodded to his hand and Ilya lifted it, flexing his fingers.

“It’s not broken, just...I punched a locker,” he bowed his head, a bit ashamed.

“Oh?” Galina looked genuinely surprised, “do you want to talk about that?”

“My Coach benched me for our first three games,” then sensing she wanted more information, he sighed, and fiddled with his mother’s necklace. “I may have been an asshole to him, and maybe checked another player, maybe I quit. Not really. Not seriously. I don’t know, I feel like an asshole all the time these days. Not the fun kind. I feel like...” he stopped, unsure of how to say it, even in his own native language.

“Are you struggling with your mood these days, Ilya?” That was one way to say it.

“Yes, but...I only have two moods. Sad or angry, but it’s more than angry, more than sad, I feel a little like I am going crazy,” he rubbed his hand over his face, “and I also feel scared. Scared I am ending up like the worst of my parents.”

Galina’s eyes did not hold pity, but they were sympathetic, and thoughtful, “can you describe these moods to me?”

“I cannot. They are nothing new. There are many times I felt depressed, it is why I came to talk to you. But the anger is new, before I would just have fun. Go fuck, go drink, go be reckless, but now...now I just feel angry. It is somehow worse than before,” he felt his own frustration at how he was feeling, and looked at Galina, “some days I do not want to get up, and then other days, I am so angry.”

Galina scratched something down in her notepad, her lips pressed thin. She did not say anything for a long moment so Ilya decided to fill the silence.

“Shane suggested I get on another anti-depressant or maybe I need a stronger dose,” and that was really why he came here. Anything to stop himself from being the worst of himself.

“Actually, Ilya, I don’t think anti-depressant’s are going to help you,” Galina said looking up at him, apology in her eyes.

The words felt like a ton of bricks crashing down on him. He felt his heart jump into his throat.

So he was beyond help.

“I’m sorry,” Galina continued.

“So what, I am going to always be like this?” Ilya demanded, frustrated tears springing into his eyes, “You can’t give me anything? Therapy doesn’t help, pills don’t help, being married to the most wonderful fucking man doesn’t help? What else can I do? I run, I exercise, I even eat better now, I quit smoking and don’t drink as much. What the fuck can I do?” he was raising up out of his chair, gripping his hair with his uninjured hand. He looked at Galina who stared up at him from her seat, her gaze unwavering.

“Ilya, please sit down,” she instructed and Ilya wanted to cry, wanted to storm out, but instead he sat down and tugged the pillow into his lap beside him and held onto it tightly. Galina took a moment to gather her thoughts, and then tapped her notepad. “I feel I owe you an apology.”

That was surprising.

“I had suspected it before, but I did not feel comfortable with giving you that diagnosis without real and proper testing. But your recent shifting moods confirms it for me.”

“Confirms what?” Ilya’s eyes narrowed slightly.

“Ilya, have you ever heard of bipolar disorder?”

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Ilya was not sure how he got home. He had driven on autopilot until he parked outside, feeling his brain starting to turn back on as he saw the lights on in his home, signaling that Shane was still up. He had told Shane what he was doing that day, so he must be waiting up for him.

The bottle in his pocket lay like a heavy weight and reminder of what his therapist had said.

It wasn’t possible.

But after spending two hours answering a questionnaire, Galina had said she felt comfortable writing him a prescription for a low dose of lithium.

Ilya still pushed back. “I don’t have manic episodes, I remember every stupid thing I do.”

Galina smiled, "I understand, but there are actually two types of bipolar, bipolar one and bipolar 2. I suspect you have the second. It presents with more depressive episodes and hypomania. That could just look like a very energetic day, or uncontrollable anger, or reckless behavior."

"Why do you think I have this?"

"Because of the medication I gave you. Many SSRIs make bipolar symptoms much worse, they cause something called rapid cycling where..."

The words all seemed to blur together as Galina talked and Ilya felt the weight of this diagnosis fall upon him.

Bipolar.

The kind of thing that was used as the butt of jokes when someone was acting a bit crazy on the ice. Or something they made fun of in Russia.

This was not just a little depression that could be fixed with therapy, medication and time. It was a lifelong disorder.

It felt like a death sentence.

"It could be late onset, it could be masked by other things. We've talked about the possibility of you having adhd."

"Perhaps one diagnosis at a time."

"It could have been masked by a chaotic life, now that you settled..."

That had made Ilya angry. So because his life was good now, his brain needed to fuck it up?

"I advised you before about alcohol," Galina gave him a pointed look, "now I will strongly advise you against it."

"Not even a beer?"

"Most people cannot stop with just a beer. It's a natural depressant and it could worsen your..."

He looked through the window to see Shane moving around the livingroom, picking up Anya's toys. He was glad that he played with her, because lately Ilya had not felt up to it.

He didn't feel up to anything.

"The other medication it um," Ilya coughed, red at the ears, "it made things hard...or actually not so hard."

Galina smiled at that, "some people do have a decrease in libido and erectile dysfunction," Ilya frowned at that, "however, some people have increased libido because of a decrease in

their depressive episodes."

Well, at least he still might have that. Maybe.

He stared at Shane's back, watching him scope out the livingroom. His hair was pulled back into a bun.

Ilya's heart ached.

Shane...he never asked for this.

How was he going to break the news to him?

He slowly got out of the car, his hand wrapped around the pills inside his pocket, feeling like every step was worth a thousand.

Finally he made it to the front door and he called out, trying to be playful and alleviate the tension in his chest, "honey, I'm home."

"Hey," Shane rushed over to him, as did Anya, and Ilya leaned down to scratch her behind the ears. "what happened? I thought the appointment was like an hour, you've been gone for four."

Had it been that long? He double checked the time and indeed it had.

"Sorry to worry you," Ilya leaned down to kiss the corner of Shane's mouth.

Shane pulled back in surprise, "you don't smell like smoke."

Ilya's face fell flat, "I quit, do you have amnesia?"

"No," Shane shook his head and then followed Ilya into the kitchen, "Sorry, that was a dick thing to say, you were just gone for so long."

"Is okay," Ilya sighed as he began to hear up some water, "I almost bought a pack."

Shane smiled small, obviously happy with the almost. He then, as usual, wasted no time getting down to business, "so how did it go?"

Ilya filled up a glass of cold water while his water boiled and took a long drink. He then cleared his throat and he set the cup immediately into the dishwasher. Just like how Shane liked.

He then stuck his hand into his pocket and pulled out a bottle of pills. "She gave me brand new drugs to try." He threw them to his husband who caught them with ease.

"Lithium?" Shane read the label. "Like that one song?"

"You know songs now?" Ilya gave Shane a look of fake shock as he poured his water into his mug.

"I know your playlist," Shane replied examining the bottle of pills in his hand. "I thought lithium was just for batteries."

"We've been wrong all this time, I am robot, not you," Ilya teased, and Shane sent him a look.

"Seriously though, did she say anything?"

Ilya had a lot of bravado, but many times he was quite cowardly. Whenever things were hard, he would tell Shane in Russian. But Shane was starting to become too good at Russian for him to hide behind. Still, this word he was sure he did not know.

"биполярное расстройство."

Shane was quiet for a moment, ticking through the words he had learned and picked up over the years. As Ilya suspected, this was not one of them.

Inevitably he asked, "what does it mean?"

It was Ilya's turn to be quiet.

For a brief moment of insanity he did not want to tell Shane. He thought maybe he could keep it a secret, because who knew if it was really true. Could those papers really be relied on? What if this was some mistake.

Yet, he found his resolve crumbling when he looked at Shane's curious and concerned face. So open, so pretty, so willing to listen so he could solve this with Ilya.

But this could not be solved.

"It will never go away, but it can go into remission," Galina had told him.

Remission. Was that not the word they used with cancer patients? It felt wrong to think of that word in this context. Going into remission? Until it came back and killed him?

"Most people who struggle with depression actually have bipolar 2, it's very underdiagnosed, in comparison to bipolar 1."

His therapist had said that to make him feel more normal but he just felt helpless.

He swallowed a gulp of far too hot tea before saying, "bipolar."

Shane straightened up at that, he then forced himself to relax, before straightening up again, "oh, um, okay, what...what's that mean exactly."

Ilya set his mug down, wiping his mouth and massaging the roof of his mouth that felt a little burned with his tongue. "It means what it means. It means I am a fucking nut case," he turned to the sink.

"Don't say that," Shane got up and Ilya wanted to run but he stayed and felt Shane's strong arms wrap around him. "Hey, whatever this is, we'll get through this together. I'll do-"

"Research?" Ilya smiled wetly.

"Yeah," Shane smiled and kissed Ilya's shoulder.

"Fucking nerd."

"Fucking asshole." He smiled as he turned and kissed Shane, pulling him impossibly closer.

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Three days later

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"Well, I am glad to hear that," Galina said and Ilya sighed as he looked over at Shane who was reading something on his iPad, wearing those sexy glasses.

"Yes, is good, my crazy is confirmed," Ilya sighed in English before continuing in Russian, interrupted by a yelp when Shane pinched his ankle. "Maybe it is a fluke with the medication. Does it always work so quickly?"

"Not always, but sometimes, and it working so quickly is a good sign. It means you are responding well to it. I sent you some reading on bipolar 2, I hope you take a look at it."

Ilya had no intention of ever doing that. Well, maybe not ever, just not right now. He had too many thoughts in his head already, he did not need to think more about it.

If the medicine worked and he stayed in therapy he could deal with the details later.

"You should also quickly find out about the side effects, like the ones we discussed. Now that we have scaled back the SSRIs, you may find some things going back to normal." Galina said and Ilya eyed Shane in his sexy glasses and felt a stirring he had not had in a long time.

"I think that won't be a problem."

After that he said his goodbyes and rubbed over his bruised and scabbed knuckles, eyeing Shane.

"мой пылесос," he called playfully and Shane turned to him, his eyebrow raised.

"Did you just call me a vacuum?" He asked and Ilya smirked and spread his legs.

"You restocked the couch lube yes?" He asked and Shane's eyes squinted before he answered in a whisper like it was a secret.

"Yes," he mumbled, pink on his freckled cheeks.

"Good," Ilya reached down to rub himself over his shorts, "finger yourself while you suck my cock."

Shane almost dropped the iPad, and he shut it off and set it on the coffee table. "R-right now?"

Ilya smirked, "take off your clothes and leave the glasses on. I will cum on them later."

"Holy shit, Ilya," Shane tackled him in a kiss and Ilya gripped his hips, laughing into his mouth.

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One week later

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"That was..." Ilya leaned back, his eyes closed, sweat still dripping down his face.

"Hard as hell," Shane collapsed beside him, "Wiebe seemed happy as hell to have you back though." They both got up from the bench as they removed their gear.

"Yes, well, is not easy for him to accept when he's wrong," Ilya joked and Shane shoved him a bit.

"Shut the fuck up," he smiled, "I'm just glad you aren't benched anymore."

Ilya nodded and rubbed the back of his neck, "of course, you could not survive without me."

In reality, Ilya was happy too. Wiebe had been kind enough to accept his apology and after discussing it with Shane, Ilya also decided to tell Wiebe about his diagnosis. Just for transparency.

They'd sprung enough surprises on him for a lifetime.

Wiebe understood. "Actually my cousin has it."

Ilya was surprised to hear that. Wiebe seemed so normal like his whole family was even more boring than the Hollanders.

"He manages it but we almost lost him a few times," Wiebe gave a pained smile and then looked at Ilya with misty eyes, "thank you for telling me."

"Well, you are the coach, yes?"

"Yes, and as your coach, I am going to officially unbench you-"

"Ah, don't do that," Ilya waved his hand, "do not treat me differently because of this."

"I'm not unbenching you because of that, I've been wanting to since I decided to bench you. We need you out there, I need you out there. Captain," he handed Ilya his captains jersey and Ilya smiled and pulled Wiebe in for a bear hug.

"I really was an asshole," Ilya sighed, taking a drink of his water and passing it to Shane as they walked toward the car.

"I read up on the effects of SSRIs on people with bipolar, I'm glad the worst that happened was you being a dick."

"Don't excuse me," Ilya waved his hand.

"I'm not, but if it messes with you that much, it must have been really hard," Shane said and Ilya reached for his hand as they got in the car. "It's like, you know that thing we think I might have."

Ilya cast a look over at him, "a great ass? Sweetheart, I know this already."

"Fuck off," Shane rolled his eyes, a fond smile on his face, "you know what I'm talking about."

They'd said it out loud a couple of times but Ilya figured Shane might feel the weight of the word as well every time it's said.

Autism.

This is something Ilya had researched, because he loved Shane, and he wanted to do his best to support him even if he was never formerly diagnosed.

"Point is, if I have it, then there are things I do that unintentionally hurt people too, you can't go around feeling guilty all the time for a mental disorder making you mentally out of order."

Ilya turned to Shane and leaned over, pressing their foreheads together before kissing him, and then pulled away. He then cleared his throat, putting on a serious face.

"When we get home, I want you to undress, touch yourself until you are hard, put on the cock ring, and wait on your knees in our bedroom."

Shane's jaw dropped slightly, "am I going to get to blow you?"

Ilya smirked, "if you are good, I might fuck your mouth."

Shane swallowed, his eyes already clouded with lust, "do you want the regular one or the vibrating one?"

Ilya hummed thoughtfully, "you will cum fast if you wear the vibrating one."

"Fuck you," Shane huffed, "fine, I'll wear the regular one."

"Good boy."

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Three days later

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For once, Ilya was awake before Shane. He sat out on the porch looking into the trees.

He dreamt about his mother again.

Her long pale arms in the sunlight, her hand reaching out to grasp for his as she walked down a path he'd never been with her.

A path blooming with flowers that fell around her like pink snow.

"Ilyushka, the weather is so beautiful today, shall we do something fun?" His mother spun around, smiling widely, her blonde curls bouncing as she turned.

"Mom, slow down," Ilya called to her in English and she turned around, spinning so fast that she fell back, and as soon as her back hit the pink petals, she exploded into a flurry of snow.

He turned around, finding his surroundings covered in snow. He was knee deep in it, and he looked around through the slurry to see a familiar retreating back.

"Shane!" He called but his voice could not be heard over the wind. "SHANE!" he shouted but Shane did not turn around. He sobbed out as he tried to move but he could not move forward. "SHANE!" He screamed until his voice was hoarse.

And he woke with a start.

He looked over at Shane, his dark hair splayed around him like a halo, his hand reaching out toward Ilya.

Ilya gripped that hand carefully, and brought it to his lips to feel the familiar heat of his husband's body.

He was here.

It was still summer.

He moved out bed and got dressed quietly and made his way to make some coffee. He had another few hours before he took his medication so he waited to eat anything substantial and grabbed a protein bar.

As he sat outside with his coffee, he played the dream over in his mind. He expected to feel the lingering cold clutches of depression but it did not come.

He felt strangely peaceful despite being shaken up by the dream. He reached down to pet Anya who settled at his feet, deep in thought as the door opened and out stepped his still half asleep husband.

"Morning," Shane came up behind him, swaying slightly, "you made coffee."

"I've been known to," Ilya passed back his cup and Shane took it and crouched down next to his husband to pet the dog.

"You want to go for a run?"

"No," Ilya shook his head.

"Okay," Shane nodded and Ilya placed his hand on his head, and brought his head to lean on his knee.

Shane stayed in a squat that Ilya thought was impossible to do. Yuna called it the 'Asian squat', Ilya called it magical.

He was Slavic, he could squat with the best of them but his heels never touched the ground.

Ilya kept his hand on Shane's head, somewhat for comfort and also to prevent him from looking at Ilya, "I dreamt of my mother," he felt his throat grow tight again.

Shane's arm wrapped around his leg, hugging him, "oh?"

Ilya was quiet and then, "do you think she had...what I have."

Shane did not answer immediately and then he nodded, "it's possible. It's genetic."

The word made Ilya laugh. It was the inside joke between him and Shane and now it was unintentionally turned against him.

"So that means..." fuck, why was he about to cry again? He finally let go of Shane's head and the other man immediately turned to look at Ilya. "She could have been helped."

Shane did not say anything. Instead he relied on action and he climbed into Ilya's lap and kissed his face sweetly, and wrapped him in a hug. Ilya did not cry, he simply clung to Shane like a lifeline and breathed him in.

They sat that way until Ilya's leg began to fall asleep and he adjusted and Shane adjusted as well.

Finally, his husband said, as he combed through Ilya's messy curls, "you can't do anything to change what happened. Sometimes our best choices aren't the best but they were the best we had."

Ilya leaned back to look at Shane's face, "you are philosopher now?"

Shane laughed, his gaze adoring, "fuck off."

"Buddha watch out, Shane Hollander-Rozanov is new wise man," he tickled Shane's ribs and Anya barked happily below them.

Shane gripped Ilya's chin gently, "you know you're not alone in this, right?" he asked and Ilya felt warm. He wanted to cry again but all these tears were going to ruin his tough guy persona.

"I know," he said and kissed Shane softly. "And same for you if you ever want to get diagnosed. Or not."

Shane nodded, looking a bit hesitant but then he nodded more firmly, "I think maybe I should try. You made me think maybe it doesn't have to change everything. It's just more information right?"

Ilya nodded, "right."

"And also I think my dad might have it," Ilya pretended to be shocked.

"You don't say? The man who organizes ties by thread count?"

"Oh fuck off, Rozanov," Shane got up, "that's not a bad system anyway."

Ilya kept his hands on Shane's hips. "You organize by color, that is normal."

"And by brand!"

Ilya chuckled, "is that why there are a ton of rainbows in your side of the closet. Thought you were showing pride."

"Let's eat breakfast, I'm starving, you cook," he held out his hand and helped Ilya to his feet.

Ilya kept hold of his hand, "okay I cook, you wash."

"Sounds fair," Shane nodded.

"Then I strip you and fuck you over kitchen counter," Ilya drawled in his ear.

Shane eyed him, and then slowly nodded and Ilya grinned and he pinched at Shane's sides until they were both inside giggling.

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One week later

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"First game is tomorrow, you boys excited?" Yuna asked as she passed the salad over to Shane.

"Shane has not shut up about strategies all week," Ilya replied.

"We have to be prepared for anything," Shane insisted as he plated himself some salad and reached for the dressing. "Mom, does this have grapefruit juice in it?"

"Oh, shoot," Yuna cast a look over at Ilya, "sorry, I have some others in the fridge." Of course he had told the Hollanders. How could he not have? They were his family. Besides, he knew Shane would feel guilty if they kept it a secret. Not that he would let Ilya know that. But he knew Shane well enough.

"Is fine, I am not a rabbit," he would rather enjoy the pasta instead.

"What's wrong with grapefruit juice?" David asked, "Ilya, I didnt know you were allergic to it."

"He's not," Shane replied with a look over at Ilya who smiled awkwardly.

"Is my new medication, I am not supposed to have grapefruit juice," Ilya said, and then clarified, "new new medication. To help with new medication as my body stops old medication."

After hearing about his anxiety and issues with sleep, his therapist had given him a mood stabilizer to help alongside the lithium.

"This isn't a forever thing, just to give your body and mind a boost and a time to heal. You're already responding well to lithium, but this will help stabilize your mood until you are completely off the SSRIs."

Yuna nodded, "sounds complicated. I remember when I was on anti anxiety medication, I couldn't even think about touching coffee."

"You were on medication for anxiety?" Shane asked and Yuna took a sip of her tea.

"Yeah, being a mom, a wife and having a career was a little overwhelming at times, and it helped with the mild case of postpartum after you were born," she took a bite of her salad nonchalantly as if she had not dropped massive new information.

"You had postpartum depression?" Yuna held up her fork at Shane's question.

"It was very mild, I don't like to mention it because I don't want it to be a whole-" she stopped herself as she realized what she was saying.

Almost the exact same thing Ilya had said when he told them.

She had insisted that while it was not a big deal, it was important to know because she loved and cared about him.

"I guess it might have been helpful if I was more honest about my own struggles, maybe you wouldn't feel the need to be so perfect," Yuna smiled at Shane, "and I am definitely not perfect."

"I don't need to be perfect," Shane grumbled and Ilya and Yuna shared a look.

"Anyway, what's this thing you wanted to tell us Shane? You two gonna finally give us some grandkids?" David grinned and both Shane and Ilya coughed at that.

"Anya is the perfect granddaughter," Ilya said as he drank his diet coke.

"I am thinking another one, two legged, less hair," David grinned.

"Anyway, that's not what I wanted to talk to you about," Shane looked over at Ilya who reached over to squeeze his thigh under the table.

His husband took a deep breath, wiping his mouth and then folding his napkins neatly.

"Mom, Dad, I think I might have autism, and I am going to get diagnosed," he swallowed as Yuna and David looked at their son mid chew.

Yuna, unsurprisingly, was the first to speak, "well, okay honey but we did have you tested as a child. They just said your speech was a bit delayed because of learning French and English at the same time."

Shane nodded, a little dismayed and feeling brushed off. Ilya kept his hand on Shane's thigh, "Sometimes those tests miss things," he said a little quieter and then, he rubbed his hands

against his legs and caught Ilya's hand. Intwining their fingers, he smiled at the other man and nodded before turning back to his parents, "I know you had me tested, but I feel like the more I do research, the more I am sure I'm on the spectrum."

"And I think so too, I trust Shane knows himself better than anyone " he said and Shane smiled and Yuna nodded.

"You're right, those tests do miss things sometimes. Sweetie, whatever you decide, we are behind you a hundred percent, just like with Ilya, it doesn't change anything but it will be important to know," and the boys could already see the cogs turning in her head on how to make their lives a little easier and more manageable.

They were lucky to have such great parents.

As Ilya and Shane cuddled on the couch, drifting as Yuna and David prepared dessert, Ilya heard David say, "well, I heard autism is genetic. Where do you think he got it from?"

Yuna sighed, affectionately, "your guess is as good as mine."

Ilya snorted a soft laugh and it was enough to wake Shane up.

"Hmm? Time to go home?" he asked, moving his head up Ilya's shoulder.

"Not even close, we still have dessert," Ilya kissed the top of Shane's head.

"Mmm, what is it?" Shane asked.

"Berry pie I think," Ilya wrapped his arms around Shane and nipped at his ear, "much rather eat you," he whispered.

"Stop saying stuff in my parents house," Shane moved away, and Ilya was sorry for the loss of the warmth.

"I'm cold, I'll behave," he opened his arms and Shane settled back into them.

"Alright boys, hot berry pie and cold ice cream the perfect combination," David brought over two plates and two forks. "Hurry and eat it before the ice cream melts."

The two took the pie and ice cream and ate it lazily, still cuddled together.

"It really is perfect, ya know, ice creams not too cold, pie is not too hot when they are mixed together, good balance," Shane swallowed another bite, "ugh, this is the life!" He grinned up at Ilya. "Don't you think."

Ilya took another bite, enjoying the tang of the berries and the creamy ice cream. "Is pretty good."

"I'm excited for the new season to start. I'll miss the fresh berries in the winter though," Shane sighed, "but it's not so bad."

"Yeah," Ilya smiled. He thought about the cold that used to claw at his chest. The void that sat there for so long. It was a familiar wound that now faded into a scar.

He thought about his mother who hated the winter and his heart broke again. Maybe if they had gotten help for her sooner...

He then thought about that wintery day in Saskatchewan. Pink freckled cheeks, earnest eyes.

It was the dead of winter.

But Ilya never felt so alive.

That night, as they settled into bed, Ilya played with his mother's necklace. He turned to look at Shane who was already asleep, exhausted from sex.

He waited for that chill to come. The ghost of it still haunted him.

But it never did.

Instead he felt steady, even possibly happy, and as he turned over, he wrapped his arms around Shane.

"Моя весна," he whispered and Shane stirred.

"Moya vis-na," his husband repeated, slightly slurred from sleep. He gripped Ilya's hand, and turned to cuddle into his chest. "'s that mean?"

Ilya smiled, pressing his lips to Shane's forehead before whispering,

"My spring."

End Notes

This will probably be the first and last time I write for the Heated Rivalry fandom. I feel very shy about writing for a fandom I am not really a part of but I love Heated Rivalry and The Long Game so much, and seeing it brought to life has been so inspiring.

I hope you enjoyed! Please leave a comment 🥹

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