

All I Want for Christmas

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All I Want for Christmas

by [FlameHazel18](#)

Summary

Shane and Ilya's relationship is the best kept secret in all of professional hockey. That is, until an ill-fated Christmas party brings it all crashing down.

Notes

This story takes place during November and December of 2020, and it's a slight AU in that no one, except Rose and Shane's parents, knows about their relationship at this point. Some timelines have also been tweaked slightly to fit my Christmas fluff agenda.

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

The Christmas party had seemed like a great idea at the time.

Shane and Ilya were at the cottage the day the full season schedule was released, both of their phones chiming at almost exactly the same moment with news of the announcement. Lazy and comfortable as they were, lounging on the dock, drying off after an afternoon swim, the game schedule had seemed like the least important thing on Ilya's mind. But after enduring several minutes of pestering from Shane, he had finally snagged his phone and pulled it up.

Ilya had scrolled the schedule, phone held out so Shane could read it from where his head was resting on Ilya's chest, both of them skimming for the dates of the Ottawa-Montreal match-ups. His fingers, which had been absently combing through Shane's wet hair, had paused when he reached the end of the December games.

"We play against you December 22nd," Shane said — unnecessarily, given that they were both looking at the same thing. "In Ottawa."

"You could stay for Christmas," Ilya said, thinking aloud, though they both seemed to realize the problem at the same time.

"I'll have to fly back with the team. Or they'll wonder why I stayed."

Ilya hummed in agreement, dropping the subject as they perused the rest of the schedule. But even then, an idea had already begun to take shape.

He floated it to Shane a few days later, in the quiet, comfortable space that existed between sex and sleep, the two of them wrapped up in each other under the tangled blankets. He had expected some sort of resistance, had prepared himself with all kinds of explanations about how it would be good for the optics of both teams. The kind of thing that would get all kinds of social media engagement — which was something Ilya actually cared about, now that he was such good friends with the Centaurs' social media manager, Harris. But Shane hadn't needed any convincing; he'd agreed so quickly that Ilya started to wonder if, maybe, Shane was just as tired with hiding as Ilya was.

It wasn't that Ilya was ready to go completely public, necessarily. But being as secretive as they were was...exhausting. He didn't need them to tell the world, but maybe it was time that they tell someone besides Shane's parents. Maybe they could try letting their guard down a little, try being a little less careful in the company of their friends and just... let them draw their own conclusions.

A Christmas party at Ilya's house seemed as good a place as any to test the waters.

A month or so before the game finds Ilya in Harris's office, being the worst kind of backseat driver.

"I like the lighter green better," Ilya says. He's dragged the extra chair over from the corner of the office, placing it uncomfortably close to Harris's seat so he has a good view of the computer screen.

"The darker will show up better," Harris says, repeating himself for at least the third time. "Would you trust me? This is my *job*, you know."

Ilya sighs, slumping back in his seat. Of course Harris knows what he's doing, but he can't help it. He just wants this to go perfectly. Which is stupid, when he thinks about it. There are no real stakes here. It's just a Christmas party, an opportunity for some photos and good press for both teams, and a chance for everyone to cut loose and enjoy a little holiday cheer. Hopefully after the Centaurs hand the Voyageurs a solid beat down.

But Ilya can't help feeling like it's critical that this go well. Even though no one will know it, it's the first time Ilya and Shane will be hosting a party together. The first time they'll be inviting their friends into their home — or, ostensibly Ilya's home, though they spend as much time there together as anywhere else. Ilya just wants everything to be perfect, hoping, perhaps naively, that if things go well, it might convince Shane that they can be a little less tight-lipped about their relationship. Because if the two teams can spend a holiday together without any bloodshed, would it really be such a big deal if they found out their respective captains were in love with each other?

"What do you think?" Harris asks a few minutes later, zooming out so the festive invitation fills his screen.

Ilya scrutinizes it for several long seconds before nodding his approval. "Perfect. Thank you, Harris. I will tell management they are not paying you enough."

Harris snorts. "I'm not sure your authority as team captain extends to increasing my salary, but thanks anyway." He makes a few more swift, practiced clicks, and then the invitation is ready to be posted on the team's social media accounts.

While the party itself had been Ilya's idea, Harris had really run with it. Posting a public invitation to the Voyageurs on the Centaurs' socials had been all Harris's idea, and Ilya had to admit it was a good one. They had originally planned for Shane to just tell his team that Ilya had extended the invitation, but by doing it via social media it insulates them from any questions about when exactly the two captains were cozily discussing Christmas plans with each other. Making such a public display of themselves will also make it harder for the Voyageurs to turn down the invite, lest they let Ilya fucking Rozanov, of all people, look like the kind and accommodating one.

"Last chance to back out," Harris says, putting the finishing touches on the Instagram post. He's tagged the official Voyageurs account, as well as all of the players that use social media, including Shane himself. Ilya notices that Harris has, seemingly at random, tagged Shane right over the image of Ilya's signature at the bottom of the invitation. He gives Harris the go ahead to post it, doing a terrible job at biting back his pleased grin.

"Why do you want to host a party, anyway?" Harris asks, and Ilya can tell it's a question he's been mulling over for a while. "I mean, you almost never have the team over, much less the Voyageurs."

Ilya shrugs, hoping he comes across as more relaxed than he feels in the moment. "Good publicity for both teams, and for the Foundation."

"Sure," Harris acknowledges, though he still doesn't look convinced. "But even so, you don't have to host it at your house. I could've helped you find an event hall, or something."

"I have a very big house. Plenty of room."

Harris stares at him for a long moment, his eyes slightly narrowed, like he's trying to work out a complex problem that's been bothering him. Ilya really doesn't want him to think about it too hard — Harris is sharp, and Ilya wouldn't be surprised if he was able to put two and two together where no one else has.

Luckily, his salvation appears in the form of Troy Barrett. The dark-haired forward pokes his head through the door Ilya left ajar, his gaze fixed on Harris, a rare smile replacing his usual frown. It disappears immediately when Troy catches sight of Ilya, though. He takes a half-step back into the hall, like he's considering making a run for it, then seems to come to the conclusion that it's not worth it, given that Ilya has already seen him, and edges his way through the door, his arms crossed protectively over his chest.

"Hello, Barrett," Ilya greets him cheerily; Troy really is doing him a favor, even though he doesn't know it. Let Harris get distracted trying to keep his own secrets, so he forgets about trying to work out Ilya's. "Harris was just helping me with invites for the Christmas party. You are coming, yes?"

"Uh... I guess?" Troy says, sounding about as enthusiastic about it as he does most things.

"Good!" Ilya says, clapping him on the back. And he means it, even though he can tell Barrett doesn't really believe him. The way his old teammates turned their backs on him before kicking him to the curb really did a number on the poor kid. Despite only being a few years younger than Ilya, he seems small somehow. So unsure of himself, everywhere except on the ice.

It's only been a few weeks since he joined the Centaurs, so Ilya still has hope that, in time, they'll be able to convince him he has a place here. The way Ilya had laid out Dallas Kent at the game against Toronto last week seems to have bought him some goodwill, at least; Ilya just has to convince Troy that the rest of team has his back just the same. He certainly seems to think he has a friend in Harris, given the amount of time Troy has spent holed up in his office over the last month or so...

Or maybe he just lurks quietly in the corner making heart-eyes at their social media manager, like he's doing now.

"I should go," Ilya says into the awkward silence that has befallen them, slipping his arms into the coat draped over the back of his chair. He generally enjoys making a nuisance of

himself, but even he can only stand so much time as such an obvious third wheel, especially without Chiron around to keep him company. "I have a party to plan."

The Voyageurs locker room is loud and rowdy after practice wraps up. Thanksgiving is in two days, and they'll all be taking some much needed time off until their next game on Saturday. Players jostle and tease each other, practically giddy with the fact that they won't have to see one another for a few days. Shane, for his part, is distracted as he strips off his gear, his mind already fast-forwarding through the next couple of hours and instead focusing on the fact that, after almost three full weeks apart, he'll be sleeping in Ilya's bed tonight. His bag is already packed and stowed in the trunk of his car, so the only thing standing between him and being on the road is a much needed shower.

That, and whatever Pike and Webb are talking about.

"What the fuck is Rozanov's problem?" Webb asks, sounding equal parts annoyed and bewildered. It's a very specific tone, one that is often reserved for discussions about Ilya Rozanov, and so Shane's interest is piqued before they even say his name. He keeps his eyes trained on the back wall of his stall, going through the motions of putting away his gear and waiting for someone else to ask the question, so he doesn't have to.

J.J. obliges. "What did he do now?"

"He's hosting some Christmas party," Hayden Pike answers, holding his phone out to J.J. "Apparently we're all invited."

Noise ripples through the room, all of it somewhere on the spectrum from disgruntled to disbelieving. Shane observes everyone's reactions quietly from his corner of the locker room — no one is quite cursing Ilya's name, but they're not too thrilled by the prospect of attending his party, either. They start to speculate on what Rozanov might be up to, eventually agreeing that he's probably planning to kill them all with poisoned eggnog.

"I'm not going," declares their rookie defenseman, Jake Lyon. On either side of him, Koval and Webb nod their agreement.

"We have to," Pike groans, sitting heavily in his stall and dropping his head into his hands. "The post already has thousands of likes on it. If we don't show up, we look like assholes. And worse yet, fucking *Rozanov* looks like the good guy."

There's a collective groan throughout the room and Shane has to duck his head, fighting to keep himself from laughing. Everything is playing out exactly as Ilya had predicted. Shane can't wait to get home and fill him in on the details, and to hear his smug *I was right* voice as he tells Shane just that. Ilya is cute when he's smug — which is a good thing, because he's smug about one thing or another pretty much all the goddamn time.

Shane schools his expression as Pike appears next to him, leaning against the wooden divider of his stall as he runs a towel through his still-damp hair. "You know anything about this?"

Hayden's tone isn't accusatory — if anything, it's more along the lines of sympathetic — but Shane still feels defensive. "Rozanov mentioned it last time they played here," he says, shrugging. "I didn't think he was serious, though. I thought it was just, you know... Rozanov being Rozanov."

Pike snorts, evidently agreeing with that assessment of Ilya. "Can't believe I'm going to have to spend a perfectly good evening in that asshole's house," he complains, tossing his used towel in the industrial-sized laundry bin. "It's probably filled with autographed pictures of himself."

Unfortunately, Hayden is right about that. Ilya has, on more than one occasion, put up autographed pictures of himself, though it was primarily as a means of annoying Shane.

The first one had appeared one day on Shane's nightstand. Then, a few days later, another had been hung on the mirror above Shane's sink in the bathroom. After a week on the road, Shane had returned home to Ottawa only to find several more hanging on the wall on his side of the garage. He hadn't said anything about the pictures, instead biding his time until he was alone in the house for a few hours while Ilya was at practice. Ilya hadn't been amused by the speech bubbles Shane had added, making Ilya's headshots say things like *Shane Hollander is the best Center in the league* and *Voyageurs: 2021 Stanley Cup Champs*.

'You could have at least made me say something truthful,' Ilya had complained before adding one of his own to another picture: *I love sucking Shane Hollander's cock*. After letting Ilya do just that, Shane had hidden that particular photograph away for future blackmail purposes.

"You're probably right," Shane agrees. "It'll just be one night, though. How bad can it be?"

As expected, news of the Christmas party explodes on social media.

The Voyageurs official Instagram account responds to the invite a few days later, photographing a few of the players posing with kegs of beer and asking if they should bring anything else. Harris and Isobel, the social media manager for Montreal, spend a few weeks in a lively back and forth, keeping the fans engaged and even getting the story picked up by multiple news outlets.

At Harris's recommendation, Shane and Ilya decided to turn the event into an opportunity to raise funds for the Irina Foundation. Promotions for the Foundation and donation links were added to all of the articles and posts about the party, and Harris had even helped them change their donation page to add the option to donate under Team Ottawa or Team Montreal. Drawing on the competitive nature of both fan bases was a brilliant idea, allowing them to

raise a truly shocking amount of money. After much sweet talking from Shane and Ilya, management of both teams had agreed to match donations from the fans, which has officially turned this party into one of the most successful fundraising drives the Foundation has run to date.

Just over a week before the party, Shane turns into Ilya's driveway, the sensor clipped to his visor opening the gates automatically to let him inside. He takes the curve that leads to the garage much too fast, the gravel loud under his tires, but he's too eager to see Ilya to care about anything else. Their teams both returned home today after long trips on the road, which means they have a couple of days off before their next home games. It's also the last chance they'll have to see each other until after the party, and Shane is looking forward to a solid thirty-six hours spent in bed with Ilya.

He kicks off his shoes in the garage, flipping off the light and letting himself in the door that leads to the kitchen. He tosses his bag in the general direction of the stairs, peeking down the hallway in search of Ilya, but coming up empty.

"Ilya?"

"In here!"

Shane follows his voice and the soft melody of what sounds like Christmas music coming from the living room. He rounds the corner and freezes in the doorway, his jaw going slack at the overwhelming scene.

"Hello!" Ilya greets cheerily. He's dressed in black joggers and a white t-shirt with a faded Centaurs logo on the chest, a long strand of Christmas lights looped over his arms and around his neck. He's standing on a step ladder, presumably trying to attach the multi-colored lights to the mantle above the fireplace, though he's doing a terrible job of it.

The rest of the room looks like a department store Christmas display exploded on it. Dozens of meters of garland are spread across the floor, boxes of ornaments are open and spilling onto the couch, and the disassembled pieces of at least three large artificial Christmas trees are heaped into a pile in the corner.

"What the hell is all this?" Shane asks, his brain unable to process the sheer volume of *mess* around him.

"We have to decorate for our party!" Ilya informs him, just as cheerful as before.

"Your party—" Shane begins.

"*Our* party," Ilya corrects.

"Isn't for over a week. Surely this can wait."

"Harris wants to take some pictures for Instagram ahead of time."

"Okay," Shane says, crossing the room gingerly so as not to step on any fragile decorations.

"When is he doing that?"

Ilya pushes back his sleeve to check his watch. It's the one he always wears, the one Shane had given him as a birthday gift two years earlier, engraved on the back with the date of the 2008 World Juniors. The date they first met.

Any goodwill Shane had toward Ilya thinking about those days quickly evaporates when he answers, "he will be here in twelve hours."

"Seriously?"

"No. More like eleven and a half."

"You're joking," Shane grits out, knowing he isn't, but desperately hoping anyway.

Ilya gives him his most winning smile. "Will be easy! You are here to help!"

Shane sighs, shucking off his jacket and tossing it over the back of the couch. "What do you want me to do?"

The energy in the Ottawa locker room after the game with Montreal is electric. They're always in a good mood after a win, even though that sort of thing is getting more common as of late. In fact, their win tonight has set the record for the longest streak in franchise history, and winning in a shootout is always a sure-fire way to get the adrenaline pumping.

For Ilya, personally, it's always a little more exciting to beat Montreal than anyone else. There are few things in the world he relishes more than shaking hands with the Voyageurs after handing them a loss. He loves the way Shane will glare at him the entire way down the line, all but ignoring everyone else. The way he grips Ilya's hand much too hard, his nails biting into the flesh of his palm. Tonight, Ilya had given him a shit-eating grin as he shook his hand, earning himself the wonderful surprise of Shane telling him to go fuck himself in perfect Russian.

Ilya has never loved him more.

His only regret is that the shootout only made it to the second round, as he and Shane were slated to face each other had it gone to a third. Although, it's probably for the best that it didn't, considering they have to keep themselves in check for the duration of the party. There's no time tonight for the long, angry fuck that would have certainly accompanied that outcome.

Ilya takes a moment to hug Wyatt, congratulating him on his excellent goal-keeping skills before joining the scrum surrounding the two newest players on their veteran team. Luca Haas and Troy Barrett are being rightfully hailed as the heroes of tonight's game. Both of them had nailed their shots, making it look easy despite the Voyageurs having an all-star player in goal tonight.

Haas looks as embarrassed by the attention as he always does, though his eyes are shining with delight. Barrett, on the other hand, just looks nervous. Ilya is glad he made the winning goal — maybe all the backslapping and congratulating will convince the kid that he is, in fact, still one of the best players in the league, and that they're lucky to have him here. The way his lips start to tentatively quirk up each time one of the players embraces him makes Ilya hopeful that, maybe, he's starting to realize just that.

Over the jovial conversation in the locker room, another sound catches Ilya's attention. The booming barks get louder, as do Harris's gentle rebukes of the dog, reminding him he's supposed to be on his best behavior.

"Chiron!" Ilya yells, only serving to rile up the excitable dog even more. He drops to his knees, opening his arms and letting the now sizable puppy nearly bowl him over as he jumps on him.

"You're a terrible influence," Harris gripes, tossing the end of Chiron's leash to Ilya. "We're supposed to be working on not jumping on people."

"But he is so cute," Ilya says, gathering the dog in his arms and snuggling him to his chest. "Just look at him! He's the best dog."

Harris sighs but doesn't disagree. Now that Ilya has forcibly taken over on puppy care duties, Harris wanders over to where Troy is putting away his gear. Ilya watches, not even attempting to hide his smirk as Harris produces the game winning puck from his jacket pocket and gives it to Troy. It's ostensibly so Harris can get a picture for the team's Instagram, but from the way Troy is biting his lip and staring at the floor, it's clear that he's more than pleased by the gesture.

"I'm always right about everything," Ilya tells the dog, scratching him behind his ears. Chiron yips his agreement, further cementing his status as Ilya's favorite dog of all time.

"Harris!" Ilya calls once he's finished congratulating Troy. "Are you bringing Chiron to the party?"

"I was planning on dropping him at home first."

"No!" Ilya gasps, cradling the wiggling puppy to his chest. "You have to bring him! I have presents for him!"

Harris rolls his eyes, sitting down in the stall next to Ilya so he can pet the dog too. "Alright, then I guess I'm bringing Chiron."

"Do you hear this?" Ilya says to the dog. "Your first ever party!"

"You spoil him too much," Harris says, not for the first time.

"Impossible!" Ilya adjusts the dog so their faces are side by side, both of them looking up at Harris with wide eyes. "Just look at him!"

"You're nowhere near as cute as the dog, Ilya."

"Lies!"

With lots of post-game celebrating to do and a puppy to play with, Ilya isn't surprised to find that Shane has beaten him home.

From the moment he pushes open the door, he's greeted by the scent of an array of party appetizers already in the oven. His stomach growls, demanding that he follow his nose. It leads him to the kitchen, where Shane is already hard at work. Ilya had prepared most of the food the night before, so it was just a matter of moving everything to the enormous dual ovens he hardly ever makes use of, but damn if Shane doesn't find a way to look good doing it. He's dressed casually, in a Montreal t-shirt and a pair of dark jeans that fit him much too well. He's also wearing an irritated expression, the corners of his mouth turned down into an agitated frown, quietly furious about losing to Ilya.

Ilya doesn't even try to hide his cocky smirk. Maybe he's a bad person, but pissed off might just be his favorite flavor of Shane Hollander.

"We should get you an apron," Ilya says, stepping up behind Shane at the counter and wrapping his arms around his waist.

"Fuck off," Shane snaps, and Ilya grins. He's never once been able to resist the opportunity to further infuriate Shane.

"You would look good in it," Ilya assures him, kissing the strip of exposed skin at the back of his neck, just above his collar. "I think you should retire, be housewife instead. Have dinner waiting when I come home after a win."

"You have a whole block of freshly sharpened knives here," Shane threatens dryly, without looking up from his task of carefully arranging deviled eggs on a serving platter.

"You would never," Ilya says confidently, hooking his chin over Shane's shoulder. "I would bleed a lot. Too much mess."

"This is a terrible idea," Rose says, startling the two men apart. Looking at Shane, pinned between the kitchen counter and Ilya's body, his face flushed and his hair all kinds of fucked, Ilya can't say he disagrees. Maybe it would be best if they cancelled the party altogether, and Ilya just carried Shane up to bed instead.

Rose sets a few bottles of wine on the counter, sighing as they make an attempt to right themselves, though Shane's already tight jeans have definitely stepped over the line into obscene. "You guys are definitely going to get caught."

"No, we're not," Shane says, his tone verging on petulant as he pushes Ilya away from him. Ilya frowns, already missing the warmth of Shane's body against his, but there's very little time to dwell on it. By the time they've both greeted Rose, the front door is opening again to reveal Yuna and David Hollander. Given that the party has become an Irina Foundation event, Yuna would of course be expected to attend, but it's also a convenient cover. They've decided to celebrate Christmas together in Ottawa this year, at Ilya's house, since they were all planning to be here for the party anyway. Ilya hasn't said as much, but he's quietly thrilled that he gets to host everyone this year. As much as he loves being a guest at Yuna and David's, and appreciates the way he's been so easily and eagerly welcomed into their family, he can't deny the warm feeling that grows inside his chest each time he thinks about the upcoming holidays. He's never been able to invite anyone to his home for a holiday before — has never had anyone to invite, or a home worth bringing them to. But now that he does, he can't wait to start making his own traditions with them.

Assuming he and Shane make it through tonight without killing each other, that is.

"Ilya!" Shane hollers from the other room, not for the first time. Ilya is busy in the kitchen, putting the finishing touches on a charcuterie board that looks professionally done. Maybe he should retire from hockey and go into party planning instead. It seems like he may have missed his true calling.

The sound of Shane's stomping footsteps echo through the hallway, so Ilya doesn't bother going to find out what he's done this time. He just waits in the kitchen, head bent forward over his work and a small smile playing on his lips.

"You said you took down all the pictures!" Shane accuses.

"I did!"

And it's true — Ilya really thought he had gotten them all. But the sharp corner of a picture frame digging into his stomach would seem to say differently.

Ilya takes the photograph, admiring the two of them in their respective uniforms for a moment. Yuna had taken the photo at their first camp in Montreal last summer. On the last day, all of the players had worn their uniforms so the kids, and even a few of the parents, could get pictures with them. Once everyone had gone home, Shane had been collecting discarded pucks on the ice, distractedly hitting them into one of the goals to make clean up easier. Ilya, of course, couldn't let that stand, and had jumped onto the ice, deflecting one of his half-hearted shots. It had taken less than a minute for the two of them to devolve into fierce competition, and clean up had been all but forgotten. After several minutes of increasingly intense competition, Shane had claimed victory by shooting the final remaining puck into the net. Somewhere between Shane being an incredibly fucking smug winner, and Ilya gracelessly accepting his punishment of dragging the nets back to the equipment room, Yuna had posed them for a picture.

In it, they're wearing matching giddy smiles, their cheeks pink with the exhilaration that always comes with going head to head against each other. The picture isn't completely damning, but the way Shane's arm is slung low around Ilya's waist, their faces just a little too close to be just friendly... Well, it would definitely raise some questions as to why Ilya Rozanov would have that picture, of all things, framed and hanging on his wall.

"I'll put it away!" Ilya insists as Shane continues to glare at him. He gets an exasperated eye roll in response, but he knows Shane well enough to read the fondness he tries to hide, in the twitch of his mouth and the sparkle of amusement in his eye. Shane leaves to inspect the rest of the house for incriminating evidence Ilya may have missed, and Ilya searches for a good place to hide the photo. His teammates should start arriving any moment, and he doesn't really want to be caught red-handed with it. He quickly opens the drawer of miscellaneous detritus he doesn't have a better place for, the one Shane calls the 'hell drawer' with a disproportionate amount of disdain in his tone, and tucks the frame carefully inside, laying a dish towel over the glass for good measure.

The front door opens moments later, Harris calling out a greeting that can barely be heard over Chiron barking.

Ilya abandons his work in the kitchen in favor of scooping up the dog now eagerly pawing at his legs. Harris appears in the doorway a minute later, his large bag of equipment slung over his shoulder. He quickly goes to work, screwing the lens onto his camera and taking a couple of test shots to make sure everything is in working order. Ilya scratches Chiron's ears, receiving several sloppy kisses to his face as he listens to Harris happily chatter away about engagement on their social channels today. It's one of his favorite things about Harris, the way he gets so easily fired up about most things, his excitement irresistible and infectious. Ilya is listening so intently to his analysis of follower demographics that he almost doesn't notice Troy lingering in the doorway to the kitchen, half-hidden behind the wall.

"Barrett," Ilya acknowledges him with a nod and a small, knowing smile. "You are here early."

"I gave him a ride," Harris explains.

"Did you now." Ilya arches an eyebrow and Troy flushes to the roots of his dark hair, which is all the confirmation Ilya needs. He can't wait to get a moment alone with Shane later, so he can tell him he was right about those two.

As if summoned by Ilya's longing, Shane appears in the doorway a moment later. Harris greets him warmly, which seems to surprise Shane a little. Despite Ilya's insistence to the contrary, he's probably prepared himself for the Centaurs to be cold and distant with him. Shane just doesn't understand this team. Not that Ilya really does either — in all his years of hockey, he's never played with a team like this before.

The four men make easy conversation, Shane and Ilya gamely cooperating with Harris's instructions as he poses them for a few photos. Just to bother Barrett, Ilya insists on taking a photo of the two of them. Harris puts up a little resistance, insisting no one wants to see pictures of the social media manager tonight, but he eventually agrees. Troy goes pink again when Harris easily throws an arm around his neck, his hand resting somewhere over Troy's

chest, but he doesn't shy away from the contact in the slightest. They make a good looking pair, Troy in a dark Centaurs zip-up and Harris in a loud, colorful Christmas sweater, both of them smiling more genuinely than the situation would seem to warrant.

Ilya turns the camera back over to Harris, giving Shane a significant look when the other two inspect the preview of the photo. Before Ilya can tease Troy too much about the flush coloring his neck, the front door opens again, this time accompanied by the raucous laughter of several people ready to have good time.

The kitchen is quickly filled by a majority of the Centaurs roster. Yuna, David and Rose return from wherever they'd been hiding during the photo session, and the three Hollanders all seem surprised by the warm reception they receive from Ilya's teammates. Yuna is quickly diverted, a few of the veteran players peppering her with questions about getting their own charities off the ground.

"Do not steal my executive director," Ilya warns them, crossing his arms and trying to look every bit the commanding, intimidating captain they all know he isn't. "Or I will bench you."

"I think that's my decision," Coach Wiebe says, a cheer going up when the players realize their much loved coach has decided to join them. He's carrying a stack of plastic containers so tall he can barely see over them, and Ilya and Wyatt quickly relieve him of his burden.

"What did you bring us?" Hayes asks, trying to pry open one of the lids and get a peek.

"I am the host, whatever he brought is for me," Ilya tells the goalie, pulling the container out of his reach.

"They're for everyone," Wiebe says, nodding for the curious crowd of men to open the containers. "My kids made them for you."

Inside the boxes are dozens and dozens of sugar cookies, all shaped like hockey jerseys. Each one is frosted in either Centaurs black or Voyageurs blue, the names and numbers of each player carefully written in white frosting. The players all shout their thanks to Coach Wiebe, Harris snapping about a hundred photos before the cookies can be disturbed.

Ilya searches out Shane in the crowd, finding him at the far end of the kitchen island. His eyes are wide, and he looks touched that Wiebe and his children would be so thoughtful as to make Christmas cookies for the opposing team. It could just be written off as the Christmas spirit, but Ilya knows it's more than that. At his core, Brandon Wiebe is just a *good guy*, and Ilya has no doubt that he's raising similarly kind children. Shane has spoken to Ilya at length about his fears if their were to ever secret get out, and losing the respect of his coach is near the top of the list. Ilya wishes the Voyageurs coach was a little more like Wiebe. He's never worried for even a second about Wiebe not having his back if word ever did get out, and he hates that Shane doesn't have that with Montreal.

"Everyone get out of my kitchen!" Ilya shouts over the din of dozens of crisscrossing conversations. "Party is supposed to be in living room. I put up decorations and everything!"

"Who put up the decorations?" Shane murmurs as he passes him on his way out of the kitchen, and Ilya grins at him, his smile probably a little too flirty. But what can he say? It's Christmas. His family and friends are all here in his home, drinking his wine and eating his food, and Ilya can't think of a time he's ever been happier.

Nearly an hour after the advertised start time to the party, the rest of the Voyageurs make their appearance. They all arrive at almost exactly the same time, and Shane wonders if they all carpooled from the hotel, coordinating carefully so that no one would end up outnumbered in the home of the enemy.

Shane is leaning against the wall when they arrive, ostensibly having a conversation with Rose, though he's mostly just watching Ilya hold court on the other side of the room. Everyone on this team loves him, and Shane can tell Ilya knows it. Not in his usual, cocky way, though. It's something much quieter, a softness that Shane rarely gets to see in the presence of other people. This team is his family as much as Shane and his parents, and Shane can tell Ilya feels lucky to have them.

"Can't believe you survived this crowd without us," Hayden Pike says by way of greeting, pulling Shane into a hug and slapping him soundly on the back. Rose steps in to welcome Hayden too, wrapping her arms around him and kissing his cheek, which immediately reduces Pike to a blushing, stuttering mess. The only person in the world who is more infatuated with Rose Landry than Hayden is his wife, Jacki, and Shane wonders if she's upset that the party was too far away for her to attend tonight.

"I'll leave you to your team," Rose says, patting Shane on the cheek. "Besides, I think I've spotted some fans of mine behind enemy lines."

It's true — there's a group of young Centaurs players who have been stealing not so subtle looks at her all night. All of them turn beet red when Rose glances in their direction, and Shane is certain a few of them are close to having heart attacks when she crosses the room to join them. They all scatter from the couch, each offering her their seat, and she winks back at Shane. Rose had mentioned no less than three times tonight that she's bored of being single, and Shane is pretty sure she's going to be taking a plaything back to her hotel tonight. Maybe two or three.

The Voyageurs are slightly more immune to Rose's charms, given that she usually attends a few of their games each year to support Shane. The players surround their captain, sticking close together like they're afraid of being picked off one by one. No one is too devastated about losing the game — it's not like it had been a blow out, they'd lost in overtime, plus Ottawa has been on a real hot streak lately. It also probably helps that their record against Ottawa this season is overwhelmingly in Montreal's favor, but still, the Voyageurs are clearly not going to be the ones to extend the first olive branch.

Wyatt Hayes and Zane Boodram arrive in short order to do just that.

"There's food and beer and wine in the kitchen," Hayes says, gesturing down the hallway. "Or ginger ale if you're lame like Hollander."

Shane rolls his eyes, but Zane keeps talking before he has a chance to argue.

"I also make a pretty mean Moscow mule, if anyone is interested!"

The Voyageurs look between themselves nervously, unsure of what to do with this unexpected hospitality, and Wyatt laughs. "Come on, guys. It's a party, right? I promise I won't even let Bood put jalapeños in the cocktails."

"I only do that to Rozanov," Bood insists, slinging an arm around Wyatt's shoulders and heading for the kitchen. Some of the braver Voyageurs follow, splitting their group about in half. Slow progress, but Shane will take it. He'd half expected some of the players to already be making excuses to leave by now.

But even the most stubborn of the Montreal players don't stand a chance against Chiron. Harris lets him back in from where he and Troy Barrett had been throwing a ball for him to chase in Ilya's backyard, and the dog immediately sets out on a mission to make twenty three new friends. The frosty exteriors of the Voyageurs melt in the face of the small, eager puppy begging for belly rubs, and Shane starts to think that—maybe— this was a good idea after all.

Not that he would ever say as much to Ilya.

The first time is most definitely Shane's fault, though Ilya is sure he would go to his grave saying otherwise.

"The food is amazing, man," Zane Boodram tells Ilya, in the kitchen filling yet another plate for himself.

Wyatt nods fervently in agreement. His mouth is stuffed with the majority of a slider, but he doesn't let it slow him down. "I had no idea you cook!"

Ilya shrugs, attempting to play off the pleasure rising in his chest at the praise. "I know, I am amazing."

"And humble, too," Shane teases when the other two men make their way back to the living room, leaving the two of them alone in the kitchen.

"I do not know this word."

Shane snorts. "Of course you don't."

Ilya spreads his arms in a *what can you do* gesture. "I can't help it, Hollander. I'm just very good at...most things." He lets the register of his voice trip and fall a little lower on the last two words, making them come out gravelly and heated. His eyes flick down to Shane's lips, tracking the movement as his tongue quickly darts out to wet them. And fuck would Ilya like to shove him up against the counter and kiss him right now... But that would only lead to trouble. For once, Ilya does the responsible thing and takes a step back, putting an end to the game at least for now.

Shane seems to be in agreement that they're flying a little too close to something they won't be able to take back. He snags his plate off the counter, winking at Ilya over his shoulder before leaving him alone in the kitchen.

Or, he'd thought he was alone, anyway.

"You have to stop."

Ilya nearly jumps out of his skin, cursing loudly in Russian as he turns to see J. J. Boiziau lurking in the hallway that leads to the garage. "Fuck, Boiziau! You scared the shit out of me."

"You have to stop," Boiziau repeats, as if Ilya hadn't spoken. "You can't keep fucking with him like that."

Ilya raises an eyebrow at the other man. "I always fuck with Hollander. Is what I do."

"He likes you," Boiziau grinds out, as if the words are causing him physical pain. "And you know it."

"I know nothing," Ilya says, trying to keep his face neutral.

Boiziau scoffs, his irritation growing by the second. He points an accusing finger at Ilya. "I know you're a fucking asshole, but this is low, even for you."

Ilya is caught somewhere between being amused that J.J. fucking Boiziau has decided it's his responsibility to fight for Shane's honor, and molten fury that he can't tell Boiziau, tell everyone, that he's not leading Shane on at all. That Shane doesn't *like* Ilya, he loves him, and that Ilya loves him too. At the moment, he's not sure what words might come tumbling out of his mouth, so he elects to keep it shut, instead fixing Boiziau with one of the amused, cocky looks he's perfected over the years.

It's the wrong move. In a heartbeat Ilya finds himself shoved up against the wall of the kitchen, Boiziau's strong forearm pressed hard against his sternum, holding him there. "Fuck you, Rozanov! Shane is a nice guy. He doesn't deserve this."

A soft intake of breath catches both of their attention, their heads turning in unison to find Shane standing frozen in the doorway. They all stare at each other for a long moment, Boiziau still pinning Ilya to the wall.

"I, uh— I forgot my drink," Shane mumbles, pointing to the abandoned glass of iced tea on the counter, though he makes no move to collect it. Boiziau seems to have no idea what his next move should be. He's clearly still furious with Ilya, but he obviously doesn't want to have to explain his reasoning for that in front of Shane, so Ilya takes matters into his own hands.

"How would you like me to handle this?" Ilya asks Shane, a challenging note to his voice. Shane has been saying for months now that he wants to tell Pike and Boiziau, but that there just hasn't been a good time where he's had them alone away from the rink.

Well, perfect timing delivered, thanks to Ilya.

Shane flushes, glancing over his shoulder to make sure no one else is anywhere in earshot. "Let him go," he hisses, tugging at Boiziau's arm and stepping between the men once they've separated. He's probably worried that Ilya will retaliate and ruin the party, but the only thing Ilya is capable of at the moment is staring at Shane, hope expanding in his chest. Because Shane looks so determined, and maybe he's actually going to...

"Okay?" Shane asks quietly, seeking Ilya's permission, and Ilya can only manage a shaky nod in response.

"What's—" Boiziau starts, staring confusedly between the two men, but Shane cuts him off.

"He's not fucking with me," Shane says. His voice is strained, and without thinking Ilya wraps a comforting arm around his waist, pulling him to his side.

Rose was right, this party was a horrible idea.

Boiziau takes a step back, shock written on his every feature at the easy way Shane leans into Ilya's embrace. His mouth opens and closes a few times, no words making their way out.

"We're together," Shane says, exhaling the words like it's a relief to say them aloud. It's certainly a relief to Ilya to hear them. "Have been, for a long time."

The full range of human emotions cross Boiziau's face. "What— I mean how— *When-?!*" He sputters, but Shane shakes his head.

"This isn't really the best place to talk about this," Shane says, glancing nervously down the hall again, and Ilya reluctantly drops his arm, knowing he's right. The last thing they need is for both teams to find out about this right now, lest it come to blows with Ilya's poor house caught in the crossfire. Boiziau, though, is a good guy — not that Ilya would ever tell him that. He'll keep their secret, even if at the moment he looks like his head is at risk of popping off.

"We can talk about it tomorrow," Shane assures him, gently leading Boiziau away from Ilya and out of the kitchen. Shane pauses in the doorway for a moment, his perfect lips curving up into a small grin when he looks back at Ilya.

Ilya's answering smile is blinding.

The second time is probably Ilya's fault. But if he really thinks about it, he could definitely find a way to blame it on Shane.

Ilya is still hiding out alone in the kitchen, unable to hide his delighted smile or rid his body of the giddy tension that filled it the moment Shane claimed him as his in front of Boiziau. Ilya wants to find him, to pull him aside and make sure he's okay, but he's fairly certain if anyone saw the goofy, love struck expression he knows he's wearing right now, the secret would be well and truly out.

He's regained some semblance of control over himself when he hears footsteps in the hallway. Luca Haas appears, nervous and looking a little out of place, as is typical for the rookie.

"You found my hiding spot," Ilya says, hopping up to sit on the counter with his beer.

"It is getting very loud in there," Haas reports. "They are taking bets on line ups for the All Star game this year."

Ilya flicks a nervous glance toward the living room. "Should I break it up?"

Haas shakes his head. "No, they are having fun. No one is fighting."

"Good," Ilya breathes, some tension leaving his shoulders. "I like my house. Would be a shame if some Voyageurs trashed it."

Haas chuckles, crossing the kitchen and picking up a bottle of wine to refill his glass. He tips it upside down, but no liquid comes out.

"There are more behind you," Ilya says, gesturing to the long line of bottles brought by the other Centaurs players.

Haas looks over their options, eventually choosing one. "Corkscrew?" He asks, searching through the mess of half-eaten trays of food on the counter.

"Drawer on your left."

Ilya still feels a bit like he's floating, the events of the last half hour driving him to distraction. Which is why he doesn't immediately notice that Haas has opened the wrong drawer, choosing the one on the far side of the island, instead of the one to his immediate left. A warning bell goes off in Ilya's mind, though he can't quite remember why until he sees Haas pulling out the upside-down picture frame hidden in there, a confused expression on his face.

Ilya curses in Russian, jumping off the counter and nearly smashing his beer bottle on the floor in the process, but it's too late. Haas looks from the photograph to Ilya and back again, pieces slotting together in his mind much too quickly.

Ilya grabs the frame, pressing it to his chest as Haas stares at him, wide-eyed. He can't really find it in himself to be too concerned — not right now, and not when the person who's found them out is Luca Haas. The kid is a sweetheart, and is definitely more than a little infatuated with Ilya. Ilya could probably tell him he was a serial killer and Luca would keep his secret, if he asked him to.

"Please do not tell Shane about this," is all Ilya says by way of explanation as he hides the photograph more carefully in the back of the pantry.

"O-of course," Haas stammers. "I would never."

Ilya pats him on the shoulder. "I know. You're a good kid, Haas."

"I'm not a kid!" He insists, his petulant tone undermining the statement somewhat.

"Of course you are. You are, like, seven."

Luca rolls his eyes, shaking his head at Ilya's amused expression as he makes a second attempt at finding the corkscrew.

Shane nearly trips over an excited Chiron, who has taken a break from being petted by a mass of tipsy hockey players in favor of running up and down Ilya's staircase. The ridiculous reindeer antlers Ilya bought for him are clinging crookedly to his head, perfectly matching his dopey smile. Shane sighs as he kneels on the stairs to scratch behind Chiron's ears.

He can't believe he's going to have to get a dog.

Harris calls for Chiron from downstairs, and after one final goodbye lick, the dog takes off running to find him. Shane continues his trek up the stairs, glancing around to make sure no one else has wandered up here before slipping into Ilya's room and closing the door. He flops down on the bed, his legs hanging off the end and stares at the ceiling. Now that everyone is partaking in Ilya's too strong eggnog and starting to loosen up a bit, the noise downstairs was getting a bit much for him. Unintelligible snippets of dozens of conversations had filled his ears until his head was too jumbled to concentrate on anything. He just needs a few minutes of quiet, a few minutes to relax here in their bed, surrounded by the smell of Ilya's shampoo, and then he'll be alright.

He tries not to let himself think about the inevitable conversation he's going to have to have with J.J. in the morning. He'd promised to get breakfast with him before the flight home, not

wanting to draw attention to the fact that he wouldn't be sleeping in his room at the hotel tonight.

All things considered, J.J. had taken it pretty well. After they had left the kitchen, Shane had been half-convinced that J.J. might just walk straight out the front door and leave. But all he'd done was give Shane a pained look and say, "Rozanov? Really? Are you *sure*?"

Shane closes his eyes, folding his hands over his stomach as he exhales long and slow through his nose. Some of the tension he's carried in his shoulders since 2009 starts to dissipate. There are only really two people on the team he cares about telling, two people that he really *needs* to have his back on this, and being one for one so far feels pretty good.

He takes slow, deep breaths, making use of some of his meditation techniques to try to calm his racing mind. But even years of practice with being mindful can't withstand the memory of Ilya's face when Shane had told J.J. about them. That pleased little smile made Shane's heart race, and he'd had to remove himself from Ilya's side immediately before he could do something stupid, like kiss it off of him.

Shane redoubles his efforts to relax, almost reaching a state of calm before the click of the door handle startles him. He scrambles up into a sitting position, coming face to face with Hayden Pike, standing in the doorway with his phone pressed to his ear and a confused expression on his face.

"One second, Jacki," he says into the phone before pressing it to his shoulder and turning his attention to Shane. "What are you doing?"

"I was just—" Shane starts, hoping his brain will conjure up a brilliant excuse he can finish that sentence with, but unfortunately nothing comes to him.

Pike glances around the room, and Shane thinks he's half expecting to find someone else in here with him, half-dressed and trying to stay out of sight. He's not sure who Pike thinks he would have snuck away with, but he's fairly confident he knows whose name is at the bottom of that list.

"Is this Rozanov's room?" Hayden hisses to him, sounding slightly horrified.

Shane shrugs, hoping it doesn't come off as forced as it feels. "Not sure, it was just the first empty room I found. Why are you up here?"

"I just wanted to FaceTime the kids from somewhere quiet," Hayden says, moving to sit next to Shane on the bed. "Want to say hi?"

Shane agrees readily. He loves the Pike children, and with the season in full swing and so much of his free time spent commuting back and forth between Ottawa and Montreal, it's been way too long since he's seen them.

"Uncle Shane! Uncle Shane!" Ruby and Jade chorus eagerly when their faces appear on the screen. Behind them Shane can make out Arthur, trying to to squirm in between his sisters so he can see the screen too.

The girls eagerly tell him about their new teachers at school and the gifts they got to open early for Christmas, both of them talking over each other and making it hard to keep up. After a little prompting from Hayden and Jacki, Arthur tells Shane that he's started taking figure skating lessons, a slight flush to his cheeks at all the attention being focused on him. Shane glances at Hayden, biting back a smile at the way his friend is absolutely beaming with pride.

Getting Shane on the line was probably a mistake, given that the kids are now way more riled up than they should be at bedtime. Hayden and Shane say their goodnights, apologizing to Jacki for making more work for her than usual.

"I'm used to it," Jacki says with an eye roll, though she's smiling. The kids can be heard yelling in the background, and Jacki leans in closer to the phone before asking in a low tone, "by the way, is Rose there?"

Hayden laughs. "Goodnight, Jacki," he says, hanging up over her protests, insisting that he send her pictures.

"You know," Shane says, getting up as Hayden sprawls sideways across the bed. "I could always see if Rose would be into—"

"No," Hayden says, cutting him off. "I can't have my wife running off with Rose Landry."

"Fair."

"I can't believe this is Rozanov's room," Hayden says, glancing around at the mostly bare walls. "I thought there'd be, like, life-size posters of himself everywhere."

Shane snorts. In truth, there usually are more photos on the walls and dresser, but all the pictures including Shane and his family are currently hidden in a box in Ilya's closet. Except for one, from their first summer camp, surrounded by the other coaches and the smiling faces of all the kids who attended. Shane and Ilya are on opposite sides of the frame, so they'd decided it was safe to leave it up. Shane's glad they did — it wouldn't feel quite right, to have no evidence of himself here, in one of the very few places he feels most at home.

"Do you think he has a bunch of weird sex toys in here?" Hayden asks, and Shane barks out a laugh.

"Gross, Hayd."

"What? You're telling me you don't think Rozanov likes weird shit in bed?"

Shane isn't touching that with a twenty foot pole. "Why have you thought so much about what Rozanov likes in bed?"

Pike pulls a disgusted face, not bothering to answer the question. Instead, he checks his phone, smirking at what Shane can only assume is more messages from Jacki about Rose, then drops his phone on his chest, stretching his arms up over his head, his hands disappearing under the neatly organized pillows. Shane is distracted, wondering if Ilya only

put all the extra pillows on his bed in an attempt to impress his mother, so he doesn't notice at first that Hayden is pulling something out from under the bedding. By the time Shane recognizes the shirt his teammate is unfolding, it's way too late.

Hayden looks from Shane to the blue Voyageurs shirt, embroidered with Shane's name and number on the back, his mouth hanging slightly open. There's a moment where Shane is fairly certain that, if he comes up with the right excuse, he could play this off, but he's unable to make his mouth form the words, and he can feel his face heating to an undeniable red.

Instead, silence stretches until Hayden manages a staccato "what. The. *Fuck.*"

"Rozanov is secretly a huge Voyageurs fan?" Shane tries half-heartedly, but it's far too late for that. And Shane finds he doesn't really want to lie this away, even if he could. Of course, it wouldn't have been his first choice for Hayden to find out this way, in a house full of people not even an hour after he'd just had to tell J.J., but...

Reality seems to wash over Hayden, and he leaps off the bed. "Oh god, gross!"

"Hayd..."

"Rozanov?! Seriously?!" Hayden asks, looking a little green. "And I was laying on the bed! I need a fucking shower."

Shane elects not to mention that they've made almost as much use of Ilya's shower as they have his bed.

"How long have you been hooking up with him?" Hayden asks, though he looks uncertain as to whether or not he actually wants to hear the answer.

"A while," Shane says, scooping up the shirt from where Hayden threw it on the floor and tossing it into the laundry basket, lest someone else make the same discovery. "And we're not... We're not just hooking up."

Hayden's expression shifts, shock overwhelming his disgust at the idea of his friend sleeping with *Ilya Rozanov*. "What do you mean you're..." he trails off, the pieces visibly coming together in his mind. "Oh my god. *Boston Lily.*"

Shane looks down at the floor, scrubbing a hand through his hair, which Hayden seems to take as confirmation.

"Does anyone else know?"

"A couple of people. My parents, Rose. J.J. just found out tonight."

Hayden snorts. "Bet he loved that."

"I don't think he was too shocked," Shane says, exhaling a laugh. "He thought I had a crush on him, but that he was straight."

"Oh, I think we all thought that."

Shane shoves him, a soft thud echoing through the quiet room as Hayden's shoulder hits the wall. "Why does everyone think I'm all sad and pathetic?"

Hayden raises an eyebrow, giving Shane a once-over that clearly says *I mean, look at you.*

"Shut up."

Hayden laughs, and Shane is pretty sure that, once the shock wears off, they're going to be okay.

"I gotta go find J.J.," Hayden says, his eyes bright with amusement. "Much to discuss."

Shane rolls his eyes. "Just don't say anything to Ilya tonight. I'll tell him once everyone's gone."

Hayden shudders. "Don't call him Ilya, it's too weird. I can't cope."

"Don't tell *Rozanov*, then," Shane quips, following Hayden to the door. "We should get back."

Hayden nods, starting to leave, then pauses with his hand on the doorknob, his nose wrinkling. "Ew, I just realized that means they're *your* weird sex toys too."

"*Get out!*"

Ilya figures that, given the number of people in the house, he's probably safe from getting a lecture from Shane about smoking.

He stands on the back porch with Wyatt, Dykstra, and Boodram, stamping his feet in the light layer of snow, trying to stay warm. He wishes he would've thought to grab a warmer coat, but it's too late now. He bums a cigarette from Bood, after promising several times over not to tell Cassie that he was smoking. Wyatt and Evan lean against the icy railing, passing a joint back and forth between the two of them.

"Did you do something to Haas?" Wyatt asks Ilya, apropos of nothing, as is his usual style.

"I don't think so," Ilya lies. "Why?"

Wyatt shrugs. "Dunno, the kid just seems more nervous than usual. After he was talking to you earlier, Hollander tried to introduce himself to him and he spilled his drink all over the couch."

"Haas spilled wine on my couch?" Ilya asks sharply. "Why is this the first I am hearing of this?"

"I think it was white, if that helps," Dykstra offers. Ilya scoffs, tapping his cigarette on the railing and watching the ash scatter into the snow. Wyatt gives him an odd look, but doesn't press the issue any further.

Not that he has much of a chance. The cheery notes of a generic ringtone play from the pocket of Bood's jacket and he curses, nearly burning a hole in the leather as he tries to pull his phone out.

"Oh shit," he says, his eyes going wide. "It's Cassie."

"Answer it, dumbass!" Wyatt says, making Zane jump and nearly drop the phone before he complies. "Honestly, I can't believe he's about to be a father."

From the little of the conversation they're privy to, and the look of dawning shock and mild horror on Bood's usually relaxed face, it's clear becoming a father is happening sooner rather than later.

"She's in labor," he says as he hangs up the phone, sounding a little awestruck.

"Shit! Congratulations, man!" Dykstra says, pulling Zane in for a hug and slapping him soundly on the back. "Let's get you out of here."

"I rode with Wyatt." Zane's eyes go wide in alarm. "Shit, I don't have my car."

"I can't drive," Wyatt says apologetically.

"Have you been drinking?" Ilya asks, trying to make a list in his head of who's likely to still be sober. Shane doesn't drink anymore, but he's not sure how Zane would feel about Ilya suggesting he ride with the enemy. Even if that enemy is as non-threatening as Shane Hollander.

Boodram saves him the trouble. "No, I haven't since we found out Cassie was pregnant."

"Then you take one of my cars," Ilya says swiftly, leaving no room for argument. He plucks Boodram's cigarette from his hand, dropping it in on the deck next to his own and squishing them both under the toe of his boot. "Come on."

Ilya drags Bood back inside, pulling him through the throng of people playing beer pong on his dining room table and toward the garage, Hayes and Dykstra following close behind. He snags his keys off the hook by the door, idly noticing that Shane has hung his there too out of habit. They're nondescript, unlikely to be noticed unless Ilya draws attention to them, so he leaves them where they are.

"It's early," Zane says as Ilya presses the keys into his hand. He looks scared, smaller than Ilya has ever seen him.

"It will be okay," Ilya assures him. Not that he knows anything about anything, but talking out of his ass is one of his specialties. "Baby is just excited to meet her fun mom and boring dad."

Boodram laughs shakily. Behind them, Wyatt finishes the call he'd been having in low tones and hangs up the phone. "Lisa is working tonight. She's going to meet Cassie at reception and stay with her until you get there."

Zane nods, taking a few deep breaths to calm himself. Ilya grasps his face between his hands, loudly kissing his forehead. "Go be better dad than you are hockey player."

"Fuck off, Roz," Zane says affectionately, climbing into Ilya's car. The three of them wave him off, waiting until the brake lights disappear around the corner before heading back inside.

"Guess we better break out the cigars," Dykstra says.

"I think it's bad form to smoke them without the new parents," Wyatt laughs.

"Damn."

Ilya follows behind the other two men as they head back to the porch, in search of the half-smoked joint they left behind. Before he can make it to the sliding glass door, he feels the heat of eyes on him. He looks up to find Shane glaring at him from the staircase. After a long moment, Shane turns on his heel, heading up the stairs. Ilya sighs, giving it a minute or two before he follows — better to get the lecture out of the way now, when the house is still full of witnesses.

Shane is nowhere to be seen when he reaches the second floor, but the door to one of the guest rooms is ajar. Ilya pushes it open, finding an irritated Shane on the other side, his arms crossed over his chest.

"Cassie is in labor!" Ilya says, but Shane isn't deterred.

"You were smoking!"

"New life is coming into the world as we speak! Is a miracle! So maybe my smoking *one* little cigarette is really not so important, when you think about it."

Shane looks wholly unimpressed. "If you get lung cancer—"

"I know, I know," Ilya says placatingly, closing the door behind him. "You will miss me very much after you kill me."

"Ilya—"

"I know," he murmurs, dropping his hands to Shane's waist. He turns the other man around, pushing him gently backwards until his back is pressed to the door. "It was just one. I won't do it again... probably."

Shane huffs a laugh, shaking his head as Ilya leans in to kiss his neck. "You smell terrible."

"You smell good." Ilya nearly groans when he catches the scent of his own aftershave on Shane's throat. "This was mean. You know I can't control myself when you smell like this."

"You're so self-obsessed."

"No," Ilya growls. "I like you smelling like you're *mine*."

Before Ilya can make good on his terrible idea to show Shane exactly how possessive he feels at the moment, a loud thump from the other side of the room startles them. Ilya's hands are still on Shane's waist, his fingers sneaking up under the hem of his shirt, when the closet door opens, and the forms of two people come tumbling out from the shadows.

Shane lets his head fall back against the door, muttering under his breath about what a mistake this party was, but he makes no move to extricate himself from Ilya's embrace. Probably because there's no real point, given what their eavesdroppers would have already overheard.

Ilya, on the other hand, is delighted. Harris groans as he sits up, rubbing at his elbow where it made sharp contact with the doorframe on the way down. His shirt is half unbuttoned, the hem pulled from the waistband of his jeans. The festive Christmas sweater he'd been wearing over it is nowhere to be seen. Beside him, Troy leans back against the wall, one leg folded awkwardly in front of him in what Ilya can only assume is an attempt to hide *something*.

"You see!" Ilya says excitedly, smacking Shane's shoulder. "I told you he had a crush on Harris!"

Troy goes impossibly redder. "I was going to say the same thing about you and Hollander."

Ilya waves him off, making a skeptical sound in his throat. "You were not. You are surprised. You cannot believe it."

"I'm actually not surprised at all," Harris says, finally noticing that his shirt is still hanging half open and buttoning it back up — quickly and incorrectly. "You never have parties, even for the team, and suddenly you want to have one with the Voyageurs? And the way you watch game tape of his team—"

"Alright!" Ilya interrupts, color rising in his cheeks. Shane looks annoyingly pleased by this new bit of information, grinning smugly up at Ilya.

"Finally, someone thinks *you're* the pathetic one."

"What does that mean?"

"Tell you later."

Ilya curses in Russian. Pathetic? Him? Well... yes, probably. But no one else is supposed to notice that. Barrett especially is too amused by the whole situation, so Ilya turns his ire on his friend.

"I wouldn't be laughing, Barrett. You are the one who literally just fell out of the closet."

"Fuck you, Roz."

"I think I'll leave that to Shane."

"Jesus fucking Christ," Shane mutters, finally pushing Ilya away and straightening his shirt. "Is everyone decent? We should get back to the party."

Troy grumbles his agreement, pushing himself to his feet. His expression softens as he stops to help Harris fix the buttons of his shirt. Harris beams back, the two of them nauseatingly cute together. Unfortunately, instead of lovesick adoration, Shane is glaring at Ilya like the entire situation is his fault.

It probably is, but there's no point dwelling on the past.

Ilya can't resist getting one more quip in as Shane opens the door, checking that the coast is clear. "This is the worst foursome I've ever had."

"Shut up, Ilya."

The party starts to break up somewhere around midnight. The Voyageurs have an early flight back to Montreal to catch, and as much as everyone had gotten along for the evening, they're still not too keen on being left alone in a sea of Ottawa players. The first few dominoes fall, which starts a near mass-exodus, and within fifteen minutes the only Montreal players left in the house are Shane, Pike and Boiziau. Ilya watches from across the room as Shane helps Harris pack away his camera equipment, the two of them getting along exactly as well as he always knew they would. Troy leans against the back of the couch beside Ilya, studying Harris with a faint smile.

"Are you going to tell people?" Ilya asks gently, and Troy shrugs.

"Maybe. I mean, yeah, probably. I don't mind you guys knowing, but everyone else is..."

"I know," Ilya says, and he really does. Maybe more than Troy even realizes. "No one on this team will bother you. And if they do, they will answer to me about it."

Troy smiles down at his feet, bumping his shoulder against Ilya's. "Thanks, Roz. You're a good guy, no matter what I usually tell people."

"Do not ever tell anyone I am a good guy," Ilya says with mock sincerity. "I have image to maintain."

The remaining Centaurs are a little slower to leave, making their way to the door one slow step at a time, conversations dragging on until Ilya is ready to kick them out. He's pretty fucking keen for him and Shane to have the house to themselves, and the way Shane is looking at him like he wants to devour him really isn't helping. Nor is the fact that, in the course of a few hours, they told four people their secret, and nothing terrible happened. The

sky didn't fall, lightning didn't strike, and Roger Crowell didn't rear his ugly, annoying head. Ilya can't help the way his hope buoys him, making him think that, just maybe, this won't be as bad as they always predicted.

Ilya collects the last of the cups leftover from the beer pong tournament and carries them to the kitchen. The house is a disaster, but he can't really bring himself to care. Hopefully Shane will be amenable to Ilya's plan to leave clean up until the morning, but just in case, he might as well get a head start on the worst of it while the stragglers work out their carpools.

He has his back to the door as he rinses out cups for the recycling, but he would know the exact sound of Shane's footsteps anywhere. His warm chest presses against Ilya's back, his hands smoothing up over his chest, and Ilya sighs contentedly.

"I put Rose in a cab," Shane says, resting his chin on Ilya's shoulder. "She'll be back for her car in the morning."

Ilya turns off the faucet, turning in Shane's embrace so his back is to the counter. "At least someone here will eat my pancakes."

Shane rolls his eyes. "Yes, you two both eat like teenagers. I have to leave before breakfast, anyway."

Ilya's heart sinks a little at the reminder that their time together is so short. Shane will be back later in the day, after a wholly unnecessary flight back to Montreal to keep up appearances, but even so. It's nothing new, but Ilya still hates having their already limited time together chopped up into small segments like this. Tiny windows where Ilya gets a taste of what he wants, making him miss it all the more when he can't have it.

Summer can't get here soon enough.

"You know, you are neglecting a very important Christmas custom," Ilya says. Shane raises an eyebrow at him, confused, and Ilya points to light fixture over the island, where he'd hung several sprigs of mistletoe.

Shane shakes his head, lips curving into an amused smile. "We're not exactly standing under it."

"Oh, so you are a Grinch. No respect for the holiday."

"You're annoying," Shane says, in the way that always sounds much more like *I love you* to Ilya's ears.

"I delight you."

"You're alright."

Ilya makes a pained sound, pressing his palm to his chest. "You wound me, Hollander! You must kiss it better."

Shane sighs at Ilya's dramatics, but ultimately obliges. Ilya can taste eggnog on his lips, even though Shane swore up and down that the drink was disgusting, insisting that he wouldn't have even a sip. Feeling charitable for once, Ilya decides not to make fun of him for it, instead twisting his fingers through the belt loops of Shane's jeans and using them to pull him closer. Shane hums against his mouth, melting into Ilya's embrace and deepening the kiss. His fingers tangle in Ilya's unruly curls, his lips part, and Ilya is about to lift him up onto the counter and make good on every single thought he's had since he first saw Shane skate out onto the ice earlier that day, when an awkward cough behind them startles them apart.

Ilya is ready to apologize to Shane's parents, who he'd entirely forgotten were still in the house, but instead he's greeted by a whole crowd of people filling the hall and doorway. Dread settles like a rock in his stomach as he registers several surprised faces looking back at him. Wyatt and Dykstra are right at the front of the group, a nervous looking Luca Haas between them. And, worse yet, behind them stands Coach Wiebe, his arms full of empty Tupperware containers. Boiziau is there too, which isn't the end of the world, but next to him is Hayden Pike, and Shane is absolutely going to kill him for letting his best friend find out this way.

Shane is stiff as a board beside him, no longer within his embrace but still close enough that Ilya can feel the anxiety coming off of him in waves. Silence stretches for several long seconds, no one knowing quite what to say. Then, just when the air seems too thick with tension for Ilya to draw breath, Wyatt starts to laugh.

The small sound seems to split the room open, and within a few seconds, everyone has joined him. Even Shane cracks a nervous smile, taking a half step closer to Ilya without seeming to notice he's done it. The cat is well and truly out of the bag now, but Ilya still resists the urge to wrap an arm around him.

"At least I can stop pretending like I don't know now," Wyatt says to no one in particular. Behind him, Evan Dykstra and, horrifyingly, Coach Wiebe both nod in agreement. Ilya is fairly certain his jaw is going to have to be scooped up off the ground.

"What?!"

Wyatt shrugs. "You two aren't as subtle as you think you are."

There are murmurs of agreement from the others, and Ilya has never been so incensed in his life.

"This is not true!"

"This is literally the second time tonight you've gotten caught," Harris observes unhelpfully. A betrayal that Ilya takes deeply to heart.

"That was Shane's fault."

Shane sputters indignantly. "It was not!"

"Shh, is okay. I forgive you."

"It was your fault J.J. found out!"

"No, that was also you."

Shane lets out a frustrated groan. "Well how did all of *your* teammates find out?"

All eyes turn to Wyatt who, as usual, looks totally unbothered by the little melodrama playing out in front of him. "At the All Star game last year, I saw Hollander sneaking out of your room at two in the morning."

Ilya gives Shane a shit-eating grin, which Shane refuses to acknowledge. Then Wyatt's words finally catch up with him. "You've known for a year?"

Wyatt shrugs. "Figured you'd tell me when you were ready."

Fuck, Ilya loves this team. He's glad he turned down the offer to share the joint he and Dykstra had earlier, because if he was high right now he would probably do something incredibly embarrassing, like cry.

"Uh, I should probably tell you though," Wyatt says, an uncharacteristic note of discomfort in his voice. "When we saw you, we were headed back from the bar—"

"Who is *we*?" Ilya demands, but from the Wyatt's grimace he's fairly certain he already knows.

"Scott Hunter."

Shane laughs at that and Ilya glares at him. Scott fucking Hunter knows about them? Has known about them for an entire year? Suddenly his relentless interrogation of Ilya at the last NHL awards about why he traded to the Centaurs makes more sense. It's good that Wyatt told him about this now — the next All Star game is still a month away, which gives him time to plot his revenge. He wonders if he might be able to bribe the hotel staff into putting him in the room next door to Hunter, give him a front row seat to exactly why Ilya had wanted to be closer to Montreal.

"Hollander told me," Pike says, looking just as displeased by the revelation as Ilya hoped he would be.

"Rozanov told me," Haas says. Shane gives him a triumphant look, but Ilya waves him off.

"That's like one to four. I am still winning."

"Two to four," Coach Wiebe interrupts, his smile slightly apologetic. "I heard you on the phone in the hotel bar a few weeks ago."

Everyone's attention turns to Dykstra, who raises his hands in a gesture of surrender. "No one needed to tell me. I mean Jesus, Ilya, the way you watch Montreal game tape..."

"That's what I'm saying," Harris mutters, Troy stifling his laughter in his shoulder.

"Does not matter!" Ilya shouts over the commentary. "Three to four! I still win!"

"Should've known they'd be as competitive off the ice as they are on it," Wiebe says, and Yuna laughs.

"You have no idea."

Conversation eventually moves on from Shane and Ilya's secret affair, the excitement of the last few minutes reigniting the party atmosphere. Wyatt snags a handful of beers from the fridge, passing them out to the holdouts. He offers one to Shane, who surprises Ilya by accepting it, immediately cracking the top off and taking a long pull.

"Everything okay?"

Shane nods shakily, wiping his mouth with his sleeve. "Yeah. Yeah, I just... I can't believe everyone already knew."

Ilya takes a chance, letting one hand rest low on the small of Shane's back. He has to bite down on his cheek to keep from smiling too hard when Shane doesn't pull away. "See, Hollander. We are not so interesting. No one cares."

"I fucking care," Pike mutters darkly, glaring daggers at Ilya.

"Like I said," Ilya says, gesturing to Shane's teammate. "No one cares."

"Fuck off, Rozanov," Pike says, taking care to bump his shoulder hard against Ilya's as he follows the others out of the kitchen. Ilya grins, thrilled by the vitriol.

"Pike is very jealous of me," Ilya says to an exasperated Shane. "He would like to fuck you."

"Or maybe he hates you because you say shit like that."

Ilya pretends to think it over, then shakes his head. "Hate me? No. He loves me. I am a joy to be around!"

It's pushing one in the morning, but their friends are still posted up on Ilya's couches, talking and laughing and watching the end of a game on the west coast that's gone into overtime. Ilya finds he doesn't mind so much anymore, though. Not now that he can sit next to Shane, his arm thrown over the back of the couch, twisting strands of his long hair through his fingertips. He's a warm and comforting presence at his side, and Ilya lets the happy chatter and laughter of their friends wash over him.

This is far and away the best Christmas he's ever had.

"Roz?" Comes a voice from the front hall, along with the sound of the door slamming shut. "You here?"

Zane Boodram appears in the entryway, Ilya's car keys clutched in one hand. The room goes quiet, the remaining partygoers looking from Bood to where Shane and Ilya are still sitting a little too close on the couch.

"False alarm," Bood says, oblivious to the tension that now permeates the room. "Took Cassie home, but I felt bad about stealing your car. I can catch a ride back with Wyatt and Haas."

Finally seeming to notice the uncomfortable silence, Bood looks around, his eyebrows drawing together when everyone continues to blink at him. "So...what did I miss?"

And suddenly, Ilya finds he's very tired of talking; they've explained themselves plenty tonight. Ilya is sleepy and a little drunk and probably the most at home he's ever felt in his life. So he gives up on explanations, writing the entire English language off as a bad job, and pulls Shane in by the collar of his shirt. Shane goes willingly, his lips meeting Ilya's for the first time in far too long. Perhaps as much as half an hour.

The kiss is messy — Shane is a lightweight after abstaining from alcohol for so long, and now that he's a few drinks deep he's fairly intoxicated. It also doesn't help that the both of them are smiling like idiots.

"Jesus Christ," Ilya hears Bood say somewhere in the distance, across the living room and a world away. "How fucking long was I gone?"

End Notes

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