

Before I'm someone you leave behind (I'll break your heart so you don't break mine)
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Before I'm someone you leave behind (I'll break your heart so you don't break mine)

by [unlikelychild](#)

Summary

What if Shane never got injured?

What if Ilya decided to finally take a step back?

What if the 5th best player of MLH was suddenly spotted hanging out hockey's golden boy Shane Hollander?

What if Ilya had a few feelings about it?

—×—

Ilya is aware of Sebastian Hawthorne like he's aware of all the top 10 players of the league. Though he knows no one can come close to him and Hollander, he still likes to keep an eye out for them.

Hawthorne, or as his teammates call him, Hawk, joined the Toronto Guardians during his Rookie season and has been there for the past six seasons. He's the assistant captain.

“It's like he's already seen the play unfold five seconds ahead,” Shane had once complained to Ilya over the phone after a particularly nasty loss against the Guardians some seasons back. Ilya then got the impression that Shane didn't like him either.

So imagine his surprise when the picture of Hollander and Hawk shows up on his feed: laughing and practically having the time of their lives while leaving a high-end bakery.

Notes

It is my humble request to you all to read this with the Creator's Style on.

Chapter title from the song Takeaway by Illenium, Lennon Stella, and The Chainsmokers.

Huge thanks to my friend @kxvindayslvt for proofreading this and pep talking me into believing it's not a complete utter disaster.

Note: all the conversations between Ilya and Sveta are in Russian (but for the convenience of the majority written in English).

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

April 2017

1... 9... 1... 9

The door beeps open and Ilya tries not to think too hard about the implications of being invited to Shane Hollander's place through his front door for the first time. Ilya takes off his shoes and puts them in their designated spot. He takes off his coat and hangs it in the coat rack. He makes sure to not hang it on the side hook so that it doesn't tilt. Because Ilya knows it'll tilt. He's the person who apparently knows how Shane Hollander's fucking coat rack works.

The apartment is bathed in a soft light. There's some sounds coming from the kitchen. Ilya can smell something cooking; something delicious. His heart does that funny thing it has been doing since the All Stars Game.

He's quiet as he turns the corner and finds Shane depositing something on the kitchen counter. His face is a little flushed from the heat. His hair is still wet. He's wearing a soft blue pullover with his fucking glasses on. Ilya has the ridiculous urge to wrap him in a hug and take in his smell.

He tramples down the urge however, and simply chooses to look; drink his fill because it may as well be the last time he sees him like this.

Ilya has thought about this long and hard. He is in love with Shane. For the life in him he can't say when it happened. He just knows that he nearly died when left him on his couch. He felt like a fucking zamboni had run him over when he saw him and Rose together. And the only time he felt unadulterated happiness pour through him was when Shane was around him. But then again, he couldn't pinpoint exactly when he started to feel like this. Maybe it has always been like this. Maybe since that day in Saskatchewan 2008, Ilya was royally fucked.

Of course, Shane doesn't know that. But Ilya gets the feeling that if he asks Shane, he might tell him that he's feeling at least something for Ilya. Which is the crux of it all. Ilya can handle loving Shane in secret. It will damn near kill him, but he can do it. But looking at Shane and knowing that he might feel something even akin to what Ilya feels is dangerous. It is career suicide. It is stupid. Because Ilya will drop everything if Shane asks him to. He will change the entire trajectory of his life if Shane looks at him with those bright eyes and pouty lips and asks him to do it.

As he said, he's royally fucked.

Ilya can't risk it. He can't drag Shane into the mess that is Ilya Rozanov. They both have so much at stake and this just simply wouldn't do. So here he is standing on the first floor of Shane's open concept apartment trying to think of a way to officially end the arrangement they started nearly a decade ago.

Because he is in love with Shane Hollander and that wasn't part of the deal.

"Did you forget to mention you were having company over?"

Shane looks up at him and... fuck! He beams. Boston beat Montreal by 3-1 and Shane is still beaming at him. The funny thing in his chest intensifies.

"Hey," he says, still smiling. "No, it's just you and me."

“What is all this then?” Ilya asks as he comes closer to where Shane is standing, only being separated by the kitchen counter.

“I just thought I'd make us some dinner.”

Ilya raises an eyebrow. “Do you cook all your hook-ups dinner? Have you been holding out on me, Hollander?”

Shane gives him an unimpressed look. A flicker of hurt passes his features. Ilya tries not to let it affect him. He's here to end things.

“It's just you,” Shane turns as he says it, low and quiet. Ilya almost misses it as if it's not meant for his ears. He swallows. It's just him. It has always just been him. And really what the fuck does he say to that?

“So what are you making?” he asks conversationally, taking a seat at one of the stools.

“Uh,” Shane looks around. “Nothing much. Chicken parmesan. And some wine. And I made dessert too. It's baking right now.”

Chicken parmesan. Ilya's favorite. He tries to think if he's ever told Shane that. He comes up empty. Is it a lucky guess? Does Shane just like the same thing Ilya likes?

“Fancy.”

Shane smiles. Ilya really wants to pull him close and kiss those pouty lips. But he can't. He won't. Because the moment he holds Shane, he'll chicken out. He's a weak and cowardly man when it comes to this guy.

“So,” Shane says as he slides a glass of wine toward Ilya and pours one for himself. “Congratulations on the game tonight. You were good.”

Ilya takes a sip and nods. He was good tonight. He drove the offense all night: two goals, an assist, and a brutal hit into the boards that tagged him in the ribs. There's a nasty bruise forming on the right side of his ribcage as he speaks.

“Sorry your team played shit.”

Shane huffs. Montreal was off its game tonight. It's not uncommon. Happens with Boston too.

They just look at each other for a moment. Ilya lets his eyes travel, taking in the man before him properly. He starts with Shane's half dried hair flopped over his forehead, his eyebrows, thick black eyelashes that frame those brown eyes that can make Ilya do next to anything, his cute little nose. Those fucking freckles that Ilya can't stop looking at or thinking about. He wants to brush his thumb over them one last time. It is the only thing he will allow himself to do. He needs it.

Shane is biting his lower lip when Ilya's eyes travel down to them. He has the urge to pull it free with his thumb and run the pad of it on the spit slicked surface before sinking his own teeth into them.

“Ilya.” His name comes out like a breath from Shane's lips. He's blushing, Ilya notices. He wonders what his own face looks like.

Ilya has to break it off. He's here to break it off. He has to do it. He will. Right now. Here he goes.

The timer on Shane's phone goes off making them both jump.

"Oh shit," Shane scurries off to turn off the timer and open the oven.

Ilya lets out a sigh of relief.

Shane sets a steaming cake tin on the marbled surface and Ilya watches as he methodically separates the dish from the cake and sets it properly on the cake stand. Whatever Hollander made looks vaguely familiar. There's a sweet smell of apples that fills the air almost immediately. Ilya knows this smell. But from where?

"What is it?" he asks, genuinely curious.

Shane is a little uncertain as he answers, "It's called a Sharlotka, I think? That's what the recipe calls it."

Ilya feels his heartbeat waver. "You made... Sharlotka?"

He hasn't had a Sharlotka in... fuck! A decade!

"Yeah. I wanted to make something from your country. I know you might be feeling a little homesick. You know, after everything. So I googled the recipe after some research. It's a comfort food apparently. Did you know it has a British origin?"

No, Ilya did not fucking know that. Who the fuck knows that on the top of their head? Shane Hollander apparently, who made Ilya a fucking Sharlotka!

"You made Sharlotka," Ilya repeats stupidly. He's dangerously close to doing something stupid. Like cry or kiss Hollander. Or both.

Shane shrugs. He still hasn't looked at Ilya, too busy tidying up the kitchen and plating their food. Ilya should help. He should offer at least. But he can't fucking move.

Because see, the only person who ever made Ilya a fucking Sharlotka was his mother. He loved how she made it. He misses it like an organ when days are too hard on him. And Shane fucking Hollander, captain of the Montreal Metros, best hockey player with highest hockey IQ and 27 goals in the season so far, two times MLH champions made him a fucking Sharlotka because he wanted to cheer him up.

"I mean it wasn't a complicated recipe to be honest." Shane says, still completely oblivious to the crisis Ilya is having. But then something seems to occur to him. He turns, looking worried and says, "You don't hate this particular dessert, do you?"

All Ilya can do is shake his head. No, he doesn't hate Sharlotka. It is present in nearly all his happy memories. Much like the man in front of him.

"I don't think I can pretend to not like you anymore." Shane had said in that hotel room all those months ago, and even now when Ilya ends up thinking about it, his heart blooms with hope; hope that has no business being there. There's no future for them. For whatever this thing is.

Much like everything Shane Hollander does, the dinner is perfect. Ilya can say it's one of the best chicken parmesan he has ever eaten. They make small talk. Shane talks about his summer plans. Ilya listens. Then contributes about his own. He says that even though he doesn't like Russia, he would like to spend a little time with his niece. But he's worried that his brother will make it difficult given their verbal altercation last time.

Ilya watches as Shane contemplates something. He wonders how he can bring up the conversation he wants to have. He would like to end this as amicably as possible. He would like to cause Shane the least amount of hurt.

“So,” Shane starts. “I know you have plans to go to Russia. But I uh, I was wondering—”

Ilya feels a twist in his gut. He has a feeling where this is headed.

“Hollander.”

In one breath Shane asks, “Will you come to my cottage this summer?”

Ilya stays quiet. His brain takes a bit to catch up. What is Hollander asking him actually?.

“It's private. We won't be disturbed. We can have a week or two together.”

Ilya takes a steadying breath and averts his eyes. Before he can say anything, Shane speaks again, “You don't have to decide now, obviously. Just... think about it?”

Then Ilya makes the grave mistake of looking at Hollander.

Ah, fuck!

He is looking at Ilya with so much hope, Ilya has to look away immediately. Has he ever denied Shane anything? Not that memory serves him. No, he's readily given Shane whatever he asks for, always. He has never made Shane work for anything. Because that's who Ilya is. When he loves someone he gives and gives and gives until there's nothing left of himself. Usually, they don't give much in return. But Shane... Shane made him Sharlotka.

“Please?” Shane adds. Ilya curses in Russian, low and inaudible. The uncertainty in Shane's features, the underlying fear is what does Ilya in. Because he knows what it is to be in Shane's position. He knows exactly what it does to someone asking a little more than what he's been getting when nothing about the relationship is simple.

“Maybe,” Ilya says because he's fucking weak.

Shane gives him a smile. A genuine smile. His shoulders relax a little. Ilya feels his own heart flutter again. It feels right, seeing Hollander smile at him, because of him.

I love you so much that I don't know what to do about it.

Ilya's ringtone makes both of them jump. He checks and finds it to be Marleau. He can ignore it. He almost always does. But:

Marly

Yesterday 10:15 PM

did u take my neck pillow again?

Today 9:25 PM

sanders drank too much and flirted with the wrong chick

her bf punched him

we're headed to the ER

Ilya curses again and grips his phone tight. He has to go. If Coach finds out, all their asses will be on the line. Especially his, given he's captain and all. Sanders is the new rookie and Ilya's about to teach him a very important lesson about messing up his limited time with his "Montreal Girl."

"Everything okay?" Shane asks. Ilya clenches his jaw and flips his phone around to show Shane the texts.

Shane grimaces.

"I should go." Ilya gets up rather reluctantly.

Shane doesn't stop him. But then he says, "Wait 5 minutes."

Ilya finds himself standing outside Shane's apartment with a plastic container in hand with two pieces of Sharlotka stuffed inside. Their heat seeps through the container onto Ilya's palm. He watches as his car arrives.

He won't be seeing Shane for a while. Boston will make it to the playoff this year. Montreal won't be.

I could go to his cottage, like he had asked me to.

As he gets into the car, he knows he won't be.

The Sharlotka is cold by the time Ilya finally has time to taste it. His eyes sting painfully at the first bite. Somehow he knew it would be perfect. Somehow he knew it would taste just the way Maman used to make it.

He is *so* royally fucked.

Two Weeks Later

Ilya is aware of Sebastian Hawthorne like he's aware of all the top 10 players of the league. Though he knows no one can come close to him and Hollander, he still likes to keep an eye out for them.

Hawthorne, or as his teammates call him, Hawk, joined the Toronto Guardians during his Rookie season and has been there for the past six seasons. He's the assistant captain.

"English-born, Canadian-developed. Speaks with a faintly polished British accent that somehow survives chirping in a North American locker room. Smug in a tailored-suit way, not a loud way." A commentator had described him.

He plays right wing.

The man had continued, “First power-play unit, last guy you want cheating toward your blue line.”

Ilya has played against him of course. And he has seen too much of himself in that cocky bastard. He still has most of his teeth intact. And when he flashes that white toothed smile at Ilya, Ilya feels the urge to punch him every single time. They have never been in an outright brawl. Ilya doesn't play like that. But there had been a few close calls.

Hawk's not the fastest skater in a straight line, but his edge work is obscene. He glides instead of sprinting. Makes defenders bite early, then humiliates them for it. He plays with his head up and shoulders loose.

“It's like he's already seen the play unfold five seconds ahead,” Shane had once complained to Ilya over the phone after a particularly nasty loss against the Guardians some seasons back. Ilya then got the impression that Shane didn't like him either.

So imagine his surprise when the picture of Hollander and Hawk shows up on his feed: laughing and practically having the time of their lives while leaving a high-end bakery. Hawk is holding balloons that say Happy Birthday! and Shane is holding a purple colored box. The picture is taken in Montreal.

There's a news article linked to it. Against his better judgement, Ilya clicks on it. It takes him to a TMZ news site.

The title makes his jaw tick.

TMZ

Uh Oh 🐼 Hawthorne and Hollander Caught in Sweet Situation...?

A brief go through tells him that the “pair” have been spotted buying gifts for a Pike child's birthday. Apparently Hawk's family is close to the Pikes and they have included the “often social recluse” Metros captain into their gatherings. Then for some fucking reason it goes to explain how Hawk has been rumored to be seen with both women and men in intimate settings. Although, nothing has been confirmed yet from his side.

Ilya thinks of the several texts he has received from Hollander in the past few weeks which he has yet to answer.

Because Ilya Rozanov hates himself, he looks through Hawk's Instagram profile. He has made very heartfelt posts about Pride Month, fellow athletes from other sports coming out, and there's a picture of him playing with shelter puppies encouraging to “adopt, don't shop.” The post has nearly a million likes.

To Ilya surprise, Shane commented a small yet sweet message about having a rescue dog till he was sixteen.

Ilya doesn't know what to say or what to feel. He feels pathetic and jealous. He hates himself. He wants to disappear or forget the last decade or so just so that he doesn't have to think about the implications of charismatic Sebastian Hawthorne and eligible gay bachelor Shane Hollander.

Because for all his dickish charm, Hawthorne isn't complicated. Nobody expects Hollander to hate him like they do Ilya.

He copies the link to the TMZ article and sends it to Svetlana. He needs a third person's point of view in this.

Sveta

Today 7:24 PM

You sent an attachment

What do you think this means?

It means they're good uncles to the Pike kids

Ilya rolls his eyes. The only other person who knows the clusterfuck Ilya has set up for himself is Svetlana. Which is a good thing because if Ilya had to deal with the past few months by himself, he doesn't know what he'd do.

Sveta

Today 7:24 PM

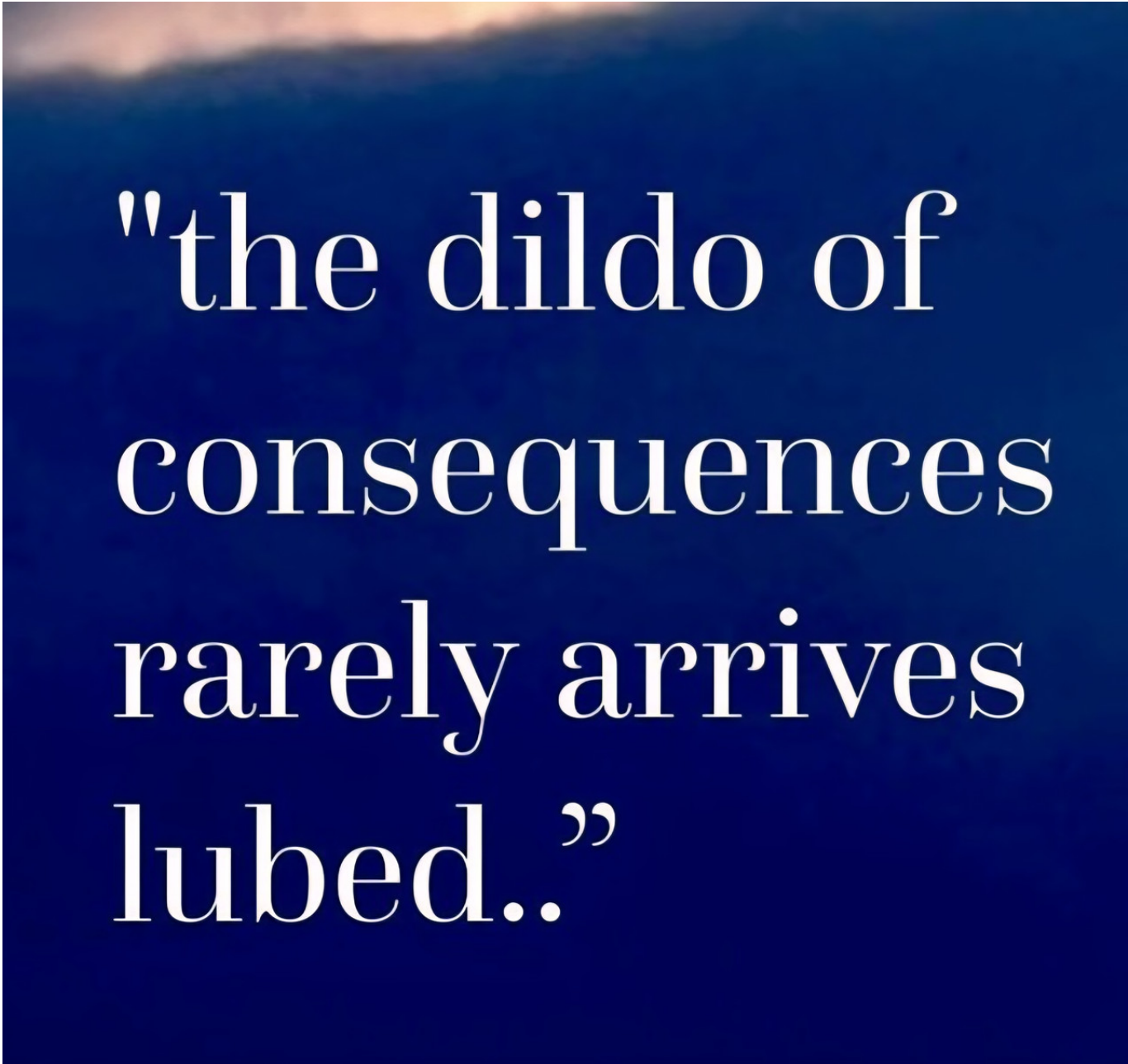
You sent an attachment

What do you think this means?

It means they're good uncles to the Pike kids

Do you think they're dating?

I have just the picture for this



"the dildo of
consequences
rarely arrives
lubed.."

Ilya scowls at the text.

Sveta

Today 7:24 PM

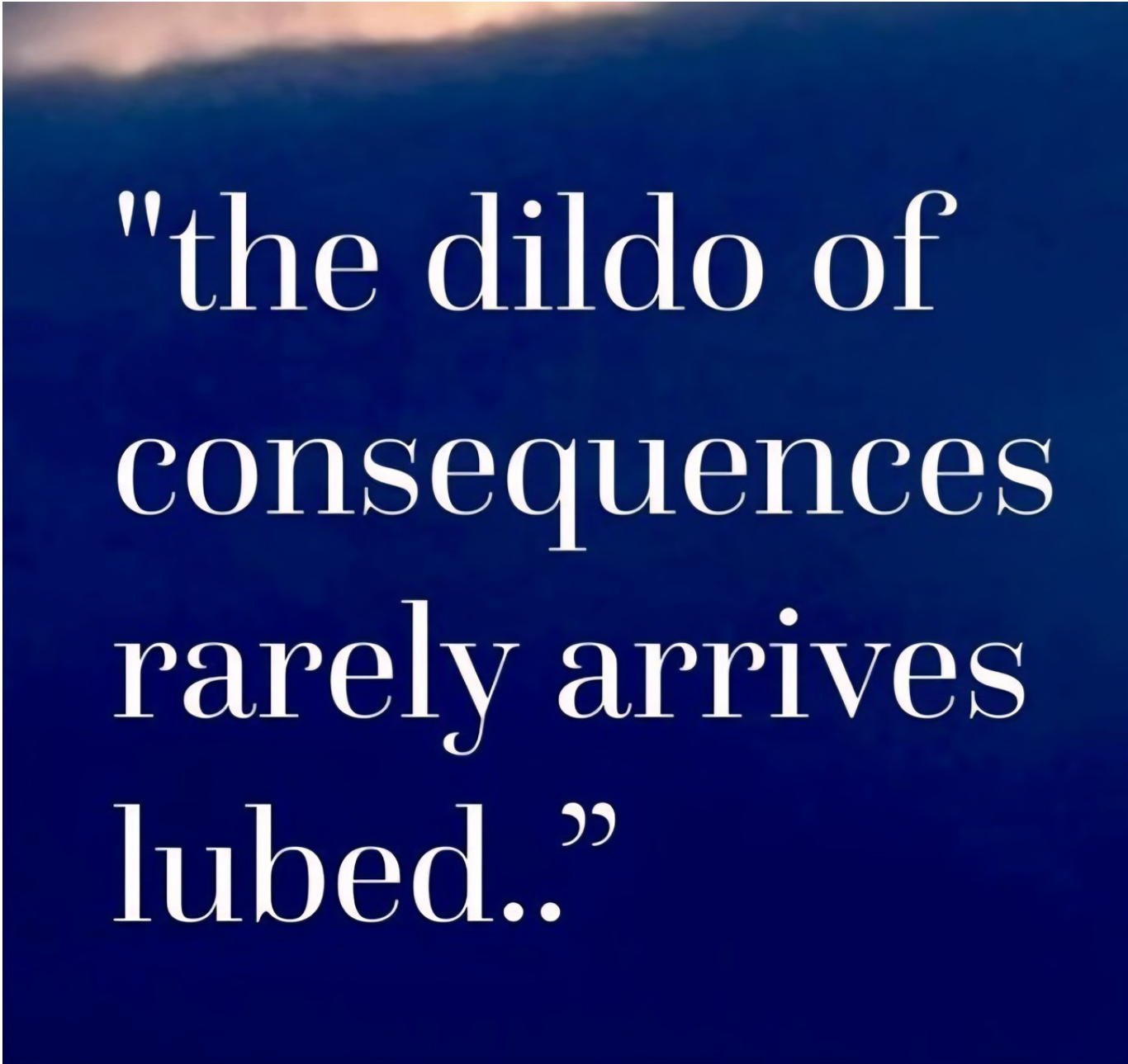
You sent an attachment

What do you think this means?

It means they're good uncles to the Pike kids

Do you think they're dating?

I have just the picture for this



"the dildo of
consequences
rarely arrives
lubed.."

you chose this

So why does it matter if he's dating Hawthorne?

Hawthorne is hot. They will make a power couple.

I don't care

yes ilusha you're the picture of nonchalance

and being with the 5th best player in the league does not make you a power couple

Yuna Hollander will make it work

She is a beast when it comes to good marketing

you are no help

no I am. You just don't like hearing how big you have fucked up this time

it had to end

sure

if you say so

Ilya swallows his pride and endures. Because yes Svetlana is right. Of course she is right. He fucked up big this time.

Next time they play the Guardians, he and Hawk bend down in a face-off. Ilya typically goads all the players. This time however, he clenches his jaw and doesn't say anything.

Hawk doesn't share the same manners. "Crushing Boston on home ice has always been wonderful."

Ilya mutters in Russian, "Shut up before I break your jaw."

The cocky motherfucker in front of him only smirks. And just seconds before the puck drops he says in perfect Russian, "I'm a lover, not a fighter Rozanov. Just ask Hollander. You guys are buddies right?"

Ilya loses the face-off. Toronto scores a goal 30 seconds later. Boston loses the game 2-6.

It eats Ilya up thinking about what Hawk had meant. What the fuck did he mean by "just ask Hollander"? What does Hawk know?

There's a sinking feeling in his chest. He can make an educated guess about what Hawthorne was talking about. So are they together now? Is that why he knows about Ilya? How far have they gone? Are they exclusive? Is he giving Shane everything Ilya couldn't?

Fuck that, Ilya doesn't give a fuck. But he nearly burns a hole in his carpet pacing back and forth anyway.

He almost texts *Jane* back.

His teammates invite him out but he brushes them off. They don't push. They have given up on trying to get him out. He hasn't gone out drinking or even for a meaningless fuck in months. He wishes he could say it was after that night at Hollander's place. But no. It was before that. It was after All Stars. So yes, certified manwhore Ilya Rozanov hasn't slept with anyone since Shane Hollander.

He doesn't know how Shane did it. As far as he knew, Shane only ever slept with him. And sometimes it'd be months since they got to see each other. How did he manage? It drives Ilya nearly crazy not fucking anyone. But he also physically can't fuck anyone. His dick is like a barcode scanner now. Unless it's Hollander, it doesn't want anyone else.

His sex drive is... not low exactly but very selectively high.

May 2017

Both Toronto and Montreal are kicked out of the playoffs and Boston, Buffalo, and Tampa are through. But Ilya can't enjoy his win. Not for long anyway.

The article drops in May, and takes Ilya's entire gastric system with it. A sports magazine has done a small interview with Shane and Hawk. Their frequent outings together has sparked an interest in the realms beyond hockey. They're both Hockey Heartthrobs of the moment apparently. Ilya almost scoffs at that. So what if they have been spotted a handful of times with each other in both Toronto and Montreal? It's not like they were alone. Pike and his wife were there as well.

Yes, almost like a double date.

The whole article is basically them praising each other sprinkled with the discussions of growing up as kids who were different from the mainstream. Begrudgingly, Ilya learns a lot about Shane's struggle as an Asian kid in his early days. Kids laughing at the traditional food he used to bring to practice, him being bullied for his appearance. Shane is quick to point out the advantages his white sounding name has brought him. Ilya would much rather learn these stories from Shane himself but there's not much option left for that anymore.

Against his will, Ilya learns a bunch about Hawthorne as well. He only had his mum growing up but she passed away before she could see him succeed. Much like his role model Scott Hunter, Hawthorne doesn't have any blood relatives he's in contact with. He mentioned how growing up a mixed-race child with roots in India, Canada, and England hasn't always been the easiest, especially with only a single mother as parent. But he has always been careful of sharing this part of his life. He doesn't want to become the cover boy of tokenistic diversity.

The Well-Being Digest

Friends In (Un)Likely Places

MLH darlings Hollander and Hawthorne sit down to talk about their childhood, professional experiences, and what they have in common (spoiler alert: it's not only hockey)

[...]

When Hawthorne starts talking about responsibility, he does it without theatrics. No buzzwords, no rehearsed pauses. We're seated in a quiet corner of the rink lounge—glass walls, pale wood, the hum of skates somewhere far below.

"I never want to be the dude who's a standard for someone who looks like me," he says, hands folded, voice steady. "I also don't want to be part of fake wokeness. If I ever bring change, I want to do it in a meaningful way."

It's the kind of statement that could sound defensive in another mouth. Here, it does not. Raised by a single mother of Indian origin, Hawthorne is no stranger to the prejudices of the system.

Beside him, Hollander nods immediately, like this is a conversation they've already had at 2 a.m. over takeout containers. "My whole life has been hockey," he adds. "It means nearly everything to me. But I do think we have a long way to go as a community."

Hawthorne smiles at that. "If I had to say it in one sentence," he says, "I think hockey doesn't love me as much as I love it."

"Yet," he adds belatedly. "But I think we're making some good changes."

When I ask how this unlikely friendship formed, Hawthorne laughs, the tension easing from his shoulders. “You can thank Hayden and Jackie Pike for that,” he says. “They kept sending us on side quests together until we both caught on that we’re probably loners who could use some friends.” He pauses, amused at himself. “And then we started hanging out together by ourselves.”

It’s the most unglamorous origin story imaginable and somehow, that makes it perfect.

I ask them what they like about each other, expecting deflection. Instead, Hollander answers without hesitation.

“I like that Hawthorne is kind,” he says. “He learned Russian for the two rookies who joined the Guardians two seasons before.”

Hawthorne flushes slightly at the praise. “I think it’s important to make sure everyone feels included,” he says quickly. “It was nothing in the grand scheme of things. And my Russian is terrible.”

Then he considers the question properly, turning toward Hollander with a grin. “I like that Shane will only read books related to hockey. We went book shopping for the Pike kids the other day, and he left with three hockey biographies.”

Hollander doesn’t even look guilty. “Sue me,” he says. “I like to learn about the sports I’m involved in.”

Hawthorne throws his hands up in mock despair. “Where’s your whimsy? You’re still young!”

They look at each other then: fond, familiar, entirely unperformative, and it’s clear that whatever they represent to the league, to fans, or to the future of the sport, to each other they’re simply two people who found companionship in a place that doesn’t always make room for softness.

And that, perhaps, is the most radical thing of all.

That is all Ilya can stomach reading before he stops. He doesn’t want to know about Hollander smiling at Hawk like he has fucking earned his smiles. Most of these pieces are exaggerated anyway. He decides to look at the pictures instead.

The pictures are... a lot. They, to the general public, are innocent and completely platonic pictures. They’re wearing sportswear in them. It is as if the interviewers caught them in the middle of practice. The pictures appear to be taken in the Bell Center, Ilya realizes.

His brain connects some dots he doesn’t want it to connect. Hawk came to Montreal for this interview. Given their current proximity if this article is to be believed, there’s a good chance he stayed at Shane’s place.

Did they sleep in Shane’s bedroom? Did he get to see Shane asleep even though Ilya couldn’t? Did Shane make them dinner?

The idea of Hawk kissing Shane and having him in ways only Ilya could make a visceral sort of anger rush through his body.

On a particularly vulnerable night after Admirals kick Raiders out of the playoffs and Ilya’s ribs are killing him, he gets drunk and opens Shane’s inbox. He types in Russian:

Jane

Today 2:15 AM

It's funny because I wanted you to move on. I wanted you to be happy and leave me behind. You did exactly that. You listened to me. Like always. And now I'm the one who's miserable. I was so scared that night, Shane. When you asked me to come to your cottage, all I could think about was how much I wanted that. But I was so scared because everyone I have ever loved and wanted to love me back, has left me. And I pushed you away before I even gave you a chance.

He sighs and deletes the text. He stares at the ones Shane had sent. The last one chokes him like it did all the other hundred times he's done it.

Jane

April 4, 2017 10:15 PM

Hey

Is your rookie okay?

April 6, 2017 8:35 PM

Did you try the Sharlotka?

April 8, 2017 5:53 PM

I didn't poison you with it, did I?

April 10, 2017 12:47 AM

Hey

Are you okay?

April 11, 2017 9:22 PM

Can you just fucking tell me what I did wrong?

April 15, 2017 2:10 AM

Missed call from Jane

Missed call from Jane

Missed call from Jane

April 22, 2017 2:14 AM

Ilya

Please

Today 2:15 AM

You deleted this message

His thumb hovers over the call button. The clock tells him Shane is probably in his bed by now. Probably reading one of the hockey biographies he bought in his glasses.

What if Hawk is there with him?

Ilya finishes his vodka before passing out on his couch.

After summer passes, slow and agonizing. Ilya watches Admirals head toward finals for the first time in decades. His fingers itch to text Shane, to call him, to hear his voice, to banter with him. But he books a ticket to Russia instead.

When Scott Hunter kisses his boyfriend on ice, all Ilya can think about is a German word he has recently learned: *Zeitenwende*. It means the change of times. He feels like history is being written in front of his eyes. He feels his blood rush under his veins and his heart pumping quickly to keep

up. He wishes he had someone to share it with. No, not someone. A very particular someone. He nearly caves and calls Shane. He nearly tells him he will come to his cottage. He nearly does.

Two days later, TMZ has a field day when a supposedly Asian looking man is spotted kissing Hawthorne in public. Ilya feels bile in his mouth when he looks at the grainy picture. The Asian guy is almost hidden from the frame. He is wearing a hat and the only things visible are his eyes. Which are also closed. Hawk's back is to the picture.

Ilya realizes the other man looks a lot like someone he knows. The internet starts to think that as well.

Hawthorne Spotted Kissing “Mystery Asian Man”... And the Internet Has a VERY Specific Guess

Hawthorne’s Late-Night Kiss Sparks Frenzy — Is That Shane Hollander Under the Hat?

Unsurprisingly, that's what breaks the camel's back. Ilya gets absolutely shit-faced in the absence of wiser company (Sveta had a meeting she couldn't skip), and stabs the call button from the alley behind the club.

It rings and rings until the call cuts off.

“This is Shane Hollander. Sorry to have missed your call. Please leave a message. I will get back to you as soon as possible.”

Ilya huffs. Why isn't Shane picking up? Is he busy with... no. Ilya can't think about that. His eyes are already stinging. It feels like something is tearing just under his ribs.

He dials the number again.

It rings out. Again.

“This is Shane Hollander. Sorry to have missed your call. Please leave a message. I will get back to you as soon as possible.”

Ilya's vision swims a little. It was a really stupid decision to pair two mollies with Russian Vodka.

After his fourth try, Ilya gives up.

“This is Shane Hollander. Sorry to have missed your call. Please leave a message. I will get back to you as soon as possible.”

Ilya doesn't hang up. He takes a few seconds to somewhat compose himself before speaking.

“Was it you? In that picture? With him?” is the first thing that comes out of his mouth. “I know it is not my business. I hurt you, Hollander. I am sorry. I am coward and mean. I keep hurting you when I just want to protect you. From me. From what will happen if anyone finds out. When you asked me to come to the cottage, I wanted to—*fuck!*”

He leans his head back against the brick wall.

“You're so brave. And I'm just...” he sniffs. “I let you go.”

Ilya feels his vision swim again. His stomach lurches in an unpleasant way. He's going to be sick. He needs to go home.

"I am going now. Have to go home. Have to go back to Russia. I would rather be with you. I love you. Goodbye, Hollander."

Ilya contemplates taking his car, but he's in no state to drive. So he does the wise thing and calls a car service to pick him up. He does the wise thing and puts on his seat belt when he gets in the car. He does the wise thing and doesn't throw up in the car even though he really wants to.

He makes all the wise choices but the car still gets rammed into a tree when someone else coming from the other side of the freeway doesn't make the wise choices.

A blinding pain in Ilya's head knocks him out cold. His last thought is: At least I told him I love him. He would know I loved him.

Shane wakes up to a throbbing headache. He's been getting these stress headaches more frequently these days, and he doesn't know why. He's at his cottage by himself. He's relaxing, making proper use of his time off. On paper, this is exactly like all the other summers he has spent here. But he's so fucking sad. The pain is a tangible thing sitting on his chest, refusing to move.

Hawk FaceTimed him the other day and the first thing he said was, "Wow, you look like shit."

Shane didn't say anything in retaliation because yes, he does look like shit. He has dark circles, he hasn't shaved in a bit so there's itchy scruff on his cheek.

Maybe something is wrong in the way he speaks too. Rose called a few days back and she asked him multiple times if he was okay because he sounded "off."

He texted his parents afterwards and told them he was going on a silent retreat to enhance his focus, thus remaining unavailable for a week or so. Then he put his phone on silent and put it in a drawer.

He hasn't looked at it in three days.

This morning however, he has the strange urge to do so. Shane ignores that urge and does his yoga, makes his smoothie and breakfast, and washes the dishes he left in the sink the night before.

Then he finds himself with nothing to do again. So he sighs and finally takes out his phone.

Predictably, there are a lot of notifications, emails, texts, and missed calls that greet him. He does a cursory look through and removes the unimportant ones.

He nearly drops his phone when he sees four missed calls from *Lily*. Four missed calls and one voicemail. Ilya never left voicemails before. In fact, he hates voicemails. His own voicemail recording says: *Hi this is Ilya. I will never listen to your message.*

With shaky fingers Shane plays the recording before pressing it to his ears.

A few beats of silence pass. Shane hears the distant sound of cars and the city. Is Ilya back in Russia now? Or is he still in Boston? Shane doesn't know because the man has stopped acknowledging his existence.

What was Shane thinking, inviting Ilya to his cottage? Clearly he was overstepping—

“Was it you? In that picture? With him?”

Shane frowns. With whom? What picture?

“I know it is not my business. I hurt you, Hollander. I am sorry. I am coward and mean.”

Ilya sounds wasted. His English sounds choppy and slurred. What he says makes emotional clog up in Shane's throat. He has to swallow it down forcefully.

“I keep hurting you when I just want to protect you. From me. From what will happen if anyone finds out. When you asked me to come to the cottage, I wanted to—fuck!”

Shane can hear shuffling and some other unintelligible noises.

Yes, you fucker, you hurt me. I am pathetically in love with you and all you do is push me away. Why didn't you come? You could have. We could've had some time to ourselves. Why do you need to make yourself so difficult and miserable?

“You're so brave. And I'm just...”

Ilya sniffs. Is he crying?

“I let you go.”

Shane feels his eyes sting. He clenches his jaw tighter.

“I am going now. Have to go home. Have to go back to Russia. I would rather be—”

The voicemail cuts off reaching its 3 minutes limit.

Shane sits in his empty living room trying to take in everything he has just heard.

His phone pings again. It's a text from Hayden.

Hayden

Today 9:32 AM

Hayden sent a link

holy shit dude have you seen this?

Shane is going to leave Hayden on read but then he sees the title of the article.

Boston Raiders Star Caught in Deadly Car Crash That Leaves One Dead!

Shane feels something inside him plummet.

No. It can't be him. Shane just heard his voice. It can't be Ilya.

But Shane knows it could be him. He was drunk and sounded upset. Ilya is smart but with his defenses down anything is possible.

Shane scrolls through the article twice, trying to find anything that mentions the player's name. Nothing. It says it was a collision with another car. The condition of the player is unknown at the moment. The Media Spokesperson of the Boston Raiders has yet to make a statement.

The time of the accident is all the evidence Shane needs. It's ten minutes after he received the voicemail from Ilya.

Shane doesn't know why he does it, but he calls Ilya's number.

It rings out the first time. Shane reaches his bedroom when he dials the second time.

He's shoving whatever he can find in his small carry-on bag when the other side finally picks up. Shane feels relief in his chest momentarily.

"Ilya," he breathes. Ilya is okay. He's okay.

But then. "No," says an unfamiliar female voice and Shane is panicking again.

"Are you his Jane?"

Ilya knows he should feel relief that he didn't die. And he will. As soon as his head stops killing him and he can look at light without wincing.

As far as accidents go, he was incredibly lucky that it wasn't life or career ending. The driver has a fractured collarbone. During a brief visit by his lawyer Ilya has told her to make sure the medical bills are paid for the driver.

The other guy hasn't been so lucky unfortunately. From what Ilya has been told, he was already very drunk and high and not wearing his seat belt. His car had toppled over and he died while being taken to the hospital. Logically Ilya knows it's not his fault. He was in the wrong place at the wrong time and that if it hadn't been him, it'd be someone else. It still doesn't make him feel any less shitty.

When Sevtia finally visits him, he learns that he's being released in two days if everything looks normal. Ilya knows he has a stitch in his left temple that'll leave a permanent scar. Broken glass left tiny cuts on his forearms. And he has a nasty concussion.

Sveta informs him that she has to leave for Russia in a few days. She looks guilty enough that Ilya has to assure her that he will be fine, that although everything hurts like a bitch, he can still walk and talk just fine.

"You are one lucky bastard, you know?" she tells him.

Ilya grunts.

"You have a second chance, Ilusha. Don't fucking waste it."

Ilya doesn't know what she means by that. He already lost his chance where it matters the most. Maybe he will win two more Cups and a few MVP rings. Maybe that will help with the hollow feeling in his chest.

The next day the Raiders' media team reaches out to him. They explain the statement they will be putting out shortly. Ilya knows they know about the molly and alcohol found in his blood. He brushes off their suggestion to see a therapist. He's fine. It's off-season. He won't be doing it once the new season starts.

Instead of two, Ilya ends up staying at the hospital for four days.

Sveta drops him off at his house and helps him settle in.

"If you sleep, set alarms so that you wake up in intervals. Don't drink, Ilusha. I'm so serious. If I find you in a hospital bed again, I will be pissed."

Ilya pulls her into a hug instead of answering. She hugs him back tightly.

"Don't stare at your phone too much," she warns before she goes.

Ilya looks at the texts he got. There's a lot. He ignores most of them. He replies to Marleau only. Then checks his inbox with Jane. He tries and fails miserably to not feel sad when he sees nothing new.

Ilya takes a slow shower, heats the prepped meals his housekeeping agency makes with adherence to his diet, takes his medicine, and decides to lay on his couch because he's too tired to climb the stairs by the time he's done.

A noise wakes him up before his alarm can. He frowns with his eyes closed. His head starts to hurt again. He tries to place the sound. Someone is at his door. Knocking. Even though Ilya has a perfectly functioning doorbell.

It reminds him of Hollander. He knocked when he first (and only once) came over. The thought of the man makes Ilya sulks and he delays getting up.

Three sharp knocks echo again and Ilya groans out loud. Why can't he just be left alone in peace?

He takes his time getting up and slugging his way to the door. Whoever is on the other side, is impatient enough to knock again in the meantime. Ilya has some colorful things he'd like to say to the intruder. In fact, he's gearing up to do exactly that when all his words die down in his throat.

"Hol—"

Ilya barely says the word, barely registers the bag at Shane's feet, his blotchy face, teary eyes, reddened cheeks, and those damn freckles before he's being dragged into a tight embrace. His body protests immediately, but he swallows his discomfort.

Shane has dropped all pretenses and is fully crying into Ilya's neck. Ilya is so dumbfounded that all he can do is hug the man back and just... hold on. He feels Shane shake beneath his arms as sobs leave him. He feels the heat of his breath on his neck. The tears from his eyes wet his bare shoulder..

"I'm sorry," Shane chokes out. But he doesn't let go. Ilya is glad for that.

"No. No, no sorry. Is okay," Ilya soothes.

Shane keeps crying. Ilya keeps holding the nape of his neck with one hand while running the other one up and down his spine soothingly.

Something gives away in Ilya's chest like a knot coming undone. He blinks back rapid tears. He's not going to cry now. He has to hold on to Shane. He has to be there for him.

Life gave him a second chance. He's not going to fuck it up again.

The Boston summer sits all in its glory outside.

Ilya feels like he's having déjà vu as he watches Hollander clatter about in his kitchen. He's making them dinner. Ilya had insisted that they order in, given that Hollander has made them at least two meals a day since he arrived three days ago. Ilya feels terrible letting him do all the work.

"You are not my housemaid, Hollander," he snapped yesterday. The withering glare he received in return almost made him flinch.

"Thank you for clarifying," Hollander sniffed and went back to chopping vegetables.

"You don't have to do this. Why are you even here?" Ilya asked because it truly made no sense to him. He left Shane in his kitchen and didn't talk to him for the better part of six months.

"Do you want me to leave, Ilya?" Shane asked without even looking up from his task.

That had promptly shut Ilya up. Because no, he didn't want Shane to leave. He wanted him here. He wants him here. A part of Ilya wants Shane in his field of vision all the fucking time.

"You're not allergic to seafood, right?" Shane asks him as he stirs something on the pan. The aroma is wonderful. Ilya blinks.

"No."

Shane nods and goes back to work.

"What are you making?" Ilya asks to make conversation. To be honest, he doesn't care what Hollander makes. He'd eat grey sludge if Hollander made it.

"Shrimp pasta."

They had hotdogs last night and burgers the night before.

"Isn't this fucking up your macrobiotic whatever?"

Shane shoots him a look that to Ilya simply reads, "Are you stupid?"

"It's okay," Shane says eventually.

Ilya rolls his eyes and then winces when the movement shoots pain through where he has stitches on his temple. If Shane notices this little display, he doesn't comment on it.

Things have been... strange between them. After hugging and crying at Ilya's doorstep, Shane has managed to somehow distance himself from Ilya while still taking care of him. Ilya is mostly left to

his devices throughout the day while Shane spends most of it either on his laptop attending meetings and answering emails, or doing whatever he does. Ilya mostly naps and watches TV. He'd like to go running but he's still not symptom-free. So mostly he's a couch potato these days.

Shane's phone rings from next to Ilya.

"Who is it?" Shane asks, not pausing.

Ilya flips the screen and clenches his jaw in irritation as he sees the name.

Incoming Call: Sebastian

He shows Shane the screen and tries not to crack it from how hard he grips it.

"Put it on speaker."

"You can talk to him. I can cook," Ilya offers because he can't sit here and listen to them talk. He can't.

"No it's okay," Shane says, seemingly unaware of Ilya's predicament.

Ilya grits his teeth and stabs the accept button before putting it on speaker.

"Hollander!" booms an infuriatingly loud voice from the other side.

"Hey," Shane greets. Ilya notices the smile that tugs at the corner of his lips. Shane hasn't smiled at him like that in a while. "I'm cooking right now. So you're on speaker."

"Why have you been MIA? I'm getting bored playing FIFA by myself."

They play FIFA together? That's okay. They can play FIFA together. Ilya plays Call of Duty with Marleau all the time. Friends do that.

"Something came up," Shane says. He's draining the pasta now. Slowly and expertly. When the fuck did Ilya buy a pasta strainer?

"Everything okay? Are your parents okay?"

Ilya barely suppresses the scoff that threatens to be let out. Why is this guy such a kiss ass?

"Yeah, yeah. They're fine. Mom was asking about you by the way. She loves the wine you sent."

Ilya feels nauseous from the surge of irritation he can sense under his skin. Who the fuck is this guy? Why is Shane so close with him that his mom is getting wines from him? Also, who likes wine? Vodka is clearly the more superior drink. And Ilya can send top-shelf Russian Vodka to the Hollanders in crates. In fact, he will do that. For Christmas. He makes a mental note of it.

"I told you I have a talent for picking the right wines."

Shane snorts. "Sure man."

"So what happened?" Hawk's British accent is especially grating on Ilya's nerve right now. And why is he being so invasive? Shane clearly doesn't feel comfortable sharing his personal life with

him.

Shane hesitates to answer. Ilya understands. Of course he does. Their relationship—or whatever this is—is a secret. Ilya doesn't get to be chummy with Shane's parents. They won't readily accept someone who has been publicly portrayed to hate their son for a whole decade. Plus, Ilya's reputation isn't exactly parents-friendly.

“I'm looking after a friend, right now.”

“Who?”

Well, aren't you a nosey little fucker?

Shane's eyes flick to Ilya. He tries to give a causal shrug. He's not sure how successful he is at his attempt, but he's curious to see how Hollander plays this out. He's always been a shit liar.

“A friend,” Shane says, proving Ilya's point.

“Does your friend happen to be the one living in Boston?” Ilya feels his heart drop. What the fuck?
“The one who wouldn't text you back? What was her name again? *Lily!*”

Ilya watches in real time as Shane flushes red and stumbles to turn off the stove before making a run to grab his phone.

Shane at times makes it so fucking obvious that he's a only child. He has not been subjected to sibling cruelty in his entire life. No one has practiced their WWE moves on him or held something above his head before he hit his growth sprout. So he doesn't see it coming when Ilya grabs his phone and darts away. He might be concussed but he's not invalid.

Shane shoots him a shocked look first and then a glare. They start to slowly circle the kitchen counter. Ilya feels a rush he only feels on the ice.

Sebastian seems oblivious to all this. “Is it her? Are you guys back together now?”

Ilya raises an eyebrow in question as if to ask: ***Are** we back together Shane?*

The man on call keeps going without any prompting. “Man, I am so glad. You were so sad these past few months. I was gonna bring it up, but then Hayden told me how you probably hit a rough patch with your girl. So I thought I'd wait until you told me yourself.”

“No,” Shane tries to grab the phone from over the counter and Ilya moves away. He makes sure to plaster his best shit-eating grin on his face.

“No?” Hawk asks.

“I mean, no, we're fine. I mean, there's no Boston Lily.”

Ilya smirks and mouths: *Oh?*

Shane glares.

Hawk makes a noise that sounds a lot like a disbelieving scoff. “Uh-hu. Sure buddy.” He changes the subject then. “Hey you're coming to Toronto in July right? You promised you'd visit.”

The brief good mood of Ilya's disappears.

“Uh,” says Shane.

“I will not take no for an answer. You promised. I even got a new mattress for the guest bed.”

Ilya's jaw hurts and he realizes he's set it too tight.

“Yeah,” Shane says as he watches Ilya carefully. He watches Ilya like one would watch a feral animal trying not to get attacked. “I'll come. I did promise you.”

“Cool!” Hawk's joy sets fire in Ilya's chest. He barely resists the urge to cut the call and drag Shane into him until he forgets this stupid encounter. “I already told my cooks to adjust the recipes to your diet. So it shouldn't be a problem. I know how picky you are about what you eat.”

“Thanks, Seb.”

The nickname pisses Ilya off. It's ridiculous. Sveta calls him Ilusha all the time. Why does it matter if Shane calls him Seb?

Because you are a jealous fucker. If you could, you'd pee on him to mark your territory, you fucking troglodyte.

“Yeah, no problem, man. Can't wait to see you.”

Ilya slowly sets the phone down on the counter and slides it to Shane. At his inquisitive stare, Ilya points to his head indicating that he has a headache before leaving the kitchen and going to his bedroom.

He has no right to Shane Hollander. He knows. He fucking knows. It still doesn't soothe the throbbing ache in his chest.

Shane watches Ilya disappear up the stairs before taking his phone off speaker and pressing it to his ear. His heart is still going haywire from the adrenaline rush he just had.

Ilya is not Sebastian's biggest fan, Shane knows that. Only, he thought it only extended to their professional career. But it seems that Ilya is not a fan of him as a person as well. Granted, Ilya isn't fan of most people.

“How are things with Adrien?” he asks his friend.

Seb sighs. “He's visiting his parents in Korea. I miss him.”

“When does he get back?” Shane asks, smiling.

“Day after tomorrow.”

“Are you guys alright now? You know—after the whole paparazzi thing?”

“Yeah,” Seb sighs. “He was more cool about it than me, really. I was the one who freaked out. But my lawyer took care of it. It's fine. People are gonna know soon anyway.”

“Are you nervous?”

Seb takes a moment to answer. “Fuck! I’m shitting myself here dude!”

Shane snorts. “Gross.”

“Seriously!” Seb’s voice goes an octave higher. He lived a good chunk of his life in both Canada and the States, but he never dropped his British accent. So hearing him speak in a posh accent with the dialect of the States and Canada is peculiar. “What if he says no? Like what if he’s not ready?”

“Seb,” Shane warns.

“No really! What if I go down on one knee and then he realizes I’m not worth all this trouble?”

“You’re not trouble.”

“I’ve made him endure so much, Shane. I made him hide in the closet for years. He was already struggling with his sexuality and I just made it ten times harder on him.”

Shane understands. “You didn’t have a choice.”

Seb sighs.

“But now you do. After Hunter, I think a lot of players know that they’re not alone. And if you choose to come out publicly now, you’ll have support. A lot of it.”

“I guess.”

“But you don’t have to do that. You can just ask your boyfriend of eight years to marry you and not tell anyone you don’t want knowing. You don’t owe it to anyone.”

“No, I do. I owe it to him.”

“Talk to him about that.”

“I will.”

“And let me know how it goes.”

“Oh yeah definitely.”

“Why are you sleeping in the guest bed?”

The question catches Shane off-guard. He tears his eyes from the TV and looks at Ilya.

“Would you rather I slept on the couch here?”

Ilya rolls his eyes. “No. I want you sleeping in my bed.”

Shane’s heart stumbles. “Really?”

Ilya gives him a disbelieving look. “Why does that surprise you?”

Shane scoffs. “Why wouldn't it surprise me? I thought you were over fucking me. Done with whatever it is that we had.”

“Why the fuck would you think that?”

Oh, he can't be serious. Can he? Is Ilya really serious or is he fucking with Shane right now?

He can't keep his voice level. It rises. “Why the fuck wouldn't I? You ghosted me for nearly six months after I made the barest suggestion that we could probably see each other during summer. Then you sent and deleted a text before I could even read it. Ignored my multiple texts and calls. And then sent me voicemail drunk off your ass, half of which didn't make any sense by the way, before getting into a fucking car accident and nearly dying!”

“I didn't die!” Ilya bites back petulantly. “And you didn't seem like you were missing me very much, Hollander. Weren't you busy hanging out with your buddy Seb?”

“Oh fuck you, Ilya!” Shane spits. “You don't get to do this to me. You left! I was sad, and I needed friends.”

“Ah yes, friends! Friends who kiss each other, da?” Ilya looks more pissed than Shane has ever seen him. He's worried about Ilya's headache coming back.

“What the fuck are you talking about?” Shane is truly and utterly lost. How did they go from watching nature documentary to fighting over their unresolved issues of the past decade in less than five minutes?

“I saw the pictures, okay? I saw you and him kissing each other.”

Ilya says the words with so much certainty that Shane actually for a second wrecks his memory trying to think if he's really kissed Seb. But then he remembers—

“No you fucking moron, that wasn't me! That was Adrien! Hawk's actual boyfriend of eight years!”

Ilya is finally quiet now. His eyes are wide as he tries to process what he has heard.

“Not all asian people look the same,” Shane huffs.

“That's not—but the picture—” Ilya sputters.

“Yes I saw the picture! You can't see anything other than his eyes, which are closed. We might be the same height, but he definitely doesn't have the build of a professional hockey player. He's doing his PhD.”

Ilya blinks trying to process everything. Shane should let him but he's so pissed off. “Jesus Christ, Ilya. You lost your shit because you thought someone else was kissing me? Why? Even if it was me, why would you fucking care what I do? You left!”

“You heard the voicemail,” Ilya says. And Shane is so done with this roundabout conversation.

“What about it?”

Ilya gives him a wounded look, like Shane has slapped him or kicked his puppy.

“I—” Ilya looks away. “Nothing.”

“No, we're not doing that again. No way. Tell me. What about the voicemail?”

“Let it go Shane,” his voice is hard now. Like he's trying to shield himself.

“No, tell me, Ilya. I deserve to know!”

“I *did* tell you!”

“What?”

“That I love you!”

What? No he didn't!

Shane would fucking remember if the person he loves so fucking much it nearly killed him, said he loved him back. Then Shane remembers that the voicemail cuts off after the time limit is over.

Shane doesn't say that though. He opens his phone silently and finds the recording. Before he plays it, he drags it towards the end.

“You're so brave. And I'm just...I let you go. I am going now. Have to go home. Have to go back to Russia. I would rather be—”

The silence is so stifling, it nearly chokes Shane. When he looks at Ilya he has his eyes screwed shut and his face twisted in a pained expression.

“Why didn't you just say yes when I asked you to come to the cottage?”

It's a while before Ilya answers him with his head tipped back and eyes still closed. “It's too easy. Being with you. I forget... my boundaries. Of what I can and can not have. The last time I did that, you left.”

“I am so—”

“*Da*, Hollander. You said you are sorry. Is okay. I'm saying that I can't do that a second time. This thing is... not easy, *da*? It makes no sense. Yet it is what I want. So fucking badly. All I do is think about this. About you. Is fucking annoying.”

Shane stares at him feeling a familiar fond smile tug at his lips.

“Oh so I'm annoying.”

“Yes,” Ilya says without a hint of hesitation. He opens his eyes and looks at Shane. “But I like you.”

Shane has awesome reflexes. He knows that because he has seen himself play. He has heard commentators and pundits sing his praise. He put those amazing reflexes to use and straddles Ilya in a heartbeat, mindful not to put any pressure on his healing body.

Ilya opens his eyes and gently rests his hands on Shane's thighs as he gazes up at him with a softness that speaks volumes.

“I like you, too,” Shane whispers. Ilya gulps. A second passes and then two.

It's unclear who moves first but one moment they're staring at each other trying to make sense of it all and the next they're kissing each other.

He was already breathless before their mouths met, close enough to feel the other man's pulse thrumming beneath his hands, close enough to taste the air he exhaled.

The kiss is like a collision.

It isn't tentative. It isn't sweet. It was hunger. Raw and desperate, months of longing unraveling in a single, shuddering inhale. Beneath him Ilya grips his waist as if afraid he might vanish, fingers pressing hard, grounding, claiming. Their mouths move with a kind of frantic reverence, like they are trying to memorize each other by touch alone.

Shane feels it everywhere.

In the way his spine arches unconsciously, in the way his hands slide up into Ilya's curls and hold on. In the low, broken sound swallowed between them. The world beyond the room seems to tilt, blur, fall away entirely. There is no before, no after. Only this.

It is mind-numbing, the kind of kiss that erases thought and replaces it with sensation. Heat pools low in his stomach, climbs his chest, and bursts behind his ribs. His heart hammers so violently it feels unsustainable, like his body wasn't built to contain this much want.

And yet Shane does pull back.

When Ilya deepens the kiss with a filthy moan, when his hands tighten and draw him closer—*closer still*—it feels soul-shattering in the most terrifying, beautiful way. Like something inside him cracks open and lets the light in. Like every carefully constructed wall dissolves under the press of lips and breath and need.

Reality shifts.

The air feels thinner. Time feels distorted. The entire world shrinks to the space between their mouths. He could have sworn the earth had moved. Or maybe it is just him: undone, unraveling in the safest place he's ever fallen.

And when they finally break apart, foreheads resting together, both breathing hard—

Ilya looks at him like he's looking at a celestial entity: awestruck, devoted, frantic. Shane takes in his wet and puffy lips, his soft pants, and wild hair made wilder by Shane's fingers.

Shane dives in for another kiss, because kissing Ilya will never be satiating enough. The beast that lives inside Shane's chest, the one only Ilya knows how to tame, will never be satisfied with kissing Ilya. It keeps wanting more.

So Shane feeds it. He bites into Ilya's plush bottom lip, tangles his tongue with his, lets their teeth clash, makes noises that come from a deep carnal part of him and feeds them to Ilya. Ilya for his part is equally hungry. His grips are hard enough to leave marks. Shane wants there to be marks. He wants to trace the red and purple bruises later, wants to dig into them with his own fingers.

Shane feels warm palms sneak under his shirt and run over the expanse of his overheated skin. He grips the hem of his shirt and rips it off before tossing it away. Ilya's eyes travel all over his body. He feels him take in the changes these past few months have made.

When Ilya meets his eyes again, Shane sees so much emotion in them, so many questions. The sea-green pools try to say everything he can't express in a language his mother never taught him. Shane feels like he understands it anyway.

He nods, giving Ilya permission.

Touch me. Take me. Make me yours. I'm yours. Have me. Please have me, Ilya.

Ilya slowly traces his palms over Shane's back. His thumbs fit themselves into the divids of Shane's back before they sink under the waistband of Shane's sweats and grab handfuls of his ass.

Shane whimpers, resting his hands against the couch behind Ilya's head so he doesn't put any pressure on the man beneath him. He needs to heal.

Ilya, ever the opportunist, closes his lips over Shane's left nipple and sucks.

“Oh my—*fuck!*”

Shane grabs a fistful of Ilya's hair, not pushing him away, just holding on.

Ilya's hands explore him, worship him, while his mouth tortures him deliciously. Shane can feel his arousal climb up to his brain and push him into that foggy headspace he likes so much.

He feels Ilya harden against his hip and inner thigh.

It takes him back, strikes him with a memory that is not too pleasant. Maybe he should do something about it. Maybe he should rewrite the history they share.

Shane leans back and takes Ilya out of his sweatpants. Ilya being the smart man he is shrugs off his t-shirt. His golden cross makes an appearance against his flushed skin. Shane has the ridiculous urge to put it in his mouth. So he trails wet and hungry kisses down Ilya's neck instead while he slowly pumps him.

Ilya is hot and hard in his grip. But the pull is dry. Almost painful, Shane imagines.

He meets Ilya's lust-filled hazy eyes before he gathers spit in his mouth and drops it into the palm of his hand.

Ilya curses but doesn't look away. Shane wraps his wet palm against Ilya's throbbing cock and starts to jerk him off.

“F-fuck!” his breath hitches.

Shane leans in close to his ear and presses a soft kiss before whispering, “It’s you, Ilya. Ever since I’ve had you, it has always been you.”

Ilya shivers under him and moans. “Hollander.”

“I need so much,” Shane continues. “There's a gnawing void in me that keeps wanting.”

His hand twists and thumb swipes the underside of Ilya's dick just the way he likes it.

“Do you know what it wants?” he asks and when Ilya doesn't answer him, he stops moving his hand and looks down at the man beneath him.

Ilya whines but meets Shane's eyes and shakes his head.

“It wants you,” Shane says at the same time as he thumbs Ilya's slit, spreading the pre-come. Ilya jerks underneath him. It's unclear if it's for Shane's words or what he's doing.

“It only wants you,” Shane continues. He feels himself painfully hard in his sweatpants. But he doesn't take himself out. He has a point to get across.

“You're it for me, Ilya,” he says clearly so that it doesn't get lost in any translation. He moves his hand faster. Feels Ilya's stomach clench in that familiar way. “Nobody else will do.”

“Shane, fuck!”

Ilya comes. He comes a lot. In thick ropes and for a while. He paints Shane's stomach and his own with his release. Shane keeps pumping his fist, milking it all out of him.

Shane peppers soft kisses all over Ilya's face: his eyes, his forehead, his cheeks, his nose. Before he closes the distance between their lips once again Shane gathers all the courage he doesn't feel and says, “I love you, too.”

The kiss that follows ends with Shane rutting against Ilya's hips and coming in his pants.

When Seb calls to confirm whether Shane is coming to Toronto or not, Ilya shakes his head, being vehemently opposed to it. In fact, he's so averse to the idea that while Shane tries to make up some boring story about his coaches asking him to come back early to try some new workout routines to boost his stamina, Ilya blows him. Hard, fast, and merciless. Shane comes moaning against his own palm with Seb on mute.

He doesn't go to Toronto.

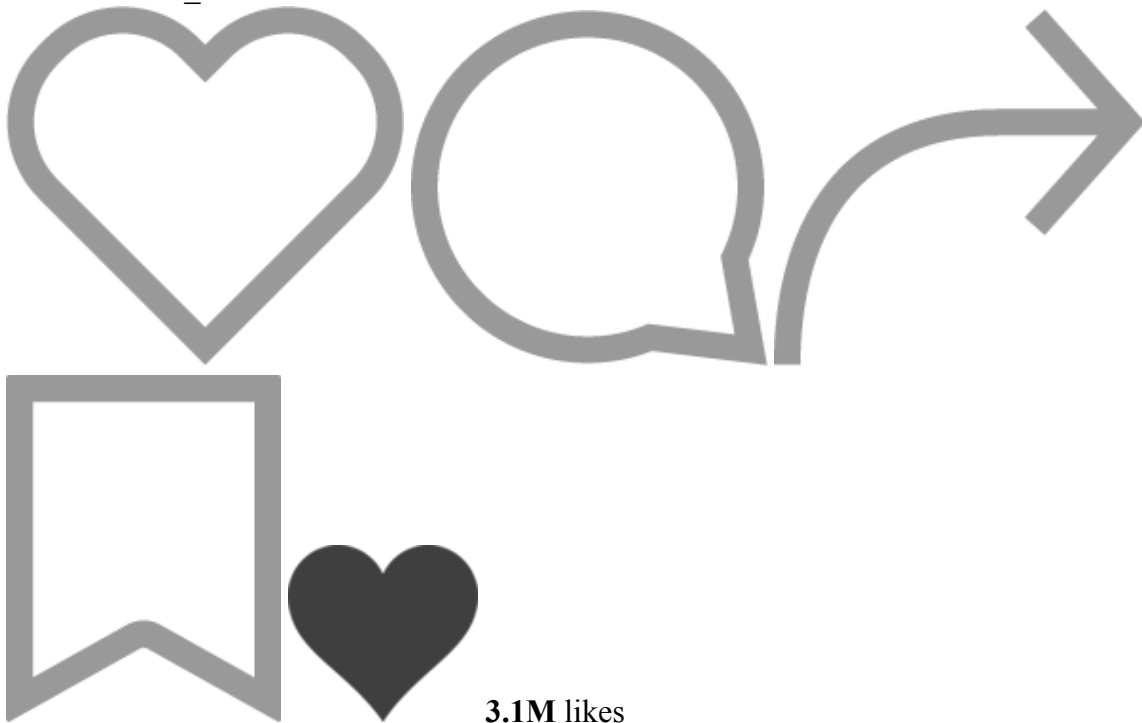
They go to Shane's cottage instead. Ilya brings the best vodka he owns before tying it in a nice blue bow which he does it himself by catching a YouTube video.

He will meet Shane's parents. They have talked about it. They've also talked about the future. It's a work in progress. Shane assures him that Yuna Hollander will have some input into it that will help them both.





sebhawthorne_mlh



3.1M likes

sebhawthorne_mlh I met Adrien in my econ 101 class. From the get-go we just... clicked. I never felt that way about a guy before, so it scared me. It terrified me to the point that I shut him out. Ditched out from our friendship. It took me one near death experience to put things into perspective. I asked for his forgiveness, confessed my feelings, and Adrien being the kindest and

most generous person that he is, took me back. He loved me through everything. From my first game in MLH to getting that A on my jersey, he has been here for me through the good, the bad, and the worst. My rock. My person. And in return I hid us from the world I believed wasn't kind enough to someone like us—someone like me. **@scott_hunter** showed me that there is a place beyond fear and it is beautiful. So inspired by his courage, I would like to say that I, Sebastian Hawthorne, Assistant Captain of the Toronto Guardians Hockey Team, am a proud member of the LGBTQIA++ community. I love hockey, I love my life, and most importantly I love my fiancé Adrien. I'm aware of the journey ahead, and I am so excited because I get to do it with the man I have loved for the better part of a decade. Thank you Adrien. You make me want to be better. I love you.

shanehollanderhockeyplayer: Extremely happy for you. Congratulations to the happy couple.

scott_hunter: it's all worth it, trust me. Congratulations 🎉🎉.

ilyarozanov81: if you visit gay bar **@kingfisher**, try the virgin Scott Hunter. They give you generous pour if you flirt with the cute bartenders.

scott_hunter: ok you're not allowed at Kingfisher anymore.

bennett_goalie: fuck off, rozanov.

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9 July 2017

End Notes

sighs

Guys I've been working on this for over three hours. The coding took me forever on my phone.

When I was writing this I probably went through all the stages in the emotions spectrum—from "this is the greatest piece literature to have ever been written" to "what the fuck is this garbage?"

So safe to say that I'm not exactly sure how this turned out.

Please leave me a comment if you liked this. It would mean the world to me. Kudos are also appreciated.

Come say hi to me on [Tumblr](#) if you want. I'm nice and always up for HR conversations.

Take care guys. Stay hydrated ❤️

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