

you know i think about you all the time (my deep misunderstanding of your life)

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by [yrsaffectionately](#)

Summary

The entire time Hayden has known him, and known *of* him, he has been Ilya Rozanov; violent player and serial womanizer. The media was saying those things about a child, and no one had given a shit, because Ilya had never spoken up for himself. He'd never protested their unfounded claims, and he never tried to prove them wrong, either.

Which, now that Hayden knows the things he does, makes perfect fucking sense.

or

Hayden finds himself unlearning everything he thought he knew about Ilya Rozanov

Notes

hi lovely people!!!

i'm a bit nervous about this one, but i'm proud of it, so i hope it's not too terrible. it's probably a bit ooc, but look past that for me, okay? i love me a good outsider pov fic, so here's my take on hayden and ilya's developing friendship :)

also, **pay attention to the tags!!** this fic talks a lot about ilya's childhood, and the abuse/trauma he experienced and carries with him. if that's not your cup of tea, don't read this one.

just a little disclaimer; a lot of ilya's descriptions of his trauma and grief come from my own experiences, and are not the only ways for people to react to the situations he was put in. this fic is simply my take on things, not the only one!

the title is from 'the great divide' by noah kahan, because thinking about that song from hayden's pov makes me want to bang my head against a wall four thousand times.

ALSO, this is not AI. i've been seeing a lot of people have to clarify that these days, and i feel the need to put it out there that i think AI is the devil's curse on this universe, and if you use it to write anything, you are going to die and go to hell. so. leave me and my excessive use of em dashes and italics alone, thank you!

okay that's it, i hope y'all enjoy :D

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

I

Hayden Pike is a good friend.

He picks up every time Shane calls, and he drops off soup when Shane winds up sick every winter. He invites Shane to dinner because he knows that otherwise, Shane won't go out of his way to socialize, and he doesn't ask questions when he can tell Shane doesn't feel like answering them. He would drop everything if Shane needed him; hell, he *threw hands* at someone nearly twice his size, simply because they checked Shane a little harder than usual. He would do anything for Shane, because Shane is his best friend, and because Shane rarely does anything for himself.

So, when Shane came out to him as gay, Hayden took it in stride. In fact, he even tried to set him up with a few of Jackie's friends, because his wife has a surprising abundance of gay guys in her friend circle. Looking back on it, he could have taken the hint sooner, considering the look that would flash across Shane's face every time Hayden brought up a new potential suitor.

At some point down the road, he realized that Shane was taken, by whatever definition he wanted to use. He'd pieced together that *Lily* was likely a guy shortly after he'd found out that Shane was gay, but he'd not been able to decipher who exactly *Lily* could be. He knew Shane hardly had any free time outside of hockey, and when he found out that *Lily's* availability just so happened to open up during their off season, he took a wild guess, and assumed that Shane was seeing another player.

Which, overall, was already kind of jarring. He didn't know of any players that were out, which made it even harder to correctly place which one had his best friend splitting his face in half with a wide smile over a single text message. Jackie had advised him not to push, and to wait for Shane to feel comfortable enough to tell him exactly who it was, but Hayden is *nosy*.

He'd been prepared for every possible scenario. He knew Lily lived in Boston, so it had to be one of their players. And because he was an ally, and knew that face value stereotyping was bad, he considered nearly every player on the team that Shane had ever been friendly to. Which was quite a feat, due to the guy being an absolute angel to nearly everyone.

So, of *course*, Lily turned out to be the only person in Boston that Shane was *supposed* to hate.

Hayden had prepared for *almost* every scenario. Unfortunately, no amount of preparation made it easier to understand why the *fuck* his best friend chose to fall in love with *Ilya fucking Rozanov*.

But Hayden was a good friend, and because of that, he only threw up in his mouth a *little* when he found out.

He tried to understand it, he really, truly, honest to God, *tried*. He let Ilya chirp him at the dinner table, and only fought back twice, which was ten times less than he wanted to. He let the asshole walk all over him in his own house, and he only whined about Ilya's unexpected friendship with Jackie once a week. He was a fucking soldier for all of it, and the war he'd been drafted to didn't seem to have an end in sight.

Because, as it would turn out, Ilya Rozanov is an unfortunately good person.

To everyone except for Hayden, that is.

Ilya is a great captain, somehow able to take his last-in-line team to the fucking playoffs, eventually winning them a cup. He knows every one of his teammates inside and out, and has some sort of profound ability to correct their mistakes without sounding condescending, or conceited. From what Shane tells Hayden about the team overall, he knows that they consider themselves a family, which is something he hasn't experienced even once during his decade long career.

Ilya is great with Hayden's kids, too, as much as he hates to admit. Watching a six-foot-something hockey powerhouse rock Amber to sleep in his arms while helping Arthur assemble whatever Lego set he's brought over, Ruby and Jade each working on making his hair look like a mess of bows and colorful scrunchies— Hayden would rather die than admit how adorable he'd found the whole scene.

Ilya is also, as unfortunate as it is, best friends with Jackie. For some reason unknown to Hayden. Maybe the universe hates him, or maybe he was an axe murderer in his previous life. He's never believed in karma, but *Ilya Rozanov* takes *Hayden's* wife out to brunch whenever she needs a break from being a mother of four, and comes over for weekly wine nights during off season. Wine nights that Hayden must note, *he* is not invited to join in on. Which is frankly just appalling, in his opinion.

The worst part about it all, though, is that Ilya Rozanov is a great husband to his best friend. *Great* doesn't even begin to capture how disgustingly skilled Ilya is at being Shane's husband. If Hayden were held at gunpoint, he still would not admit that Ilya is maybe the only person on planet earth that he would ever trust to treat Shane exactly the way that he deserves. The room could be on fire, he could be thrown in a den of hungry lions, he could be sentenced to the electric fucking chair— nothing could get him to admit that Shane chose an incredible person to spend the rest of his life with.

It's a bit sickening, how perfect they are for each other. Ilya knows Shane better than Shane knows himself, and takes every neurotic tendency of his in stride. Hayden's pretty sure he even finds Shane's little quirks *endearing*, and that alone makes him want to put a stake through his heart. Ilya looks at Shane like he sculpted all seven wonders of the world with his own two hands, and he revolves around him like the moon does the earth. They're drawn to each other in a way that seems innate; like they were born to be in each other's orbits.

It's gross, and he is so fucking happy for them it makes him want to bang his head into a wall so that he can finally wake up from the nightmare that is his best friend marrying his number one public enemy.

Being a good friend is fucking exhausting, sometimes.

Especially when you host your best friend and his asshole of a husband for dinner, and your wife decides to whisk said best friend into the kitchen to help with dishes, leaving you to sit in silence with said asshole of a husband, questioning every decision you have made over the course of your life that could have led up to this point.

The moment Jackie asks Shane to help with dishes, Hayden knows exactly what she's doing. She's always telling him to give Ilya a chance, swearing that he's more than what he projects. Something about using humor as a coping mechanism, or whatever. Hayden doesn't really care to know *why* Ilya acts the way he does towards Hayden, he'd just like to be taken out by a freight train.

Ilya stares at him from across the table, his face unreadable. Hayden has never missed his children so much in his life. At least if they were here, he'd be able to use them as a common ground that he and Ilya could stand on. When they're alone, he realizes how little he actually knows about the man sitting stoically across from him, sipping some overly expensive wine that Shane brought because he still refuses to come empty handed, even after all this time.

He watches as Ilya sets the glass down, and decides that today is the day he finally does it. Today is the day Hayden Pike genuinely tries to understand who Ilya Rozanov *really* is. Not the asshole on the ice (or at the dinner table, in Hayden's case), but the gentle, patient, loving husband and friend that he *apparently* is. All claims are alleged, and the sources he has on record are biased, though.

"So, *Rozanov*," he says, praying his voice doesn't reveal how much he does not want to be having this conversation. He decides to start with something familiar to both of them, something they can both discuss comfortably. "That was a rough loss last weekend. First one of the season, too, huh?" He says smugly, because if Ilya is allowed to be an asshole, Hayden should be allowed to as well. You know, because of equality, and all that.

Ilya seems very unimpressed with his chosen discussion topic. "Is whatever. What's the saying? You win some, you lose some? Surely *you* know what is like to lose some."

Hayden wants to rip the smirk off of his fucking face. "I'm not taking that bait," he deadpans, finally used to how much fun Ilya has stringing him along. "You lost to the Admirals, I don't take shit from people who let Scott Hunter's dinosaurs beat them." He seems to have hit a nerve, with the way Ilya narrows his eyes at him.

"The score was 3-4, not 10-0," Ilya scowls, and Hayden can't help but feel a little proud of himself for finally being on the other side of the ribbing. "Plus, like I said; we lose sometimes. Is not a big deal. We practice harder, we win next time. Simple math, Pike."

"You're not even a little mad you lost to Scott-prehistoric-Hunter?" Hayden pushes, because the appeal of being an asshole is starting to register with him. He kind of gets why Ilya seems to be addicted to it.

Ilya smirks, letting out a small laugh. "You are right, we should have been able to beat that pile of fossils," he pauses in thought, "but we didn't. It doesn't mean we are a worse team, it

means we are..." he cocks his head to the side, seemingly searching for the right word. "Human," is what he lands on. "Means we are human, yes? Humans make mistakes, we make mistakes. Connect the dots, Pike."

Hayden thinks that might be the most unfortunately poetic way to rebound from a chirp.

"Right," is all he can say, nodding skeptically. "But you used to be so tunnel vision about winning." Ilya quirks an eyebrow at him, as if he's not exactly sure what Hayden means. "Like, you were only focused on wins. If anyone lost to you, that was all they heard about until they announced their retirement." Now that he thinks about it, he hasn't heard Ilya mention another team's losses in a chirp for a while. With the exception of Montreal, of course. Which Hayden knows is deserved, so it cancels out.

"Yes," Ilya starts, leaning back in his chair, his hands toying with the napkin in front of him. "Is true. Winning used to be everything. At first, it had to be, I think."

"What's that supposed to mean?" Hayden asks, not meaning for it to come off as condescending as it does. "I mean, like, everyone knows losing is a part of playing a sport. Haven't you played since you were young? Every junior coach will tell you that a loss does not mean you suck."

"I have played since I was young, yes," Ilya answers, seemingly lost in a memory Hayden has unintentionally brought to the front of his mind. "Russia is not the same as," he waves a hand in front of them, "here."

"How so?" Hayden pries.

Ilya winces a bit, but he doesn't deflect the question like Hayden expects him to. "When I was in Russia, I had a coach, yes. But my father—" he cuts himself off, swallowing hard. Hayden wants to tell him that he doesn't have to keep going if he doesn't want to, but Ilya opens his mouth to continue before he can. "My father was very traditional. Strict. Hard on me. Hard on all of us, really. Is why I had to go far away."

"Oh," Hayden says, dumbly. "I didn't—I didn't consider that."

Ilya smirks, "I can tell."

"Shut up," Hayden groans, rolling his eyes. "So is that what you mean when you say you had to win? Because you wanted to get drafted to an international team?"

"Kind of, yes," Ilya responds. "Even before I knew other countries were an option, I was not...*allowed* to lose. My father did not like losers."

"But you said you've played since you were a kid. Was it like that even then?" Hayden says, scared for the answer.

Ilya nods, a subtle anger flashing in his eyes. It's an expression Hayden doesn't witness much, due to the fact that when he sees Ilya, it's usually when he's got Shane with him, making him light up like the fucking sun.

“Is like I said. My father did not like losers. My father did not like me.” Ilya says it so coldly, like the admission tastes bad in his mouth. Hayden doesn’t blame him at all.

“You were a kid, though,” he points out, even though he knows it’s useless. He can’t imagine being mad at any of his kids for losing at anything, let alone something as inconsequential as a fucking *hockey game*. Just the idea of it alone makes him feel a bit sick.

“That did not matter to my father,” Ilya shrugs, like it’s not the most heartbreaking thing Hayden’s heard in a while. “If I lose, it is my fault. Never mind that hockey is team sport, never mind that I am seven. Is my fault, because I am best skater, best scorer. If we lose, is because *I* lost.”

Hayden stays silent, letting the words echo throughout his mind. He thinks back to when Ilya was first traded to the Centaurs, and how he’d thought it was the most insensible thing for a player like him to do. Even after he found out Ilya had moved to be closer to Shane, he’d still thought it was a stupid move, because if *any* player liked to win, it was Ilya Rozanov. And, at the time, the Ottawa Centaurs didn’t exactly win.

He thinks about how the first season Ilya spent in Ottawa went over— how rough it was to watch him try to lead a team that had comfortably sat at the bottom of the ranks for years to at least one victory. He remembers briefly thinking that Ilya *deserved* to be on a team that lost as frequently as Ottawa did, if only so that he could finally gain some perspective on what it felt like to be at the bottom. It feels like a selfish desire now. Probably because it was.

“Rozanov,” he speaks up, desperate for confirmation. “Did anyone ever tell you that it’s not your fault?”

Ilya stares at him, his expression impossible to decipher.

“The last time I went to Russia was for my father’s funeral. After that, I realized there is nothing for me here— why should I come back?” He pauses, sitting up a bit in his chair. “And then, Shane said I should play for Ottawa, and I said okay, because hockey was just... how I get here. Now I am here, so I don’t need hockey anymore. Just Shane.”

Hayden wants to gag, but he has manners. Contrary to popular (Jackie’s) belief.

“When he tells me to play here, my first thought is no, they do not win. I have to win, and they don’t do that.” A small smile creeps up onto his face as he talks about his team, and Hayden wishes he felt that way about his own. “But then, I remember; Papa is dead, I am in love with Shane, and I do not have to win. So, I say okay. I will play for Ottawa.”

Ilya shrugs it all off like it’s nothing.

Hayden realizes why Shane looks at him like he’s everything.

“So losing didn’t bother you after your dad died?” Hayden asks, realizing how stupid he sounds only after he’s said it.

Ilya snorts, looking at him like he knows Hayden has good intentions. “No, that is not how trauma works, unfortunately. I was scared to go to Ottawa, even if Papa was dead. I knew I would be losing more if I went, and I think that I was scared it would make me feel guilty, like I was disappointing him even after he died.”

Hayden really hates how much sympathy he feels bubbling over in his system, every last bit of it directed at Ilya Rozanov, of all people.

“I move to Ottawa because I know it will be hard, but I hoped that it would...” Ilya trails off, sighing. “I hoped it would help. With the grief, the guilt, the fear— anything. I did not really care what, I just wanted to feel less...*bad*.”

“And did it?” Hayden asks. “Help, I mean. Did it help?” He clarifies.

Ilya’s icy expression melts into something warmer, a small smile settling on his lips. “Yes. A lot. I realized losing is not the end of the world, and I found my family here. Now, when we lose, even though we do not so often anymore, it feels so small, compared to everything else. Is never *just* my fault, because I am not the only one on the team, and I do not have to carry anything alone anymore.”

Hayden knew that both of Ilya’s parents were dead, and that he had a brother he didn’t get along with. Shane never went into detail, out of respect for Ilya’s privacy, but it’s just now registering with him that Ilya had to learn how to say goodbye to every one of his immediate family members, in one way or another. It’s a striking thought, and Hayden doesn’t really know what to do with it.

“And,” Ilya breaks him out of his stupor, “I get to play the sport I love with the love of my life. Not much more I can ask for, yes?” He grins, reaching out to take another sip of his wine.

Hayden sits there, unaware of how to deal with the new information that was just loaded on top of him. He knew there was more to Ilya; there’s *always* more to everyone. He just didn’t know how *much* there was. He’s also starting to realize that he’s only just breached the surface with this conversation.

“For what it’s worth,” Hayden starts, praying Ilya will understand the underlying sentiment. “I’m glad that you were able to find a new family. Even if I’m not part of it.”

Ilya stares at him— not unkind or cold, but something else Hayden can’t quite place. “You are part of it, Pike,” and Hayden naively lets himself believe that’s the end of what Ilya has to say. “Every family needs annoying little sibling, no?”

“Oh, fuck you,” Hayden snaps, bunching up his napkin and throwing it at Ilya’s chest. “I was trying to be nice.”

“I know,” Ilya laughs, “was very cute.” He pauses, then smirks, “my father would not like you, I don’t think.”

Hayden stupidly takes the bait. “Why not?”

“I told you, Pike,” Ilya winks. “He did not like losers.”

“Man, I fucking hate you,” Hayden groans, dropping his head into his hands as Ilya bursts out laughing.

When Shane and Jackie emerge from the kitchen, Ilya is still trying to control his laughter, and Hayden is still barely holding himself back from flipping the entire table over. Both of them stare at the scene, unsure of what to make of it, and Shane makes a comment about being glad that they didn’t come back to a bloodbath.

You win some, you lose some, Hayden thinks.

II

Hayden’s not sure how he ends up alone with Ilya Rozanov for the second time in the span of a year, but he attributes the fact that they haven’t killed each other yet to the generous amount of alcohol they have both consumed over the past few hours.

It’s Jackie’s birthday, and they’re sitting at a booth in the back of a bar Hayden can’t remember the name of, both of them nursing their third (or fourth?) beer of the night. Ilya holds his alcohol better than Hayden, but he’s tipsy, at the least. Rose finally convinced Shane to dance with her, and Jackie somehow wound up between the two of them. Hayden’s not sure how he got here, but he’s not mad about it. The way Ilya’s watching them tells him that he’s not too upset either.

“Careful Rozanov, that’s my wife you’re eyeing up,” Hayden jokes, his gaze falling on Ilya, whose eyes are still trained on the dancing trio. He doesn’t look angry—in fact, he looks a little *fond*, if Hayden had to put a name to the expression currently painted on his face.

“With respect to your beautiful wife, I could not care less about what she looks like right now,” Ilya shrugs, taking a sip of his beer.

“Apologies,” Hayden says, “I forgot no one else exists to you other than Shane.”

“I don’t see the problem with that,” Ilya replies loftily, and Hayden snorts.

“You two are fucking disgusting,” Hayden groans, taking a generous swig of beer. “We’re in public and you’re shamelessly eye-fucking your husband from across the fucking room.”

Ilya sets his beer down, his eyes finally falling on Hayden. “Is my right to, no? We spend so many years not even acknowledging each other, I think I am allowed this one thing.” Hayden didn’t mean to hit a nerve, but the beer in his system tends to speak louder than his common sense after one or two bottles.

“I mean, yes,” he says dumbly, not sure how else to keep Ilya from punching him at his wife’s birthday party. “Eye-fuck away, I guess.”

Ilya huffs out a laugh, looking at Hayden like he’s having the time of his life watching him walk on eggshells. “You have such a way with words, Pike. You should look into poetry, the hockey thing does not seem to be going so well for you.”

“Man, fuck off,” Hayden dismisses him. “Why did you even wait so long to come out in the first place?” It’s a stupid question, and insensitive as hell, and when he’s sobered up tomorrow, he’ll regret it deeply. Jackie says that alcohol makes him nosy, though, so. He risks a cautious glance at Ilya, hoping he’s not met with the most murderous stare known to man.

He thanks God when he finds Ilya looking something between amused and conflicted. If Hayden had to guess, he’d say Ilya’s probably trying to decide if it’s worth explaining the concept of closets and systemic inequality to someone obviously drunk past the point of having self-control.

“You know I am not from here, yes?” Ilya asks, looking like he genuinely isn’t sure that Hayden has enough sense to place any information *at all*.

He scoffs, rolling his eyes. “No fucking shit, Rozanov.”

“Okay, so you know I am from Russia, good,” Ilya says, as if he’s conducting some weird sort of sobriety test on Hayden. “Now let me ask this; do you know what Russia thinks about people like me and Shane?” He asks, staring at Hayden like he’s some kind of Eastern European history buff.

“Like, interracial couples?” Hayden asks, and Ilya’s head immediately falls back, his hand coming up to pinch the bridge of his nose.

“You are stupid even when drunk, my God,” he sighs, looking very unimpressed with Hayden’s drunken lack of intelligence. “Queer people, Pike. I mean queer people.”

“Oh,” Hayden says, feeling stupid. “Right.”

Ilya looks like he’s holding back a laugh, and Hayden appreciates it. He gets defensive and emotional when he’s drunk, too, and it’s only a matter of time when it comes to Ilya making an offhand chirp that would make even a sober Hayden feel slightly offended.

“Yes, oh,” Ilya says, mocking him. “I will ask again. Do you know how Russia feels about queer people, Pike?”

Hayden pointedly does not, but he could make an educated guess. No amount of substance could make him forget just how much work the world still has to do in terms of marriage equality and homophobia.

When Shane first came out to him, he realized just how little he knew about queer people, and he may or may not have gone on a deep dive that included googling ‘how to be a good ally,’ and ‘what to say to your gay friends.’ In his researching trance, he had somehow stumbled upon a list of countries that had either not legalized gay marriage, or that had made it completely illegal, and punishable by law. Needless to say, that list was much longer than the list of countries that allowed queer people to simply...*be*.

“I assume they’re not exactly accepting of it,” he replies to Ilya’s question, his mind flashing back to how it felt reading over that list. It sobers him up a bit, and he kind of hates it.

“Good job, Pike. One point to Hufflepuff,” Ilya says sarcastically, and Hayden frowns.

“Okay, one, you know Harry Potter? And two, why the fuck are you assuming I’m a Hufflepuff?” He snaps, wanting to wipe the smirk off Ilya’s face with his fist.

“Is one of the books I read to help me learn English when I first came to America,” Ilya answers. “And am I wrong?”

“No,” Hayden admits begrudgingly.

“Didn’t think so,” Ilya says smugly, leaning back into the booth.

Hayden glares at him, “I’m trying to be nice, Rozanov. I’m trying to learn about you, because Jackie says it’ll make me like you, but all you’re doing is making me hate you more. Either tell me about your homophobic birth country, or shut up and go get your husband off my wife.”

“No, he deserves this,” Ilya says, his voice softer than before.

“Deserves what? My wife?”

“No, dumbass,” Ilya snaps, “the freedom. He is not used to letting himself go. He deserves to have fun with our friends.” His face morphs into a smirk. “Plus, I’m not sure you know this, Pike, but Shane is gay.”

Hayden groans, swatting at Ilya’s shoulder. “Fuck off. I changed my mind, I don’t care about your life anymore.” He says it, but he makes no move to get up, and both of them know he’s lying.

“Yes you do,” Ilya points out, and Hayden deflates.

“Don’t tell Jackie?” Hayden offers.

“Don’t tell Shane?” Ilya reciprocates.

They nod, a mutual agreement not to tell their partners that they’ve now managed to get along *twice*. God forbid they give Shane and Jackie more reasons to leave them alone together.

“So, Russia...?” Hayden restarts their previous conversation tentatively.

“Russia,” Ilya nods tersely, his body stiffening a bit. “Is not technically illegal to be queer, but you cannot be out. They say you cannot ‘promote’ it. That does not mean people aren’t queer, but. Is dangerous.”

“But you left before you even met Shane,” Hayden supplies, as if Ilya isn’t aware of his own timeline.

“Yes, good job Pike. Hufflepuff now has two points.”

Hayden has to hold himself back, both physically *and* mentally, from making any sort of retort. Ilya seems to notice his efforts, amusedly.

“I was not a citizen when I got drafted; I only had work visa. If I was out, and something happened, and I had to go back to Russia, it would not be safe for me.”

“Would they kill you?” Hayden asks, shocked at how much he doesn’t want that to happen. His horror is on behalf of Shane, he tells himself. He doesn’t believe it in the slightest.

“No, they would probably not *kill* me. But jail, maybe. Or revoke my passport, so I could not leave again,” Ilya says, repressed misery seeping through his tone. Hayden knows he’s a Canadian citizen now, and these worries are far behind him, but bringing them up again can’t be easy.

“And here I was thinking you were ashamed of him,” Hayden blurts without thinking. Ilya looks at him like he’s just admitted to orchestrating a terrorist attack.

“That was never—” Ilya cuts himself off, obviously trying to find patience that Hayden knows he’s not deserving of. “There was so much keeping me from him; my father and brother both worked for police, my country did not allow it, our jobs kept us away from each other. Never shame, though. I have never felt shame, not when it comes to him.” It’s the most romantic thing Hayden’s heard in a while. He briefly considers swearing off alcohol.

“Wait,” Hayden interrupts, “when I outed you guys, you weren’t married yet. Did I put you in danger?” He asks, suddenly horrified at the idea.

“You did not out us Pike,” Ilya says calmly. “You made dumb mistake, yes, but someone else shared it. And you didn’t put me in danger; Ottawa is not like other teams, yes? They will not kick you out for kissing boys.” Ilya cracks a grin, and Hayden winces, knowing very well that he’s talking about Montreal.

“Besides,” Ilya continues, “I was going to become American citizen before Shane even thought of me playing for Ottawa, so I could at least not have Russian passport anymore.”

“Really? How?” Hayden asks, assuming that being good at a sport isn’t enough to gain American citizenship. Then again, it’s *America*, so who knows.

Ilya snorts, biting his lip to keep from smiling. “My friend Svetlana, she lives in Boston. She would have married me, so the process would be easier.”

Hayden’s eyebrows shoot up in shock, “Shane was okay with that?”

Ilya finally let out his laugh, folding over the table. “Not at all. I thought he was going to hire a hit man when I told him,” he wheezes.

“For you or Svetlana?”

“Both, maybe,” Ilya says, trying to calm himself down. “But me first, probably. Is okay, though, they are good friends now.”

Hayden tries to picture Shane's reaction to Ilya proposing the idea of marrying Svetlana for citizenship. He tries to picture Shane's reaction to Ilya marrying anyone other than him, for any reason at all. He thinks that Ilya saved a lot of lives by not agreeing to go through with it.

"So, now that you're out, can you ever go back?" Hayden asks, knowing he's probably on thin ice already.

Ilya shakes his head. "No. But is okay. Everything I need is here." He says it with his eyes trained on Shane, who has turned to face them, no longer flanked by Jackie and Rose. He's got a drunkenly lovesick look on his face, and Hayden is hit in the chest with the realization that this is the first time he's ever seen Shane like this in *public*.

Sure, he and Ilya exist in a perpetual honeymoon phase, where they frequently violate the societal laws of what kinds of affection are appropriate when in the company of other people. Their friend group rarely goes out together anymore, though, because Hayden's got four kids and Shane is easily overstimulated. Now, sitting in the back of a bar that reeks of sweat and alcohol, watching his best friend stare longingly at his *husband*, it occurs to Hayden that—as much as it pains him to admit—Ilya was right.

Shane deserves this; the freedom, the fun, the ability to love so openly. All of it, he deserves, and it's a damn good thing that he chose to marry someone who is dead set on giving him *all of it*.

He watches as Shane stumbles his way over to their booth, a dopey smile on his face. He crawls across the seat to where Ilya is sitting, clumsily maneuvering himself so that he can settle on his husband's lap. Ilya watches him with a stupid grin, letting Shane do what he needs to get comfortable. He finally stills, wrapped around Ilya like a fucking koala bear, his face buried in Ilya's neck. Hayden feels like he's interrupting something.

"Where's my wife?" He says, suddenly feeling very alone in the presence of the two of them.

"Paying the tab with Rose," Shane slurs softly, his voice barely audible due to the loud music, and the fact that he's practically speaking into Ilya's skin.

"Ready to go home?" Ilya asks, his lips pressed to Shane's forehead. One of his hands is combing through Shane's sweaty, mussed up hair, and the other is rubbing slow circles on his back. Hayden really misses his wife.

Shane nods, forgoing a verbal answer.

"Did you have fun tonight, solnyshko?"

Another nod, Shane looking just about ready to fall asleep. Ilya takes it in stride, gathering Shane in his arms, and strategically slides them out of the booth. Shane seems very disturbed by the idea of walking, but Hayden knows that if Ilya carried him out of here, and a photo of it somehow found its way online by tomorrow morning, he'd be even more upset. Ilya seems to be aware of this too, reluctantly forcing Shane to lean into his side.

“He’s going to fall asleep on me if I do not get him to the car,” Ilya says, wrapping an arm around Shane’s waist so that he doesn’t fall over. “Tell Jackie happy birthday again, we love her more than you, and tell your kids I say you should not have made them stay home.”

“I won’t be doing any of that, by the way,” Hayden deadpans, and Ilya laughs.

“Goodnight, Pike,” he says, a genuine smile flashing across his face as he steers Shane safely out of the crowded club. Hayden watches them go, gathering Jackie and Rose’s coats from the booth.

He thinks about everything that was said tonight, and he thinks about the years he spent assuming Ilya Rozanov was a grade A womanizer. He thinks about how Ilya spent every single one of those years trying to figure out a way to be close to Shane forever, and he thinks about the fact that Ilya so casually admitted to choosing Shane over everything he’d ever known. The ease with which he said it all— void of any pain, resentment, or blame. Like he’d do it again in a heartbeat, if he could, because Shane was worth it.

Hayden swears it’s the alcohol talking when he finds himself thinking that maybe, just *maybe*, Ilya Rozanov isn’t so bad after all.

III

Hayden’s been meaning to watch the documentary the MLH put together featuring Shane and Ilya, he really *has*, but he also has four children that are all at a very attention-requiring time in their lives, so documentaries about his friends have fallen to the wayside. It’s not until Shane and Ilya come over for lunch that he gets around to it.

Shane is in the kitchen with Jackie, helping prepare the food, and Hayden would’ve forced them to let him in there too so that he didn’t have to be stuck alone with Ilya again, but the kids were home this time, so he let it slide.

They’re in the living room, Arthur educating Ilya on every dinosaur in the goddamn book, and Ilya is eating up every last word. Ruby and Jade are drawing on his arm, because he made the terrible mistake of telling them they could design his next tattoo, and Hayden is watching it all go down with a lap full of sleepy toddler. Amber had woken up from her nap around ten minutes ago, and hadn’t wanted to do anything but sit with Hayden on the couch, content to observe her siblings and Ilya in peace.

Hayden, however, is *bored*.

He turns on the TV, and flips through channels mindlessly. His gaze lands on one listed in the guide as the exact documentary he’s been meaning to watch, and he figures now is as good a time as ever. He selects the channel, and lets it become background noise in the busy house. He’s not even paying it that much attention, because he *does* have to be a good father, and make sure his children don’t set something on fire, but about ten minutes after he puts the documentary on the TV, Ruby wanders over to the couch, and plops down next to him, snuggling into his side.

He's focused on making sure Amber doesn't fall from where she's decided to settle herself on Ilya's shoulders, when he hears Ruby gasp beside him.

"What happened to uncle Shane?" She asks, grabbing onto Hayden's arm. He redirects his attention to the TV, surprised to see that the documentary has included footage from the game against Boston, when Marleau checked Shane hard enough to land him in the hospital. Hayden doesn't remember much of what anyone else was doing on the ice, because he was busy defending his best friend's honor, and watching the replay of it all makes him feel completely removed from the situation itself.

He watches as his own figure flies into the frame, shoving at Marleau, and he hears Jade say something about how *pushing is mean*, and *Daddy needs to apologize*.

Hayden nods along dumbly, eyes glued to the screen where Ilya's figure has been hovering over Shane, the refs doing their best to push him back. Somehow, every time, Ilya finds a way back to Shane's side. Hayden can't even see himself on the ice anymore, but Ilya is still by Shane's side, yelling something inaudible to the announcers.

It wasn't inaudible to Hayden, though, and everything about that day suddenly comes back to him, clear as day.

He remembers Ilya yelling at the refs. He thinks that *pleading* might be a better word, now that Hayden thinks of it. Because that's what Ilya was doing, even if no one recognized it at the time. Hayden had heard him too, remembers how many times Ilya begged them to let him see Shane, asking anyone who would listen if Shane was going to be okay.

Hayden, at the time, had seen an aggravated captain, needing to know how much he'd have to defend his teammate's actions in his post-game interviews. Knowing what he knows now, he can only see someone who has just watched the person they love the most get knocked out so hard they couldn't get back up. He thinks about what he would have done had it been him in Ilya's position, watching Jackie go down the way Shane did, and feels a rush of respect for Ilya's ability to keep himself from rocking the shit of everyone on the ice.

"Why isn't uncle Shane moving, daddy?" He hears Jade pipe up from the Lego set she's shifted to playing with. Hayden's pretty sure it's another one Ilya got for her, because he very rarely purchases his children any toys with parts small enough to wind up on the floor, posing danger to literally everyone walking around without shoes on.

"Is he going to be okay?" Arthur asks, and Hayden holds back the urge to point out that the 'he' in question is quite literally one room away, making him a sandwich. If parenting has taught him anything, it's patience; even when your children ask stupid questions.

"Yes, Art, uncle Shane will be okay. This happened a long time ago," Hayden explains, his gaze falling on Ilya.

He quickly realizes that the entire time the clip has been rolling, Ilya has been silent. His eyes are trained unmovingly on the TV, his expression stony. A clip from years ago still seems to jar him, more than Hayden expected it to. Yes, at the time, it was scary. However, it could have been much worse, and Shane is completely fine now. Has been, actually, for *years*.

There's something in the back of his mind, telling him that there's more to this; that whatever happened on the ice that day cut Ilya deeper than everyone had assumed, for a reason Hayden knew wasn't even remotely related to his role as a captain for the other team. Ilya's stiffened form and clenched jaw, even all these years later, seem to be rooted in something else, and Hayden hates how badly he wanted to know *what*.

"Why did that man push him?" Ruby asks, and Hayden snaps back to the present.

"Sometimes that happens in hockey," Hayden tells her, running a gentle hand through her hair. "He didn't mean to hurt uncle Shane, he was only trying to steal the puck, but sometimes what we mean to do matters less than what we actually end up doing."

"Uncle Ilya was watching him a lot," Ruby comments, and Hayden can't help but sneak a glance at the other man. He's still watching the screen, even though the clip is no longer playing, having switched to commercial break. He gives Ilya the chance to step in, not sure if he even has something to say that won't cause the kids to ask at least twenty more invasive questions. When he stays silent, Hayden takes over.

"He was worried," Hayden says carefully. "We all were," he tacks on, trying to redirect the conversation. "If someone pushed Jade at school, and she got hurt, you would be worried, yeah?"

Ruby nods, starting to grasp what Hayden's getting at. "Because when someone you love is hurt, it makes you worry."

"Exactly," he confirms, "we love uncle Shane, so it made us worried. But he's all better now, and that's all that matters."

Ruby seems satisfied with his answer, and Ilya has finally gone back to letting Amber pile a bunch of fake food from her play kitchen into his lap.

Eventually, to Hayden's relief, Jackie collects the kids, telling them to clean up and wash their hands before coming to the table. Flicking off the TV, Hayden looks over at Ilya as the kids file out of the room, leaving them alone again.

"I'm, uh," he says, trying to figure out how to go about this. "I'm sorry about them. They're very curious kids, as you know."

Ilya forces a small smile, and shrugs. "Is nothing. It happened so long ago, yes? No big deal, now." Hayden doesn't point out how obvious it is that, to Ilya, it clearly is *something*.

"You were scared," he says instead. Because that's so much better than prying, of course.

"Thank you for telling me Pike, I was not aware of this before now," Ilya deadpans.

Hayden sighs, "yeah, I didn't realize how stupid that sounded until I said it."

Ilya huffs out a laugh, and shakes his head. He stands up from his place on the floor, and Hayden expects him to go find Shane in the kitchen, if not because he wants to help with lunch, then because the two of them are like fucking magnets, always drawn to each other

regardless of how far apart they are. Instead, to his surprise, Ilya plops down on the opposite end of the couch, and turns his body to face Hayden.

“Go ahead,” Ilya says, waving a hand in his direction, “ask what I know you want to ask.”

Hayden really needs to work on controlling his facial expressions. “How did your mother die?” He asks, because he’s a piece of shit, who also needs to work on thinking before he speaks. He shuts himself up immediately, realizing that there could not have been a more inappropriate time for him to bring this particular thing up.

It’s been in the back of his mind for a while now, the need to know. He knows that the foundation is named after Ilya’s mother, and that it supports mental health for a reason, but he didn’t want to assume anything. He remembers Shane briefly mentioning that she died before Ilya got drafted, but that was all he shared about it. Hayden hadn’t pushed for more at the time, because he hadn’t exactly known that Ilya was going to end up becoming a permanent fixture in his social life, and he didn’t particularly care to know any more about him than he absolutely had to.

Now, though, he realizes that knowing Ilya requires knowing where and *what* he comes from, why he is the way he is. He supposes that—like anyone else carrying a grief as heavy as Ilya does—knowing him requires knowing his grief. He ignores what it means that he *wants* to know that part of Ilya for now, because he’s pretty sure that’s something he could only unpack with a licensed professional. Also, he’s not in the mood for Jackie to have another reason to say *I told you so*.

“I’m doing well, Pike, thanks for asking,” Ilya says sarcastically, looking very unimpressed at Hayden’s assumption of his boundaries.

“Yeah, that probably wasn’t the right thing to say,” he flushes, scratching a hand at the back of his neck. “You don’t have to answer it, we can just ignore that I ever said that.”

Ilya seems to consider the idea, before settling on his answer. “No, is okay. I see where they get their curiosity from,” he nods in the direction that the kids went. It goes silent between them, and for a minute, Hayden thinks Ilya’s changed his mind about telling him.

“She was very sad,” he starts slowly, his face reminiscent. “Not weak, just sad. She tried so hard to be happy for me, for Andrei, but sometimes...” he trails off, swallowing hard. “Sometimes you cannot help it, no?”

Hayden nods, still somewhat shocked that Ilya’s even willing to tell him any of this.

“There were days that she could not move because of it. My father—” Ilya’s expression sours at the mention of him, and Hayden doesn’t blame him. “He did not care that she was sad. He made the doctor give her medicine, and thought that fixed all of it.”

“That’s not how that works, I don’t think,” Hayden supplies, uselessly.

“Wow, Pike, you are smarter than I thought,” Ilya deadpans, and Hayden rolls his eyes. “But no, is not how it works, you are right. At least, not for her. Or it worked a little too much.”

Hayden may be a dumbass, but he knows how to connect two dots. He kind of wishes he didn't right now, though. Because, *oh*.

"I found her, but it was too late. She was so still, and I didn't know what to do, because no one cared about her— Andrei, my father— none of them cared about her, none of them *loved* her. But *I* did," Ilya insists, like he's trying to prove it. Hayden doesn't know how to tell him that he *knows*, that he can tell by the way Ilya talks about her, and by how much he still grieves her.

"And when we bury her, *still*, no one cares. Everyone acts like nothing happened; I am the only one crying, the only one who begged them not to put her in the ground. But papa holds me back, and Andrei tells me to *grow up*, and nobody cares that she is dead." Ilya's voice shakes on the last part of his sentence, and Hayden never meant to make him relive *any* of this.

"You found her," Hayden repeats, because he can't fucking imagine what that felt like. "You — how *old* were you?" Ilya lets out a shaky breath, his eyes looking at anything other than Hayden.

"Twelve."

Hayden feels a foreign ache in his chest, suspiciously close to where his heart resides.

"Rozanov," he starts, his eyes trained on the glassy sheen that now covers Ilya's. "I didn't know that was...that you were...I didn't know." Jesus Christ, maybe *he's* the asshole. "I'm so sorry."

Ilya shrugs, obviously trying to blink back his tears. "You didn't know. Is not your fault, Pike."

"I know, but I can still be sorry that it happened." He takes a second to really process what Ilya's just told him. "I mean, holy *shit*. That's terrible, man. I know I'm probably not helping, like, at all, but Jackie told me that sometimes the best way to be there for someone is to just acknowledge how shitty life can be sometimes, so. Not that I think you even *want* me to be there for you, so y'know, but—"

"Pike, is okay. It *was* shit. And Jackie is right, like always," he says, a small smirk forcing its way onto his face.

Hayden thinks back to the night that Shane went down on the ice, and how still he'd been. He remembers how Shane lost consciousness for a few minutes at least, and he thinks about how Ilya spent every single one desperately trying to find out if he would ever wake up. It dawns on him, then.

"So when Shane got checked all those years ago..." he trails off, his brain working overtime to make sense of things.

Ilya nods slowly, confirming everything that Hayden needs to know without saying a single word.

“Shit, dude. That must have been,” he tries to find the right word, “terrifying.” That’s the only way he thinks he could describe the feeling of seeing a person you love laying motionless on the ground for the *second* time in your life. Ilya’s hovering and insistence starts to make a lot more sense now.

He thought Shane was dead, Hayden realizes, horrified at the thought.

He thought Shane was dead, just like his mother.

“Is okay, Pike,” Ilya says with a short laugh, “I go to therapy already. You do not have to know how to handle this.”

“I know,” Hayden frowns, “and maybe this is selfish, but I kinda feel like an asshole right now.”

“You are,” Ilya says, completely serious. “Does that help?”

“Fuck off,” Hayden groans, and Ilya laughs for the first time since Hayden turned that stupid documentary on. “When Shane went down, and you kept trying to get to him, I was *glad* the refs held you back. And now, I feel like an asshole, because if that was Jackie, and someone held me back from getting to her, I would have set the whole place on fire.”

“Is okay, Pike. You did not know about us, back then. All you knew was what the media said, which was never true,” Ilya assures him.

“Well, I still feel like I should apologize,” Hayden sighs, leaning back into the couch.

“What the hell happened while I was gone?” Shane’s voice cuts through the air. He emerges from the kitchen, dish towel thrown over his shoulder, a bit of strawberry jam smudged on his cheek. “Why the fuck are you two being civil to each other?”

Ilya’s face breaks into a sickeningly sweet smile, and Hayden nearly has to look away from how bright it is. “Hayden has just told me that he thinks I am better player than you, malysh,” he says smugly, and Hayden scoffs.

“*Obviously* I did not say that,” he protests, watching Shane make his way over to where Ilya is sitting. He goes easily when Ilya pulls him down onto his lap, and Hayden is tempted to use his children as a reason to make them break apart.

“It’s okay, Hayd,” Shane snorts, wrapping an arm around Ilya’s shoulders. “I’m well aware you would rather die than compliment him.”

“Is not true, he is lying to you, what a terrible friend,” Ilya fakes an overly dramatic frown, leaning in to lick the jam off of Shane’s cheek. Shane removes the dish towel from his shoulder, and promptly swats him with it.

“Is our lunch ready?” Hayden asks, already done with having to watch them exist in their own bubble.

“Yeah, Jackie’s just getting the kids settled. She asked me to tell you to set the table, though,” Shane says, completely immune to the way Ilya has buried his head in his neck.

“God bless,” Hayden sighs in relief, getting up from the couch. “Can you two keep your hands off each other until my children are at least on another floor of the house?”

Shane opens his mouth to answer, but Ilya slaps a hand over his mouth, and smirks. “No. Is not possible. Sorry.”

“No you’re not,” Hayden sighs, turning on his heel to go find his wife.

“No I’m not!” he hears Ilya yell after him as he wanders into the kitchen.

Jackie shoves a handful of napkins and silverware into his arms, and thanks him with a kiss on the cheek. As he sets the table, he hears Shane asking Ilya what *actually* went down between the two of them, and Ilya telling him it can wait for later.

He would never tell anyone, but he’s glad that they finally had that conversation. He’s glad that Ilya trusted him to tell him all of that, and he’s glad that he took all of Hayden’s stupid, overly nosy questions in stride.

He’s on his last bite of salad when Ilya makes a joke about curiosity running in the family, shooting Hayden a wink, like it’s something only they can understand. Jackie and Shane look at them like they’ve both grown another head, and Hayden is struck by a *mortifying* realization.

Ilya Rozanov is his friend.

IV

Later that night, Hayden sits perched on the edge of Ruby’s bed, rubbing her back to help her fall asleep. Across the room, Ilya is practically a mirror image of him, doing the same for Jade. If you’d told him ten years ago that Ilya fucking Rozanov would be helping him put his daughters to bed, he would have contacted the nearest mental hospital.

Ruby’s breathing evened out a few minutes ago, but Hayden knows that if he stops now, she’ll wake up and tell him that he needs to start again. Jade is the same way, and Ilya knows that, which is another thing that took Hayden a while to process. The fact that Ilya knows his daughter’s sleeping patterns, and how to get them to doze off within minutes— it wasn’t the easiest pill to swallow, at first. Now, he doesn’t pay any mind to the way Ilya automatically heads upstairs when the twins’ bedtime approaches.

He goes over the day’s events in his head, cataloging every piece of information that he took in. He thinks back to the conversation he and Ilya had about the documentary, and his brain snags on one jagged little detail.

“Wait,” he says under his breath, his eyes snapping up to face Ilya. “Rozanov,” he hisses, trying to keep his voice low, so as not to wake up the twins.

“What could you possibly want from me now, Pike?” Ilya replies, not looking up from where he’s watching Jade sleep. It would be creepy, if he didn’t know that it was Ilya’s way of making sure not a single sign of struggle or stress was interrupting their sleep.

“About what you said earlier,” Hayden starts, and Ilya sighs.

“This cannot wait, Pike?”

“I mean, it can. Probably. But it just hit me now, so I had to ask,” Hayden shrugs, his hand moving to gently comb through Ruby’s hair.

“Ask what?” Ilya says, somewhat exhausted.

“Never mind, it can wait—”

“Oh my God, Pike, you are so annoying,” Ilya cuts him off, rolling his eyes. “Go,” he gestures for Hayden to continue, “ask your nosy question.” Hayden frowns, but Ilya’s not exactly *wrong*, so there’s not much else he can say to defend himself.

“What you said earlier, about your mother?” He starts, making sure their voices haven’t roused either of the twins.

“Ah, yes. Please, bring up my dead mother while I help put your child to sleep, Pike. Is such a fond memory, and fits the mood very well, I think,” Ilya says sarcastically.

“Hey!” Hayden hisses, “you said I could ask.” Ilya sighs, but nods for him to continue. “You said you buried your mother, after she died.”

Ilya nods, narrowing his eyes at him. “That is not a question, Pike. What is your point here?”

“If you buried her, then I assume it was in Russia. And...” Hayden doesn’t want to say it out loud. The words taste bad in his mouth. “*You can’t go back there.*”

Ilya is silent for a moment, his face unreadable. “You are correct. Still no question,” he points out, his voice completely void of any emotion.

“Did you ever visit her grave when you lived in Russia?” Hayden asks, not sure if he even wants the answer at this point.

“Of course,” Ilya nods, his face softening a little. “Is one of the only reasons I went back. Other than to take care of my father, so Andrei would stop calling me saying I am terrible excuse for a son.”

Everything Hayden learns about Ilya Rozanov makes him realize how *wrong* the world is about him, let alone how *long* they’ve been wrong.

He remembers the first time he heard about Ilya Rozanov—the overly aggressive, ruthless player, who had a tendency to check people for no reason. He remembers finding out that this so-called Eastern European monster was his age. He remembers being *eighteen* years old. A newly minted adult, still young and confused about the world, and what his place in it was.

He was stupid at eighteen, because he was allowed to be, and because it's okay to be stupid when you're eighteen.

Thinking back on it now, he doesn't think the media has ever allowed Ilya to be young and stupid. The entire time Hayden has known him, and known *of* him, he has been Ilya Rozanov; violent player and serial womanizer. The media was saying those things about a *child*, and no one had given a shit, because Ilya had never spoken up for himself. He'd never protested their unfounded claims, and he never tried to prove them wrong, either. Which, now that Hayden knows the things he does, makes perfect fucking sense.

Ilya was eighteen, carrying an immense amount of delayed grief across an ocean to a country that spoke a language he wasn't familiar with, leaving the only parent he had left, whose health was rapidly declining, and was greeted by the Western media with nothing but lies. From the moment he made a name for himself, it was covered in lies. Lies about his personality, lies about his sex life, lies about his integrity. Everything the general public knew about him for the first half of his career was an awful fucking *lie*. And he was expected to shoulder it, because he was one of the best players in the league, and letting people's opinions get to him would have thrown off his game, or made him look weak.

He remembers that night at the bar, when Ilya mentioned that he'd read popular books in English so that he could speak it better. He remembers Ilya mentioning that when he was playing for Boston, he really only had one friend he could actually talk to, who he could be himself with, and speak his mother tongue with. He remembers when Shane started learning Russian so that he could speak it with Ilya, and how happy it made Ilya when Shane would casually slip into it during conversation.

He thinks memory is a fucking *curse*.

Without it, he wouldn't be forced to realize just how much Ilya has actually gone through.

"You went home every summer to take care of your dad?" Hayden asks, deciding that out of all the things he's said tonight, it's not the farthest out of bounds.

"Yes," Ilya shrugs, sighing. "Mama died because I could not help her when she was sick; I would not be able to live with myself if papa died that way too. Even if he hated me for it, just like everything else."

Hayden feels a secondhand hatred directed at Ilya's father, and it's the most confusing thing he's felt in a while.

"It's not your fault that your mother died, Rozanov," he says softly, because he's not sure anyone has ever told Ilya that. And Hayden thinks that, if anything, Ilya deserves to know that. He deserves to believe it, and to know that others believe it as well. He deserves to know that *it wasn't his fault*.

Ilya looks at him, his hand stilling on Jade's back. He leans back on the wall that Jade's bed sits against, and resumes rubbing her back. His eyes don't meet Hayden's when he finally opens his mouth to speak.

“Sometimes I wonder if things would be different, if I had paid more attention.”

Hayden’s shaking his head before Ilya even finishes his thought. “You were *twelve*, man. It wasn’t your fault.”

Ilya purses his lips, and deflates against the wall. “She didn’t want to take medicine,” he starts softly. “She begged my father not to give her medicine— to let her talk to someone instead. She didn’t trust herself with medicine.”

Hayden nods in understanding, because there’s not much else he can do, is there?

“After mama, I was so scared; when papa started to get sick, I knew they would give him medicine, and it made me so scared to think about what happens when I am not home to make sure he does not take too much. Andrei does not care about him— he just wants money. If papa dies, he gets the money, so I knew he would not take care of him properly.” Ilya grimaces, and even in the low light, Hayden can tell he’s holding back tears. “Every time I go home to Russia during off-season, papa has gotten worse. And I know is because he is not taking his medicine, but I couldn’t decide if that was better than him taking too much.”

“Fuck,” Hayden can’t help but say, because the whole situation is...*fucked*. Ilya nods, as if he finds Hayden’s outburst amusing.

“Indeed,” he agrees with the slightest hint of a smile.

“I thought you hated him,” Hayden says, letting the hand on Ruby’s back fall to his side.

Ilya considers it for a moment, cocking his head to the side in thought. “He was terrible to me. He took so many things from me that I will never get back, and I hate that he did that.” He frowns, conflicted. “But when he got sick, the dementia made him forget what I had left for him to take. I take care of him because if I don’t, I will be guilty. I take care of him, because I am selfish, and do not want more guilt.”

“When he died, did you bury him too?” Hayden pries, because apparently nothing is too out of line tonight.

“Yes, but not where mama is.” Ilya seems to shudder a little at the idea, and Hayden doesn’t blame him. “He is next to his parents, where he wanted to be. She is far away from him, where *she* wanted to be.”

“She’s far away from you too,” Hayden points out, the statement becoming more jarring when he says it out loud.

Ilya nods sadly. “That was the only thing that made it hard to leave Russia.”

“So why did you?” he asks, before realizing he already knows the answer. The answer is sitting downstairs with his wife, probably wondering if he needs to come keep them from strangling each other. The answer is his best friend, the godfather of his children, and one of the only people on planet earth that Hayden would agree is worth abandoning everything for.

“I think you know, Pike,” Ilya says, looking smug.

“I do, yeah,” Hayden admits, leaning back against the wall, mirroring Ilya’s position. “How long did it take after your dad died? For you to make that decision, I mean.”

“Did not take any time at all,” Ilya says, frowning. “When Andrei called me to tell me about papa, I know before I even get on the plane that is last time I will ever go to Russia.” He goes silent, his eyes lost in thought. “It was hard to leave mama, yes, but I remember what she used to tell me, and then it was not so hard to get on plane home.”

“What did she tell you?” Hayden asks, lost as to how he wound up giving a shit about Ilya Rozanov’s upbringing.

“She told me all the time, *Ilyusha, you deserve to be happy*,” Ilya says with a fond smile. “She would tell me, *you should be with someone who makes you smile*. Is why I knew I had to go; she wanted me to be happy, and he makes me happy.”

“So you chose him,” Hayden states, more than asks. “You chose him over being able to visit your mother’s grave.”

The smile doesn’t leave Ilya’s face as he nods along. “And I would do it again in a heartbeat.”

Hayden doesn’t doubt it for a second. “I don’t want to overstep—”

“That’s new,” Ilya cuts him off with a snort.

“Okay fine, I won’t be nice,” Hayden glares at him, causing Ilya to stifle a laugh. He’s obviously trying not to wake the twins, and Hayden can at least be grateful for that.

“No, tell me Pike,” Ilya pouts, jutting his lower lip out dramatically. He looks like a child trying to convince Hayden to let him have ice cream before dinner. It’s ridiculous, and immature, and it only reminds him that Ilya probably never got to beg for ice cream before dinner. From the glimpses of Ilya’s childhood that he’s provided, Hayden suspects that he spent a good portion of it begging for other things. Things a child shouldn’t have to worry about; a father who loves him, a brother who wants him around, a mother who isn’t so consumed by an uncontrollable sadness. Eventually, Ilya would have had to beg for a mother who was *still alive*.

It’s an overdramatic analysis of the stupidly childish expression on Ilya’s face as he asks Hayden to be nice to him, but, still. The thought doesn’t exactly leave his mind.

“I was just going to say,” Hayden starts, watching as Ilya’s face goes smug with the realization that Hayden’s given in. “I know I never met your mom, or knew her, even, but,” he pauses, hoping what he says next doesn’t come out wrong. “I think she would be really proud of you, and the life that you’ve made for yourself.”

Ilya’s face has shifted, a flicker of gratitude peeking through the ever-present grief. Neither of them speak for a bit, leaving the room blanketed in a comfortable silence. Hayden’s not sure how they got here, but he’s not mad about it. He’s also unsure of how to feel about that fact, but he’ll unpack it later.

“Thank you, Pike,” Ilya breaks the silence, his voice soft and sincere. It’s not the teasing tone he usually takes on when he speaks, and it’s a foreign sound to Hayden. Ilya’s got a sad smile painted on his face, and Hayden wasn’t aware he was capable of feeling this many emotions.

He shrugs, as if to say *it’s nothing*.

The look on Ilya’s face seems to disagree with him, and Hayden distantly remembers his mother taking him aside at their local soup kitchen where they volunteered once a month, and telling him that sometimes, what feels like *nothing* to one person, is *everything* to another. It’s not the best comparison situation-wise, but the lesson still rings true, he thinks.

He can say anything, because at the end of the day, he still won’t be able to fully understand the emotional weight that Ilya carries with him. Nothing he says has to matter to *him*, because he’s not the one carrying it. It *does* have to matter to Ilya, though, because he can’t forget about it. It’s a part of him, as much as any of his organs are, and he will carry every burden, trauma, and memory with him until the day he dies. Hayden doesn’t know what it’s like, and he doesn’t *wish* to know, either. Sympathy is a privilege, and in this moment, Hayden has never felt more fortunate.

So, he shrugs, as if to say *it’s nothing*, even when he can tell that, to Ilya, it’s at *least* something.

V

The first time Hayden hears them discuss it, he’s too drunk to pay any mind to it.

He’s laying on a couch in Shane and Ilya’s living room, his head in Jackie’s lap while her hands gently play with his hair, and they’ve all had way too many glasses of wine for one night. On the couch opposite to Hayden, Shane is comfortably draped over Ilya’s chest, and the conversation they’re having is not one he ever thought he’d have to witness.

The thing is, Shane and wine do not compliment each other. Depending on who you ask, that is.

Shane thinks that it makes him too vulnerable. Jackie thinks that it makes him adorably needy. Hayden thinks it makes him too confident. He doesn’t really want to talk about what Ilya thinks it does.

Technically, a wine-drunk Shane isn’t that dangerous. However, a wine-drunk Shane in the same room as his husband is an absolute hurricane of emotions and clinginess. Typically, Ilya revels in it, while Shane regrets it in the morning, and promises to swear off all alcohol. And then, it happens all over again the next time the four of them decide to get together.

It’s a pattern he’s gotten so used to, and he’s genuinely considered the idea of recording his conversations. He needs witnesses for when Shane denies anything he says after a third glass, because that’s when his inhibitions seem to take their lunch break, leaving him to do as much damage to his dignity as he so pleases.

The topic of kids is one Hayden knows they've discussed, but he's not sure what extent that discussion has gone to. He knows both Shane and Ilya want them, and he can say from firsthand experience that they would make incredible parents, but they're also full time professional athletes, so he's never really questioned why they haven't gone through with the whole parenthood thing yet. He'd always assumed it was hockey that kept them from deciding to start down that road.

Jackie's complaining about Amber's recent discovery of Jade and Ruby's immaculate slime collection, when Shane lets out an incredibly dramatic sigh. Ilya smiles, his hand rubbing comforting circles over his husband's back, and Hayden doesn't think much of it until Shane decides that he needs everyone to know why he's so upset.

"I want a baby," he pouts, his face half buried in Ilya's neck. Hayden watches as Ilya's expression goes from content to something unreadable, but he doesn't point it out, because it's none of his business. That, and he's acutely aware of the catalyst that alcohol is for Shane's emotional state. He'd rather not comment on Ilya's obvious unease while Shane is at risk of bursting into tears over the mere idea of his husband ever feeling anything but profound happiness. Hayden has been there, done that, and heard it all. He can't exactly say he wants a repeat experience.

"I know, sweetheart," Ilya says, somewhat sadly.

Hayden can't for the life of him understand why, though, and it's bothering him.

"I know we said we'd wait until we retire, but that's so far from now," Shane whines, and Hayden can see tears gathering at his lashline. Ilya frowns, his hand coming up to stroke Shane's cheek, thumb swiping away the tears that threaten to fall. He looks about ready to cry himself, and Hayden is *so fucking confused*.

Retirement is a long way off for the both of them, and the MLH will be an entirely different organization when they eventually hang up their skates. He understands why they want to wait, but he also understands why Shane doesn't want to anymore. Balancing kids and his career was hard, even with Jackie being able to be at home full-time. He can't imagine how hard it would be if she was in the same line of work as him, constantly travelling and working her body to the bone for nine out of twelve months in the year.

Ilya's nodding absentmindedly at everything Shane says, a far off look on his face. Hayden stays quiet, filing it away for another time. He lets Jackie's hands soothe him to sleep, and forgets about the entire thing by the time she leads him out to their car, drowsy and on the cusp of a hangover.

The season starts back up again, and they each go back to their respective teams, returning to opposite sides of the ice. Shane and Ilya come around less often, schedules fill up, and the summer becomes a blur.

It's not until the Centaurs win the cup (again), that Hayden finds himself thinking back to that night in his best friend's living room.

Somehow, the rumor that Shane and Ilya are thinking about starting a family makes its way to Hayden, and he can't help but be a little annoyed that he didn't hear it from the source. He thinks that more than a decade of friendship and support warrants transparency, but what does he know? He tries not to be bitter; he gives Shane a week after he learns about it, before he takes matters into his own hands.

And then, in an incredibly disappointing turn of events, *Ilya* is the one to break the news. Which isn't really something Hayden plans on unpacking. Like, ever. The fact that Ilya told him about this very life changing decision before Shane did does not bother him at *all*, and it does *not* keep him up at night.

Ilya's helping him build a dollhouse, of all things, when it happens.

"I'm going to be a dad, Pike."

Just like that. No prying on Hayden's end, no sarcasm or jokes on Ilya's. Terse, and seemingly emotionless, Ilya Rozanov tells Hayden that he's going to be a father, and doesn't elaborate any further on the matter.

Hayden isn't sure what he's meant to say. Jackie and Shane are wrapping presents in the guest bedroom, because Amber's birthday is tomorrow, and they hadn't realized how many they'd bought. They'd gotten her a dollhouse, and Jackie had originally tasked Hayden with building it on his own, until Ilya found out about it, and insisted that he be a part of the project. Something about Hayden not being good at reading instruction manuals, or whatever.

He kind of wishes he'd been more resistant to the whole idea of letting Ilya help him, because now he's sitting on the floor of his living room, trying to decipher whether or not Ilya even *wants* to be a parent.

"So the rumors are true," he says slowly, handing Ilya the piece the instruction manual says he needs. Ilya takes it and nods, never once looking up at him.

"Shane did not tell you?" He asks, eyes trained on the screw he's using to connect two other pieces.

"No," Hayden replies, trying not to sound too offended. He's sure there's a good reason for it, but he's allowed to be a little put out, he thinks. "I'm not sure what I did to make you trust me more than him, but that's not important right now."

"Is not a matter of trust, Pike," Ilya says, leaning back to make sure the frame he's been constructing is secure. "I asked him not to."

Hayden scoffs. "What the hell? Why?" Ilya finally looks up at him, staring at him as if he should know why. "I know I'm not known to be your biggest fan, but come *on*, man. I wouldn't be an asshole about *this*."

"I know," Ilya says calmly, reaching for the piece that Hayden forgot was even in his hands. "Not everything is about you, Pike."

Hayden rolls his eyes, “I know that, you dick. But why are you allowed to talk about it, and not Shane?”

A pained expression flashes across Ilya’s face, and Hayden thinks he might have imagined it.

“Do not get a big head about this,” Ilya says, setting down the screwdriver, and sitting up straight. Hayden is sure his confusion is evident, because he doesn’t have to ask before Ilya explains. “I need advice.”

His eyes nearly pop out of his fucking skull. “*Advice?*”

Ilya rolls his eyes, and goes back to screwing two boards together. “Yes, Pike. Advice. On how to be a good father.”

“*You* think *I’m* a good father?” Hayden asks in disbelief. Not because he thinks he’s a shit dad, but because up until now, he was sure Ilya was deathly allergic to complimenting him.

“You have been producing children for centuries,” Ilya says, shrugging. “All so far are angels, I assume at least some of that is your fault.” He pauses, his gaze falling on Hayden’s shocked expression. “Though, I know it is mostly Jackie’s,” he adds, because he may not be deathly allergic, but a sneeze or two isn’t out of the question.

“Why do you need advice on how to be a good father?” Hayden asks, still somewhat confused about the entire conversation. “You’re great with kids. I know for a fact that multiple people have told you that to your face. Like I did just now,” he points out.

“Yes, I know,” Ilya says, his voice less sure than Hayden thinks he means for it to be. “But those are not my kids. Is why I am good with them.”

It takes a second for him to realize what Ilya’s insinuating.

“You think you won’t be good with kids if they’re your own?” Ilya flinches at the statement, and Hayden can’t help but pry. “What makes you believe that you won’t be just as good, if not *better* with your own children?”

Ilya stays silent for a moment, hand stilling in place where it’s been screwing a nail into two boards. Hayden doesn’t push, because he’s learned that if he’s patient, Ilya will open up on his own. He purposely does *not* think about the fact that he’s memorized Ilya’s conversational tells and tendencies.

“I do not know how to be a good father,” Ilya admits softly. “I only know how to be a bad one.” Hayden hates how much the admission stings.

Ilya doesn’t talk about his dad much, and Hayden knows that the guy was far from *kind*, but he never really thought about the fact that Ilya grew up without a single positive male role model for him to look up to, or learn from. Every prominent man in his life— his father, his coach, his brother— was *cruel* to him. He has no reference point for how to act, now that he’s in their position, and if Hayden is interpreting the look on his face correctly, it *terrifies* him.

“I think—” Hayden pauses, unsure of whether he’ll be able to properly communicate what he wants to say, “I think that *because* you know how to be a bad one, you will be a *great* one.”

When he looks over at Ilya, there’s a glossy sheen over his eyes, made up of tears that are begging to fall. Hayden wonders just how long they’ve been waiting to.

“Look, Rozanov,” Hayden sighs, setting the instruction manual aside. “I know we give each other shit, and heart to hearts aren’t really our thing, and if you tell Shane what I’m about to say, I’ll wring your fucking neck.” Ilya snorts, and Hayden cracks a small smile. “All jokes aside, though, I need you to know that I mean it when I say you are going to be the best father that child could ever ask for. And there is no doubt in my mind that you will be everything for *them* that your father wasn’t for *you*.”

Ilya swallows hard, and inhales shakily. “You make it sound so easy,” he says, honestly. Hayden wasn’t even aware he could be this open and vulnerable, but you learn something new every day, he supposes.

“Maybe it is,” he shrugs, completely genuine.

Ilya is the only person who has ever immediately clicked with his children. As much as Hayden hated to see it at the time, every single one of his kids warmed to Ilya like it was second nature; like he’d been a constant in their lives since *birth*. Even *Shane* had to win Amber over, while Ilya had been in their house all of three seconds before she was reaching out for him, nearly falling out of Hayden’s arms with how aggressively she did so.

As crazy as it feels to admit, Ilya Rozanov is, at his core, *good*.

Hayden would never say it to his face, or to *anyone’s* face, on that note, but it was true, and he had accepted it a while ago. Maybe not consciously, but sitting on the floor of his living room on the night before his youngest child’s fifth birthday has changed the way Hayden sees Ilya. He could be anywhere else tonight, but instead, he’s helping Hayden build his daughter a dollhouse, and it’s exactly where he wants to be. Ilya doesn’t do things he doesn’t want to, Hayden knows all too well. The fact that he’s *here* speaks to his character much more than any news outlet or tabloid ever has.

“I can’t understand what you went through, Rozanov,” he starts, softly. “I wasn’t there, and I never knew your father, or the man that he was to you.”

Ilya winces, and Hayden’s heart kind of hurts.

“What I *can* say is that I’m here now, and I know *you*. I know the guy that I trust with my children, and the guy that makes my best friend happier than anything. I know the guy who buys my kids toys that he knows I never would, and who feeds them way too much sugar, because he has no fucking resolve. I know that when Shane is with you, the world feels lighter to him, and I know that it’s because you help him carry it. I know that Amber refuses to let anyone else braid her hair, and I know that Arthur won’t shut up about how cool his ‘*Uncle Ilya*’ is when he’s at school, and I know that Ruby and Jade did their *Role Model Profile* report on you last year.”

Hayden pointedly doesn't comment on the few tears that have managed to escape down Ilya's cheeks.

"My kids fucking *love you*, dude. As much as I used to hate it, there's no one else I would rather them look up to than you. You are good to them, and good to Shane, and good to Jackie. You are good to everyone that matters to me, and that's enough for me to know that you are good. And, most importantly; *you are not your father*." He knows that there's a good chance that the moment this is over, Ilya won't ever stop giving him shit for it, but he also knows that right now, Ilya needs to hear it. Ilya stares at him, his head tilted to the side, as if he's analyzing everything Hayden's just said.

"I didn't know you had this in you, Pike," he says, finally cracking a small smile. "Maybe you are smarter than I give you credit for."

Hayden lets out a sigh of relief, grateful to return to their usual back and forth. "Can I get that in writing? I don't think anyone will believe me if I tell them you said that."

"Nice try," Ilya smirks, reaching for the discarded construction pieces surrounding them on the floor. "You do not tell anyone I said this, I will not tell anyone you said that. Is between us, yes?"

"Deal," Hayden agrees, flipping to the next page in the instruction manual.

They go back to building, and neither of them mention it for the rest of the night. When they finish, they stand back, admiring their work. Amber is going to lose her fucking mind at the final product, Hayden thinks.

"We make a good team, Rozanov," Hayden pipes up, turning to look at Ilya where he's standing beside him.

Ilya turns his head towards him, a quick smile flashing across his face. "It appears we do, Pike," he agrees, much to Hayden's surprise.

It's a truce of some sort— an acknowledgement of all that they share, regardless of how resentful they are to accept it. The people they love, the sport they love, their whole-hearted dedication to all of it. Maybe they're more alike than Hayden originally thought.

He hears footsteps on the stairs, and turns to find Shane staring at them with an odd look on his face. He looks bewildered at the fact that they've managed to build the dollhouse without lodging any of the pieces into each other's ribs, and Hayden doesn't feel like telling him they haven't been that way for a *while* now.

After all, it's between them.

Ilya gravitates towards Shane, and Jackie eventually joins them, confirming that all the presents are wrapped, and promising to repay Shane and Ilya for all their help. Both of them deny needing any sort of compensation for their help, and Jackie shoos them out the door, insisting that they finally get some sleep. They promise to drop by the party tomorrow, and Ilya threatens to bring even more presents. Hayden sighs, knowing that he's telling the truth,

and mentally preparing for the state their house will be in tomorrow. Shane hops into the passenger seat, and Jackie raises a hand to wave goodbye. Ilya opens the door, turning to face them before he gets in.

“Pike!” He calls, catching Hayden by surprise. He tilts his head towards Hayden with a nod, a genuine look on his face. “Thank you.”

Jackie and Shane stare at them in complete confusion as Hayden returns the nod. “Anytime, Rozanov.”

Because Hayden Pike is a good friend, and Ilya Rozanov is both good, *and* his friend.

End Notes

leave a comment if you liked it, they always make my day 10000 times brighter!!

if you enjoyed this fic, i've written a similar one for the rwrp fandom :P y'all can find it here [my deep misunderstanding of your life](#)

also, for those of y'all who liked my social media fics, i feel it is only fair that i inform you that i have caved to peer pressure, and have started writing another installment for that series ;)

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