

there you are, my morning star

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there you are, my morning star

by [ingberry](#)

Summary

In a move that shocks the hockey world, Shane Hollander ends up signing to the Centaurs at the same time as Ilya Rozanov. Not only do they have years of rivalry behind them, but they've also shared a night neither of them can forget.

Or, a soulmate AU where their soulmarks grow stronger as their bond grows.

Notes

I noticed a criminal lack of soulmate AUs, so I'm here to add mine to the pile of offerings!

I made a pact with princebutt that I would actually post this as a WIP and not pre-write the whole thing, so here I am, holding on for the ride!

Thanks to learnthemusic for betaing for me ♥ All mistakes and weirdness is of course my own.

Title from You Without Me by Brandi Carlile

Note that if you're only watching the show, this mostly an AU but it spoils a couple of details and has characters that come in later!

- Translation into Русский available: [there you are, my morning star](#) by [muuguaucuaс](#)

Chapter 1: Prologue

Prologue - January 2011

Shane ended his Saturday night in the hotel gym instead of going out. His first All-Star weekend was turning out to be pretty fun, all things considered, but there was only so much socializing Shane Hollander could take, and especially with strangers. When it was on the ice, it was mostly fine, because Shane could do hockey. It was just the rest of it that wasn't Shane's wheelhouse.

Especially not when Ilya Rozanov was there.

He wasn't used to having to deal with Rozanov over such a long stretch of time. His intensity was manageable when the Voyageurs played against the Bears, if only because Shane could ram him against the boards and answer all of his chirping with smart plays. But Rozanov off the ice was a whole other beast. The way he sauntered in like he owned the room. When his lips tipped up into a cheeky smile. The way he'd hold Shane's gaze when their eyes met for far too long, leaving Shane wondering what it meant.

There was also the fact that he could have sworn that Rozanov was going to kiss him after their CCM shoot. Not that Shane had wanted him to, really, but he'd seen something in Rozanov's eyes, something intense and molten that had made Shane's stomach flip violently. Shane didn't want anything to do with it.

Then why couldn't he stop thinking about it? He'd done nothing but think about it all weekend. He thought about it when he stole glances at Rozanov during breakfast and when Shane had won the shot accuracy contest and looked over to see his reaction. Definitely thought about it when he tried to avoid looking at Rozanov in the shower. It made no sense. Maybe it was just Rozanov getting under his skin, just like he'd always done.

So, obviously, Shane wasn't going to go out with the rest of the All-Stars since Rozanov was in the middle of it all, noisily sharing his excitement. He could think of nothing worse. Instead, he ran until his brain quieted down, only focusing on the rhythmic footfalls of his shoes on the treadmill. He enjoyed the way his pulse beat faster and his body responded as he pushed it to its limit. His mood had already lifted and a shower afterwards would finally make him feel more himself.

Shane rounded the final corner towards his room and immediately ran straight into Ilya Rozanov. He was wearing a worn, brown leather jacket, his hair curling softly around his ears, his cheeks slightly flushed as he looked up. A slow smile spread on his face when he met Shane's eyes and Shane immediately felt off balance again, a small shiver running down his spine.

"Rozanov," he said, walking in a wide circle around him to get to his own room.

Except Rozanov followed him, leaning against the doorframe as Shane fumbled with his keycard. He was so close Shane could smell the faint scent of cigarettes and warm, spiced

cologne.

“Had fun with your boring night, Hollander?”

“Yes,” Shane said, pulling the door open. “Shouldn’t you be out tricking some poor girl into your bed?”

Rozanov’s hand shot out and held the door open, palm flat against it. Shane traced the movement with his eyes, looking back up into Rozanov’s face. His eyes were dark, setting Shane on edge.

“I do not need to trick anyone. I never have complaints,” Rozanov said, lips pulling up into a cocky grin. “Saw something you liked in the showers today, yes?”

Shane’s heart jumped into his throat, so taken aback that he didn’t even stop Rozanov from stepping inside and slamming the door shut behind him. He took an instinctive step back, his mind spinning. He’d made an effort not to look. Surely, he hadn’t been staring? And it wasn’t even like it—like he—

Images of water sliding down Rozanov’s broad, muscular back flashed in his mind. His ass had flexed in one particularly memorable moment. He remembered being drawn to those thick thighs, water running in rivers into dips and valleys. Fuck, he had been looking, and not even respectfully. Shane closed his eyes, mortified. His cheeks were flaming.

He jumped when a hand cupped his jaw and he opened his eyes to find Rozanov so close he could see the specks of dark brown in his hazel eyes. With startling clarity, he knew he’d been wrong all along. He wanted this so desperately it churned in his stomach. He thought he might die if he couldn’t have it. A small, needy sound escaped him when the hand on his jaw tightened and tipped his head back.

Rozanov drew him into a kiss that made his knees weak. His lips were firm and warm, his body strong as he pinned Shane against the wall and it burned him from the inside out. Clinging to Rozanov’s leather jacket, Shane surrendered entirely to the way it deepened. His mouth was hot and demanding, and Shane was kissing a man. He was kissing a man and he’d never been kissed like this ever in his life. Everything he’d tried so hard to keep down bubbled to the surface and he lost his mind, sucking on Rozanov’s tongue, earning a low moan. Rozanov’s body leaned even heavier into his, hands coming to grip Shane’s hips.

“Fuck, Hollander.” Rozanov’s breath came heavy. “If I knew you wanted it so much, I would have done it already.”

Shame pooled in his gut, mixing with desire, making him so hard he couldn’t see straight. He forced himself to scoff, though, trying to get in control of the situation. What he should actually be doing was tell Rozanov to leave and stop whatever this was. Instead, he pushed off the wall and drew Rozanov into a rough kiss, biting at his lower lip, moving them further into the hotel room.

The small advantage he’d gained was lost as Rozanov gripped his waist and pushed him down onto the edge of the bed, immediately grabbing his T-shirt to pull it off. Shane fell back

onto the mattress, propping himself up on his elbows, his spread legs hanging off the edge. His eyes were drawn to Rozanov standing at the foot of the bed looking like something out of Shane's wildest fantasies. Shane's mouth went dry as Rozanov shrugged off his leather jacket, tossing it to one side, and then, in a move that should be illegal, grabbed the back of his T-shirt to drag it over his head.

Shane had never been harder in his entire life. It felt like a small breeze could set him off, which was a problem, since he currently had a whole hurricane placing his hands on Shane's thighs. His hands were so large and Shane stared at them resting over his sweatpants. They were absolutely nothing like a girl's elegant, soft hands, and the difference made Shane moan shamelessly.

Rozanov dropped to his knees, brushing up Shane's inner thighs. Their eyes met and Shane swallowed as Rozanov hooked his thumb into the waistband of Shane's boxers, pulling both his boxers and his sweatpants down past his hips, then off entirely. Shane's eyes fluttered shut, his pulse racing at the thought of what he must look like, naked and fucking needy. His cock was throbbing, leaking from the tip and down onto his stomach. He felt Rozanov lean closer, hands coming to rest at his hips, thumb brushing over the hipbone on one side.

"Open your eyes," Rozanov demanded. "You watch."

"If you want this to be over in 2 seconds, then sure," Shane said sullenly, but he still opened his eyes, regretting it immediately. "Oh, fuck, fuck, *fuck*."

Rozanov grinned, eyes bright. "You can come whenever you want, Hollander. Do not hold back for me."

Nothing could have prepared Shane for the feeling of Rozanov's grip at the base of his cock, for seeing his lips close over the head, for the wet heat of his mouth. Wrecked, Shane's stomach clenched and his elbows buckled, sending him sprawling onto the bed. His back arched as Rozanov slid down, taking him in, and he slung an arm over his mouth, muffling the desperate little moans spilling out of him.

"Oh, yes, yes, yes, *please*," he said, burying the words into the crook of his elbow.

He was already unravelling. This was such a far cry from the fumbling blowjobs he'd received. Rozanov's tongue was sure and teasing, his mouth incredible. Shane wanted to stay there, to never leave. But he was pulsing on Rozanov's tongue, so turned on his skin felt too tight for his body. In a fit of madness, he pushed back up onto his elbows and looked down, seeing Rozanov's lips stretched around his cock. Fuck, he was so beautiful, his cheekbones unreal as his cheeks hollowed.

When Rozanov reached down and softly cradled his balls, rolling them against his palm, Shane's head tipped back between his shoulder blades and his hips hitched up desperately. His mind felt like treacle, hazy and slow with pleasure, and he let himself fall. Everything went impossibly tight until it snapped, the force of it making him shout, his thighs trembling. He came down Rozanov's throat, his breath stuttering out of him between pathetic little whimpers.

His chest rose and fell as he pressed both hands to his face, flopping onto his back. Blood was roaring in his ears and he forced himself to take deep breaths, stomach muscles spasming. He became vaguely aware of warm fingers curling around his waist, an anchor for his racing mind. It brought him back into himself. Lowering his arms, he zeroed in on Rozanov's red, swollen lips. Fuck, the sight was obscene and Shane had to force down another moan. He succeeded until he realized Rozanov had opened his jeans and was stroking his hard cock leisurely.

Shane couldn't let Rozanov leave until he knew what he felt like in his mouth. He knew he would never forgive himself, even if he'd never admitted to himself that he wanted this. There was no use denying it now as he watched Rozanov's thick cock slide into his fist. He was sure Rozanov could see it all over his face. And, yeah, there was the smirk.

"Please," Shane said, wrecked.

Rozanov leaned closer, knee pressed down onto the edge of the bed. "Please what, Hollander?"

"Let me blow you."

They met in a messy kiss, Rozanov's mouth open and soft, tongue brushing hot against Shane's. He could taste himself and it drove him even further out of his mind. Gathering the little strength he had, he caught Rozanov off guard and tipped him onto his back, breaking their kiss. Rozanov looked up at him, eyes hooded, and he gave his dick a slow squeeze in an obvious challenge. Sitting on his knees next to him, Shane ran a hand over Rozanov's pec, lingering briefly over his nipple, flicking it to earn a sharp inhale. Dazed, he brushed the hard planes of his stomach, fingers dipping into the cut of his hip bone, feeling drunk on all the warm skin under his touch. His hand wrapped around Rozanov's at the base of his cock and his heart thumped in his chest at their entwined fingers, Rozanov's hips rolling up into them.

Shane couldn't look away, taking in the pre-come beading at the tip. His pulse raced as he leaned down, pressing his lips to the head in a kiss that made his cheeks flood with heat. That was too tender, too intimate for what they were, and he took the head into his mouth, feeling the weight against his tongue. His eyes fluttered shut. Fuck, it was so good—the way it stretched his lips as he took it in, sliding over his tongue. He spread his knees, sinking lower to get a better angle, his arm draped over Rozanov's stomach.

A hand came to cup the back of his head, a firm weight guiding him as he took Rozanov's cock as far as he could, moaning at the stretch. His eyes rolled back into his head when Rozanov's hips rolled slowly, only enough to slide his cock in and out of Shane's mouth. Drool slipped from the corner, and he was glad Rozanov could only see the back of his head, until somehow, Rozanov's thumb swiped through the wetness dripping down his chin. The groan Rozanov let out sent Shane's heart hammering.

Fingers twisted into his hair and Rozanov muttered something in Russian, his breath growing harsher. Shane hollowed his cheeks, trying to find a rhythm, and gave a tentative lick under the head on his way up.

Rozanov pulled his hair in warning. "Hollander, fuck, I—"

He cut himself off with a grunt, and before Shane even had the time to consider if he could do this, Rozanov's come spilled over his tongue, cock twitching in his mouth, and Shane moaned as he tried to swallow, some of it spilling out. He pulled back, wiping his mouth against his wrist. His lips throbbed, swollen, and a weird sense of pride made his chest warm as he looked down at Rozanov's spent cock. He'd done that. He had. Shane.

Rozanov's hand slipped from his hair, sliding down his back. Shane turned, forcing himself to meet his eyes and he gave a small smile. Only then did he notice that he was so fucking hard again, his dick throbbing, and Rozanov's gaze dipped down, smirking.

"You are so easy," Rozanov said, taking Shane's cock in his hand. "Such a little slut for me."

Shane's brain went offline completely, his jaw going slack as he came all over Rozanov's fingers. Fuck. He dipped his head, breathing heavily. There was no way Ilya Rozanov just made him come twice. There was no way he just came because he called him a slut. How was he supposed to face him on the ice without losing his entire mind?

"Well," Rozanov said, wiping his hand on the bed cover. "This was fun." He pushed himself up from the bed, buttoning his jeans back up and picking his T-shirt off the floor.

As he shrugged his leather jacket on, he looked over at Shane, naked on the bed. He smiled. Shane felt a tug below his navel, a need to prolong this, a need to know he could do this again.

"Yeah, definitely fun," he said, fighting to keep his voice level.

"See you around, Hollander."

Shane flopped back onto the bed, his mind spinning. This was completely insane. This was a catastrophe of unknown levels. He forced himself to get up and into the bathroom, immediately jumping in the shower. The water washed away some of the night, and he felt more grounded, more refreshed, but his thoughts were still racing. He stepped in front of the mirror, looking into his own eyes. Was he different? He ran a hand through his wet hair.

His lips were swollen, his chest still flushed. There was a tender spot on his hip and he pressed his thumb against it. It looked like it might bruise.

Chapter 2: Chapter 1 - Shane

Chapter Summary

7 years after their night at the All-Star game, Shane and Ilya both end up signed to the Ottawa Centaurs. But something is different about Ilya Rozanov.

Chapter Notes

I added a tentative chapter amount. It won't be far off from 6!

Just clarifying this is an AU that sticks to some of the timeline, but I have also tweaked some things. Wyatt actually shows up mid-season this year, but in here he's there from the beginning :)

Ottawa - September 2018

Hockey World Shaken: Trades Send Shockwaves as Rivals Ilya Rozanov and Shane Hollander land in Ottawa

Experts stunned by Centaurs' tactical moves going into the season

“How did this happen?”

Shane sat propped up on his kitchen island in the new apartment in Ottawa, his phone on the counter next to him with his agent, Farah, on speaker. He looked out into the open plan space, boxes stacked on the floor. He'd been too stubborn and too awkward to pay anyone to unpack for him. The idea of anyone rooting through his things set his teeth on edge.

And speaking of things that set his teeth on edge.

“I don't know, Shane,” Farah answered with practiced patience. “It wasn't brought up in my negotiations with them, so his deal probably came after yours.”

Would Ilya Rozanov come to Ottawa if he knew Shane had already signed on? The thought seemed impossible, but Rozanov was nothing if not unpredictable. Maybe he just didn't care whether Shane was there or not. Shane rubbed a palm over his chest, his feet swinging

lightly. That idea was probably the worst one of all—that Rozanov was so indifferent to him that it wouldn't even matter.

"We play the same position," Shane said. "It does change things quite a lot."

"You'd always have to compete with someone for your position. Rozanov is good, but so are a lot of other players."

Shane held back a scoff. "You know as well as I do that Rozanov is better than all of them."

"Well, in that case, you should be taking home a cup this season then, shouldn't you?"

"Unless one of us turns up murdered in the woods."

"Saying this right now and saying it only once: I don't have time to deal with the PR disaster that would come from you murdering Rozanov."

"What if I hired another person for PR?"

Farah snorted. "There's not a lot of hockey in jail, Shane."

"Maybe I could start my own league."

"All jokes aside, are you going to be okay with this?"

Shane looked out of the window at his new view, thinking of the new gear he'd left in his bedroom. It was a lot of change and he'd already felt weird about it. He'd already been nervous about fitting into a new team, and knowing he now had Rozanov as an audience to his awkward attempts at fitting in was not making him feel better.

"I don't have much of a choice, do I?"

"You always have a choice," Farah said. "But remember why you chose this. You know the Centaurs are inclusive, that they will support you whatever you choose to do going forwards. That's what we wanted for you."

She was entirely right. His whole motivation for moving when he became a free agent was finding a team that could accept all of him and where it could be safe for him to come out eventually. He had loved being a Voyageur, but it had become increasingly clear to him that the Voyageurs would not be that team.

"I did want this," he said, as much to himself as to Farah.

"You do want this." Her voice was steady and firm.

"I do. And Rozanov doesn't change that."

"That's exactly right. And I will say, the organization seems really conscious about what kind of people they're hiring and adding to the team to keep the atmosphere they've fostered. So if they've added Rozanov to the team, they don't think he's going to jeopardize that."

Shane had no doubt Rozanov would fit in well. He always seemed to fit in wherever he went, despite being a dick. That wasn't what Shane worried about. He also didn't worry about Rozanov being a secret homophobe. No, what Shane worried about most of all was that his relationship with Rozanov was complicated. They antagonized each other, they pushed each other. Rozanov made him incandescently angry. But that night in Nashville was one of the most intense experiences Shane had ever had, and judging by Rozanov's revolving roster of women, Shane was alone in that.

"Thank you, Farah," he said, a bit distant. "I'll be fine."



Hayden

Good luck today, buddy! They're lucky to have you

Shane

Thanks. I'm kind of losing it, to be honest

Hayden

I would be too if I played on a team with Rozanov.

Shane

Please stop.

Hayden

I'm going to give you endless shit about that dude

Shane

Great. Not like he'll give me enough shit for a lifetime!

Hayden

It's my best friend privilege. Privilege? One of those

Shane

Jesus christ. Say hi to everyone for me.



Being in a new locker room was weird. It was smaller than the one in Montreal, and Shane had less space for his things, but there was a padded seat and he had a corner stall, so he'd take that as a win. He'd come in early, too nervous to wait, and that had given him time to introduce himself to Zane Boodram who was his new captain and a few of the others on the team.

There was no reason for Shane to feel this knot of anxiety. Everyone was nice and welcoming. Coach Wiebe had even pulled him aside for a small chat right after he arrived at the practice rink. Shane liked him immediately, and he'd had a nice encounter with Nick Chouinard who Shane had always had a good impression of from afar. Still, as more people

trickled in, he felt like a rookie again. Not inexperienced in hockey anymore, but inexperienced in the culture of this team, of being new in a group.

He missed Hayden and J.J. like he would a limb.

It put him in a weird spot where he almost wanted Rozanov to show up, because at least it was a familiar name and a familiar dynamic.

He regretted that thought the moment Rozanov strolled into the locker room, his confident swagger immediately attracting everyone's attention. Rozanov threw his arms up and grinned.

"I am here, now we win Stanley Cup!" he announced to laughter and excited whoops from the rest of the room.

It was very different from how Shane had slunk into the room, almost apologizing for his presence. Shane hated it, how naturally this all came to Rozanov, and how much Shane shrank away from taking space. He watched as Rozanov dapped up one of the rookies, his smile wide. It had been a while since he'd seen Rozanov like this, all casual and out of gear, his hair a bit longer than it tended to be during the season, curling over the back of his neck.

Turning around, Rozanov's eyes fell on him and he smirked. "Hollander!"

"Rozanov," Shane said evenly, pulling on his undershirt.

"Nice of you to follow me to Ottawa."

It was only then Shane realized their stalls were right next to each other. Just his fucking luck. Someone in the Centaurs' system had a sick sense of humor, or was convinced they'd come up with some devious plan to make them get along. Having Rozanov so close was disorienting. He always felt like the air had been sucked out of the room when he was in Rozanov's space.

"I signed before you," Shane shot back. "Always knew you were obsessed with me."

Rozanov hummed, the corner of his mouth ticking up even as he didn't look at Shane. "Brave to talk about obsession, for you."

Shane's cheeks burned and he turned his attention to getting ready, suddenly desperate to get far away from Ilya Rozanov. He turned away slightly, methodically putting on his gear and lacing up his skates. Without looking back, he headed out to the rink, his head clearing as soon as he skated onto the ice. This, he could do.

He skated a few laps for his warm-up, eventually stopping by the new goalie who had been traded in before the pre-season began. The Centaurs had certainly been busy, clearing out some of their roster and bringing in heavy hitters. It had become increasingly clear that the Centaurs' leadership had ambitions.

"Wyatt Hayes, right?" Shane asked.

“Shane Hollander,” Wyatt Hayes said in reply, smiling widely. “The man who overshadowed the news of my trade.”

“Hey, Rozanov swooped in and got both of us.”

Hayes laughed, a true belly-laugh that pulled Shane’s lips into an answering smile.

“Nice to meet you, Hollander. Can’t wait to play with you; it’s an honour.”

“Looking forward to playing with you, too. How was it leaving Toronto?”

“Oh, man.” Hayes made a face. “Gonna miss the city a lot. My wife had a great job there, we loved our house, and we had to pack it all up and leave. But I will not miss that team.”

“Let me guess. Dallas Kent was your best friend?”

“Oh, yeah, loved that guy. Delightful fella.” More players spilled onto the rink and Hayes’ eyes tracked them. “My sister is a lesbian and I wanted to punch the living daylights out of him and his cronies all the time.”

Something loosened in Shane’s chest. It was like someone lifted a curtain and let in a sliver of sunshine.

“You should’ve,” Shane said, if only to make it clear what side he was on. “A parting gift.”

His small conversation with Hayes lifted his mood, and when they began shooting drills, Shane felt almost himself. He didn’t even allow Rozanov to rile him up... much. It was just a bit of healthy competition. Just a little extra spice. So, he showed off a little with his backhand shots, hearing Rozanov scoff behind him in return.

It ramped up a bit during the scrimmage where they were on opposite teams. The familiarity of it had them both chirping each other and slamming the other into the boards. The proximity of Rozanov, the way he grinned when he body-checked Shane, the Russian accent curling around every word thrown at him—it all injected straight into his system.

When practice ended, Shane looked up to find Boodram skating towards him.

“Rozanov!” he called, gesturing towards him to join them. “Over here.”

Rozanov came to an abrupt stop. “At your service, captain.”

“We all know about the rivals thing,” Boodram said, looking between them. “But you’re on a team now. You’re working together. I don’t wanna see any pointless arguments or destructive competitions. I want to see teamwork.”

Shane wanted to argue. He wanted to explain that it was just ingrained in his DNA to compete with Rozanov, but it didn’t go as deep as everyone expected. It wasn’t a deep-seated hatred, or a need to completely destroy each other. It was that extra push, that extra jolt of competition that spurred him to be better. It wasn’t as destructive as it seemed, or at least not

in the way Boodram assumed. He shared a look with Rozanov and Shane knew they were both thinking the same thing.

“Understood,” Rozanov said after a beat of silence.

“Yes. We hear you.”

“Good.” He clapped them both on the shoulder. “Great to work with you both.” He skated away, leaving Shane and Rozanov in silence.

“You got us in trouble,” Rozanov said eventually as he skated towards the exit.

Shane set off after him, his chest fizzing with energy. “*I* got us in trouble? You were cursing my entire bloodline!”

“Is normal for Russia. Not that serious, Hollander. You almost broke my ribs.”

“You’re such a drama queen, I didn’t *almost break your ribs*.”

They immediately shut up when they saw Boodram throw them a look over his shoulder as they got off the ice. Shane nearly laughed at the faux-innocent expression on Rozanov’s face, and walked behind him through the hallway and into the locker room.

Getting out of his gear, exhaustion swept over Shane. He thought of Hayden and J.J. and his Montreal locker room, and it hurt a little, but practice had been fun. Out there, he’d enjoyed it, even if it was just the first day. But it was a lot to take in, and he was tired.

His eyes drifted to Rozanov taking off his undershirt, the muscles in his chest shifting. The bear tattoo he’d seen up close one night many years ago was as ridiculous as he remembered. But his attention caught on something else entirely. On his other pec, Rozanov had a soulmark patch. Shane’s stomach clenched, tearing his gaze away.

Staring at other people’s soulmarks wasn’t the most polite, even if they were covered up. If they were fully formed and clear—showing a full bond—and proudly displayed, it wasn’t that big of a deal, but in locker rooms there was always an unspoken rule not to comment on one. Shane’s questions lodged in his throat. He couldn’t ask Rozanov about his soulmark or why he was covering it up or whether it was fully formed. They had almost slipped out, alongside the observation that he hadn’t had it in Nashville. Which made sense, because that night was 7 years ago. Of course Rozanov had met his soulmate during those 7 years. It shouldn’t have surprised him so much, but he felt it like a kick to the stomach.

Ever since the night they’d hooked up, Shane had felt drawn to Rozanov. Maybe it was the intensity of the experience, or just the fact that he’d finally allowed himself to be with a man. He’d forced down the desire to knock at Rozanov’s hotel room or ask someone for his number. He’d cleared his mind of every thought after every disappointing hook up. The day after things had finally ended with Rose and Shane had admitted himself that he was gay, he’d watched Rozanov play and briefly allowed himself to think of Rozanov’s mouth on him. Then he reminded himself again that they were rivals and there could be nothing between them.

And through all of this, through Shane's private and endless struggle, Rozanov had found his soulmate. It had never occurred to him, but now it was staring him in the face. As Shane showered, he couldn't stop wondering who it was. Was she the reason he came to Ottawa? It would make sense.

His mind was spinning as he left, overwhelmed with everything the day had brought.



Even with adjusting to a new team, the first week of practice went better than Shane expected. At the base of it, hockey was hockey no matter where he was, even with new teammates and new coaches. Shane could adjust, he could learn new dynamics, he could pick up new strategies. In his best moments, he even thought it was a fun challenge to adapt his play to new teammates. They were mostly good teammates too. Better than he'd expected going into it. The only exception was Tanner Dillon who was already annoyingly slow to pick up on Shane's plays. He secretly hoped Dillon would be on Rozanov's line, especially because Rozanov seemed even more annoyed than he was.

On Sunday they had a day off and the whole team was invited for a barbecue at Bood's house. It was the kind of team bonding Shane could get behind. Anything that wasn't a bar crawl or table service at a club was refreshing, and for once a small part of him actually looked forward to it as he drove over on Sunday afternoon.

It was relatively warm for September and when Shane walked onto the patio out back, everyone was lounging around in the sun. Portable speakers blasted some sort of country music and most of the group was gathered in a large outdoor seating area where couches and chairs circled a fire pit. Over to the side, Bood was at the grill, a woman who must be his wife laughing at something he said and slapped him playfully upside the head.

"Holly!" Bood called out when he looked up to see him there. "Get over here!"

The group around the fire pit looked up and hollered their greetings and Shane waved back, only feeling marginally awkward. He stepped up to Bood, accepting the quick bump of his fist and took in the spread of different meats.

"Wow, I sort of expected a few hot dogs and burgers," Shane said. Some of this looked fancy as hell.

Bood laughed. "It'd probably be what this lot deserves, but no, not in this house."

"This is Zane's main passion. Hockey is far down the list." His wife was pretty, in a girl-next-door kind of way, all natural and sweet-faced with long, brown hair. "I'm Cassie."

"Shane," he said, holding his hand out. "So I gather this is where we do all team hangouts from now on?"

"You might be joking, but it's mostly here or this one bar downtown," Cassie said, shrugging. "We bought a big house because Zane loves to host."

“Alright, you also love to host, babe, let’s not make it seem like it’s all for me.”

“Yes, but I don’t have a whole hockey team. I have like 3 friends.”

He watched them bicker with a slight smile on his face, gaze dropping to what he’d assumed was a tattoo on Bood’s forearm until he realized it was too clear to be anything but a soulmark shaped like an old-school cassette tape. He averted his eyes and felt his cheeks heat.

“Shit, sorry, I didn’t mean to stare. I thought it was a tattoo.”

“Oh, no, you’re completely fine. It’s big for a mark so I get that all the time.”

“Hollander!”

Shane turned to see Rozanov yelling from across the whole patio. He raised his eyebrows in response, amused despite himself.

“We will see who can handle most spice!” Rozanov waved him over. “Come here. Do not bore Bood to death with your talking.”

Both Bood and Cassie let out startled laughs as Shane yelled back. “You think you can outdo someone who had an Asian grandma, Rozanov?”

“I think I can outdo *you*.”

Moving over to where Rozanov stood with Dykstra and LaPointe, Shane tried to ignore that Rozanov was in a tank top, his biceps looking unfairly good. He lifted his gaze to Ilya’s face and regretted that too. His crooked smirk had always set Shane on edge.

“So, what you got for me then?”

“Bood’s spicy wings, three levels.” Rozanov held out the plate and pointed to each kind. “Medium. Spicy. Death.”

“Sounds reasonable.”

“We will start with medium and work up. You cannot drink anything. The first to drink anything loses.”

“You’re on,” Shane said and accepted a glass of water from Dykstra. Not that the water would even help much.

The eyes of the others were on them as they both grabbed a medium wing and nodded to each other, taking a bite. The medium was completely fine. Delicious, even.

Shane hummed. “That’s good.”

“Perfect,” Rozanov said, grinning.

The next one definitely hit Shane's tongue a few seconds after he took the bite. It was almost a numbing feeling, his lips prickling. Rozanov's eyes watered slightly, his lips growing redder. He was clearly struggling and Shane wanted to laugh, that rush to beat Rozanov sparking in his chest.

"You doing okay over there?"

"Yes, easy," Rozanov said, his voice slightly strained. "So good."

"Alright, so the big one then?" Shane asked, holding it gingerly, careful not to get too much on his fingers. Rozanov did not take the same precautions. "Hey, go wash your hands after and don't touch anything."

Rozanov smirked. "And what would I touch?"

"I mean, if you want your dick to shrivel up and die, be my guest."

Dykstra choked on air next to them and there was laughter from the group around the fire pit.

"Ready?" Rozanov asked and Shane nodded.

The "death" wing was definitely something. It exploded onto Shane's tongue, his eyes immediately watering in response, and he almost felt a chill run down his back. Rozanov was worse for wear, though, as his cheeks burned bright red and sweat beaded at his forehead.

"This dynamic is really fascinating," Dykstra said to LaPointe as Shane and Rozanov stared each other down, neither budging. "Is this what the rivalry has been the whole time? Just these two knuckleheads being stubborn mules?"

"Looks like that's exactly what it is," LaPointe said.

Rozanov was glaring at Shane, but his eyes were constantly watering and he was getting more desperate as the minutes ticked on. Just as he seemed to reach his breaking point, Shane gave him a lazy smile, just to crush his morale.

"Fuck!" Rozanov exclaimed and went for the glass of water, gulping down half of it. "This does not even help!"

Shane laughed. "Someone bring him some milk."

"No, no milk."

"Well?"

"Well, what?" Rozanov said, breaking out into a cough.

"Will you admit I won?"

"Rematch next time."

“Absolutely not!”

“Oh my god, this is somehow exactly what I expected and not what I expected at all,” Dykstra said, sharing a look with Bood across the patio.

“Admit it, Rozanov.” Shane said, hitting him on the shoulder.

“Ow. Bood! Hollander is getting violent!”

“Stop tattling on your teammate, Roz,” Bood called back.

Shane was two seconds away from sticking his tongue out at Rozanov and caught himself just in time. Jesus Christ, was he 7 years old all of a sudden?

“That’s impressive, Holly,” LaPointe said, eyebrows raised. “Those are bad.”

His lips were still burning, so Shane would say they were in fact pretty bad.

“My grandma made the spiciest ramen known to mankind.”

“That’s cheating,” Rozanov said.

“It’s cheating to not be born into a culture that lives on beets and sour cream?”

“Dear god, someone break them up,” Bood called from behind the grill and Dykstra pushed Rozanov along the patio.

“How about I let you change the music, Roz.”

“Thank fuck, your music taste is terrible.”



“How’s the shoot going?” Shane asked, planting his feet up on his coffee table and crossing his ankles. He rested his phone on his thigh.

Rose groaned. “So much more boring than you’d think. I’d much rather hear about your first couple weeks with the Centaurs, honestly.”

“You want to hear about hockey? Did someone bonk you on the head?”

“This is how boring it’s been, Shane,” Rose said. “The girl I’ve been shooting a lot with this week has been talking about kombucha. All the damn time. Besides, I like hockey. I just don’t like when it’s the only thing we talk about.”

“Maybe I also want to talk about kombucha.”

“Don’t you fucking dare.”

Shane bit back a laugh. “Alright, fine. It’s been really good, actually. Better than I thought in some ways, harder in some ways. Everyone’s really nice.”

“Everyone?”

“Yeah? What do you mean?”

“Rozanov, you idiot.”

“Oh.” Shane rubbed at the back of his neck. How did he say this in a way that made sense to anyone else? “Rozanov is Rozanov. He’s never been *mean*, we’re just competitive.”

Rose hummed, going quiet for a moment. “And it’s not driving you out of your mind that he’s there?”

It was, in a way. Shane chewed on his bottom lip, one hand picking at the seams of his couch cushion.

“You can’t tell anyone this, if I tell you.”

“Of course not. You know I don’t do that.”

“I know, but it’s not my story, technically. It’s just—” Shane stopped. “He’s wearing a soulmark patch.”

Rose was quiet, her voice careful when she spoke again. “This bothers you?”

“No!” Shane rushed out, cheeks heating. “Obviously not. It’s surprising, is all.”

“It’s not that surprising, babes. 88% of people have soulmarks.”

Shane didn’t. Sometimes he thought he did. There was a spot that sometimes looked darker than the area around it, if the lighting was right, but it never became clearer. There had never been a change in it and he didn’t even remember when he’d first noticed it. It was mostly just wishful thinking, that there’d be someone out there for him.

“Yeah, but, Rozanov,” Shane said. Rozanov just always seemed like he was separate from all that, somehow. “It would explain why he’s here though. Maybe he followed her here.”

“That would definitely explain why he’d show up in Ottawa,” Rose said. “Why do you think he’s hiding it?”

“It’s pretty common to hide it, to be fair? At least it is in the locker room. Most people who keep theirs uncovered are people with fully formed marks that are married or in committed relationships. Maybe his is developing.” When he thought about it, though, he would have pictured Rozanov as someone who just didn’t care about letting it show.

Before Rose could reply, Shane jumped in, the truth rushing out of him. “We hooked up once.”

“What?”

“In, like, 2011.”

“Oh my god, what the fuck,” she said, faintly. “Everyone would go crazy if they knew. That’d be wild.”

“Yeah, so they’ll never find out.”

“You’d get a lot of money for that story, I bet.”

Shane snorted. “Absolutely never, for any amount of money. I’m barely telling you.”

“Was it good?” He could hear her smile through the phone.

Nothing has ever compared.

“Yeah.” He forced his voice to stay even. “But he’s a dick and we’re on rival teams.”

“Well, you’re not anymore.”

“No, now we’re teammates and that’s probably even worse,” Shane said, staring blankly at the random nature documentary he had on mute. “But that doesn’t actually matter because he’s an asshole and I don’t like him.”

“Right,” Rose said, and Shane really didn’t appreciate that tone. “You hate him a lot. He’s absolutely terrible.”

“Yes, he is.” He sank further into the couch. “Hey, does your co-star have any kombucha recs?”

“I will gut you alive.”

Chapter 3: Chapter 2 - Ilya

Chapter Summary

Ilya had discovered his soulmark a long time ago.

Chapter Notes

How wild are we all feeling after this premiere stuff? I'm buzzing out of my skin and gnawing at the walls.

Ottawa - October 2018

There was nothing better than the reactions of a crowd. The cheers, the jeers, the boos—Ilya lived for all of it. There was slightly less of all that in Ottawa, admittedly, but that was fine. Ilya could draw enjoyment out of even the faintest boo and even a single Rozanov poster. There was, in fact, a Rozanov poster and Ilya skated past, giving the kid a quick wave and grinning at the way she jumped in excitement, beaming up at her dad. He turned to find Hollander looking at him from the bench and he felt the gaze follow him as he moved, pushing a Seattle player into the boards.

First period went without goals for any team, and Ilya opened the second with a shot that went straight into the back of the net, only for the game to equalize a few minutes after. They weren't playing terribly, but it didn't *flow*. No one seemed to be exactly where Ilya needed them to be. On the power play, he and Hollander weren't on the same page at all. Not even in the same book. It was frustrating. Ilya took it out on a few Seattle players, swiping his stick against their ankles as much as he could get away with and checking them whenever he got the chance, but in the end, Seattle's right wing sent a puck flying up into the left corner of the net right before third period ended.

Ilya Rozanov wasn't used to losing, and by the looks of Hollander's sour little face, he wasn't either. It almost made Ilya laugh despite everything. He delighted in Hollander's face and all the stupid expressions he made. It was hilarious to rile him up until his little brows furrowed and his lips pursed. Not to mention how flirting with Hollander made his cheeks redden so much his freckles seemed to glow. Ilya didn't have many regrets in life, but one of them was that he'd let Hollander suck him off without seeing his face. At the time, it'd been hot, his hand at the back of Hollander's head, but in the years after, he kept wondering what his face would look like, what expressions he made when his lips were stretched around Ilya's cock.

It wasn't the greatest timing to have the thought while Hollander was undressing next to him, the locker room heavy with the tension of a loss. Ilya turned away, keeping his eyes away from Hollander's naked chest and downturned lips. He tried to block out thoughts of what Hollander's face had looked like when he came, all blissed-out and stunned like he'd never come before in his life. Catching the eyes of Wyatt Hayes across the floor, Ilya nodded his head, tipping the corner of his lips up. He got an answering smile.

"Next game, Hazy," he said, loud enough for others to catch.

"There's always a new one," Wyatt agreed.

"And we will practice more. Get used to each other, yes?"

Wyatt picked up his towel, ready to head into the shower. "I don't think it's possible to get used to you, Roz."

"Because I am a delight."

"Well, that's one word," Dykstra interjected.

"More like a rascal," Nick Chouinard said from his stall.

"Rascal?" Ilya said, the word strange on his tongue. "I don't know this word. Means sexy and brilliant?"

Chouinard laughed, the sound booming in the otherwise silent room, cracking some of the tension. "Sometimes I wonder what it's like to have your confidence."

"You should try it," Ilya shrugged. "Sometimes you win games because you believe you are the best and will win."

A brief silence followed until Dykstra hummed, rising from his seat. "Roz is right. It's all up here." He tapped the side of his head.

Several others murmured their agreement. Ilya pulled off his undershirt and slapped a hand over his soulmark patch to check it was still in place. He undressed and headed into the showers, keeping his eyes far away from Shane Hollander.



They practiced the power play. Originally, they'd put Ilya on right wing to keep Hollander on center, but the more they played it, the more they began alternating. Ilya couldn't pinpoint exactly when, but something started clicking. It felt like they instinctively knew when it was time to swap. Hollander was always where he expected him to be. The passes between them were razor sharp.

"This should be illegal," Chouinard complained, panting. "Are we sure we're allowed to do this?"

"I can't wait to unleash this on the fucking Guardians." Bood grinned.

Wyatt let out a whoop, slapping his thighs, urging them to keep going. They kept playing, Ilya's brain going on autopilot as he followed Hollander's moves. For the first time since the trade, he felt like things were clicking. It was funny that Hollander, of all people, was at the center. He'd always enjoyed their rivalry, but through all that, he'd wondered what it was like to play with him. They'd always been separated at All-Star games since the league was way too invested in their rivalry, so he'd never had a chance to even see what their dynamic would be. But playing with Hollander was exhilarating. Watching his timing, his speed, his technique had always been fascinating, but seeing him time a pass to perfection and feeling their timing align like this was something else entirely.

They were going straight from practice and onto the bus taking them to Toronto. Ilya took too long getting into the shower and was the last one out, leaving him only one open seat: the one next to Hollander. Their eyes met briefly before he stashed his bag into the compartment above and swung into the seat.

Hollander had his headphones on and he turned to look out the window as the bus pulled away from the curb. They settled in, Ilya taking out his own headphones and putting on his metal playlist before pulling up a game on his phone. Next to him, Hollander had his head tipped back against the headrest and his eyes closed, his hand holding his phone against his thigh. He was completely still, breathing deeply.

It dawned on him that Hollander was fucking meditating on the bus. Ilya hid his smile behind his hand. It always cracked him up how Hollander, the second best player in the NHL, was so unlike everyone else. He was extraordinarily boring, always laser focused on hockey and performance. The only thing that seemed to shake him was Ilya, which Ilya had always chased ruthlessly.

Ilya watched him, his phone game forgotten. Hollander's expression was relaxed and peaceful. Up close, Ilya could count the freckles scattered across his cheeks and over his nose. His plush lips were slightly parted. Then, his eyes blinked open and caught Ilya's gaze immediately, making his pulse spike. He'd been caught staring, and he couldn't even play it off. He swallowed, slipping lower into his seat.

"Meditating on the bus, Hollander, really? Can't even watch movies like the rest of us?"

Hollander scoffed. "Maybe you should try it."

"I bet I would be so much better at it."

"You want to be better than me at meditating?"

"Yes."

"Jesus Christ." Hollander ran a hand over his face, shaking his head with a small smile.

"Okay, let's see who can stay quiet the longest."

Ilya narrowed his eyes. "You cannot trick me, Hollander."

"What do you think meditating is if not staying quiet?"

“That is what meditating is?”

“Well, not *just* that.” Hollander scrunched his nose and Ilya couldn’t stop staring at it. “There can be many elements to it, depending. You focus on your breathing. Sometimes there are guided meditations.”

“You have weird hobbies, Hollander.”

“It’s not weird,” Hollander said, and then laughed—a low, soft thing. “Do you want to watch a movie?”

Surprised, Ilya watched as Hollander ducked down to grab his iPad and AirPods out of his backpack.

“I promised Rose I’d watch this movie when it dropped.” He handed Ilya one of his AirPods. “I think it’s some sort of spy thriller?”

Rose Landry.

He remembered when he’d seen the headlines. It had seemed almost impossible. Shane Hollander with one of the biggest movie stars in the world. There was something that had seemed so wrong about it, seeing photos of them together at clubs and out at restaurants. He could’ve sworn they broke up, though.

Putting one AirPods in, he sank low in his seat while Hollander pulled down the tables in front of them and placed his iPad in the middle. Their shoulders brushed as they both leaned towards the middle to watch, and Hollander didn’t pull away from it as the movie began. He stayed a warm presence at Ilya’s side where they were tucked into their own little world. After a while, Ilya knocked his knee against Hollander’s, their legs pressed together. Neither of them moved.

The next day, the power play was better than it’d ever been, even if Toronto won in overtime.



“Harris!” Ilya greeted, dropping his bag inside the door.

“My favorite hockey player!” Harris said as he looked up from where he was setting up the camera.

“Bet you say that to all the hockey players.”

Harris laughed. “Maybe. But few of them make my job as easy as you do.”

Ilya was the first one here, in the office Harris used as a studio for the sitdown videos he did for social media. This was where Harris had done his first interview, just a little introduction of himself to the fans. He’d done a couple of others as well, but they’d all been on the ice. Now, he’d agreed to do a video with Hollander, looking back at important parts of their careers and their rivalry.

He'd said yes because he understood why it would be interesting. They had never done a joint interview, and in all honesty, Ilya wanted to see what Hollander would say about all the years they'd been pitted against each other.

"Good morning, Harris," Hollander said as he stepped inside, looking unfairly fresh-faced for this early in the morning. He'd probably been up since 5 AM.

"Oh and good morning to you too, Rozanov," Ilya said in a sing-song voice.

Hollander looked like he was trying desperately not to laugh. "Good morning, Rozanov."

"Are you guys ready to face your baby-faced past?" Harris asked, moving two tall bar stools in front of the white backdrop.

They took their seats and recorded a short bit to introduce themselves and the video before Harris handed them a picture to look at. Hollander accepted it and Ilya leaned in to see. He laughed when he saw it was from the day they got drafted.

"You look 12," he said, pointing at Hollander's round little cheeks.

"I did not!" Hollander protested loudly. "I was 18. Not everyone can look 30 when they're 18, you freak."

"I looked like healthy 18 year old."

"No, you looked 30. It's probably the smoking."

"You hated getting drafted second," Ilya said, smug.

Hollander glared at him. "So would you."

"But I did not."

Sighing, Hollander held out his hand. "Harris, where's the next photo?"

Laughing, Harris passed on the next one and Ilya couldn't help but smile down at it. The photo was from the CCM shoot in Toronto where the two of them were facing each other, eyes intense.

"Remember how we could not stop laughing?" Hollander asked. "I thought they were gonna kick us out and fire us on the spot."

"Was your fault."

"It was not my fault!"

"Your face looked funny."

"They asked us to look intense, I was just following orders!"

"You do not know how to look intense. You look like angry kitten."

He'd looked so cute. Ilya had wanted to kiss that look off his face that day, only just managing to hold onto reason. There was something about that little scrunch of his nose. The next photo, though, was where he'd no longer been able to hold back. He shared a quick look with Hollander as they were handed one from the shot accuracy competition at their first All-Star game.

"Our first All-Star game in Nashville," Ilya said, trying to ignore everything else that happened that weekend. "They always put us on opposite teams. Scared of us together, maybe."

Hollander snorted, peering down at it. "Yeah, they've never put us together. I think they were sort of obsessed with the rivalry of it all." He tapped the paper. "Hey, remember who won this, Rozanov?"

"Next photo," Ilya said and Hollander threw his head back and laughed.

When he received it, he tried to give it back again, only for Hollander to wrestle it out of his hands.

"Oh!" Hollander crowed. "When I won rookie of the year!"

"I hate you," Ilya said, voice light and casual.

"Yeah, yeah. Old news."

The next photo was from the olympics in Sochi, a silver medal hanging around Hollander's neck, but Hollander didn't comment on it immediately. Instead he looked over at Ilya, expression unreadable.

"That was a hard time for me," Ilya said. "So much pressure and everything was bad, very bad."

"You got your revenge later in the year, though," Hollander said, and on cue, Harris passed over a shot of Ilya raising the Stanley Cup trophy over his head.

"Yes," Ilya said softly, looking at his younger self. "Best feeling in the world."

Hollander hummed.

"And now we stop," Ilya said, laughing as Hollander swatted at his shoulders.

"Trying to hide my back-to-back Stanley Cup wins?" Hollander asked, teasing.

"No such thing has ever happened."

"I love that you're trying to rewrite history, Rozanov."

"Maybe you have fantasies," Ilya said.

Hollander laughed. "Like delusions?"

“Sure. It is why you are so competitive. I have 1 Stanley Cup and you have 0.”

“Yeah,” Hollander said, looking directly into the camera like he was trying to send a message. “Also, I’m competitive? Last week, you wanted to beat me at *meditation*.”

Harris jumped in. “Not to bring down the mood, but...” He handed over a photo that Ilya had never seen before.

The image showed Hollander lying crumpled on the ice and in the background Ilya was standing to the side, face pale as he looked over. He didn’t say anything, waiting for Hollander to take the lead, as he studied his own expression in the photo. It made him uncomfortable how worried he looked, and he was momentarily brought back to that day on the ice.

Hollander let out a long breath. “That was the worst injury of my career. It was scary for a bit. I didn’t know how bad it was. Luckily, I made it out with just a broken collarbone.”

“Yes, was bad,” Ilya said, still looking at it.

“I remember—” Hollander stopped speaking and Ilya looked up, meeting his eyes. “My mom said you visited me in the hospital.”

Ilya’s throat went dry. He’d never expected to have to admit that publicly.

“Yes,” he forced out. “Marlowe felt very bad about it and it was nice thing to go as captain. To see if you were okay.”

Harris held out the last photo and Ilya pulled himself together.

“Now we’re talking,” Ilya said, holding up their new promo photos in Centaurs gear.

“We look good in red.”

“We look good in everything,” Ilya said. “Maybe extra in this. Right, Harris?”

“Never looked better.” Harris laughed. “So, what’s it like playing for the same team now?”

Looking over at Hollander, Ilya wondered what kind of answer they were giving. Were they going for a joke, or were they being completely honest? Hollander didn’t seem to want to go first either.

“Is fun,” Ilya said, trying to find a balance. “Something new and different after many years of being on opposite sides.”

Hollander looked thoughtful and was quiet for a moment before he spoke. “I think people forget we’ve sort of grown up together, Rozanov and I. We were pitted against each other from the start, and yeah, we’ve always been competitive. Maybe even hated each other a little bit, sometimes. But we know each other pretty well, and now we get to explore how this works, on the same side.”

“What he said.” Ilya pointed to Hollander, smirking.



Ilya had discovered his soulmark a long time ago. Even though it looked like a bruise, shapeless and barely darker than the rest of his skin, it had an unmistakable quality to it. When Ilya touched it, he felt a spark of something. His parents had been in the minority—soulmarkless and looking for love without the divine connection—and Ilya had always just assumed he would be the same. He loved sex, he preferred casual connections, he’d never felt romantic love or anything close to it. It seemed impossible that the mark was there, on his chest, but there was no denying it.

He’d kept it uncovered for the first few years. It wasn’t really noticeable to anyone else, and it had no discernible shape. He didn’t know who his soulmate was, but since the mark never developed he figured it was one of the people he’d hooked up with and never saw again. There was no urge to go looking. What good would it do anyway? Sometimes, he didn’t even know the name of the people he’d met in a club or taken to his hotel room. And if it was fated to be, it would be.

It was when the mark suddenly changed last year that he felt more protective of it. He’d gotten so used to it that he never really registered it, never really studied it, but one day he caught himself in the mirror and realized it had definitely taken on more of a shape. It stood sharper against his skin and would draw attention if anyone looked at his chest. He still couldn’t make out what it was supposed to look like. Sometimes he thought it looked like a truck, but it seemed more rounded in shape, more ovular. One of those balls from American football, maybe, but that didn’t seem right either.

After that, he was oddly possessive about it. He didn’t like the idea of people looking at it and it was private, just for him. He started covering it. Worst of all, he felt weird about other people being close to it and he began shying away from hook ups. The last time he was with Svetlana felt so wrong on his skin that he put a stop to things, unable to stomach the feeling it brought. He didn’t know if it was a normal consequence of soulbonds strengthening or if it was just him.

His life was a confusing mess around the time the mark changed. His father died, he went back to Russia, he grappled with the feeling of not belonging there anymore, of needing to tell his brother to fuck off for good. He didn’t know where home was. He had no family. An intense loneliness settled around him in a way Ilya had never known before. Suddenly, Boston felt suffocating.

And, as Harris had reminded him today, he’d watched Shane Hollander crumple on the ice and felt a stab of fear he didn’t know what to do with. They weren’t friends. They were rivals, maybe colleagues of a sort, and they’d grown up in each other’s orbit, always tied to the other by everyone around them. They’d hooked up once, and Ilya had held himself back ever since, knowing it was far too complicated to pursue again even as much as he enjoyed danger. There was no reason for fear to crawl into his throat.

He’d somehow figured out what hospital Hollander was in and sat in the lobby for an hour trying to make up his mind. He nearly went home five different times, debating it over and

over on loop. Ilya was usually quick to make decisions, never one to dwell too much on it, but this had him rattled. It wouldn't be completely strange for the opposing team's captain to show up and extend his apologies, though. It'd be seen as good sportsmanship, and he didn't even know why he was overthinking it so much.

Finally, he spotted Hollander's mom, and in a split second made his decision. He would talk to her, give his well-wishes, and ask how Hollander was doing.

"Thank you," she'd said, blinking in surprise. "I'll let him know. I'm sure he'll be very grateful."

"And he is fine?" Ilya asked. "Marlowe is very worried."

"He has a concussion and a fractured collarbone, but he'll be alright. Could've been a lot worse, honestly."

He followed her as they spoke, suddenly coming to a stop outside a room.

"He's asleep," she said, cracking the door open.

Through the opening, Ilya could see Hollander pale against the hospital sheets, his head tipped back against the pillow. There was something so wrong about seeing Hollander—always quick and sharp and almost supernatural on the ice—so still and fragile. He looked breakable, which was not something Ilya had ever thought before. Ilya had always wanted to mess him up a little, break his perfect facade, but now it felt strange seeing his rumpled hair and the circles under his eyes.

He forced his eyes away to meet Yuna Hollander's gaze. "Give him our wishes for recovery."

"I will. I'm sure he'll appreciate it."

Ilya didn't know at the time if she had. He'd never spared much thought to how Hollander might've reacted to him showing up, because not long after that, his mark had changed and everything in Ilya's life suddenly felt like an ill-fitting jacket. Now he knew that she had told him, and so would everyone who watched the video.

He dug his palms into his eyes, curling up into the corner of his couch, his breath growing shallower. Surely, it was a coincidence that the mark developed right after the hospital visit. It could be so many other things. Even when he was back in Russia, maybe. No, he knew the mark had been the same when he returned from the funeral, but there were other things in his life at that time too. It could be any of those other things. There was no reason it should be connected to Shane Hollander.

Absolutely no reason.

Chapter 4: Chapter 3 - Shane

Chapter Summary

Shane can't deny his feelings for Rozanov anymore, but Rozanov has a soulmate. Shane doesn't know what to do about it.

Chapter Notes

Canon typical references to suicide in this chapter, just as a heads up!

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

November 2018

Shane sat next to LaPointe on the plane to LA for the first stop of their West Coast road trip. It was fine, really. LaPointe kept to himself, headphones on, and after 30 minutes he was fully asleep. They didn't talk, but that was okay. Shane wanted to meditate and read his book anyway, and he didn't even know LaPointe that well. His gaze slipped over to Rozanov diagonally across the aisle. He was laughing at some story Dykstra was telling, his head thrown back. His curls were spilling over the headrest and Shane's eyes stuck to the crook of his neck where his shirt collar fell loosely against the skin.

Honestly, he had hoped they would sit together. They'd been together on a couple of bus rides and it suddenly felt strange to be seated next to someone else. He enjoyed sitting with Rozanov. Their conversations were just long enough that Shane found them entertaining, but not overstimulating. He liked watching movies together on his iPad, their bodies meeting in the middle. Rozanov's shoulders would jostle as he laughed, and once, Shane had woken with his cheek pressed to Rozanov's soft sweater.

It was stupid to be disappointed. Rozanov didn't owe him anything, and he didn't own Rozanov's company at away games. Of course, Rozanov could sit with whoever he liked, laugh with whoever he liked. And still, Shane didn't know how to stop looking over, pushing down the urge to yank Dykstra out of his seat to take his place.

Fuck, this was insane.

It didn't help that Hayden was texting him. He regretted having logged into the WiFi almost immediately.

Hayden

Have you seen some of these reactions to the video you guys posted?

It's fucking hilarious.

Shane

You know I don't look at anything ever

Hayden

the sexual tension????

Is this what the rivalry has been all this time? Just two dudes flirting?

i feel like i'm intruding

fuck were the hollanov shippers onto something? I bet their group chats are going crazy rn!

So we're just brushing over Ilya Rozanov visiting Shane Hollander in the hospital, like is that not INSANE LORE?

Well, I guess we know chemistry won't be an issue.

Shane

Where are you even finding these?

Hayden

This is like every comment on the video, Shane!

Peering around to make sure no one was looking, Shane pulled up the video on his phone. His cheeks were already warm from reading the texts from Hayden, but he blushed even more furiously. He didn't like seeing himself at the best of times, but this was something much worse. On-screen-Shane was getting flustered by Rozanov's teasing, then he was laughing, head thrown back, before he, too, was throwing it right back to Rozanov with a glint in his eyes. When he watched himself swat playfully at Rozanov's shoulder and wrestle over a photo, he groaned and buried his chin into his hoodie.

Why would Harris post this? Shane's crush could be seen from space.

The very same crush he'd been desperately denying and trying to hold back. He was nursing terrible feelings for Ilya Rozanov, who was now his teammate, and most importantly—he had a soulmate. Shane tucked the hood tighter around his face, trying to separate himself from the world. Fuck, how had he ended up here and how was he supposed to fix it?

He'd tried to stop thinking about Rozanov's soulmate, but he kept wondering who she was, if she was in Ottawa, if Rozanov went home to her every day. In his mind, she'd fully formed as a redhead with striking green eyes and a soft, but slender body. He didn't even know if that was Rozanov's type, but in his mind she had a killer smile and he could see them together,

cooking in the kitchen and cuddling on the couch, her fingers sliding through Rozanov's curls.

Sometimes, the image of her morphed into Shane and he let the fantasy play out just a little until he pushed it into a little box and shut the lid, because it could never be him. The soulmark patch was evidence of that. And now Shane's pathetic crush was blasted on the internet for everyone to see. He kind of wanted the plane to fall out of the sky.

To get his mind off of it, he pulled his iPad out and pulled up footage from their last game. He'd analyzed it extensively already, but he zoned in on his stickhandling this time, pausing intermittently to get a better look. He got so lost in it he nearly jumped out of his skin when a heavy hand clapped onto his shoulder.

"There's no way you're reviewing game footage, Hollander," Boyle said, laughing. "Relax sometimes, man!"

Shane looked up, reply dying on his tongue. It seemed Boyle didn't need a reply, though, since he just shook his shoulder and walked past to get to the toilet up front. Feeling an inexplicable rush of shame, Shane sank down into his seat and looked up only to find Rozanov's eyes on him. Great, now Rozanov witnessed him being called out for being boring and unfun. Turning away, Shane picked the iPad back up. He didn't know how to be anything else but this. It was who he'd always been and if that wasn't okay for the Centaurs, then what could he do about it?



Leading up to their game in LA, Shane tried to keep his distance from Rozanov. Seeing himself in the video had opened a door he didn't know how to shut, and being close to Rozanov was making his stomach flutter and his skin buzz. He avoided him at breakfast, only catching flashes of his curls and echoes of his laughter from across the room. On the bus to the arena, he slipped down next to Wyatt and ignored the look Rozanov gave him as he walked past.

It was only when they reached the locker room that he had to accept his fate. As usual, Rozanov was set up right next to him, their gear ready for them as they entered. Shane kept his head down, still entirely aware of Rozanov's presence so close. It was like a magnetic field, drawing Shane into his orbit. Taking a couple of deep breaths, he used some of his meditation techniques to shut the rest of the room out until a sudden commotion jolted him out of it.

Rozanov had made it over to Boyle and they were laughing loudly about something, before Rozanov raised his voice, pointing at Boyle and commanding the entire room's attention.

"Hey, Boyle likes to play, what is it—solitaire!" Rozanov announced. "Only card game you play *alone*."

"There's nothing wrong with solitaire!" Boyle protested, his voice going high.

“So you rag on Hollander for watching his own gameplay, but you’re playing cards with yourself?” Dykstra asked.

“Is this why you always turn down poker nights?” Chouinard said. “Can’t cheat on your other card game?”

Boyle rolled his eyes and muttered something.

“What was that?” Rozanov asked, leaning in closer.

“I said I always lose and my wife makes me sleep on the couch!”

“Oof.”

“Roz, I will murder you.”

“After the game,” Bood said, pulling on his compression tights. “No murder before we’ve won.”

Boyle continued bickering with Dykstra, and Rozanov turned, his eyes meeting Shane’s across the room. He winked, lips tipping up into a crooked smile and Shane’s heart did a weird little jump. Shane smiled back, overwhelmed with a rush of gratitude.

After that, it was all a lost cause. Before they went onto the ice, Rozanov gripped him by the shoulders from behind and playfully jostled him back and forth, his large hands heavy even through the layers of padding. When Shane scored in the second period, Rozanov knocked their helmets together, his arm hooked around Shane’s neck, and he suddenly couldn’t stop thinking about the impossibility of them being here, together. He watched Rozanov’s beaming face, unable to stop himself from grinning before the moment was broken by Chouinard ramming into them in celebration.

Winning hadn’t felt so good in ages. Wyatt was screaming in his face and Shane’s cheeks hurt from the smile he couldn’t shake. After the first few weeks of struggling, they finally pulled it together and made everything align. Shane wasn’t planning to let this feeling go. He promised himself right there on the ice as he watched his teammates celebrate that he’d give them this over and over again.

“We,” Wyatt said, arm slung over Shane’s shoulder as they entered the locker room, “are going out.”

“Oh, no,” Shane said, on instinct, his thoughts immediately going to noisy clubs, dancefloors he didn’t want to go anywhere near, and women he had to pretend to be interested in.

“Holly, yes. The kids are going to a club, but Bood and I were talking about the rooftop bar near our hotel.”

And, okay, he could do that, couldn’t he? He could just get a drink, nurse it for a while, sit around a table and talk.

“No dancing?” he asked, almost wincing at how nervous he sounded.

“No dancing,” Wyatt promised.

“Alright, I’ll go.”

A second later, Rozanov popped up behind them. “Going where?”

“Rooftop bar next to our hotel,” Wyatt said. “Join us, Roz!”

So that was how Shane found himself on a rooftop in LA with Ilya Rozanov and a handful of his new teammates. Last year, he’d felt trapped on the Voyageurs—a team that meant a lot to him, but that put him in a box that was getting suffocating. It had been perfect for him when he first got drafted, but somewhere along the way, they’d grown apart, and he needed things they could never give him. Now, sitting here listening to the others playfully rag on Wyatt for his superhero obsession, he was starting to feel like he could belong, being fully himself.

“Bood, why are *you* getting on my case?” Wyatt said, betrayal written all over his face. “We watched *Black Panther* and *Deadpool* together at my house two weekends ago!”

“I lost a bet.”

“No, you didn’t!”

“I was forced and coerced.”

“You suggested it!”

Bood made an exaggerated face. “Who here believes that, though, Wyatt?”

“Is okay if you are a nerd, Hazy, we still love you.” Rozanov patted him on the shoulder.

“Holly, you’re on my side, right?” Wyatt leaned into him, as if looking for physical support.

Sheepish, Shane took a sip of his beer. “How much will you hate me if I don’t know what *Deadpool* is?”

“Get me out of here,” Wyatt said, deadpan, pretending to escape.

“Finally someone said it, Hollander.” Dykstra laughed. “I knew I could trust you.”

Rozanov pushed Wyatt back into his seat. “Hazy, you can’t listen to Hollander. He does not even listen to music.”

Dykstra’s eyes bugged out. “You don’t listen to music?! I take back what I said.”

“Oh, great, Rozanov,” Shane said, but it came out more amused than annoyed. “Spilling my secrets.”

“Well, they deserve to know, yes? That you are abomination.”

“Abomination?” Shane asked, voice cracking on a laugh.

“Is that not what I mean?” Rozanov looked genuinely puzzled for a moment. “You are weird. Not normal.”

“Oh my god.” Shane kicked him under the table and he yelped, kicking back.

“You know,” Bood said, interrupting their war underneath the table. “I didn’t know what to expect with you two, but I have to say you’ve surprised me.”

“Me too,” Dykstra chimed in.

Shane looked over at Rozanov who had his elbows planted on the table, one hand wrapped around his drink. His forearm flexed as he brought it to his lips. Rozanov shrugged one shoulder.

“Has surprised many people, probably,” he said. “People think we are enemies.”

“Yeah, I mean, that’s what it’s been this entire time,” Dykstra answered. “At least from the outside.”

“Maybe it’s more frenemies,” Shane suggested, his lips pulled into a small smile. Rozanov looked confused and Shane automatically supplied, “like friends who are also enemies.”

Rozanov laughed. “Friends is maybe too much. Is more two people who are the same age and same skill level. Made rivals by—” He paused, waving his hand idly. “—people around us.”

“The circumstances,” Shane added.

“Yes.” Rozanov nodded.

“But also, you’ve been a dick.”

The others laughed and Rozanov held a hand up to his chest in mock-hurt. “Hollander!”

“The first time I said hi to you, you were smoking in front of a sign that said no smoking and you barely said a word to me!”

“My English was terrible, Hollander,” Rozanov said, taking another large sip. “Even worse than now.”

“It’s not bad now,” Shane protested and Rozanov’s eyebrow raised. “It’s not!”

“You are blinded by admiration for me.”

Shane turned to Wyatt, eyes pleading. “Save me.”

“Oh, no.” Wyatt held his hands up. “You abandoned me in my hour of need, and now I’ll let you dig your own grave.”

Two hours later, Shane found himself drunker than he’d been in a while, which to be fair, didn’t say much. It was the only explanation he had for why he went off to look for Rozanov

who'd been missing from the table for a while. They were seated out on the terrace, so he went into the bar itself, weaving through the tables and stopping by the toilets, finding no signs of him. Back on the terrace, he walked to the other side, leaning onto the railing. He looked out into the LA evening, breathing deeply. It was only when he heard a shuffling sound behind him that he noticed there was a little hidden corner between the railing and the building. Rozanov sat with his back against the wall, legs out in front of him. He took a long drag of his cigarette.

"What are you doing here?" Shane asked, sliding down next to him.

"Smoking," Rozanov said, head tipped back against the wall.

"I thought I heard you say you'd quit smoking."

Rozanov smirked, shrugging. "Mostly. You want one?"

Scrunching his nose, Shane shook his head. Even just the smell gave him a headache sometimes.

Rozanov laughed, his hazel eyes locked on Shane's face. Holding his gaze, Shane gave a small smile, his heart beating faster in his chest. He fought the urge to press his hand against it, feeling the need to anchor himself somehow. Rozanov's eyes seemed impossibly vast, like he was falling into them, like he couldn't get out.

"You played well today," Shane said, scrambling for some way to distract himself from the swell of *something* in his chest.

"I always play well," Rozanov replied. "You were sharp. Nice goal."

"Wow, compliments from Ilya Rozanov."

"I have many compliments for teammates. I am a very generous person."

Sometimes Shane nearly forgot they were on the same team. Even when they were playing together, even when they were practicing and travelling, even when they were asked what it was like to play on the same team. It never seemed to truly settle as a truth, deep in him, that they were *teammates*.

Apparently, Rozanov had gone down the same line of thought. He put out the cigarette by pressing it to the concrete wall and looked back at Shane. "Why did you leave Voyageurs? Thought you would keep staying with them."

Shane inhaled deeply and let out a shuddering breath. He picked at his jeans, his hands going clammy.

Closing his eyes, he forced the words to the tip of his tongue and let them go. "I'm gay." He let them sink in. It wasn't the first time he'd said them. He'd had the conversation with Rose, with Hayden and his parents, but this felt different.

Rozanov's knee knocked twice against his and Shane's lips tipped up into a smile. He opened his eyes and found Rozanov still looking at him.

"I want to stop hiding it. I want to be myself, openly, while being a hockey player in the league. When Scott came out, I started thinking, you know, why can't I?" He shrugged. "But I realized that even if I loved being in Montreal, they were never going to be the team that supported me like that."

"So, the Centaurs," Rozanov said. He'd drawn his legs up to his chest, his arms resting over his bent knees.

"The Centaurs," Shane affirmed. "They've been very openly inclusive. My agent did some research for different teams too, but this just seemed like the right place. The owners know and I have it in writing that the organization will support me when I choose to make it public."

"Good," Rozanov said, his eyes intense. "You deserve that, Hollander."

Shane's cheeks warmed and he felt suddenly exposed.

"Hey," he said, keeping his voice light. "Did you know Wyatt's sister is a lesbian?"

Rozanov huffed a laugh. "I did not, no."

"And Harris is gay."

"Yes, Harris is definitely gay," Rozanov agreed and Shane frowned.

"What, did you—?" He couldn't get out the rest of the sentence, and mortification filled him when Rozanov burst out laughing.

"Oh my god, your face." He pushed at Shane's shoulder. "No, Hollander, I did not get involved with our social media manager."

Shane wanted to bury his face in his hands and scream. Fuck, he was so easy to read. He couldn't keep his reactions to Rozanov under wraps anymore. It all just leaked out of him, like he was a dam with cracks in every direction. He fought for control, swallowing against the dryness in his throat.

"And what about you?" he asked. "I was surprised when I saw you'd signed."

Rozanov reached up and ran a hand through his hair, rubbing over the back of his head.

"Last year, my father died." He swallowed. "I cut my brother off. Nothing left for me in Russia anymore."

"I'm sorry," Shane said.

"Don't be. I am not."

“What about your mom?”

He realized immediately it was the wrong question and he wished he could take it back. Rozanov’s jaw clenched, his eyes going glassy.

“My mother died when I was 12,” he said, rubbing a thumb across his jaw. “She killed herself.”

“Oh my god.” Shane swallowed against a sudden lump in his throat. “Shit, I’m so sorry.”

“Thank you.”

They sat in silence for a moment, Shane not wanting to push Rozanov to say anything he didn’t want to say. He wanted to reach out, but it still felt like it was too much. Instead, he shifted just a little closer until their shoulders were touching.

“So Russia is not my place anymore,” Rozanov said. He leaned into Shane’s side, just a little. “Thought about marrying Svetlana, but...” He paused. “She is not my soulmate.”

Svetlana. Shane had a vague image of a woman Rozanov had been photographed with several times, and assumed it was her.

“Did you love her?” he asked, voice quiet.

Rozanov’s eyebrows rose in surprise. “Oh, no, no. Would marry for citizenship.”

“Oh.”

“Svetlana is a good friend. She would be good wife. But—” Rozanov gestured towards his chest.

Shane wanted to ask about the soulmate. He did. But he also did not want to know. He didn’t want the confirmation. Eventually, he would ask, but he just needed more time, just a little more time to come to terms with it. He just needed to work through these feelings that he’d buried, and accept the idea of Rozanov’s soulmate. Just more time, that was all he needed.

“Canada seemed like good place to live. Safe. And I would never play for Toronto or Montreal.”

“So, Centaurs,” Shane said.

“The Centaurs.”

“Do you think we made the right choice?” Shane asked, and he suddenly realized how close they were now. If he just leaned in—

“Yes,” Rozanov said, his gaze dropping to Shane’s lips and then back up again. “I think so.”

Shane’s heart was too big for his chest. It was going to explode out of his chest. God, he wanted it. He remembered, faintly, what kissing Rozanov had felt like, and he wanted it

again, wanted to know if it was as deliriously good as he remembered. Nothing else had ever compared, and maybe Rozanov himself wouldn't even live up to the memory Shane had built in his head. Or maybe it'd be even better. He was drawn in, like his body was just pulled into Rozanov.

"Ilya," he whispered, his mouth grazing Rozanov's bottom lip.

And then a chill ran down his spine, like being doused in cold water. He wanted it so badly it felt like agony, but Rozanov's soulmate—his fucking soulmate. Shane made a wounded noise and pulled away, scrambling to his feet.

"Shane?" Rozanov said, eyebrows drawn in confusion.

"I have to go."

Shane didn't look back, his heart throbbing painfully.



They won in Seattle too.

Shane hadn't played well, but it had been enough. He barely knew what he'd been doing out there, running on autopilot completely. Relying on his decades of hockey, he just let his body take over as his mind blanked.

He knew people could tell he wasn't himself, but it couldn't be helped.

Stepping into the shower, he felt Ilya's eyes on him. His skin buzzed under their weight, heat licking up his spine, but he squeezed his eyes shut, pushing it to the back of his mind. He stayed in his own world, counting slowly back from a hundred, focusing on each number and what it looked like in his mind. When he reached zero, he started over again.

When he finished, the showers were empty, and he released a long breath. But when he turned, Bood suddenly stood in the doorway. Shane wrapped his towel around his waist, giving Bood a questioning look.

"This is none of my business," Bood said, his voice quiet. "But I thought, maybe, you would want to cover it up. If you hadn't noticed it, I wanted to give you the chance."

Shane frowned. Bood had gestured, vaguely, and Shane looked down.

"What?" Shane asked, his voice barely audible.

"Under the towel," Bood said and left.

His pulse racing, Shane unwrapped the towel and ran his fingers over his skin.

What the fuck.

The spot on his hip, the one that he'd sometimes thought might be something if he looked at it under certain lights, was now unmistakably different. It wasn't a large area, just the size of his thumb along his hipbone. Random lines had appeared, seemingly making no discernible shape. Some were vertical, others horizontal, and slightly spaced out.

For a moment, he tried to understand what it was, what it could possibly turn into when fully formed, but then it suddenly slammed into him.

He had a soulmate.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much to everyone who's following along and commenting ♥ you are a blessing!

Chapter 5: Chapter 4 - Ilya

Chapter Summary

Ilya's soulmark takes shape , Shane gets injured and things come to a head.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Colorado - November 2018

Ilya's soulmark was a fucking bird.

It wasn't even a cool bird, like an eagle or a hawk or a raven. It looked like a duck.

Ilya stared at it in the bathroom mirror, leaning in closer to see the newly formed details. The edges were still blurred, but it was clearly a bird. A very stupid bird. He tapped his fingers against it, biting down on his bottom lip at the feeling that spread from the mark. Shivering slightly, he pulled back and reached for his soulmark patch. For the first time, he hesitated before putting it on, pressing down.

It felt different covering it now, but he was sharing a room with Dykstra, and he didn't want to invite any questions about it. Mostly because he had no real answers. He was amassing a fucking zoo on his chest, apparently, but that was all he knew.

Ilya looked at himself in the mirror.

He didn't *know*.

But the way he felt about Shane was impossible to ignore anymore. It had taken over every part of his body and was forcing itself out through his pores. He couldn't see a world where his soulmate wasn't Shane, but he didn't know if one-sided soulmates existed. It wasn't something he'd looked into, but soulmates were always talked about in pairs and it was always spoken of as a bond. Having a bond that didn't connect with someone else seemed impossible.

Dykstra knocked on the bathroom door. "You done in there, Roz? I need to fucking sleep, my ribs hurt like the devil."

"Yes," he called back.

He left the bathroom, leaving the door open for Dykstra.

"You are such an old man," Ilya said.

“I won’t let you shame me out of my sleep!”

“Okay, grandpa.”

“Oh my god, you’re so annoying.” Dykstra slapped his shoulder as he walked past him into the bathroom.

Ilya threw himself down on his bed and picked up his phone, ignoring all of his notifications. It was frustrating that Shane didn’t really use social media. His photos were mostly just hockey. Not even the odd selfie. Ilya scrolled through his instagram profile until he found one of the only actual pictures of Shane. He was at the cabin he owned somewhere near Ottawa, the shot showing him in profile, looking out over a lake. His hair was longer than it tended to be in season. Then there were the freckles that made Ilya’s heart beat oddly. They were the first thing he’d noticed about Shane, and they still drove him out of his mind. Ilya dropped his head against his pillow and groaned, throwing his arm over his eyes.

The thing was.

He thought he’d seen something in the shower. It looked, for a moment, like there were dark marks on Shane’s skin, just barely visible. That seemed impossible, though, because surely, Shane would hide a soulmark? Unless he hadn’t even realized it was there, which would mean it was new.

Fuck, they really needed to talk.

There was one more stop after their game tomorrow and then they’d be back in Ottawa. They should talk there, when they had more than a few moments away from all their very nosy teammates. Maybe he could invite Shane over to his house.

The thought made his stomach flutter and he hated himself a little for it. If he was getting ahead of himself, and this was nothing, he didn’t know what he’d do.



Ilya went careening into the boards, a sharp pain blooming in his ribs and he rubbed at them for a brief moment before setting off again. It was an oddly brutal game considering this wasn’t a team they had any notable history with. They weren’t really known for being one of the most physical teams either, so Ilya figured he must’ve done something to piss them off.

Wouldn’t be the first time.

They didn’t just go for him, though. All throughout the game, they’d been toeing the line. It got worse once Tanner Dillon somehow shot them into the lead, and Ilya got one in at the end of the second period. The tension ramped up, the fight becoming a pressure cooker that exploded in the third period when one of their defensemen bodychecked Shane so hard he bounced off the boards and onto the ice.

An eerie quiet descended over the arena. Ilya had a wild sense of deja vu as he jumped up from his seat on the bench, leaning forwards to get a better look, his heart racing. His throat

tightened like a cold hand was gripping it, squeezing, cutting his airflow. Shane was still lying splayed out on the ice as the medics skated out to him, but finally, he moved. Letting out a long, relieved breath, Ilya searched out the offending defenseman and met his eyes head on. The expression that met him was one of resignation and Ilya gave him a crazed smile.

Shane was up on his feet, being supported off the ice and into the locker rooms. Ilya's eyes were glued to him until he disappeared from view and Coach Wiebe clapped his hand on Ilya's shoulder.

"You're up."

On his way out onto the ice, Ilya turned and grinned. "I will be right back."

"Oh, Jesus Christ." Coach Wiebe pinched the bridge of his nose.

It didn't take long until Ilya got the opportunity to throw his gloves down on the ice, the resigned defenseman dropping his stick and his gloves while heaving a sigh. They crashed together, Ilya grabbing the front of his jersey and going straight for the punches. The pads took most of the impact, but he got a couple of good hits and he grinned wildly, almost enjoying the few bursts of pain as a hand connected with his face. The defenseman lost his footing and Ilya let go, watching in satisfaction as he tumbled back onto the ice.

Skating into the penalty box, Ilya smiled and waved at Coach Wiebe and on the bench, Chouinard was laughing at his antics. Coach glared, but there was a small lift at the corner of his mouth as he turned away. It was a rough five minutes since they were now down both Shane and Ilya. Colorado got a goal in, but the Centaurs were still one up and Ilya had no intentions of letting them equalize it. The moment he was allowed back in, he shot back onto the ice and went straight into a bodycheck.

When the game ended, they'd managed to hold them off and the adrenaline started to leave Ilya's body as he went down the line, shaking hands. In its place was a buzzing worry. Shane hadn't returned to the ice or the bench, and there was no way Shane would stay away without a very good reason. Heading towards the locker room, he worked to keep his feelings off his face. He let himself be pulled into some celebrations before he unlaced his skates and got out of his gear, stripped down to his base layer.

The locker room was in high spirits and Wyatt and Dillon were doing some sort of complicated dance while Bood was off talking to the media. Ilya took the opportunity to sneak off, looking for Shane. The medical room turned out to be right around the corner from the locker room and Ilya stopped in front of the door, which was slightly ajar. He pushed at it lightly, finding Shane sitting alone atop a treatment table.

"Got you good, yes?" Ilya asked, giving a slight smile.

Shane, cradling his arm in a sling against his stomach, looked up in surprise. Something changed in his face, something that sent Ilya's heart tumbling. Fuck. His brown eyes were so warm and expressive.

"Seems like they got you too." Shane's good arm twitched, like he wanted to reach out.

“Well, only a little.” Ilya shrugged. “I won the fight.”

Shane’s eyebrows rose. “You fought him?”

“Of course I did, what you take me for?”

A smile lit up Shane’s face and he let out a small huff of laughter. “You’re such a drama queen. You didn’t need to fight the guy. We could’ve lost!”

Rolling his eyes, Ilya stepped closer. “Oh, thank you, Ilya, for standing up for me.”

“I would never say that,” Shane said, biting down on a smile.

“So bratty.” Ilya looked down at him. “How are you?”

Shane grimaced, eyes dropping to his arm. “Something with my shoulder, maybe. I need to get it checked properly.”

“Has to be bad if you did not force your way back to the ice.”

“I was threatened with a slow, painful death.”

“And that usually works?”

Dropping his head, Shane sighed. “No. It feels pretty bad, actually, so for once I figured I’d play it safe. It’s a long season.”

Ilya placed one knuckle underneath Shane’s chin and tipped his head up, looking into his bottomless brown eyes. There was pain in his expression and Ilya wanted to run his fingers over the crease between his brows to smooth it out.

“Yes, you should be careful,” Ilya said, brushing his thumb over the cut of his jaw.

He leaned down, stopping for a brief moment, for long enough to let Shane pull away. Shane stayed completely still. His chest rose and fell, his lips parting, and Ilya had no more self-control left. He leaned in and kissed him, soft and slow. Shane let out a wounded noise, his lips warm and pliant under Ilya’s, and Ilya cradled his cheek, kissing him more insistently. Everything slowed as Ilya struggled to make sense of his reaction, the way his body lit up from the inside and goosebumps rose on his thighs. Pulling back, the kiss lingered and he straightened back up, eyes locked on Shane’s plump lips.

Footsteps sounded down the hallway and Ilya moved away, even though he wanted nothing less. Shane’s eyes were on him, his expression open. Ilya’s hand burned with the need to reach back out and brush his thumb over the freckles dusting his cheeks.

He was moments away from giving in when the door creaked open and the doctor jumped in surprise when she nearly walked straight into Ilya.

“Oh my god,” she said, her hand coming up to her chest. “You scared me!”

“Sorry.” He kept his face blank, finally tearing his eyes away from Shane.

“No, it’s fine, Mr. Rozanov, I just didn’t expect you.” She stepped up to Shane and adjusted the sling slightly. “I’ve spoken to your team and given them my recommendation, and the decision is that they’re sending you home tonight.”

“No, I—”

“Yes,” Ilya interrupted.

“Ilya,” Shane said, exasperated. “There’s still San Jose.”

“And your arm is in a sling.”

Shane’s jaw tensed. “It’s a precaution.”

“You already said, is a long season.” Ilya gestured towards his arm. “You want this to bother you in playoffs?”

Letting out a long breath, Shane stared daggers at him. “No.”

“So, you do what team says and go home today.”

“You should listen to Mr. Rozanov,” the doctor said. “It might not be as bad as we fear, but if it is, and you play, it could keep you off the ice for months.”

After that, she left them alone, instructing Shane to wait for the member of the coaching staff who would accompany him home. Unable to stay away, Ilya moved into Shane’s space again, standing between his open legs. This time, Shane reached up and brushed his thumb across Ilya’s cheekbone.

“A bruise,” he said with a slight smile.

Ilya hummed. “Da, very sexy.”

“Alright, those are *your* words.”

“You will go home,” Ilya said, instead of continuing their teasing. “I will go to San Jose. When I am back in Ottawa, we should talk.”

“Talk,” Shane repeated, his voice wobbling slightly.

“Difficult thing for you?”

“Oh, that’s rich! Difficult thing for *me*?”

“I talk a lot!”

“Yes, you talk a lot of shit.”

“If your arm was not already in a sling, I would put you in one.”

Shane laughed, knocking his knee against Ilya's thigh. "Okay. In Ottawa, we'll talk."



Ilya woke up in San Jose, his head feeling cloudy and his chest tight with pressure. He swore, tumbling out of bed and squinting against the lights in the bathroom. Getting ready didn't help at all, but he tried to just push it down. He never got sick. It just didn't happen, but the last time it had, years ago, he'd just played through it, so he would do the same today.

"Are you okay, Roz?" Wyatt asked as he slumped into a seat on the bus on the way to the arena.

"Yes," he said, even as his head throbbed. "Just tired."

All through preparing for the game, his body felt sluggish and strange. He could feel the eyes of his teammates on him, but he went through the motions, forcing his body to obey. When people spoke to him, he answered something he hoped made sense, but at least once he must've answered in Russian, because Dykstra looked at him with his brows furrowed in confusion.

He couldn't even remember the game. They lost, which was no surprise since Shane had gone home and Ilya probably played like he was drunk. He had absolutely no idea what he'd done out there, and could only hope his instincts had kicked in.

"I am fine," he told Coach Wiebe as he approached. "No worries."

"You're absolutely not fine, Ilya, you look pale as a ghost."

"I will sleep it off."

"If you're not better tomorrow, you come in and see the medical team right away." Coach's voice gave no room for more objections.

On the plane home, Ilya curled up into a window seat and tried to sleep, but even in his dreams, his body ached. The dreams were strange, flashes of images that moved quickly, dissolving and morphing into new settings and impressions. But eventually as the hours passed, it seemed to calm a little—enough that he passed out into dreamless sleep.



Ilya had thrown himself down on the couch the moment he entered his house, just dropping his bag right inside the door on his way in. He hadn't moved and he had no idea how long it had been either. His head no longer felt like it would explode, but it still throbbed uncomfortably and his skin felt like sandpaper.

An incessant buzzing woke him from a fitful sleep and he sat up, confused, rubbing at his eyes. He tried to make sense of the sound for several moments before he realized it was the doorbell being pressed over and over. Forcing himself off the couch, he walked out into the hallway and yanked the door open. A harried looking Shane stood on the other side, his hair wild and the circles under his eyes dark and heavy.

Immediate relief slammed into Ilya's body. He almost sagged under the feeling, holding onto the door for support. He moaned as the throbbing in his head disappeared. Shane, too, suddenly looked like there was color in his cheeks and he stumbled inside. His eyes were wide and a little glassy. He was so pretty, Ilya couldn't stand it.

"Ilya," Shane whispered.

Ilya looked at him, waiting.

Shane's hands moved down to pop open the button of his jeans.

"What—?" Ilya stopped, watching enraptured as Shane opened his jeans and pulled down his boxers.

Ilya's breath caught in his throat at the sight of the mark on Shane's hip bone. His heart slammed against his ribs as he reached out, eyes locked on the dark lines that stood stark against the skin.

"Shane," he said, thumb brushing over the mark.

Chapter End Notes

What do we think Shane's soulmark is? ANY THEORIES?

Chapter 6: Chapter 5 - Shane

Chapter Summary

Soulmates reunite and find their way.

Chapter Notes

Some of you were very close about the mark! Sorry, I went full sap!

Thanks for following along ♥

I can't believe we're only hours away from episode 5, which will change my life actually!

Ottawa - November 2018

Heat coursed through Shane the moment Ilya touched the mark. It set his body on fire, his mind whiting out and he swayed on the spot. Fuck, the last few days had been overwhelming. The injury, the weird sickness that had now evaporated on the spot, the mark suddenly showing its shape. And Ilya. A few days ago he'd been convinced Ilya had a soulmate somewhere else, someone he went home to, and now—it felt surreal.

Shane blinked, looking up into Ilya's awed expression.

“Любимый,” Ilya said, swiping his thumb back and forth over the mark. There was something in his voice Shane had never heard before that made his insides melt.

Shane's breath hitched. “What does it mean?”

“Is like... nickname.” Ilya frowned. “I do not know how to explain.”

“What kind of nickname?”

“Like, for people you love.”

“Oh.” Shane, embarrassingly, felt his eyes sting. “Like a term of endearment.”

Ilya nodded, the corner of his mouth tipping up into a smile that was almost shy. “Wait.” He picked his phone out of his pocket, tapped something out and handed it to Shane. A dictionary was pulled up on the screen.

Lyubimyy - beloved, darling

Shane's breath rushed out of him and he stared at it, chest fluttering. For so long, he'd been so sure he didn't have a soulmate, that there would never be a mark on his body. And now, of all marks, he had this. *Beloved*. He let his own finger drift over the mark, leaving a pleasant spark.

"Oh my god," he said, faintly.

When his mark had changed, the lines filling in, it had taken him a few moments to fully understand what he was looking at. It had hit him like a truck, then, that he was looking at a word in Cyrillic. That it was Ilya, it had been Ilya all along, he'd been Ilya's soulmate this entire time.

"Kiss me," he said, tilting his head up and pushing Ilya's phone back into his hand so he could put it away. "Please."

A wide, bright smile that he'd never seen before spread across Ilya's face and Shane was desperate to kiss it off, desperate to see it every day of his silly little life. Ilya's hands came up to bracket his face, thumbs brushing across his cheeks, and Shane's breath caught in his chest as he swayed closer. It was scary how much he wanted to just surrender himself to Ilya, how much he trusted Ilya to catch him. When their lips finally met, Shane melted into it, opening up under the kiss to slide his tongue along Ilya's. Arms circled him, holding him close, and the immense relief he felt was almost enough to sweep the ground out from under him. He clung to Ilya, sighing into the kiss.

An awkward movement of Shane's arm had him wincing and Ilya pulled back, frowning down at him.

"How bad is it?" he asked, his hand sliding down to cup Shane's neck.

"Not as bad as they thought, I swear." Especially now that the intense headache was gone. "I should be able to play soon as long as my shoulder is supported."

He let himself be pulled further into the house as he looked around with interest. It surprised him that Ilya had bought a whole house when he moved to Ottawa. There was nothing temporary about buying a house, but then Ilya *had* talked about citizenship, about wanting to stay in Canada. Now, though, it also seemed obvious it couldn't be a coincidence that they both were drawn to Ottawa. The bond must have played some part in bringing them both here.

"There are more parts of the house," Ilya said, pulling Shane closer by their entwined hands.

"Oh, really?" Shane grinned. "Like a bathroom?"

Ilya hummed, wrapping his arms around Shane's waist and kissing the tip of his nose. "Yes."

"Laundry room?"

"Yes."

“Home gym?”

“Of course.”

Shane laughed, his chest feeling so absurdly light. “Show me your bedroom, Ilya.”

“Very...” Ilya stopped, searching for a word, his face scrunching up into an adorable expression.

“Forward?” Shane suggested.

“Yes, that,” Ilya said, clearly beyond caring as he guided Shane towards the stairs, pushing him ahead.

Inside Ilya’s bedroom, Shane let himself be enveloped, burying his face into Ilya’s neck, inhaling the scent of him. A kiss was pressed to his forehead and Shane closed his eyes, letting out a shaky breath. He still couldn’t believe he was here. He’d cemented Ilya belonging to someone else so firmly in his mind, this felt like an elaborate dream.

“Your mark,” he said, suddenly needing to see it.

Of all reactions, Shane did not expect Ilya to let out a scoff as he pulled his T-shirt over his head. He frowned at Ilya, who was peeling back the soulmark patch.

“You get beautiful Russian word, I get this,” Ilya said, gesturing towards his mark. “This duck creature.”

Shane stared at it, biting his bottom lip. He was torn between an inexplicable feeling of familiarity, of recognition, of home, and the need to laugh at Ilya’s consternation.

“Maybe it’s because we’re rich.”

“What?” Ilya tipped his head down, trying and failing to look at the mark.

“That’s a loon,” Shane said. “The bird that’s on the coins, you know? Loonies?”

“I have the fucking money bird on my chest?” Ilya exclaimed, face so affronted that Shane barked out a laugh. “What is wrong with you? Why is this your mark on me?”

He didn’t know if he had a real answer to that, but he couldn’t stop looking at it, even if it was a bit ridiculous.

“Well, it is the provincial bird of Ontario,” he said.

“Oh, well, if it is province bird, then of course!” Ilya said, sarcasm dripping from his voice.

Shane bit down on his lips to stop his smile. “There are a lot of those at my cottage. I’ll take you there this summer. After we win the cup.”

“See, why could not Stanley Cup be the mark?” Ilya whined and he wore such a petulant expression, Shane wanted to pinch his cheeks.

How could someone be so hot and so sweet at the same time? God, his heart was so full it hurt. He reached out slowly, pressing his fingers to the mark for the first time and a feeling unlike any other burst behind his eyelids, embedded itself deep in his core. Something clicked into place. It felt so unbearably right. An emptiness he didn’t know he’d had was filled with something so warm, so sure, so vast.

“Fuck, Ilya.” He pried his eyes open and looked up, bringing a hand up to rest on Ilya’s cheek.

Ilya was looking at him, wide-eyed and awestruck. Burying his fingers in Shane’s hair, he crushed their lips together, claiming him, drinking Shane’s desperate moans. His mouth slanted down over Shane’s jaw, and Shane threw his head back, whimpering softly as Ilya pressed kisses to his skin.

He’d chased this feeling for years. It had been lightning in a bottle, impossible to capture no matter how much he tried. After a while, he’d wondered if he’d built it up in his mind, like it couldn’t possibly be what he remembered it to be. And now, as he clung to Ilya’s biceps while Ilya mouthed along his neck, tongue hot on his skin, Shane was drowning in it. The bond must have made it even more intense, because Shane’s mind was turning to soup.

“Please,” he said, nuzzling into Ilya’s hair.

Ilya looked up from where he was nibbling at Shane’s neck. “Please, what, sweetheart?”

Sweetheart knocked the wind out of him. He moaned softly, slipping one hand up into Ilya’s curls, pressing his lips to his forehead.

“What do you need?” Ilya asked, hand gripping Shane’s waist.

“Just—” Shane couldn’t think. “Just touch me.”

Ilya smiled and stepped back to pull Shane’s T-shirt over his head, sliding his hands over Shane’s chest before coming to rest at the waistband of his jeans. Shane watched him, eyes hooded, letting him manoeuvre him out of his clothes. Running a hand through Shane’s hair, Ilya leaned in and pressed a soft kiss to the corner of his mouth.

“I have mistake I need to fix,” Ilya said. “My one regret.”

Shane blinked. “What’s your regret?”

“Did not see your face when you sucked me off.” Ilya brushed his thumbs over Shane’s cheeks. “Have never forgiven myself.”

Shane didn’t even know if he made a conscious choice to drop to his knees or if they just gave out. He looked up, a shiver running down his back at Ilya’s heated gaze, his eyes dark.

“We do need to fix that,” Shane said, his heart hammering.

His hands shook as he reached out to pull Ilya's sweatpants down and out of the way. Leaning in, he nosed against the bulge. He mouthed over the cotton fabric, moaning softly as he flattened his tongue against it, a faint taste hitting him. It made him lightheaded with anticipation when he felt it harden further under his mouth and he steadied himself with his hands splayed over Ilya's thighs. Reaching up, he dragged the boxers down, eyes immediately going to the cock he'd thought of whenever he'd bothered trying anyone else's. God, it was so perfect. It was stupid, that a cock should be perfect, but Shane wanted it, loved it, to an embarrassing degree. It twitched as Shane stared at it, enthralled.

Gripping it around the base, Shane leaned in and placed a kiss just underneath the head, then flicking out his tongue, taking his first taste. Both of Ilya's hands buried into his hair and when he took the head into his mouth, closing his lips around it, he looked up into Ilya's eyes and whimpered at the taste of him. Ilya let out a long moan and his fingers twisted so hard in Shane's hair that tears sprung in his eyes.

"Fuck." Ilya groaned, his eyes hooded with want.

Shane took more of him in, his lips stretching around it, and his eyelids fluttered shut at the feeling of fullness. His mind went blank as he found a rhythm, Ilya's cock sliding back and forth over his tongue. Ilya's hand came to rest on Shane's face, his fingers brushing over cheekbones, the corner of Shane's mouth, the cut of his jaw.

"So beautiful," Ilya said, voice quiet. "Unbelievable."

Humming, Shane looked up again, holding one hand on Ilya's hips, his heart stuttering at the look on Ilya's face. Fuck. He was going to fucking come just from this, just from Ilya's perfect cock in his mouth and the way he was looking at him.

Ilya groaned, tipping his head back. "Why are you so fucking perfect?"

Shane pulled away, pressing a hand to the base of his own cock, breathing heavily. Resting his head against Ilya's thigh, he listened to the roaring in his ears. When Ilya's hands bracketed his face and tipped it up, he let him do it without complaint.

"Are you okay?" Ilya asked.

"I also have a regret."

"What is your regret, Любимый?"

A shiver went down his spine, and he moved on instinct to caress his own mark. Ilya caught the movement and his eyes went soft, his hand stroking Shane's cheek.

"I've dreamt of you fucking me." Shane's cheeks flame at the admission. "So many times."

Ilya pulled Shane up, wrapping one arm tight around Shane's waist as he kissed him deeply, his lips soft but demanding. Shane moaned, going boneless in Ilya's arms, just letting Ilya kiss him within an inch of his life before pushing him down onto his stomach, careful not to

jostle his shoulder. Resting his head onto his forearms, he held his breath as Ilya draped across his back, the weight of him making Shane's heart hammer.

"You think of me when you touched yourself?" Ilya asked, breath fanning across the back of his neck.

Shane nodded, closing his eyes against the embarrassment.

"Use your voice," Ilya said, voice warm and coaxing, running a hand slowly through Shane's hair.

"Yes."

Ilya hummed, kissing a spot behind Shane's ear.

"Did you think of my cock when you were with someone else?"

Shane gripped the bed cover. "Yes." It was little more than a gasp.

There was a silence that sent Shane spiralling. Maybe that was wrong. Maybe Ilya wouldn't like that. The reminder that there had been other people, even if they had never been what he needed. He only calmed down when Ilya's hand ran down his side, from his ribs to his hip, slow and reverent.

"My pretty boy," Ilya muttered, pressing a kiss to Shane's shoulder. "I will give you what you need. What you always need."

Fuck, Shane thought he might cry. His eyes stung and he blinked furiously. It would be too embarrassing to cry about this, too pathetic. Just because Ilya was giving him everything he'd tried so hard to keep out of his mind for years. He bit into his lower lip, focusing on the branding heat of Ilya's hand splayed over his hip.

When Ilya pulled back, leaning over to search through his nightstand, Shane let out a long breath to clear his head to no avail. His hips rolled softly against the mattress, and he tried to hold back a string of whimpers. The moment Ilya's attention was back on him, he felt it like fire against his skin and he moaned softly, his lips brushing against his own forearm.

"Fuck, Shane," Ilya said, pressing a kiss to the small of his back. "Your pretty sounds. You are trying to kill me."

When Shane suddenly felt the brush of Ilya's tongue against his rim, he jolted, breath stuttering.

"Oh my god," he said, pushing his hands flat against the mattress. "Oh, *fuck*, mmm."

Shane pressed his cheek into the bed, pushing back into the drag of Ilya's tongue, sparks skittering over his skin and into the tip of his fingers. He was already so far gone, hands gripping the bed cover as Ilya's hands held him open, his mouth making Shane delirious. When Ilya pushed two lubed fingers into him, Shane cried out, not even trying to keep quiet.

“Fuck, Ilya, I’m gonna come, I swear, you have to—”

Ilya laughed. “Very fast, Hollander. Fastest player in the league.” His fingers curved just right, making Shane’s leg twitch.

“Shut up,” Shane complained, even as he pushed himself back onto Ilya’s hand, burying his face into the crook of his elbow.

With a soft touch to Shane’s waist, Ilya pulled out and nudged Shane to flip over, Shane’s breath catching in his throat as he looked up into Ilya’s face. His heart went crazy when Ilya smiled that devastating, crooked smile that had always sent his stomach swooping. Surging up, Shane hooked his arms around Ilya’s neck and pulled him in, kissing every feeling swelling in his chest into Ilya’s pliant lips.

“Please,” he whispered into the kiss, pulling Ilya’s bottom lip between his.

Ilya moaned, hand sliding over Shane’s thigh where it wrapped around Ilya’s hip. He fumbled for something on the bed, breaking the kiss as he picked up a condom.

“You want to use?” he asked, voice gravelly.

“I haven’t—it’s been a long time,” Shane admitted, cheeks flushing.

Ilya leaned in, pressing a kiss to the corner of his mouth. “For me too.”

There was no way for Shane to process that. Ilya Rozanov, who openly loved having sex and shied away from none of it, hadn’t been with anyone for a long time.

“Oh,” he said, head spinning and Ilya laughed, kissing his temple.

“You do not have to sound so surprised.”

“What do you even mean, of course I’m surprised! You haven’t exactly been shy about it.”

“Soulbonds are very picky, yes?” Ilya said, burying his face into Shane’s neck, the next words muffled. “No one else would do.”

“Fuck.” Shane wrapped his legs tightly around him, clinging to the body pressed against his own. “God, I’m gonna—”

He stopped, throwing his head back as Ilya slid inside, finally, and he moaned so loudly he felt a rush of shame that was almost immediately drowned out by the pleasure bursting in his chest. He dug his fingers into Ilya’s shoulders, clinging to him, as he was filled so completely. Ilya’s breath stuttered across the sensitive skin of Shane’s neck, letting out a deep groan when he bottomed out. He lifted his head and brought one hand to Shane’s jaw, turning him to claim his lips in a sloppy kiss.

When Ilya started fucking into him, Shane cried out and his eyes rolled back, Ilya’s name spilling breathlessly from his lips. They were so entwined Shane didn’t know where he ended

and Ilya began, and Ilya moaned softly, lips grazing his cheek. He wanted to stay like this, never leaving the bed, never putting even the smallest amount of space between them.

He met Ilya's thrusts with desperate rolls of his hips, his head swimming with the sudden thought of soulmates. Fuck, this was forever. The two of them, him and Ilya, so fucking impossibly. Tears gathered at the corners of his eyes and he could do nothing but let them fall. When Ilya noticed, he pulled away just enough to reach a hand up and wiped them away. Shane dipped his head down, kissing at the hollow of Ilya's throat, slanting his lips along his skin until he hovered over the mark shaped like a loon. He closed his eyes, overwhelmed, before pressing a kiss to the crisp, fully-formed mark.

He didn't have to let Ilya go, he didn't have to bury it all down anymore. It was his, this was all his. The thought sent him into a feeling so intense he swore he'd lost his grip on reality. It pulled him under, so suddenly and so thoroughly that he came before he even realized what was happening.

"Fuck, fuck, *fuckfuckfuckfuck*—" He was cut off by Ilya's hungry lips, tongue sliding hot against his.

He spilled between them, the release turning his bones into liquid, his thighs digging into Ilya's hips. His hands slid from Ilya's shoulder to grip loosely around his biceps as Ilya fucked him through it, the orgasm seemingly endless. It took a few moments before he was present enough to notice Ilya's rhythm was growing frantic. He looked up into Ilya's face, taking in his blissed out expression and an intensity in his eyes that had Shane's heart skipping a beat. Bringing his hands up, he held Ilya's face between them and leaned up to kiss him again, slow and warm and sated, and Ilya broke apart, his body shaking when he buried himself deep inside.

Breathing heavily, Shane ran his hands slowly through Ilya's hair, fingers massaging his scalp as he came down. He pressed his smile into Ilya's temple as he felt Ilya's heart beat wildly against his chest.



It was early morning when Shane woke up, tucked up against Ilya, his arm draped across his stomach and their legs intertwined. A strip of sunlight cut across the duvet slung over their hips. Shane blinked against the brightness in the room, struggling to put everything into focus until last night came back to him. He smiled widely, burying his face into Ilya's chest, which was still rising and falling steadily.

When Ilya finally woke, Shane was propped up against the pillows scrolling on his phone, which he'd found discarded on the floor together with his jeans. He looked up from the screen, smiling when Ilya stretched lazily, his eyes never leaving Shane like he was scared he'd disappeared if he looked away.

"Morning," Shane said, giving into the urge to run one hand through Ilya's curls, ruffled by sleep.

Ilya looked unbearably soft, then, his expression open and pleased. "Good morning."

“Did you also feel like shit after I left?” Shane asked.

“Da.” Ilya shuffled closer, resting his head on the pillow. “Terrible headache. I could not really play. Everything was weird.”

“Me too.” Shane nodded down at his phone. “Apparently, our bond was about to fully form and it got interrupted when we were separated. Our bodies were telling us to get back to each other.”

“So not... forever?” Ilya said, hesitating as he looked for words.

“No, it should all be fine now. According to this, there are no aftereffects.”

“You are little professor.”

Shane pushed against his shoulder while Ilya laughed, the two of them falling into each other like gravity pulled them together. The playful fighting turned into a bit of a wrestling match that turned quite serious before it suddenly devolved into laughter again, Ilya eventually pinning Shane to the bed as he squirmed.

“Get off,” he said, undermined by the way he started giggling.

Instead of letting him go, Ilya pulled him into a hug, wrapping his arms around his back. Shane let himself sink into it, resting his head against Ilya’s shoulder.

“What do we do now?” Shane asked.

Ilya’s hand brushed softly up and down the length of Shane’s back. “About what?”

“Well, do we have to tell someone? We have to be the first bonded teammates in the NHL. I don’t know if there are rules. There probably wouldn’t be, since it’s never happened. Oh, actually, it’s probably so much better that we’re not on opposite teams right now. But even then—”

“Is okay, Shane. We will figure it out.”

Shane took a deep breath, realizing he was spiralling a little. Of course, there had to be a way to figure this out. It wasn’t like anyone would be legally allowed to discriminate against them because they were bonded.

“I should call my agent,” Shane said. “She’ll know what to do, and she can help us talk to whoever needs to know.”

“I hope you pay her a lot of money.”

Shane laughed. “I should probably give her a bonus.”

It was quiet for a moment before Ilya spoke, voice steady and sure. “The Centaurs are good. They are good people. Everything will be fine.”

Pulling back to look up at Ilya, Shane met his eyes and felt immediately overwhelmed with a warmth that spread to every part of his body. The words at the tip of his tongue shouldn't feel so scary, considering they had each other's marks permanently etched into their skin. But the bond was one thing, something like fate, while the words were a choice.

Ilya's eyes were searching his face, his eyes crinkling as he smiled. "I love you," Ilya said, kissing him deep and slow.

Shane's skin broke out in goosebumps, his heart feeling so impossibly full.

"I love you, too. So much I can't—" He cut himself off and let out a shuddering breath, letting Ilya kiss him and press him into the mattress.



The thing with Shane's mark was that it was extremely obvious. Ilya's was a mystery, something that provided no real clues. No one in the locker room would look at the loon and connect it to Shane. But anyone would see the word in Cyrillic on Shane's hip and connect it to Ilya immediately.

The problem had been put off by his shoulder keeping him off the ice for three weeks, but now he was cleared for practice and for their upcoming home game. This was why he was standing in front of the bathroom mirror with a soulmark patch, staring at the mark in the mirror as he tried to put the patch on.

It should be easy, just slapping the patch onto the mark and getting on with his day, but it felt like an impossible task. Ilya had said he'd started feeling weird about hiding it the clearer it became, but Shane hadn't fully understood what that meant until now. The feeling of discomfort was indescribable. He inhaled deeply and pressed the patch in place, his stomach turning. Fuck. He ripped it off again, throwing it straight in the trash.

So.

Shane was going to have to flaunt his very obvious soulmark.

Picking up his phone from the bathroom counter, he took several deep breaths to calm the rolling of his stomach. Ilya had already gone in for a little social media shoot with Harris, while Shane was due for practice in an hour.

Shane

I can't put the patch on. It's literally making me vomit.

He was in the kitchen when Ilya answered.

Ilya

Don't make yourself feel sick

You should throw out patch

Shane

Are you sure? You know everyone will know.

Ilya

Good

I want them to know

Shane stared down at his phone, trying to check in with himself. Would he be okay with it, with letting them see? He brushed his hand over the spot where his mark was.

Putting a patch on was out of the question. He couldn't do it. So that didn't leave him with much choice, really. Either he would hide it, or they would know. He would just have to accept that he couldn't keep it secret..

Shane arrived at practice much later than he usually would. Normally, he was one of the first ones out, but now there were only a few of his teammates left in the locker room. Trying to ignore their presence, he stripped out of his clothes, forcing himself to keep things normal. He didn't hunch in on himself and he didn't hide. No one said anything and his shoulders relaxed just a little.

At practice, he did some drills away from the others just to be careful with his shoulder, but other than that everything was deceptively normal. Ilya skated past, throwing out a comment about his drills and Shane rolled his eyes, chirping back about the way Chouinard had stolen the puck from right under Ilya's nose. Towards the end, Shane joined the rest of the team for some tactical drills.

Of course, all sense of normalcy disintegrated the moment he was in the shower. He felt their eyes on him, catching them steal glances as he shifted under the spray. Ilya stayed quiet, carefully observing, and that didn't exactly help the strangeness. It was almost unbearable, because no one would be rude enough to bring it up, so it just sat there as this heavy, unspoken thing.

Shane walked back out into the locker room, wrapping a towel around his waist. As others trickled in from the shower, Shane let out a long breath and turned around to face the room.

"This is so fucking stupid," he said. "You can talk about it."

"Oh, thank fuck," Dykstra exclaimed.

"Fucking finally," Wyatt said, throwing his hands up. "I was going to lose my entire mind. You could cut the tension with a knife."

Tanner Dillon leaned forwards with his arms propped on his thighs. "Am I the only one who has no idea what's going on?"

"Yes," LaPointe said, looking down at him with raised eyebrows.

Shane's eyebrows rose. "What?"

“What do you mean, what?” LaPointe turned to him, incredulous. “You’ve been circling each other like sharks since the season began.”

Chouinard wrapped an arm around Shane’s shoulders. “We were about to stage an intervention.”

Shane sputtered and Ilya laughed, delighted.

“Bood stopped us and said you had to figure it out yourselves, but I’d almost ordered a banner and everything,” Chouinard continued.

“What the fuck,” Shane said faintly.

“The banner would have been good, maybe,” Ilya admitted.

“You’re insane,” Shane said, poking him in the chest.

“What? Would save us lots of time. Would save you a lot of angst.”

“Me?” Shane exclaimed. “Angst. Me.”

“Yes. Angst. You.”

Dykstra leaned into Wyatt. “This might actually be worse somehow.”

“Nothing can be worse than watching them stare longingly at each other across the room.”

“Are you sure about that?” Dykstra asked, eyebrows raised.

Ilya and Shane were still bickering until Ilya playfully swatted Shane’s ass, leaving him standing with his mouth wide open.

“Ilya!”

Chapter 7: Epilogue - Ilya

Chapter Summary

Ilya discovers the loon and what it means to him.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

June 2019 - The Cottage

The low sun glittered on the surface of the lake and the early evening was still hot, not even a slight breeze in the air. They'd been in their own bubble for days, just the two of them alone, cooking together, swimming, fucking, existing, recuperating after a long season that ended in the second round of the playoffs. Every evening had been spent out on the deck, curled up on the couch or in a sun bed, lounging and lazy and relaxed.

Tonight was no different. A bottle of beer was on the table, wet with condensation on the outside. His swim trunks were pooled on the deck where he'd stepped out of them. He had Shane writhing in his lap, moaning desperately at every roll of his hips. Ilya's hands cupped the perfect curve of his ass and he stared up into Shane's face, his cheeks flushed, his lips red and swollen, his eyes glassy. He was so fucking perfect.

Ilya buried his face into Shane's chest, mouthing at the hollow of his throat. Shane tasted of sunscreen and summer and cologne. He got lost in the rhythm of their bodies, the feeling of Shane on top of him, so warm and beautiful and uninhibited. When he came, he sucked at a mark that was already blooming under Shane's jaw, bringing Shane with him over the edge.

They showered together, sharing soft, uncoordinated kisses. Ilya loved how Shane always swayed into his space, always touched him, his hands lingering. It made him feel drunk, sometimes, when he looked down into his sweet face and tucked him in close.

After it turned dark, they lit the fire pit and Shane had his legs over Ilya's lap, his arm draped over his shoulders. Ilya's hand rested at Shane's hip, rubbing softly as Shane told him about a book he was reading. The peacefulness of it was pierced by a wail so loud that Ilya jumped, looking around in a panic. He tried to shield Shane behind him, pushing him back behind his arms, but Shane just held on, laughing deliriously.

"What are you doing?" Shane exclaimed, voice breathless with laughter.

"There is a wolf, Shane! Did you not hear?"

Shane clung to him, looping his arms around Ilya's waist from the side. "Ilya." He broke down laughing again. "That's the fucking loon you have marked on your chest."

“What?” Ilya yelled. “Why does it sound like it will eat me?”

“It’s a bird that barely leaves the water, how would it eat you?”

“Well, listen to it!” Ilya gestured wildly.

“Hey,” Shane said, his lips curving up into a mischievous smile. “Listen to this.” He cupped one hand against his mouth and made a sound so bonechilling and eerily similar to the fucking bird that Ilya nearly pushed him away.

“You have lost your mind,” Ilya said. “You and the loons. Crazy.”

Shane’s eyes crinkled at the corners. “And what does that make you?” He flicked the spot where he knew the mark was underneath his T-shirt.

“A joke for the universe.”

Two days later, Ilya saw one of the birds, bobbing in the water down by the dock. Shane was inside preparing dinner, and Ilya was stretched out on a sun bed, too comfortable to move. He followed the bird’s movements where it swayed gently on the water.

It was now that he knew why his soulmark was a bird, of all things. That the bird was *this*, was them, here, this feeling of belonging and boundless love. If, in some universe, the mark had never appeared on his skin, Ilya thought he would put it there himself.

Chapter End Notes

I hope you've enjoyed this little soulmark AU! It's been a ride!

Thank you! ♥

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