

When Silence Starts Speaking

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When Silence Starts Speaking

by [loveleclerc](#)

Summary

Plagued with the issues of his family past and present, Ilya Rozanov finds himself in the media's eyes for all the wrong reasons recently with no end in sight. When the team decides enough is enough with the drinking and whoring, Ilya is suddenly faced with a new issue to tackle—a personal calming omega hired by the team: Shane Hollander. Shane is up for the task of getting the Russian alpha under control for the season, but are they both up for the unexpected heated connection between them that follows?

Notes

While this work of fanfiction is inspired by the canon series written by Rachel Reid, most aspects of Shane and Ilya's story have obviously changed for plot purposes.

Chapter 1: Team Omega

Ilya woke with a sharp pain in his temple and a deep breath from the nightmare he'd been having in his sleep. He blinked with bleary eyes at the scenery around him and found that he was in his apartment in Boston, safe in bed and completely alone. With a soft groan, he rolled onto his back and dragged his palms over his face while he scrambled to figure out why he was having nightmares about his mother again.

He'd been doing good for a while there.

He dropped his arms to his sides and stared up at the bland ceiling of his bedroom while blinking slowly. Ilya didn't need to look to know that the half drunk bottle of vodka from the night before was still sitting on his nightstand beside him. The dryness in his mouth also made itself known once the last tendrils of sleep slipped away from him.

With another huff to himself, Ilya peeled back the covers and sat up to make his way to the joined bathroom. The night before hadn't really been something he was proud of. They'd played against New York and Ilya always hated playing against them because they were too fucking good. No passes connected, every shot was blocked, and the general togetherness of the team had been completely off on Boston's side.

They'd gotten reamed by their coach before every man on the team scurried away to lick their wounds in private. For Ilya, he'd chosen the route more expected by the media these days. He'd gone out, found a club that played ear shattering music, received a messy yet quick blowjob from an eager omega fan, then got the fuck out of dodge to get wasted at home.

He was sure the media that had followed him from the club had captured his rather sloppy and sloshed appearance at some point. It was only a matter of time until the pictures were all over social media and Ilya was getting pulled into the coach's office once more. They probably *were* already over social media, actually.

Ilya licked his lips before confronting his appearance in the mirror once he reached the bathroom. His blonde curls were a disaster on top of his head and the facial hair he hadn't bothered to shave in a while looked scraggly and gross. His eyes were bloodshot and his skin was splotchy from the alcohol that was trying to leave his system.

All in all, he looked like a real piece of work.

Ilya ran a nervous hand through his hair and turned to the shower, not wanting to look at himself anymore, when his phone began to vibrate somewhere in the distance behind him. He swore softly under his breath in Russian, then pushed his naked body back out into the bedroom to find the damn thing.

He tore through the covers, lifted pillows, then finally found the nuisance on the floor by the wooden base of the bed. Ilya accepted the call without looking at who exactly was reaching out and asked impatiently, "Yes?" to whoever was on the other end.

There came a scoff in response that was undeniably Cook's—the assistant coach for the Boston Bears—followed by, “Hello to you too, Rozanov. Coach wants to see you this morning at ten, so whatever you're doing, wrap it up and get down here.”

Ilya felt his stomach sink slightly inside of him at the implication of what a meeting with Hayes meant, but he accepted anyway with a grumble of agreement to the beta who was far higher up on the hierarchy than Ilya was, regardless of his designation. He tossed his phone back onto the bed, then returned to the shower that was still waiting for him to enter.

As the hot water flowed over his body only a few minutes later, Ilya let his mind turn back to the thoughts he'd been having about his mother. It was the same one he had almost every time he dreamed about her. She'd be in the hammock, swinging and alive, and reach out to hold his hand for just a little while before her eyes would close, her grip would become loose, and all Ilya could do was stand there and plead for her to wake up.

There was probably someone out there that would tell him the reason for his irresponsible actions like hooking up with random omegas and killing his liver with alcohol was directly tied to finding his mother dead, but Ilya didn't want to hear it.

He just wanted to focus on hockey. Sue him if he needed to drown out his thoughts sometimes.

By the time Ilya showed up to the training facility forty minutes later, the nerves inside of his stomach had doubled and the lack of cars in the parking lot only made him fret further. Coach Hayes wasn't a cruel man, but he was a serious one. If he was calling Ilya in on an off day to have a private conversation, it most likely wasn't something light topic-wise.

Ilya shut the door to the newest sports car he'd gotten and shoved his hands into his jeans as he headed towards the front doors. It was just as quiet inside as it was outside, though Ilya knew his way around like the back of his hand and refused to let the uneasiness of the empty hallways turn him around directionally.

He eventually made it to the coaching staff corridor and slowly approached the door with *HEAD COACH* engraved on a golden plaque attached to it. Ilya lifted his hand and knocked twice before reaching for the door handle and cracking it open. Hayes was sitting inside slumped over his keyboard while he scrolled through some kind of forum on the desktop in front of him.

“Sit down, Rozanov,” Hayes greeted without looking away. Ilya swallowed thickly and did as he was told while Hayes pulled himself away from whatever he was looking at to eye Ilya. The alpha across from him was not one that Ilya ever wanted to challenge. Hayes was older with the wrinkles and grey hairs to prove it, but his athletic build and sharp eyes suggested he could easily best Ilya in any kind of disagreement—physical, verbal, or mental.

Ilya dipped his head and lowered his eyes in a show of respect to the other alpha when Hayes finally met his gaze. “You've got more pictures circulating. I could've gone the rest of my life without seeing what I just saw splashed across the internet, Ilya. The orders are coming from management at this point and I don't have a choice in what I'm about to tell you, but I have to say, I think it's the right move,” Hayes started cryptically.

Ilya shifted in his seat and nodded while his entire body went numb from fingers to toes. They were going to let him go, terminate his contract, trade him to a new team, send him to rehab—

“We’re bringing in a team omega for you.”

Ilya immediately stopped breathing from where he was sitting across from Hayes. He blinked once, twice, then parted his lips despite not knowing what to say. If he were to speak, Ilya wasn’t even sure it would be English that came out of his mouth. Hayes just watched him with a steady expression that gave away nothing.

When it was clear Ilya wasn’t going to say anything, Hayes tilted his head to the side and shook it gently. “This has to stop. You want to play here? Stay on this team? You need a chaperone that isn’t going to be looked at twice by the media. Team omegas come in all the time for reasons just like this and worse. No more going out, no more getting wasted, and no more getting photographed with random fuckin’ omegas.”

Ilya finally sucked in a breath and found that he felt sick. To put it simply, team omegas acted much like a chaperone who just happened to be hired by management for alphas that needed someone to watch over them. They could serve for whatever reason—calm down a stressed captain during playoffs, bring a hot-headed enforcer to a state of peace, be a voice of reason to an alpha that didn’t make the best choices—anything.

They had abilities with their designation that alphas just didn’t have. They’d been used by the league since the start of the goddamn sport to get wild alphas under control and focused on their teams. The one thing they weren’t to be used for, however, was sex. Which meant that if Ilya was being assigned a team omega, it meant no *sex period*.

Considering getting wasted was also out of the picture as well, Ilya was going to be left with no outlets for his emotions thanks to the hiring of this new chaperone. Exercise and practice only did so much for him these days while the thoughts of his deceased mother and his father’s declining health plagued his existence. Even Andrei had started to grate on Ilya’s nerves recently by constantly asking for more and more money.

“Management got you a good one—a Canadian omega. Responsible, kind, patient. *Safe*. He’ll keep you out of trouble and focused for the rest of the season. Playoffs are around the corner, Rozanov, and we can’t take the chance,” Hayes explained severely.

Ilya just nodded dumbly at his coach and watched as Hayes twisted towards his computer. He clicked on a few different tabs, following one link to another, until he found whatever message he’d been looking for.

“Management says he’ll be here in two days. His name is Shane Hollander, he’s your age, and he’s from Montreal. You’ll be his ninth alpha that he’s worked with, but his fourth at the NHL level. If it makes you feel any better, he was the team alpha for Ryan Price at one point, so he can handle your shit. This is nonnegotiable, Rozanov. Do you understand?” Hayes asked after giving Ilya some basic information.

Ilya nodded and took in a shaky, yet steadying breath. This was happening. There would be no getting out of this, then.

“Can I ask a few questions?” Ilya questioned once he managed to find his voice. Hayes nodded and sat back in his chair as he folded his hands across his stomach expectantly. “Will he be living with me? Will it be... that close he is watching me?”

“Unless you don’t have a guest room, yes. He’ll be staying with you. You know how these contracts go, though. No sex, Rozanov. That’s not what he’s there for. You feel like going out? He’s stopping you at the door. You want to get wasted? He’s putting the bottle away. You want to make a bad decision in public? He’s making sure that no the fuck you aren’t.”

Ilya nodded quickly and flared his nostrils while thinking of sharing his space with an omega he didn’t know. There’d be pheromones all over his apartment now—invisible little chemtrails in the air that put him in a constant state of calm—and he’d have no choice but to live in them. Would it take away the nightmares though? He quickly shoved down the thought and met the eyes of Hayes across from him once more.

“How long?”

Hayes shrugged, never looking away from Ilya in a display of the clear power imbalance between them at this moment, and countered, “That depends on you. Could be a month, could be the rest of the season. Until shit like this stops happening in the media, he stays. You’re an alpha—a *leader*. Act like it.”

Ilya ducked his head and dropped his eyes again while the back of his neck burned in shame. He knew his scent probably reeked of something sour in the confined office space from his humiliation, but he couldn’t find it in him to care. He deserved this, so he would sit there in his wilting scent until Hayes let him go.

The alpha across from him just sighed and leaned forward to clap a hand on Ilya’s shoulder. “Look, I know you’ve got shit going on, okay? I think everyone on the team knows you’re working through shit on your own, but you need help. It stays private until it *can’t* stay private anymore, got it? This is a last ditch effort before management takes more drastic efforts.”

“I understand,” Ilya murmured. Hayes was quiet for a moment as he looked Ilya over, but he didn’t seem to find anything that warranted another small speech, so he just patted Ilya a few more times then jerked his head to the door.

“You’ll understand then that you’re also scratched tomorrow night. What you’ll be doing is staying home and getting your place ready for Shane when he gets there. Now go home, Rozanov. We’ll see you for practice Sunday morning.”

Ilya didn’t think it could get any worse, and just like that, it had. His shoulders physically slumped and Ilya knew he’d been in a low state of mind for the rest of the day because of everything that had just been dumped on him. No game tomorrow, new chaperone omega, shared apartment, goodbye alcohol and anonymous sex.

He rose from his seat, numbly shook Hayes' hand, then turned and left the office without another word. Had the pictures really been that bad? Was his deteriorating mental state really that obvious? He'd been doing relatively good on the ice this season aside from the blowout that that was yesterday's game, so it wasn't like all of this was affecting his ability to play.

Or, well, not yet anyway.

Ilya pulled out his phone as soon as he got into his car and immediately went to the internet to search *ilya rozanov clubbing* in the search engine. Almost instantly, news articles of his scandalous behavior from last night with a dozen pictures taken from inside the hazy club splashed themselves across his screen.

He bit down on his bottom lip as he scrolled through them and found the fuzzy yet damning evidence of him in the hallway with his pants shoved to his thighs and an omega on her knees blowing him. Ilya shut off the phone quickly and tossed it to the side with a shuddering breath.

What a fucking idiot.

He drove home in silence—only his thoughts to keep him company and drown out the ringing quiet.

Shane stared out the window of the airplane, his warm cheek supported by the palm that awkwardly kept him from getting jostled too hard by the plastic wall next to him. He'd gotten the call for the Rozanov contract two days ago and he couldn't lie, he was nervous. He'd seen all the news articles about Rozanov and it didn't take him too long to figure out that his assistance was needed for the very sleazy public reputation the alpha had.

Shane had dealt with hot-head alphas in the past, first in junior hockey and now at the professional level, but something seemed a little more... raw with this one. He couldn't place his finger on what exactly it was, though, and it had been bothering him the past two days as he packed for a long-term stay with yet another alpha.

He'd done his research to try to prepare himself as best as possible, though.

Ilya Rozanov was from Russia and had been drafted first overall to the Boston Bears when he was eighteen. He had a brother, a father, and a step-mother, all of whom were still in Russia. His mother had passed away when he was younger and Ilya had thrown himself into hockey hard enough that he represented the Russian team in the world juniors championship as captain. His success there was what had led him to Boston where he was the captain there now too.

He lived alone despite the frequent news reports of sharing his time with random omegas from miscellaneous bars or clubs. There had been a few articles online that had hinted at a possible drinking problem as well, but nothing had been confirmed. In contrast, Rozanov was focused on the ice, had led his team to winning a cup already, and was in search of another one.

He was somewhat aggressive on the ice when needed to be and had quite the reputation for getting under opposing players' skin with his words. His English was very good in all of the videos Shane had watched, though his Russian had been just as addictive to listen to.

Part of Shane wondered if this was going to be a good idea. He'd been a great team omega for other players and was considered to be a star recommendation for teams based on his success in his contracts, but again, this felt different.

He watched as the plane drifted lower and lower until the city of Boston came more into focus beneath the aircraft. Shane closed his eyes when the plane finally touched down with a sharp jerk followed by the harsh rattling of the plane slowing down quickly. For as many flights as he'd been on in his life, they never seemed to get easier.

The process of getting off the plane was slow and monotonous. He slung his bag of clothes over one shoulder and grabbed his additional carry-on full of clothes from the overhead bin, then trailed behind the slow moving line to exit the aircraft that had ferried him from one country to another. Baggage claim was another waiting game for his two checked luggages that were also carrying clothes, shoes, toiletries, and a few other things Shane refused to leave behind in Montreal.

Rozanov was supposed to be picking him up from the airport after the team's morning practice, but Shane hadn't received any messages from the Russian man on his phone yet and was halfway convinced that he'd just be getting a taxi to the address on Rozanov's file instead.

The lights came on at the carousel along with a buzzer and Shane watched with bored eyes as the multicolored bags slid down to be picked up. He wasn't sure how long he stood there for, but at some point, a large silhouette had approached from behind and made itself comfortable in his shadow. Shane felt the pinpricks of being stared at on the back of his neck first which made him look over his shoulder nervously, then the feeling of shock followed second.

Ilya Rozanov stood before him in all of his alpha glory with a calculating expression on his face and searching eyes. "Shane Hollander," he greeted in the same thick accent Shane had listened to on his phone. The way the alpha said his name sent a rolling wave of *something* Shane didn't want to name through his body and he forced himself to ignore it as he turned fully around.

"Ilya Rozanov," he greeted. Shane stuck out his hand to the alpha, refusing to look away from the intense gaze on him, and waited for Rozanov to accept his introduction. Rozanov slid his palm against Shane's and shook it twice before dropping Shane's hand like it had been something he really hadn't wanted to touch.

“You get your bags yet?” Rozanov asked as he pulled his eyes away from Shane to look in the direction of the belt. Shane turned and watched as one of his bags slid down the ramp at that exact moment followed by the other a second later. It was a good distraction from the blatant fact that Ilya Rozanov was *stunning*.

Blonde curls, tanned skin, hazel eyes, sharp bone structure, thick lips, and athletic body—he was sinfully gorgeous and Shane could get lost in staring at him if he wasn’t careful. Shane had been around his share of attractive alphas, especially when he did contract work with hockey players, but Ilya Rozanov was in a league of his own. He nearly took the damn breath out of Shane’s lungs, that’s how gravitational the Russian man’s pull was.

Shane didn’t even want to acknowledge his scent either. That could be appreciated later when he was alone.

“That’s them,” Shane pointed out with a cough once he pulled himself from his straying thoughts. Before he could head over, Rozanov passed him and easily grabbed both bags from the belt despite the fact they had to weigh a ton. Shane felt his mouth go dry at the sight of the alpha getting his bags for him with his obnoxiously muscular arms. Okay, he got the damn point. Ilya Rozanov was a hot athletic alpha with an insane presence—whatever.

He didn’t *mean* anything special.

Rozanov walked over to Shane with both bags rolling behind him and jerked his head in the direction of the exit doors a moment later. “Come. I left the car running outside with no driver. I’d really like to not get a ticket for that,” he instructed. Shane nodded quickly, internally scolding the action from the alpha, and followed behind towards the sports car that had, sure enough, been left unattended in the pick up lane.

It was a bit of a puzzle they had to figure out when it came to shoving Shane’s bags inside of the tight space, but they made it work. Then it was just the two of them in the confined car for a long drive to Rozanov’s apartment. Shane shifted uncomfortably in the passenger’s seat and decided to make the first move in conversation.

“I just want to say that I’m going to do my best to make this not feel like a prison sentence. You’re a grown adult and your own person. There are going to be things that I can’t let you do, I know, but they’re your team’s orders, not mine. I’m here to help you find other ways to calm down or relax or unwind. I’m also here to be someone you can talk to if you want. This doesn’t have to be something we’re both miserable with,” he rambled.

Rozanov gave him a sidelong glance and nodded. “Okay,” he replied simply.

Shane just blinked at him, stunned by the short and nonchalant response. *Okay, so that’s how this was going to be then.* Shane licked his lips and tried his next approach. “Is there anything you like to do besides what I’m here to prevent from happening? Things I could suggest you do instead when you start to get those other desires?”

Rozanov snorted at that and smirked more to himself than Shane as he watched the road in front of him. “If I liked anything else that wasn’t bad in the media’s eyes, I would be doing

that, Hollander,” he countered roguishly. Shane could feel his cheeks burning, especially at the call out of his last name, and he admitted the defeat on that one.

That had been a stupid question to ask anyway.

He resigned himself then to replying the same way Rozanov had after his initial spiel before turning his attention to the car window to watch the Massachusetts scenery pass them by. He could be a better team omega later when he settled somewhat from the flight. For now, he could admire Massachusetts. Everything was a blend of historical and modern with narrow roads, scattered greenery, brick accents, grey statues, and towering buildings. It was a place Shane could appreciate while he was here.

So Shane tucked himself into the sports car and simply stared at all Boston had to offer while Rozanov drove beside him, completely unaware of the secretive looks he was getting from the alpha he'd be sharing the rest of the hockey season with.

Chapter 2: Inappropriate and Wrong

It was strange to be sharing his space with an omega. The first thing Ilya had noticed about Hollander when he walked up behind him was how delicious he smelled. His scent was unlike anything Ilya had ever encountered—sweet but not overbearing, light but not faint, rich but not heavy. Ilya wasn't even sure he could pick out what each distinct scent was in the mixture.

Bergamot? Sea salt? Mandarin? Green tea?

Whatever it was, it was now permeating in the apartment and Ilya felt drunk on it. He listened from the kitchen as Hollander got unpacked in the spare bedroom with the ridiculous amount of bags he'd brought. Ilya tried not to read too hard into the haul as his mind spiraled with thoughts of just how long Hollander might be staying with him on this team omega contract.

He sucked in a steadying breath and turned to open the fridge so he could at least do something decent like make lunch for them. Of course, the task of cooking food allowed Ilya's mind to wander yet again. Instead of thinking about the contract or Hollander's scent or his father that had called him half a dozen times since the news broke that he'd gotten a team omega, Ilya let his mind wander to Hollander himself.

The omega was beautiful. There was no denying it.

Full black hair, tanned skin, freckles across his cheeks and nose, dark eyes, sculpted lips, and lean body packed with hidden muscle, Shane Hollander had been quite the surprise look-wise to Ilya. He was absolutely the kind of omega Ilya would try to pick up at a club on one of his alcohol fueled nights out. But, again, nothing was to be done with Hollander except for allowing the omega to chaperone his behavior.

The shuffling going on in the guest bedroom came to an end, then Hollander was walking quietly into the kitchen and making himself comfortable on one of the stools at the island. Ilya did his best to act uninterested as he stirred the frying vegetables in the skillet in front of him.

"So, I thought it might be good if we try to get to know a little bit about each other," Hollander spoke once a few beats of silence passed between them. Ilya dipped his head in acknowledgment and finally looked over his shoulder to run his gaze over the omega sitting nearby. That damn scent assaulted him almost immediately as soon as his nose was turned in Hollander's direction and Ilya was quick to turn his head back.

"I know a few things about you just from the internet, but not anything past, like, where you're from or who your family is or how you got your hockey career," Hollander continued. Wow, he liked to talk. He was also annoyingly polite. *Canadians*.

Ilya sniffed and reached over to grab some seasoning for the wilting vegetables he was messing with. He hated cooking. "Okay, what do you want to know?" Ilya asked with his

back still turned.

“I don’t know. Maybe what your favorite color is? Favorite animal? What you like to do on a lazy night in? That kind of thing. It would be nice if you worked with me here,” Hollander bit out slightly. Ilya smirked and raised an eyebrow to himself at the slight venom in the omega’s tone and part of him appreciated the fact that Hollander wasn’t the kind of omega to roll over and be pleasant the majority of the time.

Deciding the skillet would be fine for a moment without him watching, Ilya turned around and leaned against the counter while crossing his arms over his chest. He’d seen the way Hollander had been looking at his arms at the airport and felt like playing into that at this moment. “Red, dog, jerk off,” he listed out.

Hollander jerked back with wide eyes like he’d been sprayed with water. Ilya just raised his eyebrows further on his forehead and extended a hand to Hollander in invitation for the omega to reply in his own kind. Hollander gritted his teeth, his jaw clenching slightly as if he was readying for a fight, and glared slightly at Ilya before answering, “Blue, cat, watch movies.”

Ilya *tsked* at him in mock disapproval and said plainly, “Boring,” before turning around to give his attention back to the vegetables.

Hollander’s sweet scent began to turn burnt in the room, a clear sign he was pissed off, and Ilya felt his own traitorous instincts growling at him to fix it. He’d made the omega unhappy with his own actions and every fibre of his being was yelling at him to make it better. With a twitch of his eye, Ilya sighed and turned back around despite himself.

“I don’t really do much, Hollander. I play hockey, I answer shitty phone calls, I work out at the gym, and I go to clubs for some drinks or sex. I can’t even do the last two things anymore, so forgive me if I’m not super happy about the change or that I’m being watched like a baby,” he explained as coolly as possible to give the impression he wasn’t affected by Hollander’s scent reaction.

Hollander was still looking at him with something dark, but he seemed to accept the small handout of conversation as his scent calmed back to a subtle sweetness.

“I used to play hockey,” Hollander said after a minute. Well that was a surprise. Ilya cocked his head to the side, suddenly more interested than he already had been, and replied with syrupy intrigue, “Do tell.”

And, *oh*. Hollander *blushed* at that.

Ilya swallowed hard as he watched the omega’s freckled cheeks turn rosy at the slightest bit of attention and Ilya had the sinking realization that he’d suddenly do anything to make Hollander blush like that again. His instincts seemed to be in agreement as his body physically lit up inside with pride at whatever he’d done.

“It was just kind of something you grew up doing in Montreal, you know? I played all the way through juniors, but I just... I don’t know. I liked being the guy that people could come

to if they had any issues on or off the ice. I chose this path and I'm happy I did. It's like I get the best of both worlds," Hollander explained with a small smile to himself.

Ilya cocked his head to the side and thought of the few team omegas he'd witnessed throughout his life playing with other alphas on his junior teams. They'd always been a steady, calming presence both in and out of the locker room—never distracting or overbearing.

Hollander had said he didn't want this to feel like being a prisoner when they'd met and everything he'd done so far had suggested he really just wanted to form a relationship that Ilya could depend on for making better decisions. With a slow nod to himself, Ilya sucked in a deep breath, pursed his lips, then slowly walked forward to extend his hand.

"Okay," he said. "We will do this."

Hollander eyed the hand warily, but accepted it all the same in a quick shake. Ilya ignored the tingles that ran up his arm at the contact and refused to look away from Hollander's gaze as they shook on the otherwise unspoken agreement of making their contract work. Ilya didn't have to like it, but he would make it work. For the team, for Hollander, and maybe even for himself, he would make it work.

Shane watched from the bench two days later as Rozanov participated in the scrimmage that the coaches had put together for practice before the game that night. He tilted his head slightly and watched as Rozanov wove expertly around the defensemen on the opposing side and charged down the ice towards the goal. The *ping* from the puck hitting the posts before sailing into the open space behind the goalie sent a shiver down Shane's spine while a small smile tugged at the side of his mouth.

He loved that sound.

It was easy to acknowledge that Ilya was a force to be reckoned with on the ice and it seemed everyone else understood that as well as they shook their heads with grins of disbelief at the third goal Rozanov had gotten.

Coach Hayes stood beside Shane and gently nudged him, his strong alpha presence settling Shane rather than intimidating him. "He's good on the ice. It's off the ice we're worried about. Has he been good so far?" Hayes asked while the scrimmage continued with other coaches on the ice dissecting the play.

Shane nodded slowly. "He's been okay. No alcohol at home and no going out. He was a little snippy this morning, but nothing I haven't dealt with before. He's tried with the conversation as well—the getting to know each other. It's been okay," he admitted. Hayes just frowned at that and turned his attention fully to Shane with sharp blue eyes.

“We thank you for doing this. Roz can be a bit reserved in a different kind of way. He’s deflective when people try to get too close and the over the top confident persona he puts on for the media isn’t fooling me, personally. If you can find any way to just...” Hayes trailed off with a sigh and crossed his arms. “It would be nice for him to have a *friend*.”

Shane understood what Hayes was trying to say and gave a small smile of reassurance. He could be a friend along with being Ilya’s team omega. Or, well, he could try.

The whistle blew on the ice to signal the end of practice, pulling Shane from his thoughts to watch as Rozanov slowly made his way over with other players to exit the ice. He followed behind the long trail of hockey players into the locker room and gently set himself down in Rozanov’s station while the alpha began to tug off his gear beside him. He simply watched as the Russian man methodically pulled off the jersey and the shoulder pads to leave him completely bare from the waist up.

Jesus Christ.

Ilya Rozanov was a far too attractive alpha that Shane couldn’t help but stare at. Sculpted abs, defined chest muscles, devastating v-cut by the hips—he was mouthwatering in every sense of the word. And when he was sweating and hot? His scent practically covered Shane in a cloud of tobacco, rum, agarwood, and cinnamon.

To Shane’s horror, he could feel himself get wet with slick only seconds later. *Fuck*.

His face immediately heated and he tried to make himself small in Rozanov’s stall, reminding himself harshly in his head that he was supposed to be professional. He’d never *never* gotten wet for an alpha he had a contract with. To add to his mortification, he lifted his gaze slowly and found that Rozanov had stopped in his actions and was staring back at him with dark eyes.

Rozanov’s nostrils flared and Shane knew he was caught.

Shane stood immediately and quickly exited the room before anyone else could catch on to what had happened between them. *Fuck, fuck, fuck*. This was bad. This was *so* bad. This wasn’t why he was here and what had just happened had been so unprofessional. Shane hurried through the hallways of the practice facility with shame spoiling his scent and covering his face.

If anyone had caught wind of what had happened, he’d be let go immediately. If Rozanov told anyone either...

Shane pushed his way into one of the private changing rooms in a stray hallway and pressed his hands against his face in humiliation. When he managed to drop his hands a few minutes later and suck in steadying breath, Shane decided he’d have to have a conversation with Rozanov in private at the apartment about what happened and vehemently apologize.

The opportunity seemed to come even sooner, however, when the door to the changing room slammed open and Rozanov himself stalked inside with wild eyes. He was dressed in tight compression leggings, a long sleeve athletic shirt, and white socks pulled up to his ankles

with slides haphazardly shoved onto his feet. His blonde curls were a mess on his head and his skin glistened with sweat that remained from practice.

“You were wet for me,” Rozanov called out bluntly.

Shane’s eyes went wide and he couldn’t help but take a nervous step back to press himself against the wall. “I’m so sorry. That was so inappropriate and wrong. It won’t happen again, I swear,” he promised anxiously. Rozanov stalked forward, like an animal hunting its prey, until he was directly in front of Shane with the same dark gaze and heavy scent Shane had encountered earlier.

Oh, fuck.

As if to prove that what had happened earlier was true, slick pooled in Shane’s briefs beneath his joggers and permeated the air with arousal in his scent. Rozanov shuddered when it reached his nose and he all but collapsed around Shane, locking him against the wall as he pressed his hands on either side of Shane’s head and leaned in. His nose brushed against the scent gland on the right side of Shane’s neck before he took in a deep breath. The growl that slipped past his lips made Shane whimper in response. This was bad. This was *really* bad.

“We shouldn’t... We shouldn’t be doing this,” he panted into Rozanov’s chest.

“You want me to stop?” Rozanov breathed out huskily.

Amazingly, Shane couldn’t find the words to reject whatever was about to happen. There was this undeniable pull he had to the alpha in front of him—a reaction that he’d never had to another alpha in his entire life or hockey career. “We...” he whispered weakly. Rozanov was leaning closer, sliding his hand down from the wall to gently grasp Shane’s jaw instead.

Slowly, *so* slowly, Rozanov parted his lips and pressed his open mouth against Shane’s. Shane was helpless to do anything other than kiss the alpha back as his shaking hands slid up over Rozanov’s chest to settle over the same pectoral muscles that had gotten him wet with slick in the first place.

The kiss was slow and tentative at first with Rozanov pulling back just to change the angle for the next time he went in with his open mouth. Then his hands were all over Shane—circling the base of his throat, grabbing his chin, cupping the side of his face, pulling the omega in by the curve of his waist—while his hot tongue slid into Shane’s mouth to claim him there too. Shane melted into the alpha and eagerly accepted each heavy clash of their mouths while his body lit up.

The sound of their trembling breaths, wet lips, and sloppy tongues finding one another in the empty changing room echoed in the open space, ringing back in Shane’s ears with a scandalous reverberation. He could feel Rozanov growing hard against him, the alpha’s cock pressing into his own evident arousal, and Shane knew that if they didn’t stop now, he was going to do something dumb like drop to his knees and let stupid instincts take over.

Shane pressed gently against Rozanov’s chest once a brief moment of clarity washed over him and was surprised to find that the Russian alpha stepped back with ease, parting from

Shane's mouth without being asked twice despite his swollen lips and expression of deep want.

"Not—not here," Shane stuttered out through trembling lips before he could stop himself.

"Apartment?" Rozanov asked with his lips still parted and shiny from the spit they had swapped between one another. Shane shook his head and lifted his hands to drag them down his face as he desperately tried to regain control of the situation.

"No, no, we—we *can't*. This is against the contract and what I'm supposed to be doing here. This was a moment of weakness and we can't," Shane tried to argue weakly. His legs still felt like jell-o from the makeout while his cock protested with a slight jerk in his pants at the implication of not being attended to. Rozanov just tilted his head to the side and let his large palms curve around Shane's sides to keep them close, relentless in ensuring that Shane was very much aware of what had happened between them.

"Can't or shouldn't?" Rozanov asked as his heavily lidded eyes trailed over Shane's face.

Shane glared at the alpha as best as he could, but made no move to step away or escape from the alpha's grasp. He could admit that the kiss they'd shared had been hot and that Rozanov being turned on by him was a major boost to his ego. However, it had to be a one time thing or else this entire contract-based relationship would be jeopardized.

"I'm supposed to be here to stop you from making bad choices, not joining in on them."

Rozanov hummed raspily. "Mm, but bad decisions feel *so* good, don't they?"

Shane swallowed down the lump in his throat at the words dripping with pure sex appeal. He had to get out of here. If he didn't put space between them, he was going to fall for whatever trap Rozanov was obviously trying to lay with his provocative language. "I'm going to go back to the apartment and we can talk about this later, but not here. You need to go change and we can't let anyone know what happened. Okay?" he tried to reason.

Rozanov dropped his hands from Shane's sides and slowly nodded, though his eyes never fell from watching Shane as he fiddled against the wall.

"Okay. No one will know," he eventually agreed. Shane nodded jerkily, then slid out from against the wall to pass Rozanov and escape the room. He knew his scent was probably soaked with arousal, but getting out of the facility and into fresh air would help erase the trace of it. He didn't really care what Rozanov did about his own heated scent. He just needed to get out. So he tore through the back hallways, located an exit door that no one else was around, and entered the cool spring air while his thoughts raced.

Back in the changing room, Ilya stared at the empty wall in front of him where Hollander had been. His cock was throbbing inside of his compression leggings and he could feel the slight knot that had started to build at the base of it, desperate to grow and lock itself inside of something hot and tight.

As soon as Ilya had caught the scent of Hollander, wet and aroused and horny, his instincts had flared to life in a way they had never done before. He'd never lost control like that—tearing off his gear and shucking on clothes haphazardly to hunt down an omega that had fled from him. When he had found Hollander alone in one of the spare changing rooms for visitors at the facility, his rational thoughts had gone out the window.

All he could do was sit back in his own body and watch as his instincts took over, pressing Hollander into the wall and kissing the breath out of the omega. He'd been so pliant, so open and welcoming to the invasion, and had made the softest little sounds of pleasure that went straight to Ilya's cock.

Thinking about them made Ilya step forward and close his eyes as he pressed his forehead against the wall. He didn't care that people were probably wondering what happened to him and Hollander. If anything, they probably thought he just needed a moment to be focused and calmed down from the heater he'd been on during the scrimmage, so Ilya didn't mind taking a little more time to himself in the empty room.

With a growl of equal parts frustration and desire, Ilya shoved the compression leggings down far enough to pull out his length and spit on his hand. He jerked himself roughly with fast strokes, thankful that the foreskin around the head of his cock had enough give to cope with the brutal motions he was giving to himself.

This was a means to an end, nothing else.

His knot swelled at the base of his cock further, desperate for release, and Ilya knew he wasn't going to last long. The scent of Hollander was still heavy in the air, so Ilya allowed himself to get lost in it as well as the imagination of the omega still being here and participating. The thought of Hollander alone just watching as he jerked off was enough for Ilya to grunt and squeeze his knot with his other hand as it popped with relief.

Hot spurts of cum pooled on the tile floor beneath him, feeling nearly endless as Ilya breathed roughly through the orgasm and massaged his knot to get every last drop out. He finally opened his eyes a solid few minutes later and looked at the mess he'd made of the practice room floor that some poor soul was going to find and have to clean up later.

Maybe Hollander had been right. Maybe they couldn't do this again, because if Ilya got his hands on Hollander like this just one more time, he feared he'd want the omega for a whole lot of other reasons than just to calm him and his bad decisions down. Maybe he already did.

Fuck.

Chapter 3: No One Has to Know

Chapter Notes

So.... anyone else already counting down the days until the next episode?

Shane had been left behind in the locker room while the distant roar of the game going on outside filled the mostly empty space. A few equipment crew members wandered to and fro, carrying things like extra stick tape, new gloves, a few spare jersey letters, and broken mouthpieces to wherever the hell they belonged in the madness that was a game night.

While Ilya was busy leading the team to what would most likely be another victory, Shane was sitting in Ilya's cubby with his hands curled on the wooden bench beneath him. His mind was still stuck on what had happened between them earlier in the day—the kiss.

He'd avoided Ilya like the plague when the alpha had eventually returned home from the practice facility by taking way too long of a shower, performing a seven step skin care routine, hanging up clothes that had yet to be unpacked, and putting together his nest in the guest room. Thankfully, Rozanov hadn't wanted to acknowledge the tension between them either when they finally clambered into the car together hours later—Rozanov in his fancy suit and Shane in a much more casual outfit.

The car ride had been uneasy with neither of them saying anything to one another and Shane knew that he'd have to be the bigger person after the game by starting the dreaded conversation they needed to have. The bitter scents alone from strain were too much to deal with.

For now, though, he would sit in the locker room and stare at the television displaying the game on the wall across from him.

He watched as the game shifted and Ilya's line returned to the bench, heaving and sweaty and worn out from the effort of the third period. The other team, New Jersey, had been putting up a good fight for the lead, though Boston had managed to stay ahead by one point for the duration of the third. It wasn't a comfortable lead though, and Shane could tell that Ilya was irked by how close it was even with all the effort he and his team had been putting into the game.

Shane had given a couple of calming scent sticks to the equipment manager on Rozanov's behalf before the game had started. They weren't anything fancy—a white little tube that held a rod of fabric coated in Shane's synthetic pheromones inside—but they would do the job of calming down an alpha who was irritated or stressed.

He hadn't really expected the alpha to use them, but when Rozanov suddenly waved over the very man Shane had given the sticks to while on the bench, Shane could only watch with wide eyes as Rozanov took one of them and held it up to his nose to breathe in deeply. He was breathing in Shane's synthetic scent to calm down.

It had been something all the alphas Shane had worked with in the past had done, but there was something about *Rozanov* doing it that sent a shiver down his spine. The alpha had deliberately requested Shane's portable scent for that exact moment and seemed to be devouring it with greedy inhaled of pheromone-soaked air right there in the middle of a game.

Jesus.

Shane shifted where he was sitting and swallowed thickly as the memories of Rozanov pressing him against the wall earlier that day and kissing him within an inch of his life flashed through his head. He forced himself to shake the thought away as Rozanov capped the stick, tossed it back to the equipment manager, then flung himself over the boards with his line when it was time for another shift.

The team managed to keep the lead as the time wound down, and when it finally concluded with a loud horn to signal a win for Boston, Shane rose to his feet so he could make his way to the end of the tunnel that the players would be coming down soon enough.

He listened to the sounds of the crowd, the hum of the game coming to an end, and imagined the handshake line both teams were going through before being allowed to exit the ice. It didn't take long until the first players and staff began to trickle down the tunnel. Shane stood to the side, smiling politely at the players that he'd been introduced to only days ago, and waited until Rozanov finally strode down the passage in his bulky gear.

The skates and padding only made him taller and more intimidating, but Shane refused to let the image of the strong alpha approaching affect him. Rozanov dipped his head in acknowledgement to Shane and said nothing as the omega trailed beside him back into the locker room. Everyone sat to listen to the closing statements from their coaches, weathering both the good and the bad commentary, before they began tugging off their soaked gear with big grins and red faces.

Rozanov seemed to want no part of it, however, as his gaze fixed itself on Shane.

"You watched the game?" Rozanov asked as he pulled off his jersey. Okay, Shane could do this. He could be in this situation again and not have an embarrassing reaction. He could prove that he was professional.

"Yeah, it was good. Close, but good. You played well. You're awesome to watch," he complimented in the wake of clearing his throat. Rozanov nodded slowly, his eyes never leaving Shane's, and shucked off the shoulder and elbow pads to leave him bare chested for yet a second time that day. Shane swallowed hard, but kept his eyes trained on Rozanov's.

"I think I will take us straight home after this. I'm not sure I feel like drinking in public," Rozanov said after a tense moment passed between them. Shane snorted and he shook his

head.

“The drinking isn’t happening at home either. We’re going home and going to bed. Nothing else.”

Rozanov narrowed his eyes, searching for something on Shane’s face that the omega had no idea of, then finally turned his attention to getting undressed the rest of the way with a small smirk on his lips. Whatever he’d been looking for with Shane had apparently been found, but the alpha’s reaction left an uneasy feeling in Shane’s stomach. He wasn’t sure what Rozanov was up to, but the alpha *was* definitely up to something if Shane’s instincts were firing off inside of him with queasiness.

He’d never wished for hockey to have a fourth period more than that moment.

Ilya tossed the keys into the bowl on the entryway side table and ignored the buzzing happening in the pocket of his slacks. He knew his father was trying to call him and that he’d eventually have to answer in order to get the verbal reaming over with, but he was too focused on the way Hollander was casually slipping off his shoes like he’d always lived in Ilya’s apartment.

Ilya’s nose was still thick with the synthetic pheromones from the stick that Hollander had given the equipment manager. The game had been too close for Ilya’s liking and he knew that his boys were flagging by the end of the third period from trying to prevent New Jersey catching up or surpassing them.

It had been a snap decision, asking for one of the scent sticks, but it had done the job. One deep inhale and every nerve in Ilya’s body had settled with an odd sense of serenity at the hint of an omega’s scent—real or fabricated. It wasn’t an exact match to Shane’s natural pheromones, though that didn’t seem to stop Ilya’s stupid alpha instincts for believing it was.

Damn his traitorous designation. He’d played the rest of the period hard in his jock strap while his cock rubbed painfully against the fabric with each punishing stride he took down the ice. It had maybe done more than just *calm* him...

And now he wasn’t even allowed to drink or fuck whatever the hell that meant away.

He’d been gritting his teeth together with tension the whole drive home and had no idea how he was going to come down from the strain his brain and body were in. He needed some kind of release from this and he had a suspicious fear that jerking off wasn’t going to do it tonight. So seeing Hollander toe off his shoes without seemingly any kind of stress? And seeing the way the omega had looked at him in the locker room when he told Ilya no?

It was enough to make Ilya growl and cause the omega in front of him to stop in his tracks. Hollander slowly turned around with wide eyes and paused for a tense minute to take in whatever image he was seeing of Ilya in the front entryway. The immediate wave of calming pheromones from the man across from him hit Ilya like a slap to the face, only making his frustration with the situation grow inside of him.

“Fuck this,” he snarled. “I’m getting a fucking drink.”

“No, you *can’t*,” Hollander hissed. Ilya clenched his jaw so hard, he swore he heard one of his back molars crack. He didn’t have to be on the outside looking in to know he looked wild compared to the stoic stance Hollander had in front of him. Ilya had to give the omega credit where it was due—he was standing up to an alpha who probably looked halfway to losing control and didn’t even appear to be scared.

His eyes were wide and he was practically blasting biology towards Ilya in an attempt to calm him down, but Hollander remained firm where he stood with an expression that said *I dare you*.

Ilya shoved past him anyway and tore in the direction of the kitchen. “If I don’t get to fuck or get wasted, I’m drinking here. I don’t give a fuck what you think. Whole day has been shit,” he explained shortly over his shoulder. He could hear Hollander following him and bringing his overwhelming scent with him, but it wasn’t working.

It wasn’t calming him down in the slightest. It was doing exactly what it had been doing the minute Hollander had gotten there—messing with him and his instincts.

Ilya pulled open the cabinets that hid his good liquor he didn’t want pilfered during house parties and tugged out a half full bottle of vodka.

“Stop it,” Hollander seethed. The omega, despite being a little shorter and leaner, shouldered Ilya to the side with ease and shoved himself directly between Ilya’s body and the kitchen counter. They stood there then, bodies pressed against each other in the tight space with barely any room to breathe, and stared each other down with parted lips and wide eyes.

“You have better idea?” Ilya growled, his English turning sloppy with his heightened emotions. “You cut off my alcohol, you cut off my chances to go out, you cut off any opportunity I have to get off, what does that leave me with? *Hm?* You want me to try drugs next? Be like my—”

Ilya instantly cut himself off by slamming his mouth shut as new rage simmered beneath his skin at that thought alone. Who the fuck was Hollander to tell him what he could and couldn’t do in his own home anyway? The team had said to control him ‘off the ice’ in reference to doing things in public like what had gotten him in this situation in the first place. As far as he knew, his private apartment wasn’t public.

He reached around to grab for the bottle of liquor again only for Hollander to grab his wrist, press his thumb deep into the hidden gland just behind the veins running up to his hand, and instantly turn Ilya’s arm to jell-o. *Fuck. He was good.* Ilya narrowed his eyes with a

depreciating smirk while Hollander flared his nostrils and glared back, yet to back down from the alpha in front of him.

“I said *no*,” Hollander spat.

Ilya’s mouth was on the omega’s in the next instant.

He wasn’t sure who moved first, just that their lips were open and hot and wet against each other as Ilya dug his fingers into Hollander’s sides to push him further against the counter. The omega was greedy in his return—fisting Ilya’s shirt, shoving his tongue against the alpha’s, whimpering when their already hard cocks pressed against one another, filling the air with the sickeningly sweet scent of slick arousal.

Ilya shoved his hands under Hollander’s thighs and hoisted him up with a hungry grunt to put the omega up on the counter and get a deeper angle at kissing him. It was so sloppy. *So* sloppy. Their lips were swollen, their breath was steamy between them, and their hands were fervent in finding every inch of each other as they pushed and pulled and fought to be impossibly closer.

The bottle of vodka tipped over and shattered on the floor by Ilya’s feet, but he didn’t give a single fuck. When he picked Hollander up once more and rasped out, “Is okay?”, the omega nodded rapidly in eager agreement. He wrapped his arms around Ilya’s neck and held on while Ilya walked them steadily in the direction of the guest bedroom and the nest that was bound to be inside.

Sure enough, the sight of the bed covered in soft throw blankets, fluffy pillows, a plush comforter, and random scraps of well loved clothes greeted them which only made Ilya’s cock throb harder in his pants. He dropped Hollander unceremoniously into the middle of the nest and took a moment to simply stare with dark eyes and a gaping mouth at the image in front of him.

Thoroughly rumped, flushed, and messy in every sense of the word, Hollander lay sprawled out in the middle of his nest with a gaze that suggested he wanted nothing more than to fuck the alpha in front of him. The invitation into the nest wasn’t typical—wasn’t a verbal request—as Hollander spread his legs open to show the damp patch of fabric of his grey joggers where slick had started to seep through.

“I want you,” Hollander pleaded with hushed words.

“*Fuck*,” Ilya swore darkly.

It was a scramble to remove clothes then as he shucked off his suit jacket, ripped the dress shirt hard enough for the buttons to pop, threw the tie, and shoved his slacks to the floor. Hollander followed the alpha’s lead until they were both completely bare and connecting again at the mouth when Ilya toppled over onto him. Their cocks rubbed between each other’s slick abdomens and Ilya could feel that his knot had started to build at the base of his length.

Just like the changing room, he knew he wasn't going to last long, but that didn't mean he could be alone in it. He trailed his lips down Hollander's skin, tasting the mixture of salt and skin with each press, until the dark trail of hair beneath the omega's belly button led him to the most enticing cock he'd ever seen.

Curved up towards Hollander's somewhat soft lower belly, slightly darker in tone than the rest of the omega's tanned skin, and weeping heavily from the rosy head begging for attention, Ilya wasted no time wrapping his lips around Hollander's length and sinking down.

"Oh, *fuck*, fuck... Rozanov... *Ah!*" the omega cried above him as soon as Ilya took him to the very root and lapped at the base with the flat of his tongue. One of Ilya's hands pushed the underside of Hollander's thigh up to the omega's chest while his other hand found the source of the delicious slick that had stained Hollander's joggers.

His hole was soft, pliant, and soaked as Ilya ran the pad of his thumb over the tight ring of muscle. He gently pressed the digit inside as he pulled up on Hollander's cock, swirled his tongue at the tip, then sank back down to build up a rhythm.

The omega had found Ilya's blonde curls with his fingers only seconds later and held on tightly as obscene sounds of pleasure filled the room. "Yes, *yes*, *fuck*, yes, Rozanov..."

Hollander was so fucking warm and wet inside. Ilya had been with a lot of omegas in his life—men and women—but none of them had felt like this. Addicting. Inviting. Perfect. Home.

He fucked Hollander with his thumb leisurely as he sucked the omega in front of him off with every skill he knew. By the way Hollander was writhing in the sheets, moaning like it was the only sound he'd ever known to escape his throat, Ilya knew the other man was close.

Slick was dripping out of Hollander's hole each time Ilya pressed his thumb inside and Ilya suddenly became horrifically aware of the fact he was about to reach his own peak despite giving himself absolutely no attention. He rutted his hips against the soft throw blanket beneath his body and shivered when his knot caught repeatedly on one of the pillows underneath it.

Fuck, he was going to come.

"I-I'm gonna come. *Shit*, Rozanov... F-Fuck, I'm gonna come. You might, *fuck*, you might want to... Rozanov, *ah!*" Hollander cried out when the warnings of his release fell on deaf ears. Ilya swallowed the omega deep into the back of his throat and greedily accepted each hot spurt of cum with a growl of approval that only made Hollander whimper in response to the stimulation.

His grip was tight in Ilya's hair, just a touch away from being painful, but Ilya didn't care. He just fucked his own cock into the soft spot of Hollander's nest that he had found as he slid his mouth off of the omega slowly.

With heavily lidded eyes, Ilya lifted his head and stared Hollander down while he thrust into the fleece of the omega's nest in time with the thumb that was still inside of the other man.

Hollander's eyebrows were drawn up, his mouth slack and wet, while the softest sounds of pleasure escaped his mouth.

Ilya breathed in deeply and he pursed his lips as he finally pulled his thumb out of Hollander's hole to furiously stroke himself instead. Just when his knot felt like it was going to physically burst out of his skin, Ilya hissed out, "*Fuck*, Hollander," and gripped the swollen base of his length to release everything that had been building inside of him since Hollander had fled the private changing room that morning.

He spilled again and again and *again* between the omega's legs until the soft blanket was sopping wet with a mixture of milky cum and clear slick. For a while, neither of them moved or said anything. They simply stared at each other with dark eyes, parted lips, and heaving chests.

Hollander swallowed hard and slowly began to ease his leg down that had been pressed up against his chest. Ilya pulled back slightly to rest on his haunches while the omega dragged his hands down his face and laughed humorlessly into his palms.

"I'm so losing this contract," he murmured.

Ilya shook his head and crawled over Hollander so he could gently grasp the man's wrists one by one to pull them away from the omega's face.

"No. No, I won't let it happen," Ilya swore. Hollander just stared at him with uncertainty but curled his hands around Ilya's triceps to keep the alpha close. The way he bit his full bottom lip made Ilya's heart skip a beat in his chest, but he refused to acknowledge that. Even the skin contact between Hollander's hands and his arms was sending some strange kind of humming feeling through his veins.

"Okay, I can't do anything in public. No sex, no drinking, no bad decisions. You make sure it stays that way. But when we're here? Just us? I'll give up the liquor in trade for this. You're driving me fucking crazy and I don't know why but I want this. The team doesn't have to know—no one has to know. Just us," Ilya rambled nonsensibly.

"What... What do you mean, *this*? W-We can't," Hollander protested weakly.

"We already have. Don't tell me you don't feel it too," Ilya countered with a slight rumble in his chest. The omega practically melted at the sound of subtle possessiveness and blinked up at Ilya with the same big doe eyes that he'd had since he'd showed up on Ilya's doorstep.

"You... want to have sex? Like, in secret? Make the team think I have you under control in public and everything when I actually don't?" Hollander asked anxiously.

Ilya shrugged and raised an eyebrow at him. "I mean, if it's not happening in public and I'm not turning to other things like vodka or shameless behavior... I would argue maybe you do have me under control. I want you, Hollander," he breathed out huskily. The omega shivered against the bed sheets and stared at Ilya for a long time.

Just when Ilya thought he was going to be rejected, turned down and told he was absolutely insane, Hollander gave a slight nod of his head.

“I... Okay. This is such a bad idea, but... I feel it too. I need more. I need... *you*. I need you, even if I don't understand why.”

Ilya dipped back in to press a heated kiss against Hollander's already swollen lips, but he couldn't get enough. Hollander's scent, touch, taste, sounds—all of him. He felt like he was ensnared in this omega who'd only just waltzed into his life and Ilya felt helpless to do anything other than fall into whatever this was.

They just had to keep it secret.

Chapter 4: The Opposite Designation

Chapter Notes

alright... time to get soft

Ilya stared at the omega sleeping next to him on the plane. Hollander was curled up in a soft blanket with his head resting on a comfy pillow against the aircraft window. Ilya could do nothing but stare at how adorable the sight was and how peaceful the omega looked in his sleep. They had spent the night together in Hollander's nest after their frenzied coupling last night, but Ilya obviously hadn't been awake to see what the omega looked like.

He swallowed hard as he let his gaze drift over the freckles scattered across Hollander's nose, the long eyelashes that brushed the top of his cheeks, the soft skin free of any flaws, and the plush lips that were slightly pouted while he dreamt.

The chair in front of him creaked and Ilya tore his gaze away to find that Marlow was peering over the seat and raising an eyebrow at him. "Going okay back there?" the other alpha asked with a gleam in his eye.

While the team had been a little stunned at first to figure out that Ilya had been assigned a team omega, they seemed to have settled with Hollander's presence and turned their attention into gentle ribbing instead. "Yes, everything is fine," Ilya snapped to his, unfortunately, best friend on the team. Marlow's shit-eating grin just grew.

"You know, when an alpha and omega love each other very much, they get ma—"

Ilya growled at Marlow and folded his arms across his chest at the teasing. While Ilya was well known in the media and in the hockey world for hooking up with just about anyone he wanted, he'd never been the type to go steady with anyone.

He'd never had a serious girlfriend or boyfriend, so as soon as his teammates found out that Hollander would be sticking around for a while by Ilya's side, the joke that he was finally settling down had run rampant through the group chat.

No one had said anything to Hollander, though. *Lucky bastard.*

Marlow's laugh tapered off after a moment while Ilya stewed in his seat and glanced back over at Hollander who was still fast asleep. "I mean, he *is* pretty. I know he's a contract and you can't actually get together or anything, but maybe after it's over, if you two get close enough..." Marlow trailed off.

Ilya turned his dangerous gaze back to his meddling friend and shook his head. "That's not what this is. He's here to make sure I don't make bad decisions in public or at home where it

could affect the team. It's not anything else."

Marlow nodded slowly and held up his hands in mock surrender. "Alright. Maybe one day you'll actually settle down, Roz. It's not that bad." The other alpha turned back around, deeming the conversation over, and left Ilya with his thoughts.

Marlow had been mated for years to his high school sweetheart. Whenever he brought her up, it was always *'I knew at first sight it was her'* and all the additional sappy shit Ilya had heard from other mated teammates. He'd seen first hand just how wrong being mated to another person could go, however. It had killed his mother after all.

He twisted uncomfortably in his seat and reached up to rub his fingers over the crucifix on his necklace, a steadying thing around his neck that had belonged to his mother before her death. Irinia had thought at one point that Grigori Rozanov had been the only alpha she wanted to be mated with, and that had resulted in a life of depression, pills, and pain. Ilya turned his eyes back to Hollander and felt his heart skip a beat inside of his chest.

Hollander would probably be mated one day. He'd probably settle down with an alpha just as polite, safe, and level-headed as he was and live an average, happy life. Until then, he was stuck with Ilya. Ilya twisted his lips and forced his eyes away yet again to focus on something else.

His father had called him this morning with nothing positive to say about the win from last night. He had insulted Ilya's playing, called him slow and sloppy, and had blamed the game being so close on no one other than his son. Ilya had just numbly agreed with everything his father said to make the call end quickly. And then his father had asked when he'd come visit him and his mother.

That had felt like a bucket of ice water being dumped on him.

He'd had to gently remind his father that his mother was dead and he'd been remarried. Grigori had just gruffly responded with, "Of course. I know that. That's what I meant." The call had left him with a sinking feeling in his gut and an itch for a glass of strong liquor. Instead, he'd gotten on the plane with a clenched jaw and watched as Hollander fell asleep almost immediately after take off.

The game was in Toronto tonight. They'd be staying in a hotel with the rest of the team, but unlike everyone else, Ilya would be rooming with Hollander. Part of him wondered if they'd end up having a repeat of the night prior, but he wasn't really sure. Maybe the game would go well, he'd be on top of the world, and the urge to drown his sorrows in liquor or someone's body wouldn't exist.

He settled somewhat in his seat, flicked his gaze to Hollander again, then forced his eyes to shut before his heart could traitorously pick up speed at the sight of the omega next to him.

The game did not go well. Ilya felt about ready to pick a fight with his own teammates as they left the ice 6–2 in Toronto's favor. He was a grey cloud of anger when he trudged back into the locker room with his gaze set firmly on the pair of skates walking in front of him. It didn't take long for the black plastic and blades to turn into a pair of nearly laced sneakers.

Before Ilya could react, warm hands were reaching out and gently cupping the sides of Ilya's neck where both of his most important glands were. His entire body melted at the touch and all the anger he had in his system disappeared as Hollander guided him to sit down in his stall while he massaged the glands expertly with his thumbs—something Ilya had never experienced before.

“You played well. Losses happen. Toronto was on another level tonight and any team going up against them would've met the same fate,” Hollander murmured to him while the team around them grumbled amongst themselves and began to undress. Ilya's eyes closed without him even wanting to do so as he lost himself in the feeling of Hollander's hands on him. He'd never been touched this way before and his instincts were on *fire* with approval at the omega's ministrations.

Biology in Russia had been rudimentary when it came to learning about the opposite designation. Ilya knew what slick was, how pheromones worked, where an omega's glands were, and that a mating bond was no joke, but that was about it. He'd never really learned how to... *use* biology for anything other than sex.

Hollander certainly had, however, as he dug his thumbs in deep with years of experience behind the action and brought Ilya in closer so the alpha could breathe in the relaxing scent Hollander was giving off. His limbs felt like they were made of jelly by the time Hollander stepped away when the coaches entered the room.

It was a struggle to keep his eyes trained on the staff. Their words of constructive criticism and disappointment washed over him, but didn't linger. Whatever Hollander had done, it had left him sluggish and heady. Everything just felt... fuzzy. He blinked lazily at everyone and nodded languidly as expected whenever the gazes of his coach drifted over him, though that was about all he could manage.

When the team was eventually left to undress and shower, Hollander rose to his feet once more and reached out to help Ilya out of his jersey. “What did you do to me?” Ilya asked with a thick tongue.

Hollander smirked slightly, his freckled cheeks turning pink, and responded soft enough that no one could hear, “You know I'm actually *good* at my job and am a team omega for a reason, right? I know what I'm doing aside from rolling around in bed.” Ilya hummed as a sly smile of his own tugged at his lips. He let the omega ease him back into full control of his body, then playfully pushed him to sit down so Ilya could stand instead and finish the rest of his undressing.

His shower was quick but far less charged with frustration like usual after a loss. Even though his fingers twitched to hold a glass of vodka or tip a shot glass back against his lips, the

ability to deny himself was easier as he focused on washing himself off instead. Hollander was waiting after all.

The omega had made himself comfortable in Ilya's cubby and was chatting with Marlow and Connors when Ilya stepped back into the locker room in nothing but his briefs and a towel around his waist. Hollander said something that made the other two alphas laugh and Ilya was caught off guard by the sizzling feeling of jealousy that coursed through his veins at the sight.

Hollander hadn't made him laugh like that since his arrival. *Why?*

He strode over with a new furrow to his brow and inserted himself immediately. "What's so funny?" he asked as he grabbed his suit that had been hung up in the stall. Hollander turned his attention to Ilya and grinned—wide and innocent and happy.

"I was just telling them a story from my time in juniors where I put my best friend's clothes in the center of the ice after practice and he had to go get them in nothing but a towel and skates," Hollander explained. Marlow snorted again and looked at Ilya with a flash of amusement in his eyes.

"Funny guy. Should've done that to you."

Ilya just flipped Marlow off and tugged on his suit piece by piece while the others broke away to do the same. Hollander waited patiently with his hands in his hoodie, watching with soft eyes as Ilya buttoned up his shirt and pulled his jacket on. "Ready to go?" Hollander asked after Ilya raised his eyebrows at him expectantly.

"Yes, is why I'm standing here waiting for you to get up," Ilya responded sarcastically.

"Asshole," Hollander retorted with a humorous scoff.

They were one of the last few players to get on the bus, though Ilya didn't mind as they didn't have to wait long in their seats. Once the last few stragglers took their seats, the bus jolted forward and Ilya turned his attention to the omega sitting beside him. "You were good in juniors? Good player?" he asked.

Hollander blinked at him in surprise and blushed a little at the attention, clearly caught off guard by the personal question that he hadn't expected. "Uh, I mean, I was alright. I had a few interested agents and promising offers for the future," he admitted. Oh, so he *was* good then. "But, like I said, I liked this aspect of the game a little bit more and I'm happy with it. I want to help a team no matter where I am."

A perfectly polished answer, as expected.

"Maybe we can play together some day. For fun," Ilya offered. Shane just stared at him in response, still lagging behind apparently in the understanding that Ilya was trying to have a conversation with him. "You drink?" Ilya asked next to move on from the suggestions. Hollander shrugged and ducked his head a little once he seemed to get on board with finding a new topic.

“I mean, not really. I like ginger ale and I’ll ask for it if I go out, but I’ll drink a beer every now and then too.”

Ilya nodded slowly and couldn’t hold back the smile that stretched across his lips. Hollander narrowed his eyes at him, though his own grin was playful and filled with amusement.

“What? Say it.”

Ilya just shrugged and bobbed his head from side to side. “Is such a Hollander thing to drink—safe, boring, good for an upset stomach, calming.” Hollander rolled his eyes and shoved Ilya gently with his shoulder, clearly having already heard this kind of teasing before about his choice of drink.

“You have boring missionary sex too?”

Hollander’s face went bright red at that and his eyes flitted around the bus nervously only to find that all of the other players had their headphones on or their eyes closed. No one was paying attention to them. “I… no. No, I don’t *just* have missionary sex,” Hollander hissed back. Ilya nodded with a mischievous glint in his eyes and left the omega alone for the rest of the bus ride as a welcome tension built between them.

They shuffled off the bus with the others, grabbed the gear from under the bus, collected their key cards for their room, then parted ways with everyone else as they entered their separate space. Ilya dumped his gear bag and suitcase to the side before slipping his suit jacket off with a heavy sigh.

“So I was thinking,” Hollander began behind him. Ilya raised an eyebrow at that and baited with a smirk, “Dangerous thing for you to do, Hollander.” The omega glared at him with no heat and shucked off his shoes by the door before approaching the alpha with his hands in his hoodie pocket.

“You seemed to like the gland massage I gave you at the rink, but I was wondering if you ever tried scent swapping?” Hollander questioned—the teasing mood suddenly shifting to something open, vulnerable, and sincere. Ilya blinked a few times at the question that had nothing to do with the possible sex they’d been hinting at having on the bus.

Shit, had he been reading into the missionary comment too much?

To answer Hollander’s question internally, however, no. Ilya hadn’t. He wasn’t sure what it even *was* exactly, but he was interested all the same. He couldn’t remember the last time he’d been interested in doing something with someone that wasn’t playing hockey or having sex. He hadn’t responded, but Hollander understood Ilya’s lack of an answer anyway and wasted no time jumping into the explanation.

“Sometimes, if alphas know they’re going into a stressful situation and won’t have access to a scent stick, they scent swap with an omega beforehand. It’s a calming thing—a way of going everywhere with that presence even if the other party is absent. It’s just another option for ensuring the alpha is surrounded by relaxing pheromones if the omega isn’t around.”

Ilya ignored the way his heart began to beat rapidly inside of his chest. Having Hollander's scent covering him, seeping into his skin and being carried around with him even if Hollander was absent? "Okay," he agreed before his brain could even process the fact that he'd agreed to this rather innocent idea. Hollander just smiled his sweet little smile and jerked his head in the direction of the bed, clearly pleased.

Ilya licked his lips and turned his attention away from the omega in front of him to the task of undressing himself while his heart raced. Hollander took his time peeling off his own clothes and folding them on the other side of the hotel room by a stray chair, seemingly unaffected compared to Ilya.

Of course he folded his fucking clothes.

Something tugged at Ilya's heart regardless while he watched the omega gently cross the sleeves of his hoodie, flip the midsection in half, then smooth the fabric free of wrinkles. He repeated the process with his sweatpants and socks until he was standing before Ilya in nothing but his briefs.

Ilya, on the other hand, dropped himself completely bare on the bed and scooted backwards until he was sat against the headboard with the sheets peeled back. He needed to give off the impression he wasn't nervous about what he was going to indulge in, or the treacherous way his heart skipped a beat at the sight of the omega in front of him. He had no idea what any of it meant—why his body was reacting the way it was—and he was too scared to ask questions.

"You know, I figured you'd probably want to do this with minimal clothing unlike other alphas, but you don't *always* have to be naked," Hollander mocked as he rubbed his arms at the foot of the bed.

"I know," Ilya said plainly. Hollander just snorted, then nervously tucked his thumbs into the waistband of his briefs so he could push them down to the floor and step out of them. He, of course, folded those too. Ilya watched as Hollander's cheeks turned bright red while he clambered onto the bed beside him, clearly not as comfortable being openly nude as Ilya was.

"Okay, so, the way I've done this in the past is—*oomf!*"

Ilya pushed Hollander onto his side and curled up behind him before the omega could overthink anything. He wrapped his arms around Hollander's waist so he was flush against the hard planes of Ilya's body and tried his best to ignore the realization that their bodies fit together perfectly. Ilya's knees slid right behind Hollander's bent ones, his arms encircled Hollander's body comfortably, and his face tucked itself with ease into the crook of Hollander's neck.

With his face so close as well, Ilya had direct access to Hollander's scent gland and the intoxicating pheromones that escaped his skin. It was... *nice*. It wasn't sex, but he found he actually liked it a lot, just holding this sweet smelling, soft omega in his arms. Hollander squirmed a little bit as he tried to adjust to the sudden entrapment and gave out a frustrated huff before grumbling, "This works too, I guess."

Ilya just hummed and buried his nose into the gland, inhaling deeply the comforting fragrance that came from within. Hollander swallowed hard and squeaked out, “You know, it’s a little rude to scent someone like that.”

“But you smell *so* good,” Ilya groaned as obnoxiously as possible. He slid one of his large palms up over Hollander’s chest and squeezed one of the omega’s pectoral muscles, loving how it filled his hand entirely and then some. He especially loved the reaction of Hollander’s nipple as it hardened against Ilya’s calloused skin. “Want to be covered in you.”

Hollander choked on air at the statement and did his best to look over his shoulder at Ilya’s lazy eyes. “You—You can’t say something like that!” Hollander cried. Ilya looked at him, unimpressed, and dared Hollander without saying anything to explain why he couldn’t. “This isn’t—you—we—this is *supposed* to be a professional thing!” Hollander sputtered out. Ilya just grinned at him and ribbed gently, “Is very professional, Hollander.”

The omega just huffed again and turned his face back to the other direction as he settled himself against Ilya’s body. In the new quiet of the bedroom, Ilya allowed his eyes to drift over the curve of Hollander’s silhouette and the way the warm light of the bedside lamp shone on his tanned skin. There was a scar on his shoulder, but that was the only blemish he had.

Everything else was covered in freckles like his face and Ilya sucked in a steadying breath at the fact he had noticed Hollander’s *freckles* for fuck’s suck.

“I can hear you thinking back there,” Hollander grumbled.

“Thinking about how warm you are. So soft, so pretty,” Ilya goaded under his breath, matching the comfortable quiet of the room. Hollander elbowed him in the ribs in response and suddenly released a wave of dizzying pheromones into their shared space. Ilya’s eyelashes fluttered as his body melted at the relaxing scent that filled his nose. He was becoming addicted to how Hollander smelled, and before he could stop himself, he asked softly, “How do you do that?”

Hollander was quiet for a moment before he carefully twisted himself around in Ilya’s tight grasp to turn and look upon the alpha. Their faces were inches apart, their legs tangled around each other, and their hands grasping one another’s arms with tender fingers due to the change in position.

“You mean projecting?” he offered, his voice no louder than a whisper in the small gap between their lips. Ilya stared back at the brown eyes watching him and found that Hollander’s expression was just as soothing as his scent was—open, kind, vulnerable, lovely. He really was pretty. Maybe the prettiest omega Ilya had ever seen. That thought alone did something funny to Ilya’s gut.

“Yes, what is projecting?” Ilya finally got out once he realized he was supposed to be saying something in response. Hollander frowned at him in confusion and nervously inquired, “You’ve never... projected before?”

Ilya shook his head. Hollander reached up hesitantly with one hand to cup the side of Ilya's face, and then the immediate bloom of his intoxicating scent filled the space between them yet again. Ilya physically shuddered at the first contact of pheromones with his nose.

"Projection is when you can, like, direct your scent at someone specific. It's a thing all omegas and alphas can do. It's what makes things like scent swapping and scent marking happen," Hollander explained carefully.

"You just... think about sending out more of your scent to the person you have in mind and it just... happens. I don't know, I've never really thought about how I do it. I just... do," Hollander clarified. "Try it. Try focusing on me and imagine covering me in your scent."

Ilya narrowed his eyes, part of him wondering if this was some kind of cruel joke, but he allowed himself to be as vulnerable as Hollander was in that moment towards him. He pictured in his mind stretching his scent out, coating Hollander's skin in it, soaking the omega in his own pheromones so everyone would know that Hollander was spoken for by an alpha.

Hollander reeled back with wide eyes as he sputtered out, "Woah, okay, that's strong." And then Ilya had to witness just inches away from the omega's face as Hollander shivered head to toe, his eyes drooping and pupils dilating, while his lips parted to draw in the pheromones through his mouth as well. "That's r-really good, yeah."

Ilya wasn't sure who moved first in the tense *something* that had built between them and their mingling scents, but Hollander's face was suddenly buried in the crook of his neck while Ilya tucked his own nose into the warm skin that covered the omega's scent gland. His eyes were closed tightly as he breathed in, losing himself to the scent covering him, and his grip was possessive on Hollander's back as he kept the omega close.

They were a mess of tangled limbs, open mouths, shut eyes, and deep breaths. It was impossible to pull away from one another and let go. Ilya needed more and more and *more* of the omega. His instincts were going crazy inside of him, obviously exhilarated at whatever the hell he was doing in that moment, but he just couldn't get enough and he didn't know why.

Hollander was driving him crazy and Ilya was helpless to do anything other than lose himself in whatever was happening. There was no sex that night—no handjobs, no blowjobs, no fingering, no nothing. Just an alpha tangled up in an omega and an omega tangled up in an alpha.

How was Ilya supposed to know what they'd really initiated?

Chapter 5: It's a Bond

Chapter Notes

this will be the last smut-focused chapter for a bit. it's time to let shit hit the fan >:3

Shane had made a lot of dumb decisions in his life, but this had to take the cake for the worst one. His intentions had come from a good place, a professional place, and Ilya Rozanov had gone and messed it all up by *scent marking* him without knowing instead. To be fair, Rozanov hadn't even been familiar with the tamer action of scent swapping when Shane suggested it, so when Shane had told the alpha to envision blanketing another person in his scent, Rozanov had done just that.

It was just that, like all things with Rozanov, he'd done it without holding anything back and had accidentally drenched Shane in his scent the way an alpha would when marking an omega as *theirs*. Shane had gone to sleep in a daze because of it, floating in a fuzzy headspace caused by the rush of possessive pheromones to his brain, but had woken up with a racing heart once he realized what had happened.

Scent swapping typically only lasted for a few hours when done, but *scent marking*? He was going to smell like Rozanov for a good two days or so if they didn't get their hands on some Grade A scent blockers to smear over their bodies. Everyone on the team would know what had happened between them as soon as they took a good sniff in the hotel lobby without the temporary band aid of blockers.

Shane was already trying to figure out what to say or how he could get his hands on the blockers without someone figuring out what transpired between him and the alpha when Rozanov shifted beside him in bed and tugged Shane flush against his body.

Like the pliant omega he was, always following the lead of his instincts, Shane melted into the alpha's grasp and felt his thoughts settle before they could get too out of control. The alpha nuzzled his nose into the crook of Shane's neck where his scent gland was, and in his sleep, projected yet again to cover Shane in his dominating pheromones.

Well, there went any hope of trying the dull-it-down route for his future morning scent blockers hunt.

Shane lay there with heavy lids and blinked at the morning sun that streamed through the hotel curtains while Rozanov slept easily behind him, oblivious to the fact he was easing Shane into a mental state of peace and tranquility. In his calmer condition, Shane allowed his thoughts to turn for just a moment away from the scent marking and more towards the fact that Rozanov had been rather open last night.

The alpha hadn't talked about liquor or sex and had been honest with his questions about the activity he'd never heard of. He'd been willing to try something new, just because Shane had suggested it, and had apparently enjoyed it very much considering he was still wrapped around Shane with his scent permeating the air.

Every day, it seemed like Rozanov was getting more and more settled with sharing his space and having Shane around. The few intimate acts they'd shared had been insanely hot and rather addictive in feeling, but Shane liked what they'd done last night too and Rozanov didn't seem too unhappy with what had transpired either.

It meant that there *was* hope then for Rozanov releasing stress, frustration, or anger using methods that came in more gentle forms. As if Rozanov had heard him thinking of the word gentle, the alpha stirred behind him and began to press soft kisses along the curve of Shane's neck above his scent gland.

"You smell like me," the alpha greeted in a raspy voice still thick with sleep. It sent a delicious shiver down Shane's spine that had him turning in the alpha's grasp so he could face the man responsible for the mess they'd have to explain. Rozanov blinked at him sleepily and lifted a heavy hand to cup the side of Shane's face just before leaning in to connect their mouths together.

The kiss was slow, sensitive, and dripping with the kind of syrupy morning arousal that suggested both parties involved were still slow in their full mental cognition but interested nonetheless. "I want to fuck you," Rozanov murmured in promise against his lips. Shane whimpered in response as something heavy and charged hit him hard in his lower gut.

"We... we have a bus to get on by noon," he answered pathetically. Rozanov just hummed against his lips and reached down to take Shane's cock in his hand, grinning when he found the omega already hard. He stroked Shane slowly from root to tip, running the pad of his thumb over the head of Shane's cock to collect the bead of precum that formed there, and lazily pushed his tongue into Shane's mouth to devour him there too.

They kissed through heavy breaths and soft sounds of pleasure while Rozanov lazily jerked him, building him higher and higher despite having just woken up, until Rozanov suddenly pulled away and put his hands on Shane's hips instead. "Roll over," the alpha commanded gingerly.

Shane was putty in the man's hands and did exactly as he instructed, rolling onto his stomach while Rozanov pushed himself up and settled behind him on top of the covers. Shane took a minute to glance at the clock and felt the last bit of tension slip away when the display showed 8:17 in the morning—a good amount of time available for them before the bus would leave with the team for the airport.

Rozanov pressed hot, open mouth kisses to Shane's spine while his hands roamed over the globes of Shane's full ass in appreciation. His long fingers dug into the skin around Shane's hips and guided the omega up onto his knees so Rozanov could have a front-row view of the omega splayed open in front of him, most likely glistening with slick to prepare Shane's body for the alpha's wicked intentions.

Shane bit deep into his bottom lip while the alpha trailed his kisses lower and lower, his nose and mouth just inches away from Shane's tight entrance. "*Please,*" Shane begged softly into the sheets.

"Please what?" Rozanov demanded from behind him.

Shane fisted the pillows underneath his head and swallowed hard, knowing Rozanov well enough by now to understand the alpha wasn't going to give him anything he wanted unless he got something in return—Shane's submission.

"Please... Fuck me," Shane pleaded with rosy cheeks. The true growl that ripped out of Rozanov's throat sent Shane's instincts into total control as he arched his back immediately, spread his legs wider, and slicked up impossibly faster if the hot trails of wetness suddenly streaking down the back of his thighs were any indication of his instincts stepping in.

Rozanov swore darkly in Russian behind him and moved his palms to grab handfuls of Shane's ass and part him wider, exposing his wet hole to the cool hotel room air. The tongue that was on him in the next instant made Shane moan loudly and push back greedily, desperate for the warm pleasure lapping at his entrance. The alpha was relentless in the way he devoured Shane.

His tongue swirled around the tight ring of muscle, licked broad strokes over the entrance to the omega's body, and pressed inside deeper and deeper with each eager action of prodding when Shane had loosened up further. He was ravenous—practically drinking Shane's copious production of slick while the omega writhed in the sheets with his fingers clenching the white fabric while his toes curled and flared to cope with the pleasure.

The first press of Rozanov's finger inside made Shane keen and release the filthiest sound he'd ever heard come out of his throat. Rozanov moved his mouth to one of Shane's delicious asscheeks and bit down in approval at the noise while he pumped the finger in and out of Shane's entrance. "So good for me. Such a good omega," Rozanov murmured hungrily against Shane's heated skin.

The words only boosted the ego of Shane's instincts as it was their sole desire in life to be just that—good. His body arched further to take Rozanov deeper before the alpha pushed a second digit inside with hungry words of praise to him. *Taking me so good, so wet and open for me, such a good omega, can't wait to fuck you.*

Shane's cock bobbed unattended in the air between his legs, throbbing and aching for attention, and part of Shane wondered if he would come untouched from this. The dripping head of his curved length slapped against his stomach every time Rozanov thrust his fingers deep inside of him and that was about the extent of stimulation it got while Shane let out obscene sounds into the hotel room.

"Please, please, *please,*" he all but sobbed to no one in particular when Rozanov curled his fingers inside of Shane and stroked that delicious bundle of nerves buried inside. "Fuck me, please, I'm ready, I *need* you. *Please,*" Shane begged shamelessly.

Rozanov pulled his fingers out and ordered with absolute authority, “Stay,” before he clambered off the bed and tore through his suitcase that had been discarded to the side when they’d first gotten to the hotel room. Shane panted into the fabric of the pillows, skin heated and wet at the back from the slick oozing out of him, but he did exactly as his alpha commanded and didn’t move a fucking muscle as he waited.

Only seconds later, the sound of Rozanov tearing open a condom package with his teeth and situating himself behind Shane on his knees filled the omega’s senses. He was about to get fucked by Ilya Rozanov. Shane whimpered into the pillow his head was supported on and wiggled his ass impatiently as Rozanov rolled the condom onto his length.

“*Fuck,*” Rozanov swore behind him.

The blunt press of Rozanov’s cock into Shane’s pliant entrance was slow but steady. Shane gasped the entire time Rozanov pushed inside of him, his eyelids heavy and mouth parted while pleasure shot straight up his spine. The alpha’s length felt nearly endless as Shane took more and more until he felt stuffed to the brim with cock.

“Is okay?” Rozanov asked once he was completely sheathed inside of the omega. Shane could feel the swell of Rozanov’s knot against his entrance and whimpered at the feeling, knowing that it would be inside of him soon enough.

“Yes, *please,* move. I need it, alpha,” he prattled pathetically. Rozanov bent over him with a low rumble in his chest to press a line of possessive kisses along Shane’s spine before he pulled back, gripped Shane’s hips tightly, then pulled out only to snap back inside. The moan that escaped Shane’s mouth was pornographic and encouraging as he welcomed the thrust of the alpha’s cock inside of him.

Rozanov grunted and sucked in sharp breaths as he worked himself up to a punishing rhythm, the tip of his cock brushing against Shane’s prostate with each stroke. Shane gripped the sheets like his life depended on it while he took what the alpha gave him. His body was pliant and open, sopping wet and accommodating to the sweet torture he was receiving from behind.

He could feel every bump, ridge, dip, and vein on Rozanov’s cock as it pounded into him. His eyes were screwed shut as he lost himself to the feeling of the alpha, but when Rozanov suddenly pulled out just to flip Shane over onto his back, Shane’s eyes were suddenly wide open and staring at the man on top of him.

Rozanov gripped the underside of Shane’s knees and pushed them up towards his shoulders before entering him again, swift and unforgiving. Shane threw his head back with a cry of pleasure while Rozanov growled out, “Fuck, so good. Ah, *shit,* Hollander...”

Their foreheads touched as Rozanov leaned further and further in with each thrust inside of Shane’s tight hole. Their mouths were open, sharing hot breaths and sounds of ecstasy, and Shane knew he wasn’t going to last much longer. His hands were fisting the pillows on either side of his head to steady himself while his own length leaked clear fluid all over his stomach.

He was about to come untouched yet again by Rozanov's doing. The alpha buried his face in Shane's neck and nipped at the scent gland beneath the skin there, careful to ensure it wasn't the mating gland, before he bit down fully and left a claiming mark behind with the imprint of his teeth

"I'm so, *ah*, close. I'm gonna come," Shane warned breathily.

"Do it. Be a good omega and come for me," Rozanov growled against his skin. Shane let go of the pillows and reached out to wrap his arms around the alpha, clinging to him with everything he had as soft little sounds of *ah, ah, ah!* grew higher in pitch with each thrust he received. Rozanov bit down again on Shane's scent gland, this time hard enough to slightly break skin and push the omega over the edge at the idea of being marked by an alpha.

His body bowed off the bed while his toes curled in the air as spurts of hot cum coated both his and Rozanov's abdomens. He wasn't sure if he cried out Rozanov's name or nothing at all, but Shane didn't care. All that mattered was the pleasure coursing through his veins, the settling tension inside of his belly, and the subtle sting of Rozanov's bite on his skin.

The alpha pulled back to spread Shane open wider, chasing his own release, and all Shane could do was lie there and take it with limp limbs and heavy eyes. Rozanov stared at him darkly and swore in heated Russian before he pressed forward entirely—knot and all—into Shane's body. Shane's eyes went wide as soon as the alpha's knot slipped in, filling him up to a point just shy of uncomfortable, while Ilya grunted and came hard into the condom with a heave of, "*Hollander.*"

For a while, neither of them could do anything except gasp for air and stare at one another. It was Rozanov who broke first, surprisingly, by dipping down and devouring Shane's mouth with his own. They kissed until their lips were swollen and wet with shared spit and Shane's vision was swimming around him.

"Was good?" Rozanov panted when he broke away to look Shane over. The omega swallowed, nodded, and shuddered under Rozanov's gaze.

"Very good," Shane whispered. He refused to acknowledge the way his heart lurched in his chest with something other than just arousal at the alpha on top of him. Whatever was building between them—the scent marking, the sex, the inability to draw themselves away from each other, the non-committal biting—was equal parts scary and intoxicating.

It wasn't Shane's fault he hadn't caught on to what had really happened between him and Ilya.

Ilya was the one who left the hotel room to track down one of the team physicians for scent blockers. Shane had been extremely adamant that they cover up their mingled scents as best

as possible considering they'd gone far past scent swapping the night before... and the following morning. Ilya smirked to himself as he thought about the sex they'd had—how intoxicating it was. Ilya wanted more. He wanted to be back in the room surrounded by everything Shane was.

In fact, the further he moved away from Shane, the more his skin began to turn uncomfortable. It was an unsettling prickling at first that turned into a tension in his muscles. No matter how much he flexed, stretched, or shook out his limbs, the feeling didn't go away.

A few tense minutes later, he clenched his jaw and looked at his phone again to double check that he was standing in front of the correct room of the physician he'd texted on the team. He knocked on the door, shoved his hands in his pockets, and rolled his head as he waited for Mike to open the door and welcome him inside.

"Jesus, Roz, you smell like sex," Mike groaned as soon as he welcomed Ilya in. "I thought the team omega wasn't supposed to let that happen." Ilya just shrugged as casually as possible and thanked all that was holy that Mike hadn't assumed the sex smell came from the team omega. He always had been a little bit on the dafter side despite being someone in charge of the health of the players on the team.

"His job is to make sure it doesn't happen in public. Behind closed doors? Is free game," Ilya played along.

Mike shook his head with an exasperated grin and pulled out a bag from his suitcase that was filled with different pills, vials, patches, bandages, and needles. He tugged out four scent blocker sticks and handed them off to Rozanov with a wink. "Here, take some extras. Something tells me you'll need them if this is going to continue. This is good shit, too. The team'll be completely oblivious."

Ilya just lifted the hand holding the scent blockers in thanks, then turned to leave the room before Mike could ask further questions or come to a different conclusion than the one he'd landed on. "Oh, and Mike?" Ilya suddenly remembered before he could open the door completely. He looked over his shoulder at the beta who had already started to put everything away and waited until Mike met his gaze. "Let's keep this on the down low, yes?" he suggested.

Mike just grinned and shot him a thumbs up. "Got it, Roz."

Ilya managed to make it back to the hotel room without running into anyone else, much to Shane's probable relief. He knew that it was more of a big deal to the omega than him that their scents were so potentantly mixed and a small part of Ilya's heart ached traitorously in his chest at the notion of hiding what they'd created together.

Ilya liked that Shane smelled like him very much. His instincts went wild with the knowledge that Shane was covered in his scent.

His skin had started to become more comfortable the closer he got to the hotel room and when he finally stepped back inside to find that Shane was where he left him, naked and sprawled out in the bed, it warmed with something akin to approval. He cocked his head to

the side and raked his eyes over the spent omega in his bed that smelled like him—had been wrecked by him.

The bite mark on Shane's shoulder only made Ilya's inner alpha preen further with pride.

Shane shifted in the bed and cracked open an eye to meet Ilya's gaze. "Mmm, what took so long? I was starting to get antsy," he all but purred into the pillows. Now that was a sound Ilya would love to hear from Shane—purring. Omegas did it sometimes when they were absolutely content, happy, and safe. He wondered if Shane would ever feel that way around him and Ilya suddenly became very interested with the idea of being the alpha to do that for him.

"Look what I got," Ilya spoke, holding up the four scent blocker sticks and forcing his thoughts back to the present moment. Shane grinned lazily in acknowledgment of a successful hunt and pushed himself up from the bed before rubbing his fist lazily against his sleepy eyes. Ilya melted internally at the sight of the drowsy omega in the bed they'd shared.

"We need to take showers and be downstairs in an hour. Get one started for us? We can share and save some time," Shane suggested. "No funny stuff, though. My ass is sore." Ilya smirked at that and raised a playful eyebrow at the omega.

"Is a good ass. I'm not done with it."

Shane just rolled his eyes at Ilya and lifted himself out of bed entirely so he could gather up some clothes for the day while Ilya turned to the bathroom and followed through on what Shane had asked. As he tugged off his own clothes that he'd haphazardly thrown on after Shane shoved him out of the bed to go get the scent blocker sticks, something in the mirror caught his eye.

He frowned a little at the sight of a mark on the side of his neck, where his scent gland was, and couldn't recall when Shane had bitten him like he'd done to the omega. Where had that come from? He leaned forward to inspect it more and ran the pads of his fingers over the dark pink teeth marks. When his fingers didn't meet the expected dip of skin to suggest he'd *actually* been bitten, however, Ilya felt his stomach drop slightly.

Shane padded into the bathroom behind him a moment later and reached out to wrap his arms around Ilya's abdomen. He pressed his face against Ilya's strong back with a soft hum and murmured, "I know you're hot and all, but can we focus on the shower instead of your reflection? We really don't want to be late for the bus."

Ilya turned and took Shane's face in his hands so he could gently push Shane's face to the side and look at his neck where he'd bitten him. Sure enough, the omega's scent gland showed off the small scabs and depressions from the bite Ilya had delivered during sex.

"Are you okay? You're not... on anything, are you?" Shane asked in confusion as Ilya observed the mark closely, probably acting and looking like a crazy person. He then stepped behind Shane and looked in the mirror, flicking his eyes between the mark on Shane's neck and his own. It looked exactly the same. "Ilya. What's going on?" Shane questioned nervously.

“Your mark. It is on me too,” Ilya stated bluntly. Shane’s eyebrows furrowed up even further and he finally turned his attention to the mirror so he could look at whatever the alpha was looking at. Both of their eyes moved from one person’s neck to another until Shane’s features morphed into something stunned and scared while Ilya’s heart picked up its pace in his chest at the sight.

“Oh, *fuck*,” Shane whispered.

“What? What is it? You know what this is?” Ilya asked quickly. Shane swallowed hard and nodded as he reached up to touch the mark over his scent gland—the same pink circle of teeth imprints that was evident on Ilya’s skin despite him not biting the alpha back.

“It’s a bond.”

Chapter 6: A Good Match

The entire flight back to Boston was completely silent for Ilya and Shane.

They'd slathered on the scent blocker after a rushed shower, covered up the marks on their necks with hoodies, and somehow managed to go undetected by the team throughout it all. Shane hadn't said a single word to Ilya since informing the alpha that there had been some kind of bond created between them—one that was strong enough to match the mark on Ilya's skin with the original on Shane's.

He was busy doing research on his phone with his eyebrows all furrowed and his lips all pouted while Ilya did his best to focus on simply breathing. He had a bond with an omega. He had a bond with his *team* omega.

He reached down to grasp the crucifix of his necklace with his right hand and played with the piece of jewelry while his thoughts went wild. Ilya knew that bonds existed and that there was more than just one kind of bond. Almost everyone was most familiar with mating bonds considering they were the most serious and sacred kind of bond between an alpha and an omega.

But there were other kinds of bonds than just mating bonds.

There were familial bonds that formed the instant a baby was brought into the world through a mated pair. There were best friend bonds that formed over years of closeness between two platonic individuals. There were even team bonds in the world of hockey that formed when players worked together since they'd started the sport or been drafted at the same time.

Ilya had no idea what kind of bond this was between them. He didn't know what kind of bond resulted in matching marks that weren't on a mating gland or reciprocal. They weren't *mated*, so what was it? He flicked his eyes over to Shane where the omega was doing his research and wondered if the Canadian man was discovering anything of use for their situation.

If it was coverable like the sex they were having, then Ilya tried to assure himself he shouldn't be too concerned. But the image of the mark on his neck reflected earlier in the mirror flashed through his mind and sent a wave of warmth through his entire body that he didn't want to read into.

He *liked* Shane.

It had only been a week since the omega had shown up, but there was something between them that Ilya couldn't name—didn't know how to define—that had been there the moment Shane had shown up. It was apparently only getting stronger if the bond that had snapped between them was any proof of that. Shane shifted beside him in his seat and set his phone down with a loud, nervous swallow.

Ilya glanced over at him and raised an eyebrow when the omega looked back at him wearily. “We need to talk when we get back. In private,” was all Shane revealed under his breath. That only made the nerves bubbling up in Ilya’s stomach increase tenfold, but he kept his expression neutral and subdued as he nodded back in agreement.

Shane curled up in his seat and turned his attention to the window, crossing his arms protectively over his chest. Ilya went back to fiddling with the crucifix of his mother’s necklace and let his thoughts turn to anything other than the impending conversation he was going to be having at the apartment later. For the flight only being an hour and a half, it sure felt like an eternity to the Russian alpha.

They shuffled into the apartment quietly with their luggage trailing behind them and Shane wasn’t sure if he was thankful for the three day break they had before the next game or not. The information he’d found online about their spontaneous bond hadn’t been bad, per se, but it hadn’t been super reassuring either.

He really wanted to curl up in his nest and hide for a bit. His inner omega was anxious, pacing inside of him as his instincts fired on protection mode for whatever possible direction this conversation could go in. Ilya made himself comfortable on the couch with his head in his hands while Shane slowly approached and took a seat on the plush cushion next to him.

“What is it? What did we do?” Ilya asked slowly. Shane licked his lips and let his eyes trail over the tense shoulders of the alpha across from him. Everything in his body screamed at him to go to the alpha, to comfort him and calm him down, but Shane wasn’t exactly relaxed himself and wasn’t sure his efforts would be successful.

“It’s a soul bond. They’re rare, but... they happen. Everyone online said it has to be a very strong connection between an alpha and omega for them to happen. They’re the only kind of bond that does *that*,” he said, pointing to the duplicate mark on Ilya’s skin that was on his. Ilya reached up and cupped the pink marks on his neck that were of his own teeth while Shane did the same to feel the bumpy scabs the alpha had left behind.

“What does that *mean*, though?” Ilya demanded. Finally, Ilya turned his serious gaze on him and stole the air right out of Shane’s lungs at the eye contact alone. His skin buzzed at the alpha’s attention and Shane did his best to ignore whatever reaction that was. When Ilya had gone to get the scent blockers in Toronto though, his skin had also had a weird reaction at the loss of the alpha’s presence.

He *really* didn’t want to think about it too much.

Shane nodded slowly in acknowledgement at what Ilya said, then nervously tried to explain, “You scent marked me, had sex with me, then bit my scent gland. I think our instincts... assumed we would be a good match.”

Ilya's lips tightened while his eyes narrowed on the omega across from him. "A good match, Hollander? Our instincts are trying to play matchmaker with us? With our souls?" Shane quickly shook his head and felt his cheeks go hot at the situation he was only trying to make sense of. He didn't really know what it meant and no one online seemed to understand what caused them to form either. He'd read a lot of the word *soulmate* and was scared to read into that too much.

"A soul bond can't happen if both parties don't accept it. I think our instincts both... accepted we're good together," Shane reasoned uneasily. Ilya swore in Russian under his breath and dropped his head into his hands again before raking his long fingers through his blonde curls. It wasn't something they could necessarily control—it was biology, nature, designation.

Their bodies had obviously understood whatever was going on between and had accepted the soul bond readily without Ilya and Shane knowing it was happening. The pull to one another, the instant connection, the need to be around and inside each other meant *something* to their designations and it was up to Shane and Ilya to catch up with what that was now.

The bond had already happened and there was no going back unless Shane stepped away right then and there and never saw Ilya again. The mark would fade with time, instincts would guide them both to someone new, the bond would eventually sever, but there was no telling how long it could take. And the thought alone of leaving Ilya felt *wrong* to every fiber of Shane's being.

"So what do we do, Mr. Biologist?" Ilya inquired once he got over the initial shock of Shane's information. For a brief second, Shane was impressed that the Russian man knew the word biologist and he wanted to tease him about it, but it wasn't the time and he didn't actually have the answer Ilya was looking for.

"I don't know. I guess the question is whether or not you want to break the bond," Shane avowed. They stared at each other for a tense moment, eyes searching eyes for any hint of what the other person was thinking. When Ilya abruptly rose to his feet with a sharp, "*Fuck,*" and headed in the direction of the bar cart across the room, Shane scrambled up to follow.

"What are you doing?" he demanded as he scurried behind Ilya.

"Getting a drink to deal with this," Ilya growled. Shane's eyes widened and he picked up his pace so he could shove himself between the alpha and the liquor he wanted so badly like he'd done once before. Shane placed his hands on Ilya's chest to stop him in his tracks and pleaded, "No, that's not going to solve this. Stop, Rozanov."

Ilya sidestepped him with a glare and reached for the first bottle of vodka he could see. Shane smacked his hand away and put himself in front of Ilya once more, his back hitting the bar cart and making the bottles rattle dangerously. "We need to talk about this, Ilya. I won't let you get drunk and make this decision," Shane argued.

Then—

"*Not everything is about you, Hollander!*" Ilya exploded.

Shane couldn't help it when he flinched, hard, at the sudden outburst from the alpha he was bonded to. Every instinct in his body recoiled with fear, even if he knew logically that Ilya wasn't going to do anything to him. He'd been on the other end of an alpha's anger quite a few times when he played hockey, but it had never felt this... intimate. His bottom lip began to tremble pathetically.

Ilya growled at whatever he saw and tore himself away from Shane. His focus turned to the front door of the apartment and a new emotion, anxiety, began to fill inside of Shane's body as he watched Ilya grab the leather jacket hanging up on one of the nearby hooks. "Where are you going?" Shane whispered stupidly.

"Out. Don't stop me, Shane."

The slamming of the door behind Ilya made Shane jump which in turn caused all of the liquor bottles behind him to finally tip over and shatter on the floor. He didn't care about the Russian alpha's private alcohol supply or whatever he got himself into as he quickly made his way to the guest bedroom and tore open the closet, sudden tears streaming down his cheeks.

Fueled by a new numbness coursing through his veins at the loss of the alpha's affection, he pulled all of the clothes he'd hung up off of their hangers and began to throw them onto the bed. The suitcases came next, cracked open and tossed on the floor, followed by Shane very poorly dumping all of the clothes he'd thrown onto the bed into the abused luggage while he pathetically cried.

If Ilya was going down, he wasn't going to join him. He was going to leave, break the contract, apologize for failing, and lick his wounds in private. He'd find another alpha, maybe not at the professional level after this fuck up, but he'd find someone.

The unexpected sound of the apartment door opening and closing only moments later made Shane whirl around in his actions and watch as Ilya himself strode with purpose in his direction through the living room. The soft dripping of liquor on his hardwood floors was matched only by the resolute footsteps from the Russian man.

"I thought you—*oomf!*"

Ilya grabbed Shane by the sides of his neck and pulled him hard against his mouth, devouring him with his lips and tongue like a man desperate for a drink of water. Shane melted against the alpha and clutched him tightly as he was practically bowed backwards by the force of the kiss. They fell into a tangled mess of limbs on the bed, rumpling the nest that Shane had fixed after their last round of debauchery in it, and continued to kiss until Shane felt dizzy.

When Ilya finally pulled back to stare at him and wipe his tears away, Shane breathed out, "I thought you were going out."

Ilya sighed heavily and cupped the side of Shane's face. "I can't, remember? I have a team omega who tells me no," the alpha answered tiredly. "And I'm also bonded to him, so I can't go far without my skin aching. And I made him cry like an asshole." Shane bit his bottom lip and blinked a few times in embarrassment at the callout while his cheeks heated.

“I never learned about any of this biology stuff. My education wasn’t a priority for my father; it was always hockey. I don’t know what to do here, but I know that I can’t go far without feeling like I need to come back to you and I can’t get enough of you no matter how hard I try to deny myself,” Ilya continued honestly.

Shane swallowed hard, then carefully pushed Ilya onto his back so he could crawl on top of the alpha and look down at him instead. Ilya’s hands slid over his ass, but there was no heat in the action. The way he stared up at Shane with searching eyes made Shane’s heart skip a beat in his chest and he knew he needed to get the words out in his head before Ilya was scared away again from the serious conversation.

“This is new to me too,” Shane whispered through slightly watery eyes. “I think the best plan is to do whatever the bond wants. Stay together, avoid media attention, hide the scents and the marks, and just do what feels right until we can separate without it affecting your team.”

Ilya stared at him hard, his expression unreadable to Shane, then asked, “Is what you want?”

Shane licked his lips and nodded. “You get to finish your season, I get to do my job, and we get to... figure something out together. I’d like to see it through,” he admitted. Ilya reached up to cup the back of Shane’s neck and bring him down for another kiss, though this one was far more slow and apologetic than the one he’d given after marching back in the apartment.

They settled in the nest after a few quiet moments passed between them, silently shuffling backwards so they could be on the pillows with blankets thrown haphazardly over them. Ilya tugged Shane into his side, wrapped him in his arms, and petted Shane’s hair before murmuring, “I’m sorry for yelling at you and making you cry. I don’t know if you can tell, but I don’t handle things well when I get overwhelmed.”

Shane nuzzled his face into Ilya’s chest and smoothed his hand over Ilya’s strong abdomen. “I don’t think I cried because of that,” he responded thoughtfully. “I think the same way your body gets sensitive when you’re away from me, my emotions get sensitive.” Ilya hummed in acknowledgement at the thought process and pressed his nose into the top of Shane’s hair.

“My father is sick,” Ilya shared without any warning. Shane went to lift his head in surprise, but Ilya’s hand was firm in his hair and kept him pressed down so he could get out whatever else he wanted to say without being stared at. Shane settled against the alpha, even if he wished he could meet Ilya’s eyes and show he was listening—that he cared.

“He is forgetting things, getting lost in the past. My brother isn’t taking care of him the way he should be and the money I’m giving him to take care of my father keeps getting spent on things it shouldn’t. The drinking, the clubbing, the fucking...” he trailed off, but Shane knew what he was trying to say. He didn’t know how else to cope with everything.

“And now you are here. And I am a bonded man,” Ilya murmured.

Shane closed his eyes and pressed a gentle kiss to the side of Ilya’s chest. “I said it when I first came here and I’ll say it again. This doesn’t have to feel like a prison sentence. If you’re having second thoughts at all about—”

“—Stop talking, Hollandar. I want you to stay. I want to see this through. Instead of going to a club or getting a drink or fucking someone else, I came back to you. That means something, I think,” Ilya revealed. Shane’s heart warmed inside of his chest and he did his best to hide his smile in the fabric of Ilya’s shirt as they curled impossibly closer together.

“Thank you for telling me.”

“You owe me something now. Tell me something about you.”

Oh, so this was how he wanted to play this? Shane thought of everything he could possibly say, then decided he might as well just tell Ilya everything about himself. It wasn’t like the alpha was going anywhere and he didn’t know if this kind of scenario would ever happen between them again despite the fact they now shared a soul bond.

“My hometown is Ottawa, I’m an only child, and my parents’ names are Yuna and David. My mother is Japanese, but she grew up in Canada, and my dad is a full blooded Canadian which makes me Japanese-Canadian. I played hockey my whole life, loved every aspect of it, and decided when I was eighteen that I wanted to go the team omega route.

“My mom was a little disappointed, even if she didn’t say anything. They put a lot of time and effort into me going pro with hockey, but... I don’t know. Like I’ve said before, I just liked being the guy people could depend on more and I couldn’t always be that when I played full-time. I got my first professional contract in Buffalo, but I’ve kinda been all over since.

“When I’m not playing team omega, I really like to read, I like yoga and running, and I like to watch movies. I’m not the best cook, but I’ll give it a go every now and then with a new recipe. Um, let’s see... I told you about the ginger ale thing. I used to be a real health nut with my food when I was younger, not so much anymore. I’ve never had a pet.

“I like the color blue and I had to get a personal stylist last year to help me redo my wardrobe because I was apparently really boring with what I wore. My family has a lake house in Canada that I go to during the summers. Oh! I can also speak—”

“—Jesus Christ, Hollander. I said tell me *something*, not *everything*,” Ilya cut in with a laugh. Shane’s cheeks immediately went pink and he was quick to hide his face in Ilya’s side out of embarrassment while the alpha squeezed him tightly. “You shouldn’t be as adorable as you are. You talk my ear off, but you’re adorable still. Is not fair.”

“Sorry,” Shane peeped.

It was quiet for a long amount of time after. The sun was inching closer to the horizon, not anywhere close to it being evening yet, but Shane could see it through his sheer curtains as it coated the room in a warm light. Flecks of dust swirled through the air on a mission to land who knows where while the sounds of Boston were muffled outside, a soft contrast to the silence he and Ilya shared.

Ilya nuzzled his nose in the omega’s hair and spoke gently then, “You smell like me again.”

Shane blinked a few times at the statement and bravely asked, “Do you like that?”

The alpha rumbled deep in his chest in approval and managed to pull Shane closer to him despite the fact they were already tangled together tightly. “I do. I think we...” he trailed off, not finishing where his sentence was going and Shane poked him repeatedly in the side until Ilya huffed in amused frustration, grabbed his hand to stop him, and continued, “I think we are a good match. Maybe biology is right.”

Well, shit. That hadn’t been what Shane was expecting.

“When I think about my mother and father, they were not a good match. They were mated, but not a good match,” Ilya explained tightly. He didn’t elaborate on what he meant and Shane didn’t press him to go on. He’d mentioned his brother and father, but this was the first time the Russian alpha had mentioned his mother.

He’d also mentioned her in the past tense.

Shane pulled back slowly and stretched, trying to find a way to move them on as they’d been focused on the bond for hours now and he didn’t want to push Ilya any further than he already had been. Just what he’d opened up with alone today had been monumental.

“Shower?” Shane offered when he looked over to the alpha and found Ilya was already staring back at him. Ilya blinked and there was something in his eyes—an emotion that Shane couldn’t place—that made Shane’s breath hitch in his throat. Ilya just nodded and reached out once more to pull Shane’s mouth towards his own and kiss him tenderly before leisurely leaving the bed.

The shower was... nice.

He wasn’t really sure what had changed, but something had shifted between them when Ilya said he believed they were a good match. Their eyes never disconnected as they shared water, shampooed each other’s hair, and washed one another’s skin with thick blocks of soap. Ilya’s hands were nearly on him the entire time and their gazes had turned heated for a different reason than what had been typical for the last week.

When Ilya backed him up against the shower wall after they were clean, Shane went willingly with parted lips. Their breathing had turned shaky between the both of them, and then Ilya was kissing him with a passion that Shane hadn’t felt from the alpha before. His own instincts swooned at the attention and Shane was helpless to do anything other than sink into what his body told him to do—hold on and kiss him back with the same vigour.

Hands, mouths, breaths, eyes, lips, tongues. They kissed until the water turned cold and the matching pink marks on their necks darkened in color. Who knew getting closer would make a bond stronger? Definitely not them.

Chapter 7: Too Much All at Once

Sex, long flights, hockey games, laughter. Sex, shared meals, competitive runs, movie nights. Sex, cramped showers, hotel rooms, lazy mornings. Sex, silly conversations, readjusted nests, inside jokes. By the time Shane realized he felt truly comfortable and settled around the alpha, two months had passed since he'd first arrived in Boston.

Playoffs were around the corner and, now more than ever, Shane needed to keep Ilya in check when the losses came with the team. He'd done a good job of distracting him in front of the team and keeping him out of the media's attention, but Ilya was starting to get antsy whenever the Bears couldn't quite pull off a win. They couldn't afford any more mistakes if they wanted to fight for the Cup.

Shane had been able to calm him down in the locker room for the last two months by providing gland massages, handing off scent sticks, murmuring words of affirmation, and releasing calming pheromones. When he needed more on the road, sex was an easy solution as well in the privacy of a hotel room.

When it was just the two of them in the privacy of their shared apartment, however... things had gotten so much more intimate between them emotionally, physically, and mentally. They shared a bed every night, talked about nothing for hours, made each other laugh until their stomachs hurt, exercised and ate side by side, and indulged in one another's every desire with stupid smiles on their faces.

Their bond had only gotten stronger and they had become practically inseparable both publicly and privately. The team teased them relentlessly for how they were always by one another's side now, but Shane was quick to give the same response he'd been defaulting to for the last few weeks—it was his job to be close to Rozanov.

The mark on his neck, however, suggested it was far more than just a job.

Instead of remaining a soft shade of pink like it had started as when Ilya first bit him, the mark had turned a dusky rose color—a sign that their bond was continuing to solidify every day. Ilya's twin mark on his own neck had also darkened significantly and it was becoming a real bitch to cover when sweat, heavy gear, and jerseys constantly rubbed against the area.

Where it made Shane secretly nervous with everything a strengthening bond entailed, Ilya seemed to be fascinated with it. He was constantly touching it and admiring it in the mirror. Whenever they had sex, it was the first place his lips found and Shane had caught the alpha more than once staring at Shane's neck with something in his expression that Shane couldn't identify. Shane himself had begun to find himself watching the alpha more and more for reasons other than he was supposed to.

He watched the way Ilya styled his curls in the morning, the way his lips curled up slowly before stretching completely in a smile, the way he reviewed game tape with sharp eyes, the way he fiddled with the crucifix on his necklace whenever he was nervous, and the way he recently began to hold himself back from making rash decisions without Shane's doing.

The loss against New York that night, however, seemed to send Ilya spiraling far past the point of being able to check himself and his emotions. Shane watched from Ilya's stall as the captain shouted at his team after the loss, reamed them verbally for not showing up, and stormed into the showers with his gear still on. Shane realized he'd tucked himself in tight, even though he wasn't the one who Ilya had been shouting at.

He hadn't seen that side of Ilya since he'd arrived and it frankly frightened him to know the same alpha who cuddled him, kissed him, teased him, fed him, bathed him, and followed him was capable of such rage and fury.

When Marlow, Connors, and everyone else on the team looked at *him* afterwards... that's when Shane also realized he was the one that needed to fix whatever was going on. If anyone could do it, it was him. He carefully pulled himself up from the stall and muttered a few condolences to the players he passed before he rounded the corner and stepped into the showers. Only one was on, all the way at the end, but Shane couldn't see the alpha he was bonded to anywhere.

"Ilya?" he called gently. He slowly made his way forward until the waist high panel blocking his view revealed the Russian man sitting down in the middle of the shower stall, still fully clad in now soaked gear. Shane's instincts went into immediate comfort mode and he quickly reached out to shut off the water, ignoring the fact that it was scalding hot and burned his arms. "Ilya," he breathed.

The alpha looked up at him from under the visor of his helmet and Shane realized he was *crying*. Something very wrong was going on. What had he missed? What wasn't he seeing? What had shifted so rapidly? Shane worriedly looked over his shoulder to make sure no one had entered before he got down on his knees and wrapped Ilya in a hug, pulling him close despite getting his own clothes soaked.

"Come on. We need to get you home. I can take care of you better there," he coaxed as he released as much of his scent as possible into the emptiness of the shower.

"I feel like I am going crazy," Ilya said numbly. Shane swallowed hard at the empty sound of Ilya's voice and hurriedly tugged the alpha to his feet when the sound of approaching voices echoed in the showers. Fuck, not *now*. Ilya managed to get to his feet, though the sound of his blades scratching on the tile beneath his feet made Shane cringe.

"You have to get out of your gear. Come on, listen to my voice. Follow my lead," Shane urged quietly as he walked Ilya back towards the locker room. He gave his best 'leave us alone' glare to the players who had gathered in the entrance to the shower and were watching the scene play out. Everyone quickly stepped back at the look from the omega and gave them space as Shane sat Ilya down in the stall and began to hurriedly tug off his gear.

"Arms, Ilya," Shane murmured. He was well aware they were being watched, coaching staff included, and his cheeks burned at the attention as his fingers pulled at fabric, undid velcro straps, tugged out laces, and shucked off clothes. He didn't notice the way Ilya was watching him the whole time too. "He'll take the fine," Shane decided when he finally stepped back to look at the suit hanging up. "We need help getting out of here."

“On it,” the team’s PR manager declared.

Shane turned to find coach Hayes nearby and shook his head when the older man opened his mouth. “I’m taking him home and I’ll call you. You need to let me do my job right now and give us space,” Shane informed as bravely as possible. It took a lot of strength to stand up to an older alpha, but Ilya was superior to Hayes on Shane’s list of alphas he cared about, so he squared his shoulders and readied himself for a fight.

Hayes just gave a curt nod and jerked his head in the direction of the exit. “Get him out of here unseen. I trust you.”

Shane was flooded with relief, though it didn’t last long as he turned back to Ilya and forced the Russian man to his feet. He was dressed in nothing but his compression leggings and slides, so Shane had to scramble to find a Boston Bears hoodie from another player’s cubby to tug onto him. He pulled up the hood, slung Ilya’s gear bag onto his shoulder, murmured, “Stay with me,” to the alpha, then turned to pull Ilya out of the locker room.

The tunnels to the parking lot were completely empty thanks to whatever magic the PR manager had worked and Shane wasted no time loading Ilya into the passenger’s side of his fancy sports car while he rounded the hood to tumble into the driver’s side. Ilya didn’t say a single word the entire drive home.

He simply stared out of the window, face emotionless, and ignored the buzzing that suddenly came repeatedly in his gear bag. Shane knew it was Ilya’s father. He knew by now what kind of call was coming after the loss, and while he knew that Ilya’s father was sick and old, he didn’t feel much sympathy for the man and his condition at that moment. The buzzing of the impending call only seemed to make Ilya crumble in more on himself. Shane reached over and placed his hand on Ilya’s thigh to comfort him while he navigated downtown Boston and its frustrating post-game traffic.

It felt like an eternity had passed when they finally parked in the underground garage of the apartment complex and clambered out of the car. Ilya kept his hood up while Shane shuffled them towards the private elevators that required a keycard to operate. “Alright, come on, almost there,” Shane murmured as he hugged Ilya in the elevator and continued to release as much of his calming scent as he could muster.

Ilya just sank against him like dead weight.

Shane didn’t care that Ilya was dirty from the game when they toppled into the nest he’d moved to Ilya’s bed. His hair was matted down to his forehead with dried sweat and his compression leggings had to be grimy against the alpha’s skin, but he melted against Shane all the same when they fell into the bed. “Talk to me,” Shane whispered as he carded his fingers through Ilya’s damp locks.

“My mother committed suicide when I was young. I was the one who found her,” Ilya said softly.

Shane’s heart stopped in his chest along with his breathing. *What?* He tightened his hold on Ilya and swallowed thickly, but said nothing as he waited for the alpha to continue. “She

wasn't happy to be mated to my father. She was depressed for as long as I can remember her. He ignored her, gave attention to other omegas, was too busy for what she needed... so she killed herself.

"My father covered it up as best as he could. Got the surgery to remove his mating gland and her mark. Found another omega to be with. Not mated, obviously, but married—the beta way of doing things," Ilya muttered.

Shane had no idea where this was going, but his heart ached with every word. He'd had no idea. *No* idea.

"I think maybe... I am like her sometimes. I think where she went to pills, I go to..."

Shane nodded and furrowed his eyebrows as he continued to stroke Ilya's hair. "I thought things were getting better?" he asked unsurely, matching the quiet tone that the alpha was speaking in. He didn't want to spook him now, not with this kind of subject matter. Ilya buried his face in Shane's chest and tightened arms around the omega's waist.

"It's a lot right now, Shane. My father is sick, my brother is an asshole, we are one loss away from not making it to playoffs, I have to hide you and our bond, and the anniversary of my mother's death is coming," he rattled off into Shane's shirt.

Shane bit his bottom lip and asked unsurely, "What can I do for you?"

Ilya shook his head. "Just hold me, Hollander."

Shane didn't sleep for the rest of the night as the alpha clung to him. All he could think of was a scene where Ilya was alone and dealing with this on his own. Something inside of Shane whispered to him, *what if he wasn't alone for the rest of his life? What if you were there every time? What if you were his mate?*

When Ilya woke the next morning, his skin felt stiff from dried sweat and his hair was flat against his forehead. The bed was also empty, but it smelled so strongly of Shane that he couldn't help but bury his face in the mess of pillows and blankets to lose himself for a few more moments. Last night had been a disaster. Everything had just gotten too much and he'd had a nervous breakdown of sorts.

And now Shane knew all about him and his sad little life.

The thought was more comforting than nerve wracking to him, surprisingly. Ilya had accepted over the past two months as he got closer with the omega that he was starting to develop serious feelings for Shane. He liked the omega. A *lot*. Every time he looked at Shane, his heart skipped a beat in his chest and his breathing became a little unsteady.

He liked how calming of a presence Shane was, even when he wasn't intentionally trying to be. He was always there when Ilya needed him and always seemed happy to tag along with whatever Ilya wanted to do. Share a shower? Shane was heating up the water. Try a complicated cooking recipe? Shane had the ingredients organized. Watch a stupid movie? Shane had the couch ready to go. Discover a new sex position? Shane was bent over and waiting.

Shane had been there through everything last night and Ilya had never wanted to kiss and hold and worship someone more than in that moment. He drew himself out of bed and slowly made his way out into the living room of the apartment to confront the very man that consumed his thoughts. The omega was found in the kitchen, cooking something on the stove with his phone against his ear, when Ilya eventually located him.

"—might really be beneficial, yeah. He was asleep when I last checked on him, but I'll keep you updated." A pause. "Yeah, okay. I'll let him know. Take care. Bye." Shane pulled the phone away, disconnected the call, then turned his attention back to whatever he was making for breakfast. Ilya approached as quietly as possible and just watched for a moment while Shane flipped the... *omelete? Yes, omelet*, that he was working on.

"You talking about me?" Ilya asked, grinning when Shane practically jumped out of his skin at the sudden voice.

"Jesus! You asshole!" Shane cursed as he whirled around and pointed his spatula at Ilya. The alpha just smiled wider and approached, reaching his arms out to pull Shane into a hug against his grimy chest. Not the most romantic, but necessary. "It was Hayes on the phone," Shane grumbled. "He was asking how you were."

Ilya nodded and placed his chin on the top of Shane's head, closing his eyes while he imagined what conversation they were possibly having about him. "Telling him all my secrets then? How fucked I am?" Ilya asked as steadily as possible despite the fact the question made his stomach sink with nerves.

Shane pushed back, his expression hurt, and Ilya knew at that moment that Shane hadn't said anything about Ilya's personal life. He immediately felt like an asshole for assuming the worst.

"No. No, Ilya, *Jesus*. He asked how you were and I said you had a lot going on and it might be a good idea for a team therapist to get involved if you wanted to, but that it was your decision, not mine or his. It just might be beneficial for you, or whatever. He said they still have you on the roster for tomorrow's game, but it's your choice if you want to scratch yourself or not. I said I'd let you know," Shane revealed as he set the spatula to the side and turned off the stove.

Ilya cocked his head to the side, considering, and reached out to cup the side of Shane's face to admire the freckles across his cheeks, the v at the top of his lips, and the dark brown eyes that stared back at him for just a moment. God, Ilya was infatuated with the omega in front of him.

“I will play,” he decided softly. “And I will talk to the team therapist. For you.” Shane sucked in a sharp breath and nodded before leaning into Ilya’s touch to show his approval.

“Okay. Good. Um, I made you breakfast and then maybe you can, uh, take a shower? We can just have a lazy day afterward? Maybe talk a bit more?” Shane offered while also doing his best not to wrinkle his nose at whatever Ilya smelled like. The alpha caught onto it immediately, however, and backed Shane up against the counter with a smirk.

“Oh? I smell bad or something?” he teased.

It was so intoxicating to watch Shane blush. Ilya loved to make Shane blush. “No! Well, I mean, it’s just that you didn’t change after the game last night and, um—”

“So I need a shower right now then? Is too much for Shane’s adorable nose?” He got closer and closer, tapping said nose with his finger, until Shane was practically bending backwards over the counter with a glare aimed directly at the alpha.

“I know what you’re doing, Rozanov,” Shane denounced.

“So cute. Like a puppy,” Ilya taunted with a wide smile. Shane looked about ready to bite his head off when Ilya reached down and abruptly picked Shane up by the underside of his thighs. The omega scrambled to grab onto Ilya’s shoulders and cried out, “Put me down! Breakfast is *ready*, you asshole!”

Ilya just reached out with one hand to quickly push the skillet to the side before cupping Shane’s underthigh once more—maybe not as smooth as he imagined. Shane’s entire face was red and he was very evidently pouting at Ilya’s change of direction for where the morning was going, but he didn’t seem to put up too much of a fight when Ilya walked them in the direction of the bathroom and stole kisses along the way.

“If you’re very nice to me, maybe I’ll be very nice to you back. I had a very rough night last night,” Ilya murmured mockingly against Shane’s lips once he set the omega down on the bathroom sink. Shane smacked his chest weakly and chirped back, “We’re not finished talking about everything. And I seem to remember being *very* nice to you last night.”

Ilya hummed in agreement as his fingers worked under the hem of Shane’s shirt and pushed it off of the omega. *God, he was pretty... and so good to him.* Smooth, toned, soft, warm, sweet, kind, brave, thoughtful. Ilya couldn’t keep his hands off of Shane once he curled his fingers around the omega’s waist and stood between his legs to slowly devour his mouth. Shane moaned in appreciation at the contact and began to work off the grubby hoodie that Ilya was, unfortunately, still wearing.

“I’ll make a deal with you,” Shane whispered against the alpha’s lips.

“Hollander bargaining with me? Hell has frozen over,” Ilya murmured back between broken kisses. Shane just grinned and pushed him away gently, willing the alpha to give him space as he jerked his head in the direction of the shower.

“You get it warm, I get undressed.”

Ilya immediately whipped around, grinning as Shane laughed behind him in amusement. He'd never started a shower so quickly and been so impatient for the water to heat up. He shucked his leggings down with one hand to get himself naked while the other reached out to feel the shower as it went from frigid to cold to cool to warm to hot. When he turned back around to tell Shane it was ready, his mouth watered at the sight of Shane already standing behind him, bare and awkward.

"Ready," Shane squeaked, shifting on his feet uncomfortably while he tried not to fidget with his hands. Like Ilya said—adorable.

"Yes, you are," Ilya agreed heatedly.

He tugged the omega into the shower and pressed him against the wall, finding Shane's lips once more and eagerly pushing his tongue inside. Shane welcomed him with a soft, pliant sound and wrapped his arms around Ilya's neck to keep the alpha close as they kissed. It didn't take long for Ilya to reach down between them and find Shane's half-hard cock as well as his own throbbing length.

He could never get enough.

Ilya was convinced they could have sex every day for the rest of their lives—be physically *inside* of Shane—and it still wouldn't be enough of the omega. He wasn't stupid. He knew the bond between them was getting stronger, more stable, more intense. The marks on their necks were darkening, the thought of leaving Shane's side caused him heart pain, and their mixed scents were requiring more and more scent blocker sticks to cover it.

But he didn't give a damn when he had the omega in front of him, hard in his hand and panting against his mouth. Ilya didn't want to spend another day without having Shane like this. The thought alone of Shane with another alpha one day made Ilya growl and pull his lips away from Shane's so he could mouth and nip at the mark he'd left behind months ago on the omega's neck.

"Fuck, *Ilya*..." Shane whimpered into the steam of the shower.

"I know. Let me take care of you," Ilya murmured against his wet skin. He took the both of them in his hand, the water slickening the tugging motion as he jerked their cocks together, and swallowed Shane's moans when he recaptured the omega's lips. It was fast, filthy, and desperate. His stomach had been tight the second he'd seen Shane naked and Ilya knew he wasn't going to last long.

Something about Shane just made him crazy. He wanted him so badly it hurt. From his boring ginger ale to his dorky glasses to his movie nights in to his cozy nests to his broken little sounds during sex, Ilya wanted it all. Ilya wanted *Shane*. In the middle of the hazy shower, his hand pleasuring both of them and his lips against the omega's mark, Ilya had a startling realization.

He loved Shane.

Chapter 8: His Name is Shane

They didn't lose the next game. Or the one after that. When they defeated Colorado a week after Ilya's episode, the Bears clinched themselves a spot in the playoffs. Shane sat back in Ilya's stall and watched with fond eyes as they popped champagne and punched in beer cans, flooding the locker room in alcohol and excited cheers. Ilya indulged in being sprayed and jostled around by the boys while his hands never found themselves holding a bottle or a can for himself.

"I'm sure they'd understand if you wanted to drink a little," Shane said affectionately when Ilya collapsed in the stall beside him and threw a damp towel over his wet face. Ilya was beaming when he tugged the white fabric away and turned his attention to Shane.

"No. I don't need it," Ilya assured. Shane smiled wider and dipped his head in acknowledgement at the decision. Ilya was whisked off his feet by Connors and Marlow in the next instant to rejoin the fun, but Ilya's eyes found their way back to Shane's repeatedly throughout the little celebration of making it to the finals.

Shane's heart raced in his chest at the eye contact and he couldn't deny anymore that Ilya had been a bit more... *focused* on him in the past week. It was like Ilya followed him with his gaze and his feet no matter where he went. Shane had to physically push him out of the bathroom that morning just so he could pee in privacy.

That being said, Shane knew that his feelings for Ilya were getting serious. He wasn't much better than the alpha considering his eyes always ended up on the Russian man and he was somehow always within five feet of him no matter where they were. He liked Ilya Rozanov very *very* much and if he thought too hard about it, a certain four letter word started to materialize in his brain and heart.

He absently cupped the mark on his neck and jumped a little bit when the back pocket of his jeans began to buzz, pulling him from his thoughts. He dropped his hand to pull out his phone and felt his face heat immediately when his mother's name displayed on the screen. Shit, he hadn't called her yet today. Pursing his lips, Shane ducked around the spray of alcohol and left the locker room to accept the call before it went to voicemail.

"Hello?" he asked as soon as he was free from the celebrating hockey team.

"Finally, he answers," Yuna greeted teasingly on the other side. Shane grinned and found a nearby wall to lean on as the distant sound of jubilation echoed through the hallway.

"Sorry, I'm here. It was just a bit of a hectic day with it being the game and everything." *And the mindblowing sex on the couch he'd had with Ilya Rozanov.* "How are you and dad? Everything okay?" Shane asked while his cheeks heated at the memory from earlier between him and Ilya.

"We're fine. Everything's fine. We're more interested in *you*, honey. How are things going? Congratulate Ilya for us on making it to the playoffs! That must be very exciting for him and

the team,” Yuna praised. Shane could hear the slight shift in her tone though—the one that suggested she wished it was Shane she was saying it to.

He frowned slightly and wrapped an arm around his waist for subtle protection. “Yeah, it’s very exciting. I’m glad to be a part of it,” Shane agreed, a little forceful in that last part. There was a pause on the line, then a soft sigh.

“That’s not what I meant, honey. You know we’re proud of you,” Yuna relented. Shane nodded and tilted his head back before the sound of the locker room door opening filled the hallway alongside the muffled celebration. He glanced over to find Ilya looking both directions down the hallway until the alpha’s gaze landed on him. His face lit up like an excited puppy and Shane’s heart skipped a beat inside of his chest.

“Ilya’s here right now, actually, if you want to congratulate him yourself,” Shane said loudly as Ilya approached. The alpha raised his eyebrows in surprise and nervously took the phone while Yuna chattered excitedly without Shane actually listening.

“Is your mother?” Ilya asked softly. Shane just nodded with a grin and watched as Ilya slowly lifted the phone to his ear and greeted, “Hello, Mrs. Hollander.” Shane snorted which immediately turned into a wince of *ow!* when Ilya kicked him lightly in the shin. The alpha smirked at that while Shane glared.

“Thank you. Yes, we’re very excited. I couldn’t have done it without Shane by my side.” A pause. “Yes, he’s a very good, er... influence? Is that the word? Yes, influence.” A longer pause. “I think if I could, I would have him stay for the rest of my career.”

Shane blinked a few times at the statement, caught off guard by whatever had warranted that response. Ilya just flicked his gaze over at Shane and smirked. “Yes, you raised a good son. I will let you talk to him again. I still have some celebrating left to do,” Ilya concluded smugly. Shane could hear his mother laugh on the phone as Ilya handed the phone back with a wink.

“Don’t be too long. I miss you,” Ilya whispered suggestively as he passed the omega. Shane just mouthed back *asshole* before putting the phone back to his ear.

“Talk about sweet,” Yuna complimented as soon as she heard Shane murmur that he was back. “What a lovely man. Ugh, is he single? *No, no*, don’t actually answer that. But I’m glad he has you, honey. I’ll let you get back to the festivities, though.” Shane’s face was burning red and everything in him wanted to scream, *Yeah and we’re soul bonded too! Isn’t that great?*

“I’ll call you tomorrow mom. Goodnight, love you.” He put his phone back into his pocket as soon as she said her own goodbyes, then returned to the locker room to find that the alcohol had been put away and most players were starting to get undressed. Shane just made himself comfortable in Ilya’s stall and let his eyes close as the alpha’s voice echoed in the showers.

He was tired.

Florida was the team Boston was up against in the first round of the playoffs. They played a ruthless game that had no mercy when it came to hitting opposing players hard and shoving themselves into carefully crafted plays. Shane watched the whole game with his teeth in his bottom lip until he could taste blood. Ilya had been boarded roughly a few times and had fallen victim to a high stick on his cheekbone that was shoddily patched on the bench.

Shane forgot how taxing playoffs could be. Everyone wanted the Cup and would do anything in their power to get it. He winced whenever Ilya got back on the ice and let out a breath of relief whenever he exited untouched... for the most part. By the time the third period started, the game was tied and Ilya seemed to have a scent stick permanently shoved under his nose while his sharp eyes scanned the ice for a chance to dominate the next play.

Shane yawned in the locker room from where he watched and leaned back in Ilya's stall, wrapping himself up in the Boston Bears hoodie he'd snagged from Ilya's closet before they'd left for the game. He hated late games. As someone who always enjoyed going to bed at a reasonable hour, Shane had to admit that following Ilya to all of his games sometimes got to him.

It should be Ilya yawning, not him. He shook his head to wake himself up and immediately shot into the air to cheer by himself when Ilya slung the puck perfectly through the air and directly into the net. The goal horn blared through the air and the stadium roared as the Bears took the lead in the game. Their job was to keep it that way for the remaining twelve minutes.

Shane wasn't sure when exactly he fell asleep, but one second he was watching the game and beaming, and the next he was jerking awake to the sound of an excited team bursting through the locker room. He blinked rapidly and swallowed down his fright at waking as Ilya charged towards him immediately and wrapped him in a bear hug.

"Let's go, baby!" the alpha cheered. Shane grinned and held him back, pulling away before their intimacy could be read into by Ilya's teammates. Ilya turned to then hug everyone else as the coaches came in and began to settle everyone. The speech was typical—don't get too excited, they weren't in the second round yet, stay focused, get ready to fly to Florida in two days. Ilya departed for the shower afterwards and Shane, yet again, fell asleep in the alpha's stall.

When Ilya found him ten minutes later, his arms were gentle and secure around Shane as he lifted the omega up from the enclosure and carried him out of the locker room. Shane hummed at the contact, too exhausted to open his eyes, and murmured, "I can walk," to the alpha. Ilya laughed softly and shook his head, though Shane wasn't fully awake to see it.

"No. You cannot. I think maybe we go to sleep as soon as we get home. You're so tired lately," Ilya teased.

"The team will see us," Shane protested weakly.

“Don’t care.” And, well, that was settled.

What didn’t settle, however, was Shane’s fatigue. Ilya watched two days later as the omega slept through the entire flight to Tampa, the entire bus ride to the hotel, the entire day—for the most part—before the game, and then the additional bus ride to the stadium. His states of lucidity were short, but Ilya observed each time with a deeply worried expression.

What had started out as humorous began to turn into serious concern. His scent seemed okay, nothing bitter or sour there, so Ilya wasn’t sure what was up.

Even Connors, Marlow, Hayes, and the rest of the team had started to notice. No one could give him a straight answer. If he was coming down with something, his temperature hadn’t suggested it as the back of Ilya’s hand frequently found itself pressed against Shane’s forehead. Maybe he was doing it wrong, though.

“Shane,” Ilya whispered as he pulled on his gear to get ready for the game against Tampa. The omega blinked lazily and looked up at Ilya from the practice stall, his cheeks flushed from sleep. “Game is about to start. You want me to find you a blanket?” he asked softly. Shane shook his head and settled deeper into the stall. He was dressed in one of Ilya’s many Bears hoodies *and* a pair of Ilya’s joggers that were a bit small on the alpha.

Ilya huffed and nervously looked at one of the nearby team physicians. He jerked his head in Shane’s direction and the physician strode over with a grim look on his face before kneeling down in front of the omega.

“Rozanov! Let’s go!” Hayes called from behind him. Ilya licked his lips, latched the strap of his helmet under his chin, then grabbed his stick before painfully parting from Shane. The physician was gently waking Shane and asking him questions calmly, but Ilya couldn’t make it out as he moved further and further away from him. The whole game, Ilya found himself distracted by thoughts of Shane and what was possibly wrong with him. He missed passes, couldn’t find the puck, and hadn’t gotten a single opportunity to shoot on the goal. It was a disaster.

When the first period ended, he practically tore through the hallway back towards the locker room and felt his heart sink when Shane wasn’t there. Every instinct in his body immediately went on high alert. *Where was he? Where was Shane? Where was his omega?*

“Rozanov. Here,” the same physician from earlier called. While everyone else readied themselves for a stern talking to with their coaches, Ilya readied himself for the worst with Shane. The omega was laying down on one of the massage tables with a blanket over him and an ice pack on his forehead. Ilya was by his side instantly.

“He’s running a slight temperature, but nothing too bad. I think it’s just a little bug. It would explain the fatigue and lack of appetite he told me about. His suppressant dosage is steady, so it’s not a drop or spike either. I think his body is just telling him to take it easy with the travel and late nights,” the physician explained. “I gave him some medicine for now. Temperature should be okay in about twenty minutes or so.”

Ilya nodded and ran a dotting hand through Shane’s hair as he looked at him.

“Ilya,” the physician said, suddenly serious and quiet. “He has a mark on his neck.”

“That’s enough,” Ilya snapped. The physician blinked at him, expression stony, then murmured back sternly, “I hope you know what you’re doing.”

The second period improved. He managed to assist in the team’s first goal of the night and delivered a punishing hit to one of Tampa’s biggest nuisances on the ice. Shane was back in his stall after the period, small but awake. He smiled softly at Ilya, congratulated him on the assist, then made the alpha promise to get a goal.

The third period brought exactly that as thoughts of healthier Shane in the locker room lifted his spirits. His goal wasn’t exactly pretty, but it counted, and the team was glad to take it. In the end, the game finished 2–1 in favor of the Bears and Ilya was eager to celebrate by doing nothing more than cuddling close with his sick omega.

Shane was pliant, soft, and quiet through the entire process of the team wrapping up, showering, dressing, loading the bus, and making it back to the hotel. “You had a temperature earlier. How are you feeling?” Ilya asked as soon as they were alone in the hotel room. Shane shrugged weakly and collapsed on the bed.

“I just feel... tired. It’s like I can’t stay awake no matter how hard I try and I don’t have the energy to do anything except to get from one place to another, then crash there. It almost feels like—” Shane cut himself off while Ilya raised an eyebrow at him.

“Feels like what?” Ilya pressed.

Shane stared at the ceiling, then slowly sat up. “Will you get me my toiletry bag?”

Ilya frowned but did as the omega asked. It took a minute to locate the navy blue bag in Shane’s suitcase before he gently handed it off and watched the omega rifle through it. He pulled out a sleeve of pills, muttered a few things under his breath, then went pale. “*Fuck. Fuck, fuck, fuck.*”

“Hollander, you are having a panic attack. What’s wrong?” Ilya fretted.

Shane pressed his lips together tightly and handed over the sleeve of pale yellow pills to the alpha. “These are my suppressants. I take one a week. I knew I was getting close, but with playoffs and travel and everything going on, I just kept putting it in the back of my mind and forgetting. When I get to the fourth row, that means it’s time for me to... you know...”

No, Ilya didn’t know. “Time too... what?”

Shane’s face turned bright red and he had to physically cover his face with his hands to admit, “It’s time for me to go through a heat cycle. I’m on the fourth row, third pill. I wasn’t even paying attention. I have to cycle soon or else it’ll be a breakthrough heat at some random point in the future.”

Heat. Heat cycle. *Shane* was going to go into *heat* next week. They had three games next week in the playoffs. Ilya felt his throat go dry at the implication of everything those facts

entailed and knew immediately that, if Shane asked, he would scratch himself from the games to see the omega through. In fact, he was dying for Shane to ask.

“How long does it last?” Ilya asked.

Shane shrugged weakly. “Usually four days. Three if I’m lucky. I’ll have to find a heat hotel and pack you extra scent sticks for the bench while I’m gone,” he huffed. Ilya stared at him, his inner alpha perturbed at the idea of leaving Shane alone to deal with his heat while he went off and played hockey.

“I can help,” Ilya blurted before he could think better of it. Shane snorted immediately and sat there for a while until he realized Ilya was being serious and slowly pushed himself up to his elbows to look at him. The hotel room was silent for a moment as Shane visibly tried to process what to say to Ilya’s offer.

“Ilya, you have the playoffs. That’s more important than a stupid heat cycle that comes every four months,” he finally protested with furrowed eyebrows. Ilya shook his head and took a step forward with serious eyes, determined not to let Shane change the subject back to hockey. This was far more important to him. The mere thought of Shane alone and in pain through a heat twisted his stomach and made him sick.

“I need to talk to you,” he said abruptly. Shane blinked and nervously shuffled on the bed as Ilya came to terms with the fact he was about to be very brave with his words and emotions. “I have been thinking a lot and I think we have a bond for a reason. We laugh, we joke, we have great sex, yes... but we also are honest, we talk, we care for one another. I don’t think the soul bond was a mistake.”

Shane swallowed hard and looked up at Ilya through long lashes, his gaze unsure but steady.

“I think you are a very special omega, Shane Hollander. I think... when the season ends, I would like for you to stay. For a reason other than a contract,” he carefully admitted. “So, when I am offering to help you through your heat, it isn’t because of the bond or because I feel I need to after everything you’ve done for me. It’s because I—” his throat choked up on his words and Ilya sucked in a sharp breath as he clenched his fist by his side.

“It’s because I like you. Very much. I would like for you to stay with me and let me help you through your heart because I like you.” It wasn’t exactly the word he wanted to use, but Ilya had just accepted himself the full weight of his emotions for Shane. He didn’t want to scare him off, not when this was already a leap forward between them.

Shane worried at his bottom lip with his teeth and whispered, “I like you too. A lot.”

Relief washed through Ilya’s body and he didn’t waste another moment of standing there like an idiot. He all but fell on top of the omega as he approached the bed and pressed his lips against Shane’s, though it was barely a kiss considering they were both grinning like fools through it. They shuffled up the bed until they were against the pillows and Ilya finally got the chance to take his time with Shane, memorizing his mouth and touching every part of his chin, neck, and face.

When they broke apart, however, Shane looked at him with worried eyes and Ilya knew that he was about to hear some boring, yet sensible, logic spill out of the omega's swollen lips.

"You *do* have to play though. It's the playoffs, Ilya. They aren't going to let you sit out for a game or two just because I'm in heat. That would actually make it worse if they knew you were assisting me through my cycle," Shane explained softly.

Ilya sighed heavily and rolled onto his back, pulling Shane with him so the omega could tuck himself into his side. "I don't like the thought of you going through that alone," Ilya murmured. Shane just buried his face into the side of the alpha's chest and squeezed him gently around the waist.

"It wouldn't be the first time. I'll have another one in four months when you're in the off season and you can help with that one. This is what's best for the team and you know it. You're so close. I won't be the thing that holds you back from going all the way."

Ilya closed his eyes and knew that the omega against him was right. Shane had played hockey and had been surrounded by hockey all his life. As much as he wanted to be there, now wasn't the time to get distracted or miss games unless it was absolutely necessary. His friends, his team, and his city needed him and he had to be okay with losing this one thing just once.

Shane would have a lifetime of heat cycles and Ilya was adamant that he wouldn't be missing any others.

"Okay," he agreed eventually in the stillness of the room. Shane pressed appreciative kisses against Ilya's clothed chest, then tucked himself in further to begin drifting off once more. The fatigue started to make sense the more that Ilya thought about it as he ran his fingers through Shane's hair and listened to the way the omega's breathing steadied out.

Heat cycles kept omegas up for days, especially if they went unhelped, and Shane's body was preparing for that exertion. Ilya nuzzled his nose into the thick black locks of Shane's hair and frowned as he imagined Shane alone in a heat hotel, begging for something he couldn't have, while Ilya was on the ice far away.

His stomach flipped uncomfortably while Shane slept peacefully in his arms, completely unaware of the inner turmoil building in the alpha who held him. Ilya pulled away after a little while to tug off the suit he was still wearing and quietly take a good look at himself in the mirror.

His mark was nearly a chocolate brown on his neck, like freckles if someone did a quick glance, and contrasted beautifully against the gold chain of his mother's crucifix. He grabbed it in his fingers and closed his eyes as his lips trembled with the weight of what he was going to do next.

"Mama," he whispered in Russian. He paused for a moment, steadying himself in the darkness of his eyelids and the feel of the metal in his fingers. "I met a boy. His name is Shane. It would have been really nice if you were here right now. I think you would have loved him as much as I love him. I would have liked to see that."

When Ilya crawled into bed quietly five minutes later, cheeks a little stained and eyes a little puffy, he pulled the covers around a sweetly dozing Shane and gathered the omega back into his arms. He swore his necklace was just a little bit warmer against his skin that night.

Chapter 9: A Really Bad Idea

Shane made it to one more game before it became too dangerous for him to travel with Ilya. It felt wrong to let him go, to know that he would be in Boston while Ilya flew to Florida for a game. They'd lost the last one, making it 2–1 in the standings for who would continue on in the playoffs. Ilya wasn't about to let Tampa tie them up, so he regretfully parted ways with Shane despite every fibre of his being aching.

His limbs hurt. His mark twitched. His muscles protested. His skin itched. His heart ached.

He felt uncomfortable in his body with each hour he put between him and his omega. Eventually, the same physician who had called him out for the mark when examining Shane silently made his way to Ilya and passed him a bottle of pills with a knowing look. Ilya had stared at the bottle for a very long time.

All he could think of was his mother when he observed the tiny white tabs inside of it and Ilya decided he wouldn't be indulging in a single one. The bottle was chucked into his gear bag with a frown. In his mind, it was better to feel pain and know Shane existed than feel nothing at all.

As they geared up for the game that night in Tampa, Ilya grabbed his phone and nervously sent a text to Shane. He wasn't sure how far along he was in losing full lucidity considering it was Shane's first day of his cycle. He sent the message anyway of *How are you doing?* and nibbled on his necklace as he watched the empty screen. Finally, the bubbles jumped up on Shane's end and Ilya's heart skipped a beat in his chest.

Hot. Horny. Tired. You ready for the game?

Ilya snorted at the fact Shane would, of course, still ask about him despite dealing with his own shit. *I'm ready. I wish you were here, but I'm ready. Text me if you need anything.*

Shane sent back a heart and a thumbs up which made Ilya roll his eyes and set the phone up in his cubby as he finished dressing. Marlow was eyeing him strangely with a curious smile. Ilya caught the look from his friend and raised an eyebrow, challenging him to say something. "Let me guess, it's Shane on the phone?" Marlow finally questioned.

Ilya blushed. *Hard.* "What if it is?" he shot back to the other alpha. Marlow just held his hands up in faux surrender and smirked a little.

"You know, it wouldn't be a bad thing if you liked him, Roz. A little unconventional, sure, but once the season's over... He's a good guy. Funny, safe, cute, smart. He keeps you steady," Marlow explained with gentle suggestion. Ilya swallowed hard and looked around the room to observe his teammates who were very much minding their own business and not at all paying attention to what they were saying.

"Am I obvious?" Ilya asked under his breath. At that, Marlow let out a booming laugh and shucked on his jersey over his shoulder pads. Ilya took that as a yes and pulled on his own

sweater while trying to hide his hot cheeks. “Does.... anyone else know?” Ilya pressed further. Marlow shrugged at the question and looked at the rest of the team with a considering expression.

“Connors knows you like him. Hayes is suspicious. A couple other people have started to notice you’re close and one of the team physicians watches the both of you pretty often. I’m just saying... once the season’s over and his contract is over, I don’t think anyone would bat an eye if you got with him.”

Ilya huffed out a breath and latched his helmet on his head while the coaching staff started to round them up for going down the tunnel. Marlow clapped him on the shoulder, gave him a kind grin, and turned to focus on getting the rest of his gear on quickly while Ilya processed what had been said to him. If they could continue to hide their bond and, er, *relationship*? until the end of the summer, it didn’t seem like it would actually be that big of a deal for them to go public.

Public. Is that something Shane would want? Ilya wanted that. Ilya wanted that very badly. He entered the ice with yet another ache in his heart, though this time it was for more than just missing Shane’s heat. It was yearning for a future with the omega he was bonded to.

When Ilya checked his phone after the game, sweaty and tired and sore from yet another win, he found that Shane had sent him *Good luck! ;)* followed with *I wish you were here* thirty minutes later. Ilya swallowed hard and glanced over at Marlow who was shrugging off his jersey and furiously wiping away the sweat on his brow.

“When is our next game?” Ilya asked suddenly.

Marlow eyed him and licked his lips before answering, “I think Tuesday. One day break, one day for them to fly and practice, then game day.” Ilya nodded slowly at the response and did the calculation in his head. If today was Shane’s first day of his heat and it took him about three or four days to get over it... he could technically finish out Shane’s heat with him. It might be risky, especially if his heat potentially ended on a game day, but... Ilya *really* wanted to be there.

He squared his jaw, firm in his decision to take the risk because it was Shane and he loved Shane, then began to undress with the rest of the team. *Just hold out a little longer for me*, Ilya sent out into the universe.

“What are you *doing* here?” Shane gaped as he hesitantly opened the door of the hotel room he was staying in. Ilya had managed to get past the front desk by showing off his bonding mark and pictures of him and Shane together that he had on his phone. They’d been hesitant, but when Ilya showed their text messages as well with the address of the hotel Shane was

staying at—where he was literally standing—they'd given him the room number with the cautionary warning that Shane might not open.

Ilya had knocked and called for Shane through the door, adjusting his sunglasses and the bag on his shoulder as he looked along the length of the hallway for anyone else. Heat hotels were an option for omegas going through their cycles where the sound-proof walls kept scents trapped inside and rooms could only be opened with a unique passcode made by the omega staying within.

No key cards, no sounds, no scents. Discreet, quiet, private.

So when Shane cracked open the door, brave and wide eyed and reeking of sex, Ilya about lost it on the other side. But he *had* been raised with manners when it came towards entering an omega's space, especially one that was vulnerable. Shane pulled the door back more and grabbed Ilya's wrist to tug him inside with a hissed out scolding of, "Get inside!"

Ilya smirked and shut the door behind him before he backed Shane up against the wall and let his eyes rake over Shane's naked body. His face was beautifully flushed, his hair was damp, his inner thighs were coated in slick, his lips were parted to pull in air, and his eyes were wide as he took in Ilya's form.

God, his scent. He smelled fucking delicious. So strong, so sweet, so intoxicating... It was like a shot of straight adrenaline to the system as soon as Shane's scent hit his nose.

"You should be with—"

Ilya's mouth was on Shane's before the omega could even finish his sentence. Shane sank into the kiss immediately and stumbled in the direction of the bed as Ilya felt his control over his instincts start to slip the further he got into the room. The bed was a mess of slick and sweat and... *fuck*. There was a knotting dildo right there on the sheets. Jesus Christ, he was going to die before he even got to fuck Shane.

"Get it off," Shane whined suddenly as he shoved his hands under Ilya's shirt impatiently. The alpha growled in agreement and tore himself away so he could rip off his shirt, joggers and briefs, socks, and shoes. Even the poor sunglasses he'd been wearing were thrown haphazardly in the direction of the front door.

As soon as he was as bare as Shane, he picked the omega up by the underside of his thighs and walked the both of them to the bed that smelled of Shane's heat. "Fuck, you smell so good," Ilya rasped against the omega's throat. He couldn't help it when he nipped at the mark on Shane's neck possessively, suddenly very pleased with the fact he'd been the alpha to make it.

"Fuck me. *Please*, alpha," Shane whimpered as Ilya dropped him onto the bed and crawled on top. One look at Shane's rosy cheeks and dark eyes and Ilya knew he was getting close to another wave of incessant need for a knot. He wasted no time finding his way between Shane's legs and pushing them up to his chest so he could devour the slick covered hole that rested between them.

He was stretched already from the multiple rounds he'd put himself through with either fingers or the dildo that was beside them, and Ilya knew he wasn't going to hold on much longer with his own control. His inner alpha was screaming to get out, to take over, to let Ilya take a backseat while instincts guided him through the scene they were about to have.

Shane was already gone above him. He was babbling the word *alpha* and *please* nonsensibly, clawing at the sheets and Ilya's curls, pushing himself further against Ilya's mouth and tongue, and leaking against his belly with his bright red cock. When Shane started to hiccup and sob for it, Ilya regretfully pulled himself away from the hole he'd been tonguing at to line his cock up against it instead.

He was painfully hard, biology readying him the state of mind he was about to enter, and without a single moment of hesitation, Ilya pushed himself inside of the tight heat belonging to the omega below him—the man he was bonded to. Every single rational thought went out the window as he pounded relentlessly into Shane, gripping his thighs hard enough to leave bruises, while the omega whined and keened and soaked the mattress with slick beneath him.

Ilya watched with parted lips and wild eyes as his hand curled around Shane's cock and stroked the omega with each brutal thrust he made inside of his lean frame. Shane's head was thrown back, his mouth open wide, and his eyebrows furrowed up in ecstasy while he moaned *yes, alpha, please, fuck, harder, more* in a multitude of different ways.

When Shane's back bowed off the bed and cum painted his toned stomach minutes later, Ilya became aware of his own knot starting to swell at the base of his cock. Heat sex was often like this—frenzied, fast, dirty, and quick. It wasn't for pleasure or fun, it was for biology. Shane's body wanted an alpha, Ilya's could give that eagerly to him. They would be persistent in their actions until the desire was satisfied and the frenzy of being accepted by an alpha repeatedly calmed Shane's omega instincts.

As if hearing Ilya's thoughts, Shane gripped the alpha's wrists in a small moment of post-orgasm lucidity and hurriedly pleaded, "Please, *please* knot me. I need it, alpha, *please*. I need you. Knot me. I'll be good, I *promise*."

Ilya swore in Russian and pressed a hand over Shane's flat stomach, smearing cum across the omega's skin, before he shoved his knot inside of Shane's stretched hole and felt it catch there on the rim of tight muscle. A second later, Ilya came deep inside of the omega as he buried his face in Shane's neck and bit down right over his original mark on Shane's scent gland.

Shane clutched him tightly while Ilya came, a seemingly never ending feat as heats usually demanded every single drop of cum from the willing alpha. They breathed deeply in the still air of the hotel room until Ilya's brain came back to him and control of his actions was relinquished from instincts to man.

Ilya carefully adjusted them so he could spoon Shane from behind while his knot remained inside, determined to keep part of his body locked within the omega. Shane let out a content sigh and murmured, "This is the first time it hasn't actually kept hurting after an orgasm and a knot." Ilya nuzzled his nose into the crook of Shane's neck and breathed in deeply to find

that their scents had already begun to mingle again—harsher than usual due to the wildness of a heat cycle.

“It has hurt before?” he asked.

Shane lifted one of Ilya’s hands and laced their fingers together before he brought the alpha’s knuckles to his lips and scattered kisses across the bony bumps. “The only thing that makes it feel better is the real thing. My body knows when it’s real or not. I feel... satisfied. Warm. Comfortable,” he whispered.

“Is there anything I can do to make it better?” Ilya questioned further as he began to pepper kisses of his own along the inflamed mark he’d left behind on Shane’s neck. A few spots were bleeding, little pinprick things, and Ilya’s stomach flipped uncomfortably at the sight. He didn’t want to see Shane in any kind of pain or with any type of injury.

“Just stay with me,” Shane sighed happily. “Even if you should be resting for the playoffs and your game is in two days.” Ilya rolled his eyes and pinched Shane in the side just to hear the omega huff and slap at him. “This is a really bad idea, by the way. I’m not saying I don’t like it and I’m not happy as fuck you’re here, but this is a bad idea. My heat could last longer than two days.”

Ilya kissed the omega’s neck softly and buried his nose in Shane’s hair just to memorize the smell there before he murmured back, “I don’t care. I just want to be with you. Plus... I think some people on the team know something is going on between us.”

Shane threw an anxious look over his shoulder at Ilya and frowned then. “What? Who?”

“Friends. People we can trust. They just think we are close and could be a thing after the season. They don’t know anything is going on *now*,” Ilya assured. Shane worried at his bottom lip and Ilya couldn’t hold himself back from reaching out to gently tug the poor abused thing free from the omega’s teeth. He smiled softly and kissed Shane’s jaw in hopes it would calm the man he loved down from whatever stress he was definitely working himself up into.

“Sleep. I’ll be here when you wake up and need me again,” Ilya muttered soothingly. Shane nodded once, his eyes searching Ilya’s face for just a moment, then turned back around to settle slightly and drift off for a moment’s peace until his next wave of need. Ilya found sleep too, though it was much more restless than the omega’s likely was as his instincts waited in anticipation for the moment Shane began to get fussy and wake.

They managed about an hour before Shane was pawing at him and Ilya’s cock was stiffening against his thigh from where it had slipped out of the omega. He took Shane from behind next, siding his length back inside with one easy stroke and holding Shane tightly in his arms so the omega would remain in place while he fucked into him.

The sex was just as frantic as the previous time and Ilya was attentive in stroking Shane’s cock again until he painted the sheets with cum, but the begging from the omega had calmed slightly once he realized that Ilya wasn’t going to deny him what he wanted.

He whispered heated words of praise into Shane's ear, talking him through one orgasm and then another moments later that was more aftershocks than anything, while his free hand wrapped carefully around the base of Shane's throat to keep the omega's ear right next to his lips. When he eventually knotted him, Shane practically turned into jello-o in his arms and moaned in satisfaction at the fullness his body craved.

Their first day together continued mostly of that—hectic fucks through fitful bouts of sleep with small breaks of clarity to eat, use the bathroom, and talk before it started all over again. Ilya was sore from the game against Tampa, but Shane was far more important to him than the aches and pains that bloomed in different parts of his body whenever the two of them were still after a round of coupling.

Nighttime brought a messy bath that had started with good intentions and ended with half the water on the floor when Ilya bent Shane over the edge of the tub and fucked him from behind. Dinner wasn't much better as Ilya tried to feed Shane bits of fruit, cheese, and meat that were stocked in the room's mini fridge, but Shane had ended up face first in the carpet while Ilya ate him out for a meal of his own.

Throughout the early hours of the morning, they went three more rounds and left the bed an absolute mess of tangled sheets, damp skin, slick, and sweat. Day two went about the same, but began to taper around the afternoon as the desire to fuck every hour moved to every two hours, then every three. Ilya was there for it all—the good and the bad.

He was there to wipe away Shane's tears when the need was just a little too painful to deal with, he was there to clean off Shane's skin whenever it became a little too uncomfortable to live inside, and he was there to hold Shane whenever the omega was just a little too weak to support his own body.

When the sun rose on the very last possible day Ilya could stay with Shane, the omega slept for a good four hours before he needed anything. Their sex was a lot slower, more focused and intimate, and they faced each other as the morning sun drifted through the sheer white curtains of the hotel room window.

Shane's hands held Ilya's face as he rode the alpha and stole kisses between shared breaths of exertion. All Ilya could focus on was how beautiful Shane was. He fit in his hands so perfectly, said his name so delicately, gave him his body so willingly. Ilya was without a doubt in love with Shane Hollander and he felt helpless with the emotions swelling inside of him and no outlet. If he said it in the midst of coming down from heat, Shane might not take him seriously.

But if he didn't say it at all, Ilya might burst from within. He could imagine future after future after future in his head with the omega by his side. A home in the Boston suburbs, a cabin in the Canadian wilderness, an apartment in downtown Montreal, an estate in Russia—which would never actually happen but was nice to think about.

In every future Ilya could think of, Shane was there.

He held onto the omega's hips as he pressed up inside of him with each downward stroke from the man in his lap and felt the words sitting on the tip of his tongue. Shane was looking

at him like he'd hung the moon and the stars in the sky for fuck's sake. Ilya closed his eyes to break off the connection before he said something stupid and pushed his lips against Shane's instead to stop himself from letting the words fly free.

Shane moaned into the kiss and dug his fingers into the curls at the base of Ilya's neck before he shuddered on Ilya's cock with the telltale sign of his orgasm. Hot spurts of cum painted their skin as Shane rode it out and Ilya allowed himself one final time to push his knot inside of the omega and seek out his own release in the hot, wet heat that welcomed him.

They fell into a tangled mess of limbs on the bed sheets that seriously needed to be changed—they'd turned a little yellow actually—and Ilya wasted no time pulling Shane as close as he possibly could to cuddle. He kissed the omega all over his freckled cheeks, his straight nose, his sharp jaw, and his sloped neck. There were marks all over Shane's skin that he had left behind.

All except for one.

When he reached Shane's mating gland, he rubbed his nose over it with a soft hum and allowed himself to confess into the quiet morning air, "You would look pretty with my mark here."

Shane sucked in a sharp breath and tightened his hold around Ilya's waist as he held onto the alpha still locked inside of him. "Don't say that unless you mean it," he chirped weakly, the words not holding any real kind of warning. Ilya just grinned against Shane's heated skin and whispered, "I mean it."

Shane stayed behind at the heat hotel to rest once Ilya was absolutely certain he wasn't needed anymore and the omega would be okay on his own. They'd changed the sheets, showered with only a slight distraction of a shared handjob, and pulled on clean clothes to feel as normal as possible after everything had happened despite their instincts having just been in control for the past forty-eight hours or so.

Shane promised he'd be at the apartment waiting for Ilya when the game was over, so Ilya reluctantly let him go with a final murmur of, "I meant what I said earlier. Think about it," and a tap to Shane's untouched mating gland. The omega had just blushed hard at his words and watched him go after giving him a fond goodbye kiss.

Ilya wasn't exactly sure what he was expecting when he turned up at the practice rink under an hour later, nearly late, with his gear on his shoulder and a skip in his step. He hadn't checked his phone since he'd arrived at the heat hotel to help Shane through the worst of his cycle and he hadn't really paid much attention to his appearance when he'd tugged on his clothes and combed through his hair beside Shane.

As soon as he stepped into the locker room, however, everyone's eyes settled on him and the jokes of him being alive, disappearing on them, and skipping an optional skate the day before washed over him in one massive wave of relief. He accepted the mockery, the teasing, the laughing—all of it—because it was better than the ulterior. No one knew he'd been with Shane. No one smelled Shane on him. No one associated his disappearance with Shane's.

Ilya wasn't sure what hurt worse inside—the fact that no one assumed he'd be with Shane, or the fact Ilya couldn't say he had been.

Chapter 10: Hidden in Plain Sight

Shane cooed as he curled up against Ilya's body and placed an ice pack wrapped in a towel gently against his bruised abdomen. The alpha hissed at the contact but eventually gave in, slumping against Shane while his eyes closed and his head fell against the back of the couch. They'd made it to the second round of the finals for the Cup, but it had come at a cost. The purple and yellow injuries that bloomed across Ilya's body made Shane cringe whenever he saw them.

Tampa had fought, dirty and ruthless, in a desperate attempt to advance, but they'd fallen short and Ilya had a break for a few days before the second round began with the other winner in their conference. Ilya was betting it would be New Jersey, but Shane had his money on Montreal. The game that would determine the winner played in front of them on the tv as Shane nursed his aching alpha.

"I feel like a piece of meat," Ilya grumbled into the air. Shane snorted and kissed him gently on the cheek as he watched Montreal tear down the ice with the puck only to lose it after a poor shot on goal.

"A hot piece of meat," Shane teased. Ilya laughed softly at that and squeezed him against his side before he groaned at the action and immediately regretted the pressure of the omega against his bruised ribs. It wasn't ideal for him to be so injured, but playoffs were like that. It was common for hockey players to work through things like broken fingers, pulled muscles, bruised bones, or cracked teeth whenever playoffs came around—anything for the chance to win.

"When this is over, I think I would like to take us somewhere warm. Relax on a beach. Sleep all day and tan in the sun and drink fruity cocktails," Ilya imagined out loud. Shane glanced over at the alpha at the mention of *us* and decided now was a better time than ever to talk about what had happened during his heat and Ilya's suggestion with his mating gland.

"Are you, um, sure you want to be with me after the season ends? Like, really?" Shane asked as nonchalantly as he could possibly manage. Ilya's eyes immediately opened and he pulled back slightly to look at Shane with furrowed eyebrows.

"Of course. I have never been more sure of anything in my life," Ilya said seriously. Shane nodded slowly and reached up to rub his palm over the mark that was slightly scabbed over from Ilya's teeth after his heat. "And I meant what I said about that too." Shane glanced over to see that Ilya had was staring at the mark his hand was covering. "I'm serious about you. About us. I meant it. When I say I want to take us somewhere after this season, I mean us. *Together*. As a couple that will one day be mated."

The breath was stolen from Shane's lungs.

Ilya was *serious* serious about him. Ilya swallowed and sat back a little bit when Shane didn't respond, then slowly rationalized, "I guess I haven't said it, but I *love* you Shane Hollander." If Shane thought he wasn't breathing before, he really wasn't after that. His lips were parted

and his heart was stalled inside of his chest as his brain tried to wrap around the fact that Ilya had just told him he loved him. Ilya Rozanov *loved* him.

“You do?” he squeaked.

Ilya huffed out a humorous breath and nodded as he adjusted the ice pack to sit up further with a slight wince. “Quite a lot, I think. Sorry.”

Shane could feel his bottom lip begin to wobble while his eyes crested with tears. As soon as Ilya noticed, he quickly dropped the ice pack and reached out with nothing but pure concern etched across his face. “Or not. If that’s too fast, I take it back,” Ilya quickly tried to save. Shane just let out a choked wet laugh and launched himself forward to wrap his arms around the alpha, not caring that the Russian man grunted in pain at the impact.

“Is this... good? I don’t know what’s happening,” Ilya confessed unsurely. Shane buried his face in Ilya’s chest and nodded hurriedly.

“I love you, too. I really, *really* love you.”

Ilya’s strong arms quickly wrapped around Shane’s body and held him closer, eventually tugging him completely onto Ilya’s stretched out body as they shuffled around to lie down on the couch. Shane was distantly aware of the puddle the ice pack was making on the hardwood floor beside the couch, but it wasn’t as important as this.

He nuzzled his nose into the crook of Ilya’s neck over the matching soul bond mark there and let himself finally accept that everything that had happened between them was absolutely for a reason. The instant connection, the inability to stay away or keep their hands off each other, the bond snapping into place, the irritation at being apart—their biology knew before them that they would end up here and Shane felt settled in that realization.

A cheer came from the television as Shane inhaled the alpha’s scent and Ilya murmured in his ear after a moment, “We are playing Montreal.” Shane huffed and pushed himself up slightly so he could look down at Ilya in mock irritation.

“We’re having a sweet moment here. Asshole.”

Ilya just grinned dopily at him and reached out to cup the back of Shane’s head so he could bring the omega down for a long kiss. “You are so perfect. Has anyone ever told you this before?” Ilya breathed against his lips when he drew back slightly to trail doting eyes over Shane’s features. Shane blushed deeply and tucked his face back into Ilya’s neck to hide his embarrassment.

“Maybe my parents when I was little.”

Ilya hummed at that as he ran his hands soothingly up and down Shane’s spine. “I think I have decided on what to do with my father,” he spoke, suddenly changing the subject. Shane frowned a little bit, but kept his head down since he knew Ilya had a hard time opening up and being serious if someone was staring right at him.

“My brother, Andrei, I am cutting him off. I’m paying him to look after our father, but he’s not doing it the way he should be. So, I figured, why not pay people who actually will and cut off Andrei?”

Shane nodded in the tight nook of Ilya’s collarbone and waited for him to go on. “There is a nice place not far from the estate in Moscow. Expensive, but worth it. They will take him. Andrei can fuck off, my father can be comfortable with people who know how to care for him, and I can be... settled,” Ilya explained.

“It sounds like you’ve been thinking about it a lot,” Shane admitted softly. Ilya patted his back and nodded, jostling Shane a little where he was. “Then I think you should do it. If it would help you feel better and you’ve put a lot of planning into it, I don’t see why you shouldn’t. It’s a hard decision—both of them—but I think it’s for the best.”

Ilya sighed and wrapped both of his arms around Shane to squeeze him tightly. “This is why I love you. Right here. You always just... you are boring, Hollander, yes, but you are never wrong in what you say.”

Shane’s cheeks were flaming at the compliment and mockery, though he decided to tease the alpha a little bit himself by lifting his head, offering a small smile, and asking, “Can I get that in writing?” Ilya just laughed at him and rolled them over to dig his fingers into the omega’s sensitive sides, ignoring the aches and pains in his body in favor of listening to the man he loved squeal and squirm to get away.

Montreal was a beast. They wanted the Cup badly and had a look in their eyes that made Shane queasy, even from the locker room. He watched as they targeted player after player on the Bears—high sticking, boarding, slew footing, tripping, spearing, cross-checking—and went more or less unpenalized by the referees on the ice. The Bears lost the first two games they had against Montreal and Shane felt more like a nurse than a boyfriend at the end of each night.

When he wasn’t on the ice, Ilya was covered in ice packs, bandages, wash clothes, and wraps. He looked like he’d gone toe-to-toe with a professional boxer almost every match and Shane had to admit he was starting to get very worried about whether or not the team would actually make it to the final round. They still had to beat *another* fucking team besides Montreal to even get there. The only benefit of playoffs was the facial hair that everyone on the team grew under the superstition that shaving it ruined their winning streak.

Shane liked the way Ilya’s beard burned between his ass whenever he ate him out on the nights he felt a bit more up for things, but he also liked the subtle scrape of it against his cheeks or lips when they simply kissed for good luck. He was handsome with facial hair, even if his left cheek was swollen and bruised to high hell from a high stick underneath it.

The Bears managed to tie up the score 2–2 with Montreal before pulling ahead, 3–2, when their Canadian captain suddenly and unexpectedly had to be medevaced off the ice in a frightful frenzy. Shane watched with a sick feeling in his gut as Montreal's captain caught an edge during a penalty kill and went barreling head first into the boards, slamming against it hard and going limp.

When he held his alpha that night, Shane's mind was filled only with thoughts of how that could've been Ilya. It was easy for them to continue on with winning afterwards considering Montreal lost one of their main pillars to the team and their minds had obviously become trained on something other than achieving the Cup. Shane knew what that was like—to be so close to winning something only to find that something else was more important in the end.

It was still a little tough to watch when Montreal shook the hand of every Bears player with distraught eyes and pursed lips when they eventually fell, never able to bounce back from the loss of their captain. Vancouver was the next team they were up against and they were a monster in their own right. Solid defense, a team that connected everywhere on the ice, and a goalie who was completely dialed in every game—they were tough.

The wins and losses darted back and forth like a pingpong match with the Bears winning the first game, then Vancouver, then the Bears, then Vancouver again. In the fifth game they played against each other, Ilya was slammed hard enough in a corner by two players that his nose broke against the boards and the game had to pause to shovel off the blood that pooled on the ice.

Shane paid extra care to him in the hotel room that first night, gently prodding the tender skin with sympathetic noises while Ilya swatted at him in faux annoyance. Kisses had to become a whole lot more interesting and Ilya was denied one of his favorite activities of eating Shane out, but Shane didn't mind stepping up as most days started to begin with a blowjob, breakfast, and a bath. Ilya liked to call it the Four B's, adding in Bears at the end of it whenever it was an actual game day.

He had to play with a full face shield going forward during each match up and Shane got to listen to him complain about that too on top of everything else he was juggling. *It was a fishbowl, it fogged up, it felt heavy, it was stupid.* Shane heard it all from the alpha who looked at him pitifully around bright yellow and purple eye sockets that just made Shane wince whenever he stared too long.

On the nights when there weren't games, it was easy to fall into gentle routines that gave them both the much needed rest their bodies craved. Shane wasn't playing, that was true, but he was traveling with the team all the same and following them to every hotel in Vancouver they could possibly shove the team into.

Some nights, all they could manage was a shared bath where Ilya passed out halfway through Shane's careful washing of him. Other nights, Shane pushed the alpha down into the mattress and rode his cock until he felt delirious with need. There were quiet moments in between—slow rises of simply admiring one another, scattered kisses on cheeks and collarbones, sweeping touches over sleep-warm skin, hushed words of affection and secret thoughts.

At some point, they stopped using the scent blockers.

Maybe it was when everyone reached the absolute dirt-tired point of playoffs where no one seemed to care anymore about anything other than surviving the night and pulling off a win so they could nurse wounds or sleep. It could've been when Connors pointed out the mark on Ilya's neck and Marlow just said, "Yeah that's been there," and no one batted an eye. Maybe it was when Hayes clapped Shane on the shoulder and murmured, "You're good for him. I hope you stick around."

Whatever it was, the scent blockers stopped being used and the thick cover-up Ilya had been getting away with to hide visible injuries went away. No one said a single fucking thing or looked at them a different way. Everyone just geared up, hit the ice, rallied themselves when they were down or up, and went back to wherever the fuck they were sleeping to prepare for the next game.

It was nice to be hidden in plain sight, Shane thought. They'd agreed they would tell the team whenever the season ended and Shane's contract finished—though was it really even a contract anymore?—that they were a couple and had no intentions of breaking what they had off.

In a way, it was nice to know Shane was already accepted by the team and welcomed by everyone Ilya seemed to consider important. It was also extremely reassuring to know that nobody had called out the fact that Shane and Ilya were vehemently breaking about every single rule of a team omega contract. Everyone just... kept going as if nothing was new or unexpected. So Shane followed, supported the team, took care of Ilya, and watched great hockey.

In the end, the competition between Boston and Vancouver concluded, unsurprisingly, with a tie in the third period which led to OT. It was another 20 minute 5-on-5 match that would only end when someone scored. Sudden death, more like it.

Shane whittled his nails to the bone as he watched from the locker room on his feet with anxious eyes. His nerves were on fire as he observed Ilya and the rest of the team pour their blood, sweat, and tears into each play for the desperate attempt at scoring the goal that would take them to the Cup finals. He'd never felt more proud in the moment that Ilya intercepted a pass between two Vancouver players, dug hard into the ice to turn the play around, charged down the ice on a breakaway, then snapped the puck straight into the back of the net.

They were going to the finals.

That night, Ilya indulged for the first time in the champagne that could be found in the hotel mini-fridge. He kissed Shane silly in the shower, green bottle still in hand while steam rose around their naked bodies, and passed the sweet flavor of the alcohol between their tongues. When they collapsed in the bed later, still soaking wet and a little tipsy from the bottle they'd shared, Ilya pushed through the ache in his broken nose to kiss every part of Shane's body with reverent lips.

He fucked him close and deep until Shane was clinging onto his shoulders with strong fingers and moaning loud enough that Ilya had to cover his mouth with one strong hand. The last thing they needed was chirping from the team the following day. In the end, it wasn't the

noises Shane made that got them amused glances from Ilya's teammates, but the sloppy row of three bite marks over Shane's scent gland that couldn't even be hidden with a hoodie.

Ilya just growled possessively at anyone who looked too long and tucked Shane into his side on the airplane back to Boston. Colorado was the last team they had to face before earning the Cup for themselves. They got a comfortable three days before the first game against the other players dominating the standings and Shane intended to use the small break to his full advantage.

He sat next to Ilya as he made the call to Hill House Living in Moscow which specialized in memory care for people living with dementia. He held Ilya's hand as the alpha organized the transportation of his father to the assisted living home along with his most important things. He ran his palm soothingly over Ilya's back as he began the process of selling the estate once his father would vacate it. He kissed Ilya's cheeks softly when the tough conversation with his brother about cutting him off finalized everything. Between it all, there was only love.

Shane didn't really care if Ilya won the Cup or not. Well, okay, he *did*, but it wasn't all he cared about. He cared about the slightly hollow look on Ilya's face after each call. He cared about the way Ilya held him just a little closer at night after he fell asleep. He cared about the three words Ilya said to him randomly throughout the day. He cared about the lightness that grew more and more in Ilya's words, actions, and thoughts.

The day before the first match against Colorado, Shane slowly woke to the sun just barely rising in the sky behind the cityline of Boston. He blinked blearily and rolled over in the nest that he'd made for the week to find the alpha sprawled out on his back beside him.

His lips were parted in his sleep and the bruising around his eyes was just about gone, but the facial hair was about as wild as his blonde curls and the deep gash across the bridge of his nose was an angry red.

Shane sighed softly and turned further so he was on his side, facing the man he loved. Ilya's mark was dark brown—solidified and strong—on his neck and Shane didn't need to look to know his was the same. How he ever thought Ilya would be just another contracted alpha he had in his life, he didn't know. But it led to a lot of questions he'd been trying to answer recently.

If he stayed with Ilya, what would happen to his career? There was no way he'd be able to travel with or provide services of comfort to another alpha and the only other thing he really knew how to do was play hockey. He hadn't played competitively in *years* and, as much as a guy could dream, the Bears wouldn't be signing him to the team anytime soon.

Shane didn't really know what to do with that information. It wasn't like he could continue to be Ilya's team omega. That broke so many rules of the contract they had in place and they really didn't need to try to violate any more. While the team had mutually agreed in silence to keep what he and Ilya had under wraps, management had no idea of anything that was occurring and Shane had no desire to keep them in the loop with the others.

He'd have to figure out something to do that brought in money and didn't leave him feeling useless. Maybe he could run a hockey camp for youth athletes or something. Maybe he could

start a hockey school for omegas who often got cut from teams. Maybe he could do both. There were options, but again, he didn't really know. All he knew right now were playoffs, Ilya, and nerves.

He reached out to cup the side of Ilya's face, smiling at the scruffy facial hair that greeted his palm, and stroked his thumb over the sharp lines of his alpha's face. So handsome. So strong. So perfect. Shane loved Ilya Rozanov more than anything. He'd do whatever it took to stay by his side and keep the alpha in his life. He knew without a doubt that Ilya was the alpha he wanted to be mated to one day, but he was in no hurry.

They had their soul bond, they had their routine, they had the team, and they had their little life.

Maybe one day they'd have a real house of their own and a kid or two running around, though that was really thinking far ahead and Shane didn't want to be one of *those* omegas. He smiled anyway at the thought and gently released an intentional cloud of his scent saturated in happy pheromones to cover Ilya's sleeping form.

He tucked himself into the alpha's side and, for the first time in a very long time, allowed the small rumble of bliss start up in his chest. Shane couldn't remember the last time he purred. Maybe in his car after his first kiss in high school? Maybe on his couch when he got his first contract call? Maybe when he was just a little boy getting his first set of gear that wasn't borrowed from someone else who outgrew it.

It didn't matter as he smiled against Ilya's warm skin and pressed a tender kiss against one of the many bruises on his chest. "That tickles," Ilya's voice suddenly said, gravely and thick with sleep. Shane loved his morning voice—syrupy, accent-heavy, slow, deep. It sent a shiver of arousal down his spine whenever he heard it.

"Mm... smells good in here," Ilya mumbled as he shifted to roll onto his own side and pull Shane tight against his body.

"Careful with your nose," Shane muttered through his smile. Ilya just blew a raspberry at him and buried his face in the crook of Shane's neck before he stilled and pulled back with a strange expression on his face. "You are purring," he stated bluntly. Shane could feel the way his face heated up at the statement and he shrugged as nonchalantly as he possibly could.

"I'm just happy," he reasoned. The smile that bloomed over Ilya's face was beautiful. Around the scraggly mess of facial hair, his perfect display of the same delight Shane felt only made the omega pur harder until they were in a fit of laughter and teasing at the sound. In the end, Ilya rolled on top of him and kissed him silly while Shane ran his hands dotingly over the alpha he loved.

They just had to make it a few more weeks and then everyone in the whole world could know for certain how in love they both were. If a Cup happened to come along with that, even better, but Shane was happy with this. This was something he could be happy with forever.

Chapter 11: Make Me Yours

Chapter Notes

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

ONE YEAR LATER

Shane clawed onto Ilya's back as the alpha pounded into him, his back cold against the tinted window of their penthouse while the city of Boston sparkled below. "Fuck, *ah!*" Shane cried out loudly, burying his face into the crook of Ilya's neck where he could stifle his sounds. Ilya growled at the action and pushed his own face against Shane's so he could bring the omega back up and press their foreheads against each other.

His eyes were dark and sharp, focused solely on Shane while the omega's eyelids drooped in a haze of pleasure. While the festivities of Boston bringing home the Cup for a second year in a row went on far below them, they were having a celebration of their own high above. It was the early hours of the morning and the rest of the team was long gone from Ilya's penthouse that he and Shane had upgraded to after the end of their last season.

When Boston had brought home the Cup against Colorado the previous year, it had been a whirlwind of emotions, media, sex, press, interviews, parties, and feelings. Everyone wanted a piece of Ilya Rozanov, the valiant captain of the Boston Bears who had led the team to victory while playing with a fractured sternum that had occurred during game four against Colorado.

Shane had hated every minute of that final round last year. He'd fretted and frowned each time Ilya got on the ice when each night before, he was propped up in bed with rattling breath and pain medication handy on the nightstand. It had been worth it in the end when Ilya held the Cup high above his head and traded it off with equally exuberant members of his team on the ice.

It had been even greater when the Cup sparkled on the coffee table beside them on their day with it as Ilya fucked Shane within an inch of his life on the couch.

Healing had been long after that, but Ilya had followed through on his promise to take them somewhere warm once everything calmed down with the media, the team, and the injury. Shane found himself for a beautiful two weeks worn out, sexed out, and blissed out on the beach with a nice tan and his relaxed alpha by his side.

Now, after another unbeatable season by the Boston Bears, the cup was theirs yet again and Calgary had fallen victim to their success. Ilya had walked away far less injured, only a pulled muscle in his shoulder that didn't seem to be bothering him at the moment as he held Shane against the glass of their penthouse with ease.

Streamers, confetti, empty champagne bottles, crinkled beer cans, half burnt cigars, and puddles of unknown liquids were scattered around the space behind them, but it could be an issue for tomorrow. All that mattered right now was the promise Ilya and Shane had made to each other for this exact moment—officially mating with one another and becoming bonded for life at the end of the season.

They were slightly less sober than they'd hoped to be for the moment, and a little unethical with where it would be happening as Shane's bare back was against the window of the penthouse high above the city, but it was *them* and that was what mattered.

"*Fuck*, I love you so much," Ilya groaned into Shane's open mouth. The omega whimpered and lurched forward to catch Ilya's lips with his own, plunging his tongue into Ilya's mouth so he could taste for himself the champagne and cigar smoke that the alpha had consumed. It was a heady flavor and Shane felt more slick drip onto the hardwood floor underneath him as Ilya thrust inside of his body again and again, claiming it like he owned him. Shane loved it. He loved Ilya.

The alpha growled suddenly and whisked them away from the window so he could toss Shane onto the massive leather couch they'd purchased more as a joke than anything. Shane yelped as he landed on the cold couch, a sharp contrast to his heated skin, but then Ilya was clambering back on top of him and yanking him forward by his thighs to split him open once more on his cock.

He gasped at the action and scrambled for purchase with his fingers, digging the digits into the brown leather around him while he moaned loudly and bowed against Ilya's body. "So fucking good. *Jesus*, Shane... so fucking wet for me," Ilya panted while he sank his nails into Shane's hips and left crescent shaped indents beside the stretch marks already there.

Shane nodded stupidly and arched his neck to the side to eagerly show off the bare mating gland, soft pink and throbbing, beneath his tanned skin. Ilya swore in Russian and collapsed on top of Shane as he pounded into his ass, his knot catching repeatedly on the tight ring of muscle he'd be locked inside of soon enough. The alpha began to leave wet open-mouth kisses over the exposed gland and the rumbling in his chest that followed from satisfaction at what he found made Shane keen further in the moment.

"I want it. *Please*, alpha, I want you. Bite me. Make me yours. Please, Ilya, *pelase*. I need you," Shane begged while one hand dug into the base of Ilya's long curls and the other scratched red lines into the curve of Ilya's spine.

Ilya slammed himself deep inside of Shane, pressing his knot fully into the omega's pliant body, and bit down with a sharp grunt at the same time his knot popped within the tight heat engulfing his length. Shane gasped—shocking and clear—as his eyes flung open and his heart stuttered inside of his chest. He was distantly aware of the fact that he was experiencing his own orgasm, coating his stomach in milky streaks of cum, but the overwhelming sense of *Ilya* was all he could focus on.

His heart changed its beat until it matched the alphas, his scent rearranged itself to make room for Ilya's, and his emotions became mixed with the Russian man's own sentiments that had yet to be held back. Half of Shane became Ilya and half and Ilya became Shane. He let

out shuddering breaths of air as he worked his way through the intensity of it all, then tilted his own mouth forward eventually to reciprocate the action.

“Bog ty moy... Fuck, Shane,” Ilya wheezed into Shane’s neck when the omega bit down as hard as he could manage to break the skin and reach the gland below. The coppery taste of blood was heavy on Shane’s lips when he pulled away, but the sight of his mark on Ilya’s mating gland completely pulled his focus away from the sharp tang that mixed with his spit. Ilya’s eyes were shut tight as he breathed roughly through the same feelings Shane had just experienced moments ago.

Eventually, he came to and slowly opened his eyes to look down at Shane with blown pupils. For a moment, all they could do was stare at one another with parted lips, heavy gasps, and heated gazes. “I feel you... everywhere,” Ilya whispered as he reached up to cup the side of Shane’s face in reverence.

“I know,” he breathed back. They grabbed each other up hurriedly then in a tight embrace and held one another for who knows how long on the cooling leather of the sofa. It was a gentle ebb and flow as they navigated all of the newness coursing through them. If Ilya poked a little bit into his emotion of happiness, Shane felt that giddy feeling course through his own body. If Shane’s heartbeat started to slow from relaxation, Ilya’s heart matched it and he calmed too.

The biggest mindfuck was their scent. *Their* scent. Smokey, rich, bright. Shane could pick out the subtlety of his own unique pheromones, but Ilya’s blended in with his instead of just coating him made his head spin. “It’s going to be a problem that I literally smell you embedded in my skin now,” Shane murmured into Ilya’s neck.

“Going to be ready for me all the time?” Ilya asked with a smug tone. Shane smacked his shoulder playfully, then pulled back to let out a startled laugh at the way he felt Ilya’s humor as if it were his own. “Okay, that’s going to take some getting used to,” Ilya grumbled.

With a soft grunt, the alpha pulled back and took Shane with him, gathering the omega into his arms so he could pick him up as smoothly as possible with his knot still locked inside. He carried Shane under his thighs, the same way he had held him against the window, and walked them to the bedroom while Shane drowsily rested his head on Ilya’s shoulder.

His eyes trailed over the scabbing mark left behind on Ilya’s neck and couldn’t help but smile at the sight. He was a mated man—a man mated to Ilya Rozanov. “I can feel you getting all excited about something,” Ilya called out as he carefully deposited Shane onto the bed and followed with a slight hiss when his knot tugged a little too hard.

Shane winced himself but welcomed the alpha with open arms into their nest once they adjusted against the pillows and found a position facing each other that was comfortable. Thank all that was holy that no one had come into their bedroom during the party. Everyone had enough etiquette to know not to intrude on a shared space between an alpha and omega, but it was still nice to know that no one had gotten drunk enough to lose their manners.

The nest smelled like them, or well, them *before* being mated. He’d have to wash the sheets, set up a new nest, and get it coated all over again in their new mixture. Shane leaned in to

kiss over the mark on Ilya's neck and shuddered when Ilya returned the favor. "Tell me what you are excited about," Ilya murmured.

Shane rubbed his cheek against the alpha's and admitted softly into the stillness of the air, "I'm mated to you. For real. Not just a soul bond but a mating bond. You're mine." Ilya sank his fingers into Shane's hair and pulled him back just so he could grin at him with that dazzling smile Shane loved so much.

"And you're mine."

"Well? Let's see it!" Yuna exclaimed excitedly after she pulled away from hugging her son to turn her attention to the alpha behind him. Ilya grinned and tugged the Cup out of the backseat of the car where it had been strapped in. She clapped her hands together in awe and stared at it with wide eyes as Ilya brought it closer. Of course she was more invested in seeing the Cup than hearing about their mating, but she wouldn't be Yuna if that weren't the case.

"It's bigger in person," she gasped while David came through the front door of the cottage with a kitchen towel in his hands and a fond expression. He just shook his head knowingly at Shane and watched alongside his son while Yuna and Ilya talked exuberantly about the win.

"That's what she said. Or should I say 'he said'?" David muttered to Shane when the younger omega walked over to stand beside his dad. Shane turned bright red and looked at his dad in horror while David just chuckled and held up his hands like that would get him out of the terrible joke he'd just made. "I don't actually want to know anything," David continued.

"Okay, that's enough," Shane asserted painfully. David reached over to clap his son on the shoulder after the humorous moment passed and when Shane glanced at him next after turning his attention to his mate for a second, he found that his dad was smiling at him with something warm in his eyes. Pride.

"I'm really happy for you, Shane. Congratulations. Take it from someone who's been mated for a long time—it only gets better," David said to him meaningfully. Shane bit down on his bottom lip as a grin stretched over his face and he had to duck his head to hide the blush that spread across his cheeks for an entirely new reason than prior embarrassment. He'd never felt so whole in his life.

The crunching of feet on gravel drew both of their attention away from the private conversation they were having and David joked loudly, "Finally done fantasizing about the Cup? Or do you want more time alone with it inside?" while Shane sucked in a deep breath to stabilize himself. His parents were happy for him and a weight felt lifted off his shoulders.

He knew that his parents loved Ilya, that they'd wanted nothing more than for them to be a bonded pair after they'd met him for the first time the previous year, but it had still been a nerve wracking thing to call them and tell them that they were mated a few days after it had happened. As soon as they'd been told, however, it was *How soon can you come to the cabin?* and *Can you bring the Cup with you?*

Yuna smacked David on the shoulder and corralled everyone inside, Cup included, to get comfortable instead of standing around. Ilya placed the magnificent trophy on the coffee table and headed into the kitchen for a bowl of pasta salad that Yuna had apparently been telling him about while Shane and David had their own little moment.

It was nice to see Ilya in his family's space. He'd been here before a few times, yes, but it was still nice to see. He looked so light these days. He never went to clubs anymore unless Shane was with him, his alcohol consumption was for celebrations only, and while he and Shane still fucked like wild animals most days, Ilya's sex life was private and remained as such if Shane had any say in it.

He reached up to cup the side of his neck where the semi-healed mating bite was and smiled at the little tingle beneath his skin that came with any kind of contact. It would be sensitive for a while, but that was okay. He kind of liked it and the little jolt of pleasure it sent to his lower belly.

Ilya looked up at him from where he stood in the kitchen between a fretting Yuna and David who were arguing on whether or not the pasta salad was better eaten cold or heated up. He raised an eyebrow in amusement, as if to ask Shane *Don't you want to come join me here?* while Shane just laughed and leaned against the entryway wall with a fond smile. Ilya's eyes drifted to where Shane's hand was and the hilarity that had been there in his gaze before shifted to something soft and sentimental.

He rubbed his own palm over his mating bite and Shane felt the swell of emotions come rushing through the new bond they shared—contentment, love, happiness, pride, joy. All of them were Ilya's emotions, though Shane knew his were equally reflected as Ilya's affectionate smile only grew.

So while Shane's parents continued to talk loudly about pasta salad and the television played some kind of rerun of a hockey game from last season and the Canadian wilderness echoed outside through the open porch doors, Shane and Ilya just stared at one another while their hands covered the mutually given marks that bound them together for life and symbolized their intimate connection.

Sometimes, silence spoke louder than words.

Thank you so much to everyone who has read this, commented, given it kudos, everything. You can read my NEW Hollanov fic linked below if you enjoyed this fic and want some more Shane and Ilya in my style! :) xx

[In You, I Find Me](#) (3974 words) by **[loveleclerc](#)**

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