

What the Ice Takes First

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What the Ice Takes First

by [RimsHiddenQuill](#)

Summary

Shane Hollander has built his life on control — of his body, his instincts, his silence. As a secret omega in a league that still punishes vulnerability, secrecy is survival. Loving Ilya Rosanov has always been the one thing he's never learned how to do safely.

When a brutal on-ice collision during a rivalry game leaves Shane fighting for his life, the careful balance holding his world together begins to fracture. Under stadium lights and thousands of watching eyes — including his parents — pain, fear, and unspoken love collide. And Ilya, furious and terrified, is forced to stand helplessly close while the truth remains buried.

Some things break loudly.
Some break quietly.
And some are never said at all.

Or, one brutal hit forces Shane to stop hiding and start feeling.

Chapter 1: The Things He Never Learned to Say

Chapter Summary

A brutal collision on the ice leaves Shane fighting for his life. Trapped in his own pain and fear, he cannot speak, cannot explain, cannot protect the fragile secrecy he's built around his identity and his love for Ilya. And Ilya, furious and terrified, is forced to watch helplessly as everything he cares about is at risk, under the eyes of thousands — including Shane's parents.

The ice has always been the place where Shane learned how to endure discomfort without naming it.

Cold here behaves in ways he understands. It presses back when he presses down, answers force with resistance, obeys rules that are visible if you know how to read them. Even pain usually makes sense on the ice — a sharp edge, a bruise that announces itself clearly, an injury with a beginning and an end. Tonight, though, something feels off. The cold no longer steadies him. It feels watchful, hostile in a quieter way, as though it has decided to stop keeping its promises.

The wrongness begins with sound.

Not louder, just sharper. Individual noises refuse to blend together the way they usually do. The scrape of skates comes too close behind him. A shout reaches him from the wrong direction. The hollow boom of the boards rattles inside his skull long after it should have faded, lingering like an echo his body can't shake.

His helmet presses unevenly against his temples. The sensation is small enough that it shouldn't matter, but it compounds, stacking with everything else until his body feels subtly misaligned, as if something has shifted just far enough out of place to make every movement ache. Sweat collects beneath his pads, sticky and distracting, and the chemical bitterness of suppressants coats his tongue, grounding and nauseating at once. He catalogues it all automatically, the way he always does, checking for deviations in routine, for errors he can correct if he finds them quickly enough.

Across the ice, Ilya Rozanov moves like gravity is optional.

Shane doesn't mean to look, but he always does. Some part of him tracks Ilya the way his brain tracks exits or memorises patterns without conscious effort. Ilya skates with an ease that looks almost careless, shoulders loose, movements fluid and unapologetic. Even in the wrong colours, even surrounded by players who are meant to be obstacles, he looks inevitable.

Beautiful, Shane thinks helplessly, and the thought hurts in the familiar hollow way it always does.

Their eyes catch for just a second. Ilya's grin softens into something private, something unguarded, and the shift makes Shane's chest tighten painfully. It is a look that never lasts, a look Shane never allows himself to hold onto. He looks away immediately, guilt flaring hot and instinctive.

Later, he tells himself.

There will be time later.

The lie settles heavy in his chest, as it always does.

The hit comes without warning.

It is not clean. Not part of the play. One moment he is skating, calculating angles and speed, his body moving in practiced harmony with the ice, and the next something slams into him from the side with catastrophic force.

The air is ripped from his lungs so violently it feels as though his chest collapses inward, breath stolen in a single brutal instant. His skates lose contact with the ice, and the sudden weightlessness disorients him completely, his body briefly unsure which way is down.

Then his head strikes the ice.

The sound is dull and wrong, a crack that reverberates through his skull and down his spine, rattling his teeth. Pain follows a half second later, blooming outward in an overwhelming surge that consumes everything. It is not sharp or focused. It is vast, crushing, white-hot pressure that reduces thought to fragments.

He lands wrong.

The knowledge arrives instantly, even as his brain struggles to keep up. Something is misaligned. Something critical has failed. He tries to move his legs and nothing happens, the absence of sensation so sudden and complete that panic floods him faster than the pain ever could.

This is how it ends, he thinks distantly. On the ice. In front of everyone.

The whistle screams, piercing and unbearable, drilling straight through his skull until his vision blurs and darkens at the edges. The ice presses cold and unforgiving against his cheek, grounding and cruel at once. He wants to curl inward, to make himself smaller, but his body will not obey.

Hands grab his shoulders.

Pain detonates.

The pressure sends lightning through his spine, agony flaring so violently it steals what little breath he has managed to drag back into his lungs. His chest seizes, breath stuttering and failing, panic flooding his system in a hot, uncontrollable rush.

“Don’t,” he gasps, the word tearing out of him broken and raw. “Don’t touch me. Don’t—don’t touch me.”

The words loop uselessly, his mind clinging to them as if repetition might create safety. The world is too loud, too close, faces blurring above him, lights stabbing into his eyes.

“Shane!” Hayden’s voice cuts through, urgent and terrified as he skates into view. His face is pale beneath his visor, eyes fixed on Shane’s unmoving body. “Hey. Hey. You’re okay. Stay with me, alright? Just stay still.”

Shane tries to focus on him, but the pain keeps dragging him under. His chest feels wrong, each shallow inhale scraping painfully, as though his lungs have forgotten how to expand properly. His heart hammers too fast, each beat heavy and disorienting.

“Don’t touch me,” he repeats weakly. “Please. Don’t.”

Hayden swears under his breath and looks up at the trainers crowding too close. “Can you back up? He needs space. He needs—”

The air shifts.

It happens before Shane understands why. A subtle drop in pressure. A warmth that rolls through the space like a tide. His body reacts instinctively, relief and fear crashing together so hard it almost hurts.

Ilya.

“Move.”

Ilya’s voice slices through the chaos, rough and uneven, his accent thickened by something sharp and dangerous beneath it. “You move away from him. Now.”

He drops to his knees beside Shane, movements abrupt at first and then painfully careful, as though every inch closer costs him something. Shane feels him before he can properly see him, alpha presence flooding the space, familiar and overwhelming, making his chest ache even as it heightens his panic.

When his vision finally cooperates enough to focus, the sight of Ilya’s face hurts more than the pain tearing through his body.

Ilya looks furious.

Not teasing anger. Not the sharp-edged grin he uses to unsettle opponents. This is raw and stripped bare, eyes blown wide and bright, jaw clenched so tightly the muscles stand out beneath his skin. His breathing is uneven, chest rising too fast beneath his pads, and there is something wounded in the way he looks at Shane that makes Shane’s throat tighten painfully.

He looks beautiful like this, Shane thinks deliriously, and the thought devastates him.

“Shane,” Ilya says, his voice breaking around the name. “You hear me? Look at me.”

Shane tries. The lights smear. His vision swims.

“Helmet,” Ilya snaps at the trainers. “Off. Slow. Very slow.”

Someone protests weakly. Ilya cuts them off, Russian spilling out sharp and furious. “*Ty chto, glupyy?* You break him more, I break you.”

The helmet comes off.

Cold air rushes across Shane’s scalp, the pressure shifting too quickly for his brain to process. Pain spikes brutally, white-hot, and he cries out, the sound thin and broken as tears spill without permission.

Ilya swears softly, viciously, words tumbling out in Russian — curses tangled with something that sounds dangerously close to prayer. “*Bozhe moi...* fuck. Fuck.”

Shane’s breath stutters. His chest tightens, panic spiralling as oxygen refuses to cooperate. He can smell blood, coppery and wrong, and the scent of his own fear curls sharp and unmistakable in the air.

The suppressants fail completely.

Omega distress floods the space.

Ilya freezes.

For a fraction of a second instinct flashes across his face, dark and dangerous, before he drags it back with visible effort. His hands clench at his sides, fists white-knuckled, as if he is physically restraining himself from touching Shane.

“Stretcher,” he snarls, voice hoarse. “Now. *Pozhaluysta*. Now.”

They lift him.

The movement is wrong.

It is wrong in a way his body understands instantly, a violent shift that tears through him like something splitting open from the inside. Pain becomes total, a roaring presence that consumes every nerve at once. It feels as though his body has forgotten where it ends, sensation flooding every available space and then spilling over into places that should not be able to feel at all.

His spine screams.

His chest collapses inward, breath ripping out of him in a sound that is not quite a scream and not quite a sob. The arena fractures into light and noise and agony. He tries to curl inward,

but the restraints hold him in place, his body arching helplessly as his nerves misfire wildly.

It hurts too much to think.

It hurts too much to exist.

The noise returns as individual points of impact. Gasps from the crowd. Someone shouting his name. The hollow roar of the arena pressing down on him from every direction.

They are still here.

They wheel him toward the tunnel, the stretcher rattling beneath him, each vibration sending fresh spikes of agony through his body. As they pass the benches, something cuts through the haze.

His mother.

She is standing, hands pressed to her mouth, eyes wide and shining. His father stands rigid beside her, knuckles white against the railing.

The sight devastates him.

*I didn't mean for you to see this, he thinks, panic tightening painfully in his chest.
I tried so hard to keep everything safe.*

The oxygen mask presses awkwardly against his face now, plastic smell sharp and overwhelming, fogging faintly with each shallow breath.

Ilya's voice breaks through again, closer now, shaking despite the fury threaded through it. "Shane. You stay with me, da? You hear me?"

Shane tries to answer. His mouth opens uselessly, jaw trembling, but no sound comes. Pain coils tighter. The world dims.

He sees Ilya's face one last time as they turn into the tunnel — furious, terrified, devastatingly beautiful — stripped of all pretense.

*I loved you so quietly, he thinks.
I thought silence was safer.*

The tunnel swallows them.

Monitors begin to scream.

"No," Ilya says somewhere above him, the word tearing raw from his throat. "No, no—"

The darkness closes in anyway.

And the last thing Shane knows is that everything that mattered most was never said out loud.

Chapter 2: Fractured Ice

Chapter Summary

A dirty hit shatters the fragile equilibrium Shane Hollander relies on, leaving him critically injured and unconscious on the ice. Ilya Rosanov's carefully curated rivalry fractures under the weight of fear he can't disguise. Driven to the hospital by Marly, Ilya waits alongside Shane's parents, guarding a secret that no longer fits neatly inside his chest. While Shane lies in a coma—sedated, broken, and unstable—he drifts in and out of awareness, trapped inside a body that will not respond, held tethered to the world by pain, memory, and the sound of Ilya's voice.

Chapter Notes

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

Ilya sees it before it even happens.

The shift is almost imperceptible, the kind of deviation only instinct notices. A fraction of a second. Maybe less. Shane's weight tilts just enough to be wrong, the slide widening when it should have tightened, the angle sharpening instead of correcting. Ilya's chest tightens instantly, a coil of instinct screaming before thought can catch up, breath snagging hard in his throat. His eyes narrow, tracking Shane's movement with ruthless precision, already calculating outcomes he refuses to name.

He opens his mouth.

“Stoy—wait—”

The sound never makes it past his tongue. The arena swallows it whole, noise crashing in from every direction at once.

The collision happens.

Chaos detonates.

The whistle shrieks like a blade driven straight through Ilya's skull. Skates scrape the ice in frantic, panicked arcs. Shouts fracture into something jagged and unrecognisable. Every muscle in his body screams to move, to shield, to intercept the damage with his own body if that is what it takes. He cannot. His feet feel welded to the ice, taut and unyielding, as though the ground itself has decided he is not allowed to intervene.

Panic coils hot and wild, tangling with the helplessness that curls deep in his gut. One thought breaks through the noise with terrifying clarity.

This will change everything.

Shane's body crumples.

Pain blooms everywhere at once, white-hot and indiscriminate, expansive in a way that steals edges from the world. Sound dulls. Colour smears. The ice, the lights, the crowd all collapse inward, replaced by the brutal immediacy of Shane's suffering. He looks suddenly smaller, fragile in a way Ilya has never allowed himself to acknowledge, broken under the weight of a moment that refuses to pass cleanly.

Every heartbeat Shane takes is a tremor. Every breath is shallow, stolen.

Ilya's eyes never leave him. Urgency burns behind them, fierce and voiceless. The trainers move in, hovering, uncertain, hands shaking where they should be steady. The helmet lifts too quickly, then stops, hesitation rippling through the group.

Ilya's voice cuts through the mess, rough and jagged, threaded with fear he does not bother disguising. Russian spills into clipped English, sharp and furious.

"Helmet. Very slow. *Blyat*'. You break him more, I break you."

The helmet comes off.

Shane cries out.

The sound rips straight through Ilya's chest, jagged and unbearable, leaving nothing intact in its wake. His hands clench at his sides, fists whitening, veins standing out beneath his skin as alpha instinct flares hard and violent. Every part of him wants to shield, to take the pain into his own body and make it stop there.

He cannot.

Not here. Not in front of everyone. Not while the cameras are hungry and the arena is awake and the world is watching.

The stretcher slides beneath Shane, metal scraping ice, and every small jolt sends lightning straight through Ilya's core. He follows instinctively, close enough to feel heat through pads and fabric, taut enough that his whole body hums with contained motion. The tether between them tightens into something almost physical, an invisible line pulled too hard.

The arena remains alive around them.

Crowds press forward, panic and fascination blending into a suffocating wave. Commentators' voices overlay everything, frantic and clipped, words half-heard but impossible to escape.

"...severe collision..."

"...possible spinal—"

"...may be career-ending—"

Ilya does not listen. He cannot.

Shane's body is all that exists. Trembling beneath the oxygen mask. Too still. Too quiet. Wrong in a way that makes Ilya's throat tighten until breathing hurts.

They pass the benches.

Yuna stands frozen, scarf clenched tight to her chest, lips pressed thin, eyes wide with terror she is barely containing. David is rigid beside her, hands locked white against the railing, jaw set so tightly it looks painful. Hayden leans forward, silent but alert, his expression carved sharp with worry.

Ilya registers them like a photograph in a flash.

Then the world narrows again to the rise and fall of Shane's chest, the flutter of fingers, the fragile rhythm of a body fighting not to slip away.

"I am here," Ilya whispers, low and rough, the words trembling despite his effort to control them. "Stay. Da? Stay with me."

He leans closer, careful not to touch, every micro-step measured, but the weight of his presence radiates outward all the same, alpha gravity pulling tight around Shane like an invisible brace.

"Do not leave," he murmurs. "Ne odin. I am here."

Shane's eyes flicker.

Unfocused. Desperate.

Every shallow breath, every twitch of a finger anchors him to Ilya's presence. The omega instinct reaches for him, raw and unguarded, grasping for protection, for grounding, for something steady enough to hold onto.

Ilya can feel it like pressure in his own chest.

He cannot take the pain. Not fully. Not yet. The arena is too loud, too public, too close. Shane shivers, scent-driven panic curling from him in sharp waves, each tremor twisting Ilya tighter.

After that, time breaks into splinters.

Ilya does not remember leaving the ice. Memory returns in shards: the tunnel narrowing, the stretcher rattling beneath Shane's unmoving body, the sound of his own heart hammering too loudly in his ears. Every step feels unbearable, every second stretched thin and fragile, held together only by one relentless thought.

Stay close.

The trainers try to stop him at the tunnel mouth.

“Rozanov—”

He barrels through without slowing, skates scraping uselessly against concrete, balance chaotic under the rush of adrenaline burning through him. Someone grabs his arm.

“Don’t. Touch me.”

Voices murmur. Heads turn. People stare.

Ilya does not care.

Hollander is too still. The thought circles endlessly, relentless and sharp. Too still. Too quiet. Wrong. The monitors scream, the sound detonating in his chest, pain he cannot feel yet echoing like fire behind his eyes. He stumbles, catching himself against the wall as doctors swarm the stretcher.

“No,” he gasps, voice hoarse, breaking apart. “No—no—”

Hands push him back, firm and practiced.

“We need space.”

“I stay,” Ilya says, breathless. “I stay right here.”

“You can’t.”

He laughs once, brittle and hollow. “Watch me.”

They don’t.

Two security staff step in, blocking his view completely. For one terrifying instant, Hollander vanishes from sight. Ilya lunges forward on instinct, alpha panic screaming as the world narrows to a single point of terror.

“Move or we make you,” one of them says.

A doctor steps in, voice clipped and final. “Enough. You’re interfering.”

Interfering.

The word lands like a slap. Ilya freezes, lets them push him back against the wall because fighting now would pull him farther from Hollander, and that thought is unbearable. The jersey is cut away. The sound is obscene, fabric tearing where skin should be safe.

Ilya turns his face to the wall, breath hitching, heart hammering. His hands shake, nails digging into his palms.

Get it together.

Skates scrape behind him.

“Rozanov?” Hayden’s voice comes careful, uncertain.

Ilya does not look.

“That hit was dirty,” Hayden says quietly. “I mean—I’ve seen you go after guys before, but this? You almost—”

“Don’t,” Ilya snaps.

Silence thickens.

“I thought you two hated each other,” Hayden murmurs.

Ilya’s jaw tightens. His knuckles go white.

“People think lots of things,” he says flatly. “Doesn’t make them right.”

The rivalry has always been a cover. A convenient shield for the way he tracks Hollander without looking, for how he notices every tilt of his head, every shift of balance.

But this isn’t rivalry.

This is fear.

Pure. Unfiltered.

The next clear moment is the car.

One moment he is standing in the cold, sirens echoing through his chest. The next, he is buckled into Marly’s SUV, hands braced on his thighs, helmet discarded at his feet like dead weight.

“Seatbelt,” Marly says quietly.

Ilya obeys without thinking.

The city slides past in blurred streaks of light. Every stoplight feels accusatory. The ambulance is already gone, swallowed by distance and everything he cannot control.

“You scared the hell out of people back there,” Marly says eventually.

“I don’t like dirty hits,” Ilya replies, voice low and detached.

“Yeah,” Marly hums, not agreeing, not arguing. Just letting it sit there between them like a lie they both understand.

The hospital smells like antiseptic and fear.

Too bright. Too loud. Too clean.

The waiting area is all fluorescent glare and plastic chairs bolted to the floor. The air hums with machines Shane cannot see yet, a steady electronic pulse threading through the corridor walls. Nurses move past with clipped efficiency, shoes squeaking softly against linoleum. Somewhere beyond the double doors, a monitor alarms once, sharp and brief, before settling again.

Yuna sits rigid, spine straight as if posture alone might keep everything intact. Her hands twist her scarf until the fabric creases under the strain. David doesn't sit at all. He stands with his back to the wall, arms crossed, jaw locked, eyes fixed on the corridor like it might fracture open if he watches hard enough.

They both look up when Ilya steps inside.

He is no longer in gear.

No skates. No helmet. Just street clothes pulled on hastily, hair still damp with sweat, hands shaking faintly at his sides. He looks wrong out of uniform, stripped of the armour that makes him easy to categorise. Out of place in a way that immediately puts Yuna on edge.

Confusion lands first.

Then something sharper.

"Rozanov?" David says, voice low and controlled, the syllables edged with warning. "Why are you here?"

Ilya opens his mouth, then closes it again. The answer tangles in his throat, heavy and dangerous. Behind his ribs, the pull is relentless, a physical insistence drawing him down the corridor toward a room he has not yet been allowed to see.

Before he can speak, a nurse appears, clipboard tucked against her chest.

"Mr. and Mrs. Hollander?"

Yuna is on her feet instantly. "Yes."

"We're transferring your son from imaging to a monitored room," the nurse says gently. "He's stable for now, but we need to keep him immobilised. One of you can walk with us."

David nods. "Both of us."

The nurse hesitates, then allows it.

They move quickly down the corridor. Ilya follows without being invited, stopping just short of the threshold when the doors swing open.

Shane is wheeled past.

He is immobilised on a spinal board, neck braced in a rigid collar that keeps his head fixed in place. Electrodes dot his chest, wires snaking down to a portable monitor that chirps

unevenly at his side. An IV line runs into his arm, fluid dripping steadily. The oxygen mask covers most of his face, fogging faintly with each shallow breath.

He is pale.

Too still.

Yuna makes a sound she doesn't seem to recognise as her own. David's hand clamps down on her shoulder, grip iron-tight.

As the bed passes, something in Shane shifts.

Not consciousness. Not movement in any way that belongs to intention. But his breathing stutters, chest hitching as if his body has sensed something before his mind can catch up.

Ilya steps closer without thinking, stopping at the edge of the bed.

"Hollander," he says quietly.

The response is immediate.

The monitor reacts first — heart rate dropping by several beats, the erratic spikes smoothing into something more controlled. Shane's chest rises a fraction deeper beneath the mask. One hand twitches weakly against the restraint securing him to the board, fingers curling as if reaching for something just out of range.

The nurse slows.

The doctor walking alongside the bed stops entirely.

Yuna notices the numbers before she understands what they mean. Her eyes flick from the monitor to Shane's face, then to Ilya standing rigid at the bedside. "What—" she breathes. "What just happened?"

David sees it next. His jaw tightens. His gaze sharpens, flicking between the monitor and Ilya, confusion hardening into something wary.

Ilya doesn't move. He doesn't touch Shane. He barely breathes.

"Hollander," he murmurs again, lower this time.

The effect compounds.

Oxygen saturation ticks upward. Breathing evens further. The tremor in Shane's fingers fades, his body settling against the restraints as if it has found something solid enough to rest against.

The corridor goes very still.

The doctor studies the monitor, then Shane, then finally looks directly at Ilya for the first time. “How long have you known him?” she asks, careful, neutral.

Ilya swallows. “Long enough.”

Yuna’s confusion fractures into fear. “Why does my son—” Her voice breaks. She gestures helplessly at the bed, the wires, the numbers. “Why does he respond to you like that?”

The doctor exhales slowly, already rearranging possibilities in her mind. “Because his nervous system recognises him,” she says. “And right now, that recognition is stabilising.”

David stiffens. “Recognises him how?”

“Your son is an omega,” the doctor says gently. “With spinal trauma, the body is under extreme stress. In some cases, proximity to a bonded alpha — even an incomplete or unacknowledged bond — can produce measurable physiological effects. Heart rate. Breathing. Muscle response.”

Silence crashes down.

Yuna’s hand flies to her mouth. Her eyes stay on Shane, then slide back to Ilya, searching his face for something she does not yet know how to ask.

David’s gaze hardens, protective instinct colliding with understanding he isn’t ready to accept. “Bonded,” he repeats. “You’re saying—”

“I’m saying his vitals respond to him,” the doctor says calmly. “That’s what matters medically.”

Ilya doesn’t speak.

He doesn’t confirm it. He doesn’t deny it.

He stays.

Shane exhales, long and shaky even under sedation, chest easing beneath the mask. The monitor steadies into a rhythm that sounds almost merciful.

The doctor nods once. “For now, his presence helps. We’ll proceed carefully. This stays private.”

She turns back to the bed. The nurse adjusts the IV. The spinal board is locked into place before they move again.

Ilya shifts back a fraction of an inch.

The reaction is immediate.

Heart rate spikes. Breathing stutters. A sharp tremor runs through Shane’s fingers, the monitor screaming its objection.

Ilya steps forward again without hesitation.

“Hollander,” he says urgently.

The numbers settle.

Everyone sees it this time.

No one speaks.

And in the quiet that follows, the truth takes root — not as an explanation, but as a fact no one in the room can ignore.

Even in darkness, even in pain, Shane knows who waits for him.

He cannot let go.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much for reading! I hope this chapter left you feeling the tension, the fear, and the fragile threads between Shane and Ilya. If something in the story moved you—or if you just want to share your thoughts—I’d love to hear from you. Comments, thoughts, or even little reactions are always welcome and mean a lot. Thank you for being part of this story with me!

Chapter 3: The Weight of Ice

Chapter Summary

Weeks after Shane's devastating hit, he drifts in and out of sedation, trapped between pain and awareness. The pain never fades—it rearranges itself—but Ilya's constant presence, tethered humor, and careful attention give him fragile anchors. Outside the room, media speculation grows, rumors of rivalry, omega status, and next-season availability swirl—but Shane can only respond with subtle micro-movements and physiological reactions. The neuro consultant performs a full exam, confirming his awareness, while Ilya nearly loses control trying to protect Shane, ultimately tethering him with presence and words.

Chapter Notes

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

The pain does not fade so much as it rearranges itself.

Shane learns this slowly, in fragments, drifting through a half-state where sensation arrives before thought, where his body reacts long before his mind can catch up. Sometimes the pain is sharp and blinding, a sudden white-hot flare down his spine that steals the breath straight out of his chest, leaving him gasping, lungs stuttering like they've forgotten their job. Other times it settles into something dull and crushing, a constant, grinding pressure that makes simply existing feel like labour. There is no rhythm to it, no warning. It comes when it wants. His body braces instinctively every time, even when there is nothing he can do to prepare.

Time loses its shape.

He cannot tell whether minutes pass or hours. He measures everything in pain spikes and the fragile spaces between them, in the steady beep of the monitor and the soft, mechanical hum of machines doing work his body no longer trusts itself to manage. Sound arrives out of order. Touch arrives too loudly. Thought lags behind both.

At some point, he tries to move again.

Nothing happens.

The realisation lands fresh every time, sharp and disorienting, like waking into the same nightmare over and over without the mercy of forgetting. Panic follows immediately, hot and vicious, racing through him before he can contain it. His chest tightens, breath going thin and uneven, shallow gulps that do not feel like enough. His heart begins to hammer, too fast and too loud, as if it is trying to escape his ribcage altogether.

The monitor notices before anyone else does.

Its calm rhythm fractures into urgent, irregular protest, alarms sharpening the air.

“Easy,” Ilya says at once.

The word cuts through the panic like a hand closing firmly around Shane’s wrist in the dark. It does not erase the fear, does not touch the pain, but it stops the spiral, arrests the freefall just short of catastrophe. Shane’s breathing stutters, then slows, syncing instinctively with the cadence of Ilya’s voice. The pain remains—present, relentless—but it shifts into something survivable, something he can endure instead of drown in.

“That’s it,” Ilya murmurs, quieter now, almost coaxing. “You’re okay. Don’t fight it, da? You fight, you lose. Body always wins.”

Shane hates how much he wants to listen.

He hates the way his body responds without permission, the way it softens when Ilya is near, like it knows something his mind refuses to accept. It feels like weakness. Like something deeply private is being exposed under harsh fluorescent lights, witnessed by strangers and machines and people who are not supposed to know him this way.

At some point, he hears his mother cry.

The sound is soft, barely there, but it cuts deeper than any spike of pain. It tears straight through him, ruthless and precise. He wants to tell her he is sorry. That he did not mean for this to happen. That he tried so hard to keep everything contained, controlled, safe. His throat tightens, muscles straining uselessly, but no sound comes. His jaw trembles. His eyes burn.

“I know,” Ilya says quietly—not to her, not to the room. To Shane. “She’s scared.”

The understanding in his voice hurts almost as much as the pain. It feels too intimate, too accurate, like Ilya can see straight through him even now, even like this.

Another spike hits without warning.

White-hot agony rips through Shane’s spine, detonating outward, violent and immediate. His body arches helplessly against the restraints, every nerve screaming at once. A broken sound tears out of him that never quite becomes a scream, trapped somewhere in his chest. The monitor erupts, alarms sharp and frantic.

“Fuck,” Ilya breathes, the word torn out of him, rough and unfiltered. “What did you do?”

The question is not aimed at the staff scrambling into the room. It is for Shane, even though he knows Shane cannot answer. Even though he knows the truth.

Hands move quickly. Voices overlap. Someone calls out numbers. Cold medication floods into Shane’s veins, the sensation almost shocking in its clarity, like ice water poured straight into his bloodstream. The pain blurs at the edges, dulling just enough to stop consuming him whole, but it never leaves. It lingers, coiled and watchful, like it is waiting for him to relax.

“We need to keep him as still as possible,” the doctor says firmly. “Any sudden movement could worsen the spinal injury.”

“He didn’t move,” Ilya says flatly, anger sharp beneath the control. “It just hit him.”

The truth settles heavy and unyielding in Shane’s chest. There was no mistake. No miscalculation. Just bad luck and worse timing.

He drifts again, exhaustion dragging him under, fear clinging stubbornly to the edges of his consciousness.

Don’t leave me alone.

“I’m still here,” Ilya murmurs, softer now. “I’m not going anywhere. Even if you’re pain in ass.”

The words almost make Shane laugh.

Almost.

The night stretches on.

Hospital time warps and bends, minutes bleeding into hours without meaning. Shane exists inside the steady beep of machines and the constant echo of pain, drifting between sedation and awareness. Sometimes the absence of sensation below his waist terrifies him more than anything else, a hollow nothingness that feels wrong in ways he cannot articulate. Sometimes he is too tired to feel fear at all.

Outside the room, the world refuses to slow down.

Screens fill with slowed footage of the hit, replayed endlessly, dissected frame by frame until it no longer looks real. Analysts gesture at frozen images, draw lines, speculate. Headlines multiply, sharp and merciless.

HOLLANDER IN CRITICAL CONDITION
CAREER IN JEOPARDY AFTER DIRTY HIT
ROZANOV ABSENT FROM TEAM ACTIVITIES

Ilya hears it all without ever looking.

Nurses whisper when they think he cannot hear. Phones buzz constantly. Someone turns the television toward the wall and it still feels too loud, the speculation bleeding through anyway.

Will Rozanov play next season?

Was the rivalry real—or something else?

Unconfirmed reports suggest Hollander may be an omega.

The word omega slices straight through Shane, even through sedation. His heart rate spikes violently. The monitor shrieks its protest.

“No,” Ilya says immediately, leaning in, voice sharp with refusal. “Don’t listen to that. They don’t get you. They don’t get shit.”

The numbers ease again, slowly, reluctantly, like Shane’s body is choosing to believe Ilya over the noise.

Yuna watches it happen.

She has been watching for a while now—the way Shane’s body betrays him, the way it calms only when Ilya is close. The way Ilya never leaves the chair beside the bed, never truly rests, never lets his focus drift from her son. The way exhaustion etches deeper lines into his face with every passing hour.

“You can sit closer,” she says softly at one point.

Ilya looks startled, like the thought never occurred to him. “This is fine.”

“You calm him,” Yuna says simply. “That’s not nothing.”

David nods once, arms folded tight across his chest. “We see it.”

Ilya swallows. No explanation. No denial. Just a small, contained nod.

“Thank you,” Yuna says quietly.

Shane hears that, too, and something in his chest aches in a way no medication can touch.

Hayden Pike shows up a day later, awkward and careful, eyes flicking between Shane’s still body and Ilya’s rigid presence.

“Well,” he says, attempting lightness. “This sucks.”

Ilya does not look away from the bed. “You here to stare or talk?”

Hayden exhales. “Fair. How is he?”

“Alive,” Ilya says. “Unstable. Stubborn. Very annoying.”

Hayden winces. “Yeah. That tracks.” He hesitates, then smirks faintly. “So... do I call you Rozanov, or Lily?”

Ilya finally looks at him, unimpressed. “You call me nothing if you want leave with teeth.”

Hayden lifts his hands. “Kidding. Mostly. You’re not exactly subtle.”

“I’m not hiding,” Ilya says flatly.

“They’re asking if you’ll play next season.”

“I don’t care.”

“And the rivalry stuff?”

“Let them talk.”

“And the omega rumors?”

Ilya’s gaze goes cold. “They don’t get that.”

Hayden shrugs, smirks faintly, and leaves the room.

The quiet settles again.

Weeks have passed since the hit, but the ice’s cost lingers. Shane drifts closer to full awareness, pain spiking, mind sharpening just enough to register the weight of everything waiting for him: decisions, consequences, truths. Every second he spent believing control was enough, every moment of pretending safety could be guaranteed, has left its mark.

Outside his awareness, voices gather.

“His intracranial pressure has stabilised,” the neuro consultant says calmly. “Which means we can begin lightening the sedation.”

Yuna inhales sharply. “Is that safe?”

“It’s necessary,” the doctor replies. “We need to assess neurological function. Responsiveness. Awareness. We won’t remove all sedation—just enough to see how he reacts.”

Ilya stands rigid beside the bed, arms folded tight, jaw set hard enough to ache. “It will hurt,” he says. Not a question.

“There may be discomfort,” the consultant agrees evenly. “But we’ll monitor him closely. If his vitals spike too much, we stop.”

“He’s already in pain,” Ilya says flatly.

The doctor meets his gaze without flinching. “I know.”

Shane feels the shift before he understands it.

Pressure changes. The dull fog lifts just enough to let sensation flood back in. Cold slides through his veins.

Then fire.

His body reacts before his mind can catch up. Muscles tense reflexively. His breathing stutters. Pain sharpens cruelly along his spine, radiating outward until it feels like every nerve is lit at once.

“Easy,” Ilya says immediately.

The word reaches Shane like a tether thrown into deep water. The panic pauses. The monitor flares, then steadies.

“That’s it,” Ilya murmurs. “Stay with me. Don’t go anywhere stupid.”

Shane tries to move.

Nothing happens.

The realisation crashes into him, disorienting and fresh, panic surging hot and fast before he can stop it. His chest tightens, breath turning shallow and erratic. The monitor protests sharply.

“Shh,” Ilya says. “I know. I know. You’re awake now. Or... awake-ish.”

Wake.

The word rattles through Shane’s skull. His thoughts surface slowly, heavy and misaligned, like furniture shoved into the wrong rooms. He tries to open his eyes. They burn.

“Nope,” Ilya says at once. “Bad idea. Very bad. You open eyes later. Eyes are optional.”

The strained humor grounds him anyway. His breathing slows despite himself.

A penlight flickers near his face. “Shane,” the consultant says gently. “If you can hear me, don’t try to move. Just stay calm.”

The doctor watches the monitors closely. “Heart rate’s elevated but responsive. That’s good.”

Pain rolls through Shane again, deeper now, grinding and cruel. His body arches uselessly against the restraints, a broken sound tearing out of him. The monitor shrieks.

“Fuck,” Ilya breathes. “What did you do to him?”

“We’re stopping,” the consultant says immediately. “Increase sedation slightly.”

Cool floods in again, blunting the edges just enough to keep Shane anchored.

“He’s responding,” the doctor adds. “That’s important. Awareness is there.”

The room quiets.

The first thing Shane becomes aware of is the weight.

Not pain—not yet—but a heavy pressure pressing down from the inside, like gravity has decided to settle somewhere deep in his chest and stay there.

He tries to breathe.

It works. Barely.

Sound returns next. The steady beep. A chair shifting. Fabric rustling.

Then—

“Hollander.”

The name is quiet. Close.

It lands in him with startling force. His heart rate jumps.

“Nope,” Ilya says immediately. “Don’t do that. Is bad idea.”

A pause.

“You are very dramatic,” Ilya adds softly. “But you wake up. This is good thing.”

Shane wants to answer. His mouth opens uselessly.

“You don’t have to talk,” Ilya says, leaning closer. “You don’t have to do anything. Just be awake. I do rest.”

Pain spikes again. A small, broken sound escapes Shane.

“I know,” Ilya murmurs. “Is bad. But you’re still here. That matters.”

Tears slip from the corners of Shane’s eyes.

“Oh,” Ilya says softly. “No crying. I am terrible with crying.”

A beat.

“I lie. I am very good. But still.”

Shane’s fingers twitch faintly.

Ilya freezes. “There,” he whispers. “You did that.”

Hope settles. Dangerous. Unavoidable.

When Yuna’s voice comes, Shane hears it—and this time, he stays.

The neuro consultant continues the exam, calm and precise.

“Shane, I’m going to check reflexes now.”

“Let’s start with fingers. Can you wiggle them?”

Tiny, imperfect movement. The monitor records it.

“Good,” the consultant says.

Toes. Arms. Pupils.

Every command is agony braided with hope.

Shane wants to speak. To tell them he is awake. But his body refuses.

Ilya grips the edge of the chair, knuckles white, control fraying. A nurse steps too close; he nearly reacts before catching himself, muttering in Russian under his breath.

“Heart rate elevated,” the consultant says. “BP stable. Pupils reactive.”

Proof.

When the exam ends, Ilya leans close again.

“Hollander,” he murmurs. “You do very good. Very good boy. Rest now. I do not leave.”

And Shane does.

Pain remains. Awareness remains.

But he holds on.

Chapter End Notes

Hi everyone! 

This chapter dives deep into Shane’s pain and Ilya’s unwavering presence—there’s a lot of intensity and quiet moments of connection. Writing it was emotionally heavy, but I hope the way their bond threads through even the hardest moments comes through for you.

If you’re enjoying the story, the tension, or just want to share what you’re feeling about these characters, a comment really brightens my day. Your thoughts and theories about Shane and Ilya’s secret connection, or even just your favorite small moments, mean so much!

Thank you for reading, and for letting me share this messy, painful, tender part of their story with you.

—

Chapter 4: Ice Between Heartbeats

Chapter Summary

Emotions run high as friends and loved ones gather in a tense hospital setting. Bonds are tested, loyalties weighed, and decisions must be made under pressure. Amid the clinical routines and urgent discussions, moments of connection and understanding reveal the depth of care between them, highlighting the fragile, unspoken threads that hold people together in times of crisis.

Chapter Notes

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

It had been a few days since the consultant had tried to rouse Shane, and each time the doctors came and went their voices remained calm, measured, repeating the same careful reassurance: he will wake when he's ready. And still the odds hung stubbornly at fifty-fifty, as if the universe itself refused to tip the scales, content to keep them suspended in that cruel, indifferent equilibrium.

The room held him like a fragile monument.

Every hum of the machines, every soft hiss of the ventilator, marked time with relentless precision. Even in stillness, Shane was there—tenuous, tethered to a world he could not yet touch, hovering between silence and the faint stirrings of return. Every shallow rise of his chest, every twitch in his fingers, became magnified in the quiet, turned into a kind of proof that life lingered just beneath the surface. Fragile. Waiting. As if daring the world to notice and not jinx it.

Yuna sat so close to the bed that the edge of the metal frame pressed into her knee, a dull, grounding pain she had not moved away from. She had not shifted in a long time. Her body had gone stiff, locked into position as if motion itself might invite catastrophe—as if the smallest change could tip something already precarious into freefall.

Her hands were folded in her lap, fingers laced together too tightly. The skin across her knuckles had gone pale, stretched thin beneath the pressure. She did not seem to notice. She had not noticed much of anything except Shane.

His face was still. Not peaceful—she refused that word—but emptied out. Too smooth. Too quiet. The places where tension should have lived were slack, erased, as if someone had carefully taken him apart and reassembled him without putting everything back where it belonged.

The neurologist had been here less than an hour ago. Lights in Shane's eyes. Firm voices. Requests he had not been able to answer.

Shane. If you can hear me, squeeze my hand.

He had—barely. A tremor of movement, more instinct than intention. Enough to mean something. Enough to mean he was close.

Too close for this room to feel safe anymore.

The machines never stopped. They breathed and clicked and hummed around him, filling the space where conversation should have been. Soft beeps marked time with cruel precision. A ventilator released air in slow, measured sighs, patient and unyielding. Electricity ran through cords and screens and tubing, a steady artificial pulse pretending it was enough. Wires tracked his heart and oxygenation, adhesive pads clung to skin that looked too thin under the light; IV lines fed him what his body could not take on its own; a tangle of medical logic stood in for will.

I hear all of it, Shane thought dimly. I hear everything. I just can't tell anyone I'm still here.

"Ilya," Yuna said at last.

Her voice barely survived the distance between them. It sounded fragile, like glass under strain, like speaking too loudly might fracture something already splintering.

"You should go," she continued carefully. "Just for a little while. Get some sleep."

The words landed on Shane like weight.

Ilya stood on the other side of the bed, unmoving. He had not changed position in what felt like hours. His posture was rigid, spine held too straight, shoulders drawn tight as if bracing against something invisible and relentless. His hands were clasped behind his back, fingers curled into his palms hard enough that it bordered on pain. His gaze was locked on Shane's face with an intensity that felt almost feral—an alpha's focus dragged taut by instinct and fear and something he refused to name out loud.

"I cannot leave," he said.

The words were measured. Controlled. Each one placed with care, as though precision itself might keep the world from tipping any further off its axis.

"He is not well. My place is here. Even if he cannot move. Even if he cannot speak."

Something twisted violently in Shane's chest.

I can hear you.

"You've been here for hours," Yuna said more softly. "You haven't eaten. You haven't slept. Shane will still know you're here when you come back."

Ilya shook his head. Once. Slow. Absolute.

"My heart will not rest while he is like this."

There was no embellishment in it. No drama. Just truth, stark and unyielding. Shane felt it anyway—the way Ilya’s entire world had narrowed down to the bed, to the shallow rise and fall of his chest, to the terrible, hovering possibility that it might stop.

This is my fault, Shane thought, panic flaring hot and useless. *I did this. I trapped him here.*

Yuna leaned forward, resting her forearms on her thighs. Even the movement looked heavy.

“Ilya... you don’t have to prove anything. You don’t have to stay every second to be enough.”

For one brief, devastating moment, the mask slipped. Fear flashed across Ilya’s face—raw, unguarded, stripped of discipline and years of careful restraint. It was gone almost instantly, crushed back into place, but it was there long enough to do damage.

“If I leave,” he said quietly, voice tight, “and something happens—”

“It won’t,” Yuna said immediately. “And if it did, we would call you. You would be here.”

Silence flooded the room, thick and pressing, made heavier by the steady insistence of machines that did not care about fear, only function.

Then Ilya moved.

He stepped closer to the bed, close enough that his shadow fell across Shane’s chest. Close enough that Shane could feel him—could sense his presence like gravity pulling him back toward the surface, anchoring him to this side of consciousness. The monitor’s rhythm held steady, but something in Shane’s body tightened as if bracing for the loss of that proximity.

Ilya leaned down slightly, invading his space as if closeness alone could tether him to life.

“*dorogoy*,” he murmured.

Sweetheart.

The word trembled, just barely, balanced on the edge of collapse.

Shane’s fingers twitched.

The movement was pathetic in its smallness. A reflex. A whisper of rebellion from a body that refused to fully surrender. But it was real—real enough for the monitor to catch the micro-change in pulse, for the air in the room to shift as if everyone sensed something and did not dare name it.

Ilya saw it.

His breath hitched, sharp and silent. Relief cracked through his chest with dangerous force, splitting something open that had been clenched too long. He went still, as if even acknowledging it might make the moment disappear, as if hope was the kind of thing that startled easily and ran when chased.

I'm here, Shane screamed inside his own head. I'm still here. Please don't let go of me.

Yuna did not notice. She looked away instinctively, giving them space without realising she was doing it, her gaze fixed on Shane's face as if looking too closely might change the outcome.

"Ilya," she said softly, "letting someone else hold things for a moment doesn't make you weak."

"I feel everything with him," Ilya said as he straightened slowly.

His voice stayed controlled, but the strain beneath it was unmistakable, like a wire stretched too tight.

"Every pain. Every fear. If I sleep... if I turn away... I am afraid I will miss something."

"You won't," Yuna said. "You're human. Even guardians have limits."

The word tightened his jaw. Guardians did not fail.

"I will go," he said finally, the decision dragged out of him like something torn free. "But only a little. Then I return."

Yuna nodded. "That's all I'm asking."

Ilya hesitated, then leaned down once more. Shane's fingers twitched again—weak, searching—like reaching through water toward something he could sense but not hold.

"I am here," Ilya whispered. "I am not leaving you."

Then he turned and walked out.

The door clicked shut behind him—too loud, too final, the sound landing in Shane's awareness like a slammed hand.

Don't go, Shane thought, terror surging. *I need you.*

Yuna let out a breath she hadn't realised she was holding, the kind that shakes on the way out because it has been held too long.

Hours—or minutes—passed. Time bent strangely, half inside himself, half trapped in the machinery. The room held the same clinical light, the same steady rhythm, and still Shane hovered in that narrow, brutal in-between.

Then a soft, careful knock.

Hayden entered first, restrained, almost reverent. David followed, his face composed but brittle, holding too many outcomes in his head at once.

“Yuna,” Hayden said quietly, “we need to talk.”

She didn’t look away from Shane. “I know.”

“There are leaks,” David said, voice low. “Medical records. Someone is talking.”

“How bad?” Yuna asked, and the calm in her tone was a practiced thing, an effort.

“Bad enough,” Hayden said, shifting slightly, hands sliding into jacket pockets, posture careful. “The League’s Medical and Status Oversight Committee will get involved if this keeps spreading. They already flagged the incident because of the nature of the injury and the suppressant levels in Shane’s system.”

And then Ilya returned.

Quietly, like he had been trying to make the hallway swallow his footsteps. He held a small container of food in both hands, careful, deliberate, as if carrying anything heavier than that would be an admission that the world still moved. He stopped at the door, gaze locking on Shane before anything else, instinct reading the monitors and the rise of his chest and the slight flutter of fingers.

Shane’s fingers twitched at the presence.

The tether tightened—barely there, but unbreakable.

Ilya’s jaw tightened, and when he spoke his voice was low, controlled, edged with the kind of restraint that could cut. “Suppressants are legal.”

“They are,” David said evenly. “But only up to a point. Regulation 12.4. Any omega competing at elite level is required to disclose secondary sex status to the League’s private medical board once suppressant dependency exceeds threshold variance.”

Yuna’s head snapped up. “Private,” she said sharply. “Not public.”

“In theory,” Hayden said. “In practice, confidentiality holds only until there’s a question of player safety. Spinal trauma combined with suppressant failure puts him under Section Nine.”

Ilya turned slowly. “Explain.”

Hayden met his gaze, unwavering. “Section Nine allows the League to suspend an omega indefinitely if they determine that competition poses an unreasonable biological risk. No appeal without an alpha sponsor on record. The only way to bypass this is for a public claim by a compatible alpha.”

Shane felt the words like punches.

Suspend. Indefinitely.

The ice flashed behind his eyes—the only place his body had ever made sense. You can’t take that from me. It’s mine.

“And if there is no sponsor or... claim?” Ilya asked.

David’s voice lowered, steady. “Then Shane cannot return to professional play. Not this season. Possibly not ever.”

The machines filled the pause: beep, breathe, beep.

Yuna pressed her palm flat against her thigh, grounding herself in the pressure. “You’re talking about him like he’s already been ruled on.”

“I’m talking about timelines,” Hayden said. “Once the narrative shifts from accident to biology, the League steps in fast. Especially with interconference rivalries involved.”

Shane caught that.

Rivalries. You mean him.

Ilya’s shoulders drew back instinctively, bracing. “They will accuse him of manipulation.”

“They already are,” Hayden said grimly. “There’s speculation his performance metrics were artificially stabilised. That the hit—” He hesitated, glancing toward Shane, as if the word injury was too blunt. “That the hit happened because his body was compromised.”

“That’s a lie,” Ilya said immediately, rougher than before. “He was targeted.”

David nodded. “We know. But narrative doesn’t care about truth. It cares about liability.”

Shane’s chest tightened, breath hitching against the ventilator rhythm. *I wasn’t weak. I wasn’t reckless. I was good.*

Ilya stepped closer, and this time he did not hover on the edge of the bed like a guest in a room he did not belong in. He settled his hand over Shane’s, deliberate and gentle, as if making the decision with his whole body. Shane felt it as warmth flooding numb limbs, like a line thrown across a gap that had been widening.

The monitors steadied almost instantly, pulse easing by degrees, oxygen saturation creeping into safer numbers. The room noticed. It always noticed.

Yuna noticed too. She always did.

Her gaze flicked to the screen, then to Ilya’s hand, then back to Shane’s face, and something in her expression changed—not suspicion, not shock, but a careful recalibration, as if the shape of what she had been refusing to name finally took form.

Behind them, the conversation continued, but it began to blur at the edges for Ilya as if the words had opened a door and now his mind was walking through it whether he wanted to or not.

Russia would close its doors—not loudly, not officially, but in every way that mattered.

His mother's grave would become memory instead of place. He would never stand there again, never brush snow from the stone, never whisper to her in the voice he only used when alone.

If his father died, he would not be allowed to attend the funeral. He would grieve from afar, forced to watch absence swallow the rituals he had once relied on to hold meaning.

His niece would grow up with stories instead of visits. The moments when she still needed him, the shoulder rides, the laughter, the quiet secrets—they would vanish like smoke, untouchable, irretrievable.

Friends, colleagues, allies—all of them would turn away. The people he had trusted, who had counted on him, would become strangers. Or worse—they would see his choice as betrayal, as weakness.

Family, society, the life he had known, the world he had built—it would crumble into dust.

Or he could still have everything.

If he did not choose love.

If he turned away from Shane.

If he preserved everything else but lost the one thing that mattered.

He would leave the room, leaving Shane tethered to monitors, to machines, to the fragments of his own body and breath. Each shallow rise of Shane's chest would gnaw at him, an echo of what he could not give. The quiet beeping, the hiss of ventilators, the whisper of cords and tubing—they would mock him with life he refused to anchor.

He would see the faint twitch of fingers, the almost imperceptible shift toward the absent hand. He would know, in the core of him, that Shane reached, that Shane needed, and he would not bridge the gap.

The choice would preserve his world, his family, his home. But the cost—

The cost would be a heartbeat gone untended. A soul left untethered. A love denied.

And the room would feel colder for it.

Shane would stir, barely, eyes half-lidded, searching for what was no longer there. The hand hovering just out of reach, the warmth that had tethered him... gone.

Ilya would step back, shoulders tight, chest aching with a weight he could not lift, heart breaking in silence. He would walk out of the room, each step an echo of loss, each breath a reminder that he had chosen everything else over the one life that mattered more than any law, any country, any family expectation.

The door would click shut behind him, final and absolute. Shane's eyes might open, or might not. But the tether—the fragile, unbreakable bond—would fray in his absence.

And in that silence, Ilya would feel it—the crushing, impossible ache of what he had refused.

Because he had survived the world, only to lose the one thing worth living for.

The thought did not arrive as poetry. It arrived as weight, as inevitability, as something already decided in his body before his mind could argue.

He leaned closer to Shane, their foreheads touching, the air between them thick with everything unspoken, every risk, every loss, every consequence stacked like stones on his chest. His voice came low, raw, trembling just enough to betray the control he had fought to maintain for hours.

“I choose you.”

Shane’s fingers—still weak, still trembling—reached instinctively and curled around his. Just a touch, just enough to tether himself to the presence that had been his anchor through suffocating fear and unbearable stillness.

And then the world shifted.

Not suddenly. Not cleanly. But undeniably.

Shane’s eyelids fluttered, fragile wings of consciousness breaking through the haze. A shallow inhale. A flicker of recognition. His chest lifted against the ventilator’s rhythm, uneven, yet alive. The faintest stir of breath, a tremor in his limbs, as though the body itself was testing whether it was allowed to come back.

Yuna went still, every muscle in her turning to attention.

The machines registered it too—numbers shifting in small increments, alarms staying quiet, as if even the monitors were holding their breath.

And at last—at long, agonising last—Shane opened his eyes.

Chapter End Notes

This chapter explores the fragile spaces between presence and absence, the quiet tension of waiting, and the small threads that tether us to one another in moments of uncertainty. Sometimes, life feels suspended—like walking on ice—where every heartbeat and breath carries weight, and hope exists in the smallest stirrings. Also, can we just take a moment to appreciate Episode 5 of Heated Rivalry? Hudson and Connor absolutely deserve an Emmy—so much emotion and intensity, it was impossible not to be inspired while writing this chapter.

Also please leave a comment - I love reading your thoughts.

Chapter 5: Thawing Ice

Chapter Summary

Shane awakens in the hospital, tethered to a body that feels both fragile and foreign. Pain and fear surge as he confronts his limitations, while the presence of someone he trusts becomes a lifeline amidst the sterile chaos. Every movement is measured, every breath monitored, and every moment spent relearning control is tempered by the quiet, grounding support of the person by his side. Amidst the uncertainty, a fragile hope begins to flicker, offering warmth in the cold stillness of recovery.

Chapter Notes

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

Consciousness did not arrive gently.

It tore its way in, sudden and merciless, as if someone had hooked a hand under Shane's ribs and hauled him upward through layers of dark he hadn't realised were stacked over him until they peeled away. He did not wake into softness; he woke into a body that had been rearranged, into sensation that arrived before thought, into a room that felt too bright and too sterile to be real.

Pain came first—not sharp, not blinding, not the clean kind he understood from the rink, but something deeper, denser, rooted at the base of his neck and spreading downward like weight bolted into bone. It was suffocating in its steadiness, a pressure that insisted on itself with every beat of his heart. His body felt wrong, not because of the pain alone, but because of the way everything seemed held in place by forces outside him—braces, wires, straps, the tight authority of medical restraint stronger than will.

He tried to move.

Nothing answered.

The absence of response hit like a second injury, disorienting and immediate. Panic followed hard on its heels, cold and fast, racing ahead of reason. His chest jolted as air forced its way through the tube lodged in his throat, lungs filling and emptying on a rhythm not his own. The sound of it was obscene up close—hiss and push, mechanical patience, a breath that was technically life and yet felt like invasion.

No. No—

His eyes flew open.

White ceiling. Blinding light. Blurred shapes moving in and out of focus. Sound came in fractured layers: the steady beep of a monitor, the hush of airflow, distant voices that became sharp only when they rose.

Then—abrupt, devastating—

Ilya.

So close their foreheads nearly touched. Breath warm against Shane's skin. Eyes wide and unguarded, fear leaking through every crack of restraint as if Ilya had been holding himself together on sheer discipline and it had finally slipped. One hand braced low at Shane's hip, not pressing, not pinning—grounding. The other hovered, halted by the lattice of rules and wires and the terrifying awareness that the wrong movement could do damage neither of them could take back.

Shane latched onto him like a drowning man finding air.

Relief crashed through his chest so violently it hurt, a surge of recognition that made his ribs ache and his eyes sting. He tried to speak. A broken, strangled noise tore from his throat instead, useless and raw. His hips jerked instinctively toward the anchor his body recognised —

Pain detonated down his spine.

It ripped through him bright and immediate, an electric flare that made his vision blur at the edges. His body convulsed against restraint he hadn't noticed until now, straps and brace holding him in place while every nerve screamed to move anyway. The monitor leapt into frantic protest.

Alarms screamed.

“Don't move him—”

“Spinal—hold his shoulders—”

“Stay still—”

Hands descended, firm and practiced, pressing him back down. Pressure locked his shoulders, his chest, his hips into place. The room narrowed to sensation: the burn at his throat, the vise at his neck, the spread of fire down his spine that made him feel as if he were being split and welded back together at once.

Ilya reacted on instinct.

“No—he has spinal injury,” he snapped, voice cutting through the chaos. “Do not let him move.”

“Sir, step back!”

“He is awake. He is afraid!”

“We need space!”

Shane’s eyes never left Ilya’s.

Don’t let them take you.

His fingers found Ilya’s hip again, weak and shaking but desperate, clutching fabric like it was the only solid thing left in the world. His pupils were blown wide, his breath stuttering against the imposed rhythm of the ventilator. Monitors spiked, answering his panic before anyone else could.

“We need him out. Now.”

Hands closed around Ilya’s arms, decisive and unyielding. He didn’t fight—not fully, not in a way that would risk being dragged farther away—but every line of him strained toward Shane, as if muscle memory and instinct were trying to overrule protocol.

“Shane,” Ilya said urgently, forcing his voice low and steady despite the tremor beneath it. “Look at me. Do not move. You hear me?”

Shane made another broken sound, chest heaving. His body tried to curl inward. It couldn’t. It could only tremble against restraint and brace, trapped in place while panic tore at him.

Ilya leaned forward despite them. “You are safe,” he said, voice rough with insistence. “I am here.”

Then they pulled him away.

The contact broke.

Shane’s grip slipped, fingers scraping uselessly against the mattress as Ilya was forced back. Shane’s eyes followed him until the door closed—too loud, too final—and the room seemed to lurch, as if the walls had shifted closer the moment Ilya disappeared.

Panic surged instantly.

Heart racing. Breath tearing shallow and frantic against the ventilator’s rhythm. Vision tunnelling. The monitor screamed its own alarm, translating his terror into numbers.

A cool burn slid into his IV.

The room softened.

Not comfort—suppression. A fog poured through him, dulling the edges of panic without removing it, slowing his body’s ability to fight even as his mind still clawed at the loss.

The next hours—minutes—shattered into fragments.

He remembers sensation more than sequence: a nurse’s hands pressing him down with gentle authority, straps being checked, the brace at his neck tightened a fraction, the ventilator’s tube

repositioned because the earlier angle made him cough and spasm. He remembers voices leaning closer, calm but firm, repeating words like a mantra meant to reach him through drugs and fear.

“Stay still... just stay still.”

He remembers the first tug at the nasal line—a sharp flash of discomfort that sent a spike along his spine, setting off a reflexive jerk his body couldn’t complete. Hands pinned him again, gentle and unyielding.

He remembers the tube at his throat being adjusted, then removed when his oxygen sats stabilised enough to tolerate it, the sensation so wrong it made him gag and choke at the same time, a strangled rasp ripping out of him as his lungs tried to remember how to draw breath without a machine doing it first. His throat burned like sandpaper. The air tasted thin and metallic.

Small tugs at the remaining lines brought fresh jolts—each one a reminder that he had been tethered, silenced, restrained for long enough that his body had grown used to being managed. Tape peeled. Adhesive pulled at skin. Wires shifted. A feeding tube was removed once he was stable enough, leaving him with the hollow ache of an empty stomach and a dry mouth he couldn’t properly soothe.

He tried to cry out again, to scream for Ilya, to demand the one presence that made his panic slow—

But the sedatives spread wider.

Vision smeared. Sound slowed, warped. Muscles slackened despite his will. His chest rose and fell in uneven bursts, and his fear became a distant scream behind glass.

Finally, Shane let go.

Eyes half-closed, body sinking into the mattress, the hum of machines and the measured cadence of nurses became his only tether. Alone, exposed, and fading, he drifted somewhere between terror and release, aware of how fragile he was and unable to do anything but surrender to the haze.

When awareness returned again, it came slower, less violent.

He did not try to move this time. The first lesson had been carved into him: movement meant pain, and pain meant panic, and panic made the machines scream.

Pain lingered—contained rather than consumed—wrapped tight and controlled by brace and restraint. Smaller lines burned faintly along his arms beneath careful tape. A pulse oximeter clipped his finger. ECG leads pulled gently at his skin with every breath. His chest rose and fell with help for a while, oxygen delivered through a softer line now, the rhythm steadier, less invasive.

He was awake.

Fragile. Aware. Tethered.

Yuna sat at his side so close the chair nearly touched the bed frame. Her eyes filled immediately when she realised his gaze was tracking, that he was truly here. Her hand hovered for a second—hesitant, as if she was afraid that touching him might startle him back into panic—before she let it settle gently over his.

“Oh, Shane,” she whispered. “You scared us.”

“M-Mum...” His voice was barely more than a rasp, dry and cracked. Pain shot through his throat with each syllable, as if his voice had to scrape its way out after weeks of silence.

Her fingers tightened around his. “I’m sorry,” she whispered, and her voice thickened as if the words had weight she’d been carrying for too long. “I’m sorry you thought you had to hide from us.”

Something in him broke open.

His chest heaved as tears spilled without warning, hot and fast. His throat burned with the effort of crying and speaking at once. Every breath felt too shallow. Every sob pulled at the brace at his neck, reminding him he was stitched together by other people’s hands.

“I... I didn’t want... to upset you,” he managed, words broken by shuddering breaths.

“You could never upset us,” Yuna said softly, brushing tears from his face with a touch so careful it was almost reverent. “We were just scared you felt you had to hide who you are. Shane... you don’t have to hide from us. Ever.”

His fingers twitched weakly around hers. “I... I didn’t know how... to tell you,” he whispered, each syllable scraping painfully. “I thought... I had to handle it alone.”

“Oh, my baby...” Yuna’s voice cracked. She held his hand more firmly, as if she could physically anchor him to life. “You never had to handle anything alone. We love you—all of you. Always have. Always will. Nothing you feel... nothing you hide... changes that.”

The relief that threaded through him was almost unbearable in its softness. He cried harder anyway, because relief and grief were never neat.

“I... I’m sorry,” he rasped again. “I didn’t mean to hide it... or hurt anyone.”

“You could never hurt us,” Yuna said, pressing a gentle hand to his cheek. “We just want you safe... happy... and free to be yourself. That’s all we’ve ever wanted.”

His gaze flicked to the door as if his body was searching for something his mind couldn’t fully articulate.

“I know,” Yuna said, following his eyes. “He’s here. They just needed to stabilise you.”

Relief tremored through him so hard it made his stomach twist.

A man in a white coat stepped forward—calm, measured, deliberately unthreatening. Another followed. Both stayed in his line of sight, moving carefully so they didn't spike his heart rate.

"I'm Dr. Kline," the first said. "Neurosurgery."

The word landed heavy.

"You sustained a cervical spinal injury," Dr. Kline continued evenly. "There was instability. We operated to decompress and stabilise your spine. Right now, movement is restricted to protect your spinal cord."

Shane swallowed around the dryness in his throat. The brace at his neck felt suddenly enormous.

"You're not paralysed," Dr. Kline added carefully, as if he understood the terror sitting behind Shane's eyes. "We did a full response check. Your reactions were positive. You may not remember it. We will go through it again to ensure nothing has changed. Rehabilitation will be slow, strict, and supervised."

Time. Monitoring. Braces. Restraints.

Shane stared at the door anyway, chest rising and falling with his assisted oxygen, body held together by straps and careful hands.

The door clicked open again, quieter this time.

Ilya stepped in.

Careful. Deliberate. Controlled so tightly it looked like a physical act. His eyes locked on Shane immediately, and Shane's fingers twitched instinctively against the sheets, searching for the presence that had anchored him even through panic and sedation.

"I am here," Ilya whispered, voice low, threading through the hum of machines.

Just hearing it made something in Shane's chest loosen. The monitor reflected it, the spike smoothing as his body chose Ilya's voice over the room's noise.

Dr. Kline watched the interaction with a measured expression. "We need to ensure stability first," he said. "Any sudden movement could compromise the fusion. Range of motion is restricted."

Ilya didn't argue. He simply hovered close enough that his warmth reached Shane without forcing contact, one hand resting near Shane's hip like a quiet promise he could keep without breaking rules.

Then, when Dr. Kline shifted his gaze back to the monitor, Ilya leaned slightly closer, lowering his voice. "Doctor... he asks... will he be able to play again? Skating? Competitions?"

Shane's pupils dilated. The question hit him like grief with teeth. He wanted to speak, to demand answers, to insist on control—

His body was still pinned by brace and wires and pain.

Dr. Kline's eyes softened. "We focus on recovery first. His cervical spine must consolidate. Neurological function is stable, but any return to athletic activity—especially at competitive level—requires full rehab and confirmation of strength, flexibility, and coordination. No shortcuts. Premature stress could reverse the surgery's success."

Ilya exhaled slowly, swallowing hard. He glanced at Shane with subtle attentiveness that felt too intimate to exist in this room. "He wants to play," he murmured, low enough that it felt like it belonged only to Shane. "It is important. He cannot imagine life without it."

Shane's hand twitched again, brushing weakly against Ilya's sleeve. The tether pulsed between them, quiet and stubborn.

"We'll begin assisted movement tomorrow," Dr. Kline continued. "Pain management is optimised. Reflexes and coordination will be monitored daily. You responded well in prior checks. We need to ensure the same now."

Ilya's thumb brushed lightly against the edge of Shane's brace—careful, not shifting anything. Shane's fingers clenched weakly around fabric and warmth, holding onto presence like it was the only part of his world that didn't feel foreign.

"You hear that?" Ilya murmured. "Step by step. You do not rush. But yes... you will skate again. And we... we will see."

The room softened around its own harshness. Machines hummed. The monitor beeped. Shane's pulse still raced with fear, but the thread of hope was there, fragile and undeniable.

"I stay," Ilya added quietly. "You do nothing but survive."

Morning came slow.

Light filtered through the blinds in pale bands. The monitors hummed, steady and familiar now. The oxygen line was gentler. The brace still held him like a collar of consequence. Yuna and David had left at some point. Ilya had not.

Dr. Kline entered with the morning team—calm, methodical, his coat crisp against the room's soft mechanical noise. Shane's chest tightened at the sight of him, the antiseptic smell mixing with faint metallic notes from tools and clips, making him acutely aware of every wire and strip of tape holding him together.

"Vitals stable," Dr. Kline said. "Pain management adjusted overnight. No complications."

His eyes scanned Shane's face, noting the way his pupils tracked movement, the tension at his jaw, the careful alertness in his gaze.

“Today we begin assisted movement,” Dr. Kline continued. “Very gentle. Closely monitored. Any sudden motion could compromise the fusion.”

Shane’s pulse jumped anyway. His body itched for freedom even as it was tethered in place. Under the fear, something else coiled—restlessness, a quiet instinctive need for grounding, the omega hum that sharpened when he felt vulnerable and exposed.

His eyes sought Ilya automatically.

Ilya was there, steady, almost impossibly still. One hand rested at Shane’s hip, pressure gentle but anchoring. That contact alone steadied the restless coil inside Shane’s stomach, easing it into something manageable.

Dr. Kline crouched slightly beside him. “We will support every movement. Pillows under the spine, straps to guide the shoulders. We’re not asking for strength. Only responsiveness, coordination, feedback.”

Pillows slid beneath Shane’s arms. Straps were fastened with practiced care, keeping his shoulders aligned, lifting his chest a fraction. Each adjustment sent a pulse of awareness through him—not sharp pain, not unbearable, but a bright reminder of everything his body had endured.

“You may feel strain,” Dr. Kline said. “Listen to your body. We stop if anything is unsafe.”

Ilya’s thumb traced slow, deliberate circles along Shane’s wrist. Shane’s fingers twitched in response, seeking more contact, craving the tether his body trusted. The omega hum inside him warmed, soothed by presence, turning restlessness into something that felt like coming home after being lost for too long.

“Okay, Shane,” Dr. Kline said. “First, a small tilt. We lift your upper body slightly. Tell us if anything hurts.”

The tilt was gentle, almost imperceptible, but Shane felt every fraction of his spine adjusting. His stomach tightened. His breath hitched.

“I can... feel it,” he rasped, voice fragile. “The tilt... it moves... but it doesn’t hurt.”

Relief flashed through him like light through fog.

Ilya leaned closer, voice low. “Good. You do exactly what you should. Nothing more.”

They extended his legs slightly to assess response. A tremor ran through Shane’s spine—small but immediate. He braced for pain that didn’t arrive. Instead, warmth spread through him: nerves waking, fear receding by degrees, the tether to Ilya radiating steady reassurance.

Dr. Kline nodded, satisfied. “Very good. We’ll increase gradually, within limits.”

Then, carefully, he added the words Shane had been waiting for even if he was terrified to hear them. “Full athletic activity won’t resume for months. First basic mobility. Then

strength, balance, coordination. There are no shortcuts. But yes—you will skate again. You will play. The timeline is strict, but achievable.”

The room felt heavy with possibility.

When the team left, the door clicked shut. The machines kept breathing for him. Ilya remained close, the quiet steadiness of him more convincing than any medical reassurance.

Then the thought hit Shane, sharp and cruel: the season.

The games he would miss. The training. The ice that had always been his place of certainty.

“I can’t play against you next year,” he whispered, voice trembling, small and devastated.

Ilya’s hand settled over Shane’s, thumb brushing slow circles across his wrist. “We will train together,” he said, warm and steady. “Off-season, rehab, ice when they allow. I push you. You complain.”

Shane swallowed around the ache.

Ilya’s lips curved faintly, something almost amused and almost broken. “It’ll be boring to play against anyone else. I’ll have to play against Scott Hunter at least. You won’t have to see that old man.”

Shane’s lips twitched faintly, a ghost of humour threading through grief.

Then Shane’s voice turned raw, stripped of the bravado he didn’t have the energy to wear. “I... I could hear you. No matter how hard I tried... I couldn’t open my eyes. That pain... I could handle. But hearing you... hearing Mum, Dad... and not being able to answer... it tore me apart.”

Ilya’s fingers threaded through his, grounding him. “I never left,” he said, unwavering. “I’m here.”

And something inside Shane—restless, raw, instinctive—flared in response.

Omega need, not tidy, not polite. A pull for contact and reassurance. A craving for a steady presence that made his nervous system stop screaming at the world. He felt it ripple through him like liquid heat, coiling low and insistent, making his breathing speed up even as his body remained pinned by brace and exhaustion.

His hands twitched, fingers brushing against Ilya almost desperately, wanting the smallest proof.

Ilya’s gaze flickered down to Shane’s mouth. His nose flared, pupils widening. Want and restraint crossed his face in a blink—heat behind control, the kind of discipline that had clearly cost him all night.

Then Ilya kissed him.

Soft at first, testing, careful not to jolt the brace, patient as if he were asking permission not with words but with the pace of his mouth. Then it deepened, urgent in a way that still held back, as if even this relief had to be measured against the fragility of Shane's body. Shane's lips parted instinctively; a low, trembling sound escaped him—relief and longing tangled together.

Ilya responded immediately, the weight of him close but controlled, hands sliding from Shane's shoulders down his arms with careful pressure, grounding without forcing movement. A rough curse slipped out in English, sharp with emotion. His mouth lingered like it was drinking something he'd been denied for too long, and Shane felt it as water after thirst.

The warmth of it softened the sharp edge of the panic that had lived in him for weeks. Not erased. Not healed. But soothed, dulled into something survivable. The tether between them tightened, quiet and unbreakable.

When the kiss finally eased, it didn't vanish so much as settle—heat lingering, promise lingering, the truth of it resting between them like something they'd finally stopped pretending they didn't want.

Shane pressed his forehead lightly against Ilya's, careful, breath shaky. "I missed... I missed seeing you. I missed your face."

Ilya's thumb traced gentle patterns over Shane's wrist. "I am here," he murmured. "Always."

Shane's eyes fluttered closed briefly, exhausted and overwhelmed and still held upright by machines and brace and Ilya's presence.

"I choose you," Ilya said quietly, voice raw enough to betray how hard he'd fought to keep it controlled.

Shane's fingers curled weakly around his.

Just a touch. Just enough.

Enough to hold.

Chapter End Notes

I stayed up way too late finishing this one because, honestly... I'm just as obsessed with Shane and Ilya as you are. Don't judge me. 😊 Chapter's done, but my sleep schedule? Not so much. I'll be posting the next chapter tomorrow, so go ahead and get your kudos and comments ready—let's see if you can make my tired little writer heart explode in the morning. Nighty night... or, you know, morning, depending on when you read this!



Also—let's be friends on Twitter! I'm @justanotheraeri ❄️ Come fangirl/fanboy with me and talk all things Shane & Ilya 🍷.

Last thing I write in sections and then try to blend everything if it doesn't make sense, sorry in advance—I'm too tired to edit. 😊

Chapter 6: Thin Ice

Chapter Summary

Shane navigates the challenges of recovery while Ilya remains close, protective, and unrelentingly present. The chapter explores their evolving bond, the tension between personal choice and external pressures, and the way trust, care, and quiet defiance shape their connection. Emotional stakes run high as the pair confront vulnerability, support, and the complexities of reclaiming control over one's life.

Chapter Notes

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

The television had become part of the room in the way an IV pole became part of the room—an object no one thought to remove because it had always been there, because it served a purpose, because silence felt riskier than noise.

It wasn't background sound. It was weight.

Someone must have left it on after rounds, the volume turned down with the careful, almost apologetic touch people used when they were trying to soften the sharpness of the world. The kind of restraint that implied mercy.

It didn't.

The light from the screen flickered across the sterile surfaces—white walls, pale sheets, the polished plastic of monitors—casting moving shadows that made everything feel less stable than it already was. The commentator's voice came through low, smooth, professionally warm, and Shane felt it anyway, the way you could feel a bass note in your ribs even if you weren't listening for it.

"...with the Cup secured last night," the man said, measured and bright, "Scott Hunter closes out the season on a historic high."

Footage rolled. Confetti falling like static, like snow that didn't melt. The Cup lifted overhead, heavy and gleaming, hands gripping it like proof. Bodies pressed together in a tide of celebration, faces flushed, mouths open in victorious shouts.

Shane watched without blinking.

Two days ago, he'd still been drifting through sedation and pain like they were weather—time folding, sensation arriving in fragments, the edges of everything blurred. Now the world was sharp again, and that sharpness was its own kind of cruelty. Every image landed fully

formed and stayed lodged there. His mind didn't slide away from impact anymore. It absorbed it.

"And in a moment that's ignited league-wide discussion," the commentator continued, and the tone shifted with the practiced click of a man stepping onto a different story, "Hunter was caught on camera kissing another man during post-game celebrations."

The clip replayed.

Not hidden. Not framed as scandal. Not accompanied by that small, ugly pause people left when they wanted to let discomfort do the work.

It was simply there: a man's hand at the back of another man's neck, the press of mouths, the loose, bright joy of it—public and unfiltered and unafraid.

Shane's body reacted before he could decide how he felt.

His chest constricted hard enough that the breath in his throat caught on itself. Heat rose fast, sharp, unpleasantly alive, twisting low in his stomach as if his nerves had been startled awake. His pulse jumped, and he felt the rhythm of it against the brace, against the straps, against the indignity of being held together by equipment and careful rules. His eyes widened without meaning to, and the monitors noticed immediately, numbers ticking upward like the room itself had become alarmed on his behalf.

Scott Hunter had kissed another man. On camera. In front of the world. Like it was nothing. Like the world did not get a vote.

It shouldn't hurt. Shane shouldn't care. He didn't even like Scott Hunter most days. He had rolled his eyes at the man's dramatics for years.

But something in him flinched anyway. Not at the kiss, not at the fact of it, but at the ease. At the shamelessness. At the simple, reckless permission.

A flash of jealousy—hot, embarrassed, immediate—rose through him and settled behind his ribs. Desire tangled with it in a way that felt unfair, because desire was supposed to be controllable, regulated, scheduled like everything else had always been. Longing followed, quieter but heavier, the ache of wanting something you didn't even know you'd been denying yourself until you saw someone else take it.

"Focus," he muttered, so low it barely counted as sound. The word was meant to anchor him, to give his thoughts something solid to hold.

But the clip replayed from another angle, slowed for emphasis, the commentator threading it neatly into narrative. The wet press of lips. The hand, sure and visible. The roaring crowd behind them that didn't matter.

Something in Shane's chest tightened again, and the heat that coiled in him had nothing to do with injury.

Then the shift came, because the world never let him stay in one feeling for long.

“Attention has also turned to Hollander,” the commentator said, voice sharpening with that faint thrill of relevance. “The captain suffered a cervical injury at the end of March and will miss the remainder of the season.”

Hollander.

Not Shane. Not when they wanted distance, when they wanted him turned into an object instead of a person. Hollander as headline. Hollander as cautionary tale. Hollander as body.

“Medical sources have allegedly confirmed that Hollander is an omega,” the voice added carefully, as if carefulness made it less vile, “which, if verified, would place his recovery under enhanced league protocols.”

Shane’s chest tightened so suddenly it felt like something had pressed a palm into his sternum.

Omega.

Spoken like fact. Hedged like rumour. Offered up in that ugly middle space where people pretended not to be doing harm while doing it anyway.

He heard his own voice before he fully realised he was speaking. “They’re calling it a public claim.” His throat was still raw some mornings; the words came out quiet, precise, edged. “Not confirmation. Just... enough.”

Enough to poison the air around his name. Enough to shift the way staff looked at him and then corrected their faces. Enough to give strangers permission to speculate about his body as if it belonged to the public.

Only a handful of people had ever known. His parents, because they had to. Coaches, because paperwork demanded it. Doctors whose signatures filled forms thick enough to suffocate. That was it. Years of discipline. Of careful scheduling. Of patches that regulated more than just hormones—regulating mood, heat cycles, the risk of being read the wrong way at the wrong time.

Control had been survival.

And Ilya.

Ilya, who had known and never treated it like a breakable thing. Who had never used it to make Shane smaller. Who hadn’t managed him or corrected him or spoken to him like he needed handling. Who had looked at him like he was dangerous and beautiful and whole, and made Shane feel, for the first time, like the word omega didn’t have to come with an apology attached.

“Under league protection statutes,” the commentator went on, “any omega player returning from traumatic injury is subject to additional medical oversight to ensure safety and fairness.”

Safety. Fairness.

Graphics bloomed across the screen—flowcharts and risk assessments and projected timelines, a body reduced to data points and probability. A life turned into a compliance document.

Shane's fingers curled weakly into the sheets, the motion small and stubborn, as if even that tiny act of tension could be a form of refusal.

"They'll watch everything," he said quietly, more to the air than to anyone. "Sleep cycles. Stress responses. How long it takes me to settle. What my heart does when I'm anxious. Who I calm for. Who I don't."

Ilya stood beside the bed with his arms folded, jaw set hard enough that Shane could feel the anger radiating off him. The posture was rigid, controlled, a familiar restraint that only meant one thing: he was trying not to explode.

Then he reached out anyway, the movement deliberate and almost gentle, brushing Shane's hair back from his damp forehead. His thumb lingered against the skin for half a second too long, intimate in a way the room did not deserve.

"They're wrong," Ilya said, voice flat with certainty.

"They won't care," Shane replied. He could hear the bitterness he was trying not to put there. "They'll see risk. Liability. They'll see a body that might not behave predictably and decide that makes it everyone's problem."

The screen flicked back to Scott Hunter again—Cup raised, grin wide, the kiss replayed from a different angle as if the network knew exactly what it was doing. Shane's pulse raced, sharp and hot, each beat resonating through his ribs. His mouth went dry. His throat tightened around a tremor of sound.

"I can't... believe he's just... like that," Shane whispered, and he hated that it sounded like awe.

Ilya's hand stayed threaded in Shane's hair, fingers gentle but grounding. "For fuck's sake," he muttered, low and rough, an anchor thrown into Shane's spiralling thoughts. "He always did have to be dramatic."

A weak smile tugged at Shane's mouth before he could stop it, so small it barely counted as expression. Ilya leaned down, pressed a careful kiss to Shane's temple—soft heat against skin, the kind of contact that made Shane's instincts loosen their grip on his chest.

"You see that?" Ilya said, still watching the screen with disgust. "He wins one Cup and suddenly the world forgets he's unbearable."

Shane let out a breath that almost passed for a laugh, more exhale than humour. "You're jealous."

"Absolutely not," Ilya said instantly, then paused as if truth had caught him by the collar. "Fine. A little."

“You’ll lift it this year,” Shane said, because he needed to say something that sounded like future.

Ilya didn’t hesitate. “Obviously.”

“You’re an asshole.”

“And yet,” Ilya replied lightly, mouth curving, “you’re stuck watching me do it from your bed.”

“I hate you.”

“You adore me.”

Shane didn’t argue. His chest hurt too much for performance. His eyes stayed on the screen, and then they slid away because he couldn’t stand the way his own longing kept responding to other people’s freedom.

“They’ll keep me off the ice,” he said, quieter now, the words slipping out like confession. “Even if I’m ready.”

“They can try,” Ilya said. “You’ve never been good at doing what you’re told.”

“That’s rich coming from you.”

Ilya leaned closer, lowering his voice until it became private. “We’ll train. Quietly. Properly. When they let you skate, you’ll already be ahead.”

Shane swallowed hard. The thought was both comfort and grief. “I won’t play against you next season.”

Ilya shrugged like it didn’t matter, like that shrug wasn’t holding back a larger fear. “Temporary tragedy.”

“You like playing against me.”

“I like beating you,” Ilya corrected. “Different thing.”

Shane closed his eyes for a moment. The room felt too small. Too full of things he couldn’t fix with discipline or effort.

The commentator didn’t stop, because the commentator never stopped.

“In certain cases,” the voice said calmly, “the league permits an additional safeguard for omega athletes returning to contact sport.”

Shane’s breath hitched. The monitors ticked upward again, a quiet betrayal.

“A publicly recognised sponsor,” the commentator continued, “or a formally registered compatible alpha willing to attest to ongoing stability and consent during recovery.”

Ilya went very still.

Not the casual stillness he carried on the ice. This was the kind that meant something inside him had drawn a line, sharp and immediate.

“They mean a claim,” Shane said quietly. The word felt old, heavy, like something that belonged to another century and had never quite died.

“They’ll call it voluntary,” Shane went on, forcing precision into his voice as if precision could keep the panic from spreading. “They’ll say it’s support. They’ll say it reassures the league. They’ll frame it as good publicity. As care.”

Bullet points appeared on screen, neat and clean, like corporate compassion.

Public acknowledgment.

Behavioural accountability.

Mutual consent documentation.

“They’ll say it gives me permission to play,” Shane whispered, and his voice wavered despite his effort. “Like I’m borrowing my own body.”

Ilya’s jaw tightened hard.

“They can’t force that,” he said, and the fury under the words was unmistakable.

“They don’t have to,” Shane replied. “They’ll just make everything else impossible. They’ll slow-walk clearance. They’ll bury me in oversight. They’ll make rehab feel like probation.”

The commentator added, almost kindly, “Historically, omega players who meet sponsorship criteria experience smoother clearance processes and reduced scrutiny.”

Smoother. Reduced.

“They want someone visible,” Shane said, eyes fixed on the screen even as he stopped seeing it. “Someone they trust. Someone who makes them feel like they’re not taking a risk.”

“They want ownership,” Ilya said.

“They want control,” Shane corrected, the bitterness finally slipping through. “Ownership would at least be honest.”

Silence pressed in, thick and suffocating. Even the machines sounded louder when neither of them spoke. The television kept talking, and that was its own kind of violation—words filling space where choice should live.

“I don’t want that,” Shane said finally. His voice cracked, then steadied with effort. “I don’t want someone standing beside me so they’ll let me skate.”

His breath stuttered, and he felt his body try to tilt toward panic, old instinct reaching for escape.

“I just want to choose you,” he said softly, and the softness was the most dangerous part. “Not be forced to.”

Ilya’s hand moved without hesitation. Warm, grounding, fingers curling around Shane’s like a promise they weren’t allowed to make out loud. He leaned down and pressed a kiss to Shane’s lips—small, tentative, almost pleading. It lasted only long enough to anchor Shane in the moment, but Shane felt the relief of it like oxygen. His stomach coiled, then eased; his instincts settled against the tether of Ilya’s presence as if they had been waiting for permission to stop fighting.

“They don’t get that part,” Ilya said, voice low, rough.

Shane shook his head slightly. “They don’t want to.”

The television moved on, satisfied it had planted the seed. Legal experts. Former players. calm faces nodding as if this were reasonable, as if asking for proof of stability was not a leash dressed up as care.

Shane felt exposed in a way no camera had ever managed before. Not because the world knew, but because it believed it was entitled to ask.

“They’ll frame it as protection,” Shane said. “But it’s a leash.”

Ilya leaned closer, voice rough now, anger sharpened into something protective. “You don’t belong to anyone.”

Shane’s eyes burned. “They’ll say I do.”

For a moment, neither of them spoke. The memory of that kiss lingered, the way Shane had softened instantly into Ilya’s presence, the way the small tether of touch had calmed weeks of unrest.

“They don’t need to know everything,” Ilya said finally, softer, measured again. “Not yet.”

Shane breathed slowly, deliberately, anchoring himself to the weight of Ilya’s presence, to the familiar pull that made his body stop trying to run.

“They don’t get to decide who I am,” Shane said, voice steadier now, a line drawn.

“No,” Ilya agreed. “They don’t.”

Even as the season slipped away. Even as his name was spoken without his voice attached to it. Shane held on to the only things that still felt like his: breath, choice, the stubbornness that had always kept him upright.

Step by step.

He would take himself back.

And Ilya would be there when he did.

Shane heard them before he saw them—David’s voice low and steady, saying something practical and grounding; Yuna’s sharper tone cutting through like glass, brittle with exhaustion and fury. The sound of them did something to his chest that surprised him: it steadied. It reminded him that he still belonged to someone who would fight for him without needing permission.

Ilya was already there, perched half on the arm of the chair beside Shane’s bed, jacket abandoned over the back, sleeves shoved up like he’d forgotten he was supposed to leave at all. One foot hooked around the chair leg, a casual possession he wasn’t even trying to hide.

Yuna stopped short in the doorway.

Her eyes went straight to Shane—upright, brace secured, legs stretched out instead of curled defensively toward his chest. The sight hit her harder than she expected. Whatever careful composure she’d been carrying fractured instantly.

“Oh,” she breathed.

The word came out thin, almost reverent. Then she inhaled, squared her shoulders, and forced it into something firmer, because that was how Yuna survived fear. “Okay. Good. You’re vertical. I like vertical.”

David smiled beside her, restrained but unmistakably real, relief softening the edges of his face even as he kept the tone light. “You look like hell,” he said fondly. “Which is an improvement.”

Shane huffed, the sound small but genuine. “You should’ve seen me last week.”

“I did,” Yuna replied dryly, already moving closer, eyes cataloguing the brace, the monitors, the faint tremor in his hands. “I brought coffee and unresolved rage.”

She passed the cup to Ilya without asking. Not a grand gesture, not an announcement, just a quiet acknowledgement of the fact that he hadn’t moved and she’d noticed. Ilya took it automatically, fingers closing around the warmth, and muttered, “Bless you,” under his breath like it was a prayer and a joke all at once.

For a moment, the room felt almost normal.

They didn’t talk about the news first. They talked around the edges of it, the way people did when naming the thing felt like inviting it closer.

Rehab schedules came up instead—how Shane hated the new physio because she counted out loud, each number landing like a challenge he didn’t have the energy to meet; how the hospital food was still awful, somehow worse now that he could taste properly again; how humiliating it was to be congratulated for standing still.

David mentioned, almost casually, that a Montreal training facility had quietly adjusted projected timelines. Not cancelled. Adjusted. The word sat between them like a fragile

promise, the closest thing to hope he trusted right now.

Yuna filled in gaps with clipped precision—appointments confirmed, calls returned, names written down and crossed out. She spoke like someone building scaffolding around a structure that wasn't finished yet, determined to keep it upright until it could hold its own weight.

For a while, it worked. The room stayed contained.

Then Farah's voice cut in through the speakerphone, smooth and professional, and the air changed. The way it always did when someone brought the outside world into a hospital room.

"They're floating trial balloons," she said calmly. "Nothing official yet. But they're using language that implies inevitability."

Yuna's mouth tightened. She pinched the bridge of her nose, eyes closing briefly. "Of course they are."

"They've leaked just enough to test public reaction," Farah continued. "Omega protocols. Safety narratives. Framed as concern, not restriction. It's deliberate."

Ilya went still again—shoulders locking, grip tightening around the paper cup. Shane felt it immediately, like pressure dropping in the room.

"What exactly are they implying?" Shane asked, voice steady despite the tension crawling under his skin.

There was a pause on the line. Just a fraction too long.

"That your return would be... smoother," Farah said carefully, choosing every word, "with visible reassurance."

Shane closed his eyes, breath leaving him slowly.

"A sponsor," David said quietly, not looking at anyone.

"A leash," Yuna snapped, the word sharp enough to cut.

Ilya's jaw tightened, anger flashing hot and immediate. "They can fuck off."

"That's not legally actionable," Farah replied mildly. "But it is emotionally valid."

No one laughed. The call ended not long after, the line going dead with a soft click that felt louder than it should have.

A few days later, Hayden arrived like a storm, bringing chaos the way some people brought oxygen—loud, unavoidable, necessary. His eyes flicked over the room, assessing, scanning,

already looking for a problem to punch.

He froze at the sight of Shane—brace in place, legs stretched instead of curled, every careful movement radiating deliberate fragility.

“Fuck,” Hayden muttered, and somehow the swear sounded like reverence and rage at once. “They let you walk yet?”

“Define walk,” Shane said, measured.

Hayden dropped into the chair beside him, the scrape of wood on tile like a gunshot. “Fuck this place,” he growled, glaring at the walls as if they personally had betrayed him.

“You hate all places,” Ilya said from the arm of Shane’s chair, voice flat, sharp. “Some of them deserve hate more than you. Honestly, Pike... you are still terrible at hockey. I do not know why Jacky puts up with you. She must like chaos, or she is as masochistic as you are.”

Hayden’s eyes flicked toward him, assessing. “Rosanov.”

“I said your name,” Ilya shot back smoothly. “Do not like it? Tough. You should consider being grateful I do not call you ‘Jacky’s amateur hour.’”

Shane leaned back, hiding a small smile. The banter hit his ribs like something warm. Not because it was funny, exactly, but because it was familiar—the shape of normal in a room that tried to steal normal out of everything.

Hayden exhaled sharply, leaning back. “They are idiots,” he said bluntly, and there was no humour in it now. “All of them. You know that, right?”

Shane nodded once.

“They will dress it up as protection,” Hayden continued, voice low, serious. “But they’re scared. An omega who won’t behave the way they want him to scares them more than any dirty hit ever did.”

Ilya let out a sharp, frustrated laugh. “They do not get to decide that.”

Hayden’s mouth twitched. “You and I agree on something. Should I be terrified?”

“You should be terrified always,” Ilya replied without missing a beat. “It is only sensible.”

Hayden rolled his eyes, but his gaze drifted to Shane—softening, just briefly—before the mask snapped back into place.

The room held its fragile balance: anger, humour, fear, determination, all of it threaded together around one fact.

Shane was alive.

And they were already trying to decide what his life would be allowed to look like.

The days that followed began to blur into a rhythm—rehab in the mornings, exhaustion in the afternoons, visits in staggered intervals, news leaks arriving like smoke under a door no matter how tightly Yuna tried to seal it.

Ilya was there more often than not, hovering at the edges of sessions, muttering curses under his breath when Shane's balance faltered or his leg trembled in the harness. Sometimes the words were sharp. Sometimes they were low and affectionate in a way that made Shane's chest tighten.

"Slow," Ilya snapped one afternoon when Shane tried to push past the limit the physio had set. His hand hovered uselessly, because he couldn't catch Shane without risking him.

"Christ, Hollander. You trying to give me heart attack?"

Shane's mouth twitched. "You are dramatic."

"You were dead quiet for two months," Ilya shot back, lips pressing into a thin line. "I get to be dramatic now."

Hayden snorted from the side, shaking his head. "You two are insane."

"Better than you," Ilya said immediately. "You are still terrible at hockey. I do not know why Jacky keeps you on ice. Maybe she likes slapstick."

Hayden muttered something rude, but Shane caught the faint lift of amusement anyway.

Yuna and David kept pace with the outside world so Shane didn't have to—league updates, quiet calls, what Farah could confirm and what she couldn't. Hayden filtered the locker-room noise, the team's fear disguised as jokes, the rumours that spread faster than truth ever did. And Ilya stayed close enough that Shane's instincts—his omega instincts, the ones he'd spent his whole life pretending didn't matter—finally eased when he slept.

Nothing was solved. The league still hovered like a threat. The screen still existed. The word sponsor still sat in the corners of conversations like a trap waiting to spring.

But something was held.

The tether between them—Shane, fragile but alive; Ilya, protective and infuriating and unrelenting; Yuna and David, building scaffolding out of grit and love; Hayden, loud as a shield—was enough to keep the room from collapsing.

For now, it was enough.

Hey everyone! This chapter really focuses on Shane and Ilya—how they lean on each other, push each other, and navigate all the chaos around them. There's a lot of snark, a lot of tension, but also some quiet, tender moments that I hope hit you right in the feels.

What part of their dynamic did you enjoy the most—are you here for the banter, the quiet moments, or the sheer stubbornness of these two?

Chapter 7: Breaking Ice, Breaking Free

Chapter Summary

Shane returns to the ice for the first time since his accident, confronting fear and reclaiming control. With Ilya as his steady anchor, they navigate trust, tethering, and the quiet triumph of being alive and together.

Chapter Notes

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

— *One Year Since the Accident* —

Shane stepped onto the ice, tentative at first, every muscle alert, every nerve firing with the strange mix of fear and anticipation. The blades cut into the frozen surface with a soft hiss, and the arena smelled sharp, clean, a scent that carried memories and longing.

It had been months since he had awake but the two months of silence still haunted him. The feeling of being trapped in a body that had refused to obey him remained. The memory of that moment—the collision, the pain, the helplessness—surfaced unbidden. He had felt himself lifted, hurled across the ice, the impact shattering the rhythm of his life. And then the dark, suffocating coma, the days he had lain awake and unable to move, unable to answer, unable to reach out.

Now, every movement was a negotiation. Every step was measured. Every glide was a small victory. His chest rose and fell with effort, but he breathed, really breathed, for the first time in weeks, tasting the sharp, clean air of the arena.

He still remembers the aftermath of the first time he skated again. The locker room was quieter than Shane had expected or remembered. It had always been rowdy and loud in his memories.

It wasn't empty — just subdued. The hum of the lights overhead, the distant echo of skates somewhere down the hall, the soft thud of a locker door closing. It smelled faintly of ice and disinfectant and something familiar enough to make his chest ache.

Shane sat on the bench, unlacing his skates slowly, deliberately. His hands still trembled a little — not from pain, not even fear anymore, but from the aftermath of it. From having been back on the ice. From having survived it.

Ilya stood a few feet away, tugging his shoes on, movements easy, unhurried. He kept glancing over, not hovering, not crowding — just present. Steady.

“You did good,” Ilya said finally, voice low. Not loud enough to carry. Not meant for anyone else.

Shane huffed softly. “I didn’t fall.”

“That is not the same thing,” Ilya replied, faint amusement threading through it. “You skated. You trusted your body again.”

Shane’s fingers paused on the laces. He stared down at his hands, at the faint scars along his knuckles, at the way his legs still felt unreal beneath him.

“I thought,” he said quietly, “that the first time back would feel... worse.”

Ilya leaned back against the locker, arms folding loosely. “And?”

“It hurt,” Shane admitted. “But not the way I expected.”

Ilya nodded once. Like he understood exactly what that meant.

Shane slid his foot out of the skate and into his shoe. Normal. Solid. Grounded. The simple act made something loosen in his chest.

For a moment, neither of them spoke.

Then Shane did something small and reckless and very like himself.

He leaned closer, just enough that only Ilya could hear him, and whispered, almost smiling—

“1410.”

Ilya froze.

Not dramatically. Just... still.

The number hung between them, quiet and loaded and impossibly specific.

Shane swallowed. “You remember.”

Ilya exhaled slowly through his nose. “Of course I remember.”

The hotel room.

The wrong city.

The too-soft sheets.

Shane standing by the window like he might bolt.

Ilya pretending not to notice how scared he was.

“You were shaking,” Ilya said, voice rougher now. “You tried to play it off.”

Shane smiled faintly. “I was terrified.”

“I know.”

“You didn’t push.”

“I wanted to,” Ilya said honestly. Then softer, “But I didn’t.”

Shane’s throat tightened. He tied his shoe and sat back, shoulders brushing Ilya’s knee. The contact was accidental. Neither of them moved away.

“That was the first time,” Shane said, barely above a breath, “that I thought... maybe I didn’t have to be alone in this.”

Ilya’s hand rested on the bench beside him. Not touching. Waiting.

“You were brave,” Ilya said.

Shane shook his head. “No. I was scared.”

Ilya finally looked down at him. “Those are not opposites.”

Silence settled again — heavier, warmer this time.

Shane stood, testing his weight once more. Solid. Real. Here.

“I’m glad,” he said, voice steadier now, “that it was you.”

Ilya’s mouth curved — not cocky, not teasing. Just sure.

“So am I.”

They left the locker room together, shoulders nearly touching, the echo of skates fading behind them.

And the number stayed where it belonged — not in the past, not as something broken or fragile.

Just a quiet proof that some things didn’t shatter at all.

Now, Ilya stood just off the boards, hands in his pockets, eyes fixed on him. Shane felt the pull, the tether that had been present even in the ICU, even in the long nights of pain and rehabilitation. He felt Ilya’s presence like gravity, grounding him, steadying him, reminding him that he was not alone.

Shane attempted a turn, wobbling slightly, muscles trembling. His mind flashed to the hit again—the pain, the helplessness, the fear—and he flinched. But Ilya’s voice cut through the echo of memory, low, teasing, and steady.

“You’re shaking,” Ilya said softly, a smirk tugging at his lips. “Don’t let it scare you. You’ve got this.”

Shane swallowed around the lump in his throat, his pulse racing. He wanted to say something, to respond, but the words lodged somewhere between fear and gratitude. Instead, he leaned slightly into the tether, letting the quiet presence of Ilya steady him.

He pushed forward again, skating slowly, deliberately, each movement a reminder that he could reclaim his body, reclaim his life, reclaim the rhythm that had been taken from him. And with every glide, every careful turn, the tension coiled inside him loosened, replaced by warmth, by hope, by the memory of what it meant to be on the ice.

Shane came to a stop near the boards, chest heaving, legs trembling from exertion and the lingering adrenaline. The ice beneath his skates was cold, biting through his socks, but his skin felt hot, electric with awareness. He could feel Ilya close, every glance, every movement setting his pulse racing.

Ilya stepped closer, the distance shrinking until Shane could feel the warmth radiating from him even through layers of gear. His hands hovered, just out of reach at first, before sliding to Shane's waist, firm and grounding.

"You did it," Ilya breathed, voice low, rough, teasing but impossible to ignore. He stepped closer, letting the heat of his body press into Shane's without words. Shane could feel it in his chest, a coil of heat and instinct that had been dormant for months, waiting to be released.

Shane's hands twitched, almost unconsciously, reaching for Ilya, needing the anchor that had kept him steady through weeks of frustration and fear. Ilya noticed immediately. His hands moved, one settling firmly on Shane's waist, pressing him flush, the other brushing lightly along his side, grounding him, tethering him to something solid, undeniable.

"Careful," Ilya murmured, low and teasing, "we have to wait until you're cleared for strenuous activities."

Shane's stomach coiled at the words, heat flaring, chest rising faster, pulse hammering. His omega instincts, long restrained under fear and injury, surged forward with a hunger that bypassed thought entirely. His body wanted, needed, demanded Ilya's closeness, warmth, claim.

Then, deliberately, Ilya kissed him.

Soft at first, testing, coaxing, letting Shane respond. Shane's lips parted instinctively, a low, ragged moan slipping from him as weeks of restraint, frustration, and pain poured out. His hands threaded into Ilya's hair, tugging him closer, seeking contact, needing claim.

Ilya's hands roamed with a possessive ease. One slid along Shane's spine, pressing him flush against his chest, the other tracing along his ribs, brushing over tense muscles alive with emotion and memory. The kiss deepened, urgent, tongues brushing in a slow, teasing rhythm that left both of them shivering. Shane gasped, letting the fire coil inside him, raw and overwhelming, moaning again as the tether solidified, an anchor of flesh, heat, and trust.

A shiver ran through Shane, chest tightening, pulse hammering, his omega instincts finally settling, soothed by Ilya's possessive hands and the soft brush of lips and teeth along his jaw.

“Shh...” Ilya whispered against his ear, teeth grazing his earlobe, voice low, teasing, and fierce. “I’ve got you. Only you.”

Shane’s hands roamed freely, along Ilya’s shoulders, tracing down his arms, gripping, holding, searching. Every inch of contact, every brush, every sigh was a tether, a promise. The fire of longing softened into warmth, a thread of trust, but the coiled ache lingered, mingled with heat and desire.

The kiss lingered long, deep, consuming, until both of them trembled slightly, foreheads pressed together, breaths mingling, hearts racing in tandem. Shane’s pulse settled, the fire within him melting into a steady warmth, soothed by presence, possession, and the tether that defined them.

Ilya’s thumb brushed over Shane’s wrist lightly, possessive yet gentle. “Mine,” he murmured, low and fierce. “Always.”

Shane let himself relax, letting the tether anchor him, letting go of the fear, of the helplessness that had gnawed at him for weeks. For the first time since the accident, he felt safe, claimed, and alive.

He pressed his forehead to Ilya’s, voice soft and trembling, “I missed... I missed this.”

Ilya’s hands tightened slightly around his waist, thumbs brushing over his ribs, grounding, possessive, and tender all at once. “And now you have it.”

Shane’s mind flashed to the accident—the hit, the pain, the long weeks of being trapped, unable to move, unable to answer, unable to reach out. The memory brought a sharp pang to his chest, but the tether, the warmth of Ilya, the steady presence beside him, softened it.

The ice beneath them was silent save for the scrape of skates and the soft hum of the arena. The world narrowed to just the heat, the claim, the tether, and the soft, steadying pulse of being exactly where he belonged.

Shane could feel every inch of Ilya’s body, every brush of fingers and hand along his waist, and he trembled in response, omega instincts alive and soothed at the same time. The ache of helplessness coiled into heat, settling like water in a desert, quenched only by the careful possession, the quiet laughter, the whispered teasing, and the undeniable claim.

They lingered together on the ice, foreheads pressed, breath mingling, heat flowing, tether unbroken, hearts echoing in sync. The world outside—the accident, the doctors, the months of rehabilitation, the press—faded to nothing.

Finally, Ilya whispered again, teasing, possessive, a low growl underlined with laughter, “Next time, you try a lap without me holding you. We’ll see who crashes first.”

Shane let out a shaky laugh, the first real sound he had made in months on the ice, and tightened his hands in Ilya’s hair and along his shoulders. For the first time since the accident, since the hit that had almost taken everything, he felt like himself—claimed, tethered, alive, and unafraid.

The conference room hummed with anticipation, the air heavy with flashbulbs and murmurs. Rows of reporters jostled for position, pens ready, recorders blinking, waiting for Rozanov to appear. Ilya stepped in first, his Boston jersey pressed under the sharp cut of a blazer, eyes scanning the room with that trademark mix of cool amusement and latent intensity. He'd evaded questions about Hollander all season, and today the room crackled with the collective curiosity of every journalist who had been chasing whispers, leaks, and rumors.

Farah stood nearby, calm and precise, the invisible hand ensuring every camera angle and microphone placement was perfect. Her presence was understated but absolute—every gesture, every glance, conveyed that nothing would go off script.

League representatives were seated to the side, their posture rigid, expressions neutral, but their presence reminded everyone in the room that this was not just about gossip or personal curiosity. Legalities, ABO regulations, and precedent loomed over every question, every potential misstep.

Ilya took his seat with a quiet authority, shoulders squared, back straight, and the faintest curve of amusement at the corners of his mouth. The room seemed to pause around him, the hum of murmured speculation falling into a hush as he surveyed the reporters.

His second language sometimes lent his words an unusual cadence, a rhythm that could twist humor into something sharper, more cutting. Yet even in English, every syllable carried control, precision, and an undercurrent of wit that made the room lean in involuntarily.

He let the pause stretch, letting the tension coil, tight and deliberate. Every eye in the room shifted toward him, pens hovering, cameras whirring. He let the faintest smirk tug at his lips, eyes sweeping slowly across the front row, just long enough to make a few journalists flinch under his cool, measured scrutiny.

"Let's start with the obvious," a reporter said, voice clipped, attempting authority. "Rozanov, there have been persistent rumors about your relationship with Hollander. Can you confirm anything?"

Ilya's lips curved into a slow, teasing smile, the kind that hinted at both amusement and challenge. He leaned back slightly, letting the chair cradle him, fingers laced loosely in front.

"I hear things," he said lightly, voice steady but carrying a trace of dry humor that sharpened the edges of his words. His gaze flicked across the front row, brief and piercing, as though testing their resolve. "But I am a professional. I play hockey for Boston. That is my priority. Everything else... is speculation."

The words hung in the air, deliberate, measured. He let them settle, the pause stretching just long enough to make the reporters squirm under the weight of unspoken confidence.

There was a subtle defiance in the ease of his posture, the calm inflection in his voice, and the faint flicker of amusement in his eyes. He had set the stage, claimed the narrative, and yet

had revealed nothing. The room was taut with curiosity, every journalist straining to find the crack in his composure, but there was none to be found.

The room buzzed, a low hum of frustration from reporters who wanted more. Cameras shifted, pens scribbled furiously, and the tension built like a tightly coiled spring, ready to snap.

A second journalist leaned forward, elbows braced on the table, eyes sharp. “Some say the rivalry between Boston and Montreal has been... staged. Did you ever influence outcomes, intentionally or not?”

Ilya’s jaw tightened fractionally, the only crack in his otherwise controlled exterior. For a heartbeat, the air seemed to still around him. Then a rare flash of honesty pierced the calm—a faint edge of something real.

“Hah,” he said, voice low, humor threading through but laced with steel. “Rivalry is real. Every match counts. Every point. Hollander’s team is strong, smart, and relentless. I do not play to lose. Period.”

The journalist pressed further, leaning closer, tone sharp. “Rozanov, your comments suggest deep respect, but what about Hollander himself? He’s now public as an omega. Do you think omegas should be playing in such a physical, brutal game?”

Ilya’s gaze flicked to the ceiling for a fraction of a second, then back, pupils narrowing ever so slightly. The room felt smaller, the air thicker. “Hollander is Hollander,” he said slowly, each word deliberate. “Strong. Fast. Smart. Dangerous. Being an omega... does not make him weak. It does not make him less capable. I’ve played against him for years. I’ve seen the fire, the control, the precision. He is an athlete, a captain, a force.”

A ripple of murmurs ran through the reporters. Some scribbled furiously; others exchanged glances, sensing the subtle but undeniable edge in his words.

Another journalist pressed, “And personally... what do you think of him? On and off the ice?”

Ilya’s lips curved, a sly, almost imperceptible smirk. “On the ice? He’s the enemy. You play to win. Off the ice... he’s... complicated. Charming, infuriating, brilliant. Dangerous in ways most people can’t see.”

The tension in the room thickened. Some reporters leaned in further, eager for confirmation, a confession, a crack in the carefully maintained secrecy.

“And the league rules,” another voice cut in, sharper this time. “There are restrictions, protections, legal concerns about omegas in high-contact sports. Do you think he should have been allowed to return this season?”

Ilya’s eyes darkened, pupils widening slightly, a flicker of possessiveness surfacing in the way he glared toward the empty space where Shane would later appear. His voice was calm, measured, yet threaded with subtle heat. “Rules exist to protect. But some people... they defy

expectation. Hollander is one of those people. He trained, he healed, he fought. And when he is on that ice... he commands it. Don't mistake the rules for weakness. Don't mistake his nature for inability."

He leaned back slightly, the smirk softening into a proud tilt of his mouth. Even in the sterile, scrutinizing room, the possessiveness and fondness he felt for Shane radiated in his posture, the tilt of his head, the controlled intensity in his gaze.

The room stirred, pens pausing mid-scratch, whispers threading through rows of reporters. Cameras captured every subtle expression, every carefully measured flicker of light and shadow across his face.

The room murmured, pens frozen mid-air, cameras pivoting in near-unison. A low, electric hum ran through the journalists, a collective anticipation coiling tight, ready to snap. Every eye was on Ilya, expecting him to deflect, to smile, to dodge with wit. Yet even as he held the room, there was an unspoken question: what comes next?

Then Farah's voice cut through like steel, precise, commanding, leaving no room for misinterpretation. "Rozanov, if you're done, we have a surprise."

Ilya's eyes flicked to the side, quick, alert. A slow, knowing curve of his lips betrayed nothing—and yet everything. The journalists leaned forward instinctively, sensing the weight behind the words.

Gasps erupted like a wave. Whispers became a ripple, a low hiss of tension, and then came the movement at the back of the room. Through the polished glass doors, Shane Hollander appeared.

Every step measured, each one deliberate, a testament to weeks of recovery and control. Yet there was power in the way he carried himself—the quiet authority of a captain, the tension of an athlete restrained by circumstance but unbowed. Cameras swiveled, flashes erupted, pens hovered over pages, but the journalists, for a fleeting moment, forgot their questions.

Shane's eyes scanned the room, absorbing the scrutiny, the lenses, the questions yet unasked, before locking onto Ilya. The electric tension between them was palpable, almost suffocating, radiating outward, impossible to ignore.

The murmuring journalists, the hum of the machines in the back, the distant scrape of chair legs—it all became background noise. The room had transformed. It was no longer a press conference. It was a stage for something far more intimate, fragile, and explosive.

Ilya's pupils dilated slightly, his gaze flickering from Shane's eyes to his lips, a subtle flare of desire restrained by professionalism, by the eyes of the league, the press, the world. Shane's presence, tall and poised, carried the raw pull of everything unspoken, and it crashed into Ilya's careful façade.

Farah, almost imperceptibly, shifted, satisfied. The subtle cue, the choreography of timing, of reveal, had worked. League representatives stiffened, alert not just to protocol, but to the emotional charge now threading through every movement.

Shane's gaze never left Ilya's. Every breath, every shift of weight, every restrained tremor carried months of absence, weeks of fear, and days of longing. The room's tension was now a living thing—aware, expectant, ready to erupt with the next word, the next motion.

And in that charged silence, the first undeniable truth spread outward: Shane Hollander had arrived. Not just as a player, not just as a recovered athlete, but as someone claimed, tethered, and fiercely connected to Ilya Rozanov.

The press could feel it. The league could sense it. And Ilya, teasing, restrained, and possessive, held it all in a single, perfect gaze.

Ilya's lips curved, slow and deliberate, into a private, almost predatory smile. It was the kind of smile that carried ownership without a word, confidence threaded with heat, a subtle warning to anyone who might challenge it. His gaze flicked to Shane briefly, a flicker of intimacy only they could share, before sweeping back to the room.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said, his voice calm but sharp, cutting through the low hum of anticipation, "I would like to introduce my omega."

A stunned hush fell over the room. Pens froze mid-scribble, cameras lingered in mid-tilt, microphones angled as though trying to capture more than just sound. The words seemed to hang in the air, weighty, almost tangible.

Shock rippled through the press corps. The whispers began, quiet at first, then growing louder, a wave breaking against the walls of protocol and decorum. Shane—Hollander—Montreal's captain, the figure whose omega status had been hidden, protected, fiercely private—was standing there. Standing beside Ilya. Alive, poised, and unapologetically present.

The room's temperature seemed to drop, a collective intake of breath rising as every reporter registered the magnitude of the revelation. Eyes darted between the two men, searching for cues, for confirmation, for cracks, but found none. Shane's stance was steady, controlled, but even through the measured composure, a subtle tension hummed, the residue of months spent recovering, waiting, longing.

Ilya's gaze never left him, dark pupils flaring, a tethering magnet that radiated through the air between them. There was no need for words; the claim was clear, unassailable, proud. The possession was as much a shield as it was a declaration—this was his omega, not hidden, not secret, and fiercely his.

Whispers surged through the room like an electric current. Phones clicked, cameras whirled, and a few of the more seasoned reporters leaned forward, knowing they were witnessing something unprecedented, both professionally and personally. Every line of Shane's form, every subtle tightening of his jaw, every blink measured yet hesitant, carried months of unseen struggle, of survival, of trust.

And there they were, together, on display, yet untouched by the chaos around them, a single, undeniable truth threading through the room: Shane Hollander belonged to Ilya Rozanov.

The press had been expecting a statement, a team update, maybe a tease about the season—but this—this was something far more potent. It was history, scandal, intimacy, and dominance all rolled into one heartbeat, and the room shivered with the weight of it.

Shane's pulse raced, an erratic drum in his chest, his omega instincts coiling with awareness of Ilya so close. The tethering warmth threaded through him, grounding him, even as the cameras clicked and flashed, capturing every subtle glance, every measured motion. He could feel the quiet power of Ilya's presence, possessive and steady, settling the restless coil of longing and fear that had lurked in his body for months.

"Rozanov, Hollander," a reporter began, voice clipped and pointed, leaning in for any slip, any confirmation, "how long have you been—"

Ilya's interruption cut through the room like a blade wrapped in velvet. His tone was equal parts teasing and commanding, impossible to ignore. "Long enough," he said smoothly, eyes flicking briefly to Shane, lips curving with that subtle, predatory amusement. "Public record or not, Hollander is mine. He's my omega. Everyone else can write what they want."

A ripple of murmurs cascaded through the room, reporters exchanging incredulous looks, some scribbling furiously, others adjusting lenses. Shane felt the weight of every gaze, every flashing light, every inch of scrutiny, but he stayed rooted beside Ilya, letting the anchor of that presence steady him.

"You're an asshole," Shane whispered quietly, low, almost to himself. The words were warm on his tongue, intimate, more private than public, carrying the heat of familiarity and trust.

Ilya leaned slightly closer, fingertips brushing through Shane's hair, grounding him with a quiet, possessive claim. "I know," he murmured, voice low and teasing, a smirk tugging at the corner of his mouth. "But you like it."

The room's tension thickened, and the reporters pressed forward, relentless.

"Rozanov, Hollander—how does this affect Hollander's ability to play? There are ABO regulations and laws requiring compatible sponsorship. Who authorized his return?"

"Rozanov, you've been evading questions about your personal life all season. Why reveal this now?"

"Does Hollander's omega status give him a competitive disadvantage? Or is it even allowed in a league as physical and brutal as this?"

"Rozanov, there are whispers that Hollander's recovery was rushed. How can the league verify he's truly ready for high-level competition?"

"To both of you: given the secret nature of your relationship until now, are there any legal or ethical implications for other teams?"

"Rozanov, Hollander—how do you respond to critics who say this could set a precedent for other omegas in professional sports?"

Shane's stomach tightened. Each question felt like a weight pressing down on him, the public scrutiny biting sharper than any blade. But Ilya's hand remained near, brushing a subtle warmth across his shoulder, anchoring him in the storm. Shane could feel the coil of his instincts easing slightly in Ilya's presence, yet the questions of legality, personal safety, and public perception hovered like smoke around them.

Ilya's gaze flicked to Shane, eyes dark and sharp, a silent promise threading through the storm of questions. "Authorized?" he echoed lightly, smirk still in place. "I did what was needed. Hollander is fit, cleared, and ready. We don't wait for permission from anyone who doesn't matter."

The room shifted in reaction—some stunned, some scribbling furiously—but Shane felt it: the tether, the certainty, the undeniable claim threading through him. He let his fingers brush Ilya's subtly, grounding and claimed, yet still part of the world outside, every flash and murmur a reminder of the storm they were weathering together.

The hum of cameras and scribbling pens faded into an almost tangible tension as a reporter leaned forward. "Rozanov, Hollander—your presence here raises questions. Given your citizenship, your ties to Russia, how can you legally continue in this league? Aren't there serious consequences if you return?"

Ilya's jaw tightened, a flicker of something darker crossing his face. He inhaled slowly, measured, the weight of months of careful evasion pressing down. "I cannot go back," he said, each word deliberate, sharp. "Not now. Not while my omega is here. Returning... it would risk everything we've built. His safety, his career, everything that matters."

A murmur ran through the room. Reporters sensed the gravity behind his calm exterior, the unspoken threat lingering in the air. Ilya's gaze flicked to Shane, protective, fierce. "I will not leave him. He is mine. My priority is his life, his well-being, his future. The rest... bends around that."

Shane's chest tightened. Fear coiled low in his stomach, a bitter, familiar twist. He had been fragile once, tethered to a body that had betrayed him, dependent on care, on presence. Now, seeing Ilya stand like a shield, owning the risk and the choice for them both, he felt the tether pull him taut—possessive, grounding, absolute.

Another reporter pressed, voice clipped, sharp. "Rozanov, given the risks you face abroad, how can you justify continuing to play? Aren't the laws—strict? Unforgiving?"

Ilya's humor briefly flickered, then disappeared beneath the weight of certainty. "I do not justify it," he said, voice low, precise. "I act. I protect what is mine. We navigate carefully. Hollander is safe. That is what matters. Nothing else."

Cameras clicked, flashbulbs popped, pens scribbled. But in the space between, Shane felt the tether tighten, possessive and steady, wrapping around his unease and fear.

A follow-up cut through, sharper, almost cruel. "Rozanov, are you saying your loyalty to Hollander supersedes your obligations—your home, your life in Russia?"

Ilya's lips curved into a tight, almost predatory smile. "Yes. My loyalty is absolute. My omega comes first. Everything else adjusts to that truth."

Shane's pulse raced, every nerve alive, stomach coiled. He could feel his instincts—the raw, protective, tethered energy—firing beneath the surface. Even under the flashing lights and prying questions, he felt anchored entirely, wholly, to the one person who had never let him fall.

Yuna, David, and Hayden sat to the side, eyes fixed on the unfolding revelation. Yuna's fingers twisted the edge of her jacket, her expression a careful balance of pride and concern. "I can't believe he actually did it," she murmured, voice low, just for David and Hayden. "After everything... he claimed him."

David's jaw tightened slightly, a mix of relief and astonishment crossing his features. "About time," he muttered under his breath. "All the secrecy, all the whispers... I was starting to think we'd never see this day."

Hayden leaned closer to David, lowering his voice. "Do you think this will... change anything with the league? With the rules?" His eyes flicked toward the stage, scanning the reporters and cameras. "I mean, the omega status being public... people are going to have opinions."

Yuna shook her head gently, a small, rueful smile on her lips. "Opinions don't matter right now. Look at them—Shane isn't hiding anymore. He's calm, grounded... tethered. That's what matters. That claim... it's real, and he's finally safe in it."

David let out a breath, shoulders relaxing fractionally. "I just hope everyone else sees it the way we do. The claim, the bond... it's not just for show."

Hayden's eyes softened as he watched Shane lean slightly into Ilya, the private kiss on his temple sending a visible shiver through him. "God... they're actually happy. Really happy," he said quietly. "After all the chaos this year, seeing them like that... it's something else."

Yuna nodded, eyes still locked on Shane and Ilya. "It's more than public perception. It's real. The tether is real. And no matter what the press or the league throws at them, they have each other."

David exhaled again, a small, approving smile tugging at his lips. "Good. They deserve that. After everything Shane's been through... seeing him like this—claimed, safe, alive—it's worth it."

The three of them fell into a quiet, tense reverie, exchanging glances that carried understanding, approval, and the unspoken acknowledgment that the world around them could remain chaotic, but here, at this moment, Shane and Ilya were untouchable.

The last camera clicked, the pens stopped scratching, and murmurs of the press dwindled to a low hum. Shane and Ilya remained center stage, tethered, unshakable. Shane felt it fully for the first time in months: claimed, protected, alive.

Ilya stepped closer, hand sliding along Shane's waist with that familiar, grounding possessiveness. "Well," he said, voice low, teasing, and sharp, "look at you. Survived the world's questions without melting. Not bad for an omega."

Shane let out a shaky laugh, leaning slightly into the warmth. "Not bad at all," he murmured.

Ilya smirked, cocky, playful. "Not bad? That is the best you can do? I expect more fire from my omega. But... I suppose I can forgive you this once." He brushed a strand of hair from Shane's forehead, thumb lingering over his freckled skin—the patch Ilya was utterly addicted to, the light dusting that always made him tense in the best way.

Shane's pulse jumped, and almost unconsciously, his thumb grazed over the same freckles, small, tentative circles, grounding himself and teasing Ilya in return. Ilya's sharp inhale betrayed him instantly, smirk widening.

"You handled it all—every question, every camera, every blinking idiot trying to be clever. And you didn't break. I like that," Ilya said, voice low, teasing, and impossibly possessive.

Shane swallowed, chest tight with adrenaline. "So... it's really going to be okay?"

Ilya leaned down, smirk softening into a rare, warm curve. "Okay? My omega survives a press conference, and you ask if it's okay? Do you doubt me? Because I do not doubt us. Not for a second. They can write, snap, or whisper all they want. We have this. Always."

Shane's lips twitched into a small, relieved smile. "Always," he repeated softly, thumb still stroking the freckles Ilya loved, tracing the familiar spots, feeling the small shiver of reaction beneath his fingers.

Ilya's hand tightened slightly on Shane's waist, grounding him, possessive, teasing, yet utterly certain. "Exactly. So quit worrying, focus on me, and maybe—just maybe—you will stop looking like you're about to collapse every five seconds." He tilted his head, smirk flicking up, small but sharp. "Though... that is kind of adorable too. And your check-up is tomorrow... Hollander, I fully intend to make up for lost time."

Shane's stomach coiled at the words, pulse spiking. To anyone else, they were just standing close. To him, every inch of contact was deliberate, private, fire and control wrapped in one.

He let his thumb graze over Ilya's hands on his waist, small, teasing circles that made Ilya shift slightly, a sharp, quiet inhale pressing into Shane's chest. Ilya's smirk didn't falter; it only tightened, a subtle lift that promised trouble, heat, and possession.

"You feel that?" Ilya murmured, voice low, precise, confident, teasing like he had all the time in the world. "That pull? That heat? That's all for me. Only me."

Shane pressed a little closer, shoulder brushing against Ilya's chest, letting the warmth, presence, and tether settle him. Shane's arms wrapped around Ilya's neck his fingers grazing the sensitive skin skin, delicate but insistent, and Ilya's hand tightened around his waist, possessive but calm, sure.

Ilya leaned closer, subtle shift, the press of chest to shoulder enough to make Shane's breath hitch. "Mine," he murmured, voice low, small, sure, teasing. "Always mine, Hollander. And I plan to remind you... privately. Soon."

Shane's pulse raced, heat coiling low and sweet, mingling with the thrill of being claimed in the smallest, quietest ways. Every brush of skin, every whispered tease was hidden from the world—but electric and absolute to them.

He let out a small, shaky laugh, chest loosening, pulse settling just enough to enjoy the tension. Leaning into Ilya, feeling the steady grip, the possessive warmth, the small smirk that made his heart race, Shane knew—here, tethered, safe, alive, utterly claimed—it would work out. It already was.

Ilya's thumb brushed again over the freckles, slow, deliberate, teasing. "Tomorrow... Hollander," he murmured, low, confident, smirk tugging at the corner of his mouth, "you will see exactly what you've missed. I plan to make it worth every second."

Shane let out a soft, satisfied breath, chest warm, pulse finally slowing, letting the tension of the past year settle into something quiet and absolute. He pressed closer, the heat of Ilya's body grounding him, tethering him in a way that words could never fully capture.

For a long moment, neither spoke. The world outside—the press, the expectations, the accidents, the whispers—faded completely. All that mattered was the steady press of Ilya's hand, the teasing graze of his thumb, the tether between them that had never wavered.

Shane smiled faintly, finally at ease. "Always," he whispered, the word carrying the weight of everything they had survived and everything still to come.

Ilya's smirk softened, just enough, as he pulled Shane a little closer. "Always," he echoed, voice low and certain. "And no matter what comes next... we handle it together."

The ice of the past, the fractures of fear and silence, had melted. What remained was warmth, claim, and the quiet certainty that some things—like them—could never be broken.

Some things shine fiercely.

Some burn steadily.

And some are never questioned at all.

And tonight, in the safety of each other's arms, Shane and Ilya —Hollander and Rozanov — simply were.

Hey Hollanov fandom! I've written a chapter following this one that contains spice and smut. I'm still contemplating whether to post it—advice and thoughts from you all are very welcome!

Either way, Shane and Ilya's story as it stands can rest here, safe and claimed. For all those that have read and commented thank you so much. I will continue to explore these characters in other plots and storylines. So keep an eye out.

Chapter 8: Under the Ice, Under You

Chapter Summary

For the shameless (me included): Shane's cleared for sex—Ilya is happy.

Or sexy time

Chapter Notes

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

The car purred through the fog, rain-slick streets, engine low and steady, like it knew what was waiting.

Shane's body was already there—heat gathering low and insistent. He could feel himself starting to get slick, anticipation tightening through him as his fingers tapped against his thigh—not nerves, never that—just the sharp, restless edge of wanting.

Ilya noticed everything.

“You are shaking,” Ilya said quietly, eyes forward, voice rough with promise.

His hand slid over, deliberate, thumb pressing into the inside of Shane's thigh. Not touching what Shane needed—just close enough to make his hips jerk, breath hitch, stomach coil.

Shane swallowed. Didn't look at him. Let the movement happen. Let Ilya feel it.

“Am not,” Shane said lightly, but his body betrayed him, rocking subtly into the touch, slick warmth pooling, desperate and aching.

Ilya huffed a low laugh. His thumb began slow circles, possessive, testing. Claiming.

“You are soaked already.” A statement. “I bet you are dripping all over the seat.”

Shane's pulse jumped. He shifted again, sharper this time, grinding just enough to make it impossible to ignore.

“Drive faster,” he murmured around a soft gasp. It had been so long. He wanted to feel Ilya inside him. He wanted to be held down and filled. Shane's eyes rolled into his head as he imagined his big strong alpha using him—taking what he needed.

Ilya's grip on the wheel tightened. His smile turned dark. Dangerous.

“You want me that bad, Hollander?”

The thumb pressed harder, dragged deliberately, and Shane gasped—sharp, uncontrolled—hips bucking before he could stop himself.

“Fuck,” Shane breathed.

“Yeah,” Ilya said softly. “I know.”

The air between them thickened. Every sound—the engine, the tires, Shane’s breathing—felt obscene. Shane let himself move now, subtle at first, then bolder. Each shift was a provocation. Each soft sound a challenge.

“Mmm,” Ilya murmured. “Such a needy omega.”

Shane leaned closer, heat radiated off him, his voice low and smooth.

“Not needy,” he said. “Just impatient.”

Ilya glanced over, eyes black with hunger. “I will make you beg for it, Hollander.”

The driveway came too soon. The engine cut, ticking as it cooled, and for a beat they stayed frozen—breathing, burning, vibrating with it.

Then Shane grabbed him.

Hands in Ilya’s jacket, mouth crashing into his, all teeth and heat and urgency. The kiss was filthy—wet, demanding, no pretense. Ilya growled into it, hands tangling in Shane’s hair, pulling him close, closer—

Shane fumbled with the keys, hands shaking.

Ilya laughed against his mouth. “You are a slut for it.”

“Shut up,” Shane panted.

Ilya didn’t. He lifted him instead—effortless, decisive. Shane yelped, then laughed, legs locking around Ilya’s waist automatically, slick heat pressed right where it ached most.

Inside, the door barely closed before Ilya had him pinned—mouth on his neck, teeth grazing, tongue slow and punishing. Hands everywhere. Under clothes. Over skin. Mapping him like something owned. Ilya’s fingers brushed over Shane’s sensitive nipples, gripping and pulling slightly.

“God,” Shane moaned, arching into it. “Ilya—”

“Tonight,” Ilya said against his throat, voice dark and certain, “You don’t think. You don’t hold back. You take.”

Shane shuddered. Every word sank deep, settled heavy and right.

They made it to the bed in pieces—clothes stripped, mouths everywhere, hands never still. Ilya pushed him down slowly, deliberately, letting Shane feel every second of being placed where he belonged.

“Look at you,” Ilya murmured, dragging his gaze over Shane’s naked body. “You look like a bitch in heat. What would everyone say seeing you like this? Open. Wanting.”

Shane was shaking now, hips rocking, slick and obvious.

“I’m a mess,” he whispered. “For you.”

“I know.” Ilya kissed his stomach, slow, reverent, then lower. Ilya kissed the tip of Shane’s cock. “That’s mine.”

The first touch made Shane cry out—back arching, fingers clawing at the sheets. His mind went blank. Ilya took his time. Too much time. Licking and kissing the length like it was the last meal and he wanted to cherish it.

Shane’s hands gripped Ilya’s golden locks as Ilya finally took him into his mouth. His tongue slow, cruel, precise, drawing every sound out of him until Shane was sobbing tears dripped down his cheeks, breathless, begging. His hole fluttered clenching around nothing looking for something to fill it.

“Please—please—don’t stop—”

“Such a good little slut—begging,” Ilya said, voice thick. “Say it again.”

“I need you,” Shane gasped. “Need you—need it—fill me, please —”

Ilya finally turned him over in a single move hitched his legs up and pushed his head into the pillows and bent down fully, body over his, heat to heat. He lined up his cock with Shane’s fluttering hole and pushed. The stretch burned sweet and perfect, knocking the air from Shane’s lungs.

“Yes,” Shane sobbed. “Yes—fuck—”

Ilya held him there, unmoving, letting him feel it. Letting the burn ripple up his spine. Letting him melt. “You are made for me,” Ilya said quietly. “Every part.”

Then he moved. Shane shattered.

Slow at first. Deep. Possessive. Each thrust deliberate, grounding, stealing Shane’s thoughts until there was nothing but sensation and Ilya’s voice. Ilya’s hips tilted and stars exploded behind Shane’s eyes as his hole quelled, trying to grip the intrusion as it hit all the nerves inside him.

“There it is. That’s it. Take it. Just like that.”

Shane moved under him—moaning, shaking, begging without shame. His body answered every command, every touch, every whispered claim.

“Don’t stop,” Shane cried. “Please—don’t stop...Alpha—”

The release hit hard and blinding, ripping through him, leaving him shaking and wrecked, clinging to the bed like it was the only solid thing left.

Shane gasped, voice high and pleading and needy. Ilya turned him onto his back, opened his legs and pushed back into the tight heat groaning.

I... I can’t... please... I’m yours... I need it... I need your knot...”

Ilya’s lips brushed over his temple, jaw, neck, slow and possessive, thumb tracing the freckles he adored, anchoring Shane as heat spiraled higher. Ilya’s hands wrapped around his neck tightening slightly as he held him down with his entire body. Shane squirmed his body sensitive his instincts on fire. Every movement tethered them, a rhythm of control and surrender, alpha and omega, slick and responsive.

”you take it so well, my omega, so tight—so wet— so soft around me—so perfect,” Ilya growled his pupils blown wide. Sweat rolled down his face as his nostrils flare. He was close.

Shane cried out, full release hitting him, trembling, moaning, body convulsing under the warmth and tether of Ilya’s touch.

“I... I... I’m yours... I’m yours... I’m yours...”

Ilya held him close, chest to chest, steadying him as his own release followed, his knot pushing against Shane’s hole, warmth pooled into Shane’s belly, tethering, claiming, marking.

“Oh God, Shane,” Ilya murmured at the height of it, low and possessive, voice rough, his hips grinding into Shane who pushed down on the knot trying to suck him in deeper.

Shane shivered into him, his slick dripping against his thighs, his legs trembling, mind melting from pleasure, completely lost, completely tethered, completely claimed.

The world fell away. There was no press, no stress, no months of fear. Only heat, tether, possessive intimacy, slick pleasure, and the undeniable claim threading through them.

Shane collapsed into Ilya’s chest, trembling, gasping, eyes half-lidded, heartbeat settling only with the steady press of Ilya’s chest beneath him.

Ilya brushed his fingers through Shane’s hair, gentle now, soft, possessive.

“We have this,” he murmured, low and certain. “Whatever comes... we will handle it. Together.”

Shane pressed closer, muffled against him, lips grazing warmth, eyes closing.

“Together,” he whispered, letting the word tether him as fully as any kiss or touch.

Some things hold forever.

Some build slowly.

And some are shouted loud enough for everyone to hear.

Here, now, in the quiet after the storm, everything that mattered had been claimed, tethered, and made unbreakable.

Even if the world tried, they would face it all, together.

Chapter End Notes

This is where their story ends.

Not because everything is resolved neatly, or because the world suddenly becomes kind, but because they arrive at the truth they've been circling since the beginning. What started as heat and avoidance becomes something grounded, claimed, and real.

Shane's journey has always been about control—of his body, his future, his silence. Letting himself need, letting himself be seen, is the bravest thing he does. Ilya, for all his confidence and sharp edges, has always known exactly what he wants. Loving Shane isn't loud for him. It's steady. It's staying.

This final chapter is about permission—to want, to take, to belong without apology. No more running. No more pretending. They choose each other in the only way that's ever mattered to them: fully, honestly, and without compromise.

Thank you for staying with them until the end.

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