

Home Ice Advantage

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](https://archiveofourown.org/works/76095686) at <https://archiveofourown.org/works/76095686>.

Rating:	Explicit
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	M/M
Fandoms:	Game Changers Series - Rachel Reid , Heated Rivalry (TV)
Relationship:	Shane Hollander/Ilya Rozanov
Additional Tags:	Alternate Universe - Canon Divergence , Fluff and Angst , Secret Relationship , Forced Proximity , Sexual Tension , Explicit Sexual Content , Consent King Ilya Rozanov , First Time Bottoming
Language:	English
Series:	Part 1 of Home Ice Advantage
Stats:	Published: 2025-12-20 Completed: 2026-01-24 Words: 51,933 Chapters: 6/6

Home Ice Advantage

by [taywrites11](#)

Summary

“You’re going to Boston.”

Long after Farah hangs up, the words keep echoing in Shane’s head. If he had thought his thoughts had been chaotic this morning, when his biggest problem had been his rival potentially fucking him when he came to Montreal in two weeks, that’s nothing compared to the code-red panic that started the instant he found out he was being traded to Rozanov’s team.

Rozanov, who was supposed to be his great career rival. Rozanov, who he’s hooked up with twice now. Rozanov, who had been planning on coming to Shane’s apartment in Montreal to fuck him the next time they saw each other. God, how on Earth is Shane going to walk into his locker room in Boston in a few days time?

The impending awkwardness of dealing with Rozanov is almost enough to eclipse the hurt he’s trying to ignore. The knowledge that Montreal values him so little that they’re willing to dispose of him only six months into his rookie season. Almost, but not quite.

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Or, Shane gets traded to Boston AU.

Chapter 1

Shane's feet pound out a steady rhythm on the treadmill below him, providing a soundtrack to his chaotic thoughts. He should be thinking about their game against Chicago tomorrow, but throughout the entire trip back home from the All-Star game and the two days since, his thoughts keep drifting back to a dimly lit hotel room.

He almost can't believe the weekend had been real, even though he has the memories to prove it. He had hooked up with Ilya Rozanov. Again. Shane had spent so much time convincing himself that the first time had been a fluke, a stupid, risky experiment never to be repeated, but he hadn't really hesitated for a second when Rozanov had given him his room number. And it had been *good*. Just as good as he remembered.

And now Rozanov wants to come to his apartment in two weeks and *fuck* him. Despite the terror Shane feels at the prospect, he already knows that when the time comes, he's going to do it. He seems to be unable to say no to Rozanov, not when everything the smirking Russian suggests stirs his curiosity and arousal so acutely.

He's drawn out of his spiral by the harsh sound of his phone. He has a moment of confusion—his parents are the only ones who ever call him, and they had just seen him in Nashville two days ago. But a quick check of the screen shows that it's his agent, and he hits stop on the treadmill immediately. He rarely hears from Farah during the season, so it must be important.

"Shane," she greets immediately. He's always liked that about Farah, that she's not one for small talk. "Are you at home right now?"

"Yeah," Shane says, bemused. "What's up?"

Farah sighs, more of a huff of breath than anything. "I have some news, and you aren't going to like it," she says.

Immediately, Shane can feel the dread start to pool in his stomach. His thoughts go immediately back to Rozanov, to their hook-up at the All-Star game. He had known that it was stupid, that they should never have taken a risk like that in a hotel full of press and other players. They must have been caught somehow. He has no idea what other kind of news would involve his agent at this point in the season.

"I—" He wonders what they have, how incriminating it is. If it's just rumours, a blurry photo, something that can be played off. Shane's a terrible liar, but it feels like Rozanov maybe wouldn't be. Maybe he could laugh it off for the two of them. "What?" He needs to know. His heart is already beating too fast, and he needs to know just how much he should be panicking right now.

"There's been some chatter online, last night and this morning," Farah says. "About a potential trade for Matt Tremblay." A defenseman for Colorado, one of the best in the league. Shane has no idea how this could possibly be related to him, when Farah says the words he

thought he'd never hear. "Montreal is apparently interested, and it seems like you might be part of the deal."

Shane's ears are ringing all of a sudden. His eyes hone in on the seam between the ceiling and the wall, the spot where the paint has chipped a little, while he tries in vain to process those words.

The silence feels endless. Shane can't think of a single thing to say, even though Farah is most likely waiting for some sort of reaction. "I—what?"

Farah's voice is gentle. "It might not happen," she says. "I just didn't want you finding out from online, or to be blindsided at practice if it did. I called management as soon as I saw the rumours and they wouldn't tell me anything, so if I were guessing I'd say it's not a done deal. The source is good though, so maybe they've offered and Colorado is still deciding."

"Okay," Shane says. He still feels like he might pass out. He's sitting on the floor, leaning up against the treadmill now. He's not quite sure when that had happened. Horrifyingly, he feels tears start to prick at the corner of his eyes. "Okay." He says again. "I—what should I do?"

"Nothing," Farah says immediately. "You haven't been traded, you aren't on waivers, for now this is all rumours and gossip. I just wanted to give you the heads up. Do you have practice today?"

"I—optional skate this afternoon." It takes Shane a minute to remember, to mentally parse through his schedule and his plans for the rest of the day and week and month which have never felt so tenuous as right now.

"Okay." Farah's voice is steady, soothing. "Now, I know this isn't exactly what you pay me to do, but if I could give a bit of advice here, I'd skip optional skate if you can. If this does go through today, it will be big news, and you probably don't want your live reaction caught on camera. And I know this is probably a lot to process, out of nowhere. So take the day off maybe, and hopefully Tremblay gets sent somewhere that isn't Montreal in the next few hours and we can forget this ever happened. If not, I can try to find out more about the likelihood of you actually being involved and get back to you."

"Okay." Shane feels like he's just repeating that word over and over, as though saying it will make any of this actually be okay. He knows that regardless of how this ends, he's never going to be able to forget this happened if there's even a shred of truth to the rumour that Montreal is considering trading him halfway through his rookie season. It would be unheard of—regardless of who they're getting in return, teams almost never trade high draft picks early in their careers. He's supposed to be the guy Montreal is rebuilding around, not just a pawn for them to discard in favour of another.

He barely remembers hanging up from Farah, or how he makes it out of his gym. A feeling of dread has settled deep in his stomach, like somehow his body knows before men hundreds of kilometres away have even made their decision. Even though he knows he shouldn't, he can't help but go online and search up the rumours himself, only to find that everything confirms what Farah had said. Colorado has let teams know that they're open to offers for Matt Tremblay, and Montreal has put Shane Hollander up as the shiniest prize so far.

The worst part is that the part of Shane who knows hockey almost gets it. Tremblay is a player in his prime, one of the best defensemen of his generation. Shane is an up-and-coming star, the years of his career stretching out ahead. For a team like Montreal, who has a decent forward group, an aging All-Star goalie, and absolutely terrible defence, it makes a bit of sense to try and shore up their weaknesses and make a run for the Cup now, rather than engage in the years-long commitment of a rebuild.

But still, Shane can't help the tears that blur his vision as he reads post after post full of speculation. Even though he knows that trades are part of hockey, that they aren't always personal, he can't help but feel like he's done something wrong for them to even consider trading him in the first place. He has 41 goals this year and sure, that makes him one of the top scorers in the league, but maybe he hasn't been as sharp on defence as he could be. He hasn't made many friends on the team yet either, not with most of the guys being so much older than him and busy with their wives and families. There has to be something, some explanation for why the team he thought he'd stay with for his whole career suddenly wants him gone after six months.

It doesn't even matter to him that Colorado is a good team—a better team than Montreal right now, even. They're at least going to make the playoffs this year, which is more than what Montreal can say. Shane knows nothing about Colorado, the team or the city. He doesn't care.

He's spiralling so hard he almost doesn't notice when the phone rings again. By the late afternoon light coming in through the windows, he's been sitting on his couch for hours. He doesn't even need to look at the screen to know that it's Farah calling, and he doesn't even need to answer the call to know what she's going to say.

"It's official," is the grim greeting that he gets, like Farah knows that dragging this out is only going to kill Shane more than this already is. "I just got a call from management."

Before Farah can say anything else, offer some reassurance that would definitely make the tears finally fall from where they've been threatening for hours, Shane cuts in. Tries to sound like the logical, practical person he wishes he could be about this.

"How soon do I need to be in Colorado?"

There's a pause—longer than the question merits. That's when Shane should have caught on that there was something wrong. But nothing could have prepared him for the next words Farah says.

"Well. What the rumour mill didn't know was that it ended up being a three-way trade. So it's not actually going to be Colorado. They got Wilson, Boucher, and a few picks. Tremblay is headed to Montreal. You're going to Boston."

"You're going to Boston."

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Rozanov, who was supposed to be his great career rival. Rozanov, who he's hooked up with twice now. Rozanov, who had been planning on coming to Shane's apartment in Montreal to fuck him the next time they saw each other. God, how on Earth is Shane going to walk into his locker room in Boston in a few days time? It's one thing for his rival to know this secret that they both share, especially when they only see each other a few times a year. It's a completely different thing for his teammate who he sees every day to know.

The impending awkwardness of dealing with Rozanov is almost enough to eclipse the hurt he's trying to ignore. The knowledge that Montreal values him so little that they're willing to dispose of him only six months into his rookie season. Almost, but not quite.

Before this, Shane had had no idea how trades worked in the NHL. He, perhaps naively, had never really considered the possibility of being traded. But Farah had explained the necessary logistics to him in short, clipped sentences, like she knew that there was only so much information Shane could handle right now. What it had boiled down to, at least in Shane's mind, was that he only needed to pack a single bag with the essentials and get himself on the next plane. His new team would deal with booking him a hotel room and eventually helping him find a new place, as well as hiring people to pack up and move the rest of his stuff. He tosses things in a bag almost on autopilot, having not even fully unpacked from All-Star weekend yet.

All-Star weekend. He had been Montreal's choice for the All-Star game, by their own admission the best player on the team, even as a rookie, and they had still traded him.

He can't think about that, not without the tears making a resurgence. He's determined not to cry about this, so he finishes throwing clothes in a bag with clenched teeth and only spares a single glance around his apartment as he pulls his coat on near the door. It's strange to think that he probably won't be back here. It's still a little bare, not quite lived in yet, since Shane had only moved in six months ago. But it's still the first place other than his parents' house that has ever been his home. Yesterday, he had thought he would live here for years to come.

No. He can't keep thinking like that. He needs to pull himself together by the time he gets to Boston.

He takes a cab to the airport. He knows the exact second that his trade is announced to the world, because his phone immediately starts blowing up. He stares at it in a daze for a few moments, his last sights of Montreal whipping by through the window, before the cab driver gives him an annoyed look and he quickly silences his notifications, not even looking at them. He's glad he had worn a hoodie—he's still getting used to being recognised in public, and he doesn't want to deal with the attention he would get if he were recognised tonight.

Thankfully, the airport is empty enough on a weeknight, and no one bothers him as he goes through security and finds his gate. Farah is efficient—his flight is in less than an hour, his

hotel reservation in Boston already sitting in his inbox. There's a press conference scheduled for tomorrow morning, and Farah had promised that by the time he wakes up there will be prepared comments ready for him as well, bland platitudes that give nothing away as to how he really feels about his whole life being uprooted before his career has even really begun.

Shane has the thought that he should maybe call his parents, that they're probably freaking out right now. God, his mom is going to be devastated. He realises that his hands are shaking. He clenches them into fists and leaves his phone in his pocket.

He realises once he's boarded the plane that he hasn't brought anything to do on the flight. It's not a long one, but usually when he travels with the team he has a book or something to pass the time. It doesn't matter. He stares out the window and tries and fails not to think of anything at all. He probably wouldn't have been able to concentrate anyways.

He can't remember landing in Boston, making his way through the airport, getting another cab to his hotel. They had booked him a suite, probably because he'll likely be living here for a few days at least until he finds a new place. He has the vague thought as he drops his things that he should maybe eat something, but after collapsing on the bed he finds he doesn't really have the energy to move.

He does need to know what time the press conference is tomorrow though, and also how far the arena is from here so he knows when to set his alarm. That requires looking at his phone—something he's been diligently avoiding for hours now. He's not sure what he's afraid of, exactly, until he unlocks the phone and it's staring him in the face.

(6) missed calls from Lily

Shane slams the phone down on the bed, like Rozanov can see him through the screen. Lily. God. The name still brings to mind Rozanov's smirk as he typed it into Shane's phone, the aftermath of their last hookup still crystal clear in his mind. The promise of more to come. God. What is he going to do?

He steels himself and picks up the phone again. Against his will, his eyes go to the next most recent notification.

Lily: Montreal is stupid, trading away best player. We will show them together

That's... not what he had expected. It seems almost sympathetic, which was not something Shane knew Rozanov was capable of. And no mention of sex at all. Shane isn't sure why he had been braced for Rozanov to mock him somehow, to hold what they had done together over Shane's head. He never has before, but Shane can't shake the feeling that this is his rival. Someone he's been pitted against since before they were even drafted. For the first time, he wonders what Rozanov is like as a teammate. Wonders if he'll find out, or if things are already so messed up between them that they'll never be able to be normal.

As he's contemplating this, his phone starts buzzing again. Shane freezes, terrified that it's Rozanov, but of course it's his mom. He's sure that if he had been given a few more seconds to scroll down, he would have found more than just six missed calls from her in the last few hours. He feels guilty that he hadn't even sent off a text to his parents before hopping on a

plane to a whole other country, but not guilty enough to answer the phone right away. Instead, he takes a few deep breaths to steady himself, his heart pounding all of a sudden. He's not sure it helps, but he hits "accept call" anyways.

"Shane?" His mom's voice is breathless and obviously surprised, like she had just been calling again out of habit and not because she expected to actually reach him.

"Mom." His voice is strangled, but steadier than he feels. He can't think of any other words, so he leaves it at that. An apology is stuck in his throat, but he's not sure what he even needs to apologise for. Not giving his parents a heads up about the trade, probably, but there's also a whisper in the back of his mind telling him that he needs to apologise for fucking things up so badly that he's been traded away from his mom's favourite team after less than a year.

"Shane!" Yuna's voice is clearer now, more confident. "Oh my God, Shane, we've been trying to reach you for hours. David, come here, Shane's on the phone! Are you okay? Do you need us to drive down? I was thinking we might anyways, help you pack up at least. We can be there before midnight if we leave now. I can't believe this. It makes no sense at all for them to trade you, especially with the season you've been having. Absolute morons, every one of them, and I guarantee they'll regret it. But this must have been such a shock. How are you doing?"

"I—I'm in Boston," he says, voice cracking a bit. He knows it's not an answer to her question, but for some reason his mind has latched on to her comment about driving down to help him pack, and it's important to him that he tell them that he isn't in Montreal anymore. That he isn't going to be an easy two-hour drive from his parents from now on.

"Boston?" The shock is clear in his mom's voice, and Shane thinks that she must really be shaken up by this trade, to be surprised at that. Yuna Hollander is the biggest hockey fan Shane knows by a long shot—she has to know that players aren't usually given time to process and pack their things when they're traded.

"Yeah," Shane says, fighting to keep his voice under control. "Uh, there's a press conference tomorrow, and practice the next day. They put me on the first flight."

"Oh, Shane, honey." It's like all of the righteous anger has evaporated from his mother's voice in an instant, and Shane feels the tears that have been threatening to fall all day prick traitorously at the corners of his eyes again. "How are you doing?"

"I'm—" The words lodge in his throat. How is he doing? Hurt, betrayed, terrified. None of them feel like answers he can say out loud to his parents, not without worrying them even more than they no doubt already are. "I'm fine," he grits out eventually. "It's fine."

There's a heavy silence on the other end of the call. For the first time, his father's voice comes through the speaker. "What do you need from us right now?"

The careful tone, the sympathy... all of a sudden it's too much. Before Shane can even process what's happening, his cheeks are wet, and the heartbroken sob he's been holding in all day is forcing its way out of his chest.

"So Shane, it was pretty well-known that Matt Tremblay was on the trading block, but I think him going to Montreal was a shock to everyone, and it was especially shocking that you were part of the deal. Did you have any indication before yesterday that being traded was a possibility?"

There are at least fifty microphones in front of him and just as many cameras lining the back wall of the room where Boston does their press conferences. Shane has never seen this many reporters in his life. The press had been a little crazy at the start of this season, and he had done a few press conferences with other players when the Montreal media couldn't get enough of their newest prize, but that had been nothing compared to this. He doesn't think it's Boston that makes the difference—nowhere is crazier about hockey than Montreal. No, this is just because of how huge of a story the Shane Hollander trade is shaping up to be.

"Well," Shane says, mentally running through his lines. It's almost uncanny, how Farah had been able to predict this question almost word for word. He doesn't pay her enough. "Of course I always knew a trade was a possibility. That's hockey, and honestly I don't think too much about that side of things. I'm always just focused on the next game and what I can do to help my team win. I'm happy to bring that focus to Boston now."

"Any thoughts about playing with Ilya Rozanov after the rivalry that's sprung up between you two this season and before that at the World Juniors?"

"Rozanov is a great player. Of course it will be interesting to play on the same team as him for the first time. I'm looking forward to it."

"Shane, you were traded just a little over halfway through your rookie season, and to one of Montreal's biggest rivals. Does that cause any hard or conflicted feelings?"

The questions feel endless. All permutations of the same thing, searching for the juiciest soundbite that they can dissect on the nightly sports news. Shane does his best to give them nothing, sticking to the bland and scripted answers Farah had dutifully sent him this morning. When it's finally over, he sits there and nods while Boston's management answers the same stupid questions. At least they seem genuinely happy about the situation—from what Shane could tell in his brief meeting with them this morning, they had pushed hard for Shane and were thrilled that they had gotten their way. One of the front office guys had shaken his head in astonishment as he recounted the manoeuvring it had taken to acquire Shane, whispering to himself about "two generational talents on the same team".

Finally, one of Boston's PR guys ends the press conference, and the reporters start packing up their equipment. Shane makes sure to shake the hand of the General Manager again before he's ushered out, just in case his performance wasn't convincing enough. Even though, as his mother reminded him last night, it's probably normal to feel at least a bit conflicted about something like this, he doesn't want the rumour started that he hates his new team before he's even played a single game with them.

It's been enough of a whirlwind this morning that Shane is looking forward to just going back to his hotel room and collapsing. He doesn't even feel the itch to get on the ice like he usually would after a few days without skating, his mind is still so overwhelmed by all the change suddenly happening in his life. He checks in briefly with the staff member who's been shepherding him around to meeting after meeting all day to confirm that this press conference was the last of his commitments, and when he gets the all clear he heads straight for the exit. As he pushes open the door to the back hallway, still looking over his shoulder at the crowd of reporters packing up and the GM talking to one of them with a self-satisfied expression on his face, he almost trips over the person sitting on the floor just outside the door.

"Sorry!" Shane says, stumbling a little to avoid a collision and righting himself as the other man scrambles quickly to his feet. Then he realises who it is and he jerks backwards on instinct.

"Hollander," Rozanov says. "Took you long enough."

Shane's tongue feels stuck in his throat. He hates the way he unconsciously takes in the way Rozanov looks, casual in track pants and a black shirt that's at least three sizes too small. Hates how instinctively he's drawn in.

He can't do this right now. He glances back towards the door that's just closed behind him, beyond which lies a crowd of reporters would love nothing more than to overhear a snippet of whatever conversation it is that Rozanov wants to have. He knows that the two of them should probably talk, that Shane needs to put an end to this thing between them once and for all, but suddenly his heart is beating three times as fast and he just... can't.

He presses his lips together and nods. "Rozanov," he says, as casual and businesslike as he can muster. Then he puts his head down and pushes past Rozanov, setting off at a fast clip down the hall and not looking back, even when he hears Rozanov calling out to him in confusion.

By the time he reaches the parking lot, he's running, and Rozanov is nowhere to be seen.

Shane's heart feels like it's about to beat out of his chest.

He's hiding in the bathroom. His first official practice with Boston starts in half an hour, and his first game is tomorrow. He knows he's lucky—some people get traded and are playing with their new team within twenty-four hours, without even having a full practice to adjust to new lines and plays. But even then, the idea of walking into the Boston locker room right now is sending him into a panic.

What if they all hate him? They've spent the last six months having his and Rozanov's supposed rivalry shoved down their throats, so it wouldn't be surprising if they still thought of him as the enemy. Worse, what if they pity him? The poor superstar rookie who got traded

away in his first year, who somehow couldn't make himself valuable enough to even Montreal's shitty roster for long. They probably want nothing to do with him.

And Rozanov. After he had calmed down last night, Shane had managed to muster up a stab of guilt for how he had ignored Rozanov after the press conference yesterday, especially since his supposed rival had probably been deliberately waiting for him. But he still can't bring himself to regret it. Whatever conversation they're going to have, he doesn't want to have it at the arena, surrounded by staff and potentially new teammates. And he's going to tell Rozanov that today if he tries to corner Shane again. He had practiced.

Shane has just finished meeting with his new coach, Smith. He at least had seemed thrilled that Shane is here. The man is gruff and no-nonsense, like most hockey coaches, but he had chatted with Shane for a bit about potential line combinations that they would be trying out over the next few weeks, and he had been willing to answer all of Shane's questions about Boston's plays and what changes Shane should be focusing on to make the transition as smooth as possible. Smith had told him that regardless of who his linemates ended up being, Shane would be centering the second line, the same way he had in Montreal, and he would have a spot on their first power play unit, likely at wing. It's the exact same role he had played in Montreal, but somehow it still feels like a demotion. Especially with Rozanov having worked his way up to the first line already.

Shane can't think about that right now though. All his focus needs to be on proving that he's still the best, that this trade hasn't fazed him. He won't let this be the thing that derails his career before he even gets started.

And right now, what he needs to do in order to do that is walk into the Boston locker room and not let on how much he absolutely does not want to be there.

God, what if Rozanov says something to him in front of everyone?

He wants to maybe splash some water on his face, but his hands are shaking so much he isn't confident that he'll be able to do it without soaking half his shirt. He definitely doesn't want to look like a drowned rat for his first time meeting his new teammates, so he does his best to fix his appearance in the mirror, squaring his shoulders. He doesn't think anyone will be able to tell that he had been crying last night, not unless they look really closely. And his mom had done her best to reassure him that trades were normal for everyone in the league, that no one would hold it against him.

He definitely isn't imagining the way silence falls immediately when he pushes open the door to the locker room. He forces a smile and a nod for the twenty or so guys who are now looking at him, eyes darting around looking for his stall. He suddenly regrets not being the first one here—he's off-kilter now, not sure where to go, and he had wanted so badly to project a confident image to these guys.

"Hollander!" A familiar Russian accent breaks the ice, because of course Rozanov has to be the first to say something. "Good to see you join winning team now. You tired of me beating you already?"

Shane's shoulders sag in relief. This, friendly chirping, he can do. He hates that he's going to have Rozanov to thank for breaking the tension.

"If I remember correctly I'm pretty sure I've beaten you two out of the three times we've played this season." Shane volleys back. He notices as he does it that there's a jersey with his name on it hung up in the stall next to Rozanov, so he walks in that direction, relieved when some of the others remember that they had been in the middle of something. The rustle of people getting changed resumes, although it's obvious that people are still paying attention.

"Ah, but we beat you last time," Rozanov says, which is true. It had been just before the All-Star break, a gritty game full of penalties that had resulted in a frustrating shutout. "Montreal is headed in wrong direction. All those goals you score do not help them. Is good you play for Boston now."

Shane drops his bag on the bench, still hyper aware of the attention on him. "Yeah, heard you guys need some help in the goal scoring department, don't you? Only 38 for you so far this year."

Rozanov's eyes narrow. It's not like Shane to participate in this kind of chirping off the ice, and Rozanov has seen him enough to know that now. But he must just chalk it up to not really knowing Shane all that well—either that or he can see how terrified Shane is right now. Either way, he goes along with it.

"Ah, we will see how things stand at end of season Hollander. Still lots of time for me to catch up."

A big hand suddenly claps down hard on Shane's shoulder. He turns to find Josh Nelson, Boston's captain. "Are you two gonna be able to stop chirping each other long enough to actually play hockey?" he asks, although the question obviously isn't serious. "Roz, you aren't allowed to corner the guy in some dark alley just so you can win the scoring race, okay? Hollander, I'm Josh, welcome to the team. I know it was probably a shock, but we're all happy to have you."

"Thanks," Shane says. "Happy to be here." The words don't sound convincing, even to him, but thankfully Josh lets it go.

Practice unfortunately does not help Shane's discomfort with being the center of attention, since the main goal of the entire team seems to be getting him up to speed. But with hockey to focus on, it becomes infinitely more bearable. This, Shane knows how to do. Running drills, feeling out who among Boston's wingers he has the most chemistry with, slotting himself into their existing plays, it's all second nature after years of playing hockey for lots of different teams with different styles. At some point, pretty much everyone on the team makes a point to introduce themselves to him, and Shane finds it so much easier to make small talk on the ice while they're setting up a drill than he does in the locker room. After the main practice is done and most of the guys filter out, they have some ice time for just the power play too. It's more than Shane had expected, everyone working hard to make sure he feels good going into the game tomorrow. He's not sure the team in Montreal would have made the same effort for a mid-season trade.

The whole time, Rozanov is there, seemingly always in the corner of Shane's vision. He gets the same feeling that he has every time they play against each other, a sort of constant awareness of where Rozanov is on the ice. Other than a few friendly chirps here and there, always about their supposed rivalry, which garner genuine laughs from the others, he mostly leaves Shane alone while they practice. However, once it's time to focus on the power play, there's no avoiding him.

"Hollander," Coach Smith says as soon as the five guys on the first unit huddle together. "I know you played right wing on Montreal's power play, but Marlow's been great for us there so far this season and we aren't going to fuck with something that's working. So I'm going to try you at left wing for a few games, just see how it goes. I know it's not your usual, so no worries if it doesn't work out or if it takes some time to get used to. As a back up option, we move you to centre and get Roz to try left wing, but our power play numbers have been good this year, so I want to try this first."

Shane swallows down any protest, even as the dread fills him. He hasn't played left wing in years—he can already see his scoring numbers plummeting. But it isn't his place to give an opinion, especially without even trying it, so he just nods, not meeting the eyes of any of his new teammates. "Sounds good," he says.

He has to admit, the drills they run aren't a complete disaster. Shane has an uncanny sense for where Rozanov is on the ice at all times, and from what he can tell it must go both ways, because they barely need to look at each other to pass the puck. He gets a little thrill, tearing up the ice with Rozanov at his side, weaving around invisible opponents. They aren't playing with a goalie, so when Rozanov whips the puck across the ice for Shane to one-time it into the net, it's no surprise that it goes in. But Shane knows in his bones that it would have gone in no matter who was standing between him and the net. Marlow, almost forgotten at right wing, lets off a low whistle.

"You two are fast," he says. "Gotta let us old folks keep up." Shane is pretty sure Marlow can't be more than a few years older than him and Rozanov, but before he can ask Rozanov is already chirping back.

"Is okay Marley," he says. "You stand back there by blue line, we do all the work. We do not want you hurting your old bones trying to keep up with young players."

"Fuck you, Roz," Marlow says, but there's genuine affection there. As much as Rozanov seems to project the image of an asshole to the rest of the world, his teammates at least obviously like him. There's a comfort as they chirp each other that Shane envies—even in Montreal, he had always felt a little removed from the rest of the guys. He had been the youngest, and the focus of so much media attention that he knew some of the guys who had been on the team longer resented how Shane was being framed as some sort of saviour.

Either Rozanov hadn't had the same issues, or his brazen charm had torn right through any barriers they may have caused. Unfortunately, Shane thinks it was probably the latter.

When practice is finally over, he can't help but feel a little more settled. Being on the ice has always affected him like that. The doubts are still there, the crushing feeling of shame over being traded pressing down on him, but it feels a little more distant than it had this morning.

The team in Boston is nice, welcoming, and willing to work with him, as much as that would have surprised him to learn a week ago. For the first time, instead of looking at the years ahead with dread, he wonders if maybe he can make this work.

That is, of course, ignoring the problem of this being Rozanov's team. And of Shane's particularly complicated history with him, of which he is immediately reminded in the showers after practice when Rozanov appears seemingly out of nowhere and turns on the water for the shower right next to Shane's.

He doesn't stick around to see what Rozanov would have said, if he would have said anything with the other guys also showering nearby. Shane's mind is immediately brought back to the first time they had found themselves in the same showers after a skate, and the events that had followed. He grabs his things and almost trips in his scramble to get away, not meeting Rozanov's eyes, soap suds still running down his skin. He changes as quickly as he can, and leaves the door to the practice facility swinging shut behind him before anyone else even finishes their shower.

Of course, it's not like he can avoid Rozanov forever. Eventually, someone would be bound to notice that the only time the two of them ever talk is to chirp each other, and it would probably seem strange. Especially because, being on the same team now, Shane doesn't think he has it in him to keep pretending that he hates Rozanov. He's annoying, sure, but there's never been any sort of intense personal dislike between them like the media wants to believe. At least not on Shane's part, and he's fairly confident that Rozanov wouldn't have hooked up with him twice if it wasn't the same for him.

Shane figures that he can probably get away with avoiding Rozanov for a few weeks, at least. Enough time for his hands to stop shaking every time he thinks about the fact that someone who is now his teammate knows this thing about him. That they have this kind of history between them.

He's wrong. Barely two hours have passed since the end of his first practice when there's a knock at the door of his hotel room. Shane doesn't know how Rozanov found out where he's staying, but he knows before he even looks that there's no one else it could be.

For a very brief moment, he considers not answering. Pretending that he's out somewhere. He immediately feels ashamed. He's already been beyond rude to Rozanov, ignoring him after the press conference yesterday and after practice today, even though his former rival had been the first one to welcome him to his new team. He knows he's being ridiculous, just as much as he knows that the two of them really do need to talk.

He still takes his time walking over to open the door. It doesn't matter—Rozanov is still standing there, leaning against the wall and looking irritated.

"Finally," he says, immediately shoving past Shane and into the room, barely sparing a glance for him. "You would think that moving to same city as me would make you easier to talk to, not harder."

Shane can only shut the door behind him and stare at the floor. He feels like apologising, but the words get stuck in his throat. Him and Rozanov aren't *nice* to each other—that's not what

they do.

When Shane isn't forthcoming with a response, Rozanov sighs and rolls his eyes. "Come on Hollander. You do not need to look like I am going to murder you. We are teammates now, yes? I only want to talk."

"I know," Shane says quietly. He still can't quite meet Rozanov's eyes, so he fixes his gaze on a point just over his shoulder. "I wanted to talk to you too. I just..."

"Yes." Thankfully, Rozanov doesn't seem too upset that Shane is having a hard time translating his thoughts into words. They're probably written all over his face. "Is big few days for you. Still," he frowns. "You do not have to run away from me."

Shane still can't look at him. This scene, the two of them in a hotel room, is already too familiar. He realises abruptly that's he's afraid. Because he knows this... *thing* that they have needs to end, but he doesn't trust himself to be able to end it. Not when there's a small part of his brain who's upset about the trade not because of all the very legitimate hockey reasons that he should be upset about, but because it means that Rozanov is never going to come to his apartment after the game in Montreal next week and—

He realises all this very quickly, and he hopes that the panic doesn't show on his face. God, he's pathetic. Traded away halfway through his rookie year, and all he's worried about is not being able to hook up with his rival anymore, when he should have never let it happen in the first place.

Shane realises that he still hasn't said anything to Rozanov. "Sorry," he chokes out belatedly. "I just..."

Rozanov sighs, but he just turns and walks over to the couch, plopping himself down. When Shane stays where he is, planted near the door, he rolls his eyes. "Are we going to yell across the room to each other?" He asks. He gestures for Shane to join him. "Sit down, Hollander. I will not bite." He smirks a bit, and Shane can almost hear the dirty joke he wants to make, but surprisingly Rozanov leaves it at that.

Shane moves slowly over to perch on the sofa next to Rozanov, careful to keep as much distance as possible between them. "We can't..." He still doesn't know what Rozanov even wants.

"Hollander." His voice is hard, the annoyance seeping through. "I am not here to fuck you. Or do anything else you do not want to. But we are going to need to talk to each other to be on same team."

Some of the tension seeps out of Shane. "Okay," he says, forcing himself to look up and into Rozanov's eyes for the first time. "Okay, sorry. I just... I didn't really know what to think, when my agent told me I was coming here. I never really expected to play with you."

Rozanov snorts. "That is two of us," he says. "But is good for us that Montreal are idiots. We are both good players, probably better together. But you need to be able to look at me at practice."

Shane winces. He doesn't know why, but he hadn't expected Rozanov to notice the way Shane had been avoiding his gaze all day. Not when he had also mostly stayed away from Shane on the ice. "I know," he says. At Rozanov's unimpressed look, he goes on. "I know. I was just... worried, today. I'm not great at meeting people, and I was worried maybe you'd say something to me. I don't know. It was dumb."

"Yes, you are very dumb. You need to stop that. Only smart people play for Boston."

Against his will, Shane snorts.

Rozanov doesn't give him any time to formulate a response to that, not that Shane is really in the mindset to chirp right now anyways. "Hollander." He waits until Shane looks up at him again, features becoming serious. "I am not going to tell anyone. Or say something to you where people can hear. You forget I have same secret."

Shane swallows and nods. He hadn't forgotten that, but something about how easy this all seems to be for Rozanov makes him anxious. Like maybe he would be less careful about it. He knows that's stupid though—Rozanov is from Russia. He has to be more careful than anyone.

"Okay," he says eventually. "I knew that, really. I just... I think I needed to hear it."

"Well now you have," Rozanov says. "You will be normal on ice now?"

"I'll try," Shane says. He feels like there's no way he won't be weird about playing with Rozanov for at least a little while. But if he can maybe put this entire thing out of his mind and focus on the hockey reasons why it's weird, that would be better. Easier to explain to others too. "Just... is this not weird at all to you? Playing together when we've..."

Rozanov just looks at him. "No," he says. "You are making big deal of nothing. Playing with you is good thing—we score more goals." When Shane makes to protest, to explain himself further, Rozanov throws up his hands. "We fucked, Hollander. So what? No one will know. Unless you stare at my ass in shower again, so maybe don't do that."

Against his will, Shane laughs. And once he starts laughing, he can't stop. He laughs until tears are streaming down his face and he's bent over gasping for breath. At the absurdity of the situation, at the fact that he's even having this conversation with Rozanov, of all people. At first Rozanov just looks at him like he's crazy, but eventually he starts chuckling too.

"I think I understand," Rozanov says, when Shane has finally calmed down. "Why you say is weird. Is little weird, not something we expected, to be on same team. But I think it is good thing." He pauses, and suddenly his eyes on Shane feel heavy. "You knew I was telling truth before, right? Montreal is stupid, to let you go so easy. You are too good of a hockey player to be traded like that, in first season with no warning."

Something sours in Shane's stomach at the reminder. He shrugs. "Well," he says, laughter evaporating. "Apparently not."

Rozanov narrows his eyes. "You should not pity yourself so much, Hollander. You know they are stupid, I know they are stupid, everyone on team knows they are stupid. Fans too. Have you seen online how pissed Montreal fans are? You are good player—second-best in league. Do not prove stupid Montreal right and let this get in your head."

As much as Shane wants to bristle at the words, at the lack of sympathy with which Rozanov delivers them, he knows that they're right. He has been pitying himself a lot in the last few days, stuck in a constant spiral of wondering what he had done wrong when he knows that there is no real answer to that. He does need to get it together before their first game tomorrow, and especially before they play Montreal next week. And that definitely starts with getting over whatever hang-up he has about playing with Rozanov.

"I know," he says eventually. "I know. It was good today, playing with you guys. Mostly. I swear I'll be fine in a few days."

"I believe you," Rozanov says. "Just maybe hurry up a little, okay? You having bad day affects my power play now."

"Oh, it's your power play, is it?" Shane rolls his eyes.

"Yes."

"We'll see about that."

"Good," Rozanov says. "Sounds more like normal Hollander." He stands to leave. "You are going to be normal now? Not explode if I chirp you in front of team? They will be suspicious—I was too nice to you today."

"Yeah, yeah," Shane sighs. If today had been Rozanov being nice to him, he wonders what normal is like. He hadn't seemed to hold back on chirps, at least. "Just not about..."

Rozanov rolls his eyes. "No, Hollander, I am not stupid. Will be our secret."

Shane can't help himself. He needs to just make sure that they're on the same page here. "And we can't..."

"Can't what?"

Shane forces the words out through gritted teeth. He hates how red he is, how he can't control it. "We can't hook up anymore."

Rozanov raises an eyebrow. "Can't we?" He asks, and there's definitely something a little mocking in his tone.

"Rozanov," Shane starts, because how on earth can he think that that could ever be a good idea? But Rozanov cuts him off.

"Is fine, Hollander. You don't want to fuck, we don't fuck. But you can't deny would be very convenient." He waggles his eyebrows.

"No." Shane's voice is firm. "We can't—we're teammates now. We can't."

Rozanov shrugs, like it doesn't matter to him either way. It sends a pang of hurt through Shane when he realises that it probably doesn't. "Okay," he says simply. "But if you ever change your mind, you know where to find me."

Then he winks, and leaves.

Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

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

"Shane, how do you feel about your first game with your new team?"

"I feel good. Obviously there's always an adjustment period playing with new guys, but I think I was able to create some good opportunities in front of the net and stick with the play. And a win always feels good."

"Shane, you had a great assist on Rozanov's power play goal tonight. I think people were excited to see the two of you play together for the first time, can you tell us what that's been like?"

"I mean, Rozanov's a great player. I just sent him the pass, he's the one who really did all the work to make that goal happen. Playing on the left wing for the power play is obviously new for me, so I was just happy that we could get the puck to the net."

"Shane, Montreal lost their game 7-1 last night. Do you think your old team regrets trading you?"

"Uh, well, I don't think I'm going to comment on other teams' games. I'm focused on my team here in Boston."

"Shane, how do you think things are going with your new team off the ice? You and Rozanov have famously been rivals since the World Juniors two years ago. Has it been difficult putting that aside and learning how to work together?"

"Well, I think our rivalry was always born from competitiveness, not any kind of personal dislike. So some of that's still there, obviously, but I think it pushes us both to be better."

"And the rest of the team?"

"Everyone's been super nice and welcoming. To be honest I've barely seen anyone off the ice—they've been working really hard to get me up to speed, so it's been a lot of extra hours at the rink. And I've been spending the rest of my time finding an apartment and getting settled here in Boston. But I'm looking forward to getting into a bit more of a routine and getting to know some of the guys better."

"Rozanov scored two goals tonight and you only had an assist, which means that he's now only one behind you in the scoring race. Are you worried that the extra stress of the trade and getting used to a new team will affect your chances?"

"Uh, no, not really. I don't really think too much about stuff like that. I just want to do the best that I can to help my team win."

Once again, Shane finds himself in front of at least a dozen microphones, reporters jostling each other for space. This is by far the biggest post-game media availability he's ever done, the hype around the Shane Hollander trade obviously not having died down in the last few days. And every other question seems to be about either Rozanov or his feelings towards Montreal, trying to drum up some kind of drama for tomorrow's headlines.

Truly, Shane doesn't have anything new to say. It's only been around 72 hours since Farah had called to tell him he was being traded, and he isn't lying when he says that at least since his first practice yesterday, all he's been able to think about is hockey. He's not going to admit it, but since Rozanov managed to at least somewhat snap him out of his funk yesterday, all his focus has been on proving Montreal wrong, of playing better than he ever has before so that it's obvious to everyone that trading Shane Hollander was the biggest mistake they'll ever make. He's not going to let this get in his head, as Rozanov had said. He had arrived early and stayed late at morning skate today, determined to play as well as he could in the game tonight. To his surprise, a bunch of the other guys—including Nelson, Marlow, and Rozanov—had stayed with him, running drills and going over plays. He had been as ready as he could possibly be for his first game tonight.

And he had done well. He hadn't been on the ice for any of the goals against, he had created a couple of good scoring chances, and he had gotten his first assist for Boston on Rozanov's power play goal. Even playing an unfamiliar position, he had contributed. Coach Smith had clapped him on the shoulder and given him a nod of approval on his way out.

But before the All-Star break and the trade, Shane had been on a seven-game goal streak, and tonight he hadn't scored. So in the reporters' eyes, this is probably the beginning of Shane Hollander's downfall.

Talking to the press has the side-effect of dampening the adrenaline of the win a bit, so Shane is a little more subdued when he returns to the locker room. The atmosphere is still rowdy though, spirits up for the first game and first win since the All-Star break, everyone feeling a little more energy than they usually would. Shane skirts around some of his new teammates' antics to make his way back to his stall and start getting changed, already thinking ahead to getting back to his hotel room and maybe ordering in tonight before crashing. He's moving into his new apartment in the morning, and he had been planning on spending a few more hours at the rink too, even though there's no skate scheduled.

Those plans are immediately dashed when he feels Rozanov's arm come down around his shoulders. Shane jerks away on instinct, but Rozanov seems to have expected it and his grip is firm, even as he laughs at something Marlow is saying. His hand feels like a brand on Shane's bare skin.

"You," Rozanov says, poking Shane's chest. "Are coming out with us tonight. And you are not allowed to be boring and say no. We are celebrating your first game, you must come."

A few of the nearby guys cheer, and Shane does his best to hide his disappointment. He hates going out—he had almost never gone anywhere with the guys in Montreal, even though he had been old enough to drink there. He would much rather get a good night's sleep and have more energy for hockey tomorrow, but there's a little voice in the back of his head telling him that maybe not bonding with the team enough had been the reason Montreal had gotten rid of

him so easily. It's consistently the only real thing that Shane can think of that hadn't been going well in Montreal, so that must be it. He's determined not to make the same mistakes again, so he holds back his sigh and nods.

"I suppose," he says. "But just for a bit. I really am beat."

Rozanov frowns. "Is this another stupid English expression I do not know? You are not beat, we win game."

Shane can't help but laugh. "Yeah," he says. "It means I'm tired."

"Stupid language," Rozanov says, and the guys around them laugh like it's a familiar comment. Finally, Rozanov moves away, and Shane rushes to put his shirt on as quickly as he can. He can't handle Rozanov being so close while he's getting changed—it reminds him too much of the CCM shoot last summer, and he can't let his mind go there if he wants to keep everything that has happened since a secret. Not for the first time in the last few days, he fervently wishes that the equipment guys hadn't set him up in the stall right next to Rozanov's. They had probably thought it would be funny, putting the rivals next to one another. Or maybe it's just dumb luck, that this spot had belonged to one of the guys Boston had lost in the trade.

He tries his best to be present as the team finishes getting changed and piles into a bunch of cars to head to their usual post-game drinks spot. Shane doesn't have his car in Boston yet—it's still sitting in his parking garage in Montreal waiting for his parents to drive it down to him when they come visit in a few weeks. Instead, he catches a ride with Nelson. Rozanov offers, eyebrows waggling as he gestures towards a frankly ridiculous-looking sports car, but Shane doesn't even have to come up with a feasible reason why he doesn't want to take him up on the offer. A bunch of the guys start making fun of Rozanov's apparently excessive car collection, and Shane just joins in on the laughter.

The club they go to is loud and a little fancy—pretty much exactly what Shane would have expected from Rozanov's team. Once they get settled into a few booths in the back, Shane decides it's not too bad. The music is more muted back here, and although there is a dance floor that a couple of the younger guys head towards right away, at least half the team shows no interest. Someone orders a round of drinks, and Shane is able to casually stop off at the bar and nab himself a glass of ginger ale without anyone glancing twice at him. He's going to make more of an effort here to bond with the team, but that doesn't mean he's going to abandon his principles entirely. Alcohol is terrible for athletes.

"Not much of a dancer, Hollander?" Asks Ryan Carmichael, a defenseman a few years older than Shane, as they settle into the booth. It's mostly the older guys here, or the younger ones who are already married like Carmichael. Rozanov and his crew have already taken over a section of the dance floor—Shane is very determinedly not looking in that direction.

Shane just shrugs. "Not really," he says. For once, he doesn't feel like as much of a buzzkill—there are enough other guys sitting out that it's not odd. Montreal had been a younger team, and Shane's reluctance to party had stuck out like a sore thumb.

"I suppose you've had a hell of a week," Carmichael muses. "Great assist though, I forget if I told you that already. You should celebrate a bit. Can't be easy getting traded like that and having to adjust so fast. Was this whole thing as much of a shock to you as it was to everyone else?"

"What do you mean?" Shane asks. As much as he hasn't been able to stop thinking about it, since it's his life, none of his new teammates have actually asked him about the trade yet.

"He wants to know if Montreal gave you a heads up," Victor St-Simon, one of Shane's new wingers, chimes in from across the table. "Everyone assumed that you must have wanted to leave, because sure as shit no one else saw it coming."

"Uh, no," Shane says. He's stuck between not wanting to shit talk the team that had drafted him, while also wanting very much to spend the next ten minutes ranting about them. He's sure these guys would be down for that, but he can't muster the necessary anger tonight. Not after his first game with his new team, the relief that he hadn't totally fucked it up and the heavy knowledge that he still hadn't been good enough. "No heads up. Well, my agent called me the morning of to tell me that rumours were swirling, so I had a bit of warning, but it was just as much of a surprise to me as it was to you guys."

The guys within earshot are all shaking their heads. "Shitty thing to do," Carmichael says. "Everyone knows the only reason Montreal is even in playoffs contention this year is because of you."

It's true, even though Shane would never say so himself. Instead he just shrugs. Montreal is his division rival now, and Boston is also in the mix for a playoffs spot. Secretly, he's already had the thought that the absolute best thing he can do to spite the team that had discarded him like he was nothing is to help carry Boston to a playoff berth instead.

"It just makes no sense," St-Simon shakes his head. "Why would they trade their best player to a division rival, of all people? I mean, great for us, but there's no way they think they're making playoffs now that you're working against them instead of for them. And if they're thinking about the future, trading their rookies is a stupid move too."

Shane shrugs. "I have no idea," he says honestly.

"And to send you to Boston too," Brad Hammersmith, one of Rozanov's linemates, chips in. "I mean, obviously we know we're cool, and we aren't going to give you shit or anything. But the way everyone talked about you and Rozanov and your rivalry... shitty thing to do."

"What's the deal with you and Rozanov anyways?" Carmichael asks. It takes everything Shane has not to react to that, to ignore the complete panic that takes over his mind at the words he's been dreading hearing since he first heard the word "Boston" out of Farah's mouth. He reassures himself that these guys don't know anything, that the question makes sense in the context of the conversation.

He affects nonchalance as best he can. "Nothing, really," he says.

Hammersmith raises his eyebrows. "Come on, Hollander, tell us what's up. You should have seen Roz's face when we all found out you were coming here. Totally blank, gave nothing away. And he wouldn't tell us anything about you, or what he thought of you coming here."

"Really weird, for Roz," Carmichael adds. Shane files that little tidbit of information away for later. Interesting. Maybe Rozanov isn't as unaffected by all this as he seems. "Do you guys, like, actually hate each other or something? He's been pretty tame this week since you got here, now that I think about it. Not in your face anywhere near as much as he was when Johanssen first got traded here a few months ago."

Shane takes a sip of his ginger ale, wondering what to say. He hadn't expected to have the chance to control the narrative around the two of them like this. Eventually, he settles on something resembling the truth. "There really is nothing," he says. "I mean, the whole rivalry thing... it wasn't us that started it. It was the media at the World Juniors, since we were opposing captains, and then when we got drafted to rival teams the league sort of just ran with it. I don't hate him or anything, and I don't think he hates me. We're just... competitive. And very different, and used to being pitted against each other."

The guys are nodding. "Fair enough," Carmichael says. "And man, I can't wait to see what the two of you do to our power play with a few more games to get used to it. That goal tonight was a beaut."

"Aww, you are talking about me?" Rozanov is suddenly there, one arm around Carmichael's shoulders and the other around Hammersmith's. "I know I am best, you do not need to tell me all the time."

Carmichael laughs easily. "Fuck off, Roz," he says. "Shouldn't you be off getting laid?"

"Later, later," Rozanov waves him off. "Need to come celebrate new teammate, da Hollander? I hear he assisted on a beautiful goal tonight." Before Shane can stop him, he grabs the glass of ginger ale and takes a long swig, smacking his lips. Shane freezes, waiting for the comment, for Rozanov to call him boring again and tell the whole team he's only pretending to drink with them, but he just sets the glass back down and winks. "You're welcome for that, by the way."

Shane forces himself to roll his eyes and laugh with the rest of them at Rozanov's arrogance. It feels too hot in the club, all of a sudden, and although Shane has mostly been enjoying himself until now he abruptly wishes that he was alone again, the pressure of interacting with Rozanov with this many eyes on them almost too much. How on earth is he going to do this regularly for the next several years?

Thankfully, Rozanov doesn't stay long, disappearing back to the dance floor as soon as he finishes his own drink. The conversation turns back to hockey then, analysing different teams' playoff odds, and Shane only half-listens, content to fade into the background a little bit now that the attention is off him. He finds himself feeling strangely good about his new team—they're curious about the trade, about the rivalry, but they seem like good guys. Shane can maybe picture himself going out with them after games every so often, just like this. He hadn't expected to feel so welcome here, when he had first heard the news. If anything, he had expected the opposite.

The future spools out in front of him, but still, the great unknown is Rozanov. Shane's first thought upon being traded was of his supposed rival, and three days later with his first game under his belt, that still feels like the biggest unknown. He can see himself playing with these guys, maybe befriending a few of them. But even though him and Rozanov seem to have found a tentative peace, Shane can't help but feel that it's tenuous. He seeks Rozanov out in the crowd almost instinctively, eyes eventually landing on where he's dancing with a very attractive woman. Shane immediately looks away, flushing, from where Rozanov's hands are groping shamelessly over her body. He can't help himself though—he looks back almost instantly. Rozanov's head is tipped back, his eyes closed, reminding Shane of when—

Nope. No. He can't think about that. Not at all, but especially not here. The only possible way that he's going to get through this is by pretending that none of it had ever happened at all.

For the first time, Shane really thinks about the future stretching out before him—a future of playing on the same team as Ilya Rozanov. For years, potentially—maybe even the rest of their careers. He has the startling realisation that they will always have this history between them—that even if Shane keeps to his word and lets nothing else happen, they will always have this shared secret. It scares him a little, and bothers him, even though he can't quite put his finger on why.

Shane determinedly does not notice when Rozanov slips out with the girl he had been dancing with. He just brushes off the other guys' insinuations that he try to hook up too, claiming exhaustion and his impending move as an excuse, and goes back to his hotel room alone.

Shane stares at his phone as though that will make the screen light up with a message.

It's been ten days since the trade, ten days since he's had his life turned entirely upside down. He's moved into his new apartment, unpacked most of his stuff, and played four games with his new team. He knows everyone's name, is starting to figure out the team dynamics—who's friends with who, who secretly can't stand one another, who has weird quirks and superstitions before games that everyone just rolls with. He has three goals and five assists with his new team—it's objectively great, but Rozanov has passed him in the scoring race so it still doesn't feel like enough.

He's back in Montreal.

It feels like some kind of sick joke, that the first game of his first road trip with his new team is in Montreal. It's not like it's a surprise—back when he had thought he would be on the other side of the ice tonight, this date had been circled in bright red in his mental calendar. But knowing that it's been coming hasn't made it any easier.

Shane had had a short conversation with his mom about it on the phone a few days ago. Both of his parents are coming to the game—the first time he'll see them since the trade—and he's

weirdly nervous about it. They still haven't talked properly about any of it, and every time Shane thinks about having that conversation all he can remember is how excited his mom had been when he had been drafted to Montreal in the first place. Her favourite team. He's not sure he wants to know how she feels about him now playing for their biggest rival.

His mom had encouraged him to reach out to his old teammates. He hasn't heard from any of them since he left, not that he had really expected to. It feels weird—maybe it wouldn't if he had played in Montreal for longer, but he had only just started to feel like tentative friends with some of the guys on the team when he had been sent away. Still, he thinks it would maybe be weirder to just show up to the Bell Centre tonight, so he had sent off a message to Hayden and J.J., the two guys he had liked the most, asking if they wanted to meet up either before or after the game.

His phone's screen remains frustratingly blank.

He tells himself it's fine. It's not like he even knows them that well. It's probably normal to lose touch when guys get traded away, and he thinks he's off to a good start with Boston. He can start over.

He can't deny that the whole thing—being in this city, getting ready to play this team—is getting to him. Messing with his head in a way that he's been good at blocking out these last few weeks. When he eventually walks into the Bell Centre again, his phone having remained silent all afternoon while he watched tape and meditated to try to avoid thinking about it, his hands are shaking. He clenches them into fists, knowing that the cameras won't leave him all night. He thinks he's okay, thinks that all the anger and resentment and lingering shame that he's feeling will probably only help his game, but he's never felt like this before, so he can't be sure. He knows that either way, he can't let any of it show on his face.

His new captain can obviously tell he's off though, or maybe he just assumes some of what Shane must be feeling based on the situation. He pulls Shane aside before they go out for warmups, their conversation masked by the sound of guys chirping and laughing as they get ready.

"You doing alright, Hollander?" Nelson asks.

Shane gives him a short nod. Nelson seems to be waiting for him to say something, but he has nothing to say. Sure, he wishes that he was just about anywhere else right now, but he can't change that. And he definitely isn't going to let his emotions impact his game.

"I know this is a big game," Nelson continues when it becomes obvious that Shane isn't going to contribute much to this conversation. "Montreal games always are for us, but especially for you, this one can't be easy. Just... don't feel like you have to win it singlehandedly, you know? We've got your back, and I think we're all looking forward to showing them just how much they fucked up."

Shane forces out a smile. He wishes that they were on the ice already. "Thanks," he says.

It seems like everyone is on the same page. During warmups, Shane doesn't even have time to look across to the other side of the ice or into the crowd that had been cheering for him just

a few short weeks ago. Rozanov and Marlow keep him occupied with a mix of drills and shenanigans, and Coach Smith does him the favour of starting Rozanov's line instead of Shane's. By the time Shane jumps over the boards for his first shift, the game is already underway and there's no time to overthink anything. It's just hockey from there.

At one point, Hayden checks Shane into the boards. There's a bit of a scuffle, St-Simon slamming into both of them too in search of the puck, Comeau behind him, and it ends with the sound of the whistle. Shane isn't sure who got the penalty, but there's a second where he meets Hayden's eyes. His former teammate immediately looks down, cheeks flushing a bit, discomfort written in every line of his face.

Well. That answers the question of whether he had gotten Shane's text.

There's no time to dwell on it. It turns out Comeau had gotten the penalty for tripping St-Simon, so Boston is going on the power play. Rozanov grins at Shane as he skates by to take the face-off. He wins it, and thirty seconds later Shane is sending the puck top-shelf past Drapeau and into the back of the net.

He can't deny that it feels good.

It's their best game since Shane has joined the team by far. It's almost like Montreal is resigned to being at the mercy of their former teammate from the start, their defence crumbling in front of Boston's rejuvenated top six. Shane gets his first career hat trick, as well as two assists on Rozanov's goals. He can practically hear the crowd groaning that he doesn't play for them anymore. Boston win 7-3.

It's just one game, pretty insignificant in the grand scheme of things, but it feels good.

Afterwards, the atmosphere in the locker room is celebratory. Shane knows that it's probably always like this after beating Montreal—from what he can remember, there had definitely been an extra layer of satisfaction the two times Montreal had beaten Boston earlier this year. But Shane can't help but feel like at least some of the good mood is because of him, because his teammates had cared about winning this one in order to stick it to Shane's old team on his behalf. The thought warms him more than he thought it would.

Everyone is going out, of course, but Shane begs off. He doesn't even meet any resistance when he mentions that his parents had been at the game and that he's getting dinner with them. Marlow just slaps him on the shoulder and makes Shane promise to come next time, and Shane is surprised to find that he means it when he says he will. He still can't help but check his phone one more time before he heads out of the locker room, just in case Hayden or J.J. have had a change of heart. He doesn't really expect anything, not after a loss like that, and he isn't surprised when the only text waiting for him is one from his mother telling him where to meet them.

Thankfully, his parents are already seated when he arrives at the restaurant, tucked in a booth in the back. They both rise to hug him, and Shane can't help but glance around, wondering if pictures of this are going to end up online later tonight. They're out of sight enough that no one seems to recognise him though, so he relaxes into the hug a bit. It hits him abruptly, how much his life has changed since he last saw his parents in Nashville less than two weeks ago.

"Shane," his mom says, and there's nothing in her tone but relief and concern. "Great game tonight. That power play goal was amazing. How are you doing?"

"I'm good." Shane is actually a little choked up at the feeling of familiar arms around him, but he fights to keep his voice even as they sit down. He can't cry about this again—not in front of his parents, and definitely not in public. He's just started making peace with his new reality.

"How have things been in Boston?" His dad asks. Shane can feel both of their eyes on him, heavy with concern. Since the phone call that first night, Shane hasn't talked to them much—just short calls here and there to coordinate moving logistics and arrange them coming to the game tonight. He hasn't let any conversation drag on long enough for him to get emotional again. He knows his parents are worried about how he's handling this, and he doesn't want to give them more reason to be. Not when he can't tell them so much about why this particular trade had freaked him out.

"They've been good." Shane tries to let honesty infuse his tone, because it's mostly true. "Seriously. The team is super hard-working, and they've all put in a lot of extra time to help me get up to speed."

Yuna is looking at him with an eyebrow raised, obviously unimpressed. "Great," she says. "Now tell us something you haven't told the media after every game you've played in the last week."

Shane can't help but laugh—it is a media line, and of course his mom has watched all his games and interviews lately. She always has. "It's true, though," he says. "They have been great. Really welcoming, even beyond the hockey stuff. It was a little weird walking into the locker room the first day, but after the ice was broken it was fine. I—I still feel a little off-kilter, and I don't love playing on the left wing during the power play, but I think I've clicked pretty well with the team."

"Well that's clear to see from the way you've been playing," His mom says. "And off the ice? No one's given you any trouble?"

Shane frowns. Sure, he had been worried about Rozanov, but his parents wouldn't know about that. "Why would they?" He asks. "It's not like they have anything against me personally, just because I played for Montreal for a few months." He winces at how that sounds—like the time he had played for his mom's favourite team had been insignificant, nothing but a blip at the very start of a hopefully long career. It's true, but he already knows his mom probably doesn't want to hear it.

He's right. Yuna's eyes narrow. "Well, you never know with those old hockey rivalries," she says. "I don't think anyone could really blame you for still having some loyalty to the team that drafted you, but I could see some of the assholes on Boston having an issue with that."

"I don't," Shane says. "Still have loyalty to Montreal, I mean. Obviously—I had five points against them tonight. So no one is holding that against me. If anything they're even more pissed at Montreal on my behalf, which is sort of nice."

"Shane," Yuna says, and already he can hear the chiding in her tone. "You know trades aren't always personal. You can't—"

Shane holds up his hand, and to his surprise, his mother stops talking. "I—stop, mom," he says. He knows it sounds rude, but he had known this was coming and he suddenly finds that he can't sit here and listen to it. "Just—I know they're your team, and I know that isn't going to change, but it doesn't change that they were kind of shitty to me." He makes sure to keep his voice low—he doesn't even want to imagine the headlines this conversation would spark if it was overheard. "I just... I need to be pissed off at them right now. That's what's letting me play through this. I can't sit here and listen to you defend them all night."

"I wasn't going to defend them," his mom argues. "Shane, of course not. I know it was terrible of them, to trade you like that. No team has given up such a high draft pick in their rookie season in decades, I know that. But I'm just saying, playing into this whole hatred that Boston has for Montreal isn't like you, it's not—"

"Yuna," Shane's dad cuts her off, and Shane can't help the way his shoulders slump in relief. He had known his mom wouldn't get it. She's too invested in hockey as a fan. "Maybe let's drop it for now. Shane is allowed to be upset, and it's not hurting anyone."

Yuna huffs. "I know," she says. "I just don't want him to buy into that kind of toxic atmosphere."

Shane wants to point out that there's absolutely no difference between Montreal and Boston when it comes to their rivalry, that it isn't as one-sided as his mother is making it sound. But he already knows that it won't do any good, so he tries to turn the conversation back to safer topics.

"It's really not a toxic atmosphere," he says. "Not in the way you think. Sure, every team has their rivalries, but like I said before, everyone has been really welcoming. And... the team is a little different too. More a mix of older and younger guys, so there isn't as much partying, and everyone is really focused on hockey."

Yuna's eyebrows are raised now. "You're trying to tell me a team that has Ilya Rozanov as its star player is welcoming and doesn't party?"

Shane snorts. "Rozanov isn't the whole team," he says. "And sure, he definitely does party, and a few of his friends do too, but it's not like it's everyone the way it was on Montreal. And it doesn't take away from hockey. Him and Marlow have stayed late with me at every practice to work on the power play."

"Really?" His dad says. "I would have thought he'd be making it harder on you, not easier. He seems like he wouldn't be the type to enjoy having competition for the spotlight on his own team."

Shane shrugs. He really wishes they could talk about something other than Rozanov—he still can't bring himself to be totally normal about him. "I mean, having me there gives his team a better chance to win," he says. "He's arrogant yeah, but not stupid. He isn't going to jeopardise that because of his ego."

Both of his parents are still looking at him skeptically, and Shane decides it's time to stop talking about hockey. He clumsily changes the subject to his new apartment, and thankfully they go along with it, though not without exchanging another significant look. He doesn't care—he doesn't want to spend all night arguing with them that Boston could be a good thing, not when he's barely begun to realise that himself.

The conversation stays on lighter topics for the rest of the evening, and Shane begs off maybe earlier than he otherwise would have. He can tell that his parents are still concerned about how he's dealing with all the change, but he doesn't know how to reassure them any more than he already has, not without arguing with his mom again. He hopes that this weirdness will go away as time goes on and she gets used to the idea of him playing for Boston, that this won't be another thing his former team has ruined for him. If he knows her at all, he knows she's probably already plotting how he can eventually get himself traded or signed back to Montreal, and he knows that he'll have to break the news to her soon that he has no interest in that.

Still, he tries not to think about it as he hugs his parents goodnight. His dad whispers to him to "give her time", and Shane hopes that means he'll talk to his mom before they see each other again. They promise to come to a home game in Boston in a few weeks—thankfully not against Montreal—and Shane heads back to his hotel.

A quick glance at his phone shows that the rest of the team is still out celebrating. His gaze catches on a notification from Hayden, sent less than an hour ago, while he had been eating dinner with his parents.

Hayden: Sorry man, didn't see this until now. Pretty beat after that game, maybe next time though. Best of luck with Boston.

Well. Shane knows a rejection when he sees one.

There's also another text. Shane isn't sure what to make of it.

Lily: You should come when you are finished with dinner. Team is here.

Followed by an address.

He has no desire to go out and find his new team to join in the celebrations—not after the mental exhaustion of playing in Montreal again and dinner with his parents. Instead, he changes into his pyjamas and turns the TV on to watch the Edmonton vs. Calgary game. Boston is playing both of them in the next few weeks, so he gets lost in analysing the plays. When the knock on the door eventually comes, it scares him a little, breaking his concentration.

Shane frowns even as he gets up to go answer the door. He's lucky to not have a roommate—usually that's a privilege reserved for the older guys on the team, but since he had been a mid-season trade all of the younger guys had already been paired up. He wonders for a moment if a fan has somehow managed to figure out where he's staying—he is in Montreal, after all, and hockey fans here can go a little overboard. But instead he peers through the peephole to

find Rozanov waiting in the hall with his characteristic bored expression, arms crossed impatiently.

"Rozanov?" He asks, opening the door slowly. For a moment Shane's thoughts flash back to Nashville, to Rozanov's promise to fuck him the next time they were in Montreal, to the smug and satisfied look on his face when Shane had acquiesced. But no—Shane had made it abundantly clear that they couldn't do that, not now that they were teammates, and Rozanov hadn't even tried to push. He couldn't be here for that. Shane impatiently squashes down the tiny kernel of hope, keeping his voice even but still hesitant. "What are you doing here?"

Rozanov just rolls his eyes, pushing into the room. "Hollander, you are so boring," he says. "Relax. Am not here to fuck." He glances around the hotel room, which can't be much different from his, then turns back to Shane. "Unless you have changed your mind?"

Shane swallows, shakes his head. "Of course not," he says.

"Okay." Rozanov doesn't seem bothered either way, and Shane hates that. But he also remembers what Hammersmith had said at the bar the other night, about how Rozanov had reacted when Shane was traded. Maybe he's just much better at hiding his emotions compared to Shane.

"So... what are you doing here?" Shane asks again, eyebrows raising as Rozanov sprawls out on the bed, making himself at home.

"What? Teammates cannot hang out after good game?" Rozanov asks. "Montreal must be very boring, if this is not done there. You will see, in Boston we are fun. We like each other and hang out all the time."

Shane honestly isn't sure what to say to that. When he had played for Montreal most of the guys had gone out after away games—he honestly isn't sure if they had also hung out in each other's hotel rooms. He had usually gone to bed early, other than the odd night when Hayden hadn't felt like leaving their shared room and the two of them had watched a movie together. He doubts that Rozanov likes him at all, but maybe he's just trying to be welcoming. Much stranger things have happened to Shane this year.

"Shouldn't you be out partying?" Shane says instead. He doesn't want to think about his old team anymore. "Or getting laid? It was you who suggested going out earlier."

Rozanov shrugs. "I went out," he says. "Danced, had a few drinks. Was fun. But Montreal hook up already cancelled—did not feel like finding someone else."

It takes Shane a moment to realise that Rozanov is talking about him, and when he does he can feel his face flush all over. "Rozanov," he says, warning in his voice.

He doesn't know how he plans on finishing that sentence, but thankfully Rozanov gets it right away. He holds his hands up in a gesture of innocence. "Just telling truth," he says. "Like I said, not here to fuck. You said no, that is fine. You want me to never talk about it? Pretend it did not happen?"

Shane should say yes. He should absolutely say yes, because that's the only reasonable way forward here, the only way that he maybe has a chance of getting over this stupid hang up he has with Rozanov. But he can't. This—the trade, playing with Rozanov, seeing him regularly—still feels so big, so unknown, and Rozanov is the only other person who maybe understands why. Shane can't bring himself to pretend it never happened, because he has the sneaking suspicion that if he asks, Rozanov will do it, and they'll never acknowledge this thing between them again. Shane doesn't think he could handle that.

"No," he says finally, after far too long of a pause. "That's not what I want. Sorry, I just..."

"Is okay," Rozanov says. "Now come sit down. You have game on TV, this is good. Team is still out, we watch this together."

And they do. Shane goes to sit on the bed next to Rozanov, making sure to keep a healthy distance between them, and they spend the next few hours dissecting the game together, tossing ideas back and forth for how they can adapt their own plays to these teams in a few weeks' time. Perhaps unsurprisingly, Rozanov is a great person to discuss hockey with, and for a little while Shane almost forgets all the other stuff between them that makes every interaction feel so complicated. They're just two teammates, tossing ideas back and forth about Edmonton's penalty kill.

When Rozanov gets up to leave, there is a moment. A singular fraction of a second that lingers in Shane's memory. Rozanov rolls over to Shane's side of the bed, the side closest to the door, before getting up, bringing the two of them closer than they've been all night. Their eyes meet for a moment, after hours of being focused on the game instead of each other, and Shane is struck suddenly by the little flecks of colour in Rozanov's eyes, a mosaic of browns and greens rather than a single consistent shade. For just a moment, it seems like Rozanov is maybe leaning closer, and Shane can feel the soft puff of a breath on his face. Almost unconsciously, his eyes flutter shut.

A second later, it's over. Rozanov is continuing his movement, rolling away from Shane and standing, arms over his head to stretch out the muscles that are probably still sore from the game.

Shane walks him to the door—something he had never done, before. Rozanov wishes him goodnight with his signature smirk, giving nothing away. Then Shane determinedly goes to sleep, and doesn't think of that moment again at all.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much for all the love on this fic so far!

Chapter 3

If there's one thing the end of the season proves, it's that the addition of Shane Hollander to Boston's roster is an immediate and obvious win for his new team.

After floating on the playoff bubble all season, Boston manages to claw their way up to third in the division. They make playoffs for the first time in years, while Montreal tumbles down the standings. It's a good feeling, as they end the season in front of a cheering home crowd. It's an even better feeling because Shane scores twice in the last game, after trading places with Rozanov in the scoring race for weeks. Rozanov assists on the last goal, shaking his head in mock disappointment even as their teammates laugh and punch his arm in celebration. They had been tied going into the night, so Shane ends up with two goals more than Rozanov on the season.

It's the first time in decades that a rookie has scored the most goals in the league, and of course the story of the mid-season trade makes it even juicier. Shane tries hard to stay humble in the seemingly endless press that comes after the game, trying to hide how much he had worked for this, determined to prove himself. They all ask him about his chances for the Calder—the trophy awarded to Rookie of the Year—and bring up his supposed rivalry with Rozanov again, but Shane just waves it off. He can't help but privately hope for it anyways, but in the high of the moment, he feels like he's done all he can. If Rozanov gets the award instead, Shane thinks he can live with that. He'll already be going home with one trophy, after tonight.

Rozanov himself seems mostly unaffected by the outcome of the scoring race. He takes their teammates' chirps in good grace, and although he jokes about how he should have taken the shot instead of passing to Shane on that last goal, it's obviously said with no true regret. The two of them have fallen into a mostly comfortable pattern in the two months since Shane was traded, which mainly consists of being ridiculously competitive in practice, freakishly in sync on every power play, and Rozanov occasionally appearing in Shane's hotel room to watch other teams' games whenever he doesn't feel like hooking up. It feels like a peace of sorts has been reached, precarious as it feels some days, and the rest of the team seems to know that too.

They go out to celebrate, but it isn't the usual post-game hang out. It quickly devolves into dissecting Toronto's power play, the pressure of the first round already weighing on all of them. Most of these guys have never gone to the playoffs before, and although just getting there feels like an accomplishment, none of them want to give up now.

In the end, even the entire team being laser-focused on winning isn't enough. Shane has never worked harder in his life, and his commitment is echoed by his teammates. All of them can feel that they have the start of something really good this season, but it's just not enough. Shane is still a little uncomfortable playing left wing on the power play, and they let in a shorthanded goal in Game 2 that replays in his nightmares for days. A few of the bottom six guys had been injured at the end of the regular season, and although they try their best to play through it, the result is that Coach Smith relies on the top two lines more heavily than usual,

and tiredness leads to sloppiness which leads to more goals against. The penalty kill struggles too, and despite Shane and Rozanov leading the stats for postseason goals and points, it all results in a heartbreaking loss to Toronto in Game 7.

Shane escapes to his parents' cottage as soon as he can, needing to get away from the media and the fans and his teammates and this whole year. Even though it hadn't been like he expected to win the Cup in his rookie season, he still couldn't help but hope. He couldn't help but think that if they did, maybe it would make it all worth it.

He spends most of the summer feeling like he's walking on eggshells. Every time his phone buzzes, he's convinced it's his agent, calling to tell him that he's been traded again, that even his best effort still hadn't been enough. With no hockey to focus on, he can't help his mind from looping back around to Montreal, to wondering why they had traded him in the first place. It's been the hockey community's favourite thing to speculate about since it happened, dragging it up on every slow news day throughout the rest of the season, but no one has come any closer to figuring it out, not when it still makes absolutely no sense.

Shane's own hunch is that there is no secret reason, no grand plan. It's just a case of bad management, impatient for a Cup and not willing to actually develop a team properly in order to win one. But he knows he'll probably never know if there's a reason beyond that, and it kills him.

His mother doesn't help either. It's obvious as soon as he arrives at his parents' cottage that his dad had talked to her, because she doesn't even bring up Montreal. But it feels like a temporary peace, not a permanent one—he knows that she's too stubborn to truly change her opinion, that his dad had probably just convinced her that Shane needed time before he was willing to listen. He can feel the disappointment in her voice every time he talks about Boston or next season, so he stops bringing it up pretty quickly. He hates how this thing has come between them so easily, and he hates his mom a little bit for caring so much about hockey that she just can't let it go. As soon as the thought crosses his mind, he immediately feels guilty for it. He owes everything to his parents—how can he resent his mom's love for the sport he's dedicated his life to?

For the first time in his life, Shane is happy to leave the cottage for a few days at the end of June. As much as he loves the lake, his parents' constant presence after almost a year living on his own is starting to grate on him, especially with all the topics he suddenly needs to tiptoe around. His parents are flying to Vegas with him for the awards, but he splurges on a nice hotel room for them, away from where the players are staying, framing it as a gift to get a little distance. He's happy they're here, and he knows they would never miss it, but he's also just... tired. He's been tired since the trade, and it feels like no matter how much time off he's had, he isn't actually getting any rest.

Other than getting a little space from his parents, the other good thing about the awards show is that no one from Montreal is good enough to be nominated, so that's a whole set of awkward interactions that Shane can put off for another time. Matt Tremblay, the defenseman Shane had been traded for, is nominated for the Norris, but Shane has never met the guy and doesn't dread talking to him the way he dreads seeing some of his former teammates off the ice again. Not that his trade had anything to do with the guys on the team, but he can't seem

to separate the two in his mind. Especially since none of the guys had reached out to even wish him well after the news, aside from Hayden's rejection when Shane had been back in Montreal. He knows that he comes off as stoic and maybe a little standoff-ish, that none of the guys on that team would have considered him much of a friend after only six months, but Shane had been starting to feel comfortable there. It hurts that maybe that feeling had been entirely one-sided.

"Still feeling bad for yourself, Hollander?"

He's waiting at the bar in the hotel where they're hosting the awards, sipping on a ginger ale and trying not to make eye contact with anyone. The ceremony starts in an hour, and he's regretting his constant need to be early to everything. He doesn't want to make small talk, doesn't want anyone's pitying looks at the fact that he's here alone and doesn't know anyone and got tossed out by the team that drafted him halfway through the season.

Except, of course, he's not here alone. Rozanov is also up for the Calder, and he shows no hesitation whatsoever in reaching over Shane to order a drink, then settling in to lean against the wooden counter beside him. Shane doesn't know if Rozanov could actually tell that his thoughts had drifted back to the trade and feeling sorry for himself or whether he's just chirping, but he's gotten more used to dealing with his former rival in the last few months so he doesn't let on that Rozanov had nailed it.

"Sure, Rozanov," he says instead, letting his eyes wander across the room rather than focusing on the hulking presence at his side. Rozanov is standing close enough that Shane can feel his warmth. He looks amazing in his tux. "Maybe you should be feeling sorry for yourself. It's an awful long trip to make when you'll be walking away with nothing tonight."

Out of the corner of his eye, Shane sees Rozanov put a hand over his heart, as though wounded. "Ouch, Hollander," he says. "Thought we were supposed to be teammates now? Friends?"

Incredulous, Shane finally turns his head to look at Rozanov, only to find him grinning, like this is a game they're playing and Rozanov had just won. Shane just shakes his head and rolls his eyes. Right—friends. The concept feels so absurd that he almost laughs.

Friends or not, he can't deny that Rozanov is a life raft in this sea of people he knows but has never spoken to. Shane stays glued to him for the rest of the pre-ceremony happy hour, and Rozanov doesn't seem to mind—seems to expect it, even. Together, they make the rounds of the room, and there's no way Rozanov has met any of these guys any more than Shane has—which is to say, only on the ice—but he greets everybody like he knows them and takes the lead in fielding chirps about their rivalry-turned-partnership.

Of course, they end up sitting together for the ceremony as well. Not that Shane chooses that, especially because his parents join them. The league obviously can't get enough of the publicity they generate, and now that they can't push the rivals narrative, they're just shoving them together at every opportunity to see what happens. Shane can tell by the conversations they have with other players that people aren't sure whether they hate each other or not, and Rozanov somehow manages to reveal nothing about them while maintaining his aloof, cocky smirk. Shane is reluctantly impressed, knowing how much they have to hide and how easily

he seems to do it. But that doesn't stop the organisers from assigning them seats at the same table, joined by Shane's parents, some of the Boston front office, and the third guy nominated for Rookie of the Year along with his family.

It's painfully awkward.

If Rozanov feels the tension at the table, he doesn't show it. The whole way through the awards, he chats easily with the other player and his family, and at one point gets drawn into a hockey discussion with some of Boston's management. Shane wonders why he's here alone, why he's the only one with no family around, but if the reason bothers Rozanov he doesn't show it. He doesn't go as far as to engage with Shane's parents, and for that Shane is grateful. He doesn't know if he could handle that, so the three of them mostly stick to themselves at one end of the table.

Shane goes up halfway through the night to accept the Rocket Richard Trophy to thunderous applause. He's a little taken aback at the volume and intensity of it, and infinitely glad that scoring the most goals is not something they can keep a surprise until the awards ceremony. He's obviously known that he had won the scoring race for months, and so he has a short speech pre-written by his mother and memorised already. He has another even shorter one, just in case he wins the Calder too, that his mom doesn't know about. But still, this little bit of predictability helps, and he thinks he's able to say the right words and get off the stage without letting his nerves show too much.

He's barely made it back to his seat before they're reading off the nominations for Rookie of the Year. He tries to take a deep breath without looking like he is, knowing that every camera in the room is focused on their table right now. His stomach churns, although he doesn't know why. He's managed to do a decent job of convincing himself that he doesn't care all that much about the outcome of this—he's going home with one trophy already, which is more than most players win in their careers. It's almost unheard of for a rookie to win any of the awards other than the Calder, so really Shane has already accomplished a bigger feat. What does he care about a subjective title that has no empirical criteria?

It turns out, he cares a lot, because the overwhelming feeling when they read out his name as the winner is one of utmost relief. He doesn't even hold back his grin as he stands and hugs his parents—the montage they had showed about him when they had read out the nominees had obviously focused on the trade, on Shane having to adjust to a whole new team halfway through his first season, and he feels a sudden stab of pride that he had done it. He had proven himself, beyond any doubt.

He lets go of his dad and turns to head back up to the stage, but before he can Rozanov is there in front of him. He doesn't say anything—not that Shane could hear him anyways, with the applause ringing through the room—but he offers a hand to Shane with wry smile. His expression reveals no emotions about losing the award, and Shane takes his hand as casually as he can. Rozanov pulls him in for the sort of casual, half-hug that hockey players do all the time, that the two of them have done countless times on the ice after a power play goal, and before Shane can get caught up in that he's being pushed away towards the stage.

"Thank you," he says into the mic, once the applause has started to die down. He looks out into the crowd, and he doesn't know these people, but he thinks he sees real support there.

These people are happy that he's doing so well after being thrown such a bad hand in his rookie season, and that gives him the courage to say what he needs to say.

"Thank you," he repeats. "Um, I can't say I really expected to be up here again, so I'll keep this short." There's a laugh throughout the room, like people are surprised at his humility, but Shane isn't lying. When he had written this little speech, he hadn't truly expected to give it. Not after getting his hopes up two years ago at the draft and coming in second to Rozanov.

"Winning the Rocket Richard in my rookie season means a lot to me. Obviously. Scoring goals is ultimately what I work so hard for, and hopefully I can keep doing that." Another chuckle from the audience. "This though... I mean, you only get one rookie season. And as you all just saw, I never could have predicted how mine would go. Boston really did welcome me with open arms and I'll be forever grateful to them for it, but it was still hard, adjusting to a new team halfway through the season. I don't really think about awards and stuff while I'm playing, but I think if I did I would have definitely counted myself out for this one as soon as I got traded."

Shane pauses and takes a steadying breath before continuing. He can practically feel his mother's anxiety from here—it's not like him, to deviate from the carefully scripted comments she had written him, but he hadn't wanted to give another bland speech when he actually had something to say about this. Something his mother, with her still-present loyalty to Montreal, as much as she's not voicing it, would never write.

"So although all the thank yous I gave earlier still apply, really this one goes out to my teammates. All the guys who stayed late or showed up early to the rink with me to help me learn their plays, who accepted me so easily into their group when I moved to a new city for the second time in six months. I never would have been able to do this if they hadn't been so supportive of me, if they hadn't pushed me to be better." He looks out into the audience towards where he had been sitting as he says it. He can't see anything because of the lights, but he hopes that Rozanov knows that a lot of this is directed at him. As much as Shane had freaked out at the mere thought of being traded to Rozanov's team initially, now he can't even picture having done this with a different team, weirdness and all.

The room applauds again, and then there's someone in the wings gesturing for him to wrap it up, so he does. He barely even remembers how he ends the speech, once he has the hard part out of the way, but no one says anything to him about it after so he figures the lines he memorised must have stuck enough for him not to make a fool of himself at least. Instead, for the next hour Shane is bombarded by people offering their congratulations, all of them wanting to talk about his accomplishments. He never makes it back to his seat, although once the ceremony wraps up he catches a glimpse of his parents in the distance, chatting away to a whole group of people, so he knows they aren't exactly waiting on him.

As soon as he can, he slips out for some air. He doesn't want to go through the lobby, which is likely filled with more hockey people, so instead he follows the signs for the rooftop patio. It's almost deserted, with the party going on downstairs, so Shane leans against the railing and takes a long inhale, closing his eyes and savouring the moment of quiet.

"Tired of all your admirers?"

Shane's lips are tilting up into a smile before he even turns around. He hates how Rozanov can still do this to him, still release the tension from Shane's shoulders just by being in his presence. He doesn't hate it enough to stop it though.

"Something like that," he says as Rozanov steps up to the railing with him. He's got a cigarette between his lips, and Shane crinkles his nose at the smell but doesn't say anything. "What about you?"

"Needed a cigarette," Rozanov says. He looks out over the city lights, his expression unreadable. Shane wonders what's going on in his mind. Is he jealous about the Calder? Truly as uncaring as he seems? Shane wants to know, but doesn't know if he has the right to ask.

They stand in silence for a few minutes. Rozanov smokes his cigarette, Shane closes his eyes and listens to the sound of their breathing. For the first time since they had made the playoffs, he feels almost at peace.

"You have any plans for the summer?" He asks eventually. Partly because he doesn't think Rozanov has ever mentioned what he does in the summers, even with the team, and partly just to make conversation.

Rozanov shrugs—Shane just catches the movement out of the corner of his eye. "Flying back to Russia tomorrow," he says. "Was just waiting for awards to be over."

"Oh," Shane says. Of course that makes sense. Something else occurs to him. "Is that why your family wasn't here tonight? Because you'll see them soon anyways?" He still thinks it's a little odd, that they wouldn't make the trip for this, but he doesn't know much about Rozanov's family.

Rozanov laughs, but there's no humour in it. "Sure," he says. "One reason, maybe. They do not care about awards though. Especially not ones from American league."

"Oh. Not even if you'd won?"

Rozanov turns and raises his eyebrows at Shane. "Well, I did not, so I do not know, do I?"

Shane winces. He knows what it's like to come in second, and he wonders if Rozanov is mad at him. Shane certainly was, a bit, after the draft. "Sorry," he says.

Rozanov laughs, genuine this time. "Do not be sorry," he says. "You deserve it. I knew you would win. I had same season as you, and you did it on two teams. Obviously you deserve award."

Shane shrugs. "Maybe. I still thought you would win though."

"Because you are stupid, Hollander. We have already established this, yes?"

"Shut up Rozanov."

They fall back into silence, but it's more comfortable now. For the first time, Shane really lets himself believe that he's going to have this for a while. That Boston isn't going to trade him

again before the next season starts. He doesn't think him and Rozanov are friends now, but maybe they could be, one day.

Eventually, Rozanov snuffs out the cigarette and goes back downstairs without a word, Shane trailing along behind because he knows he should. At the very least, he needs to find his parents and wish them a good night, let them congratulate him and maybe reprimand him for going off-script in his speech. At the bottom of the stairs, he gives Rozanov a quick nod before they split up, and the ghost of a smile flits across his teammate's face.

"See you next season, Hollander."

"Hollander, I want to talk to you."

Shane thinks that he deserves another award for how he manages to nod and calmly follow Coach Smith out of the locker room. It's the first day of training camp after the seemingly endless summer, and despite knowing that it's a completely irrational fear, Shane hadn't been able to stop being worried about being traded again. When he had woken up this morning, it had been a relief more than anything, because obviously if they were going to get rid of him before the season started, they would have done it by now.

He knows that if he were traded again, the news wouldn't come from his coach, and it wouldn't happen fifteen minutes before their first practice of the season. That doesn't stop the dread from pooling in his stomach as he makes the short walk down to Coach Smith's office, and he focuses on making sure none of it shows on his face. None of his teammates even blink at him being singled out, so maybe it really is nothing.

"Good summer, Hollander?" Smith asks him as he shuts the door behind him, gesturing for Shane to take a seat.

"Yeah, it was good," Shane says, his mind already cycling through possibilities for what on earth this could be about. "Too long."

Coach laughs. "Isn't it always?" He asks. Shane doesn't think he actually wants an answer to that question though, because he continues before Shane can think of one.

"So, Hollander. I want to try something during camp this year, and I wanted to give you a heads up because I don't want you to take it the wrong way."

Shane is immediately taken back to Farah's phone call more than six months ago. *"I have some news, and you aren't going to like it."* But no. Coach wants to try something—in order to try something, Shane has to still be here. He holds onto that, schools his expression, and nods. "Alright," he says. Whatever it is, it won't be as bad as being traded, and so Shane can work with it.

"I want to try you on the left wing," Coach says. "All the time, not just on the power play."

It almost feels like a physical blow. Shane can't catch his breath for a moment, he's so shocked. Of everything he had been picturing, he doesn't think he ever would have dreamed up a scenario in which this happened.

"I know it was an adjustment for you last year," Coach Smith is saying. "But I really think you and Rozanov had something going on the power play. I'd like to see what you could do with it if you played more than a few minutes there every night. And when you showed up, we moved Hammersmith from centre to wing, and he just doesn't have the same chemistry with Rozanov that you do."

Shane nods slowly, barely processing. He knows that it's true, that even though Boston had been gunning for him in the trade, they really hadn't needed a second line centre. They had moved things around to accommodate him once he showed up, and their first line—Rozanov's line—had scored less as a result. Shane has seen the discussions online about how that had probably been one reason why Shane had managed to surpass Rozanov in goals by the end of the season, even with the adjustment period to his new team.

Still, knowing that it's true doesn't stop the stab of hurt that he feels. That even though the problem isn't with his line, he's the one who is going to have to deal with this other new change. He's always played centre—it's as much a part of his identity as being a hockey player in the first place. Even though he knows that the reason Coach is telling him like this, explaining his reasoning in a way most hockey coaches wouldn't, is because it's not that he's done a bad job, it still feels like Shane must be doing something wrong. Otherwise, Smith would never even consider moving him in the first place.

"... may not be permanent," Coach is saying when Shane manages to pull himself out of his spiralling enough to tune back into the conversation. "But I want you really give it a go, not just try it for a game or two. And I want you to be honest with me about whether it's working or not. I know you probably don't love the idea now, but if we can get both of the top two lines working the way our power play was working at the end of last year..."

Shane somehow manages to nod. "Of course," he says. "Whatever is best for the team."

Coach looks at him, and his expression leaves no doubt that he isn't buying Shane's act whatsoever. "I knew you'd say that," he says. "And I know you still don't like it. But I also know you'll give it your all, and that's all I need you to do."

"Of course," Shane says, nodding sharply. He tries to take a deep breath without making it obvious. He needs to pull it together and not get emotional right now—not when he's going to have to act like this is no big deal in front of the entire team in a few minutes. He wonders if they'll also see this as a demotion.

Coach lets him go, and Shane returns to the locker room in a daze. He pauses for a moment before the door, carefully rearranging his features back into a neutral expression. He can process this later—for now, he needs to just play hockey.

Practice goes by in a blur. He barely remembers how people react when Coach initially calls out the line combinations—he keeps his gaze to the front. Both Rozanov and Marlow, his new linemates, come over to give him fist bumps before they start doing drills though, and both of them are grinning. At least some people are excited about this change.

Other than that, it's mostly a normal practice. He isn't rusty, because he practices at every opportunity he gets, even during the summer, but he can admit that it is nice to skate with other people again. It sort of feels like he spends the whole time practicing the power play, because he still feels so out of his element on the wing, but he has to keep reminding himself that this is his position now. His mind is already spinning with ideas on how to adapt, what he'll need to work on, even as the emotions swirl around his head too fast for him to latch onto.

It doesn't help that his teammates keep slapping him on the back, chirping him about the change of position. Mostly they make comments about him and Rozanov, how they'll have to learn to work together, how even beating him in the scoring race and for the Calder last year still wasn't enough for Shane to get rid of him. Rozanov himself just laughs along, and Shane forces himself to smile every time. He knows these are good guys, and they had helped him so much last year. If anything, this just proves that they don't see this as a demotion, or as a big deal at all, but rather something fun, something to chirp about. Shane doesn't even know why he can't do the same.

It's the first practice of the year, so of course everyone goes out afterwards. It's not even that late, so they head to a local bar instead of a club, and the guys order several of every appetiser on the menu. Shane wants nothing more than to go home and crash out in peace, but he knows that if it weren't for the position change he would have gone, and he doesn't want anyone to know that it bothers him. So he tags along quietly at the back of the group, resolving to make his escape as soon as someone else leaves first.

Of course, it doesn't exactly end up that way.

He lets the girl stay the night at his place afterwards, because he's not an asshole. But he can't sleep. His thoughts swirl around without reprieve, alternating between hockey and snatches of conversation at the bar afterwards, his teammates remarking that they'd never seen Shane pick up, encouraging him to live a little. Hannah's short blond curls as she met his eyes across the room, her coy smile as she had sunk to her knees later, once they had made it back to Shane's. How long it had taken. The way Shane couldn't help but think of the last blowjob he'd received, during. How the man who had given it to him was now his linemate.

And around and around he goes.

He doesn't sleep at all, because with Hannah still in it his bed feels like a minefield for some reason. Instead he makes himself a herbal tea and settles on the couch to watch tape. He pulls up hours worth of video of Boston's games last year, both before and after Shane had joined the team, and analyses the fuck out of them. He studies Rozanov's play, even more than he has before, trying to figure out how he's going to make it work with his own style. He doesn't fully know what his style even is, having never played wing during 5-on-5, but by the time the sun is peeking over the horizon he at least has some ideas.

He knows already that he isn't going to let this be the thing that ruins him either.

When the sun is fully up, Shane scrawls a quick note for Hannah to let her know where he is, then leaves for his morning run. The pounding of his feet on the pavement steadies him, and he's able to think about nothing at all for the miles it takes to get to the local park, which is his halfway point. It feels good to be back running his normal route, and the contentment he feels makes it possible for him to pull out his phone and make the call he's been dreading since the moment practice ended yesterday.

The thing is, the first day of training camp is closed to media. But today, there will be cameras, which means the world at large will know that Shane Hollander won't be playing centre this season—at least not to start. And that means that Yuna Hollander will know that too. Shane figures it's probably better for the news to come from him.

"Shane," his mom greets. Like him, she never bothers with small talk. "How was practice yesterday?"

"It was good," he says. "I wanted to give you a heads up though, before you see it online later today. Coach is trying something new this season. I'm on the first line, left wing."

He'd decided last night that it's the best way to put it. Emphasise that he's moving from second to first line—which feels like a promotion instead of the opposite—and state it as plainly as possible. Shane almost manages to fool himself.

His mother, unfortunately, is smarter than that. "What?" She asks, the disbelief clear in her voice.

"Just trying it out," Shane says. "It might not work, and if it doesn't I'll go back to centre. But Hammersmith has been struggling on the wing, and the second line was fine before I showed up."

Shane hates how he has to pretend to be okay with this, but he already knows that this is only going to enflame his mom's already well-burning hatred for Boston. He still needs to convince her that he likes his new team, and more importantly that he has no desire to ever go back to Montreal. Even though he's not happy with the change, he can't let his mom know that, because she'll only use it as more fuel for her argument.

"Shane, that's ridiculous." He's already proven correct. "You've always been a centre, putting you at wing is a waste."

"It worked pretty well on the power play last year," Shane says, and he sort of hates that he's being forced to see the reasons why his coach is doing this. It does make some sort of sense, as much as Shane resents it.

"That's the power play," Yuna says. "It's completely different than 5-on-5 Shane, I don't need to tell you this. They're sabotaging you—moving to a new team wasn't enough, so now they're making you learn a new position too? The only thing that's going to help is Rozanov's chances in the scoring race this year. Obviously they still have their favourite."

Shane sighs. He really can't deal with this right now. "Mom, they aren't sabotaging their own player. And I can guarantee you that management does not care which one of their players wins the scoring race, as long as collectively we're scoring more goals for the team."

"Are you sure Rozanov isn't behind this somehow?" His mom asks. "It wouldn't surprise me, with how he treated you at the awards this summer. Talked to everyone at the table except us. You really think he's going to pass to you?"

"Yeah, I do," Shane says. "It didn't stop him last year. Have you forgotten he assisted on my last goal?" Yuna grumbles at that, and Shane sighs. "Look, I've got to go. I still have to finish my run and have breakfast, and I want to be early to the rink. I just figured you would want to know that before you saw it online later."

He doesn't give his mother the chance to continue the argument, although Shane is sure that she wants to. Instead he hangs up, then just sits for a moment, collecting his thoughts.

When he gets back to his apartment, Hannah is blessedly gone. She's left her number and a smiley face on the pad of paper on the counter, and Shane doesn't think too hard at all when he crumples it up and throws it in the trash.

"Let's fucking go!"

Shane can't help his grin as first Rozanov and Marlow, then the rest of the team, crash into him as the horn sounds. It's their last game before Christmas, and they've just destroyed New York on the road, 8-2. This is their eighteenth win in a row, giving them the all-time record for longest winning streak and putting them first in the league standings after a somewhat shakier start to the season.

As expected, it had taken Shane some time to get used to playing on Rozanov's left wing all the time. But once they had figured it out...

"We're going out tonight," Marlow yells over the music in the locker room after. "And none of you fuckers are bailing. We have 4 days to sleep off the hangovers."

"Some of us have kids and Christmas plans, you know," Carmichael mutters under his breath, but even Shane can hear that he doesn't mean it. They aren't flying back to Boston until the morning, and everyone wants to soak up the high of how well they've been playing lately. Even Shane, who still rarely goes out with the team after games, lets himself be pulled along easily.

"What a fucking run," Hammersmith leans back once they're settled in a VIP booth at the back of some club that is apparently all the rage right now. The guys around them all cheer, and Rozanov raises his glass in a toast.

"Is not over yet!" He yells. "By end of season, win record will be so high no one will ever come close."

That prompts another round of cheers, and Shane can't help but sit back and bask in the feeling of it all. They're top-ranked in the entire league. For a team who had made the playoffs for the first time in a decade last year, it feels almost unbelievable. And Shane knows that part of it is down to him. For all his self-doubts, the numbers don't lie. The Hollander-Rozanov-Marlow line has been responsible for over half of Boston's total goals this year, and both Shane and Rozanov are on pace to score even more than last year.

As much as Shane hates to admit it, Coach Smith had been right. He's playing the best hockey of his life.

He stays longer than he normally would. At one point he's at the bar with Marlow when a group of girls approaches them, and although Marlow immediately engages one of them in conversation, Shane doesn't even feel weird politely excusing himself from the others. He rejoins the rest of the team in their booth instead and spends some time listening to them replay some of the highlights of the last few weeks. He still doesn't feel like he's really made any close friends in Boston, but he's comfortable enough in the larger group, which is something he's never felt before. They seem to take his quirks and quietness in stride too, never chirping him much for it like some of the guys in Montreal had.

Still, Shane can't change his nature too much, and by midnight his eyes are drooping. He says his goodbyes and heads back to the hotel on his own, watching the lights of the city pass him by through the cab window. He feels weirdly grown up, all of a sudden. It's been over a year now that he's been living on his own, but it still hits him at strange times, how alone he is in these big cities thousands of kilometres away from his parents. He had dreamed of playing professional hockey for so many years, and now that it's happening it still feels a little unreal.

He putters around for a bit when he gets back to his hotel room, tired but not yet ready for bed. He doesn't even realise that he's waiting for something until the knock on the door comes and he moves to open it with no surprise whatsoever.

"No blondes tonight, Hollander?" Rozanov asks, pushing his way into the room and making himself at home on the bed like usual. He's been doing this a lot lately—showing up to Shane's room after away games. Apparently so much so that Shane had been waiting for him, even though last he had checked Rozanov had been occupied on the dance floor with the same group of girls that had been flirting with Shane and Marlow earlier in the night. "Is a shame. Girl with curly hair was very obsessed with you."

Shane just snorts. "Says you. What are you doing here then? You could have gone home with her instead."

Rozanov just wrinkles his nose. "Do not want to fuck someone who wants to fuck you," he says. "Shows bad taste."

Shane can't help but laugh—really laugh. They rarely acknowledge what had happened between them last year, but... "What does that say about you then?"

Rozanov roll this eyes, like he was expecting it. "Have a question for you, actually," he says. "Important question. Could not wait."

Shane knows Rozanov a little better now, after close to a year of being on the same team as him. So he knows not to believe a word out of his mouth when he gets a certain expression on his face, like the one he has now. "I'm sure it is. Must be, for you to follow me all the way here."

"You do not hook up with girls," Rozanov says. "Except one, after first practice of season."

There's a pause. It's true—Shane doesn't hook up with girls. The one time during training camp had been a bit of a fluke, a combination of disappointment and fear and self-loathing making Shane just susceptible enough to peer pressure to take her home. And it had been fine, but... he hasn't done it since.

He's worked hard to make sure his teammates haven't noticed though. They had all chirped him for showing up so tired to practice the second day of camp, and he had taken the teasing easily, relieved to fit in for once. And so maybe he'd implied a few other times during the season that he had left early because he had found a girl to leave with, on the nights when he could slip out of whatever club they were at without anyone actually seeing him go. Since everyone had actually seen him pick up a girl that first time, no one seems to have any trouble believing that he's done it again. It's become a commonly accepted fact that Shane does pick up, just rarely, and no one gives him any shit for it.

Except Rozanov, apparently. It does something to Shane, to know that he's apparently been watching close enough to notice, but he can't examine that right now, with Rozanov sitting right there. "That's not a question," he says instead.

"But is true, yes?" Rozanov asks. "Guys tease you and you say nothing, make them believe you are sexy and mysterious and picky about women. But you only sleep with one."

Shane shrugs. "Yeah, it's true," he says. "What does it matter, though? You gonna tell everyone?"

Rozanov frowns. "Of course not. Was just... curious. Thought maybe you did not like women, but then you sleep with one. But now you don't. So which is it?"

"Which is what?" Shane is confused. He doesn't understand why Rozanov had followed him all the way back to the hotel just to interrogate Shane about his lack of a sex life. There aren't even any other hockey games on tonight for them to watch.

"Do you like women or not?"

"I mean, sure," Shane says. "Yeah, of course I like women. I just... don't really do casual hook-ups."

Immediately, Shane winces, and Rozanov doesn't hesitate to call him out. "You are still bad liar, Hollander. You did casual hook-ups fine last year."

"I mean, that was different," Shane hedges.

"Why? Because I am man?"

Shane sighs. "No. I don't know."

Rozanov doesn't say anything else, and it feels intentional, the way Shane is forced to sit with what he'd implied. It's true, he hadn't really blinked twice about hooking up with Rozanov last year, and likely would have continued doing it had he not been traded. This is something he's known and accepted for a while, but he's never really stopped to wonder about why that feels so different to picking up women at a club. He's always hated that, and until last year he would have said that it was because he hates being so intimate with people he doesn't know. But Rozanov had also been a near-stranger the first time they had been together.

He has to like girls though. He's been busy with hockey, these last few years, but he'd had a girlfriend in his last year of high school, and he had liked her. She had been pretty, and funny, and Shane hadn't felt pressured to date her. He had liked her, and asked her out, and been happy when she said yes. He had also been the one to break up with her, shortly after graduation and the draft, but that had been because his life was getting busy and his heart wasn't in it anymore, not because he hadn't liked her.

Finally, Rozanov must have realised that Shane wasn't going to say anything else, lost in his thoughts as he was. "Is okay if you do not," Rozanov says. "Or if you do not know. Was just curious."

"Do you?" Shane asks abruptly. "Like women, I mean? I assume yes, since you're constantly surrounded by them?"

Rozanov takes his time answering, raising a skeptical eyebrow. "Yes, Hollander," he drawls. "Would not do that if I did not like women. Gender of partner does not matter to me, and is not so easy to find guys who will keep secret."

"Right," Shane says. He tries to picture doing that, going home with women because it's easier, safer. He can't. If he could, he supposes he would be doing that right now, rather than sitting here having this conversation with Ilya Rozanov. "Well, that makes sense, I guess." He has an uncomfortable feeling in his gut—one he doesn't want to examine too closely. Thankfully, Rozanov seems to sense that Shane is done with the conversation, because he abruptly stands and heads towards the door.

"Don't overthink it, Hollander," he says. "Does not have to be complicated."

Shane huffs out a breath. "Easy for you to say."

Rozanov shrugs. "Yes," he says. "Sex is not complicated for me. But that is natural, when I am so sexy." Shane rolls his eyes, but he can't stop the way his gaze lingers just for a moment. Rozanov is wearing a tight black tank top that's obviously a few sizes too small, and it does wonders to accentuate the muscles in his chest and arms. He catches Shane looking and smiles. "See? Even you cannot resist."

"Fuck off," Shane mumbles, willing the blush he knows is obvious to go away.

Rozanov just smirks. "Okay, Hollander. Good night."

Shane can't help but watch the other team celebrate, hands on his knees as he catches his breath from a brutal overtime shift. His own team is already gathering for fist bumps and pats on the back, smiles on everyone's faces. It's the All-Star game, so most players don't care much about the result, but Shane can't help but feel disappointed. He hates losing.

He also knows that Rozanov is going to be insufferable about this. He had scored the game-winner, and after months of talk about how well the two of them work together, the press had been salivating to have them pitted against each other again. So much so that the league had done Europe vs. North America for the second year in a row. Shane had been surprised to find that it was actually a little weird, to be playing against Rozanov again, but he had still played well. Even though his team had lost, in the end.

The winning team is heading over now to shake hands, all of them laughing and chirping. Shane straightens up, pasting on a smile, because he knows no one will understand him being genuinely upset about losing this game that doesn't matter at all, especially when Boston has been doing so well this season. Guys have been congratulating him all weekend on their record, and because of that Shane has felt a little more comfortable than he had last year at this kind of event. The win streak had ended back in January after twenty games, but Boston is still at the top of the standings, and that's an easy conversation starter with anyone who knows hockey. It seems almost like people have forgotten about the trade now, and about how Shane had always played centre prior to this season, other than to comment on how amazing the adjustment has been. And Shane can take a compliment, especially about hockey, but he doesn't think anyone else really understands how it still feels like he has something to prove.

Today, that something had been that he's still a good player on his own, without Rozanov on his line. And he had come away from the game with a goal and two assists, so it's not like he had completely failed. But Rozanov had won.

The man himself is grinning when he makes his way over to Shane and shakes his hand. "Well, Hollander," he says. "Are you going to congratulate me?"

Shane rolls his eyes, but he can't stop his own grin. He knows now why Boston had warmed to Rozanov so quickly, why he's so beloved on his own team even though the rest of the league hates him. Something about his sarcastic sense of humour is infectious. And although he's still an asshole, Shane has spent too many late nights in hotel rooms watching hockey with him to not fall prey to it too. Knowing that there are probably a million cameras on them, Shane tries not to move his lips as he says, "Fuck off, Rozanov."

"Oh, but then you would not score as many goals, would you?" Rozanov winks at him, and Shane rolls his eyes again. "You coming to party after?"

Shane just gives him a look. "Yeah. For a bit."

"For a bit. Always for a bit, with you. We have two days before next game Hollander, you do not need to be asleep by nine o'clock."

"Fuck off," Shane says again, forgetting about the cameras. Whoops. "You know I don't go to bed at nine."

Rozanov just shrugs. "No other games to watch with best teammate tonight," he points out. "So may as well come to party. Live a little."

Just then, one of Rozanov's temporary teammates is skating into them, clapping a hand on both of their shoulders. "Would you look at this," he yells. "Famous Hollander-Rozanov duo reunited. Can't even separate you two for a day now, who'd have thought?"

Rozanov shrugs, smiling. "Hollander is okay," he says. "Scores decent goals sometimes."

"Fuck *off*, Rozanov."

Shane is starting to feel like a broken record, but the guy—Holm—just laughs, like the animosity is expected. "Never would have thought I'd see this a year ago," he says.

"Me neither," Shane agrees, and both Holm and Rozanov laugh like he'd said something hilarious. It's completely true, though. The All-Star game last year had been the final bit of normalcy before Shane's life had blown up. He tries to imagine explaining to Shane a year ago what his life looks like today, and he knows he never would have believed it.

The comment sticks with him through getting changed and the press conference they make him do with Rozanov afterwards. All the way to the party that night, he can't stop thinking about this time last year. About how much his life has changed now.

About what he had done a year ago instead of going to the party.

It's been a year since the last time he and Rozanov hooked up. Shane doesn't think that should shock him as much as it does to realise—it had only happened twice, after all, and plenty of other more important things have happened in his life since. But there's something strange about knowing that a year ago, he had been naked in Rozanov's hotel room, and Rozanov had been offering to fuck him. Planning on doing so in just a few weeks, before everything changed and Shane's life had careened onto a completely different path.

Now, he's at Shane's side throughout most of the afterparty, their acquaintance no longer confined to secret hotel rooms. He needles Shane until he caves and does a few shots with some of the older players, and takes the lead in all their conversations while somehow still making sure Shane is included. He's not sure what he had done to make Rozanov decide to stick by his side at parties like this, but like at the awards show last year, Shane is grateful for

it. It's so much easier to be social when he doesn't have to think too hard about starting conversations.

At one point, when the group they had been talking to gets distracted by something else and it's just the two of them, Rozanov leans in close to Shane's ear to whisper. "Having fun, Hollander?" His breath smells like vodka and cigarettes—Shane isn't even sure when he would have found the time to smoke since the game. He can't help but shiver a bit at the closeness.

"Sure," Shane says. "It's good. This is good." He feels a little unsteady—since he almost never drinks, he knows his alcohol tolerance is pretty low. Rozanov seems to know it too, because he laughs.

"You are drunk?" He sounds delighted.

Shane scowls. "Not drunk," he says, and it's true. Shane doesn't think he's ever been drunk, and he's fairly sure that's not what this is. "Just... a little tipsy."

"Ah," Rozanov is still leaning in far too close. Objectively, it probably looks like he's trying to be heard over the music, but Shane can't get over the way his warm breath feels in his ear. "Too bad."

"Why is that?" Shane asks, hating the way his voice sounds a little faint. He needs to get a grip on himself.

"Because would be more fun if you were," Rozanov says. "Maybe as fun as last year."

Shane realises then that even though he isn't drunk, Rozanov probably is. Or at least he's headed in that direction. When Shane turns to look, his eyes are clouded and his features more relaxed than normal. For all that Rozanov has a reputation as a partier, Shane doesn't think he's seen him this way before. He usually paces himself, spends more time dancing than drinking so he's not hungover for practice or games. And lately, he's been leaving the clubs almost as early as Shane, turning up in his hotel room at all hours of the night when they're on the road to watch hockey.

Still, even though Rozanov hadn't said anything that anyone else could understand, Shane can't help the way he flushes and glances around them warily, checking to see if anyone else is within earshot. No one seems to be paying attention to them. "Rozanov," he says, and he can hear the warning in his own voice, but it's not as steady as he would like it to be.

"Just making observation, Hollander," Rozanov says, drawing back a little. Shane closes his eyes for a moment, trying to steady himself. "Last year was more fun, yes?" When Shane opens his eyes, he finds Rozanov blatantly checking him out, gaze roving up and down.

"Rozanov," Shane says again. "Not here."

There's a spark of victory in Rozanov's eyes. "Okay," he says easily, pulling all the way back. Shane feels cold all of a sudden. "Room 1302."

Then he turns and walks away.

Shane makes a beeline for the nearest washroom.

Once the door is locked behind him, muting the noise and the lights, he leans over the sink and just breathes for a minute.

Rozanov had given him his room number. Shane's not stupid. He knows what this is leading to, with the way Rozanov had been practically undressing him with his eyes earlier. His heart is beating even faster than it does after a two-minute shift on the ice. His thoughts are moving too fast for him to latch on to any single thing other than the fact that *Rozanov had given him his room number*.

Absently, he notices that his hands are shaking a little. He wishes that he was just a little less drunk, so he could think properly about this.

He could just not go. Walk down the hall and step into the elevator and press the button for the twelfth floor instead of the thirteenth, go back to his own room and brush his teeth and crawl under the covers. Shane knows, logically, that it's an option. It's probably the correct option. No one would think anything of it—it's well known that Shane turns in early.

But that's not really a reason. After all, no one would know if he went to Rozanov's room instead of his own either.

Fuck. Shane thinks about the way Rozanov's voice had sounded in his ear, the way Shane could practically feel the heat of his body when he had leaned in close. It's been a year of seeing Rozanov almost every day, and Shane still falls to pieces at the merest hint of proximity.

He needs to get a handle on himself. Shit, maybe he needs to get laid.

For the first time, Shane actually thinks about going out and finding someone else to sleep with. Not a woman, because he's done that and he knows that stresses him out more than anything. No, he thinks back to Rozanov's words in New York before the holidays, the lights of the city bright outside as he had asked Shane whether he liked women at all. He wonders if he could go out and find a man to hook up with, and maybe scratch this itch that he can't seem to shake. Other than the girl from training camp, it's been literal years since he's gotten laid with anyone other than Rozanov—maybe that's why a little bit of closeness makes Shane feel like he's going to crawl right out of his skin.

It's a stupid idea, obviously. It's not like he can just go home with any random guy—the risk of being recognised is too great. But he can't do this with a teammate, and especially with Rozanov, who everyone still seems to think he's in competition with. What if it affects their

performance on the ice? He had promised himself when he got traded that he wouldn't let this happen again.

Shane makes his decision. He'll go to Rozanov's room and tell him that. Remind him. Obviously the only reason this is even happening right now is because Rozanov is drunk. But he's obviously expecting Shane to follow him upstairs, so Shane needs to not be rude and go knock on his door and remind him that they can't do this.

Shane ignores the little flutter in his stomach at the thought that when Rozanov's inhibitions are lowered, it's Shane he wants. That doesn't even matter.

Decision made, Shane takes a moment to fix his hair where he's been running his hands through it. Then he walks confidently out of the washroom and towards the bank of elevators.

He gets stopped a few times on his way there. Once, by his parents, who are in town for the event. His mom seems to be finally coming around to him playing for Boston, now that they're doing so well, although she still has lots to say about Rozanov. He tells them he's heading to bed and hugs them both goodnight. Then Scott Hunter accompanies him into the elevator, and they make small talk about hockey while the floors tick slowly by. Shane wonders for a brief moment if he should get off on the twelfth floor, where his own room actually is, but thankfully Hunter is on the eleventh. There's no one at all around to witness by the time Shane steps off the elevator and quickly walks all the way down to the end of the hallway, stopping in front of room 1302.

He hesitates for only a moment before knocking. There's nothing to be nervous about. Him and Rozanov are just going to talk, like they've done a million times in a million hotel rooms in the last year.

Shane wonders absently how early they had gone upstairs last year. At this exact moment 365 days ago, had he already been on his knees? Naked on Rozanov's bed? Still downstairs making small talk?

Or maybe here, standing in front of Rozanov's door.

The door opens almost immediately, and Shane pushes his way inside, still conscious of being seen lingering outside of Rozanov's room. It would be a lot easier to explain now than it would have been last year, but still.

Rozanov takes his time shutting the door and turning around, and Shane stands awkwardly in the entryway, crossing his arms across his chest. When Rozanov finally does turn around, he looks Shane up and down shamelessly.

"Rozanov," Shane says.

"Hollander." There's a hint of mocking in Rozanov's voice. He takes a step forward, closer to Shane, and Shane takes a matching step back.

"Rozanov. We can't..."

Rozanov raises an eyebrow, taking another step forward. "No?" he asks. "Then why are you here?"

Shane takes a step back. "Just to talk," he says. Against his will, his eyes flick down to Rozanov's lips. He can't help but remember what it had felt like to kiss them.

Rozanov smirks. Takes another step. "Oh yes? What is it you wanted to talk about?"

Shane's back hits the wall.

He takes a shaky breath. It's hard to think with Rozanov boxing him in like this. All the perfectly good reasons Shane had come up with for why they couldn't do this seem to have evaporated.

When Shane doesn't answer, Rozanov takes one more step, then pauses. They're so close now that their bodies are almost touching. Shane watches Rozanov's chest rise and fall, millimetres from his own. "Hollander?" he asks. "Is this okay?"

Shane exhales and keeps his eyes on Rozanov's chest. He can't meet his eyes, otherwise he's going to lose it completely. "We really shouldn't do this," he says.

One of Rozanov's hands come up, fingers hooking under Shane's chin and forcing his gaze upwards. "You say that many times," he says. "But you also look at me sometimes like you want me to pin you down and fuck you."

Shane's breath hitches, his mind suddenly full of *that* image. Rozanov is looking at him like he's thinking of it too, and suddenly meeting his eyes is too much. Rozanov's hand keeps Shane's head in place, so instead he closes his eyes and leans back into the wall.

"Hollander?" Rozanov asks. They still aren't even touching, other than Rozanov's hand on his chin. "Is true? Is that what you want?"

Shane can't take it anymore. No amount of self-control in the world is strong enough for this. His hands come up to tangle in Rozanov's hair, pulling him up against Shane and crashing their lips together.

Once he has permission, Rozanov doesn't waste any time. His tongue pushes into Shane's mouth immediately, his arms coming up to rest on the wall on either side of Shane's shoulders, boxing him in properly. He takes another step forward, crushing Shane against the wall, their bodies finally pressing together and taking Shane's breath away. He's half hard already, and he can feel that Rozanov is too.

It feels... so good. Like some kind of release, kissing Rozanov after a year of pushing thoughts of it away. Shane had wondered, on the rare occasions when he let himself really think about this, whether his memories were lying to him. He hadn't thought it was possible for it to really feel this good, but if anything it's even better than he remembers. His arms travel downwards of their own accord, coming to rest on Rozanov's chest, at the buttons at his collar that are already half undone.

Before he can make any real progress, Rozanov breaks away from the kiss. His hands are suddenly on Shane's ass, pulling upwards, and it takes Shane a moment to figure out what he wants. Once he does, he can't help but whimper, even as he wraps his legs around Rozanov and lets the press of his body against the wall hold him upright.

"Could fuck you like this," Rozanov breathes, grinding up against Shane as though to prove his point. Shane tips his head back, ignoring the thump against the wall, as Rozanov starts kissing the side of his neck. "Would you like that?"

The first thrill of nerves hits Shane then. *Shit. Is this actually happening?* Even as he nods, he remembers how he had felt last year, when Rozanov's fingers had first ventured out of familiar territory. The combined terror and arousal when he had asked to fuck Shane. The way Shane had thought of nothing else for two days, until Farah had called and upended the rest of his life.

He tenses, and Rozanov obviously feels it. He pulls his lips away from Shane's neck, ignoring the little moan of protest Shane lets out. "Hollander?" He asks.

Shane forces his way past the embarrassment. "Yes. Yes I would like that." He leans in to kiss Rozanov again, and is surprised by how tender it is, how soft his lips feel in contrast to the heated making out of a few moments ago.

Unfortunately, Shane has almost no leverage against the wall like this, so when Rozanov pulls away again he can't chase his lips like he wants to. He tries anyways, leaning forward as much as he can, groaning when that just presses the two of them closer together. Rozanov stays deliberately out of reach though, waiting for Shane to give up and lean back. Only then does Rozanov tip his forehead to rest against Shane's.

Shane is gratified when he notices that both of them are breathing heavily.

"Hollander," Rozanov says again. He seems like he wants to say something else, but instead he just closes his eyes.

"Rozanov," Shane says, because it feels like he should say something.

Rozanov sighs. "I want to fuck you."

There's that little jolt of fear and arousal again. Shane can't hide the way his body jerks. "I know," he says, because at this point, he does. All the little comments Rozanov has made over the last year, the way he looks at Shane sometimes. Shane knows, even if he had been denying it to himself before tonight.

"I want to fuck you," Rozanov repeats. "Have wanted to for whole year. But... not here."

"I—what?" Shane is painfully hard now, and this is not at all what he had been expecting.

"You are drunk," Rozanov says. When Shane makes to protest, he just waves a hand dismissively. "Or... tipsy. Whatever. You are not sober. I am not sober. And last year... you

were scared." Again, he waves away Shane's protests. "You were, is okay. But... maybe you are still scared, just drunk. Do not want you to regret in the morning."

Shane swallows. Everything Rozanov is saying is true. But knowing that the alcohol is inhibiting his decision-making doesn't change that he *wants* so badly right now. "Rozanov..."

"And," Rozanov isn't done. "Last year, you did not want to do that here. In hotel with everyone around. So I think we should stop."

Shane sighs. He knows Rozanov is right, but he's *so hard* right now. "Since when are you the one who makes sensible decisions?" He pouts.

Rozanov just laughs. "Since I seduce all your common sense away," he says. "Was not really thinking when I gave you room number. And after, did not think you would really come." He steps back, letting Shane drop back down from the wall to stand again. "I am sorry. Did not mean to... tease."

Shane snorts. "Well, you did," he says. He's coming back to himself a little now, the frenzy he had been in broken. He remembers his original purpose in coming here. God, how had he let himself get so carried away?

Rozanov steps close again, and immediately Shane's brain goes back offline. "Was not lying," he says, voice low in Shane's ear. Goosebumps appear along the back of Shane's neck in the wake of Rozanov's voice. "Still want to fuck you. Have wanted since last time. But... sober."

Shane gulps. "You're... serious?"

"Very serious, Hollander. I know you think we cannot, because we are on same team. I do not care. Does not change anything, whether we play together or against each other."

Shane feels like he's getting whiplash, even more so than he had last year when he had gone from thinking this would happen in a few weeks to thinking it never would. Within a single night, he had resolved to stop it, then agreed, then come to his senses. And now Rozanov is seemingly offering another opportunity.

"What—what are you saying?" he asks finally.

Rozanov grins. "I am saying that you should go back to your room and sleep," he says. "Or maybe not sleep, that is up to you." He winks, because he's an asshole. "Then tomorrow, we will fly back to Boston. And when we are back home... you know where I live. You know when I have days off. If you still want... come find me."

Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

I just wanted to say a huge thank you to everyone who has read and commented on this story. There's no way I can respond to all your comments and still have time to write, but I read them all and appreciate it so much <3

Also, you may have noticed the chapter count has gone up. This chapter was just getting way too long, so I had to split it in two. On the bright side, the next update should be much sooner, since I already have a lot of it written.

Thanks for reading!

Shane taps his foot impatiently as the medic examines his neck. He had taken a hard hit, stinging pain shooting through his neck and down his arm a few minutes into the third period against Chicago. It had shaken him enough that the medical staff had pulled him aside as soon as he got to the bench to check it out, but he feels fine now, and he wants to get back out there.

There's a TV on the wall in the small medical station, allowing Shane to keep an eye on what's happening in the game. He watches, frustrated, as his line plays a shift without him. Rozanov is obviously off-kilter, too accustomed to Shane's speed at his side. They've shifted things around to put Hammersmith back on the wing, and he's much bigger than Shane, his size preventing him from keeping up and receiving Rozanov's passes. It really is a good thing Shane had switched to wing—the two of them are terrible together.

Finally, the medic gives Shane the all clear, with a strict admonishment to get off the ice immediately if he feels any pain. Shane just nods and takes off as quickly as possible—according to the TV, there are still ten minutes left in the game, and the score is tied. His team needs him.

When he emerges onto the bench his line is on the ice again, just finishing off a shift. Damn it. That's two shifts he's missed now. He gives Coach a nod to let him know that he's cleared to play, and a few of the guys fist bump him and smile as he sits back down. Rozanov skids to a stop and steps off the ice, looking Shane up and down as he takes his place beside him on the bench.

"Good, Hollander?" he asks.

"Fine," Shane says. "Did you miss me?"

Rozanov gives him a long look, the corners of his mouth turning up into the slightest smirk. "Always, Hollander."

Shane presses his lips together and looks down to hide his expression.

Rozanov has been doing that a lot lately. Little comments, here and there. Nothing suspicious, nothing weird or out of context or overtly sexual, nothing that anyone other than Shane would understand. Sometimes Shane even wonders if he's doing it on purpose, or if Shane is just reading into things too deeply. But there have been too many now for it to be a coincidence. Rozanov hasn't forgotten about that night at the All-Star game, and he's making sure that Shane can't forget about it either.

Not that Shane would have been able to anyways. He hadn't realised, before, but Rozanov is everywhere in his life. He's plopping himself down in the seat next to Shane at the rink every morning for team breakfast, making faces at Shane's protein smoothie. He's taking the seat next to Shane on the bus and plane, arguing over which movie to watch or chirping Shane for his hockey books. He's there after practice when Shane stays late to run drills, goading him on from the other side of the ice. He's in Shane's hotel room almost every night they're away, yelling at the TV and arguing with Shane about power play tactics.

Shane wonders, two weeks or so after the All-Star game, whether Rozanov is getting in his face so much on purpose, because of what had happened. But he can't really put his finger on anything that he's doing differently, so the logical conclusion is that Rozanov has been there all along. He had crept his way into every aspect of Shane's life so subtly that Shane hadn't even noticed.

He can't spiral for too long—they have a game to win, after all. It feels like it's no time before Coach is barking out "Rozanov, Hollander, Marlow," and he's back over the boards to rejoin the fray.

They win the game. They usually do, nowadays. It's been about a month since the All-Star game, and Boston is still at the top of the standings. They're only a game or two away from being the first team in the league to clinch their playoff spot. It's Marlow who ends up scoring the game-winner tonight, but Shane gets an assist on the board so he can't be too upset.

They're flying back to Boston tonight, so although the mood is celebratory, a lot of the guys are subdued afterwards. They're looking forward to a short flight and sleeping in their own beds after almost three weeks on the road. Shane is happy to be done with this endless road trip too, but he's also been dreading it a little bit.

When Rozanov had thrown down the gauntlet in that hotel room at the All-Star game, what he hadn't considered was that they weren't going back to Boston for long. They had flown across the country the next day to play a single home game, and then they were off on a week-long road trip in Canada. Then back to Boston for a back-to-back, and away again to the West Coast for almost three weeks.

There hasn't been a single day off at home since the All-Star game. Not a single opportunity for Shane to even consider taking Rozanov up on his offer.

There have been days off while they've been on the road, of course. The league isn't that barbaric, and there are usually at least a few days a month with no practice or games. A bunch of the guys had gone out together in L.A. on one of their days off, and Shane had spent another one reading by the hotel pool while Rozanov and Marlow and some of the others fooled around in the water. But it was clear to Shane that when it came to this... thing... with Rozanov, whatever happened next would happen at Rozanov's house in Boston. Where they have not been for a month. Where they are flying to right now.

Of course, Rozanov chooses this flight to sit next to Shane. He doesn't always—when he wants to be entertained, he's more likely to be found in the back of the plane with Marlow and some of the other younger guys, playing cards or video games. But occasionally—and especially on quieter, late-night flights like this one—the two of them end up together.

He doesn't say anything about going back to Boston, or his house, or the All-Star game. He hasn't all month. Even though he still shows up at Shane's hotel room a lot of nights to watch hockey, he's never once mentioned how they had kissed again, or the challenge he had laid down. There have been a lot of significant looks—at the rink, across bars, on planes—but the ball is very clearly in Shane's court now.

Shane should put a stop to it. He knows that all it would take is a text, or a few words when they're alone, and Rozanov would stop. He's always been clear that he won't push further than Shane wants to go. But Shane can't bring himself to do it. He still has no idea what he's going to do, when they get back to Boston. Their first day off isn't for about a week, and the date looms large in his mind. He's trying not to think about it too hard, because if he does he's going to start freaking out.

Rozanov's proximity doesn't help, but thankfully he seems content to stuff his earbuds in his ears and listen to music for the few hours it takes them to get back to Boston. Shane closes his eyes and pretends to sleep, but the whole time his mind is on the man whose arm is brushing against his.

The first morning back in Boston, Shane's phone rings just as he's finishing his breakfast.

The trade deadline for this season had been a few weeks ago, so Shane's heart doesn't stop the way it usually does at the sound of his ringtone. He's safe from a trade, at least for this season. He's not safe from his mother, however.

"Hey," he says, wandering over to the window of his apartment to look out over the city. He's never able to sit still while talking on the phone.

"Shane," his mom's voice is familiar and warm. "Are you doing alright? I saw you left the game for a bit last night."

"Yeah, I'm good," Shane says. "Nothing lasting."

"I figured, since you came back. But still, a text would have been nice."

Shane holds back a sigh. He knows that he's in the wrong here—of course he should have texted his parents and let them know he was okay, even if things have been weird with his mom this last year. The truth is, he had been so preoccupied thinking about Rozanov that it had completely slipped his mind.

"Yeah, sorry," he says, hoping it comes across as sincere. He's working on being less short with his mom, since she's been really trying this year. "I was just tired after the game. It totally slipped my mind."

"Well, I suppose that's good then, if it was so minor you could forget about it. How was the rest of the trip?"

Shane fills her in. It's times like these that he's happy for his mom's obsession with hockey—he never has to give much context or explain things to her. She already knows all the strengths and weaknesses of every team in the league and keeps up to date on all the latest news, so Shane can just talk about anything that's on his mind, whether it's his thoughts about a team they're about to play or the latest standings.

Today, he doesn't have any worries or approaching challenges to brainstorm with her. Not about hockey, at least. He's still riding the high of a successful road trip near the end of one of the most successful seasons Boston has ever had. He can hear the excitement in his voice as he talks about what they've been working on in practice, the way things just seem to have all come together perfectly during games, how Shane doesn't feel weird going out with these guys and celebrating afterwards. As miserable as he had been about the trade a year ago, he doesn't think he's ever been happier.

His mom must hear it too. After Shane has talked himself out, there's a short pause, then his mom sighs. "That's... that all sounds wonderful, honey. I'm glad to hear it."

Shane realises belatedly that his mom probably doesn't want to hear about her favourite team's biggest rivals having the best season in the league. "I mean, yeah," he says. "Sorry, I didn't mean to go on so long." He thinks about saying something about Montreal, some sort of peace offering, but there's nothing to say. Their gamble had most definitely not paid off—it's looking like they're going to miss the playoffs for the second year in a row.

"No, that's good honey," Yuna says. "I'm happy that you're so happy. I never would have thought a year ago, but... Boston has worked out really well for you."

The relief Shane feels takes him off guard a little. His mom isn't really saying anything that isn't objectively obvious on paper—of course Boston has worked out well for him. But it feels like something more than that, given the last year. It makes him want to give a little more in return, to give words to the thoughts that he hadn't been able to voice to anyone all year. He had wanted so desperately to talk to his mom, to have her and all her hockey knowledge talk him down, but he hadn't known how to broach the subject without it turning into an argument.

"It, uh... it really has. I was, uh, actually really worried, for a while there, leading up to the trade deadline. I wasn't... I mean, coming here last year was hard, but I do really like it. I don't want to leave."

Shane can practically hear his mother's frown through the phone, the way her eyebrows scrunch together when she's thinking. "And... did you think you would have to? Were they going to trade you?"

Shane shrugs, even though he knows his mom can't see him. "I mean, probably not," he says. "I know it would have been dumb of them. But... you never know, right?"

"Shane. You have to know that would never happen. Boston was on an upward trajectory before you showed up, but it was you that helped catapult them up the standings. You and Rozanov, playing together. They'd be insane to get rid of you before playoffs."

"I mean, I know that," Shane says. "But..."

"But what?"

Shane swallows. He doesn't know if he's going to regret bringing this up, but looking out over the city he's come to love these last twelve months, he can't help blurt out his fear. "That didn't stop Montreal from trading me. You could have said the same thing then—it made no sense. But they did. So what's to say it won't happen again?"

His mom is quiet for a long moment. "You're right, I suppose. There are no guarantees. But... you're playing much better now than you were in Montreal. Like... record-breaking levels. You know that, right?"

Shane shrugs again. "I guess," he says. "I don't know. When I'm on the ice or in the locker room with the guys, I do. But... I find it hard to judge now. Because I thought I was playing well last year in Montreal too."

Yuna sighs. "You were, honey. I—that's not what I meant."

"I know, I know," Shane reassures her. "Just... I know that it's irrational, to worry about it happening again. Especially given the season we've been having. And the deadline is past now anyways, and obviously it didn't happen, so I know I'm being stupid. But it still—I mean, that doesn't help me stop thinking about it."

"Of course," his mom says, and Shane can't tell but he thinks there's some kind of emotion making her voice sound all choked up like that. "Of course, that makes sense. I—I know you already know this, but I think I need to tell you that it won't happen. It really, really won't. Not this year and not anytime soon, if ever. What you've managed to do this season... it's remarkable, Shane. Really groundbreaking."

"I know," Shane says. And he does. It's just hard to believe sometimes, when he's in it. Winning feels good, of course, and obviously he knows that his line is scoring more than anyone else in the league right now. But it doesn't feel special. He's just playing the game he's

always played, scoring the goals he always has. They just happen a little more frequently now.

"I think..." his mom continues. "I think I also owe you an apology."

"What?"

"You... you said you've been worried about this all year, right?"

Shane's throat suddenly feels dry. "I mean... not right after I left Montreal," he clarifies. "It wasn't... I mean, I was so shocked, the possibility didn't even really cross my mind at first. But... since the summer, yeah."

"I'm sorry that you felt like you couldn't talk to me," his mom says, and yes, that's definitely some sort of emotion in her voice. "I know I didn't make it easy, last year. And you needed support. I shouldn't have let my own biases get in the way of that."

Shane blinks away the tears that are suddenly welling up in his eyes. "It's okay," he says automatically. "It's—I mean, I know Montreal is your team. I know you can't just turn that off."

"My team is whatever team you're on," Yuna says, and Shane is surprised at the intensity in her voice. "You were right, last year. Montreal treated you terribly, and I couldn't see it. And I know you haven't been talking to us as much this year about hockey, and it's my fault. So I'm sorry. And I hope you can forgive me."

Shane pauses in surprise at the words. Outside, a light drizzle has started coming down.

He doesn't think either of his parents have ever asked him for forgiveness for anything before. It feels like a big thing to give, when Shane's own feelings about it all are still so mixed up. He still resents his mom a little, still gets angry at her when she makes an offhand comment about Boston playing dirty or implies that the team is somehow inherently immoral. But on the other hand, he's tired of fighting with her. This is the first time she's extended an olive branch, and Shane can't imagine telling her he doesn't forgive her, not when her and his dad have sacrificed so much for him to play hockey.

"Of course I forgive you, mom," he says. He hopes she can't hear the uncertainty in his voice. As much as he's been hoping for a conversation like this for a while, for some reason now he just wants it to end.

"I'm just... really glad you've found a team where you're happy, Shane. And I know you guys are doing great right now, but that would be true even if you weren't. I promise I'll do better from now on. I—I want to hear about your team, what you like so much about it. What the guys are like."

"Of course, yeah. Anything you want to know." Shane would have given anything for this earlier in the season. Why does he feel numb all of a sudden?

"There is one thing I've been... wondering about. And your father has noticed it too."

"Yeah?"

"It's just... you haven't mentioned Rozanov. At all. Not since you were traded. I know before, you said he was a dick, but obviously the two of you play so well together. I was just wondering... have you not talked about him with us because he is actually a dick, or... I mean, I know you've said you like your new team, and I'm guessing he's part of that, but..."

Cold settles over Shane. Has he really not mentioned Rozanov to his parents at all in the last year? He's not exactly surprised, because just talking about him puts a squirmy, uncomfortable feeling in Shane's stomach when he thinks about it too hard. But still... Rozanov is such a big part of his life now, whether that's a good or bad thing. Hasn't Shane noticed, in the last month, just how often the two of them end up together?

"He's..." God. How on earth can he describe his relationship with Rozanov to his mother, and without giving away things Shane absolutely does not want her to know? He doesn't even know how he feels about the whole thing. How he'll feel about it in a week, when the dreaded day off finally arrives.

He definitely cannot be thinking about that right now.

"He's not a dick," Shane settles on eventually. "Or, well, he is, but not to his own team. He's sort of funny, actually, and really hard-working. We mostly talk about hockey." There. None of that is even a lie.

"Okay. That's... well, that's good. I'm glad."

Shane thinks, maybe unfairly, that his mom is glad about a lot of things today. God, he doesn't know what's gotten into him. He needs to end this call before he says something he shouldn't.

"Yeah. So, uh, nothing exciting there. But it's good, it's all good right now. Uh, obviously. I mean, yeah, we're doing really well. But I, uh... I actually have to get going here soon. I have practice, and I was gonna get there early. You know, do some stretches, work on some stuff."

"Of course, honey," Yuna says. "I—thanks for letting me know how you've been doing. Good luck in your game tomorrow."

"Thanks mom. Love you."

"Love you too. Bye."

Shane can't help but press his forehead against the window once he hangs up. He closes his eyes for a long time, taking deep breaths. He's not even sure what he's feeling—it should maybe be relief, that his mom finally seems to be coming around, taking what he says about his team at face value, asking questions about his life. Or maybe anxiety, that she and his dad have apparently been wondering about Rozanov, that Shane probably isn't the best at hiding that his feelings about that are complicated. But instead it's some weird mixture of the two, neither good nor bad, a whole tangle of emotions that seem to have lodged somewhere in his chest.

He shakes his head. He needs to figure out what he's going to do about this. Rozanov is the one asterisk, the one part of his life that is not completely perfect right now. Maybe once he figures that out, he'll be able to focus on getting things back to normal with his mom again.

He's still not sure what he's going to do. Six days now.

It doesn't matter—he has practice to get to.

The first game of their two-week homestand also happens to be the game where Boston clinches their spot in the playoffs.

It had been a rather anticlimactic moment, altogether. An easy victory against a Winnipeg team that's been struggling this season, both of their goalies dealing with injuries. Rozanov had scored a hat trick, Shane had assisted all three goals. The atmosphere afterwards is celebratory, and Rozanov declares that everyone is coming to his house to hang out. They have a two-day break before their next game, and tomorrow's practice is in the afternoon, so there's no excuse not to go.

Not that Shane minds. He's still riding the high of their season, and he's mostly found his niche with the team, sticking with the guys who don't get too wild. Team hangouts are normal for him now, which he thinks would have probably surprised him a year ago.

He's been to Rozanov's house before, although not often. It's a little ways out from the city, a bit of a pain to get to after practice or a game, so usually the team ends up at someone's apartment closer to the rink. But Shane can't deny that Rozanov's place is great for hosting. The massive floor-to-ceiling windows make the space feel huge, and it's all tastefully minimalist and open. Something like Shane would have bought, maybe, if he'd had more than a few days to pick out a place in Boston and the confidence that he would actually be here for the long term.

Rozanov greets everyone as they come in, somehow managing to flit easily between groups as people get settled and simultaneously monitor the door for new arrivals. There are trays of food everywhere, which is good considering there's an entire team of hungry hockey players present, and Shane wonders briefly how on earth Rozanov had even procured all this for what appeared to be a spur-of-the-moment gathering. He's never understood how Rozanov slots in so easily as the heart of this team, even though he's only been here a year longer than Shane and had been dealing with a language and cultural barrier when he arrived.

Watching him now, Shane realises how much everyone respects him. Even when they chirp him, there's an undertone to it. The team has been beyond accepting of Shane's quirks—his social awkwardness and work ethic and strict diet—but with Rozanov, it's more than that. They worship him, and it's hard for Shane to blame them when he almost does the same thing. There's no denying that Rozanov has made everything in Boston so much easier for Shane, even despite their unique situation.

Shane realises suddenly that Rozanov will almost definitely be his captain next season, since Nelson is retiring. The thought doesn't bother him as much as it maybe should.

Like Shane's thoughts had summoned him, Rozanov is suddenly right there, putting one arm around Shane and the other around St-Simon, who had arrived at the same time. "Finally, boring old people have arrived," he says. "Drinks are in the kitchen, if you can handle. Non-alcoholic shit in the fridge, if you cannot."

"Fuck off, Roz," St-Simon says, pushing him away and immediately making for the kitchen. Shane lingers, letting Rozanov's arm slide off his shoulders. He knows that most of the team have probably caught on by now that he doesn't drink, but he doesn't like to advertise it anyways. It leaves a sour feeling in his stomach, a tension as he waits for someone to say something, to call him a buzzkill or a pussy. He had heard it enough in Montreal, even though he'd only been there a few months.

"And you Hollander?" Rozanov asks. Shane is surprised that he hasn't already flitted away to the next group. "Are you going to tell me to fuck off too? Is very rude, I think, when I am being such good host."

Shane rolls his eyes. "Fuck off, Rozanov," he says, almost out of habit. He ignores Rozanov's fake wounded look.

"Maybe I will," he says. "Just wanted to make sure."

Shane frowns, not following. "Make sure of what?"

Rozanov smirks then, and Shane's stomach swoops before he even hears the words. "That you are here," Rozanov explains. "That you were able to find my house okay. I know you have only been here a few times—do not want you to forget where it is."

Shane flushes, and Rozanov's smirk only widens. It's the most overt reference to their conversation at the All-Star game that Rozanov has made since. When Shane just flounders, not sure how to respond to that, Rozanov seems to take that as a sign that his mission has been accomplished. Maybe he really is just messing with Shane. He winks—*and why does that always seem to do it for Shane?*—then turns and disappears into the ever-growing crowd.

Shane is off-kilter for the rest of the night.

Shane braces himself as the goal horn sounds.

Back when he had played for Montreal, his teammates had celebrated with him after goals. It's something that's done by every single team in the league, and Shane had grown up with the familiar routine of hugs and fist bumps following every change in the scoreboard. In Boston, however, things tend to get a little more... enthusiastic.

The breath is knocked out of Shane as Rozanov collides with him, slamming him up against the boards. Marlow, Carmichael, and Nelson aren't far behind. Shane is momentarily buried under a pile of hockey players, and only Rozanov's arm on his keeps him from being knocked to the ice. Shane doesn't care. It's been a hard-fought game, the other team playing dirty in their increasingly desperate bids to stop Boston from scoring. Penalty minutes have been racking up on both sides, and there have been two fights already tonight, one over a hit that Shane had taken. He never participates—both Rozanov and Nelson have told him to stay out of it and focus on scoring goals while they do what they need to do—but it gets his blood boiling nonetheless. Shane's goal midway through the third period—the first in a previously scoreless game—feels like an ice cold shower on a hot summer day. *Finally.*

After that, finishing the game feels like a formality. Boston has dominated in terms of possession all night, which is why it's been so frustrating that they hadn't been able to put the puck in the net for so long. But now that they're up by one, it becomes a fairly easy game of keep away until the final buzzer sounds. Another win in the books, another day closer to playoffs.

More pressingly, another day closer to their day off. Which is tomorrow.

Both Shane and Rozanov get pulled to do press, so they're the last ones into the locker room after the game. Everyone else is already out of the showers and in the midst of getting changed, chirps and conversation creating a low buzz in the room when the two of them walk in together. Their stalls are side-by-side, so they end up crossing the room in tandem. Rozanov gets his stuff together slightly faster, not even sparing a glance backwards as he interrupts Marlow and Carmichael's conversation, saying something that makes them both guffaw, then heads for the showers.

Shane follows, slower. Despite over a year on the same team, he doesn't think him and Rozanov have ever been the only two in the showers together. There are always other guys around, and when they aren't alone it doesn't take Shane back so clearly to that first time after the CCM shoot. But it's all he's thinking about now. He briefly considers skipping the shower and just heading home, but he knows it would just make him feel sweaty and gross. Besides, he can handle himself. He has almost every day in the last year, and there being no one else around this time doesn't change anything.

He chooses the shower furthest away from Rozanov on purpose, although the asshole had picked the one closest to the middle so nothing is really that far. Shane keeps his eyes on the ground and his mind on the game they had just played, moving as quickly as possible. The last thing he wants is for his body to betray him again—especially here, with all of their teammates in the next room.

Rozanov doesn't say anything, which is strange considering he usually never shuts up, but maybe he also realises what a bad idea it would be to start something here. Or maybe his thoughts are travelling down the same path as Shane's, to a smaller locker room almost two years ago now. Shane doesn't know, and he very determinedly tries not to think about it.

He's surprisingly successful, and in no time he's rinsing off the soap suds and turning the water off. However, as he wraps a towel around his waist and grabs his things, he can't resist a singular peek. He's never looked, not on any team he's ever been on but especially not since

being traded to Boston. But just this once, he caves. Maybe it's because it's happened before and Rozanov already knows everything incriminating about him anyways. Maybe there's no real thought behind it, just an instinct borne out of a year of repressed longing. But Shane looks.

Rozanov catches him immediately, of course. Like he had just been waiting for this. Shane's cheeks heat and he tenses, expecting a smirk or a chirp or a leer of some sort. But Rozanov just smiles, his grin wider than it usually gets, and turns to face Shane a little more fully, water still streaming down his body.

Shane immediately snaps his gaze away.

He gets changed in record time, and he's throwing stuff into his bag by the time Rozanov saunters out of the showers. A bunch of the guys are grouped together on one side of the room at that point, making plans to go out.

"Hollander," Carmichael calls out. "You coming with us?"

There's no way Shane would be able to sit in some bar surrounded by his teammates tonight. Not when they have a day off tomorrow and he still has no idea what he's going to do. He tries his best for a regretful smile. "Nah, I'm good. Gonna go sleep for like a million hours."

"Must be hard work, scoring all those goals for us, eh?" Beaulieu, their goalie, claps Shane on the shoulder. "These fuckers wouldn't know."

"Hey, fuck you!"

There's a round of laughter from the group as they prepare to head out. Out of the corner of his eye, Shane sees Marlow approach Rozanov. "You gonna meet us there Roz?" he asks.

There's a pause, then Rozanov looks across and meets Shane's eyes. "No," he says slowly. "I think I am tired tonight too. Next time." He abruptly looks away, towards Marlow, seeming to remember who he's actually supposed to be talking to. "Do not let them go too wild. Is only one day off to recover."

"Sure thing," Marlow says, clapping Rozanov on the shoulder. "Have a good night, dude."

Shane leaves with the group, not wanting to be caught alone in the locker room with Rozanov. There's no way that he hadn't been looking at Shane on purpose, just now. No way that it had been anything other than a message, Rozanov's subtle way of telling Shane *"we're off tomorrow, and I'll be home all night tonight."*

Shane sometimes thinks he's going crazy, reading signals into everything that Rozanov does. But there's just too much for it all to be a coincidence.

He breaks off from the group in the parking lot, heading towards his own car and wishing the guys who are going out a good night. He's relieved to see that him and Rozanov aren't the only ones skipping tonight—plenty of others are also headed home, so their absence won't stand out.

Not that it would have any reason to anyways, Shane thinks to himself. He yanks of the steering wheel of the car a little too hard as he turns out of the parking lot, heading in the direction of his own apartment. What Rozanov chooses to do with his evening has nothing to do with Shane.

...

Who is he even kidding? As he slows to a stop at a red light, Shane bangs his forehead a few times against the wheel. He doesn't know why he can't even acknowledge to himself what's going on here.

He's a terrified mess inside, and has been since the All-Star game. While part of it is definitely about the risk of getting caught, Shane knows that doesn't even come close to scratching the surface of it. Really, how would anyone find out if he was at Rozanov's house on one of their days off? No, the fear comes from a much deeper place.

Shane knows that if he does this now—if he shows up at Rozanov's house either tonight or tomorrow and finally gives in to this thing that's always been between them—it won't be a one time thing. Rozanov hasn't actually said anything about that, but Shane knows that he would, given time. They're too close, too often, for the prospect to not at least come up again, and if Shane manages to push past his fear this time, it will only make it easier in the future. Shane going over to Rozanov's now means starting some kind of friends-with-benefits situation. Shane's never done that before—never had a casual or even regular sexual relationship with anyone, much less a teammate. He's not sure how he feels about it—if he's always as nervous as he had been the only two times they've done this before, then it seems like he would be signing up for a significant amount of anxiety in his life. He's never pictured himself as someone who could have casual sex.

And of course, there's the issue of Rozanov himself, and what he would think of the whole thing.

The thought has occurred to Shane, in the weeks since the All-Star game, that maybe the only reason that Rozanov has been so nice to him in the last year is because he's been trying to get in Shane's pants. He mostly doesn't believe it—it would be a long and mostly unrewarding undertaking, and Shane knows that Rozanov has no problems hooking up when he wants to. But now that the thought has occurred to him, he can't help but wonder what Rozanov thinks about all this. Is Shane just another conquest to him? A convenient way to fuck a guy without having to worry about it getting out? Does he not actually like Shane at all, like everyone had thought at the start of their careers? Those assumptions had to have come from somewhere, right? Shane doesn't know if he can do this if that's the case. He isn't delusional—he knows that there can never be anything like real feelings between him and Rozanov, but against his better judgement he *likes* the guy. His sarcasm, his confidence, the ease with which he'd slotted himself into Shane's life. He doesn't think he can start something like this if there's not some level of reciprocity there, if Rozanov really does just see Shane as someone he can use.

Shane also can't help but worry that it would change things, somehow, between the two of them. Either on the ice, or off it. He can't help but feel embarrassed when he thinks back to their previous hookups, and more than a little bit ashamed too. He had been so desperate for it—so needy. The thought of letting Rozanov see him like that again, now that they're on the

same team and have to work together every day... it doesn't sit right with Shane. Will Rozanov see him differently, treat him differently? Will it affect their chemistry on the ice, or make Rozanov less willing to be a social buffer with the team, if he thinks less of Shane because of it?

Knowing that he's overthinking this doesn't make the worries go away.

There's also the knowledge that the last time they had hooked up, over a year ago now, they had left each other with a solid plan for the next time. Shane can only assume that the plan has carried over, that Rozanov is planning on fucking him. That brings up a whole other host of fears—Shane has still never done that before, and he finds the idea a fascinating mix of terrifying and arousing. But he can't let himself even think about that. Thinking leads to daydreaming which leads to... nothing helpful in terms of deciding what to do about this whole thing.

Without even realising it, Shane had somehow made it home. His brain comes back online as he pulls into his parking spot and shuts the car off.

He doesn't get out right away. His thoughts are still a mess, and he leans his head back for a moment, closing his eyes. He wishes that this could be as simple for him as it seems to be for Rozanov. He needs to get his shit together before... before...

Shane is apparently very good at lying to himself.

It's only here, sitting in the darkness of his parking garage, that he realises that the decision he's been agonising over for weeks has already been made. Had probably been made the moment he had walked out of that hotel room at the All-Star game. There's no universe in which he isn't going to Rozanov's tonight. Or if there is, it's a universe where he manages to resist this first time, but caves on their next day off. Or the one after, or maybe the one after that. Perhaps sometime in the off-season. Shane was always going to end up here—he doesn't know how he hadn't seen it before. He's going to drive over there and do whatever it is they're going to do, fears be damned, and there's no conceivable way this ever could have ended differently.

It's almost freeing, to at least know how it ends now.

He doesn't bother getting out of the car. Just starts the engine again and drives.

Chapter 5

Rozanov is smirking when he opens the door.

"Hollander. Is a surprise. Did not know you were planning on coming over." His expression belies his words, and Shane rolls his eyes and pushes past him into the house.

"Shut up Rozanov."

Shane hesitates in the entryway, fighting the instinct to take his shoes off at the door. None of the team had bothered when they were here the other night, but Shane notices that Rozanov is only wearing slides. He decides to take them off, aligning them neatly against the wall. When he looks up, Rozanov is leaning against the wall with his arms crossed, obviously holding back a laugh.

"Shut up," Shane mumbles again, hating the way his cheeks flush with heat.

"Am trying, Hollander," Rozanov says. "Is hard when your thoughts are so loud. You are freaking out, yes?"

Shane huffs out a loud exhale. He doesn't even have it in him to lie. "Yeah."

Rozanov frowns, and Shane half expects him to push off the wall and stalk forward like he had done at the All-Star game, pressing Shane against the wall and obliterating all his thoughts. He's almost disappointed when Rozanov stays where he is—as much as Shane is freaking out about this entire thing, at least if Rozanov kissed him he knows he could forget about it for a few moments.

He's so tired of thinking about this. He's done nothing else since the All-Star game, and it hasn't given him any more clarity.

"Why?" Rozanov interrupts Shane's train of thought.

"What?" Shane doesn't even know what they had been talking about.

"Why are you freaking out? You are here, yes? First day off since All-Star tomorrow, and here you are. Obviously you want this. So what is problem?"

Shane leans up against the wall opposite Rozanov, mirroring his posture. Apparently they're talking about this. He can't help but laugh, even if it comes out a little manic. "What's the problem?" he repeats. "The problem is that this is a terrible idea!"

"Why?" Rozanov asks again. When Shane just looks at him, annoyed, he goes on. "I know you say this often Hollander, but I do not understand. Why you always insist is bad idea? We are both hot, and we know is fun. Is great idea to me."

"It just—we're teammates!" Shane sputters. "How is it not a bad idea?"

Rozanov shrugs. "And? You did not have problem when we were rivals. That is more scandalous, I think."

"I mean, I thought it was a bad idea then too," Shane mumbles.

The smirk is back. "But what, I was so hot in showers that it did not matter? I do not know if you have noticed Hollander, but I am still hot. Can demonstrate in shower if you need."

"Shut up," Shane says, but even he can tell there's no heat to it. He realises abruptly that they're still just standing by the door. It makes him feel weird all of a sudden, so he takes the lead and advances into the living room—anything to avoid meeting Rozanov's eyes.

"I do not think you want me to shut up," Rozanov says, trailing behind him. "Or you would not be here." Shane hesitates, then heads over to one of the massive windows and looks out into the darkness. There are little pinpricks of light in the garden—some of kind of solar powered thing? "Hollander." Rozanov is beside him now. "Look at me."

Shane stares into nothing for one more moment before he does. To his surprise, Rozanov's expression is devoid of mocking, as sincere as Shane has ever seen it.

"You are worried that it will affect performance on ice, yes? Or that someone will find out?"

"I—yes. Of course."

"Okay. Has not affected performance so far, right?"

"No," Shane agrees. If anything, he privately thinks that their history has only heightened his awareness of Rozanov on the ice, which is probably a good thing. "But..."

"But you are worried," Rozanov finishes for him. "I think I understand. But you do not need to be, Hollander. No matter what we do here, changes nothing on ice. You are good player, does not matter who you fuck."

Shane marvels at how easily Rozanov cuts to the heart of Shane's anxiety. It's not like any of this is new information, but it loosens something in his chest to hear Rozanov say it anyways.

"I know that," he says. "Just..." He already has a hard time acting normal with Rozanov when the team is around. It doesn't bother him as much as it maybe should when they're alone, but every hockey team he's ever been on has been a performance—of being strong, unbothered, confident. Shane still doesn't know how to deal with the shift in dynamic that comes from Rozanov having seen him in a much more vulnerable way. Even though they had never even come close to discussing the complicated tangles of emotions Shane feels around Rozanov, he can't help but feel humiliated and ashamed, even just considering what they had physically done together. It's already weird now, but if they go further...

"Will change nothing," Rozanov says again. He's still looking at Shane like he can somehow unravel him with his eyes alone.

Shane swallows. "Okay." His voice is shakier than he'd like, but he's more than used to feeling embarrassed around Rozanov by now.

"And," Rozanov adds. "Being on same team makes things much safer. Anyone finds out you're here, we say we are hanging out. We are friends—is not weird. Always risk, but... safer. And much safer than trying to find some other guy who will keep secret."

"I—yeah. Yeah, you're right." The only way they would really be found out is if Rozanov says something in public, which Shane trusts him not to do, after the last year. Or if someone walks in on them, but that doesn't seem likely—they can just lock the door. Shane ignores Rozanov's implication—that Shane's only alternative is to try to find another guy to hook up with, since they both know that women don't do it for him. It's true, but Shane doesn't want to talk about that right now, doesn't want the first time he puts his sexuality into words to be here, when he's a maelstrom of other emotions about all this.

"I know I am right," Rozanov grins. "But thank you for confirming. Is no fun if you are overthinking whole time."

Now, finally, he takes a step closer. Shane has to tilt his head back to keep looking at him, and he purposely does not think about how hot that is. "Rozanov," he says, because he feels like he has to say something.

"Hollander," Rozanov replies. He takes another step closer, reaches up to run a hand down Shane's arm. Goosebumps prickles in his wake. "We are done talking now, yes? Those were all the things you were worried about?"

Shane's throat is suddenly very dry. It's not like he hadn't known where all this was leading from the moment he knocked on the door, but it feels very real now. "Yeah, but..." He doesn't know why it feels so hard to just let himself have this.

"But what? You are still scared?" One of Rozanov's hands comes up to brush Shane's cheek.

Shane bristles. "Would you stop saying that? I'm not scared."

"You are still very bad liar," Rozanov says with an indulgent smile. One of his hands rests on Shane's chest now. "Can feel your heart, is very fast. But scared is okay. As long as you still want." Rozanov's lips are close now, close enough that Shane can feel the warmth of his breath.

"Yes," he breathes. He doesn't even know what he's scared of, although Rozanov is right and he can't deny even to himself that he's terrified right now. His hands are shaking, and he clenches them into fists so that Rozanov won't notice. But he *wants*, so badly, and he's tired of doing the sensible thing when it means never getting what he wants.

This time, Rozanov moves first, hand going to the back of Shane's head to pull him closer. It feels less like a kiss and more like Rozanov is trying to devour him, but Shane doesn't care. Almost instinctively, his hands come up to wrap around Rozanov too, and Rozanov wastes no time hoisting him up against the window, a mirror of the position they had been in at the All-Star game a few weeks ago. This time though, Shane knows they aren't stopping, and the thought goes straight to his dick.

He groans softly when Rozanov moves away from his mouth, kissing down his jaw and neck, and tips his head back. Some part of him thinks that he should maybe be embarrassed about how easy he falls into this, how natural it feels after weeks of overthinking, but that side of his brain is completely overwhelmed by *want*. He had spent so long agonising over every part of this and telling himself how he should feel about the whole thing, that he had forgotten how he actually does feel when they do this, which is fucking incredible.

It feels like they kiss against the window forever. Shane is dizzy with it, completely committed to relearning exactly what makes Rozanov moan, what makes him rut up against Shane and lose some of that cockiness. It feels like their kiss at the All-Star game was nothing but an appetiser, a reminder of what they could do, if Shane let it happen, and now this is the real thing.

Just as it's starting to get unbearable, and Shane is squirming against Rozanov, trying to get any kind of friction, he feels himself being braced and lifted away from the wall. His stomach swoops at the sudden lack of support at his back, the feeling of weightlessness making him grab Rozanov's shoulders in panic. Rozanov hasn't stopped kissing him though, and Shane has to tear himself away.

"Hey! What the fuck?"

Rozanov chuckles, the sound low and sexy against his ear, and Shane feels teeth nipping at his neck. "Is okay Hollander, I will not drop you."

Shane realises belatedly that he's being carried somewhere, out of the living room and down a short hallway. He's never been this far into Rozanov's house before. "Asshole," he mutters, but he tilts his head back so Rozanov has better access. "I can walk."

Rozanov doesn't say anything to that, and Shane doesn't make any move to unwrap his legs from around Rozanov's waist.

Shane gets caught up in the kissing again, wrenching Rozanov's lips back to his own. He's barely conscious of the change in lighting that means they've entered a different room, everything bathed in a soft yellow glow, until suddenly he feels himself become truly weightless, falling backwards onto a soft surface.

He can't help his little yelp of surprised, and he rolls his eyes when Rozanov just laughs at him. "Fuck off," he mumbles, glancing around belatedly and realising that they're obviously in Rozanov's bedroom now, and he had been tossed down on a bed. "You could have warned me."

"I think you like being thrown around," Rozanov says, climbing onto the bed and settling himself on top of Shane. He smirks again when Shane's cheeks heat and he doesn't deny it. He can't, with Rozanov pressing him down like this—he can barely think.

Rozanov seems to know that too, because he doesn't bother waiting for an answer, leaning down to kiss Shane again. They're really pressed together now, with all of Rozanov's weight on top of Shane, and he's suddenly struck with the urge to be feeling this without the barrier of clothes in between them. It's been so long since he's had Rozanov like this, and although

part of his mind is telling him to slow down and savour it, a larger part is begging him to just get on with things already.

He fumbles with the buttons on Rozanov's shirt, wondering why on earth he doesn't just wear sweats after a game like everyone else. Rozanov laughs at him and doesn't help whatsoever, instead getting his hands up underneath Shane's sweater and pulling it off easily. He goes to work on Shane's belt then, getting it undone just as Shane finishes with the buttons and pushes the shirt off his shoulders. It pools somewhere on the bed behind them and Shane can't help but take a minute to run his hands over Rozanov's chest and truly admire him in a way he's been resisting for over a year now.

Rozanov, unfortunately, doesn't seem to realise just how long Shane has been waiting for this, because he interrupts immediately, scooting down the bed so he can pull Shane's pants off. He takes the underwear too, flinging it to the floor in one smooth motion, and suddenly Shane is completely naked, laid out on Rozanov's bed. He fights the shyness that comes over him, the sudden urge to cover himself, even as Rozanov's eyes rove over him greedily.

Instead, he reaches out, and Rozanov falls to meet him easily, kissing him again and taking Shane's mind off how different this feels now that they actually know each other. The other two times they had done this, they had been basically strangers, meeting up in random hotel rooms. It feels like more now, with a year of shared memories between them, with the knowledge that Shane is in Rozanov's bed right now, where he lays down to sleep every night.

Rozanov pulls away for a moment to get the rest of his own clothes off, and Shane uses the opportunity to catch his breath, staring at him. Objectively, he knows that Rozanov is hot, is faced with that fact every single day now that they're on the same team, but it really hits him now. He has no idea why he wants Shane, apparently so much that he had been willing to wait over a year for it, but there's no way Shane is taking it for granted.

When Rozanov lays back down, Shane opens his legs almost on instinct. He can feel his face flush as Rozanov settles between them, and he's momentarily distracted by all the bare skin pressed up against his own. He's warm all of a sudden, his whole body tingling. Then, he feels the press of Rozanov's dick against his ass, and he tenses.

He had almost forgotten, lost in the haze of arousal, what they're here to do.

Rozanov is looking at him intently, like he can read Shane's thoughts from his face alone. He shifts a little, grinding against him in a way that feels intentional. "You still want?" he asks.

Shane swallows and nods. The last thing he wants is another conversation about how afraid he is, because he knows it's written all over his face, as usual. And he doesn't fully understand himself what he's so scared of. He does his best to push past it. "I still want."

Thankfully, Rozanov doesn't question him, or worse, stop what he's doing to talk some more. Instead, he reaches over to the nightstand, pulling out lube and condoms and dropping them on the bed. Shane's eyes catch on the objects, unable to look away even as Rozanov starts littering kisses along his neck again.

"Just relax," Rozanov murmurs. "You will like this, promise. And if not, you say and I will stop, okay?"

"Okay," Shane breathes, finally ripping his eyes away from the condoms and looking at Rozanov again. He's staring down at Shane with a look that's almost fond, but before Shane can process *that* too much they're kissing again and it becomes hard to think at all.

Shane is acutely aware of all the places they're touching right now, even though this is technically nothing new. It's been so long that he had forgotten what it felt like, to want someone like this and to know that he's wanted the same way in return. He tips his head back and lets out a harsh breath when Rozanov starts kissing his way down Shane's body, his teeth grazing against a nipple. His hands twist in the bedsheets.

Rozanov follows his mouth with his hands, running them up and down Shane's body even as he settles properly between Shane's legs. Then he pauses, and Shane looks down from where his gaze had been fixed on the ceiling, wondering if something is wrong.

Rozanov meets his eyes with a smile though, like he had just been waiting for Shane to look. Then he leans down and takes Shane in his mouth.

This also isn't unfamiliar, but Shane can't help but moan like it's the first time. He thrusts up unconsciously, and has to clap a hand over his mouth to muffle the sound that comes out when one of Rozanov's hands wraps around his thigh, pushing him back down. God, he had forgotten how big those hands are, how easily Rozanov can pin him to the bed.

For a moment Shane is worried that this is going to be over before they even get around to the main event. Something disappointed settles in his stomach at the thought, and that more than anything convinces him that beyond the nerves, he really does want this. He reaches down, threading a hand in Rozanov's hair, but before he can say anything Rozanov seems to have the same thought. It's not like Shane had lasted all that long the other times they had done this, after all. He pulls back and looks up at Shane, trailing featherlight touches with his fingers to replace where his mouth had been.

"You are going to last?" he asks, and there's definitely an arrogance in his tone, like he knows exactly what he's doing to Shane and how hard it is to think right now.

"Fuck off, Rozanov," Shane says, trying not to notice when Rozanov reaches over to grab the lube. Instead of opening it though, he wraps a hand more firmly around Shane and squeezes, grinning when Shane's eyes roll back a little and he grunts.

"I don't know if you are," Rozanov continues, almost conversational.

Shane glares at him as much as he can while simultaneously straining upward, chasing his touch. "Not with you doing that," he admits, even though Rozanov obviously already knows.

He sighs anyways, like Shane is depriving him of something. "Okay, will stop," he says. "More fun things to do anyways, da?"

Shane swallows and nods, feeling shy all of a sudden. Rozanov doesn't seem to notice, preoccupied with clicking open the cap on the bottle of lube, pouring some onto his fingers. Shane can feel himself tense as he hand reaches back down.

"Relax," Rozanov whispers, and he leans down to take Shane is his mouth again. He doesn't move, doesn't bob his head and drive Shane out of his mind like he had been doing earlier—he just holds himself there, swirling his tongue the tiniest bit. It's enough to distract Shane, just a little, as Rozanov's fingers trail backwards and ghost across his rim.

He really does try to relax, taking a few deep breaths like he does when he's meditating. It's just hard, with Rozanov touching him like this, his thoughts scattering every time he tries to wrangle them into some kind of order. He's nervous, yes, but also incredibly turned on, and worried about coming too fast. Rozanov's fingers feel like a ticking bomb—Shane knows it's about to explode, but not when or how. He keeps bracing himself for more, for something, but for now Rozanov seems content to run his other hand all over Shane's body and drive him insane with just the brush of a finger against him.

Slowly, Shane comes back from the edge he had been teetering on before, when Rozanov had been blowing him. The tension of waiting can only last so long, and so little by little he stops expecting anything and starts to focus a little more on what Rozanov is doing. The way even the barest of touches sends sparks shooting up his spine, like it had in that hotel room a year ago. He's touched himself here before, and even more so in the last year, thinking about this, but it never really had the same effect by himself.

Rozanov seems to sense that Shane has relaxed a little, because as soon as he stops expecting it Rozanov changes things up, pushing the tip of his finger inside. Shane clenches instinctively, squeezing his eyes shut, then takes another deep breath, consciously trying to loosen his muscles. "Sorry," he says, glancing down to find Rozanov looking at him intently, even with his lips still wrapped around Shane's cock. "Sorry." It feels weird, having someone else's finger inside him, and tight too. Shane doesn't know how on earth even more than that is going to fit.

"Is okay," Rozanov says, pulling off and replacing his mouth with the hand that isn't currently occupied. "We will go slow."

Having Rozanov's eyes on his like this feels too intense, so Shane leans his head back into the pillows, closing his eyes. He tries to focus on the sensations, on keeping his body loose and pliant as Rozanov starts moving his finger inside of him, thrusting in and out. He strokes Shane's cock in tandem, and eventually it starts to feel a little less weird. Good, even. Shane can see how maybe some people like this, how it adds to the pleasure he's already getting from Rozanov's hand on him.

He grins at the thought, a little proud of himself for even managing to enjoy this, after how nervous he had been. This is good, he feels good, and Rozanov isn't mocking him or anything. Not that Shane had really thought he would, but he's still a little charmed by how seriously Rozanov seems to be taking this, by how much he obviously cares about making this good for Shane.

"Good, Hollander?" It's as though Rozanov can read his thoughts.

Shane nods, flushing again under his gaze when their eyes meet. He feels cracked open admitting it, vulnerable, and he sort of wishes Rozanov could kiss him right now, that he wasn't so far away. But he's rewarded with the feeling of another finger circling his hole, and Rozanov looking at him with an obvious question in his eyes. Shane just nods again, squeezing his eyes shut.

The second finger burns a little more going in, but it's a good stretch, and Shane can't help but arch into it. It helps that Rozanov ducks his head back down at the same time, and the warring sensations of his mouth and his fingers are too much for Shane to really process at once. He gasps when Rozanov starts thrusting, harder than he had been with just one finger, the wet sounds coming from where their bodies meet driving him crazy with a heady combination of embarrassment and desire.

Without warning, Rozanov slows his movements, then crooks his fingers inside. Shane arches up off the bed, moaning, but there are strong hands holding him down, making him take it as he does it again, like Rozanov had expected that reaction. Shane can't help but pant, eyes wide and fixed on the ceiling as fingers brush against that spot inside of him for the third time, torn between wanting to pull away and wanting to lean into it. It's so much, too much even, and Rozanov seems to know it. When Shane peeks down, Rozanov is staring at him again, a slight grin on his face.

"Okay?" he asks.

Shane nods. "Yeah, okay," he says. "But..."

"But what?"

Shane feels his cheeks heat even more—he hadn't known that was possible. "I'm not going to last long if you keep doing that," he admits.

Rozanov grins. "Oh I know," he says. "Do not worry. Will make sure you do not come yet."

Shane shudders, and Rozanov's smile widens. Then he goes back to what he had been doing.

Shane floats for a little while in the sensations, trembling all over. He's still a little scared of what he knows is coming, but it's a distant thought now, drowned out by the haze of pleasure. Rozanov is true to his word and backs off a little, making sure that Shane can't truly get close, but it's still *so much*.

When Rozanov finally pulls his fingers out, Shane almost keens with the loss. He has to press his lips together to hold in the sound, but before he can even look to see why it had all stopped Rozanov is there, draping himself over Shane and kissing him deeply.

Shane can't complain about that, and now that Rozanov is in reach again, he doesn't hesitate to wrap his arms around him. He pulls him down, wanting him closer even though they're already pressed together everywhere. Shane realises that he's still shaking, whether from pleasure or nerves he's not sure. He isn't the only one affected though—when Rozanov finally breaks their kiss to rest their foreheads together, his eyes are dark with arousal and his breathing is ragged.

"You're going to fucking kill me Hollander."

That startles a laugh out of Shane, and he mindlessly grinds upwards as Rozanov mirrors his grin. They kiss again, shorter and almost chaste, given their position. Then Rozanov reaches over for a condom and pulls back a little to tear it open. Shane's eyes follow the movement.

"Still yes?" Rozanov checks, rolling it on. Shane can't help but watch, and it hits him for the first time that Rozanov's dick is going to be *inside* him. He can't help the flash of uncertainty, the nerves roaring back with a vengeance. Sure, fingers had felt good, but Rozanov is a lot bigger than that.

Still, he hasn't come this far to chicken out now. "Yeah," he says, still not able to look away from Rozanov's dick.

"Do not worry Hollander," Rozanov says, chuckling a little, but at least it doesn't sound mean. "It will fit."

Shane hates that his anxiety must be so clearly showing on his face, but he just nods, looking back up at Rozanov. "Okay."

Rozanov kisses him again, and it's amazing how that always seems to quiet Shane's thoughts. He can feel that Rozanov is still manoeuvring, hears the click of the lube cap being opened again and feels the fingers return, wetter than before. But he can ignore that for now and just focus on his tongue in Rozanov's mouth, the way they both moan a little when Rozanov sucks on it.

Shane is breathless again when they break apart, but Rozanov just looks thoughtful. Maybe a little uncertain, for the first time tonight. "Do you want..." he starts, and Shane frowns.

"What is it?"

"Do you want... like this?" Rozanov asks, gesturing vaguely at Shane laid out on the bed. "Or... might be easier on your stomach."

Shane finally gets what Rozanov is asking, and suddenly swallowing feels difficult. The words stick in his throat as he considers; does he want to be face-to-face with Rozanov for this? His first instinct is no—it feels too vulnerable, too intense. But he also can't imagine not being able to see him at all. He makes the decision in a split second. "Like this," he says, pulling Rozanov down to kiss him again.

They make out for a little longer, then Rozanov shifts, settling himself more firmly between Shane's legs. He feels hands on him, not where he had expected, and he's confused for a second until Rozanov gets his hands on the back of Shane's knees and pushes upwards, folding him in half. Shane thinks he would probably be embarrassed about that, and about the way Rozanov is looking at him now, if he had any capacity to feel anything right now apart from arousal.

He's immediately glad that they had stayed facing each other, because as soon as Shane feels the blunt pressure at his entrance Rozanov leans down to kiss him, and it's the best

distraction. Shane can't help but brace himself a little bit, because there's no way this isn't going to hurt, right? But Rozanov runs the back of his hand down Shane's cheek in a tender gesture, whispering unintelligible words in Russian into Shane's neck, and it's enough for at least some of the tension that Shane has been carrying to dissipate.

True to his word, Rozanov pushes in slowly, his eyes on Shane's face the whole time. There's pain, yes, but not as much or as sharp as Shane had been expecting. He can tell that Rozanov is practically studying his face, and Shane lets out a trembling breath as he tries to adjust to the sensation of pressure. It somehow keeps going—every time Shane thinks that must be it, that there's no way any more will fit, Rozanov shifts forward again, going deeper and deeper. Finally, he stops, touching their foreheads together, and kisses Shane softly.

"Okay?"

Shane just nods. The words get stuck in his throat—he's not even sure if he could talk right now, even if he did know what to say. It's a weird feeling, a little painful and uncomfortable and too much, but Shane is worried that if he says any of that Rozanov will stop, and for some reason he really does not want him to stop.

Rozanov shifts again, pulling out and pushing back in slowly. Shane can't help but let out a shaky gasp—he can feel the pleasure now, through the rest of it, feel the drag against his prostate that makes him instinctively tilt his hips into it. He tips his head back, overwhelmed, and only just catches the grin on Rozanov's face as he does it again.

They kiss—mouths open, messier than they ever have before—and Shane can't help the little punched out groans that escape him as Rozanov gradually speeds up his thrusting into a proper rhythm. The fear is gone now, as is most of the discomfort, and he starts grinding into it, trying to get Rozanov to move faster, go deeper. He's so hard, his dick neglected against his stomach, but he knows that if it gets any attention whatsoever this will be over in an instant, and that's not at all what he wants. Rozanov pulls away a little, pushing into where he's still holding Shane's legs, changing the angle just slightly. Shane groans.

"Still okay?"

Shane nods again. His breaths are coming in gasps now, chest heaving. He wonders why he had been so terrified of this for so long when it feels this good. Rozanov is still looking at him like he's trying to see right through him, and Shane throws an arm over his face, struck suddenly with how he must look right now.

A moment later, Rozanov is pulling out, and Shane blinks in confusion, a slurred "what?" escaping from his lips. But he feels hands on his hips, urging him to roll over, and it doesn't take long to understand what Rozanov wants. Shane goes, positioning himself on his hands and knees because he's pretty sure he knows how this works from here.

He's surprised at first, when instead of holding him steady the hands on him pull sharply, moving Shane like he isn't a professional athlete. He finds himself at the edge of the bed, and glances back just as he feels pressure at his entrance again to find Rozanov standing behind him, one leg propped up beside Shane's knee.

It's easier this time, now that Shane knows what it feels like—a little less like Rozanov is splitting him in two. Rozanov is less careful too, obviously worked up himself, and wastes no time pushing all the way in. Shane's head drops to the pillow, his arms trembling with the effort of holding himself up as Rozanov starts thrusting, kissing his neck and shoulders. The change in angle is exquisite, every movement hitting right where Shane needs it to. His dick hangs uselessly in the air, practically throbbing, but there's no way Shane can reach up to touch himself without collapsing. Rozanov doesn't seem to be thinking about that at all, his movements getting faster and harder, hands gripping Shane's hips so tightly it feels like it might bruise. The thought does something to Shane.

Abruptly, Shane realises that even without anything touching his dick, he's close. The wave has been building since they started, and when the rhythm changes suddenly, Rozanov straightening up slightly so he can drive into Shane, the pressure gets to be almost unbearable. Shane moans, fingers twisting in the sheets, heart beating in his throat as he feels the pleasure build and build, different than what he's felt before. His heart is beating fast, his breaths coming in short gasps. He hadn't even known it was possible to come without anything touching his dick, but he feels seconds away.

He gasps out a garbled warning to Rozanov, and then he's coming, shooting all over the bed. It goes on for longer than it ever has before, wave after wave of pleasure rushing through him. He can feel himself clenching around Rozanov inside of him, can hear the strangled "Oh God, Hollander," that Rozanov lets out when he realises what's happening, and that just keeps it going. By the end, Shane is trembling, clutching the pillow like a lifeline. Rozanov is still thrusting wildly inside of him, and it's just the wrong side of too much now, the aftershocks sending sparks through him, but then he's stilling and leaning over Shane, gasping into his neck, and Shane is left breathless again at the knowledge that Rozanov is *coming inside of him*. With a condom, but still, the thought does things to Shane that he's not in the mindset to examine right now.

There's complete silence after it's done, and it feels oppressive in the wake of the noises they had just been making. Shane pants into the pillow, trying desperately to get his breath back, to get himself back from wherever his mind had gone during that whole thing. He groans a little as Rozanov pulls out, then hears him walking the few steps to the washroom to dispose of the condom. Feeling stupid with his ass in the air now, Shane flops over onto his side on the bed, but finds he doesn't really have the energy to move any further.

There's the sound of footsteps again, but they pause nowhere near the bed. Shane cranes his head up to see what Rozanov is doing only to find that he's being stared at, Rozanov's eyes roaming up and down Shane's body, lingering on his ass. Shy all of a sudden, Shane shifts, trying to hide himself a little, and Rozanov smiles.

He makes his way over to the bed, climbing up to settle against the headboard and gesturing for Shane to join him. Shane moves carefully, already feeling the twinge of soreness that's going to make sitting down tomorrow difficult. God, it's going to be a constant reminder of what they had just done. Shane winces at the thought. When they're sitting side-by-side, Rozanov pulls a blanket over their laps, and at least that feels a little less vulnerable.

Shane leans back, closing his eyes and just feeling his breathing for a moment. It's mostly back to normal now, but he can feel that his heartbeat is still pounding away at twice its regular rhythm in Shane's chest. When they had hooked up before, neither of them had lingered afterwards, too wary of being caught. Shane doesn't know what happens now, with the rest of the night and their whole day off ahead of them.

When Shane is finally feeling steady enough to open his eyes, he peeks over to find Rozanov staring at him, smirking in that way that's become so familiar to Shane recently. He feels his face immediately flush. "What?" he demands.

Rozanov laughs, like he had been expecting it. "Nothing," he says. "You just look very... I don't know how to say. Fucked, maybe?" he gestures at Shane, and Shane can only imagine what he means. He's sweaty and gross, lube still sticking to his thighs, and his hair is probably a mess. "Was good, da?"

"Yeah." Shane can't quite meet his eyes as he agrees. He doesn't know if he's ever seen Rozanov look this smug before, and he sort of hates that he finds it hot.

"Worth waiting whole year?"

Shane rolls his eyes. "I was just trying to be careful," he defends, looking up to find Rozanov's eyes twinkling. He's obviously being goaded, but he doesn't care. "I don't know how you can be so... normal about this."

Rozanov shrugs. "Is normal thing," he says. "Secret, yes, obviously, but not bad."

Shane swallows. "No, not bad," he's forced to admit. As scared as he had been before, of getting caught, of the act itself... he's not going to lie to himself. That had been the best sexual experience of his life so far.

Rozanov sighs, stretching his arms over his head. Shane can't help but stare at his bare chest. "Could have been doing that whole year," he says mournfully. "Road games would have been so much more fun."

Shane jerks in surprise, eyes going immediately to Rozanov's face at the implication. "You..." He swallows. "You want to... do this again? Regularly?"

Rozanov shoots him an unimpressed look. "Da, Hollander. Do not tell me you do not. Was way too much waiting to only fuck one time."

"I—yeah," Shane says, because he's right. Shane would probably go crazy if he left here tonight, knowing how good that had been, and they just never hooked up again. But that had also been so good that he's not even sure if he can handle it on a regular basis. Not that he's going to tell Rozanov that.

"Good," Rozanov says. "Glad is settled. I will shower now, okay?"

Shane swallows. "Okay," he says, probably too softly to even be heard. He feels overwhelmed all of a sudden, fragile. The mattress shifts as Rozanov moves away, and he

hears the sound of footsteps on the floor. Then the water turning on—Rozanov hadn't even bothered to shut the bathroom door. It doesn't matter—the illusion of privacy is enough for now. Shane fights the stupid grin that wants to take over his face and just breathes.

When Rozanov comes back from the shower, Shane half-expects to be kicked out. It's late now—had already been late by the time Shane had showed up—and now that they've done what Shane had been invited here to do, he figures that maybe Rozanov has plans for his day off tomorrow. But he just collapses on the bed next to Shane again, still damp from the shower.

"Are you hungry?"

"I—what?"

Rozanov rolls his eyes, propping himself up on his elbows to look at Shane. There's a water droplet making its slow way down the side of his neck—Shane sort of wants to lick it.

He needs to get a handle on himself.

"Food, Hollander. Do you want food?"

"I—yeah." Shane is ravenous, actually. He hadn't eaten after the game, and what they had just done had been... demanding. Both physically and mentally, considering how much he had been freaking out on the way here. "Are you going to... make something?"

Rozanov just looks at him. "Yes, Hollander," he says. "I will make something. Is surprising to you?"

Shane just shrugs, feeling a little stupid. He's not quite sure how to act after... everything. "You just don't strike me as a cook," he mumbles. "Sorry. Food would be great."

Rozanov shakes his head, but he doesn't seem too annoyed by Shane's stupidity. He just pushes himself upright, still wearing nothing but his briefs, and tosses a piece of fabric at Shane. "I will be in kitchen. Join me when your brain is working, da?"

Shane showers quickly. The sweatpants that Rozanov had thrown at him are way too big, which isn't at all surprising given that he's several inches taller than Shane. There's no reason that Shane couldn't just wear the clothes he had arrived in earlier, but he balks at the idea of putting on jeans right now. There's also a feeling that comes with wearing Rozanov's clothes that Shane doesn't want to examine too closely right now, but something about it *does* something for him. He hesitates for a moment, staring at his crumpled shirt on the floor, then just rolls up the waistband on the sweatpants a few times and wanders into the kitchen bare-chested.

He's immediately rewarded with Rozanov's grin as he unashamedly looks Shane up and down. Shane blushes, even as he tries to pretend to be unaffected. He doesn't know why he's this flustered at something so small anyways.

"What are you making?" he asks, eyes scanning over the array of ingredients on the counter.

"Tuna melts," Rozanov says. He's still just wearing briefs—Shane wonders how he's not freezing. "Is good, you will like. There is ginger ale in fridge if you want."

Shane definitely does not think about why Rozanov has six cans of ginger ale in his fridge when Shane has never once seen him drink the stuff. He just takes a can and cracks open the tab. Nothing about this night is what he had expected, given how Rozanov had practically dared him to come in the first place and subtly teased him about it all month. He hadn't thought that it would feel so... normal. Friendly, even.

Rozanov turns on the TV, keeping the volume muted. It's too late for there to be any games on, but they're showing replays from one of the western conference games that has just ended. They eat their tuna melts mostly in silence, eyes on the screen. Even though it doesn't fit at all with Shane's diet, he can't deny that Rozanov had been right and the food is absolutely delicious. He practically moans around the first bite, Rozanov laughing at him, but Shane doesn't even care. What's one more indulgence when this whole night has been something he's been holding back from for far too long?

When he's done, he looks up to find Rozanov staring at him curiously, the game highlights on TV forgotten, his own sandwich just crumbs on his plate. "What?" Shane asks, looking down at himself to see if he'd spilled sauce or something on him.

"Nothing," Rozanov says. "Just... you are not freaking out?"

Shane swallows, takes stock of himself. His heart rate has definitely returned to normal at this point, and the food has settled him, made him feel a little more grounded and less light-headed. Rozanov is still only wearing underwear, which is distracting, but not the end of the world. He feels... fine. Good, even, now that all the tension he's been carrying around with him for weeks is gone.

"No," he says, a little surprised at the realization himself. He's not surprised at the question, thinks that maybe there had been a possibility of that happening, but it feels too normal, sitting here watching hockey late at night with Rozanov. Reminiscent of plenty of other nights when they had done exactly this. Knowing that they had fucked earlier makes him a little more uncertain, but...

"I guess... no, I'm not."

"Good," Rozanov nods. "Am not done with you yet." He grins, delighted, when that makes Shane blush.

"I—tonight?" Shane doesn't know if he can handle another round of that tonight. He's still sore where Rozanov had fucked him.

"Can do other things tonight, if you cannot," Rozanov waves off Shane's worries easily. "And we have all day tomorrow."

Well. That answers the question of whether Shane is staying. It sends a thrill through him, the confirmation that he's about to have another twenty-four hours alone with Rozanov. They've never spent that much time together before—he wonders if he'll even be able to walk by the end of it. The thought doesn't worry him as much as it should, considering they're in the middle of the season.

"So we just..." Shane doesn't even know what he's asking. He doesn't know how Rozanov is so confident about this, but now that they're talking he realises he maybe is freaking out, just a little. Where do they go from here?

Thankfully, Rozanov seems able to read his mind. "Nothing changes, Hollander," he repeats, an echo of earlier. "We are still teammates, still best duo in league on the ice. You just stop lying now, stop pretending you do not want."

Well, that makes it sound easy. Shane is sure that it won't be, that he'll probably have to overthink this much more before he can be totally alright with that, but Rozanov says it so confidently it's hard to doubt him. Really, nothing will have to change, if they start doing this regularly. They already spend plenty of time together, so no one would suspect anything.

Again, Shane realises that he's thinking about this as though it's a decision he has to make. But when Rozanov goes over to the couch, crooking a finger and beckoning Shane to follow, there's no hesitation. Once again, the decision has been made, and it's easier to fall into it than to try and claw his way out.

So Shane goes, and lets Rozanov pull him down, and stops thinking at all.

Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

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

It turns out that when Rozanov had said that he wasn't done with Shane yet, he had truly meant it.

Shane doesn't end up leaving until late the following evening, and then only because they have practice in the morning. He thinks he maybe could have been talked into staying a second night, knowing now just how persuasive Rozanov can be, but Shane doesn't give him the chance to try. Hooking up is one thing, waking up and driving to practice together is a whole other can of worms that Shane has no interest in opening.

Rozanov blows him on the couch that first night, after they've eaten, then Shane climbs on top of him and jerks him off, eyes on his face the whole time. It feels surreal, that he knows what Rozanov looks like when he's falling apart. They both end up showering again, Rozanov leering at Shane through the glass the entire time because apparently he has no concept of privacy, and by the time Shane finally falls into bed—Rozanov's bed—he's too exhausted to even overthink any of it. It's late—later than Shane ever stays up after a game, and he's asleep as soon as his head hits the pillow, only vaguely aware of Rozanov climbing into the bed behind him.

The next morning, there's no slow awakening, no dawning realisation of what had happened the previous night. Instead, Shane is immediately and irreversibly awake, Rozanov's arms wrapped around him from behind and his dick pressed shamelessly up against Shane's ass.

Rozanov's groping intensifies as soon as he realises that Shane is awake, his hand reaching down to wrap around Shane's rapidly hardening dick, and in no time Rozanov is sliding into him again, Shane on his hands and knees. He can feel the way he's still a little stretched open from last night, and the thought sends a bolt of something through him—he feels slutty, easy like this, Rozanov sliding into him for the second time in less than twelve hours. Rozanov's hands are on his hips, pulling Shane in rhythm with his thrusts, and this time when he's close he reaches around and gives Shane's dick a few hard strokes so they end up coming together, shaking and trembling and sinking onto the sheets.

They shower, have breakfast, watch the recap of last night's game on TV and chirp each other about their play. Rozanov suggests a workout, and they end up downstairs in a home gym to rival Shane's own. They don't really work out together regularly, Shane preferring to get his own workouts in early in the morning before anyone else shows up and Rozanov usually joining the rest of the guys after practice, but of course it ends up being just as competitive as anything else they do together. Shane is relieved to find that Rozanov seems to have been telling the truth last night—he doesn't seem to be treating Shane any differently at all, his chirps never veering into sexual territory. Shane doesn't know why he's expecting anything different when Rozanov has objectively been great about this for over a year now, but it relieves him nonetheless.

Of course, it's not like what had happened between them has been completely forgotten. Shane had told Rozanov this morning that he didn't think he could go again today—his ass is genuinely sore now, and he feels it every time he sits down. It's not a bad thing, nothing serious, but Shane doesn't want to push it considering they have a game in two days. Rozanov had smirked at him and agreed, making a comment about how he didn't need Shane's ass to make him fall apart, and he decides to prove it after they've finished working out.

As they both gulp water from their bottles, Rozanov looks him up and down, obviously checking him out. Shane finds a weird sort of confidence overtaking him, given the last twenty-four hours. He knows he looks good right now, so he meets Rozanov's gaze head on and doesn't hesitate to check him out in return. He can't deny it's hot, especially the way that Shane can see all of Rozanov right now, given the mirror behind him.

Rozanov catches him looking and smiles. "Strip," he says.

And that's how Shane finds himself naked in Rozanov's home gym, looking at the flush creep down his body in the mirror as Rozanov comes up to him, still fully clothed, and whispers in his ear: "Get on your knees for me." He watches himself sink down easily, like it's second nature, watches Rozanov pull out his dick, already half-hard, and rub it teasingly across Shane's lips. His mouth drops open on instinct, leaning forward to take it in, but Rozanov tangles his fingers in Shane's hair and holds him still.

"No," he says. "You stay there." He looks over at the mirror then, and Shane can't help but look too. It's a striking image—Shane naked, on his knees, mouth open and face flushed, Rozanov towering over him still almost fully clothed, his hand holding Shane's head in place. "I want you to stay still and just watch."

Shane swallows and nods as best he can with Rozanov's hand still in his hair. Then he does exactly as he's told and watches as Rozanov slowly pushes into Shane's mouth.

It starts slow, Rozanov obviously watching Shane's expression closely as he thrusts a little, going just a bit deeper than Shane would normally take on his own. Shane can't help the way he moans at the feeling, the way his eyes roll back a bit at how Rozanov is holding him still, right where he wants him. Rozanov's voice is strained when he asks, "Okay?", and Shane nods as best he can, closing his eyes. Rozanov pulls back immediately. "No," he says. "Eyes open. Watch."

It's hard, overwhelming in the best way, but it doesn't stay slow for long after that. Shane is watching in the mirror, so he can see it when Rozanov really starts to lose control, when his pupils dilate and his thrusts start to lose their rhythm. His eyes never leave Shane, and even naked on his knees Shane feels powerful. He can't believe that he's the one making Rozanov fall apart like this.

When Rozanov gasps out that he's close, Shane doesn't even try to pull off like he normally does, wondering suddenly what it feels like to have someone finish in his mouth, how Rozanov would react. He isn't disappointed by the way Rozanov's eyes go wide in realisation and he thrusts harder, just barely brushing the back of Shane's throat, letting out a breathy "Fuck, Hollander," as he falls apart. The taste is bitter and salty, but not as bad as Shane thought it would be, and he swallows it feeling a tiny bit proud.

He forgets about it entirely when Rozanov is suddenly all over him, crawling into his lap and lowering Shane down to the floor. He returns the favour enthusiastically while Shane watches his ass in the mirror, and just as Shane gets close he slips a finger inside—it's dry and a little uncomfortable without lube, but the tiniest amount of pressure on his prostate is all Shane needs to come with a loud moan.

They lay together on the floor of the gym afterwards, completely spent. Then Shane can't help but start laughing, at the absurdity of the entire situation. Rozanov laughs too, and they're completely gone. They giggle uncontrollably on the floor, Shane still completely naked, and he's never felt so young as he does then, making stupid decisions and fully enjoying the consequences.

They shower again—together, because Rozanov steps in while Shane is still washing his hair and Shane isn't about to kick him out—and Shane hadn't thought it was possible for him to go so many times in a twenty-four hour period but somehow he's still up for it and they jerk each other off, breathing into each other's mouths the whole time. It's so much and so sexy and Shane still comes far too soon, but Rozanov is right there with him so he can't be too embarrassed.

Finally, after more food and chirping and watching the Admirals game on TV, Shane makes himself leave. He's really spent now, not up for anything else tonight, and especially not with practice in the morning. That means there's no real reason for him to still be at Rozanov's, so he finishes the ginger ale he's been drinking and regretfully changes back into the clothes he had arrived in. They're rumpled and creased after spending the night on the floor, but thankfully Shane had gone for an apartment with its own private entrance, so it's not like anyone will see his walk of shame. Rozanov makes a token effort to entice him into another round before he leaves, but even Shane can tell he doesn't mean it. That had been a lot for both of them, and although it had been good Shane is looking forward to a bit of space after a night and a day entirely in Rozanov's company.

So he leaves, Rozanov's promises of next time lingering in the air between them. He goes home to his own apartment, sleeps in his own bed that night, and definitely doesn't spend the entire time replaying the whole thing on loop in his mind. He's surprised to find that—even alone—he's still not freaking out. Not that much, at least. He can see now how much he had built it up in his head, with it being so long since the last time, and finally giving in feels almost like returning things to their natural order. Shane knows that this would have happened a year ago, had he not been traded, and that the two of them probably would have spent the last twelve months hooking up at every opportunity had that been the case. He's certainly not planning on that being the last time now. So it's more like... putting things back to how they should be.

Shane knows that this feeling of calm acceptance is more than likely the product of many orgasms in the last twenty-four hours. But still, he tries to bask in it as he drifts off to sleep that night. He can overthink it later, once the shine has worn off a bit and maybe they've done that approximately a million more times.

Of course, it doesn't quite work like that. Shane is nervous walking into practice the next day—of course he is. He knows that Rozanov had said that nothing will change, but he still has a hard time believing it, all his anxieties roaring back. The last thing he wants is for Rozanov to notice though, especially when he had made such a point to check in with Shane all the time and make sure he really was okay with everything. Shane doesn't want Rozanov to think he has regrets, and not only because that would probably reduce the chances of anything happening again. So he shoves his nerves down and tries to stroll into the locker room like everything is normal.

And for the most part, it is. Rozanov isn't there yet, because Shane is always one of the first ones at the rink for practice, so he changes into his gear and chats with Liam Oregan, a goalie who's just been called up from the AHL as an injury replacement. Oregan is obviously nervous—almost as young as Shane and playing in the NHL for the first time tomorrow—and it's just the distraction Shane needs. He introduces the guy to everyone as they trickle in and it takes his mind off his own worries. It also makes him realise how comfortable he feels with this team now, joking with Carmichael and St-Simon easily and rolling his eyes when Marlow makes a dirty joke to break the ice with the new guy. Even when Rozanov shows up, Shane knows it would be weird to do anything other than introduce him to Oregan like he had for everyone, so he does. The chirping comes so naturally that for a moment Shane wonders if yesterday had been a dream.

"Rozanov. Finally decided to show up, did you?"

"We do not all need three hours to put on skates, Hollander," Rozanov shoots back with an easy grin. He looks almost surprised, and Shane takes that to mean that his whole *"I'm totally not freaking out right now"* act is working. "Did you make new friend?"

"This is Liam Oregan," Shane says, gesturing from the goalie to Rozanov. "He got called up yesterday. And Liam this is Rozanov, but I'm guessing you know that." The guy's head is moving back and forth between Shane and Rozanov like he's watching a tennis match. He nods.

"Nice to meet you, kid," Rozanov says, sticking out a hand. "Oregan, isn't that place? Weird name—we'll have to find nickname fast. Welcome to best team in the league."

"Pretty sure he's older than you, Roz," Marlow butts in. "Does that mean we should be calling you a kid?"

"I would like to see you try, Marly," Rozanov says, cracking his knuckles threateningly. The guys nearby listening laugh, and Shane joins in. This is fine—normal even. He can do this.

The rest of practice goes in a similar way. Rozanov is there, chirping and joking with everyone like he always is, and Shane laughs at his antics and plays good hockey. The mood of the team is still jubilant—sure, their backup goalie had been injured earlier this week and apparently he's going to be out long enough for management to call up a replacement, but they're still the top team in the league and Liam seems like a cool addition to the group.

Shane leaves feeling good about their chances for the game tomorrow, and good about his own place in the group going forward. He gets talking with Liam about some of the hockey books they've both read, and the conversation carries them through team lunch, even drawing in a few of the other guys who Shane has never seen read a book in the entire year he's been with the team. Rozanov throws an arm around his shoulder at one point and calls him a nerd, and it doesn't seem to strike anyone as strange when Shane just rolls his eyes and shrugs him off.

They win the game the following night. Shane scores one goal, Rozanov gets two. Everyone ends up at Marlow's to celebrate, and the two of them end up in a heated argument about who has the better backhand, the whole team pitching in chirps and opinions and laughing at them.

The win the game two nights later as well. Rozanov gets three assists, but Shane is the one who scores on a breakaway, backhanding it into the net and immediately smirking at Rozanov as they crash together. The other guys on the ice catch it and make fun of them as they all skate back towards the bench.

Three nights after that, they're on the road again, a quick two-game trip to Pittsburgh and then Washington. Shane gets an assist on the lone goal in the first game, which of course is Rozanov's. Shane laughs when he tries a backhand shot and it bounces off the goalie's pads before he jams it in on the rebound. "Don't start," Rozanov threatens as they come together, and no one lets it go for the rest of the night.

Later, Shane begs off going out, tired from another week of nonstop hockey. He feels a little guilty, since this had also been Oregon's first career shutout so they actually do have something to celebrate, but he's not the only one who's tired. He had never thought he would complain about being on such a winning team, but the pressure to keep the momentum going can be a lot, the feeling that losing a single game could spell the beginning of the end. Instead, he retreats back to his hotel room, flicking through the games on TV absently, not really in the mood to watch any of them. He knows what he's waiting for, and it's a relief when the knock on the door finally comes and he can click the TV off.

He opens the door. Rozanov steps inside. There's a moment of uncertainty—it's been a week since Shane had shown up at Rozanov's and they had basically gone nonstop for twenty-four hours. They haven't seen each other outside of practice and games since, so obviously neither of them have mentioned it. Shane wonders, for a split second, if this is really what he thinks it is.

Then Rozanov pulls him in, crashing their lips together, and Shane leans into it and stops thinking at all.

Playoffs this year are... intense.

Shane had thought that it was a lot last year, the added pressure of a seven-game series against the same team elevating the stakes in a way he wasn't accustomed to, the additional media and fan scrutiny a new element to deal with in an already overwhelming season.

That's nothing compared to how it is this year.

Last year, it had been Boston's first time making the playoffs in years, and just making it to Game 7 in the first round had been an accomplishment. It had been heartbreaking when they had lost, but not entirely unexpected. This year, though... this year, Boston is going in as the President's Trophy winners, the top team in the league for the regular season. There's an expectation of winning now, from the fans, the media, even themselves. Now, it feels like anything less than making it to the finals would be a disappointment, and that's a pressure that Shane's not entirely sure how to handle.

At least he isn't handling it alone. The buzz of nervous energy in the locker room before the first game is palpable. Montreal had snagged the second wild card spot, seeding them against Boston in the first round. It should be a good thing—everyone knows that Shane's old team doesn't stand a chance against his new one, basically guaranteeing Boston a ticket to the second round, but it just makes the tightness under his skin all the more pronounced.

It doesn't help that Boston is starting this playoff run without its captain. Nelson has been dealing with knee problems all season, and he had tweaked the injury in one of the last few regular-season games. He'll be back within a few weeks, mostly sitting out from an abundance of caution in case the team does make it deep into the playoffs and needs him, but Shane only realises now how much he's come to depend on the veteran's calming presence in the locker room. He's hit with a pang of sadness that Nelson will be gone for good next season, even though he understands wanting to retire on a high note.

By some unspoken agreement though, it isn't Carmichael or St-Simon—the two A's—who get up to make the pre-game speech on the first night of the series in Nelson's place. Instead it's Rozanov, who stalks into the centre of the room like he owns it, grinning at the whoops and cheers that follow him.

Shane doesn't really hear most of the speech. He's never been one for pep talks, especially the aggressive, overly swear-filled kind that Rozanov is apparently very good at giving. He's already as mentally prepared as he's going to get, as fired up as he can possibly be while still maintaining his focus, so instead of listening Shane spends the time looking at the team's reaction to Rozanov's words, the way they're all screaming and laughing and cheering like the game is already over and they've won. It's a rare gift, to be able to inspire people so easily, and for a moment Shane is a little envious. Then Rozanov meets his eye and winks, and Shane can't help but scoff and laugh at his arrogance. It's just so *Rozanov* that he can't really bring himself to be upset.

And they win the game, so obviously it works.

They win the next one too, and the one after that. There's a slight hiccup when they lose Game 4 in Montreal, a combination of stupid mistakes and plain bad luck, but the ship is righted two days later when they take the first round in front of a screaming home crowd.

They're on to the second round against Florida.

Something Shane notices about the playoffs, the further into them his team gets, is just how brutal they really are.

It's not just the pressure, or the demands on his body after an already long season. Of course he's exhausted every night, playing hockey for weeks longer than he ever has before, of course he has aches and pains that will only really ever go away with proper rest that he hopefully won't be getting until the whole thing is over. But what Shane hadn't really been expecting—perhaps naively—are the bruises.

They're everywhere. Across his ribs and shoulders and back after being slammed into the boards far harder and more often than he's used to. On his arms and legs from stray sticks and slashes and "accidents" that rarely get called. On his face, from high sticks that usually do get called but don't hurt any less for it. He feels like he's one big giant bruise walking around, every movement tentative, every twist of his body creating pain in places he isn't expecting. He pushes past it on the ice, plays hockey like nothing's wrong because showing weakness will only make things worse, but off the ice he can barely move.

He knows it's not just him. He can see, in the locker room, that everyone is similarly battered. But it does seem like Shane is the receiver of some of the more vicious hits, and he knows why. He isn't a fighter like a lot of the guys on his team, has never actually dropped his gloves in a game. That alone probably wouldn't be enough to make him a target, but combined with the way him and Rozanov keep slipping past Florida and then Pittsburgh's defences, Shane can tell when players start to take out their frustration on him. And of course it's on him, and not Rozanov, because Shane doesn't fight, and guys know that they can get away with it.

It comes to a head halfway through the third round against Pittsburgh. Boston is up 2-1 in the series and 4-2 in the game. Shane takes a hard hit at the end of the second period—clean, but no less brutal given that it's not the first one tonight. His whole body aches, and he's a little slower getting up than he usually is. He finishes his shift and skates back to the bench, mind already moving on, pushing down the pain as something to deal with later.

Rozanov is right behind him, and instead of taking his usual spot on the bench beside Shane, he stays standing for a moment, looking at Shane like he can see right through him. "Okay, Hollander?" he asks.

Shane nods once. "Fine," he says. He gestures for Rozanov to sit down—the last thing he wants is for him to call for the medical staff or something and get Shane benched. He can handle a few bumps and bruises.

There's only a minute or so left in the period, and it's obvious as they all trudge into the locker room for intermission that Rozanov isn't going to let this go. Shane feels the

beginnings of dread pool in his stomach as he watches Rozanov stalk to the middle of the room. The rest of the guys seem to have caught on that something is happening from the look on his face, because the chatter dies out almost immediately. Even Coach Smith stands off to the side watching instead of calling for their attention for the usual intermission briefing.

"I do not like this," Rozanov says. There are a few looks of confusion on the faces of the team, and Shane fixes his stare on the ground. He knows where this is going, and he sort of wishes that Rozanov would just leave it alone.

"We are winning, yes," he goes on, but there's no mistaking in his tone that he isn't necessarily happy about that. "But we are letting them walk all over us. Did no one else see number 73 skate right into Oreo at the start of the period?"

Liam Oregan, the call-up goalie who had ended up becoming an integral part of their playoff run with more old injuries flaring up, looks just as uncomfortable as Shane feels. The nickname brings a slight smile to Shane's face though—the rookie pretends to hate it, but Shane knows it makes him feel like part of the team.

"And what did he get for it?" Rozanov asks the room at large. "A little shove from Marly? A hit three shifts later? Is this how we protect our teammates?" The guys exchange guilty looks.

"And Hollander," Rozanov goes on. "They have been all over Hollander from first game this series. Florida was too, last round, before we beat them. Guy is basically one big bruise, can barely move off ice." Shane tries to say something, to get Rozanov to shut up already, but Rozanov silences him easily with a hand in the air. "You know why they pick on him. Everyone knows—they think they can get away with it because he will not fight back." He holds another hand up to Shane's protests. "And he should not have to fight back. Is not his job. He scores goals, we do the fighting. So why are we letting them beat up our winger? Why are we letting them beat up our goalie? Our rookies?"

A bunch of the guys start yelling, feeding into the whole performance. As much as Shane doesn't love this side of things, he can't deny that Rozanov has a gift for riling people up, whether those people are his own team or his opponents. He wants to point out that Rozanov is just as young as Shane and Oreo, but he knows it won't do any good. People don't mess with Rozanov because they know he gives as good as he gets—the same can't be said for Shane. He doesn't like this—doesn't like fighting on the ice, whether it's him doing it or the people around him. He doesn't know if he'll ever be able to shake off the fear that grips him whenever a scrum breaks out. He's not a chicken, and he's gotten involved before when he needs to, pulling guys off his teammates, but Rozanov is right. Shane will never drop gloves, will never open himself up to that on purpose. He knows he'd lose, and it would be embarrassing, not to mention potentially detrimental to the team if he gets himself hurt.

Shane looks to Coach Smith, wondering if he'll put a stop to this. With the energy in the room now, there's no way this game ends without a fight, and it seems a little stupid to Shane, a little pointless to put their lead in jeopardy over a few bruises. Logically, he knows that it's more than that, knows that sometimes a message needs to be sent to set the tone going forward, but it makes him uncomfortable to be at the centre of it. They hadn't made it far enough last year for this to come up. Sure, Shane takes a lot of hits in the regular season,

enough that various teammates have had to step in and do something about it before, but only after a particularly nasty play and always in the heat of the moment.

Coach seems resigned to letting this run its course though, and Shane leans back in his stall with a sigh. It doesn't help that his ribs twinge when he does, reminding him exactly why this is happening. He closes his eyes.

What feels like a while later, although it could only have been a few minutes, Rozanov is sitting down heavily in the stall beside Shane. There's silence for a few moments, only the faint chatter of the room around them, and Shane can feel the eyes on him. He cracks open his eyes just long enough to glare at Rozanov.

"That really was not necessary," he says, for lack of anything better to say. He feels a little weird, off-kilter. Him and Rozanov have been more friendly recently, supposedly so as not to arouse suspicion given that they're also spending more time together, but they haven't been hooking up at all since playoffs started. Shane's not really sure where that leaves them.

"It was," Rozanov says simply. "I know you do not like it, Hollander, but we need you able to skate for last round. And I can't fight them all—we need me to skate too, need both of us to keep scoring goals. The big guys will take care of it now."

Shane presses his lips together and doesn't say anything else. Boston has a reputation for being a tough team, and Shane knows he doesn't fit that image. He's not quite sure what to do about it, but he doesn't like the idea of others picking fights on his behalf.

Sure enough, they're barely a few minutes into the third period when all hell breaks loose. There's a scuffle in front of the net, sticks and skates flying as Shane does his best to keep his feet and keep the puck away from Oreo. The hit isn't even all that bad, by playoff standards—a little dirty, but it doesn't hurt nearly as bad as some of the other ones he's taken in the last few weeks. One of Pittsburgh's players cross-checks him from behind and he goes stumbling into the goalie. It doesn't matter though—Shane's team has obviously just been waiting for an excuse.

Shane hasn't even hit the ice yet when he sees Rozanov flying by with a huge grin on his face, the defensemen not far behind. He helps Liam up with a sigh as gloves hit the ice.

In the end, Rozanov ends up with a two-minute minor penalty for instigating, which is canceled out by the cross-checking penalty against the guy who had initially hit Shane. A bunch of the other guys end up with majors for fighting though, and Pittsburgh ends up on the power play as a result. They score a goal, which has Shane grinding his teeth on the bench, but once the energy is out of their system the Boston team is able to hold things together for the rest of the game. They still win, 4-3, putting them one win away from the finals.

Shane doesn't say anything to Rozanov afterwards, because that would mean admitting his stupid scheme had worked. They had won anyways, and the hits against Shane for the rest of the game had all been clean.

Shane doesn't need to talk to him to know that Rozanov is smug as hell about it.

Shane's heart leaps as he spots the opening.

His thighs burn as he tears down the ice, puck on the end of his stick, only a single defenseman between him and San Jose's goal. He can feel Rozanov to his right, keeping pace, and the defenseman is stuck trying to cover two people at once. Shane reads the second of hesitation on his face, winds back as though to take the shot. He doesn't let himself think about what could happen if he does it and it goes in. Instead, he finishes the fake out, making the defenseman flinch toward Shane, then knocks the puck over to Rozanov, who one-times it into the net.

It's absolute pandemonium after that.

It hadn't been an easy round. They had taken it all the way to Game 7 in Boston, and all the way into overtime. Despite the hits lightening up since Boston started hitting back a little harder, Shane is still so sore he can barely move, and the rest of the team isn't faring much better. The third round had cost them, with several players out on injury reserve by the end of it, and that had made the fourth round that much harder. But Rozanov has just sent the puck flying into the back of the net off Shane's assist, and the crowd is losing their minds as they crash into each other.

They've done it. They've won the Cup.

Shane wraps his arms around Rozanov and *squeezes*, feeling him do the same thing back. He thinks he might be crying, but he can't bring himself to care, not when he's just achieved his lifelong dream in only his second season. Before he can even process that, the rest of the team is crashing into the two of them, and Shane can't do anything but hold on.

He manages to get himself together by the time they actually bring the Cup out onto the ice and go through all the formalities. Rozanov is announced as the Conn Smythe winner, but Shane is on such a high that there's only a twinge of jealousy as the name is read out. They had scored an equal amount of goals in the post-season going into tonight, and Rozanov had scored twice in the final game. Shane had more assists, of course, but points and goals aren't everything, and he's not really mad that it isn't him. He thinks to himself almost manically that he'll get it next year, and almost laughs out loud at his arrogance. But even though this has been the hardest thing he's ever done, it feels like the most natural thing in the world to think that they'll do it again. What else could they do, after a season like this?

Shane cheers with everyone else when the Cup is finally, finally handed over to Nelson. He does his lap of the ice with it, all the fans still on their feet, then skates back and gives it to Rozanov. Shane isn't even surprised when Rozanov does his lap, winking and smirking at the crowd the way he always does, then makes a beeline for Shane.

Something passes between them as Rozanov hands the Cup over, as Shane feels its weight settle in his hands at the same time that Rozanov's hand brushes across his shoulder. They

grin at each other, and Shane thinks they've maybe never been more on the same page than they are right now.

Then he hoists the Cup in the air.

Things are a bit of a blur after that. His parents are on the ice at some point, and they take a million pictures with the Cup. There are team pictures too, and everyone wants Shane and Rozanov to take some together so they do that too. At one point, Shane wonders if Rozanov's family is here—he's never heard anything about them, so he looks around out of curiosity. But in contrast to the huddle of family and friends around most of the other players, Rozanov is standing off to the side with only one person, a woman who looks around their age. He looks happy enough though, grinning and laughing, so Shane doesn't think much of it, immediately getting pulled away for another interview.

Eventually, the party moves to the locker room, then to a hotel the team had rented out for the occasion. There's a huge event space where the Cup is put on display, and rooms for everyone so nobody has to drive home. Champagne is flowing, and Shane does his best to soak it all in, but by the early hours of the morning he's starting to flag. He's not the only one—some of the older guys have gone to bed already, or disappeared to celebrate with their families, so Shane doesn't feel too guilty when he heads for the elevator. He catches Rozanov's eye on the way there—still in the middle of things, as always—and Shane just smiles and nods, hoping that communicates that he's done for the night but also sorry to miss out on the rest of the festivities.

The suite is nice—much nicer than what they normally get for away games, which Shane assumes is because of the special occasion. He hasn't eaten much since the game, so he orders some room service while he tries to wind down enough to sleep. It feels impossible, despite his exhaustion—he's not even sure how to start going about processing everything.

He wishes he could say that he's surprised when the knock on the door comes, but that would be a lie.

Rozanov somehow still looks devastatingly sexy and put together, even though he must be holding it together by a thread the same way that Shane is. He's in black pants and a button-down, no doubt the remnants of his pre-game suit, immediately making Shane feel underdressed in his sweats. The top half of the buttons on his shirt are already undone though, no jacket or tie to be seen, and his curls are a mess, like various hockey players have been ruffling them all night.

"Hollander," he says, once he's stepped into the suite and the door has clicked shut softly behind him.

Shane swallows, not quite sure what to say. What does one say to their rival turned teammate turned hookup on what will probably be one of the best days of both of their lives? Shane doesn't know how to put anything he's feeling into words, doesn't know why it feels significant that him and Rozanov had been the ones to make this happen. He ends up flashing him an uncertain smile, the words getting tangled in his throat.

Rozanov laughs, and Shane laughs too. Then he steps forward and pulls Shane into a hug.

They had hugged earlier, of course. On the ice, after Rozanov had scored the winning goal, and afterward too, when the team had all been celebrating. They had taken a million pictures with their arms around each other, holding the Cup together. This feels different though. Rozanov's arms are almost desperate around Shane, clinging to him, and Shane lets himself sink into it.

"Holy fuck," he mumbles into Rozanov's shoulder.

He can feel the rise and fall of Rozanov's chest as he laughs again. "Holy fuck is right," he says. He pulls back a little to look at Shane. "We did it. I told you we would."

For some reason, Shane blushes, looks down. There's a hand on his chin immediately, tilting his head back up, but Rozanov pauses with his lips just millimetres away. "You want this tonight?" He asks.

Shane thinks about it for a second. Does he want this? The easy answer is yes, of course—they had gotten into a regular routine through the last part of the season, but it's been weeks since they've done anything, too busy and exhausted with playoffs. Shane wants nothing more than to get lost in Rozanov tonight.

But he knows that's not why Rozanov is asking. Shane still doesn't know what it is they're actually doing here, but he knows that this is something they can't take back. Every time Shane looks back on his memories of winning the Cup for the first time, he'll know that he ended the night like this, letting his teammate fuck him in his hotel room.

It takes him a split second to decide. "Yes," he breathes. "Of course."

Thankfully, Rozanov doesn't question him. Just presses him up against the wall.

It feels like a breath of fresh air, kissing Rozanov again after going weeks without. Shane had forgotten how overwhelming it could be, the way it immediately consumes all of his thoughts, banishing the exhaustion and even the soreness in his limbs. He lets his head fall back against the wall and pulls Rozanov closer, rewarded when he opens his mouth and deepens the kiss.

Rozanov eventually pulls away, resting his forehead against Shane's as they both pant into each other's mouth. Shane remembers then, belatedly, what else had happened tonight for Rozanov. He should probably say something.

"Congratulations. For the Conn Smythe. I forget if I said that earlier."

Rozanov grins. "That is what you are thinking about right now?"

Shane flushes, doing his best to avoid eye contact even though they're literally face-to-face. "Just thought of it," he mumbles.

"Are you jealous, Hollander?"

Shane pauses and thinks about it for a moment. Rozanov could be asking just to mock him—it would be consistent with how he usually chirps. But it doesn't sound that way, so Shane

tries to be honest in return. "Not really," he says. "You deserve it. But I probably will be later."

Rozanov laughs, loud and unrestrained. He looks delighted at Shane's answer, and kisses him, hard. Before they can really start making out again, he pulls back, a wicked smirk on his face. "Well," he says, and a little thrill shoots down Shane's spine at his tone. "Since I won, I think that means we celebrate how I want tonight."

Shane smiles. He hates how much he finds Rozanov's arrogance hot. "And what do you want?" he asks.

Rozanov pulls away, looking Shane up and down for a long moment. A shiver runs across his body, goosebumps prickling at his arms under his sweater. "You on a bed, to start," is all Rozanov says.

Shane leads the way into the suite's bedroom, only sparing a glance at the wall of windows lining one side. The lights of the city cast a faint glow over everything, but they're on a high enough floor that they don't need to worry about anyone looking in. He approaches the bed and turns around, expecting Rozanov to maybe kiss him again, but instead he finds him leaning against the window in the corner, looking at Shane in that way that makes him feel as though he can see right into his innermost thoughts.

He's nervous all of a sudden, uncertain. "Well?" he asks.

Rozanov doesn't answer for a long moment. Then he says, "Take off your clothes."

Shane swallows. He's reminded of the blowjob he'd given Rozanov in his home gym, that day Shane had spent at his place. Rozanov had said something similar then, had watched as Shane stripped for him and dropped to his knees, but there had been a lightness to his tone then, something teasing and fun that's entirely absent now. There's something intense about the way Rozanov is looking at him from his spot across the room. Shane can't hold his gaze for long, eyes dropping to the floor.

He does as Rozanov ordered. One by one, his clothes get removed, folded, set aside on the dresser. He only hesitates when he gets to his briefs, glancing up at where Rozanov still hasn't moved.

"Those too," Rozanov grins, a little bit of his usual smirk returning. Something loosens in Shane's chest. "Or are you shy now?"

Rolling his eyes, Shane slips the last article of clothing off. Then he stands there, feeling exposed, his dick half hard already just from this.

"On the bed," Rozanov directs. He pushes himself off the window he had been leaning on, but instead of joining Shane, he reaches for a chair that's tucked away in the corner, the way that hotel rooms always have chairs in places where no one would actually sit. As Shane climbs onto the monstrously large bed and settles against the headboard, Rozanov drags the chair over to the end of the bed and sits, directly facing him.

Shane tries to take a deep breath, in and out, without making it obvious what he's doing. He's a little nervous, unsure where this is going or what Rozanov could possibly want from him. He'd thought that they had done just about everything, but this feels different, new. He can't deny he's so turned on though—they sit facing each other for a moment, and Shane can see Rozanov looking at his dick, how it's hardening by the second at the position they're in.

Finally, the tension breaks. "Touch yourself," Rozanov says.

"What?"

"Show off for me, I want to watch you."

Shane lets out a breathless laugh. His heart is pounding in his chest. "You what?"

"It's my special day, Hollander. I want to watch."

"It's technically our special day, you know."

Rozanov is unimpressed. "I won both trophies, no? Thought you said you would do what I wanted."

Shane is almost sure he hadn't actually said that, but it doesn't matter now. "I've never..." he starts, then doesn't know how to go on. Of course he's never done anything like what Rozanov is asking him to do, but that's probably obvious.

Sure enough, "No shit," Rozanov says. "But you like the idea, no?" He glances at Shane's dick again, which is obviously very into this whole thing.

Shane huffs, thunking his head back against the headboard. "Fuck off." But he knows his words are negated by the way he slowly starts running a hand down his chest, trying hard not to think about it too much. Talking is difficult all of a sudden.

Rozanov's eyes feel like a physical weight on him as he wraps his hand around himself. It feels different from when he does this to himself, more intense with someone else watching him. Rozanov isn't looking at Shane's face anymore—he isn't smiling either. Overcome by a moment of shamelessness, Shane spreads his legs to give him a better view.

"Fuck," Rozanov breathes, almost to himself. Shane swallows—he hadn't thought it would feel this powerful, touching himself with someone else watching. He tracks the way Rozanov's pupils dilate when Shane starts stroking in earnest, twisting a little the way he likes, the way Rozanov always does it. The distance between them feels charged.

There's no sound except the drag of skin on skin as Shane touches himself, the glide of wetness against his hand as he forces his way past the embarrassment and gets a little more into it. Rozanov's eyes don't leave him—it doesn't even look like he's blinking. His hands are white-knuckled on the arms of his chair, like he's forcibly holding himself back, and the thought makes Shane bold.

He reaches down with his other hand, trailing a finger towards his rim. He spreads his legs a little further, making sure that Rozanov has a good view. "You gonna fuck me?" he asks. The

words come out more slurred than Shane had intended, but he isn't disappointed when he sees the way they affect Rozanov, his breath hitching and eyes narrowing, obviously zeroed in on what Shane is doing to himself. It sends another jolt of arousal through Shane, the pleasure building faster than he had expected. He slows down a little, trying to draw things out long enough for Rozanov to actually do something.

"We will see," Rozanov answers, but his voice is strained. Shane can tell he's close to breaking.

"I need..."

"What?" Rozanov is leaning forward in the chair now, looking up at Shane's face.

Shane smiles, just a little. "You know," he says. It's such a novel feeling, being the one in control. Having this effect on someone as put together as Rozanov. In all of the times they've been together, he's never felt like this before—usually it feels like he's barely able to keep his head above water, drowning in pleasure and how desperate he is for it.

"Tell me," Rozanov's voice is deep and commanding, familiar, but there's a tremor to it now.

"You," Shane gives in, watching the reaction play out over Rozanov's face. He looks so destroyed that Shane says it again, just to be able to watch. "I need you."

Abruptly, Rozanov stands, ripping the last few buttons of his shirt open and shrugging it off in one smooth motion. Shane can see where he's hard in his dress pants, and his mouth waters a bit. He thinks about crawling down the bed, putting his mouth on Rozanov through the fabric, how Rozanov's hands would no doubt tangle in Shane's hair when he eventually swallows him down. He stays where he is, though. Hot as that would be, Shane wants something more tonight, and it seems like Rozanov is of the same mind.

He's naked before Shane can even blink, and time seems to slow down as he crawls up the bed and drapes himself over Shane. The feeling of skin on skin is heady, as is the kiss Rozanov gives him—deep and hard and demanding and sweet all at once. This is what he's been wanting since he first saw Rozanov lift the Cup over his head hours ago. Since before that even, when they had crashed together after that final goal. Shane arches up into the kiss, trying to match the energy, holding back a moan when Rozanov grinds down against him. His arms are around Rozanov, he realises belatedly, clutching his back so hard Shane wouldn't be surprised if they left marks.

Rozanov's hand snakes down between them to take over from where Shane had left off. He's quick, efficient, and Shane urges him on, just as impatient. It's no time at all before Rozanov is pulling back and looking to the nightstand questioningly.

"You have stuff?" he asks. "Lube, condoms?"

Shane's eyes go wide. Fuck. Of course he doesn't have anything—he had hardly even dared to think about what would happen if they won tonight, much less pack a bag for the possibility. Rozanov must read the answer on his face though, because he squeezes Shane's

shoulder in reassurance and smiles. "Do not worry. I thought maybe you would not, so I brought some."

He climbs off the bed, rummaging around on the floor where he had dropped his pants earlier before straightening up with a travel-sized bottle of lube and a single condom held up like a prize. Shane can't help but laugh. "Always prepared, aren't you?"

"Hollander," Rozanov's face turns serious, even as he rips the condom package open and starts rolling it on. "There was no way I was not going to fuck you if we won. Been thinking of this the whole round."

Shane's eyes widen. *Really?* "I haven't," he admits. "It was too... I was afraid to even think about winning. Like it would jinx it or something."

Rozanov laughs as he settles back between Shane's legs. He seems more open tonight, quicker to smile than usual. Shane thinks that this is maybe Rozanov happy, and he likes this new side of him. "I know," he says. "But you want it too, yes?"

Shane lets his head fall back as he feels the hardness press against his entrance. Rozanov doesn't wait for an answer before he starts pressing in, but Shane gives it to him anyways, ripped out of him before he can even process the words.

"Yes, *Ilya*, please."

There's suddenly no air in Shane's lungs. He freezes, even as Rozanov pushes in deeper, waiting for the moment of realisation, for him to pull away. But his face is hidden in Shane's neck, kissing and sucking even as he buries himself, and Shane forces himself to relax. Maybe the slip had gone unnoticed, and if that's the case, Shane certainly doesn't want to draw attention to it now. He doesn't think they've ever called each other by their first names—an unspoken line in the sand that neither of them have dared to cross.

When Ilya—Rozanov, it's Rozanov—finally does pull back, it's only to look Shane in the eye for a moment before kissing him again. He thrusts properly into Shane at the same time, and Shane can't help but let out a groan at the feeling. They haven't done this face-to-face since the very first time, and Shane had forgotten how intense it is, the feeling of Rozanov inside him and around him and panting into his mouth all at once.

He's already close from when he had been touching himself before, and Rozanov seems like he is too, even though he's barely started. He sets a punishing pace, never once removing his lips from Shane's, murmuring a mix of swear words and Russian between kisses. His hair looks almost golden in the glow of the lamp, and Shane threads his hands through it carefully, fighting against the pleasure that's already threatening to overwhelm him.

"Fuck," he can't help himself from gasping when Rozanov shifts, changing the angle just slightly, hitting Shane's prostate now with every stroke. His dick is trapped between their two bodies, but the friction every time they move is more than enough. "Fuck, I'm close. I'm gonna..."

"Yes," Rozanov breathes, and Shane doesn't know if he even hears it or if he just feels the shape of the word against his mouth. "Come on, Hollander, come for me."

Shane can't help but cry out as he feels himself start to clench around Rozanov, trying to muffle the sound in another kiss. Rozanov picks up his pace, slamming into Shane and dragging the pleasure out, his eyes never leaving Shane's face. Shane has the passing thought that he looks beautiful like this, the sheen of sweat on his chest glowing in the dim lamplight. Then his hips are stuttering, pushing in deeper than before, and Shane trembles a little with oversensitivity as he comes down from the high. Rozanov finally breaks the kiss as he comes, burying his face in Shane's shoulder, trembling as he moans, "*Fuck, Shane.*"

The only sound in the room afterwards is both of them breathing hard. Ilya collapses on top of Shane when he's done, his weight settling like a blanket, and Shane forces his body to relax. Apparently his slip hadn't gone so unnoticed, but that's okay. He can't help but hear his name in Ilya's accent, over and over in his head, *Shane, Shane, Shane*. He tries to take a deep breath to steady himself. That had been... more intense than he thought it would be. He's not sure if it's the whole night just hitting him, or maybe the fact that they had basically kissed the entire time. Regardless, he feels a little unsteady now, heart still pounding at three times its normal rate.

Eventually, Ilya sighs and pulls out. Shane groans at the sudden feeling of emptiness, the coldness of the bed when he leaves to get rid of the condom. It's not long before he's back though, sinking into the mattress at Shane's side and wrapping an arm around him, pulling him close.

"What a fucking night." Ilya sighs.

Shane swallows. "Yeah," he agrees, because it's the truth. His voice is only a little strangled. "You could say that."

Ilya slides his eyes sideways to look at him. "Was it everything you dreamed of?"

Shane smiles at the familiar words, the subtle reference to another time. This time Ilya is much closer, his eyes so much more sincere. "Pretty much," Shane admits. He can still barely believe any of it had happened.

"Same," Ilya agrees, lying back against the pillows.

They stay there for a long time, saying nothing, just staring at the ceiling together. The first rays of sunlight are starting to peek over the horizon by the time Shane speaks again—somehow he knows without looking that Ilya is still awake too.

"Did, uh... did your family make the trip? Were they at the game?" He remembers, belatedly, Ilya telling him last year at the awards that his family hadn't come, that they didn't care about American awards. He wonders if that extends to the Cup too, if this is maybe a sore subject.

Ilya doesn't seem upset though. "No," he says. "My friend Svetlana was there though. She is... we have known each other since we were children. So she is like family."

"That's cool," Shane says. He remembers the woman that had been standing next to Ilya on the ice earlier, mentally putting the name to the face. He finds himself suddenly, intensely curious. Outside of their hookups and the show Ilya puts on around the team, Shane realises he knows nothing about him. He's seen enough in private to know that the "bad boy" persona is mostly an act, but not enough to know what's really behind it. "Are you, uh, heading back soon?"

"Back?"

"To Russia. For the summer." Shane assumes that's where Ilya goes every summer, but he doesn't actually know. He just knows he had been headed there last summer, after the awards.

"Oh, yes," Ilya says. "I mean, not right away. There will probably be parade, ceremonies, celebrations. Will stay for all of that. But when it is done, yes, I will go back."

"Do you... do you like it there?"

Ilya's brow furrows, and he turns his head to look at Shane. "Like it? What difference does that make? It's home."

Shane shrugs, feeling stupid all of a sudden. "I don't know," he says. "Just..."

Just, Shane has gotten the impression that maybe Ilya doesn't have the best relationship with his family. He can't forget the bitterness that had coated his words last year, when Shane had asked why they hadn't flown out for the awards when Ilya had been up for Rookie of the Year. For some reason it bothers him to think about Ilya spending the summer in a place he doesn't want to be.

Eventually, Ilya sighs. "Is complicated, Hollander," he says. "Russia, my family... it's complicated. Not always good. But it is home."

"Okay," Shane says. It's more of an answer than he had expected, given that even Ilya doesn't seem to know how he feels about it.

"What about you? Where do you spend the summer?"

Shane can't help his smile. "My parents cottage, usually," he says. "It's near Ottawa, sort of, on a lake maybe two hours away. I've been thinking though... last summer it was feeling a little much, living with my parents again. So I was thinking maybe this year I'd start looking into having my own place built nearby."

"That sounds... nice."

Shane nods, turning his gaze back to the ceiling. "Yeah," he says. "I hope so. I'll... uh, maybe send you some pictures. If I do buy something. So you can see."

"That would be nice," Ilya's voice is so soft it's barely audible.

It's a long while later when Shane registers the sound, the soft huff of Ilya exhaling in a more regular rhythm. He's not surprised when he turns over to find him asleep, mouth open a little,

features more relaxed than Shane has ever seen them. They don't really do this—aside from the first time, they've never stayed the night, never hung around in bed discussing their summer plans, or anything else for that matter. But they've also never called each other by their first names. Never won the Cup together. Maybe it's just the weirdness of the night blurring all the usual lines.

Shane tries to be quiet as he shifts around, pulling the blanket up around both of them. Ilya looks so peaceful in sleep, soft in a way that's hard for Shane to reconcile with how he usually holds himself. For the millionth time, he wonders what they're even doing here. He wonders how it's going to end. He has a feeling that he already knows—at some point, Ilya will get tired of him, when the novelty of fucking a teammate wears off, or maybe when the risks of being caught start to outweigh the reward. Or maybe Shane will get traded again, and it won't be worth it when they can only see each other a few times a year. Either way, it will end eventually, and Shane will take it personally when it does. He knows he's too sensitive, knows that he overthinks everything. Of the two of them, it's Shane who will get hurt from this in the end, but he's not strong enough to stop it before it gets that far. He knows that the tenderness with which he gently brushes a strand of hair out of Ilya's face has no good outcome, but that doesn't stop him from doing it anyways. It doesn't stop him from snuggling in a little closer as he closes his eyes, his exhaustion finally catching up to him.

For now, he holds Ilya in his arms as he drifts off, the events of the night playing like a highlight reel on the backs of his eyelids. Maybe, if he wishes hard enough, he can just stay here in this moment forever and never have to face what comes next when they wake up in the morning to the real world.

It's a good dream.

Chapter End Notes

I've been so blown away by the response to this fic. So to anyone who read it, thank you so much <3

TLDR; Yes, there will be a sequel.

If anyone is interested in the backstory: I'm a planner, so I knew from the start that I wanted to end on a warmer version of the Vegas scene. I loved the idea of taking scenes from the book/show and dreaming up how they would be different if Shane and Ilya played on the same team from early on in the story and therefore ended up as actual friends through everything.

That being said, I did also have a vague idea for an epilogue in mind, set a few years later. I know there are loose ends that I didn't quite tie up in this story—namely Shane's lingering self-doubt from being traded, still feeling like he doesn't quite fit in with his new team, his lack of close friends besides Ilya (and his non-existent friendship with Hayden), his relationship with his mother. There are also other questions that occurred

to me about this timeline as I was writing—how would Ilya handle falling in love with Shane so much sooner, while his father is still alive and his ties to Russia are stronger? Shane is mostly finding his place with his new team while they're winning, but how would his doubts and insecurities crop back up once the team starts losing? How would the Olympics go if avoiding each other completely wasn't really an option? And of course, in this universe where they get to know each other much quicker, how long would it take for them to really fall in love and admit it to themselves and to each other?

The reason it took so long for me to get this chapter out was because I was trying in vain to write an epilogue that made sense with all these factors taken into account. I'll admit I've given up. I can't do it in a single chapter, but I'm so attached to this world and these characters that I can't bring myself to leave it unresolved either. So all this to say... there will be a sequel.

I'm going to take a break from this particular universe for a week or two first. I have an idea for a one-shot with a completely different twist that I want to write, and I'd also like to sit down and really nail down a solid plan for the sequel. But I'm guessing it will be about the same length as this story, but alternating between Shane and Ilya's point of view. It will pick up shortly after the end of this and cover the events of the next few years, including things I didn't quite get to in this story like Rose and Svetlana's characters and the cottage.

I've made this work part of series so you can subscribe if you're interested in reading more. I'm guessing the first chapter will be up around the beginning of February.

Thank you again if you've made it this far :) I'll be back soon with more.

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