

You Can Lie (Not to Me)

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You Can Lie (Not to Me)

by [newtntommy](#)

Summary

Every time your soulmate lies, their words are written on you.

Shane doesn't lie often. His soulmate does though.

Notes

i haven't done a soulmate fic in such a long time. Some of the soulmate tropes are kinda ... idk but this one sounds fun and heartbreaking. PERFECT.

this was meant to stay in one shot but sometimes i write something and it feels like a chapter ending. does that make sense ? idk. anyways enjoy!

i don't have any rights to the book or show. lines/dialogue will be copied occasionally bc this story will be weaved together with the au. this soulmate au fits so well with the pace, characters, and how it's set up. i do have my own original scenes/dialogue/plot. i'd say it's a good mix of both.

Chapter 1

I believe you. It was an accident.

The first words to appear on Shane's arm. He's in the middle of doing math homework. Math isn't one of his favorite subjects. He'd much rather work on his hockey skills at the rink, but his mom refuses to let him go without finishing his homework. School is important, helps with discipline and organization skills. All of which Shane thinks he already expresses based on his drive and dedication on his hopefully successful career in hockey. His summers consist of mulling over hockey books, repeating tricks until they're perfect, and spending every waking hour on the ice. All while completing his chores, spending meals and movie nights with his family, and finishing school work.

He spends time with friends, but that's because his parents tell him he should. Discipline.

I believe you, Dad.

Shane stares at the words. He doesn't understand the concept of lying. He's terrible at it. His parents tell him this every time. If you don't believe someone, ask questions. If you don't want to do something, say you don't. Shane didn't understand what's so bad about it. Telling the truth makes life infinitely easier.

But then Shane rejected too many invites, and his parents sat him down.

"Honey," she said one night. "You have to spend time with your teammates outside of games. Share interests. Laugh - have fun together. It's what being part of a team means."

"Okay," Shane said. That made sense. He nodded and went to every event with his teammates. He had a good time, and they didn't seem to mind when he didn't contribute to the conversation. They gave him funny looks at times, and he learned early on what to do to make them more comfortable.

Mimicking, scripting conversation, eye contact. Not quite lies. Not quite the truth either. Perfectly in the middle. It's not a lie if he convinces himself it's the truth. His words probably don't touch his soulmate's arm.

Morale went up, and people gave him the puck more. It was an interesting discovery Shane took to heart. The more he got along with his teammates, the more they liked him. The better he adjusted or masked with them, the better he fit.

I believe you. It was an accident.

Whoever his soulmate is, is lying about believing something. It was confusing. He has not learned yet why other people would lie, but since he masked for small comfort to his person and his teammates, he supposed his soulmate did the same. Maybe they have the same issue with people.

Shane hopes they're okay. He hopes they meet soon. Maybe they can help each other.

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I want to stay here to help, but I can't. I have to go.

Shane frowns. He's read a lot of lies on his arm from his soulmate. Some lies are extravagant and borderline unnecessary. They're layered with details Shane didn't do with his own. His simple lies are short, sweet, and hidden within the truth. His lies have to be a list of Yes, Yes, No, Yes, etc. If they even make it to his soulmate's arm. Probably why nobody catches him, and he's forgotten how to differentiate. He doesn't know how to invent a proper lie that makes sense, and he doesn't feel obligated to anyway. He just doesn't say anything, and the other person makes up their own lie for him.

Then as time goes on, the less he truly lies. The more he masks and fits better. It's exhausting, but worth it.

I can't. I have to go.

Where is his soulmate going? Why do they want to leave? Are they talking about school? School can be fun. Shane likes school, but he'd much rather be playing hockey.

Was his soulmate a good liar? They must be. Why do they lie? Shane hopes his soulmate doesn't lie a lot, but these past couple of years his arm has been covered in fancy nontruths.

It was an accident.

I am busy. I can't come home.

I will visit as much as I can.

His soulmate does a lot of lying. He hopes they don't lie to him. Maybe he can tell them they don't need to lie to him. They'd get away with lying because he's not good at catching them, and sometimes he doesn't catch every tickle on his arm, but it would be easier if they didn't lie to each other. They're soulmates. There's no reason to lie. They can be there for each other.

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Shane hopes his girlfriend isn't his soulmate. Which is awful to admit because she didn't do anything wrong. She's nice to talk to, and she is pretty. His friends tell him she's pretty, so she's great to have around.

He's proven right about not being soulmates when he tells her he likes kissing her, and the words don't appear on her arm. She believes him, though, and must not catch on to the fact the truth is on Shane's face and not his tongue. Either she doesn't catch the lies, or she doesn't care.

Maybe she is his soulmate. It's not as if it's a true lie. She's nice, and it's not bad to kiss her. She's kind and goes to his practices sometimes. She gets annoyed with how often Shane goes to practice, but she cheers when he scores. She is happy for him when he gets into the NHL junior teams, and she attends less games.

They're both not much into music, and they both enjoy reading. She says he's good at hockey. She's...normal which is great. His friends have girlfriends, which means he should have one.

I don't miss her.

I'm embarrassed.

Shane stares at his arm. His soulmate must be having issues too. He doesn't know what two women argue about, but his girlfriend and her friends usually work things out fairly quickly. His soulmate obviously misses her. He hopes they work it out with whoever she is.

He hopes his soulmate figures out they don't need to lie so much. At least not with Shane.

++++++

Ilya Rozanov is sort of an asshole. Shane was excited to meet him. He's heard so much about him from his games in Russia and now here in America. He loves watching him on the ice. He's a passionate player. He skates fast and doesn't hold back, and he performs moves Shane didn't know existed. They're not in any of the books he's read. He needs to work on that if they're going to play together. Maybe they could be on the same team in the big leagues.

But it's obvious when they meet that Rozanov doesn't have much interest in talking to him, or maybe he's not used to speaking in English. His accent is distinct, and it takes him a second to translate and respond. He doesn't give Shane much to work with, no masking material to bounce off of. No easy flow of conversation Shane has gotten used to doing with people.

He's rambling, which is one of the things people get uncomfortable with. It happens when he's talking about hockey or a player he gets excited over. He hasn't talked this much in a while.

Shane does them both a favor and says his parents are waiting on him.

Ah, another lie for his soulmate.

Pretty lame thing to lie about, especially after so long of carefully constructed truth, but Rozanov was trying to smoke, and Shane was intruding. He'll see him later anyway. He'll see him in action. He'll fight for gold for his country, and Rozanov will do the same.

"Good luck in the tournament," Shane says warmly. He was excited to see him play, even if Rozanov is a bit of an ass. That doesn't make him any less great.

Rozanov watches him, brows furrowed with stunned bewilderment, and his cigarette nearly falls out of his mouth. He gives Shane a guarded look, narrowing his eyes and studying him. "What?"

"Good luck in the tournament," Shane repeats.

Rozanov's stare is oddly intense, but Shane says nothing. He holds out his hand with a smile. He hopes he didn't offend him. He replays their conversation, but he doesn't see where he went wrong to get this reaction.

Then Rozanov accepts the handshake. "You will not be so friendly when we beat you."

Shane blinks, and his smile turns more smug. The challenge makes his blood rush. "That's not happening."

++++++

When Shane comes in second in the drafts, he tells Rozanov, "Congratulations. Happy for you."

Rozanov laughs, clutches his chest and throws his head back. He laughs with so much smug and joy, all Shane can do is stare.

Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

thank you so much for all your kudos and comments! i was very surprised to see how much you guys liked this soulmate fic idea. i'm in love with it and i can't wait to get this all out! i'm having a lot of fun.

i'm so glad you guys enjoyed the first chapter. i hope the second is just as good. i got really into it so it's much longer. don't be surprised if the chapter count goes up.

I was going to sleep.

I do miss Dad. I miss home.

This is the last time. I'm not doing this again. Stop calling me, or I am blocking you.

Of course Rozanov shows up to the gym at the same time Shane does. Shane couldn't sleep, and his soulmate was having a conversation in the middle of the night. One made entirely of lies and rage. Shane couldn't close his eyes for a second without the familiar sensation of itching as the words are written. Shane was still mad about coming in second with fucking Rozanov as first. The Raiders took Rozanov, and Shane signed with Montreal. He was going to see the man constantly.

There was no hope for sleep, so he went to the hotel gym.

They raced on the treadmill, and Rozanov shouldn't be as good as him because he still smells like cigarettes. Nonetheless, he keeps up with Shane, and they both sit and pant on the floor.

"What a fucking day, huh?" Rozanov says. There's a layer of sweat that makes his skin glisten, and Shane avoids staring at his neck.

"Yeah. Totally," Shane replies.

Rozanov is grinning. "Everything you dream of?"

Shane looks him dead in the eye. "Almost."

Rozanov barks out a laugh. Shane isn't being all that funny.

Rozanov offers Shane his water bottle, and Shane takes it even though he shouldn't. Shane is having feelings he can't identify. He feels *something* for Rozanov with the room buzzing with tension and the unknown. Their fingers brushed twice, and he was thinking about what more he wanted. Does he want Rozanov to touch him again?

Does he want him to kiss him? No, of course not. He has a girlfriend. A girlfriend he still hasn't texted. The same one he hasn't thought about all day.

He'll think of her now in the shower. The tension was built, and he needed to get it out. He will think about his girlfriend and not a certain dumb Russian who beat him in the drafts.

He is relieved verbal lies are the only ones that matter.

++++++

Shane hates Ilya Rozanov. He hates him and his damn smirk that drives him insane. He's always so fucking smug all the time, and it grates on his nerves. He hates how good Rozanov is at hockey, and the arch rivalry turns genuinely authentic with them on different teams. They're both insanely good and at the top of their game. They're two unstoppable forces fighting for first.

He hates Rozanov. Montreal hates Rozanov. Hayden certainly hates him, and he complains about him to Shane in the locker room.

"I wish I didn't have to look at his face," Hayden groans. "I want to punch him."

Shane changes out of his gear. "Yeah."

"And of course he's with the Raiders. He could've signed on with anyone else, and we wouldn't see him nearly as much," Hayden goes on, irritated. "I feel bad for you, man. You have to do face-offs with him. What shit does he say to you?"

"Shane Hollander," Rozanov drawls. His eyes lit with anticipation, and his famous grin that made Shane's stomach flip with something he can't describe. "Going to disappoint them?"

An adrenaline Shane isn't used to having with anyone else floods his chest. It was addicting. Warm. "Nope."

Rozanov's face bloomed with delight.

Shane shrugs. "Nothing too bad."

"Oh." Hayden looks confused. Shane realizes he said the wrong things, read the room wrong. Hayden nods, and shakes it off. "That's good. Maybe one day he'll go too far and get his ass kicked out."

Hayden looks thrilled at the thought. Shane doesn't share the same sentiment. He can't even repeat the words he thinks over and over again in the mirror. The words he hears all around him in the locker room and rink.

I hate Rozanov can never be verbally said by Shane Hollander. Because the thought of those words making it to his soulmate's arm makes him clench his teeth together. It would solidify his complicated feelings into something real he can't ignore. He blames it on the fact that Rozanov was someone he sees as a challenge. Someone like him and who plays at a level above others.

He met his match, and it was fucking relieving to have a challenge for once.

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Rozanov calls him pretty during filming a commercial, and Shane wishes he could say he hated it. He doesn't dare say it, because somewhere his soulmate will read the lie. He doesn't have to worry about his girlfriend, who he broke up with recently. It was a long time coming, and neither of them sounded too heartbroken.

Then Rozanov admits he's the one who initiated changes to this commercial and having both of them in it. He says it with a nonchalant tone, as if the reveal didn't blindside Shane and turn off his brain in shock. He hadn't expected that.

He goes into the locker rooms to wash off the sweat. He shouldn't be surprised when Rozanov follows him in. He may not say much, but he certainly moves like the world orbits around him.

Shane hates how gorgeous Rozanov is. His body is firm and bulky with muscle. His hair is slicked back from the water, and he's rubbing soap over his skin while looking directly at Shane.

Fuck. His cock is hard.

"Like what you see, Hollander?"

"No," Shane chokes out. He tries to hide his lower half. Rozanov looks at him over his shoulder with a smug grin. "I was thinking about something else."

"Right, something else."

Shane grits his teeth. He doesn't have to be cocky. He doesn't stop there, he asks more questions. He asks what Shane was thinking about, and if he wants to touch him. Questions Shane doesn't understand. Questions Shane would've thought he was asking for a reason other than to torment him. Questions that would get him in trouble with his soulmate. Mark his soulmate with evidence of his attraction to his male arch rival.

Rozanov was an asshole.

Shane tells the truth because he'd rather not let his soulmate have any part of this. He must be going insane. "Yes."

Rozanov faces him. His cock is hard with his hand slowly stroking. His eyes are clouded with desire, and Shane follows droplets of water traveling down his sculpted body. He watches as Rozanov jerks his cock, until it becomes too much, and he remembers *they're in public*.

Shane hides away at the lockers. He hopes Rozanov fucked off somewhere, but of course he didn't. He calmly walks to his locker in nothing but a towel around his hips.

Shane is used to not lying, playing the chords of the truth to trick everyone including himself. Mimicking is his salvation. He's not lying if he's copying someone. "Let's pretend that never happened, okay?"

Rozanov leans against the lockers. His left arm - his soulmate arm - behind his back. Shane wonders if his soulmate is Russian. He scratches his neck. "Is that what you want?"

"Of course," Shane says, tying his shoes to hide his face.

"You are a terrible liar," Rozanov says, laughing. Shane hates how *certain* he sounds, like all of Shane's hard work of fitting in suddenly means nothing. Whisked away by someone who's looking too closely, batted Shane's defenses away like flies.

When Rozanov propositions him, asking what he'd do if he came by at nine o'clock, Shane plays the game he's perfected for years. Rozanov will not break him.

"I might open the door."

Might is Shane's favorite word. No, favorite words make no sense. *Might* is his most strategic control over the narrative. It's a limitation and flaw to the soulmate system. *Might* isn't a lie - it is a lie and truth in one. Perfectly in the middle where Shane loves to be. He thrives there.

He *might* go to dinner.

He *might* go find a girlfriend.

He *might* have a beer.

He *might* let Rozanov into his room. They *might* just talk.

Against his better judgement, Shane does open the door. Rozanov circles him like a predator and gently presses him against the wall. He cups Shane's cheek and brings their lips together in a hungry, intrepid kiss.

Rozanov holds him close, preventing Shane from pulling back, though the idea to do so doesn't come to him. Their chests are touching, and Rozanov trails over his chest and neck. Shane's head is spinning, and his hands are reaching out, desperate to *touch and explore* before he can control himself. One shy tug, and Rozanov takes off his jacket and drops it on the floor. His forearms make Shane's mouth dry. His empty, unmarked forearms. His soulmate arm is blank. Maybe his soulmate is asleep.

Rozanov's hand seeks his hair, pulling in an almost gentle yet possessive way. He cups Shane's neck, and it's between one burning kiss to the next when he murmurs, "Only truths in

this room.”

Shane swallows. “What?”

“No lying,” Rozanov tells him. He sounds ice cold serious with no room for negotiation.

Shane’s far too caught in Rozanov’s spiderweb, already addicted to his taste to pay much attention to the request. No, he won’t lie. They won’t lie to each other in here. Makes sense. Lying in the bedroom can be dangerous. “Okay.”

The no lying rule lets Shane learn about Rozanov. He doesn’t know what it is about Rozanov, but he doesn’t hold back his questions with him. Rozanov doesn’t seem to mind, and he freely admits he’s been with other men. Shane needs to know who, where, why, how. Rozanov hesitates to answer, like he’s deciding how to thread an honest answer rather than say nothing at all.

“Do I make you curious?” Rozanov asks, while planting soft, boiling hot kisses to Shane’s neck.

“Obviously,” Shane murmurs.

Obviously is another good word. It’s not really an answer. It’s *obviously* cold outside. It’s *obviously* raining. It’s *obviously* a hard game.

He’s *obviously* curious about the man making his skin tingle and cock hard.

Rozanov looks at him like he knows what he did. He snorts and kisses him again. He said not to lie. He never said not to evade or skirt around with neutral words.

Rozanov nibbles on his lips, using his tongue to soothe the sting. Shane’s cock twitches under his clothes. “Do you like sucking my cock?”

The no lying rule is sounding awfully like an excuse to get compliments from Shane, or embarrass him.

Too bad for Rozanov. Shane knows this game too well.

“Wow,” Shane sighs. He’s smiling. They both are. “Those English words just roll off your tongue.”

Rozanov chuckles. “Yes?”

“Yes,” Shane says because he’s not answering a question.

“You want me to lie on the bed and let you do it some more?”

Rozanov is good at digging for truths. Shane is exceptional at decorating them as something else. “Let me?”

Shane does do it some more, and he likes it more than he thought he would. He likes it a lot actually. He likes the way Rozanov tastes and smells. The soap he used mixed with his musky scent of man is all too real and obsession-inducing. There was no way to confuse his brain into thinking he was with a woman. He craves for more, needs him like air. He was more consumed by the thought of Rozanov coming than his own impending orgasm.

Rozanov pretends to get ready to leave, only to climb over Shane and nestle between his legs. “You think I am asshole?”

Shane huffs. “I know you’re an asshole.”

No lie there.

When Rozanov puts his mouth on him, Shane has no chance of lasting. Not with Rozanov’s precome stained on his tongue and lips. It was embarrassing how fast he came, but Rozanov’s expert mouth and tongue left him panting. He held Shane’s hand the whole time, and Shane’s chest with the other. He was being eaten alive, and Shane didn’t have any fight in him.

Shane laughs when they’re done. This was insane. This can’t happen again.

He can’t say any of that.

“You’re not going to tell anyone, are you?”

“Of course I am-“ Rozanov stops. His eyes widen for a millisecond, and Shane tenses. He was about to lie for some reason, shatter this barrier between them and their soulmates learning any bit of this complicated situation. He can’t let that happen.

In a flash, he’s back to his normal stoic, perhaps uncharacteristically sincere self. “Hollander, I’m not going to tell anyone.”

Shane stares. His heart is beating hard, threatening to rip out of his chest. “Is that the truth?”

Rozanov doesn’t respond right away. His gaze rakes over Shane, searching for something Shane can’t figure out. It’s a chip in his big, cocky exterior, and Shane can’t breathe.

“You’ll always get truth from me, Hollander.”

Maybe it’s his tone or previous promise, but Shane believes him. “Okay.”

++++++

Shane thinks of Scott Hunter when he does interviews. The easy way he approaches questions with a charming smile. It doesn’t matter what the question is, he spins it to fit an alternative question he is comfortable answering. If Shane is asked about Rozanov, he gives the interviewer a neat answer about his desire to win and nothing else. He extracts the drama

and adds single-minded gratitude and ambition. His mother helped him do it this way. Drama is not worth it, unless a team needs attention. Montreal has plenty of attention.

The interviewer isn't pleased not getting juicy details. At least that's what his mother tells him afterwards. Shane doesn't see the point. He's there to play hockey.

Rozanov has an interview after a game. He pretends not to know who Shane is. He talks about being the best player and how many goals he's going to make.

Asshole.

++++++

I'm not doing this again. Last time.

Shane is reading one of his beloved hockey books when the words come through. He runs a fingertip over the letters and its strange font. Nobody exactly knows what determines the font style. Some say italicized words mean it's being translated. It's not a proven fact because many people speak more than one language, and they can understand because it's their secondary language. Their mother's tongue doesn't match, but they both speak another one.

Shane's words were italicized up until the past two or so years, which means his soulmate could be speaking French or another language to family and friends. Now, his words were only italicized in the evening or night. Maybe they moved out of their family home.

Shane wonders what his lies on his soulmate look like. Some say you can read the lies on your soulmate's arm no matter the language. Some say you can't. Maybe it depends how annoyed the soulmate gene gets.

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I'm sorry. I did not see you there.

Who are you? I do not recognize you. Are you a fan?

I didn't know you played tonight.

Shane frowns at his words. He didn't catch tone and hidden meanings in person, and he certainly can't with flat words. He's pretty sure his soulmate is flirting with someone. Maybe they're a singer or some sort of performer. Is his soulmate famous? Do they have a lot of fans? How are they going to meet Shane? Are they ever?

Thirty percent of people don't ever meet their soulmate. Shane wouldn't be too terribly upset if he doesn't meet his.

Shane hopes he doesn't meet his soulmate too soon. He wants to play hockey for much longer, and he doesn't know what he'll do if his soulmate doesn't like hockey or wants to get married and have kids. Several hockey players have wives and kids, but some wished they'd stop playing and traveling.

You said you would pay me one thousand for every beating!

Shane is completely lost. His soulmate beats people? Is his soulmate dangerous?

Now he really doesn't want to meet his soulmate.

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Shane wishes he perfected acting nonchalant, but he's terrible at it. Every bone in his body thrums with tension and alarm when Rozanov whispers his room number and skates off.

"What did Rozanov want?" Scott asks.

Shane avoids Scott's piercing gaze. "Nothing. Shit talking." Which was true.

Scott chuckles. "He's an asshole, right?"

"Yeah, basically," Shane laughs.

"Quieter than usual," Scott says pensively. "He's not chirping so much on the bench. It's like he's muted."

Shane hadn't noticed, but thinking back now Rozanov did seem more to himself when he's off the ice. He wasn't throwing insults left and right. "Maybe a referee or his coach got mad at him."

Shane's arm tingles again. His arm has been itching all day. His soulmate was lying left and right, and it was distracting. He wishes he could read the fleeting lies, but they'd be gone before he gets the chance. Words don't stay for very long - one minute max - so he doesn't have time to quickly roll his gear and sleeves away to read what's being said.

"Maybe he has to watch his mouth," Scott guesses. He laughs. "Imagine being able to shut him up."

The memory of Rozanov blowing him comes to mind. Shane huffs a laugh, cheeks tinting pink. His helmet does a good job hiding it.

"Imagine."

++++++

The second Shane jumps in Rozanov's arms, he gets told, "No lies. Only truth."

Shane shakily nods and goes for more kisses. He's burning up, and he needs Rozanov's hands on him. He needs to breathe him in, savor the feel of his skin and the ridges of his muscles. He smells like man and cedar wood. Rozanov tells him to get on his knees, and Shane drops down before he finishes speaking.

His smell is stronger here. Shane hurriedly unbuttons his pants and pulls them and his underwear down. He takes Rozanov's cock in his mouth with a pleased sigh, and he moans when hands grab his hair and gently guide him.

"Fuck, Hollander, you're good at this."

Rozanov picks him up, and Shane eagerly wraps his legs around his waist. It shouldn't be arousing, but he's muscular and built. He's not light, and Rozanov carries him like he's nothing. He dives in for another kiss and doesn't stop, not even when he's dropped on the bed.

Rozanov almost makes him come, and he really should figure out how to hold back. But then Rozanov tells him to get on his stomach, and Shane freezes, and his heart pounds like a drum.

Shane struggles to breathe - struggles to move - when Rozanov tells him he wants to fuck him. He's laying on his stomach, and Rozanov runs his fingers over the crease of his ass, dipping inside to graze his hole.

"Have you ever?" he whispers in his ear. Shane shakes his head, unable to properly speak while Rozanov pets his heated skin. "Do you want to?"

Shane focuses on his breathing.

Rozanov moves his hand from his ass to rub at his thighs and leans forward to kiss his shoulderblade. "You are scared."

Shane shakes his head. "I'm not scared."

Rozanov pulls back, and he goes back to rubbing Shane's hole. "Do you ever touch yourself here?"

"Jesus Christ," Shane groans.

"Why? Does touching your ass make you gay?"

"Rozanov."

“Cause you know what else makes you gay is sucking my dick,” Rozanov says.

Shane rolls his eyes. He’s relieved he’s facing away from the man. “I’m trying to tell you I have a thing.”

Rozanov pauses. “A thing?”

“A dildo,” Shane deadpans.

“What color?” Shane pushes him. “Is it big?”

“I’m leaving,” Shane scowls. *Fuck, a lie.*

Rozanov lets out what could be a laugh, but it’s cut off with a pout and he whines. He kisses Shane’s shoulder. “No, I want to fuck you, Hollander.”

Shane rolls his eyes and lets Rozanov maneuver him to his back. His necklace dangles over Shane.

“I told you no lies,” Rozanov admonishes lightly.

Shane blushes. He really can’t lie, can he? “Not here,” he says. “Not with fucking Scott Hunter next door.”

“He is hot. We should let him listen like mating call.”

“You’d like that, wouldn’t you?” Shane laughs.

Rozanov chuckles. “To see the look on his face - yes.” He kisses Shane’s nose. “Next time.”

Shane panics at that. Next time. This is a starting routine. This is a plan. This is not going to be spontaneous. This is going to happen. This is happening.

In his apartment. Where he lives.

He must be physically freaking out because Rozanov frowns. “Hollander, you are having panic attack. It’s just a plan to fuck. This isn’t anything-“

Rozanov stops. He narrows his eyes and talks with tense lips. “We do nothing else.”

“Yeah?” Shane stammers.

Rozanov nods at him, encouraging him to calm down. Shane clutches his bicep, petting his skin soothingly. Right. Yes. Just a plan to fuck. That’s it.

Rozanov kisses him, open and ravenous, and he crawls down Shane’s slightly trembling body to suck his cock. Shane’s nerves settle from the sensation, and he clutches Rozanov’s hair and shoulders with a broken cry. Rozanov massages his thigh and pec, thumbing his nipple, and Shane is coming fast.

Rozanov wears nothing but a towel from his shower twenty minutes later, and Shane struggles to put words together. Rozanov watches him panic and waits patiently.

“I know we talked about meeting in Montreal in two weeks...” Shane stops talking. He doesn’t know where to go from there. This is all so new and strange. They didn’t make plans for this.

Fuck, he just had Rozanov’s cock in his mouth. He was moaning louder than him. Now he’s spiraling because they’re making a plan for once.

“Oh my god, Hollander, you are so boring,” Rozanov groans. He gets up and demands Shane for his phone. Shane begrudgingly hands it over.

He watches Rozanov’s face as he types, admiring the sternness of his brows and curve of his lips. Curious, he looks down at his left forearm and finds it empty of lies. Neither of their soulmates were lying tonight.

If Rozanov was his soulmate, would Shane see ‘You are so boring’ on his arm? Does Rozanov really think he’s boring? It shouldn’t matter. He pushes the thought out of his mind.

Rozanov hands him back his phone. He sees a new contact named ‘Lily’ and grins. “What’s my name going to be?”

Rozanov smirks. “Jane.”

Shane guesses they text now.

++++++

The game is cancelled due to weather. Hayden asks him to come over for dinner. Rozanov isn’t texting back. Three things Shane didn’t expect, and it takes him time to adjust. He has a strict diet that he needs to follow.

“Jackie can cook anything,” Hayden promises. “Whatever you want to eat. Consider it done, okay? She’d love to have you over. We both do.”

Shane fidgets with his phone. His very silent phone. His last text was to Rozanov asking about meeting today.

Hayden is a good guy. He sees Shane hesitate and gives him several outs. Shane’s mother’s voice rings in his head, and he remembers he needs to do this. He needs to socialize and create relationships with his teammates. Hayden was always encouraging, friendly, and seemed to know Shane thought and acted a little differently than others. He made sure Shane was comfortable, and he stepped in for him if he saw him struggling in a conversation.

His arm tingles.

I'm glad you're here. I was hoping you were.

It seems Shane wasn't the only one who's plan fell apart.

"Yeah let's do it," Shane says. "I want to see you eat my disgusting food."

Hayden smiles wide and one step away from jumping in victory. "Yes! Jackie is going to be so excited. I'll tell her right now - rabbit food tonight."

Shane checks his phone again. He guesses this was his fault. Rozanov said no lies in the bedroom.

He never said no lies on the outside.

Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

Ilya's POV

Chapter Notes

i added more chapters because there's no way i can do this in 5 chapters. writing ilya's pov wasn't supposed to happen til later but finishing episode 1 fit ilya better. it felt right.

no beta. sorry for mistakes. i'm also tipsy so sorry. i love this story and it hurt writing this :(hope u guys enjoy. thank u so much for ur lovely comments ❤️ i love to read them

Ilya Rozanov's parents were not soulmates.

Russia does not view the soulmate system as a credible, working tool to a profitable world. There are no benefits to seeking and marrying your soulmate. It's a waste of time and resources to do that, and it's too solely based on emotions and other profligate aspects. It's cowardly to search for your soulmate because it implies you cannot solidify your own future. You need some made up, nonsensical fate to determine what kind of man you are.

Soulmates are weak. They do not promise success in career or bloodline. They are responsible for failure. Your mistakes are on their skin for the world to see. Anyone can use that against you.

Happiness is not an effective factor to a bright, prosperous life with trophies and influence. There is no reason for it, so it is cut out. Some people do mark their skin so they cannot read the embarrassing and shameful lies. Russia has a specific surgery that can void out the gene associated.

Ilya's father got this procedure done. His mother did not, and her husband hated her for that. He called her *weak* and *stupid*. A *child*. She covered her arms when she could, but it was a power play when Ilya's father told her to bare her embarrassment to the world. To her sons. Ilya's father hammered into them how useless soulmates are. They do not promise renowned victory or influential power. Soulmates are to be mocked.

Ilya's father mocked his wife day and night until she couldn't handle it anymore. She had an accident and she didn't have to worry about her soulmate anymore.

Ilya found her clutching her left arm like a lifeline. Tears stained on her cheeks. He cried for her as long as he dared.

His father insulted her and called her a spoiled child to anyone who would listen. He turned to his sons with his finger pointed at her casket and said, "This is what soulmates do to you. Do you see now?"

Ilya scrubbed his left arm until he bled.

+++++++

Since then, he kept his arms covered day and night. His brother already made an appointment to remove his soulmate gene. He was a twin to their father, agreed on every front and subject. Ilya couldn't help but feel disappointed and betrayed.

It took years to hear anything from his soulmate. No words marked his arm, and his father looked at him with pride for the first time. Maybe Ilya didn't have a soulmate - a flaw in the system - or they died at an early age.

Ilya was nauseous at the thought. He was abandoned by even his soulmate.

+++++++

The first lie came on a random morning, and Ilya was on the rink. He felt the light tickling, and he was too distracted by it and what it meant to avoid being slammed into the wall.

No, I do want to go to his house. It's fine. I don't need to practice every day.

The extreme ordinary and laughably innocent tone of the lie he's waited so long for makes Ilya laugh while the nurse tells him his arm is broken.

I was at his house.

I do go out.

I would love to.

He felt light tickling a lot now, and his heart raced each time. A reminder someone out there was made for him, even though their lies are dumb and pathetic. He had to hide his arms, but the sensation of each drawn letter made his toes curl.

The lying stopped happening as often with age. His soulmate did very little lying in their teenage years, which is not too surprising considering his soulmate didn't lie until Ilya's preteens. The lies eventually came in as a list of yes and no.

It was a relief for Ilya. He didn't have to acknowledge their existence because his father and brother had this annoying talent of knowing when Ilya's soulmate lied. Ilya perfected neutrality like an art form to stop the glares, and soon he ignored his soulmate's lies like his father and brother. He stopped reading them.

His father wanted him to have the surgery, especially if he was going to travel the world playing hockey. Most of Ilya's Russian teammates had theirs removed or completely marked over. He couldn't be the weak one still thinking soulmates are real, even if he was the star of the team with the most potential. That only made his father harass him more about it.

Ilya made the appointment twenty-seven times. Each time he made an excuse not to go. He is sick. He slept in. He has practice. He scheduled the wrong day. Wrong time. Anything he can think of because every night before an appointment, his mother was in his dream.

She sat on her porch bench and caressed her soulmate marks, cherishing them like gold. The grief destroyed her, and she smiled here for the first time.

Not a show for her sons, but a pure, vulnerable smile she didn't dare make around her husband.

It made Ilya cry.

+++++

Shane Hollander was annoying. His smile was too big, and he talked too much. All his emotions showed on his face, and it was like looking at the sun. Ilya had to squint at him.

Ilya wasn't responding, but Shane didn't mind or didn't notice. His questions kept coming like a stream of endless curiosity. Ilya answered some but never followed it up with his own questions. He didn't care, and he needed a smoke. It was snowing out, and this Shane Hollander was telling him he needed to smoke in the wind.

This fucking country.

Shane is over explaining the holidays and family time. Rozanov is too busy counting the freckles on his nose and cheeks. His skin is flawless, and his hair is jet black and short. His eyes are brown like chestnut.

Shane must at some point realize Ilya has no interest in having a conversation because he stops talking and swallows. "Right, uh, I should go. My parents are waiting on me."

Ilya chokes on his next inhale of the cigarette. A shiver shoots through him. His arm is tingling with that all familiar sensation, like a beacon guiding him to land. Ice cold fright squeezes his chest muscles, and all the hairs on the back of his neck rise.

He stands there, stunned in terrified disbelief. No. His mouth is dry, and he almost drops his cigarette.

“What?” he asks because he has to be wrong. This isn’t possibly happening. He didn’t travel all this way for a tournament just to meet his fucking-

“Good luck in the tournament,” Shane repeats, pleasant as the first time.

His phone feels like a brick in his pocket. He tells himself he’s not in Russia. His father is thousands of kilometers away. He can’t hurt him here.

He can’t know Ilya found his *soulmate* who is a *man* in fucking *Canada*. He can’t know anything. Shane can’t know anything because there’s no point. There’s no fucking point. This cannot be happening. He needs to control this. He needs to control the narrative because this can be very dangerous for both of them.

He can’t lie around Shane. He has to stop lying about things that can reveal his identity. He needs to pick and choose which lies are said for the rest of his life. *Fuck*. His whole life changed in a fucking cold alley because Shane Hollander wanted to introduce himself.

Has he given himself up already? Shane doesn’t look none the wiser. He hasn’t caught onto Ilya’s mini heart attack. He thinks they can be *friends*.

No. No. No. He can... He can take advantage of the rivalry the NHL is frothing at the mouth to see.

Yes. That will work.

Accepting his fate, he shakes Shane’s hand. “You will not be so friendly when we beat you.”

Shane grins, and that’s not what he aimed for. Maybe it was. Maybe he wants to see it again. He wants to see Shane make plenty of faces.

“That’s not happening.”

Then Shane finally leaves, and Ilya pulls up his sleeve. His knees buckle.

My parents are waiting on me.

He lights another cigarette.

+++++++

Ilya Rozanov made too many mistakes and lost Rookie of the Year. He worked hard, but not hard enough, and he's going to have to face his father's cold exterior and hateful words. His father will list every mistake he made, call him his greatest disappointment and a failure. He'll strike and strike, and not stop, and Ilya is going to have to take it.

Of course Shane Hollander has to ruin his moment of peace.

"You're sulking. You can't let me have one fucking thing!" Shane shouts. "You're mad you didn't take a victory lap around me!"

I let you have more than you think Ilya sourly argues.

"Not everything is about you, Hollander!" Ilya growls back.

"Then what is it?" Shane counters.

Ilya wants to throw something. He wants to leave. He wants to run away from Shane and his stupid lies that constantly remind him what he can't have. "What the fuck do you want?"

"Nothing! Some air. I wanted to see the view."

Ilya's arm tingles and he grinds his teeth. "Fucking look then."

Shane says nothing. He puts his face in his hands, and he looks miserable. Ilya can't understand why. He won the award - not Ilya. What Ilya does shouldn't matter to him. That's not what their relationship is about.

He wishes it was different, and that exact thought leads him astray into the unknown. "I go home in three days."

"Okay," Shane says slowly. "That's nice."

Ilya looks at Shane then, and he'd laugh at Shane's confusion if it didn't hurt too.

"I just thought we would..." Shane says. Ilya looks away. "Nevermind."

Shane walks down the steps. He turns back. "I will see you next season."

Ilya stares at Shane's outstretched hand like it was a bomb and not an olive branch. Ilya wants to burn it. He wants to yell at him to leave.

I want you to go. He can't say that because he can't even lie because of Shane Hollander. He has to be careful with what he says on the rink because of him.

He doesn't do what he should - a pattern of his. He presses Shane to the wall and kisses him because he's tired. He's so tired, and he's selfish and in trouble already. He tastes Shane with his tongue, swallows his soft moans that burn like vodka.

He wants to say so many lies. Watch them crawl on Shane's arm. Tell him what Ilya can't.

The moment is over when Shane tenses and shoves him away, complaining about the nonexistent people who may see them. Ilya's mouth twitches, sees the way Shane is trying to fight what he wants. A myriad of truths and lies battle in his eyes. The truth wins, and Shane presses Ilya against the wall and kisses him. He tastes the alcohol Shane said he didn't drink.

They drink each other's lies, until the truth becomes too much. Shane walks away without looking back.

"See you next season," Ilya says wistfully, barely loud enough for Shane to hear.

Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

i hope this chapter makes sense. in the show episode 2, there are big missing time periods, and i was relying on the book to help me. didn't help me lol i did morph book and tv heavily in this chapter. i think i still made sense though.

Warning: Shane has an episode when Hayden meets Jackie. He freaks out thinking he lost a friend and teammate. It's a big change for him. I think Shane and Hayden's friendship is so pure, and I wanted to portray how much they mean to each other.

thank you so much for all your comments!! they truly mean a lot to me and i'm so glad u guys are enjoying this trope.

Lily: Still mad about Vegas?

Shane reads the text and almost trips on the sidewalk. He didn't expect to hear from Rozanov. They don't text out of the blue. They don't really talk at all. The last time they talked, they argued about something Shane wasn't too clear on. He guessed Rozanov was upset because he didn't beat Shane at winning Rookie of the Year, and that's why he was hiding on the roof smoking. He learned pretty quickly that wasn't the whole issue, and he got lost on what to do or what to say. Comforting someone wasn't something he did very well.

Now the table has turned, and Rozanov thinks he's upset. Shane had been upset after the party. He got mad when Rozanov kissed him on that rooftop without checking to see if anyone was there to see. Rozanov tried to start something in public, and Shane was livid.

That was months ago, and Shane hasn't thought about him.

At all.

Shane: I'm not mad about anything!

He gets a winky face for a response. Shane grins, relieved, and shakes his head before returning to his steady speed through the neighborhood. He has six more miles to go.

Their situation wasn't ripped to shreds like he once believed.

+++++++

Hayden's first lie to Jackie occurred right in front of Shane at a club. It happened a couple years ago, and it'd been so fast and random. All Shane could do was stare as his friend gawked at his soulmate, who he apparently lied to about not noticing her as she was walking by.

Jackie looked at her arm as the words scrawled over her skin. Hayden's eyes widened, dawned by an even mix of comprehension and bewilderment. Then quickly into fragile wonder with the club's colored lights hitting his face. Jackie was smiling too, and she told him to buy her a drink.

Shane stood silently by as Hayden and Jackie got to know each other. He stared at his drink and watched the condensation drip from the handle.

Then Shane left the table and didn't look back. He heard Hayden call out, but he didn't slow down.

Hayden caught him outside. "Are you okay? What's wrong, man?"

"You found your soulmate," Shane said bluntly. Hayden smiled at the fact, as if just the reminder was all it took to distract him from Shane. Shane did what he could to stop from wringing his hands. He hasn't done that in a decade.

"I did." Hayden tilted his head. "So?"

"So, I'll leave," Shane said. He remembered Hayden drove them here, and his eyes burned. "I'll call someone to pick me up."

"Buddy, you're talking crazy," Hayden teased kindly. "I'll drive you home. Are you done already? That's fine. We can watch an episode of that history show you like. The special about hockey."

Shane bit his cheek. "Jackie is here."

"And I have her number," Hayden said reasonably. "We have a date tomorrow."

"She's your soulmate," Shane tried again. He wasn't explaining this right. He could never explain things right. "You should spend time with her. I don't want to be a bother."

"Bother? Just because I found my soulmate," Hayden said carefully. Earnestly. "Doesn't mean I don't want to be your friend anymore."

That was false. Hayden will want to spend all his time with his soulmate. Shane looked everywhere, flickering left and right before settling on Hayden's shoulder. "Are you going to quit hockey?"

"What? Shane, no. I'm not quitting hockey." Hayden squeezed his shoulder. Shane tensed and he let go, apologetically. "I'm not going anywhere. I found my soulmate, which is awesome, but I'm going to keep playing hockey and being your friend. Your best friend."

"But she's your soulmate," Shane said.

“And? Your life doesn’t end when you find your soulmate,” Hayden reassured. “It gets better. I’ll be playing hockey with my best friend, all while with my soulmate.”

Shane frowned and said nothing.

Hayden chuckled, voice warm and fond without being patronizing. “I’m not going anywhere. You can’t get rid of me that easily.”

Shane nodded curtly, and he took a breath. He breathed again, and his vision cleared. His ears stop ringing. He unclenched his fists. His nails bit into his skin. He needed to wash his hands.

Shane insisted they stay, but Hayden has already made up his mind. He said goodnight to Jackie with hearts in his eyes and told her a weak excuse of having to head in. Shane didn’t get why he lied, considering Jackie knew when he was lying.

She looked between Shane and Hayden, and then smiled, "It was nice meeting you, Shane.”

Shane didn’t understand what was happening, but he calmed down when they got back to Shane’s apartment to watch the hockey special. He had his ginger ale and blankets, and he was feeling better.

“She’s a beaut,” Hayden whistled, reminiscing on his night. “It already feels so right, ya know?”

“She was very nice. Pretty.” Shane offered a smile.

Hayden sighed and sat back. “What do you think your soulmate looks like?”

“I don’t know,” Shane said honestly. “I just want to play hockey.”

“You can have both,” Hayden insisted. Shane’s shoulders rose. Hayden’s tone turned softer, easily changing his course. “That’s alright, man. Soulmates are soulmates. They’re the person meant for you. Maybe you’ll meet her after you retire. I’ll help you find her.”

Shane nodded and focused on the tv. “You don’t need to do that. I don’t really have the time.”

Hayden got swept by the mystery. “Blonde? Brunette? Red head?”

Shane shrugged. No characteristic comes to mind. His soulmate was a blank canvas. He hoped they liked hockey. So far, his soulmate slightly scared him. Too many strange threats and comments.

“Probably brunette. If I see any pretty blonde, I’ll send them your way though,” Hayden laughed. “Just in case.”

Shane stared harder at the screen. “Okay.”

+++++

Shane's arm tingles in the locker room. He rolls up his sleeve when he's sure no one is looking.

I have plans tonight.

Shane frowns. His phone beeps.

Lily: What's a girl to do on a lonely night in Montreal?

Shane blanches at the text. He's in the locker room with his teammates after beating Boston. He's too anxious to answer, has been since he first saw Rozanov on the ice. It was nerve wracking to see him up close after everything they talked about, but it was also riveting to play against him. He won. He wants to live on this feeling.

He chooses to hide his phone in his locker.

Rozanov doesn't stop there. He sends multiple messages like that. He sends invitations that quickly shift to innuendos that Shane doesn't catch immediately, and Rozanov has to explain them. Shane blushes and hides his phone, hoping that if he doesn't look, maybe they'll disappear.

His teammates ask what girl has him smiling like this. He doesn't have an answer for them.

If invitations and innuendos don't get him an answer, Rozanov resorts to chirps and taunts about Montreal not going to the playoffs. Shane falls for it every time, sending *fuck you* while watching Boston play. His arm has been tingling all night.

I love you. You are so sweet to me.

No, I like when you give me nothing. Makes winning easier. I hate challenge.

I pay you money if you get around him. Two thousand.

He's convinced his soulmate is some sort of criminal.

Somehow, even though he's playing, Rozanov manages to text a kissing emoji.

Shane: See you next year, asshole.

Lily: Promise? I still want that asshole... and yes, is proper grammar.

Shane types many alternative texts, but he sends none. He can't form proper sentences when the elephant in the room is mentioned. Rozanov made it crystal clear how badly he wants to fuck him.

And god Shane wants it too. He thinks about it late at night, in his showers, or any time he's alone how it would be for Rozanov to fuck him. He's not afraid to admit he wants it, even sometimes entertains the thought of finding another man to have his first time with rather

than his arch rival. But then memories of his time with Rozanov in his bed reminds him they do their best communicating under the sheets.

He trusts Rozanov. He's attractive. They share the same secret. He's made Shane come multiple times. Rozanov has had sex with men before, so it won't be two men who don't know what they're doing. No, Rozanov very much knows what he's doing.

It also sounds horrifying to dare find another man interested in him. Maybe one day he will meet someone who wants to have sex with him. The possibility makes him anxious.

However, Rozanov is here, explicitly saying his desire to fuck him. Shane doesn't understand why Rozanov wants *him* so badly, but he does, even though he could get anyone and does. Rozanov doesn't show any sign of stopping - hinted by a dick pic almost two years later, and then another text describing how big his dick is.

After reading that, Shane exercised harder, burying the image under hours of exertion and aches. He can practically feel Rozanov's grin on the other end.

He's getting ready for their game, when his phone beeps.

Lily: If Boston wins this round I get to fuck you next fall. Deal?

Shane doesn't respond until late in the night.

Shane: And what do I get if Montreal wins?

Lily: Same thing.

Kissing emoji.

Shane smiles.

+++++++

Rozanov makes fun of his inability to 'sext.' Where he learned that word, Shane has no idea. Rozanov asks again where they're going to meet, and he must be wearing Shane down because he responds this time.

Shane: If you're lucky, I'll text you after the game.

Lily: Are you as hard as I am right now?

Shane sputters and hurriedly throws his phone in his locker. He freezes when his arm tingles, and he feels like he's been caught.

Never in life have I blushed. My people do not blush. We do not do this.

Odd.

+++++

Montreal wins the game, and Shane does text Rozanov. He tells him to meet at the back door, and an hour later he finds Rozanov standing in the alleyway.

Rozanov frowns, vaguely scared. “You will murder me.”

“Maybe!” Shane scoffs. “Get in!”

Rozanov rushes inside, and Shane shoves him to the wall. “Why the fuck did you think it was okay to sext me before the game? What the fuck?”

Rozanov puts his hands up in surrender and studies him. “You were hard, weren’t you?”

Shane stares, mouth gaped.

“For how long?” A pause. “The *whole* game?”

Shane scoffs again and goes upstairs. “You’re such a fucking asshole.”

“You missed me, didn’t you?” Rozanov sings, too pleased by Shane’s intentional silence.

“I fucking didn’t,” Shane denies. He’s lied twice now to Rozanov. Two lies for his soulmate to read after months of truth. Why does Rozanov get the lies he normally refuses to tell? It makes no sense. “And I still beat your ass.”

Rozanov scoffs. “Oh, barely.”

They reach the second floor, and Rozanov compliments the apartment. Shane rambles about how he bought it. Rozanov teases him with his infectious grin, and Shane rolls his eyes, fighting a blush he has no chance of winning against.

Then Rozanov kisses him, making Shane’s knees go weak. Shane cups his neck, pulling him close. Rozanov kisses the corner of his mouth. “No lies. Only truth.”

Shane blindly nods, kissing him again. “No lies.”

“Only truth,” Rozanov repeats, breaking the kiss.

Shane’s heart is beating like crazy. “Only truth,” he parrots.

Rozanov kisses him. “Where do you want me? The kitchen? The floor?”

Shane huffs a laugh. “Fuck you.”

Shane shows him to the bedroom, and Rozanov makes fun of the number of pillows. Shane shouldn't be surprised.

"You're such an asshole," Shane says.

"I think maybe you like it," Rozanov purrs. The accusation is shaped like a fact rather than a guess from learning about each other over the years.

Shane doesn't respond to that. Rozanov gives him one of his rare soft smiles, and within seconds they're kissing. Rozanov is cupping his nape and sliding his tongue into their kiss, consuming Shane where he stands. Shane gives it right back, kissing him with an obsessive need that burns in his chest. His fingers sink into curly strands, petting the dark blond hair that haunts his dreams.

They're naked when Rozanov asks again, "You still want?"

Shane nods. "I still want."

Rozanov opens him up with a focus that rivals the rapt and meticulous attention to detail he shows on the ice. He spreads kisses over sensitive skin and crevices, lavishing Shane's inner thighs and hips. He lubes his fingers and carefully and patiently pets Shane's entrance, getting him used to the feeling. He kisses the head of Shane's cock, licking his shaft with the flat of his tongue, slow and unhurried to make Shane writhe in pleasure. Shane is left gasping, holding his knees to his chest as Rozanov sucks on his cock and pumps two fingers inside his hole. He keeps at it, even when Shane is ready.

Rozanov's crucifix necklace dangles over his chest when he asks again. "Is okay?"

Shane breathes heavily and looks between their bodies, where Rozanov has his cock lined with his hole. Rozanov is watching his face, looking for any signs of him changing his mind or fear. He looks and sounds earnestly sincere, checking on him again.

Shane nods, and Rozanov slides inside at a glacial pace. Shane brings his head back with a gasp, and his fingers dig into Rozanov's shoulders. He can feel every inch of his cock filling him up. The delicious heat and thickness amplified that overwhelming arousal flaring in his gut and chest. His cock stays hard by Rozanov's hand and his vigilant attention to Shane's pleasure, and it doesn't take long for them to find an easy rhythm.

Rozanov doesn't stop kissing him while he fucks him. Their kisses turn filthier, more tongue than lips. He holds Shane's legs by his thighs, and Shane holds onto his shoulders. Rozanov's hips snap forward, and Shane yelps when he finds his prostate. Rozanov fucks him in that exact angle, and Shane whimpers and breaks from the kiss. Rozanov instead kisses Shane's jaw and cheek.

Rozanov's strong hands steady him as he gets on his hands and knees. He presses his cock back into his hole, bottoming out smoothly with the lube. He kisses Shane's shoulder blade. "Is okay?"

“Jesus Christ, Rozanov,” Shane groans. He promised he wouldn’t lie. Rozanov’s necklace skims his sweaty back with every thrust. Rozanov hovers over him, caging him to the bed as he fucks him. Shane lets out a guttural moan at a particularly hard thrust.

Rozanov’s hands dig into his skin, now kneeling behind him and snapping his hips, growing more sloppy the closer he gets. Shane grabs for the pillows, muffling his whimpers and shouts, and he comes hard on the sheets.

“Hollander? Are you-“

“Oh, god,” Shane groans, mind a hazy mess and pleasure sharp with every thrust. Rozanov chases his pleasure, and it doesn’t take long for him to come with a deep moan. He has a death grip on Shane’s hips, almost biting and certainly going to leave bruises.

Rozanov kisses Shane’s shoulder blades and neck. He moves them to their sides, spooning him, and he caresses Shane’s thigh and ass. He plants more kisses, while Shane works to regulate his breathing and racing heart.

Rozanov takes a shower and comes back. He places his head on Shane’s chest and looks up at him. “Worth the wait?”

Shane smiles, loopy from post-orgasm and the way Rozanov looks in his towel and smells like his body wash. He puts a hand on Rozanov’s throat and kisses him, quick and with feeling, and does the same to his eyebrow. He nuzzles into his wet hair.

Rozanov watches him do this with wide, alert blue eyes. He moves his head. “I should go.”

Shane nods, and he has an odd feeling he did something wrong. “Okay.”

+++++

“What do you think your soulmate looks like?”

Rozanov pauses while tying his laces. He finishes and then switches to his other shoe. “Why?”

Shane bites his lip and hugs the sweater closer to his chest like a shield. Rozanov’s cologne is laced in the fabric, while the man himself smells like Shane’s body wash. The fact makes his cheeks tint pink. Rozanov has seen every inch of his body, touched and caressed skin he himself never learned to appreciate. He pulled whimpers and moans from his parted, bitten lips as he fucked him, and Shane was blushing over Rozanov smelling like his body wash.

“Hayden thinks mine is brunette,” Shane says.

Rozanov’s eyes narrow, and he stands up straight. “Hayden is gossip.”

Shane smiles. "Do you think your soulmate is Russian? They could be there watching the Olympics."

"Not possible," Rozanov says. "Russia does not do soulmates."

A stone falls to Shane's stomach. "What?"

Rozanov gestures at his blank arm. "Most Russians receive surgery to get gene removed. No more soulmate. No more words."

A lump forms in the back of Shane's throat. He read about the surgery when he first learned about his words. The surgery is outlawed in many countries. Only a select few allow it and perform it. He studies Rozanov's left forearm and tries to find any blemishes to provide proof for Rozanov having the surgery. He couldn't...

He could have. Shane's never seen lies on his arm. Not even once.

"Why do Russians get it removed?"

Rozanov's tone comes out emotionless and overly rehearsed. "I am told soulmates are weaknesses. No benefits."

Shane clutches the sweater, feeling suddenly ice cold. He wished many times to avoid his soulmate. He has things he needs to do first, games to play and Stanley Cups to win. He didn't want anything getting in the way of that. He also never met a woman who he sees himself having that sort of relationship with, even though he tried.

There's no reason why he should be invested in Rozanov's perspective or reasons for never meeting his. They're arch rivals destined to battle it out for first place. Regardless, his questions slip off his tongue in a moment of unbridled ambition.

"Did you have the surgery?" Shane asks.

Shane expects to get another non-answer - a deflection - but Rozanov flatly says, "No."

"Oh." Shane tries and fails to control his smile. "That's good."

"Yes," Rozanov says, amused. It's gone in a flash by a barrier of indifference.

"I bet your parents will be there, right?" Shane asks, moving on.

"My father, yes. Maybe my brother, but who knows?"

"Cool," Shane says. "Anyways, I'm psyched. I've been dreaming about it my whole life."

"Dreaming of what? Bronze metal?"

"You fucking wish, dude," Shane glowers.

Rozanov grins. "Hey, uh, remember when I made you come hands-free?"

Shane's smile spreads across his face. "Go fuck yourself, Rozanov."

Rozanov leans down, placing his hands on the steps above Shane to hover over him. "Such a good trick."

Shane's cheeks turn bright pink. He doesn't meet Rozanov's eye, choosing to look at his necklace instead.

"Soulmate. Maybe they are annoying," Rozanov whispers cryptically, catching Shane off guard. He leans in so their faces are inches apart. Shane's gaze jumps to his lips. "Maybe they are Montreal fan."

Shane leans forward a little, forcing Rozanov to break the space. "Your cab is definitely here."

Rozanov smiles wickedly and kisses him. His kisses are slow and ardent, similar to the kindling flames in his fireplace. Rozanov takes his sweater back and leaves.

Shane closes his eyes and rests his head on the metal railing.

Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

Some more angst.

Chapter Notes

you guys are SO sweet for your comments and kudos. i am so happy you guys are enjoying this story. please please continue to leave your comments bc sometimes i get inspired , make changes , or whatever and helps improve my story!

so sorry for the angst. it's going to be okay i swear. this story and my other one both updated with sadness. double whammy

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

Sochi Olympics. Shane was a panel of buzzing electricity he could hardly control. He was representing his country, but he was in Russia, and he has never visited this country before. He didn't know what to expect, and the extra security requirements were worrying. He read many articles before the plane, and each one added more stones to his stomach.

He can't imagine how Rozanov was feeling. Shane was a remote switching from thrilled to stressed, and both buttons were smashed. Rozanov is representing his country, and while Sochi was beautiful, it failed to represent the dangers people in Russia can find here. Rozanov can protect himself. He would know what to do. Still, he opens the text app.

Shane: Hey! You doing okay?

Scott Hunter and Carter Vaughan join him on the beach. Scott congratulates him for his win, and Shane is thankful he's not still starstruck. They make jokes about their roommates. Shane is still eyeing his phone when Carter mentions watching some of the other games and walking around.

"It's bizarre seeing people with nothing on their arms. Everyone is bundled up, but inside their arms are on display," Carter says, confused. "They are not lying about Russians being blunt."

"They have surgeries here," Shane explains. Scott tenses in his chair. "I found an article about it. They get their soulmate gene removed, and they don't receive words on their arms anymore."

Not a lie - he studied the subject as soon as Rozanov left.

“That’s messed up,” Carter says with a grimace. “I guess it makes sense if your soulmate is the same gender. It can be pretty dangerous for some of the Olympic players. Some of the men’s figure skaters are truly brave.”

“Brave?” Scott asks.

Carter lowers his voice and glances around the beach. “You know, because of the gay thing, right? They’re risking their lives to be here. I’d say that’s pretty brave. If the wrong person finds out their soulmate is a man? They could be in real danger.”

“What do they do?” Shane asks, hesitant to get the words out.

Carter shrugs. “They wear sleeves exclusively, hang out in the locker rooms, and not lie.”

“Not lie,” Scott says, looking awfully pale.

“Telling the truth at all times sounds exhausting,” Carter chuckles and clicks his tongue.

Shane looks at his covered arm. He hasn’t got a single word since the Olympics began. Since he got to Russia. “How would you go so long without lying?”

“No lies, man. Just truth.” Carter tilts his head, looking the definition of sympathetic. “I couldn’t do it, but I assume you speak generally, don’t get too specific when you talk, and give short answers. It’d drive me mad having to worry about everything I say.”

No lies. Only truth.

Shane can hear his heartbeat in his ears. How many times had Rozanov whispered that to him? Rozanov made him promise they wouldn’t lie and only speak the truth. Every single time they met. Shane had been desperate to move things along last time, and Rozanov didn’t budge until Shane finished his promise.

He thought Rozanov was just trying to be communicative, and didn’t want Shane to feel uncomfortable. He assumed Rozanov wanted to make sure Shane felt safe, and everything was consensual. He didn’t think for one second Rozanov was taking proper precaution to make sure no life altering discoveries were made.

When would he have... Shane didn’t lie, and if he did, it wasn’t over anything serious or personal. He’ll throw out a yes or no when he means the opposite, but that was hardly identifying.

Shane stomach churns. He has lied to Rozanov. At his apartment, Rozanov accused him of missing him, and Shane shut that down with a definite no. But he had missed Rozanov, even when he shouldn’t. Did Rozanov’s arm tingle? Did his lie draw on Rozanov’s skin? How many of his words have painted on Rozanov’s arm only to be covered as quickly as they were said?

Did... Does Rozanov think they are soulmates? Did he know? Did he find out they were soulmates and felt it was essential to keep the news hidden? From even Shane? Did he not think he could trust Shane to keep his mouth shut? Both of their careers would be over if anyone even so much as theorized them being in a relationship.

A memory comes to the front of his mind. Then a flood of them. Shane congratulating Rozanov for being drafted first. Rozanov laughing when he said he was happy for him. The dozens of questions Rozanov asked him like it was a test - some sort of tactic Shane mistakenly saw as a vain attempt for compliments. Rozanov being quiet on the bench at games against Montreal.

No lies. Only truth.

You'll always get the truth from me, Hollander.

A horrible conclusion sends spikes into his skull and spine.

Did Rozanov not want him to be his soulmate? Was this rejection? Did Rozanov actually hate him? Was their rivalry real? Held in a metal grip together by Rozanov.

No, he's thinking too much. All that is subjective. Shane was a terrible liar. It's one of the reasons why he doesn't lie. Lies don't fit well on his tongue, and he didn't see the point of them. Rozanov - anyone - could see the lies he used to mask before he says it. Rozanov was also conceited, and he would dig for compliments from anyone. This was all circumstantial evidence. No proof other than to show Rozanov is an asshole.

Rozanov told him how harsh Russia is about soulmates. It would make sense for him to be conditioned into hiding from his soulmate. He would lie carefully naturally and not seek them out.

Though that doesn't explain how the lies on Shane's arm are delicately shaped into ones Shane can't possibly use to identify any hints or physical characteristics. Looking back at the lies he's read, he knows what he's looking for, and he can see their association to what a hockey player would say.

No, Rozanov is one of the biggest names in the industry. Someone would eventually connect the dots.

Rozanov isn't his soulmate. They don't even like each other. Are they even friends? Sometimes he thought they were. They made each other laugh, and Shane looked forward to their games against each other. He fought harder, focused more with a fiery intensity he didn't have with other teams, and his victories were sweeter. They were equals. He felt like he met his match with Rozanov on the ice.

Shane internally winces. Wrong choice of words.

"You okay?" Scott asks.

Shane's stomach is queasy and nauseous. His ears are ringing. His face is flushed. His left arm feels uncomfortably heavy. "I'm fine."

Fuck.

+++++++

Shane spots Rozanov standing on the other side of the arena. Shane tries not to hurry over, but he's pretty sure he fails.

"Hey," he says, heart racing. Russia's hockey team played terribly. They were a mess, and he knew Rozanov was upset. He stood like a statue, glaring at the rink like it personally offended him. It probably did.

Rozanov doesn't look at him. "Not here."

"No, I'm not..." Shane doesn't know how to end that sentence. "I saw you up here. I wanted to see how you're doing."

"Fine," Rozanov says, voice harsh and cold. "Go sit down."

Shane's arm doesn't tingle. He's at a standoff between relief and disappointment. *Fine. Fine* has variable definitions. *Fine* - I'm alive and standing. *Fine* - the weather is fine. "We..."

"We are not." Rozanov stops. A crack in his composure. The hair on Shane's arms stands up, ready to grab the rest of his words. As if Rozanov knew what he was thinking, he snaps, "Don't finish that. Go away, Hollander."

Why did he stop? Because it would be a lie?

Shane's eyes burn, and he steps closer. He hates to see Rozanov so rigid and withdrawn. He won't even look at him, and all Shane wants to do is help. He is terrible at comforting someone, but with Rozanov he will try. He knows what it's like to lose badly, and while he can tell him it's not Rozanov's fault, he knows from personal experience it would do nothing good.

Shane takes another step. "Are you okay?"

"Please," Rozanov says. Ready to break. "Go."

"You didn't answer my text," Shane says.

Rozanov's jaw clenches, and he finally turns to him. "No, I did not answer your boring text. Now, will you go?"

Shane swears the ground is moving under his feet. He's disoriented, overwhelmed, and his skin feels like it's on fire. He's asleep, trying to figure out if it's a dream or nightmare. Both.

He needs a lie. He needs dishonesty like he needs air. This is the first time he sees the importance of them. "Do you want me to go?"

"Я никогда не хочу, чтобы ты уходил," Rozanov mutters in Russian. "Go!"

Shane has never seen him so angry, at least not directed at him. Shane swallows and looks down at the game happening beneath them. His skin feels like rubber, and his chest is restricting his breathing. It's too loud in here. Too many people, too many emotions. He balls his hands into fists, trying to stop all his senses from building too high. They stretch and pull, doing him in.

If he was Rozanov and they were soulmates, he'd be disappointed too.

"Okay," Shane exasperates. "Fuck."

He leaves without another word. Whatever Rozanov said, it was the truth.

+++++++

Rozanov never texts him back.

Rozanov wins the Stanley Cup.

This was a sign they aren't soulmates, and he'd been wrong. Rozanov didn't need him.

No, he was the grand owner of a Stanley Cup. His eyes twinkled on the screen. His grin - no - a *smile* spread across his face, causing his eyes to crinkle and dimples to form in his cheeks. He was sweaty and trembling, exhilarated with adrenaline and victory. All his hard work had paid off.

He was beautiful. He looked the most beautiful Shane had ever seen him.

"You hate Rozanov," Hayden says, confident like he was stating any scientific fact.

"Of course," Shane says, selfishly wanting to leave a mark of his feelings for Rozanov on someone's skin. A part of him hopes it is Rozanov, and he can force him to listen to him.

"But he's very good at hockey."

"The best, probably," Shane murmurs.

His own arm has been bare for a long time now. His soulmate has either decided the truth was essential now, or they were dead. The latter was too grave to think about.

Rozanov shouts something about his mother. He's surrounded by his team, shining brighter than any star or sun. Shane's eyes burned from watching him, bittersweet pride encased his heart.

Hayden and the others leave the living room, muttering about Rozanov winning. Shane remains on the couch. He can't look away.

+++++++

Rozanov should be here. He's late and missing. Shane is pacing, trying to breathe.

Rozanov shows up at the last second, making a stupid comment about Shane's watch.

"Where the fuck were you? We're on in five seconds," he sneers.

"25 seconds," Rozanov corrects.

"What were you even doing?"

A pause. "I was busy."

"With who?" Shane snaps.

Rozanov doesn't answer. He makes that stupid grin that Shane wants to punch.

They announce the winner, and Shane is fuming. Rozanov was pushing him, acting like he didn't do anything wrong. He was acting like he didn't ignore Shane for six months.

Six fucking months. No texts or calls. No lies.

His hand followed the curve of Shane's back, and Shane wanted to both push him away and lean into him. He hated not knowing, and he hated Rozanov for confusing him. He hated being left alone to deal with his own complex feelings. Rozanov was so cold to him in Russia, and then he disappeared from Shane's life. He was convinced Rozanov hated him and was done with him, tossed him out like trash.

Now he's going to act like nothing changed? Fuck that.

Shane can't breathe, and he hides in the bathroom. He checks to make sure he's alone, and then he leans on the sink.

Of course Rozanov follows him. Shane glares at him, seething with boiled rage. Six months. Six fucking months of nothing. For a moment, Shane thought they were soulmates. He practically begged Rozanov to lie to him, and Rozanov shut down every opportunity and erased him from his life.

Now Shane didn't want to know - he hopes they aren't. He didn't know what Rozanov was doing or how he felt about him. Did he hate the idea of being soulmates with Shane that much? Did he fuck him to get him out of his system?

He didn't know what Rozanov wanted at all. It was like they were strangers again.

Rozanov leans against the paper towel dispenser, all loose and carefree. "Well?"

"What?" Shane asks. They're in the same room alone for the first time in six months. All his exhausted rage comes out. "What the fuck do you want, Rozanov? You haven't answered a text from me in, like, six months. You won't even acknowledge I exist unless there's a fucking camera pointed at us, and then it's for a fucking clown show. So yeah, what the fuck do you actually want from me, Rozanov?"

"I want you to suck my dick."

"Oh, fuck you!" Shane shouts. "You are unbelievable. You suck my dick."

He looks away, trying to remember how to breathe. Heavy footsteps approach him, and he turns back to face him. Rozanov grabs his chin with his thumb and pointer finger. The small touch makes Shane's knees weak, and he leans into his touch.

"Maybe ask nicely," Rozanov murmurs.

Shane's eyes are burning, and he tries to look away. Rozanov doesn't let him. He forcefully brings his head up, making him look at him. "Hm?"

It takes great restraint not to nuzzle into Rozanov's sturdy palm. He closes his eyes, savoring his cedar wood smell. He meets Rozanov's blue eyes. "Please."

Rozanov leans in a little, like he's sharing a secret. Shane stops breathing. "If you want me to get on my knees on this filthy bathroom floor and suck your dick, you will have to ask nicer than that."

Rozanov wipes his thumb on his chin, and Shane tries to follow. He feels off-center and lost with Rozanov no longer holding him. He'll say anything Rozanov wants him to.

"Please get on your knees, on this filthy bathroom floor, and suck my dick." Shane's gaze lingers over Rozanov in a suit with his curly hair slicked back. His lips are noticeably plush. It's almost too much to take in. "Please."

Rozanov tilts his head down, and Shane takes the chance to lean his forehead against his. He breathes in slowly, expanding his ribs to fit more of Rozanov's smell in his lungs. Rozanov moves his head, and Shane falls forward to lean on his shoulder and neck instead. He closes his eyes.

"No."

Shane freezes. "What?"

“No,” Rozanov repeats in his ear. The deep thrum of his voice makes Shane lightheaded. “We will go back to our seats, watch the rest of this boring show, and then go to boring party after.”

Rozanov pulls away to face him. “And then, when you have been waiting all night, you’ll come back to my hotel room, and I will maybe...*maybe* do more than just suck your dick.”

Shane was looking at his lips as he talked. He grins. “When did your English get so good?”

Rozanov leans against the sink. “I, uh, the New Yorker is helpful.”

“Really?” Shane laughs.

“No,” Rozanov says. The New Yorker is boring.”

Shane smiles. “My dad loves it.”

“Ah, so being boring is genetic.”

“Wow.” Shane smiles harder, his cheeks ache. “Genetic.”

They’re both quiet for a moment, and then Rozanov faces him again. “Then let’s make a deal. If you win MVP tonight, I will blow you, fuck you, whatever you want.”

Shane blushes. “And if I win?”

The look on Rozanov’s face turns raw and open, shocking the smile off Shane’s face. Rozanov cups his jaw and neck, and he kisses him. Shane eagerly kisses back, pleasantly surprised by the lack of arousal it stirs. They don’t pull away, both of them absorbing comfort and affection from the other. It soothes the ache in Shane’s chest, and he is lighter by the time the kiss breaks.

Rozanov leaves, and Shane checks for tears in his eyes. Thankfully, they didn’t fall.

+++++

Shane walks inside Rozanov’s room. It’s the penthouse on the top level of the hotel. Rozanov is standing by the large floor to ceiling window with a glass of vodka. His shirt is untucked and unbuttoned.

“Congratulations.”

“Thank you.” Rozanov takes a sip. “Now, take off your clothes.”

Shane blushes. “You’re such an asshole.”

Rozanov watches attentively, as if he wished to memorize the way Shane looked while he undressed. Shane folds his clothes on the couch, and he stops at his underwear. He hesitates.

“What?”

Shane gestures awkwardly. “Just a lot of windows.”

In response, Rozanov leads them to the bedroom. He moves a chair to the end of the bed. Shane follows him in. “Good. Now, get on the bed.”

Shane slowly climbs to the middle of the bed. He pushes the pillows so he can lean comfortably against them. He expects Rozanov to join him, instead he sits in the chair like a king on his throne. He compliments the hotel’s vodka, and Shane crosses his legs.

“Touch yourself,” Rozanov orders.

Shane blinks. “What?”

“Show off for me. I want to watch you,” he explains with a sip of his drink, cool and collected.

Shane was not calm. He’s blushing. “You what?”

“It’s my special day, Hollander. I want to watch.”

Shane puts his hands on his thighs. “I’ve never...”

“No shit.”

“Fuck you.” Shane tries to get an ounce of control. “Give me some vodka, at least.”

“Mm, no, no,” Rozanov denies. He sips again. “Vodka is for after, as your reward.”

An argument climbs Shane’s throat, but he swallows it down. The idea of touching himself in front of someone makes him nervous, but the fact Rozanov wants to be there as he touches himself, yearned to watch *as a reward* encourages Shane’s hand to begin to pet his neck and chest. He desired Shane enough to want that, sitting with his drink as his eyes roamed over his body.

Shane leans back, the fight completely gone, and he caresses his neck, closing his eyes as he listens to his racing pulse. His cock stirs in his underwear, and he parts his legs. He runs his hand down his body, over his chest, to rub his palm over his cock.

Rozanov doesn’t look away from his gaze. Shane tries to silently beg him to come to him with his eyes. He parts his lips, arching his back, chasing his own hands.

“No lies,” Rozanov says, voice hoarse. “Only truth.”

The words would hurt if they didn’t work like Pavlov. Rozanov *wants* him. Shane can see it on his face, and the way he’s gripping his glass. There’s a prominent tent in his pants. His

eyes are black and captivating, completely wiping away the blue in them.

Rozanov raises a brow.

“No lies,” Shane murmurs, breathing heavy. He squeezes his chest and teases his cock. “Only truth.”

Rozanov nods slowly, and Shane’s skin is sensitive and hot. Every touch leaves him burning. “Do you want to know how it feels?”

Shane strokes his cock and pets his thighs. “How what feels?”

“Holding the Cup.”

A disgruntled laugh makes its way out of Shane’s mouth. “You fucking asshole.”

“Ah, I can barely describe it,” Rozanov groans, tilting his head. “Oh my god, Hollander.”

Shane grins and slides off his underwear. He throws them at Rozanov’s chest. Rozanov gives him a dark look, holding them like a prize won and tossing them to the floor.

Shane takes the lube off the drawer. He coats two of his fingers and brings them to his entrance. He watches Rozanov’s eyes drop down, as he circles his hole before pressing inside. He breathes heavier, starting a slow rhythm and going deeper. He lets out a small whimper when he grazes his prostate. He usually can’t find it himself, and he grows more desperate, thrusting his finger faster. He thumbs the slit of his cock.

Rozanov’s mouth is open. “Fuck.”

Shane waits for him to meet his eye. He bares his throat and swallows. “Are you going to fuck me?”

“We will see,” Rozanov says, heady and wanton.

Shane’s lips quirk. “I need...”

Rozanov zeroes in on his face, overridden by his dire need to hear the end of his sentence. “What?”

Shane adds another finger and moans. He scissors them, opening himself up. “You know.”

“Tell me.”

Shane presses his two fingers all the way in, savoring the feel of being full, even though he’s desperate for something bigger.

“You,” Shane says. He doesn’t look away. He makes a show by parting his legs even further, allowing Rozanov to see more of what he’s doing. What he has to offer. It’d be so easy to fuck him. “I need you.”

Rozanov drinks in the view and then the rest of his vodka. He stands and removes his shirt, giving Shane a full view of his sculpted chest and broad shoulders. Muscles are carved in his abdomen, and Shane's mouth goes dry. He forgets about his own pleasure, suddenly hit with a white hot overwhelming desire to touch - to taste Rozanov on his tongue.

Shane gets on his hands and knees and crawls across the bed. He nuzzles his face to Rozanov's bulge, smelling him and his musky scent. He closes his eyes, kissing Rozanov's inner thigh and rubbing his cheek against his clothed cock. Rozanov brushes his hair, lightly running through his strands.

Rozanov fucks him on his hands and knees. A steady hand presses on his upper back, urging him down for a more deep angle. Shane is gasping, clutching the bedsheets with both hands, moaning at every thrust directly to his prostate. The room is filled with obscene sounds of skin hitting skin, Shane's whimpers and moans, and Rozanov's grunts and praises.

Shane comes with two strokes of his cock, and he comes hard on the bedsheets. Rozanov's hands grip his hips harder, fucking him at a sloppy, fast pace. He comes deep inside him with Shane's name on his lips.

They both wash off in the shower and return to the bed. Shane fiddles with his vodka, which was gross, while Rozanov smokes. Shane tentatively inquires whether he's going back to Russia.

"Do you have to?"

"There is no 'have to.' It is home," Rozanov says.

"Yeah, but I don't know." Shane watches his facial features. "Is it safe?"

"What do you mean 'safe?'" Rozanov asks.

Shane thinks about Russia and their homophobia. Rozanov could be in danger if anyone were to find out about him. Does he wonder about that? Is he ever scared?

"I don't know," Shane says weakly. His eyes flicker to Rozanov's left arm. Blank. "Do you- Do you even like it there?"

Rozanov gives him a long look, and he looks both annoyed and tired. "What difference does it make?"

Shane doesn't back down. "A pretty big one, I think."

Rozanov looks away from him and takes a drag from his cigarette. His eyes are far away, yet his thoughts remain hidden behind his indifference. "I need to sleep."

"Oh," Shane replies, disappointed. "Yeah, me too."

They do need to sleep. He truly didn't know where he was going with his questions. All he knew was that Rozanov was going back to Russia where he wouldn't be safe. He wished he didn't go.

He's ashamed walking out, feeling vulnerable and wounded. He's in the elevator when he pauses, stricken with grief.

They hadn't even kissed.

Chapter End Notes

Я никогда не хочу, чтобы ты уходил - I never want you to leave.

Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

i'm sorry it took awhile for an update but i knew i wanted to add things. there's a lot of time that passes where we don't know what happened. i also knew the dialogue was going to be tricky but honestly i probably changed maybe three words from the og? to fit the au? i'd say that's pretty good. the book helped too.

thank you SO MUCH for your comments. u guys r so sweet and im so glad ur enjoying this story. it means the world to me.

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

If we beat them, I am buying everyone a condo, and we can live together forever. Like one big, happy family.

Shane frowns. He hopes again he doesn't meet his soulmate. They're obviously insane.

His soulmate is back to speaking their normal amount of odd and vaguely threatening lies. Shane isn't sure what caused them to stick to the truth for almost six months, but at this point, he doesn't really care.

His soulmate is supposed to be the perfect person for him. Someone he's destined to be with and love them until his dying breath. They're supposed to get along and live in harmony, start a family and enjoy the rest of their days together. It's normal to search for your soulmate. Everyone wants to find their soulmate - the articulate puzzle piece that will make you feel complete. Fill the chasm in your chest and feel right at home with each other.

There's a hole in Shane's chest, but his soulmate is the last thing on his mind. He has other more important things occupying his focus and attention.

"Having a good night?"

Shane glares at Rozanov. He says nothing. His blood is boiling loud in his ears. He's surprised he can hear Rozanov over his rage.

"That's nice," Rozanov muses, beaming with mischief. "I think there's still time for a hat trick. Should I do now or wait til last second?"

Shane considers breaking the rules for once and slamming his hockey stick into Rozanov's knee. The victory wouldn't taste as good if Rozanov couldn't physically play.

Rozanov grins, as if he can hear his conniving thoughts. He pretends to think. "Cause I don't know, last second is more fun, but..."

Boston wins, and Shane is fuming.

It's later in the night after Shane and his teammates go to their hotel rooms or the closest bar while Boston celebrates in the locker room when his arm tingles again.

What? I said no so such thing. Show me footage of me saying that.

+++++

Shane smells leather and cedar wood. He blindly clutches the side of his couch for purchase, moaning and thrusting his body back. He would've fought or complained about being thrown onto the couch in a rather demanding way, but his thoughts quickly diverted to the mind numbing pleasure surging through his limbs, and any sort of protest flies out the window. He hates how fast Rozanov can disarm him, tug on his control as if it was Rozanov's to have.

He hates how he doesn't actually hate it.

Rozanov snaps his hips, gripping his thigh to keep his legs parted how he likes. He fucks into him, pressing deeper and harder into his hole. He rolls his hips, and all Shane can do is try not to sob at the way his cock hits his prostate. There's a hand on the back of his head, holding him down and pulling his hair.

Shane is pretty sure he's drooling. He's drunk off cresting pleasure and Rozanov's extremely thorough wrecking of his body. All he can do is moan and whimper, and do everything he can to not melt into the couch. His efforts are futile - always have been when it comes to Rozanov.

Rozanov kisses the curve of his neck and shoulders. His lips trail down Shane's spine, accompanied by a flicker of flames, heightening the pleasure coursing through him. Shane's lips part, feeling every inch of Rozanov's cock fucking deep inside him. The hot weight of his cock is deliciously perfect, filling him how he likes. He'd do anything to keep him fucking him, to feel his chest at his back and his lips on his sensitive skin. His brain might be leaking out of his ears, but he's never felt so complete.

"So fucking gorgeous for me," Rozanov whispers to his back with a kiss. Once he starts kissing, he doesn't stop. "Feel so fucking good around me. This okay?"

"Yes," Shane whines, shuddering under his attention.

"So tight and hot." He hears Rozanov smile in his voice. He runs the tip of his tongue over the nape of his neck, and he nips his skin. Shane shakes with need. "You want to feel my cock moving in you during tomorrow's game?"

"Rozanov," he cries. The idea of being sore during a game from being fucked by someone everyone thinks is his hated rival shouldn't be as tempting as it is. "Yes, god. Please."

Rozanov fucks him with sharp, measured thrusts, grinding into him like he has a point to prove. A permanent reminder that he's the only one who can make Shane feel this way. No soulmate can compare. Shane's eyes roll back. He is a writhing mess of broken sobs, as he takes everything Rozanov gives him. His cock twitches between his belly and the couch. Every thrust grazes his prostate, every kiss to his blushing, sweaty skin, and the possessive grip of his hair and thigh all come together, and he comes hard with a cry.

"Fuck, Hollander," Rozanov groans, pounding into Shane. "I fucking love when you come for me. Fuck!"

Rozanov was usually more affectionate leading up to sex, but as time went on, he became more handsy and insistent with leaving kisses all over Shane's body afterwards as well. It was why Shane sometimes left with hickeys on his thighs. Shane angrily told him to never do that again. Rozanov folded his arms while he yelled at him, only to leave a bite mark on Shane's chest five minutes later.

But Shane can only stare in awe while Rozanov kisses from his hip to his thighs a week later. His chest heaves, and his spent cock twitches. Blue eyes glued to brown - *almond* Rozanov once said - and Shane didn't leave the bed without another round of adoring kisses.

+++++++

"Have you found your soulmate yet, Shane Hollander?"

His heart skips a beat, pumping with adrenaline unrelated to the game. His media training fails to kick in, and all he can do is deadpan, "No."

"Oh no!" the reporter replies with sympathy that sounds far too dramatized. She gestures to the crowds. "Maybe she's in here cheering you on."

Shane matches her overly wide smile, and his facial muscles strain. "Yes, maybe. That would be nice."

Her face does that thing he's noticed means she's about to say something particularly scandalizing or shocking. An attempt to throw him off and provide the best news coverage. "I heard Rozanov found his soulmate. Svetlana. A childhood friend whose father is in the Boston Bear's Hall of Fame. Childhood sweethearts. Isn't that adorable?"

Shane forces a curt nod. Sweat pools at his neck. Russian woman. Makes sense. Makes every bit of sense. Soulmates have everything in common. Russian woman from childhood and loves hockey. Perfect match. He tries to remember if Rozanov has mentioned her before. The lights are too bright, and the fans are cheering and talking loudly around him.

He's nauseous and irritable. Does this mean Rozanov has been fucking Shane while with his soulmate? He knows Rozanov fucks other people, but would he really do that to his

soulmate? Did she know about him? Did they know this whole time? What does she look like? Is she pretty? She has to be.

The reporter is watching him, eager for drama and a chance to prod at the two biggest rivals in hockey. She wants a fight or a snide comment. He can give her the latter.

“I’ll make sure to congratulate him by pushing the Bears out of the playoffs.”

The reporter laughs, thrilled she got what she wanted. He’s confident he’ll see her again.

Especially because afterwards, Shane gets in two fights.

+++++

Shane’s arm tingles when he gets on the ice to hold the Stanley Cup. His soulmate was lying at a rapid rate, and Shane is too busy to lift his sleeve to see what the problem is.

He ignores it and smiles wide. He didn’t care what his soulmate was up to. He didn’t care about anything right now, besides for the celebrating fans and his team - his family. Pride warms his cheeks, burning hot enough to melt the rink. Nothing could make this moment better.

Not even his soulmate.

+++++

“I cannot believe you thought Svetlana was my soulmate,” Rozanov grunts.

“Mm.”

“Hollander,” Rozanov says.

“We’re really having this conversation?” Shane asks, exasperated. “You are, uh, fuck, *in me right now.*”

“Because Svetlana is not my soulmate,” Rozanov says. He kisses Shane’s neck and jaw, trailing his pulse with the flat of his tongue.

Shane whines at another deep thrust. His arms are pinned by his head. Rozanov has his body bent in half with his knees to his chest. Shane didn’t think he was this flexible, but he was pleasantly surprised and mildly proud that he can get in any position Rozanov puts him in.

Shane accused Rozanov of having a soulmate and cheating on her the moment he got to his condo. Rozanov was caught offguard, and he leaned on the kitchen counter not saying a word. Shane was thirty seconds into his rant when suddenly Rozanov grabbed Shane by the collar and switched their positions. He caged Shane in with his arms and legs, and he glared at him.

“You are being stupid.”

“Oh, fuck you!” Shane shouted.

“She is not my soulmate,” Rozanov said. “Liar told you that. Who said this? A reporter? To you during a game? She was messing with you. Wanted a reaction, and you give her one. Yes, you are being stupid.”

“I-I am being respectful,” Shane retorted. His mind came up short at the information.

“*Respectful*,” Rozanov mocked. His gaze darkened, as his hand crept to Shane’s neck to caress and thumb his bottom lip. He nipped at Shane’s chin, earning a whimper from him. Rozanov smiled. “Be disrespectful with me, Hollander. Respect on rink - only some. I like being dirty.”

“Playing dirty,” Shane corrected, moaning. Rozanov kissed him, distracting him from his train of thought. *Rozanov didn’t find his soulmate*. Shane clutched on his sweater and kissed back harder, yearning for skin contact more than he needed air.

“Nah,” Rozanov purred in his ear. He yanked off Shane’s shirt and sweater. He dragged his tongue over Shane’s nipple. He gripped Shane’s hips when he squirmed and cried out. “I meant what I said. No lies. Only truth.”

“No lies. Only truth,” Shane said on command. His cock hardened from just saying the words.

Shane didn’t know if Rozanov had something he wanted to prove, but he never stopped kissing him after that. Their lips touched during the whole annoying task of going upstairs to the third floor. Their kiss only broke to remove Rozanov’s clothes and then never again. Shane was continuously shoved to the glass walls to be consumed and rutted against. The third time, Shane almost came with Rozanov’s tongue down his throat and hands in his hair. His knee between Shane’s legs.

They didn’t move in-sync or in any stretch of the word, but they both refused to stop kissing. Their hands held the other tight, craved to touch every inch of skin they’ve long since memorized. It was beyond intimately open for them. It was a hunger that drove them, and it was ridiculous and unnecessary, but regardless they kept kissing between short spurts of laughter.

Rozanov kissed all over him like he never wanted to stop. His stomach, his chest, his thighs. He kissed his body thoroughly with a laser-like focus and commitment. Shane gasped and tugged on his hair, rolling his body into him, engrossed by the smell of cedar wood and clean

bedsheets. He needed Rozanov everywhere. His smell, his touch, his body heat. All of him, and Rozanov was giving it to him.

Rozanov got to his left arm, and his kisses turned light and adoring. His lips were soft and explorative, tasting the lies Shane's soulmate leaves on him. When Rozanov looked at him, Shane's vision turned blurry and it was all too much.

"I need you," Shane begged. Rozanov kissed his inner wrist, eyes hardening at his unusually broken voice. "Please fuck me, Rozanov."

Rozanov is doing as he was told, fucking him hard and unforgiving. Shane's legs hang over his shoulders. His moans and whines fill the room, voice getting higher with every thrust to his prostate.

The fucker laughs. Shane kicks Rozanov's back with his heel.

"Ow!"

"Say her name again while you're fucking me," Shane threatens. "I fucking dare you."

"I'm sorry," Rozanov murmurs, and it comes out more genuine than Shane thought it would. He kisses Shane's lips tenderly, completely at odds with his hard, brutal thrusts. "Never again."

It's completely unfair it takes one stroke of Rozanov's hand to make him come.

+++++++

"She's pregnant again?" Shane asks.

Hayden rolls his eyes in exasperation. "You need to work on your lying. 'Hayden, what great news! I'm so happy for you!'"

Shane grins. "No, I mean, a fourth kid. That's awesome, man. Really."

Hayden laughs. "See? That's better! You'll find your soulmate."

They walk together deeper into the aquarium. It's a nice summer day, and Hayden wanted to get the kids out of the house. As always, Hayden invited Shane, who, as always, agrees. Hayden is safe, and someone Shane never feels overstimulated by, even with kids. Hayden knows him too well, and he can read what mood Shane is in at all times. He never pushes Shane, and he has this perplexingly perfect ability to intervene when someone says or asks something that Shane doesn't understand.

"If Rozanov fucks you, I'll fuck him!"

Shane blinked, and a cold blanket encases him.

Hayden eyed their teammate and piped in. "You mean 'fucks with you.'"

"Whatever!"

It also helps that Hayden and Jackie have Shane's safe foods and drinks memorized. Hayden's house is another home to him.

Except for the occasional check-ins about Shane's future. "So when are you going to join me in this nightmare?"

Shane smirks. "Jesus. You want to get me pregnant too? I don't think I'm ready. I still have some hockey left in me."

"You're an asshole," Hayden laughs. He hands Shane his baby. "Have some Uncle Shane time."

Shane awkwardly holds the baby to his chest. He takes a few minutes to find a good position for his hands. Hayden doesn't look too concerned.

"You could invite your ex," Hayden tries again. "We can do couple stuff. It'd be fun."

"I don't see her anymore. She's engaged or something."

"Jackie has a friend..."

Shane rolls his eyes.

Hayden shows Shane a picture of the woman from his gym. "She does yoga! You love yoga. Already something in common. She is nice, patient, and beautiful. The perfect partner for you! She could be your soulmate. She's brunette."

Shane huffs a weak laugh. "Maybe. If I have time. I'll see."

Shane winces at the lie. Hayden looks thrilled, happy to see some give. Thankfully, he stops pressing altogether. "You know I just want you happy, man."

"I know," Shane says because he truly does.

Hayden leaves to chase after one of his daughters. Shane slowly rocks the baby in his arms, deep in thought wondering how Hayden would react if he were to reveal his interest in men. He doubts Hayden would care too much. Things might be awkward, and he will stop inviting him over so frequently. Hayden would still be his friend, but not in the same way.

He can't begin to imagine telling Hayden about Rozanov, and how they've been hooking up since before rookie season. The horror on his friend's face makes him make a sound between a wince and a snort.

The thought of telling any of this to Hayden brings a bone deep aching pain in his chest and lungs. It shouldn't matter, though, because his soulmate probably is a woman. A woman Shane would be fine settling down with. She'll be nice, friendly, patient, pretty, and support Shane in the crowd at his games. She'll have dark eyes and straight hair.

He can't control the future, and he certainly wouldn't want this mystery woman to feel unappreciated just because she looks like someone who Shane had once naively believed was his soulmate. He'd learn to love her. He would.

+++++++

I don't miss her.

I'm very interested.

I don't know what you're talking about.

I trust you can look after him. He is fine.

Stupid fucking nose crinkle.

I almost fell into a coma.

Nope. It's not serious. Or anything.

Shane's arm tingles constantly the next month. He's sitting at his kitchen table with his mom. His dad is on the couch watching the sports channel. His mom is already making guesses on how the season is going to go.

"It's Scott Hunter's year," Yuna announces. "I can tell."

"How can you possibly tell that?" Shane asks.

"She's a witch," David answers passively. "You know this by now about your mom. She's never wrong."

Yuna nods very seriously. "I am."

Shane looks between his parents. He catches the lie written on his mom's arm. His parents are soulmates, and it took two years for them to realize. Neither one lies often, especially his mom. The reason they found out was because his mom wanted to do something nice for his dad. An innocent lie about going to the store when really she was buying her then-boyfriend his favorite meal because he had a tough day.

He doesn't know how to start this conversation, but he has to start somehow. As if it heard and wanted to do it for him, his arm tingled again.

Yuna raises a brow. "What's the lie about now?"

Shane glances at it. He shrugs.

He's not even that good or good looking.

"I don't think I want to meet my soulmate," Shane admits honestly. "All they do is lie."

Yuna frowns. "Oh, honey. Don't say that. They're meant for you for a reason."

"Soulmates are supposed to have everything in common," Shane disagrees. "My soulmate and I have nothing in common."

"Who said you're supposed to have stuff in common?" Yuna asks. "That's not true. They're not supposed to be a mirror of you. They're not a copy of you. They complete you in every way you may require...*improvement* in. They are meant to challenge you and make you better. They're at the same level as you and are your equal in every way. You're not going to be matched with someone lesser."

"Lesser?" Shane asks, confused.

Yuna gestures vaguely. "A center is not going to be matched with a defenseman. Those don't work. A defenseman can't keep up."

That at least makes Shane chuckle and scrub his face.

"My soulmate lies a lot," Shane argues. "That's not me. I hate lying. It's uncomfortable and wastes time, but I have to lie to find my soulmate. It's unfair."

"I'm sure you know from your dad and I that you don't need to lie to find your soulmate," Yuna reminds him gently. "You don't need to lie to know them."

"You two told the truth. That's different," Shane rubs at his arm. It made no sense. "How are we supposed to get to know each other if all they do is lie?"

"They'll tell the truth through actions - not words. Some people feel more comfortable that way."

"Why?" Shane asks incredulously. "The truth is easier, and they never choose to say it."

"I'm sure your soulmate tells the truth more than you think," Yuna says. "Lying is not the same as not telling the truth. Telling the truth doesn't mean you're not a liar."

Shane flinches. He has many lies he hasn't told her. Lies about being normal and doing as he should. He keeps them close to his chest in defense.

"I wish they told the truth more often," Shane says sourly.

Yuna squeezes his hand and smiles sadly. "The truth can be very scary, honey."

For a moment, he thinks she knows more than she lets on. That she was talking to him now. He decides to change the subject quickly.

“Did you ever think Dad was your soulmate before the lie?” Shane asks.

Yuna tilts her head, deep in thought. A moment passes, and she nods. “Yeah, I think so. I knew at least he was very special to me.”

“How’d you guess that?”

Shane got his eyes from his mom. They’re big and warm, and tactful when it comes to Shane’s career. Most days like today they are scarily perceptive. She smiles.

“I liked the way he smelled.”

+++++

“I’d like to look at you today, I think,” Rozanov murmurs. “You on top?”

The request takes Shane by surprise. It’s not a position they’ve done before. They’ll have to face each other, and it’ll be very hard to pretend he was pretending Rozanov was someone else. As if he’s ever done that.

Shane can’t resist anything Rozanov says like this, sitting on the counter with Rozanov between his legs. He whispers his usual promise to his lips. Shane repeats them, longing for his hands on him.

“No lies.” A kiss. “Only truth.”

His ankles cross to keep him there as they kiss, slow and passionate. At least that’s not new.

They fuck on Rozanov’s bed. Rozanov opens him up with his fingers, frustratingly unhurried and rigorous. Shane crawls onto his lap and lines Rozanov’s cock with his hole. Rozanov strokes his cock lazily, gaze transfixed on Shane’s eyes and lips. Shane moans, sinking down onto his cock, taking every inch. He’s so much *deeper* like this. He can’t get enough.

Rozanov doesn’t stop looking at Shane’s face, holding tight to his hips as he rolls his body and fucks himself. “Yes, Hollander, make yourself feel good. Make us come.”

Shane whimpers and leans for a kiss. He puts his hand on the headboard for balance, and Rozanov’s hands steady him. Their kiss is open and ravenous, and Rozanov’s lips spread searing heat in his blood. Shane places his hand on Rozanov’s chest, who covers his hand in his. It’s startlingly intimate and tender, but Shane is too wrapped up in chasing his pleasure. Rozanov fucks up into him, and they move in sync in a familiar, tethered way.

Rozanov flips them over, still watching Shane's face like he physically can't look away. Shane moans and starts to stroke himself.

"Yes, sweetheart," Rozanov groans, encouraging him. His eyes are dark, entranced by Shane's hand working his cock while he snaps his hips. Shane comes between their bodies, splattering on his chest.

The pet name catches Shane off guard, but then Rozanov comes right after. He breathes hard and leans down for another kiss. More messy and filthy than the previous ones.

They take turns washing up in the bathroom. Shane glances at his clothes when he comes out, but then Rozanov pats on the bed. He changes his course and joins him. Rozanov instantly cuddles into his side and presses kisses to his shoulder and neck.

Shane shivers. "I should go."

Rozanov pulls away. His lips twitch to the side. "Or you could stay."

Shane scoffs, smiling uncertainly. "Stay?"

"Here tonight," Rozanov clarifies. He wasn't meeting Shane's eye. Was he nervous? "I'm not done with you."

Shane grins. More time for sex.

"And we have afternoon game tomorrow, so no morning practice," he reasons.

"I told Hayden."

Rozanov's brows raise. "Is Hayden your mother?"

Shane rolls his eyes. "No."

"No, he's not?"

"Fuck off."

"Who cares what you told Hayden?"

"I'm not a liar," Shane jokes.

Something flashes in Rozanov's face. A grimace. The tension leaves as fast as it appeared. He kisses Shane's lips, asking once again with his mouth an inch from his. "Stay."

Shane's eyes fall shut, soaking the warmth of his body and cedar wood body soap. He must smell like it too. He's grown greedy for it.

"Okay."

The barest of smiles grows on Rozanov's face. "Okay?"

Shane nods and kisses him. “Okay.”

They take a nap together. Shane wakes up and looks over his shoulder to catch Rozanov waking up too. Rozanov tells him he’s hungry, and Shane blushes. Rozanov calls him a pervert and gives him clothes to wear.

Rozanov’s clothes.

Rozanov walks out of the room shirtless. As soon as he’s gone, Shane brings them to his nose. They smell like Rozanov. They’re dirty clothes and shouldn’t be enticing, but it doesn’t dissuade Shane from sniffing them.

Rozanov hands him a freshly cold ginger ale. Shane looks at him oddly and takes it with a quiet thanks. He doesn’t remember telling Rozanov this was his favorite drink.

Rozanov says he’ll make them both tuna melts.

Shane blinks. “You want to make me a tuna melt?”

“I’m making me one. I can make two,” Rozanov says easily, as if what he said was normal. As if any of this was normal.

Rozanov asks where he flies to next. Shane lists his next few games, and Rozanov does the same while he cooks. He makes sure Shane’s ginger ale is cold enough. It’s all weirdly domestic and not at all what Shane expected upon coming here. He doesn’t know what to say or how to act.

They move to the living room, where they sit and watch hockey and talk about old teammates. Rozanov calls him not funny and boring, and Shane rolls his eyes.

It’s already weird enough, so Shane asks what Rozanov’s favorite city to play in is. New York. Shane lists Canadian teams.

Rozanov chuckles.

“What? Are those boring answers?”

Rozanov laughs warmly. His eyes crinkle. “Yes.”

“Well, I like hot places too.”

“Mm.” Rozanov gives him a look.

“Hot like the weather,” Shane hurries to clarify.

“Ah, okay.” Rozanov smirks. “L.A. is hot. Hot women.”

Shane swallows and pales. “Yeah, sure. I mean, there are hot women everywhere.”

“There is a girl I like here very much. You know, Svetlana.”

Shane stares at the TV. Right. The not-soulmate. “Oh?”

“She’s old friend from Russia,” Rozanov explains. Shane hadn’t known much about her, only what the reporter said. He didn’t want to know anything, really. “Her father was famous goaltender of Soviet team. She knows everything about hockey.”

Shane stares at the carpet, feeling cold. “Cool.”

“And she likes you very much.”

“Oh. That’s nice,” he says begrudgingly. “So, she’s like your girlfriend?”

“No, no. Nothing like that,” Rozanov denies. “She’s old friend. Sometimes we fuck, but she’s busy these days, you know, new business selling fancy cars.”

“Sounds perfect for you.”

“Yes, it’s close to that, but...”

“But what?”

Rozanov takes a deep breath. “But it’s nothing more than that for either of us. But it’s nice to have regular women like that around.”

Shane clenches his jaw. “You think she’s the only woman in Boston who’d sleep with you?”

“Mm.” Rozanov smirks. “I think I will find someone else. But you know me. I’m lazy.”

Shane hesitates at the distasteful words. He offers a smile. “I don’t know that side of you at all.”

Rozanov’s eyes soften, and his smile grows. His expression lacks any bit of tension in this light and in his living room. His smile is nothing like the cocky one on the rink or the bench, or the easy, infectious one onstage, or the vain one in interviews, or even the ones Shane gets during their hookups. It’s overwhelmingly intimate and bizarre, and Shane’s heart flutters at the new level of transparency.

The timer beeps and Rozanov retrieves their meals.

They’re eating when Rozanov breaks the silence. “You like them?”

The tuna melt was delicious. “Yeah.”

“Girls,” Rozanov clarifies.

Shane’s throat tightens. He approaches his answer carefully. Truth. He likes girls. They’re great. Jackie is very nice. Dating wise, he’s met women who are sweet. “Oh, yeah, sure. Of course I do.”

“I never hear about you with girls.”

“I mean, it’s private,” Shane stammers.

“Right, private.”

Shane frowns. “I keep a lot of things private. Obviously.”

Rozanov nods and drinks more from his can. He sets it down and looks at him. “I like girls.”

Shane tenses. “Yeah, no shit.”

Rozanov doesn’t look away. “But I also like you.”

“Lucky me,” Shane says bitterly.

“Even as a boring person of course,” Rozanov teases.

Shane chuckles. “Of course, I’m boring.”

Rozanov smiles. “But you have a good mouth.”

Shane blushes. Rozanov’s phone rings, and he steps out to take it. Shane’s mind begins to reel, trying to process and understand what he’s doing here. Him and Rozanov weren’t like this. They weren’t really friends. They only fuck a few times a year. They don’t sit around and eat lunch together. They don’t get to know each other - not in ways that matter other than what they like in bed.

Shane doesn’t know how long they’ll be doing this. A part of him wanted to break things off today, but he totally failed the moment Rozanov opened the door and smiled at him. He was definitely a goner when Rozanov picked him up and put him on the counter. His big hands on Shane’s thighs made his cock twitch.

Soon, one of them will find their soulmate and this will be over. Shane will find a woman who will turn his world around. He will find a woman who he won’t have to strain to stay hard. His soulmate, who he will love and complete him.

Whatever that means.

Rozanov comes back and checks on him. Shane glances at him. “How is your father?”

Rozanov’s eyes widen. “Oh, you speak Russian now?”

“I know the word for father,” Shane says.

Rozanov grins at him and laughs. He leans back into the couch, tugging Shane with him. Shane puts his cheek on Rozanov’s bare chest. A hand runs through his hair, and Shane places his on Rozanov’s thigh.

Rozanov’s body soap is strong here. He’s clean and shirtless, his whole muscular body on display. Strong fingers lure him deeper into a heavy, fuzzy daze. It’s hard to keep his eyes open, especially since he can smell cedar wood with every breath. Fingers soothingly play

with his hair. His stomach is full with good food and ginger ale. Rozanov's clothes are comfortable and loose.

Rozanov presses a kiss to the top of his head. Shane nuzzles his chest as his hand drops to caress Rozanov's thigh. His pants are pleasantly soft too under his fingertips, and he runs his hand over him. His mind is restfully empty and calm, and he lays all his weight on Rozanov. He can hear Rozanov's heartbeat.

He feels *good*. He feels light and mellow in a happy trance. He nuzzles Rozanov's chest and kisses the muscles there, and his hands grasp soft fabric. Every inhale pulls him even deeper, and he kisses a trail down Rozanov's chest to his stomach to between his legs. His musky scent is headier here, impossibly potent and intoxicating.

Rozanov lifts the back of his shirt to rub at his back. The warmth of his skin and the soothing massage erases any remaining inhibitions, and he needs more. He kisses Rozanov's clothed cock and crawls into his lap.

Shane removes his shirt and kisses him. Rozanov traces the curve of his spine, pulling him closer. He presses his cheek to his and reaches down to pull their cocks out. Rozanov moans when he wraps his hand around both of them and starts to stroke. It's dry and rough, but it's exactly what he wanted.

Rozanov again traces his back and ass, and Shane pulls back to yank his pants and underwear down. Kisses are rare and infrequent, both too swept up by the sensation from being pressed together and Shane stroking their cocks. They're moaning in each other's mouths, and Shane really likes the way Rozanov is falling apart by his hand. His mouth opens at a particular stroke, and Shane dives in for a kiss. He wants to hear him moan, taste the way he sounds.

"*Fuck*, Hollander," Rozanov moans.

"You gonna come for me, Rozanov?"

"*Fucking make me.*"

Rozanov spits in his hand, and they both groan when he goes back to stroking them. It's not long before Rozanov comes.

Rozanov's blue eyes train on him, moaning and chasing his orgasm. "Oh, fuck, *Shane*."

His come covers Shane's hand, allowing Shane to quickly get himself off. They hold onto each other, waiting to catch their breath and calm their racing hearts.

Shane's heart races faster. Rozanov just said his first name.

"*Ilya*," Shane gasps, barely louder than a whisper.

Ilya swallows and kisses him in a raw, desperate way. An apology.

Fuck. Fuck.

They break apart. Ilya goes in for another kiss, but Shane turns his head so he kisses his cheek. His heart is racing, beating painfully against his rib cage. Ilya was stroking his back and sides, tempting him to relax, but Shane couldn't. He refuses. He needs to get the fuck out of here.

He untangles from Ilya's lap and arms. "I should go."

He staggers away to look for his clothes. All he finds are the clothes he'd been wearing before everything went to shit. He shakily puts them on, all while Ilya stares openly at him in befuddlement.

"I should go," Shane repeats.

Ilya's mouth opens and closes, and Shane can see the way he's struggling to catch up. "Go?"

"I should go," Shane says again because apparently he's a broken record.

Ilya reaches out with his left arm, his features contorted in anguish, trying to decide what to do. How to stop this.

"I just...team meeting in the morning. I forgot."

Two things happen.

Within seconds, Ilya's eyes morph from dejected and confused to indifferent. The stoic shield is not as convincing, not after so long of doing this. Not in this moment - not after today. It's an act Shane can spot now, and he watches as Ilya becomes a statue.

"Okay," Ilya says. His smile lacks warmth. "You forgot team meeting?"

A statue with words on his outstretched naked left arm.

Team meeting in the morning. I forgot.

Shane shakes his head. *No*. No, that's not - that's not his lie staring straight at him. It can't be. It's *not*. Out of all his goddamn lies - *how little of them there are* - it's this pitiful lie that throws freezing cold water all over him.

Ilya and all his fucking lying, and it's Shane's lie that blows his whole life into pieces.

"Thank you for the tuna melt," Shane chokes out.

"Hollander," Ilya says. His brows furrow, confused, but then he freezes. He follows Shane's gaze to his arm, and they watch together as Shane's lie fades into nothing.

Shane's eyes burn. He steps back. "I... I can't. I can't do this. I..."

Ilya is pale as a sheet. His features are sharp and resigned, and he does an adequate job of looking like someone who hasn't gotten caught lying for years. He looks small on his couch. He clenches his jaw, and he holds out his right arm. "Hollander."

Shane's eyes brim with tears. He shakes his head. His lungs aren't working. His ears are buzzing. "I have to go. I can't do this."

"Hollander."

"I'm sorry," Shane stammers out. He rushes out of the room and leaves without another word.

Chapter End Notes

did u guys guess from the beginning which lie was going to do it?

Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

i did increase the number of chapters. this chapter was so hard to write. so hard to explain and get into shane's head. i also went back and forth between the show and book when it comes to the dialogue. sometimes a chapter ends itself.

I'm sure you guys are desperate for an ilya pov chapter but i promise he'll have his time in the next chapter to explain and get his sad feelings out. after this chapter, i'll finally be out of this angsty ass forest and write some cute shit LMAO

thank u so much for commenting and leaving kudos. i hope u guys enjoy this chapter. i worked on it for a long time. it's honestly embarrassing how many times i added or subtracted a paragraph lol

Shane buys a book unrelated to hockey for the very first time. He buys several books, and he spaces them out just in case someone at the bookstore or online shop gets too curious on why one person needs eighteen books on soulmates.

Shane loves research because it can take any complex idea and simplify it. He loves the act of studying a subject thoroughly, investigating every aspect and level from the ground-up. It started and ended with hockey. He has exactly sixty-seven books on hockey, ranging from the history of hockey, positions and roles, historical accomplishments and evolution within the sport, mental ambition and success, physical requirements and nutrition, and of course tactics and strategy. If he wasn't strict with getting eight hours of sleep every night, he would be up reading until his eyes strained through his glasses.

What sucks, though, is that this was nothing like hockey. Hockey is something you can see, do, and experience physically. It's a science, and while Shane was never too interested in school, he was interested in becoming the best in hockey.

Soulmates? There is no winning with soulmates. There is no beating with soulmates. No universal tactics or blueprint on how soulmates work. There is no scientific reasoning behind a match. The universe - *Shane rolls his eyes at 'universe'* - picks two random people and decides they are meant to be.

The History of Soulmates goes on about the first discovery. The first soulmates happened hundreds of years ago. For years, unions were accepted as a law. Two soulmates need to be married, and it didn't matter if they were old with a partner or they were toddlers. Soulmates were cherished, and it was seen as a blessing to have a soulmate. It was disrespectful not to. Why wouldn't they marry? It didn't matter if they had their life together or their life hadn't even properly started.

Soulmates temporarily were ridiculed and called a hoax in the 1500s when a king's soulmate was found to be a poor woman. He was disgusted by her, and the palace humiliated him and called for his title to be removed. They said his blood was tainted and unfit to rule. The king had her executed, and then soulmates were considered taboo for years.

Soulmates: Fact or Fiction explains more about the science - or lack thereof. Shane buys the most recent published book written by a group of scientists and peer reviewed by various college professors.

Yes, it is a gene, and nobody knows how it happened. It just suddenly activated one day with no explanation. Some say it's nature's way of encouraging solidarity and peace during wars and increased reproduction during pandemics. Insignificant battles ended because someone's soulmate fought on the other side. Treaties were written. Shane supposes soulmates were good for something.

Shane gets pulled into another rabbit hole of research on why two men on rival hockey teams would be matched together. It's not as if they're ending world wars with their constant fighting and chirps. Russia and Canada are not going to be best friends because their best hockey players are soulmates. Montreal and Boston are going to despise each other for many lives to come.

Everyone has one soulmate. You can't get a new one. It didn't matter if you hated each other, hurt each other, or betrayed each other. That was your soulmate, and there isn't an alternative. You're destined for one person, according to the gene's specific complexity. You can't change the gene's DNA or molecular structure in order to get matched with another person. Scientists have tried that, and the gene is too unstable.

The Art of Finding Your Soulmate is pointless, and Shane's stomach churns. These people are so desperate to find their soulmate, as if it was the only thing in life they cared about. Shane has never believed that; his mother made sure he knew soulmates aren't everything and shouldn't be first priority.

All he ever wanted was to play hockey and be the best at it. He didn't want any reason to stop playing, and there was way too high of a chance that he'd have a soulmate who wouldn't support him or get mad from how strict his lifestyle is. He didn't want that hindrance.

He's not the only person who actively avoids their soulmate for some reason or another. 13.9% of people state they don't want to find their soulmate. They have goals, they don't believe in soulmates, they're too busy, they're sick, they're avoidant or anxious, etc. Shane is relieved by that.

What category does Ilya fit under? Ilya didn't have the surgery to remove his gene, even though Russia believed soulmates were a waste of time and resources. He read three books on Russia and soulmates, and they've been set in their ways since the beginning. Soulmates are as important as mud on your shoes. They're a barrier - nothing more than a complication to your worth. Soulmates are a weakness, shaped into an accusation that you are an emotional mess with decision-making skills tainted with childish naivety. You're unable to think with your brain, and you are useless.

Is that what Ilya thought? Did he think having a soulmate was weak? An embarrassment? If he did, he would've had the surgery. Shane couldn't find information on same-sex soulmates in Russia. It must not happen that often.

Was it because it was Shane? Ilya didn't look surprised when he read Shane's lie on his arm. He didn't say much of anything, just sat pale and stoic, caught in a lie. He sat frozen on the couch as Shane freaked out and ran. Was he disgusted with the idea of having Shane as a soulmate? Was that why he didn't tell him? Was that why he hid it?

If Ilya hated having Shane as a soulmate, he didn't have to continue this. He didn't have to keep seeing him. He didn't have to text him after every game they played together. He didn't have to invite Shane to his home and make him lunch.

And what pissed Shane off was that he found out by accident. He wasn't supposed to find out because Ilya told him to always speak the truth. Shane helped Ilya every night get away with it, and he hadn't known. The betrayal stings.

Then Shane had guessed it during the Olympics years ago. He went to Ilya afterwards and begged for a lie. He wanted dishonesty so badly so he could know if he was right or not. He figured it out, and Ilya dodged his questions like he dodged hits on the ice. He tiptoed around with incredible precision and relentless perseverance. For a compulsive liar, he could spot a trap a mile away. It was how he was able to still lie constantly without getting caught.

Ilya had looked so angry and cold that day. He was completely unlike himself. A shell of the laughing, teasing Ilya that Shane was used to.

We are not. Shane swore he felt the hairs on his left arm rise, waiting for the rest of that sentence. Ilya snapped, slammed the door in his face. *Don't finish that.*

Don't finish what? He wanted to scream.

Soulmate. Maybe they are annoying. Maybe they are Montreal fan.

You'll always get the truth from me, Hollander.

That was...fucking rookie season. He couldn't have known for that damn long and not say a word. How could he have kept that secret for such a long time?

His mom had been right. Ilya crafted lies that sounded like lies but were all truths. Shane told truths that sounded like truths but were all deceitful.

Ilya made the decision for both of them. It wouldn't have worked out anyway. They don't like each other, and Shane refused to acknowledge his unearthed feelings for Ilya. They're not friends, and it was best that they never speak again.

Just... Things had felt different that day. They had sex, and then Ilya asked him to stay. They took a nap together with Shane in Ilya's arms. Ilya cooked them lunch and had actual conversations. He had ginger ale for Shane and made sure he was comfortable. They opened up to each other, created that bridge with trust and vulnerability that's never been fully

forged. Ilya pulled Shane to him and held him on the couch, and Shane melted into him in a buzzy daze. Ilya said his first name, and Shane said his.

Shane can't think about that right now. Ilya hid them being soulmates for years. Shane never wanted to meet his soulmate anyway. They're rivals. They're both men. This is too much. Shane isn't going to overthink something that can't happen. Maybe it's good Ilya hid this. He needs to move on.

The soulmate system isn't for everyone. That was one of the constants said in every book and article.

Shane searched the bookshop website and typed in another inquiry. A book pops up.

Soulmate Rejection: Mastering the Art of Letting Go.

He adds it to his cart.

+++++

Shane prides himself on never being late, but lately he has been unable to settle his head. Which meant he needed an outlet, and hockey is his main source of stress relief because on the rink he can distract himself from things he'd rather not think about.

He's late to lunch with his parents. He sits down with a sheepish look and reads the menu. The words are a bit blurry, and he can't focus. His nerves are still shot after three hours in the gym.

His parents are asking about Wimbledon and sitting next to a Swedish princess. Getting on a plane to travel to another country and force small talk with a girl is the last thing he wants to do. It's clear his parents are wanting to go, and Shane sort of hates his mother for beating around the bush. If she wants something from him, he wishes she would simply ask. Then they can move on from this awkward conversation.

He's uncomfortable and hot, and the restaurant doesn't have ginger ale.

"I don't think I should skip training," Shane says tightly.

"Well, meeting a Swedish princess sounds fun, right?" she replies with a patience that rubs Shane the wrong way.

"I don't have time for that right now, Mom," Shane snaps. "All my time is scheduled."

She frowns. "I just meant..."

"I get, like, two weeks off a year," Shane says. "I don't want to spend it next to someone I don't know trying to make conversation about what? Swedish politics?"

Yuna nods, placatingly. "Okay."

The server comes by, and his parents order wine. Shane sticks with sparkling water regrettably and tries not to remember the last time he had ginger ale.

"I'm sure you could have a glass of wine if that's what--"

"No, I can't." Shane shakes his head. He inhales deeply, pushing his irritation down. He's spiraling, and he's trying to hold tight to his sanity. If he starts breaking his own rules, he might lose it. "Not during the season."

"Shane," his dad says this time.

Shane grits his teeth. "Yeah?"

His dad gives him a worried look. "Is everything alright?"

"Why? Cause I don't want wine?" Shane grumbles through clenched teeth.

"Well, you seem tense," David replies gently.

"I'm fine."

He's fine. He's so fine. Fine, fine. He's so fine, he's sick of it.

"Well, I think a little trip to London next summer for Wimbledon, just the three of us, would be fun," his dad tries again. "And I think you should think about it. We could make a week out of it. Go to a play, see Big Ben. You loved it when you were a kid."

Shane takes a deep breath. "You guys should go. You'd have a great time."

"They're not going to send us the tickets, honey," Yuna says. "It's you they want. We're just the parents. You're the main attraction."

"Well, then I'll just lie, tell them I'm coming. They won't kick you out," Shane reasons.

"And you can just tell them I'm sick or something."

"Honey." Yuna frowns, and this time she looks concerned. "I don't want you to lie. That's not who you are."

Then why the fuck was I matched with someone who lies so much, Shane bitterly thinks. Maybe I am a liar too, Mom, just in a different, more cowardly way. Maybe I lie as much as my soulmate does, and I hate myself for it.

"Sorry, I'm in a weird mood," Shane says instead.

"It's okay," his mom says, still worried. "Anything you want to talk about?"

Sure, Mom, let's talk about the fact my soulmate rejected me years ago, and I just found I might not dislike him as much as I believed. But I can't be too mad, because I never wanted a

soulmate in the first place.

Shane shakes his head. He's not lying. Ilya hasn't lied, and he's not going to be the first person who does. "Let's think about London. Maybe it could be fun."

+++++++

Shane doesn't know why he listened to J.J.'s request. He should've stayed in and gone to bed, but J.J. sounded excited, and the cast for X Squad was at Mile End. He was going to bother Shane the rest of the night if he said no. He's loud and obnoxious, and even more when he's drunk. Based on the phone call, he was already halfway there.

The restaurant is closed to the public, so it's him and a bunch of people he doesn't know. He hears J.J. before he sees him, and he goes to the bar and orders a beer.

"Shane Hollander can have anything he wants here," the man at the bar says with a broad smile.

"Thanks." Shane hands him money, but the bartender shakes his head.

"On the house," he says.

"Oh." Shane blushes, and he hopes the lights hide it. "Well, you keep it then."

The man smiles. "It's an honor."

Shane smiles back and holds out his hand to shake. "Shane. Please."

"Maxime," he says and shakes his hand.

"Nice to meet you, Maxime. Are you having a good night?"

"This crowd? Are you kidding? Rose Landry is here, man!"

Shane's brows shoot up. "Seriously?" He searches the crowd. Maxime is grinning, and Shane grins back. He wanted to catch a glimpse of Rose Landry, but he was enjoying looking at Maxime. Before he could get caught doing just that, he nods amicably and walks off.

Shane finally gets to J.J. and talks to him and his friends. An hour passes, and he avoids the bar. He mingles with the crowd, until it gets to be a little too much, and he finds a table to sit down at.

"Please tell me you're hungry," a woman asks.

Shane turns and freezes. Rose Landry was eating Haitian salt cod fritters, and she moved the plate closer to him. She smiles at him and holds out a perfectly manicured hand. "Sorry. I'm

Rose, by the way.”

Shane smiles and shakes her hand. “Shane. Nice to meet you. I’m a fan.”

She leans in like she has a secret. “Well, would you be surprised to know I’m a big fan of yours?”

Shane’s jaw drops. “You like hockey?”

“I was born and raised in Michigan. Damn right I like hockey!” she laughs.

“Oh, wow. Thanks.”

“You’re welcome. Eat a fritter, Shane Hollander,” she says with a warm smile.

Shane loses track of time as they talk. Rose is a sweet woman, and she asks him a lot of questions. She talks about her life, and she asks about Shane’s childhood and getting into hockey. She talks about the movies she’s done, and the experience she had playing her characters.

“I get kidnapped a lot,” Rose sighs. “Including the one I’m filming right now.”

Rose’s bright eyes widen, and she covers her mouth. “Fuck! You didn’t hear that. They will literally have me murdered if they find out I told you.”

Shane chuckles. “My lips are sealed,” he promises.

She sinks back into her seat. “Okay, your turn.”

“Well, I’ve never been kidnapped,” Shane jokes. “I mean, there have been threats, but…”

She laughs. “Not what I meant!”

Shane laughs, and he explains being eight years old and having lots of fun. He awkwardly stumbles over the intensity of the game, and he admits hockey got less fun when it got really serious once he got older. Rose’s smile falls at that, sympathizing with him. She understood from her acting career that started when she was young.

“Have you been to Montreal before?” Shane asks.

“Once. I was shooting a role in a super terrible FBI versus terrorist whatever movie. I can’t even remember what it was called.”

“Under Dark?”

Rose’s jaw drops in both horror and amazement. “Oh my god. Shut up. You saw it?”

Shane shrugs and grins. “I fly a lot. Watch a lot of movies.”

Rose laughs. “Thankfully it was a small role. But I was only in Montreal for a week that time, and it was summer.”

“It’s a little different here in the winter,” Shane says.

Rose leans in with a conspiratorial smile and speaks in a hushed tone. “Michigan, remember? Your winters don’t scare me.”

Shane’s cheek heat, and he smoothly asks, “So, you gonna be in town for a while this time?”

She smiles at him all too knowingly. She gives him her number, and they make plans to meet for dinner later this week.

Shane was excited. He met a woman he enjoyed talking to, and there was a real connection. Something he’s never had with a woman before. He wanted to know more about her, and he’ll get to know her more on their date. She is beautiful, funny, and kind. She was fun to talk to, and he didn’t feel uncomfortable the whole night.

He finally liked a girl! What a relief. He could laugh. He may just have high standards.

He can forget all about this soulmate business.

+++++++

Rose Landry is the most wonderful girlfriend Shane could ever have. She is sweet and supportive. She flies in to see his games when her schedule lets her. Montreal fans love her. She wears his jersey at his games, and the fans go crazy. She’s everything he could want in a girlfriend, which has to be why none of his past relationships worked out.

Which is why Shane hates the relief he feels when she texts him about missing his game against Boston. He can’t explain the anxiety he feels when she’s the one who texts him and not Ilya. He’s glad he doesn’t because Shane has a girlfriend now. They can’t see each other.

It’s over between them. He doesn’t want to see Ilya anyway. He wants to see his girlfriend, which unfortunately may be at a club she invited him to. He hates nightclubs, but she asked him. He’s her boyfriend, and doing things she wants is what boyfriends do, right?

Good boyfriends think about their girlfriends, rather than some stupid arrangement he once had. He won’t think about Ilya. He may have to play against him, but that doesn’t mean he has to talk to him or even look at him. Well, he has to look at him, but nothing more than defense and offense plays.

Simple. He hopes Ilya does the same.

+++++++

Ilya does the same, but a little too well. Frustratingly well, but Shane should be relieved. He should be thankful Ilya gives him the cold shoulder.

On the ice, he's a force of nature with devil horns - thanks Hayden for that image. Ilya makes it his personal mission to slam Shane into the boards at any given chance. Shane doesn't even have the puck for some of them, but Ilya still shoves him brutally into the boards. His usual grin is nowhere in sight, replaced by a toothy scowl and stony eyes.

Neither of them make any goals, too wrapped up in throwing each other off. More Ilya than Shane. Shane glances at Ilya on the bench several times, and it's as if he doesn't exist in Ilya's world. Just another Montreal player to piss off. But where Hayden and the others get chirps, Shane gets ignored on the bench and pummeled on the rink.

Shane hates being at odds with his emotions. He doesn't know how he feels, but he certainly knows how he should. He should be thrilled. He should be relieved that Ilya is ignoring him. He should be happy Ilya never texted him. It's what he wanted. This is what Ilya wanted - someone not Shane as his soulmate. He probably has plans after the game.

This is starting to become a pattern of Shane's. Him wanting something, getting it, and then selfishly regretting it.

+++++++

"Hi, handsome," Rose says sweetly. She's sitting with two of her costars. Miles and Jiya.

Shane smiles and tries not to let it be clear how much he did not want to be here. He hates clubs. He didn't dance, and he didn't like crowds. At least he won't be expected to pick up women.

"Good game tonight, babe," Rose says. She puts her hand on his shoulder.

Shane chuckles. "No, it wasn't."

"No, it wasn't, but you won!"

"I need a beer," Shane says, already looking at the bar.

"I bet you do," Miles says, voice low and sensual. He was attractive with light brown skin and stubble. He was well-dressed, as well as a little makeup around his eyes.

Shane nods at him awkwardly, and he gets an absurdly sexy smile in response. At his side, Rose puts Shane's hand on her knee. It was natural to her and probably anyone else, but all Shane could focus on was the weight of it and how everyone must be staring at their joined hands.

Everyone orders vodka, but there's no way he'll be touching that stuff ever. He orders a beer and spends the next hour listening in on conversation and glancing at Miles. He needs to get a grip. He's here with Rose Landry. His girlfriend.

His girlfriend, who tugs on his hand. "I want to dance!"

Shane hesitates. "Oh. No, I--"

She pouts. "Come on! I never get to dance."

"That is a lie," Miles laughs.

"Well, I want to dance with Shane," Rose says.

Miles smirks. "That makes two of us."

He lets Rose pull him on the dance floor while Miles goes to get drinks for them. Rose puts her arms around his neck and begins to dance. She swings her hips as she moves with the music. She's carefree and looks stunning. He can't help but notice how most of the women around them look more like Ilya's type. He can imagine him dancing with any of them.

He lets himself wonder what Ilya is doing. Was he disappointed they didn't hook up?

Shane's completely lost dancing with Rose. His hands sit useless and hovering over her waist. He knows he should be escalating things. Touching her, kissing her, talking to her. Telling her she looks sexy or something to get her in the mood. He should be pressing closer to her.

Yet... he just doesn't.

Miles comes over and hands Rose her champagne. Rose continues to move her body at Shane's front, while Miles presses to his back. He can feel his breath on his neck, and goosebumps form with him so close. He smells Rose's perfume - it's sweet and expensive. He crinkles his nose, and he winces at all the bright lights and loud music.

This is getting to be too much. He searches the crowd for the exit. Maybe he danced long enough, and Rose won't mind if he went home. He's been here for almost two hours. She has to be tired from working all day too.

Familiar faces catch Shane's attention. Four Boston players are in the crowd dancing with women.

Including Ilya.

Shane doesn't remember walking away from Rose and Miles. He's standing about ten feet from Ilya and a blonde girl. He's trailing kisses from her ruby lips to her long neck, and she rolls her head back, body rolling into him. Ilya's hands roam over her hips and waist. He's dressed in a v-neck shirt that's almost transparent, especially with this lighting. His hair is slicked back, freshly washed and combed. His necklace pokes out from his collar.

Her hands clutch his arms, which are covered in sleeves. Even in this flashing room with shadows dancing along with the people, Shane stares at his left arm and wonders what would happen if he whispered a random lie. Would Ilya feel it? Would this woman feel his skin tingle from where she's touching him?

She's pulling him to her, and she turns around so they're dancing with his chest to her back. His hands roam over her sides, up to graze her breasts and shoulders. Her eyes are closed, grinding back into him. Ilya is watching her with hooded eyes and parted lips. Shane watches as he bites and licks at her ear. It was filthy and disgusting, and Shane doesn't get how that could be erotic.

Nevermind that Shane can't look away. He can't even move. Run. He's nauseous and dizzy. He needs to leave.

He looks up and a flash of chills runs down his spine. Ilya is watching him. Ilya caught him staring, and he's touching the woman more purposefully, more need and desire. He kisses her neck and jaw, eyes never leaving Shane. Not for one second does either of them look away. The woman is oblivious, moving into him, mouth gaped open in bliss with Ilya's mouth and hands on her.

Shane imagines those hands on him, touching him how he likes. The only hands that have memorized the places that make his knees weak and cock hard. Manhandling him, squeezing his chest how he likes, and picking him up and dropping him on the bed. He imagines those lips on his neck and trailing the knobs of his spine or over his midsection to his hips and thighs, sending sweeps of exquisite heat in his blood and making him beg for more.

Once he starts thinking about Ilya, Shane can't stop. Not even when he brings Rose to his home. Not when she's on her knees kissing him and pulling his shirt off, or when she's kissing his lips and pressing her heated body into him. He feels like he's standing outside of his body, watching from somewhere else. Someone else entirely is on top of Rose.

He thinks of Ilya again, standing in his shower jerking himself off. Ilya watches him right back, lips parted and groaning as he works his cock faster. Somewhere far away he hears Rose, but even that isn't strong enough to pull him from this fantasy. He watches Ilya come, painting his shower wall and some gets on his chest.

"Oh, fuck, Shane."

Ilya's voice moaning his first name blares in his ears, and he's worked into a frenzy. The pleasure is cresting, rolling into one giant wave and waiting for one last thing. He aches for it. The only thing that can possibly stop all of this is Rose's hair touching his arm -

It wasn't Rose's hair making his arm itch.

I did not see you.

Ilya. Fuck. Five little words stain his skin.

That pushes Shane over the edge, and he gasps as he comes.

Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

holy shit tell me why i wrote 6k words on only 20 min of the episode. it's because i had things to say!! plus i did add my own dialogue to og scenes! bc we're finally at the cute scenes and out OF THIS DAMN ANGST.

again thank u so much for ur sweet comments. im SO glad u guys are enjoying my story and my little au. i can't believe how well the real dialogue fit this au. it came together so perfectly.

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

Shane likes Rose Landry. He truly did. She is kind and generous, and she has a way about her that makes you think she's genuinely interested in everything you're saying. She asks questions and remembers answers because she cared. She didn't let stardom affect her in that way, and she deals with her fame far better than Shane does. The fact she was more known than Shane made things more difficult.

They slept together twice, and both times were fine. Sex with her wasn't bad, but it wasn't anything to write home about. With Rose, he couldn't count on his stardom for her to overlook his performance. Knowing that made him nervous, which made it more difficult for him to stay hard.

Rose was patient and helpful, but it was obvious that she was shocked by how much work it took for him to get the job done. She had to have noticed how it was such a chore, and was surprised even more especially during the second time.

Shane wakes to her getting ready to leave for her hotel, so she's there for pick-up to work. He watches her for a moment. His tongue is thick and dry, and his head is heavy with sleep. He's not the best at reading the room, but he can guess they are both thinking the same thing.

"Listen, uh, about last night," Shane begins, awkwardly.

"It's fine," she says soothingly because she's too nice for her own good.

"I think this season is stressing me out more than usual," Shane lamely says.

"Yeah. Let's do dinner this week," Rose suggests. "Maybe just the two of us?"

Maybe he hasn't ruined everything. "Yeah, for sure."

She kisses him, and he smells her flowery, expensive perfume. She is pretty and sweet, and there's no reason why he should be struggling in the bedroom. He'll do better this time. He'll

try.

They're good together. According to all the news articles and gossip websites. All his fans and hers are ecstatic to see them out and about. Some people talk about the way he looks at Rose with hearts in his eyes, and how he'd do anything for her. That he definitely treats her well, and they should get married one day.

It's all incredibly bizarre to see the way the public cares so much, and how they analyze every picture of them. Shane looks at the pictures and doesn't recognize himself. He looks happy; he's smiling and laughing about something with Rose. None of them give him butterflies, unlike the people who claim they can feel the sparks through the screen. Was that all it takes to be in love? A handful of pictures of them walking to a date?

They're certain he and Rose are falling in love, like they personally know them. Some sources are insisting they're soulmates, and that they're the perfect match. Some fansites have pictures of Rose's left arm, analyzing the lines there and relating them to Shane. That was too far, in Shane's opinion. Isn't soulmates a private affair? Shane keeps his arms covered at all times in private and public, so nobody can analyze his.

God forbid Ilya decides to be an ass and talk to him indirectly again. He could lie about hockey or Russia while Shane is with Rose or out in public, and blow his relationship with her into pieces. It's bad enough he continues to lie constantly. Shane stopped reading them.

Rose found out early on they're not soulmates. She said she didn't mind, and she logically surmised that there's a fair chance she won't meet her soulmate. She didn't sound upset or sad when she admitted to Shane how she didn't believe soulmates were everything. There's so many people out there in the world, and it would be a waste to ignore potentially loving relationships just to meet a soulmate who she may not ever meet.

Shane could've kissed her for saying that. But he didn't.

As far as the public is aware, they're a match. Two celebrities at the top of their game who met each other randomly at a bar. It was fate. It makes sense.

Shane locks his phone and doesn't look at it for hours.

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"You're so cute," Rose says. "Have I told you how cute you are?"

Shane blushes. "No. I mean, maybe."

"Well you are." Her eyes shine in the candlelight. "Miles is extremely jealous."

"Of me?"

Her face scrunches up, amused. “No, of me.”

It takes Shane a second to realize. “*Oh!* Oh.”

She tilts her head. “Did you not notice that Miles is gay?”

“I guess I hadn’t really thought about it,” he lies. Shit.

“Well, he is,” she grins. “And he’s lowkey in love with you.”

“Oh.” He blushes again. This time he hopes the candlelight hides the color of his face.

She watches him with a calm, warm scrutiny. “Does it surprise you that Miles is gay?”

“No,” he says hurriedly. “I mean, of course not, no.”

“Well, a lot of actors are,” she reveals, casually, as if Shane wasn’t panicking. “They’re just not all out.”

He swallows and nods. It’s getting too difficult to look her in the eye.

“Are there any, like, gay hockey players?” she asks. “I mean, yes. Obviously there are, but are there any openly gay players?”

“No,” Shane stammers. “I mean, yes. There are gay players. Bi players. Whatever. But no one has ever come out. Publicly.”

Her expression turns surprised. Taken back. “Huh.”

Shane can hear his heartbeat in his ears. “What?”

Her brows furrow as she thinks. “Sorry, I don’t think I’m going about this the right way. Um.”

He was on the rink staring down a slap shot. “Going about what?”

She almost looks guilty. She takes his hand in hers. “I really like you, Shane.”

“I like you too.”

Her smile wavers, warms, and then wavers again. “But I have a feeling that maybe I’m not doing it for you?”

Shane tries to fake a casual laugh. It tastes wrong on his tongue. He forces himself to concentrate. Rose wasn’t being specific so he won’t either. They’re doing a date. They’re... having a conversation. Not a lie. “Yes, you are.”

“I know you like talking to me.”

“Yeah.”

“Do you like kissing me?”

He’s grasping for the truth, but it’s like holding a pile of sand. He can hold some, but not all as it spills out through the cracks. He saw diagrams of the stupid, worthless soulmate gene, and he thinks of it. It mocks him.

“Sure,” he picks out of his safe words. *Sure. Fine.* Words with a lot of variables. Flexible.

By her face, he can tell that was the worst answer.

“Wow.”

He puts a shaky hand over his mouth. “No. No, no, of course I do. Sorry.”

He can physically feel the dreaded writing on Ilya’s arm. His eyes burn.

“No, hey, don’t apologize,” she says calmly. “I just - I have a feeling and - and maybe I’m completely off base here, but I don’t know, I feel like maybe you’d rather be kissing Miles?”

Her kind eyes suddenly felt too much to handle. He looks away, chest tightening as his body is driven into some sort of fight or flight mode. Instead he sits frozen, lost and tense. He never encountered a direct accusation before.

Except it wasn’t an accusation. She was trying to learn about him, understand him better.

“Hey, it’s really okay,” she soothes. She brushes his hand in reassurance.

“It’s not,” Shane argues in a whisper. She has no idea he’s having a conversation with two people - her and an unwanted passenger. His shoulders flex, raising in defense. He spews out everything he can say, reverting back to his deceit he can’t bare to let go of. It’s a means to survival. “I do like you. I really do. I like talking to you. I like being with you. I like all of it.”

Her expression turns complicated.

“I know the sex stuff is a problem, but...”

She shakes her head. “It’s not a problem. A problem is something you can fix. We’re more like a square peg in a round hole.”

She winces in disgust. “Ew, no. No, sorry. Forget I said that. Um. We’re just - we’re not meant to fit, and it’s really fine. I just don’t think that we can keep trying.”

Shane finds the corner of the table and stares at it. He’s running out of truths. He’s tapped out, and he’s *tired*. He’s so, so tired. “I get it. I-I just, uh, I think. Um.”

Rose sits patiently, waiting for him to explain, but with a sympathy he has no idea how she could have for him bleeds in her voice. “Hey, you don’t owe me any explanation.”

“I feel like I kind of do.”

“You really don’t.”

Shane sucks in some air, chewing on his lip. His eyes burn behind gathering tears.

“Can I ask if you’ve ever been with another guy?” she asks.

That same genuine curiosity and warmth he admires about her unfolds his truth, gently prodding. He nods.

“Have you ever told anyone that before?”

He shakes his head. His shoulders aren’t as stiff. The lies he has collected in his bones sweep out of him.

“Was it different with a guy?”

A smile breaks through. “Of course.”

He meets her face and finds it kind. “Was it better?”

Shane’s memory supplies him with flashes of golden brown curls and sparkling blue eyes. A playful, teasing smile with adorably crooked teeth Shane hopes he never tries to fix. Hard muscles and strong hands holding him, pinning him to the bed. A back decorated in a constellation of moles, meant for Shane to find as he’s entered and filled and...

“Yeah, it was, uh. It was better,” he admits with a shaky breath. The truth collects on his tongue, and the barriers he once held with an iron grip come crashing down. A huff of laughter gets through. “I kind of prefer being the hole rather than the peg.”

Rose laughs, delighted. Shane laughs, feeling lighter. “Wow! That is the best thing any gay boyfriend of mine has ever told me.”

“Oh, you’ve had other...”

“Oh, I was in theater school. Like, 70 percent of my boyfriends have left me for other guys.”

He gapes at her. “70 percent?”

“Actually 80 percent,” she laughs.

Shane laughs, and maybe he shouldn’t, but hearing that makes him feel better. Not so alone.

“You should follow Miles back on instagram,” Rose suggests.

“No,” Shane says. “I mean, not no, but I just need to sort some things out first.”

“Of course,” she replies. Something in her tone sounds suspicious. Her eyes flicker to his sleeved arm. Her curiosity wins the war inside her head. “Sort some things out. Do you mean... Your soulmate?”

His heart falls to his stomach. He must take too long to answer because she sits back in her chair. Still open and empathetic. “Did you find your soulmate?”

“Yes,” he chokes.

Rose smiles. She squeezes his hand. “That’s amazing, Shane.”

Before he can ask or stammer through a pointless question, she adds, “You always wear sleeves. You rub your arm raw in your sleep. I take it you and him aren’t talking?”

Shane takes a deep breath and fidgets in his chair. “He rejected me.”

Her eyes widen, taken back. “He rejected you? Is that what he said?”

Shane stares at the table. “He didn’t tell me that he knew, and I didn’t know. He kept it a secret.”

She nods, and her face does something complicated again. Her voice comes out gentle. “Do you think, maybe, he knew you weren’t...ready? Or maybe he wasn’t.”

“He’s been with other men,” Shane says, voice hollow.

“Okay,” she acknowledges softly. “But a soulmate, Shane, that’s serious. It’s a lot. Do you think he might be scared like you are?”

Shane frowns, stomach churning. “Scared?”

“Yeah. I mean, can he be with a man? Is it safe for him?”

A sheet of cold sweat sinks into him. Russia. What would happen to Ilya if Russia found out his soulmate was a man? His country. The only place he can call home.

She takes his silence for an answer. “Do you have any idea when he found out? Your first lie to him.”

He hadn’t figured it out yet. He scoured his memories, going back farther and farther. At Ilya’s home. In Russia at the Olympics. The first time they fucked. Where they talked in his stairwell. The first time in the hotel. The locker room. The gym. The -

My parents are waiting on me.

His first lie to him.

Shane’s jaw drops. The stunned bewilderment. The cigarette nearly falling out of his mouth. The way he stared at Shane, tense and guarded.

“Shane?”

“When we met,” Shane croaks. He grows nauseous and dizzy. Stones pile in his stomach. Ilya in Russia’s hockey team jersey. The very place gay men are harassed and killed. Shane had

put him in danger. He hadn't meant to, but Ilya must've been horrified. Unable to say anything.

"I lied the day we met."

"Oh, hon," Rose says. "I'm on your side, Shane. I always will, but I feel sad for him too. You both deserve the chance to be happy."

They sit in silence. Shane's heart racing, beating bruises into his ribs. Was it possible Ilya didn't reject him? He was just scared like Shane was?

Rose smiles. "I was kidding about Miles, but he totally would. Like in a heartbeat."

There's so many emotions running rapidly inside of Shane, that he takes the distraction for what it is and laughs. He hesitates. "You haven't said anything to him, have you?"

"No! Definitely not," Rose promises. Shane slouches in his chair, relieved. "And I never will."

Dinner comes and goes, and afterwards, Rose makes him promise to stay friends. Shane couldn't believe his luck. It's still so terrifying to have someone in his life who knows the real him. A side of him he hasn't shown anyone. Rose made him feel safe and comfortable, and like he wasn't breaking any rules. He wasn't failing to meet some criteria.

He was Shane Hollander to her. A person.

She hugs him, and he kisses the top of her head. Rose Landry is not his girlfriend. She's something better. A safe person he never had before.

+++++++

The people are wrong!

The people are wrong!

Shane has no idea what Ilya is lying about.

A small part of him agrees though.

+++++++

Shane felt light. He feels weightless and more sure about himself. He was excited to see Ilya again. He wanted to be with him alone all weekend. He was tired of lying to himself about it.

He was ecstatic to play with him on a team. He'll finally know how it feels to be on the same team and not battling it out. They'd be on even footing, working together. Ilya is a fantastic player - one of the best in the league. They'd be remarkable together. On a team.

In a relationship.

He can't say that. He doesn't know what Ilya is thinking these days. Maybe he'll want to never speak again.

Shane sees Ilya at the bar and goes straight to him. He sits to his right. A server comes by for him to order a drink.

"I'll have the same as my teammate please," he says. Does he sound as nervous as he is?

Ilya clears his throat. "So, what, are they out of ginger ale, captain?"

Shane blushes at *captain*.

"I'm feeling a bit wild." Shane adjusts in his seat. His nerves are buzzing. "So this should be fun, huh? I've always wondered what it would be like to play on the same team."

"Have you?"

"Yeah, I have. Nice that it's in Florida this year, right?"

Ilya shrugs. Shane tries to read his face for hints to how he's feeling, but he hasn't ever been good at that. "Yes."

Shane gets his drink. He suddenly really needs it.

"Did, uh, did you bring anyone with you?" Ilya asks.

Shane shakes his head. "Uh, my parents thought about coming, but they're going to Mexico in, like, two weeks, and they've been to these before, so."

Ilya's lips twitch. "Ah."

Shane grins. Maybe if he throws in some hints, Ilya might reciprocate. "Also, I didn't feel like being managed this weekend. Did you, uh, bring anybody?"

Ilya looks at him with hooded eyes. He brings the bottle to his lips. "Nope."

Shane glances at him, and Ilya is watching him. His eyes roam over Shane's body, deliberately checking him out and meeting his gaze. A heat unrelated to the weather surges through Shane.

Shane takes the chance to do the same. "Nice shirt."

Ilya picks at his Hawaiian shirt. "Thanks. I like to, you know, get into the spirit."

Shane licks his lips. Ilya watches. "You're pulling it off."

Their moment is interrupted by Carter. He teases them, drunk already in the afternoon. He walks off with his drink in his hand.

Shane laughs. "I feel like we're gonna get a lot of that sort of thing this weekend."

"It should give us a chance to get to know each other." His sultry gaze once again sends heat to Shane's face. "Who knows what we might have in common."

Yeah, like fate. Destiny. Soulmates. They have so much in common, the fucking universe is adamant on putting them together. Shane clutches his drink and takes a long sip.

"You're looking very pretty today," Ilya compliments.

"Hm?"

"Different, maybe? Someone take you shopping?"

Shane taps his fingers on the bar. "If I, um, if I tell you something, will you promise not to tell anyone or make fun of me?"

For some reason, Ilya's face falls. "Well, it depends."

"Seriously."

Ilya looks away. His indifference comes inching back. Shane wishes to know why. "Yeah, sure."

Then Ilya smiles, and Shane relaxes. "I hired a stylist."

Ilya's smile had disappeared, but now it comes back with a momentum and a surprising amount of gusto. His smile takes up his entire face. He gains dimples and crinkles around his bright eyes. He covers his mouth.

"Fuck you."

"Sorry." Ilya is failing at covering his laugh. "Wow. Of course you did."

"I shouldn't have told you," Shane says.

"No, no. I love it. I love it. You got, what, tired of looking like shit?" he jokes.

"I didn't look like shit," Shane denies. He's smiling. "I just wore, like, athletic stuff."

"Mmm. I know what you wore," Ilya says.

"And some of the guys in the league are fashionable," Shane says.

"Yeah, so very."

Shane shakes his head. "Not you. Some of the guys."

“In the league?” Ilya grins.

Shane laughs. “Other players, not you.”

“Okay.” Ilya nods and looks around. “So, this has nothing to do with Rose Landry?”

“No.” Shane hesitates. “Well, I mean, yeah, she always dressed, um, very well, and so do her friends, but I just wanted to stop looking like I was always going to the gym. I never really cared about clothes.”

Ilya swallows. “So, uh, you and her are not...”

“We’re not.” Shane’s gaze drops to Ilya’s left arm. He hopes he notices the lack of tingling skin and lies. “She’s great, but, uh. We’re just not compatible, I guess.”

Ilya’s face is blank. He looks at Shane’s lips. “Hm.”

Like a magnet, Shane looks at Ilya’s mouth and the moles peeking out from under his shirt. His long neck. Shane looks away. “I should circulate, I guess.”

“Yeah, you have new clothes to show off,” Ilya agrees.

Shane wishes he would stop looking at him like that. Like he wants to do something reckless. Say, deciding the hotel room is a much better place to spend their time.

Shane walks away from the bar. He can feel Ilya staring at him.

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“Okay, and I will not be losing this time,” Ilya announces. “But if I lose, I will buy you all candy bars from machine inside, okay?”

The kids smile in excitement.

“Hey, Hollander!” Shane looks up from where he’s laying on a pool chair. “Hollander, make sure none of these cheaters cheat, okay?”

Shane holds his thumb up. “Okay.”

“You know that guy?” Ilya asks the kids.

“Yeah!” a girl says.

“Who is this guy?”

“That’s Shane Hollander.”

“Ah, so you know this guy.”

“He’s the best player in the league.”

“Oh, no. That’s not true! Splash her! Boo!” Ilya boos and splashes the kids. “No, you get out of the pool. No, who is your dad? Show me your dad.”

Shane smiles. He is attractive playing with kids.

“Okay, I forgive you. You can stay.”

The kids giggle. They line up at the end of the pool, and then they dash off to start the race.

Ilya shouts, “There is a shark in the water!” He pretends to be yanked underwater. “There is a shark!”

Shane’s arm tingles.

There is a shark in the water! There is a shark!

Shane’s heart races. He didn’t need confirmation, but he still gets goosebumps hearing the lie in person and then seeing it on his arm. It makes him giddy.

Had Ilya done that by accident? Did he forget? Or maybe he is also tired of hiding. Maybe they can figure this out together.

The All-Star game only confirms his suspicions on how evenly matched they are. They move in harmony, catching each other's cues and knowing what the other is going to do seconds before they do it. When Shane looks at Ilya, he’s already looking at him, and vice versa. There is no guessing. They move in sync, playing off each other, integrating seamlessly into a solid, invincible duo. They’re playing better than ever.

How could he ever think they had nothing in common?

Ilya kisses Shane’s visor after they score. The fans go crazy over it. A typical Rozanov move.

Shane hopes this one is a little more special. “Great pass.”

Ilya grins. “Great goal.”

They stare at each other for far too long. Shane can’t help the rush of endorphins from being on the same team, working together rather than against, with his actual soulmate. Same jerseys. Ilya as his alternate captain. Able to act like friends in front of the cameras, rather than enemies.

They aren’t supposed to fight for first place. They’re supposed to be at the top together.

+++++++

Logically, Shane knows being soulmates doesn't mean you have the ability to locate them. That would make the process absurdly easier.

However, now that he knows it's Ilya, it's crazy to think of a time when he didn't know where he was. Including in this moment on the beach. The footsteps are unmistakably Ilya.

Ilya sits down beside him and leans on his hands. The epitome of relaxed. "Found you."

"So you were looking for me?"

"Of course not," Ilya says.

Shane closes his eyes, feeling that all familiar tingling on his arm. Hearing Ilya tell him a real lie is strange, yet it's also a breath of fresh air at the same time.

"Oh, I looked up that word," Ilya says. "Uh, 'compatible.'"

Shane frowns. "What?"

"Compatible," Ilya repeats. "I thought I knew what it meant, but I wanted to be sure."

"Oh."

"So, you and Rose Landry are not..."

Shane hadn't noticed the vulnerability in his constant questions revolving around Rose before at the bar. It comes loud and clear this time, Ilya having dropped the subtle prodding in favor of getting the indisputable truth. Even if it left him exposed.

Shane gives him it in simple words. "Yeah, not compatible. Not in that way, anyway."

They're both quiet for a few minutes. Sitting in the sand with bare feet is not the best sensation, but the salty air and the soothing sounds of waves crashing makes up for his discomfort. The setting sun over the water gives Ilya's skin a nice golden glow.

"When do you fly out?" Shane asks.

"Early."

"Same. Columbus," Shane says.

"Toronto."

From the corner of his eye, he sees Ilya moving his hand closer, bridging the gap between them. Shane smiles, and the warmth seeping in his bones has nothing to do with the radiating sand. He inches his hand closer, and brushes Ilya's thumb with his own.

An ache blooms in his chest. There are so many things left unsaid. They need to remedy that.

“What room are you in?”

+++++

Shane texts Ilya when he gets there, and he goes straight to the bed to sit down. He rubs his knees, certain Ilya could hear his heart beating like a ram.

Ilya studies him, and apprehension hardens his features. “This looks serious.”

“It’s not.” Shane grimaces. “I mean, yeah, I guess. Can you just sit down or something?”

Ilya hesitates, and then takes a seat on the hotel mini fridge. He crosses one foot over the other. His shoulders are tense, but it’s as if he realizes because he relaxes them.

“It’s not just me, right?” Shane asks quietly.

“Not just you, what?”

It feels as if a balloon was expanding in his chest, taking up more space than there is available. “You feel it too, don’t you?”

“Feel what?”

It’s coming clear Ilya wasn’t going to make this easy. Shane decides the best course of action was the more complicated one. Soulmates - sure. That’s black and white. They are soulmates, but it’s how they want to deal with it that matters.

“Last time we were together, it was different.”

“What was different? That you ran away?”

Guilt curls in Shane’s stomach and twists. “Look, I’m-I’m sorry I freaked out, okay?”

“Freaked out over nothing,” Ilya denies, tossing the idea aside.

As if Shane and the truth didn’t matter. His arm tingles, and Shane bristles. “It wasn’t nothing. Don’t act like that. This is hard enough without you being an asshole.”

Ilya eyes the floor like it personally offended him. He looks at Shane. “What do you want, Hollander?” he asks, defeated.

Shane tenses at the loaded question. He expected it as much, but it’s different to guess than to be in the actual moment. He sighs.

Ilya shrugs and purses his lips. “We get together. We fuck. It’s simple.”

The casual tone irks Shane. “Simple?”

Ilya's casual tone is unyielding. "It's simple for me."

The nonchalance is grating his nerves, electrifying the hairs on his arms as it writes every word Ilya says. Shane finally wants to be honest and Ilya has all his walls up.

"Bullshit!" Shane exclaims. Ilya's apathy falters, alarmed, revealing the cracks underneath. Shane looks away. "I think..."

Ilya gives the smallest nod.

"I think I'm gay."

Ilya immediately breaks out in laughter. He bobs his head. "Hmm. Oh yeah? What makes you think that?"

"Fuck you, you're not gay," Shane says testily.

"No, not completely."

"Yeah, well, I think I am. Completely," Shane admits.

"Okay! So you're gay, so what?" Ilya asks, voice raising.

"Well, it's kind of a big deal. To me, at least," Shane replies defensively. Ilya hangs his head with his arms at his knees. Shane glares at the way he's acting, like this was no big deal or some simple revelation, rather than something significant Shane had buried for too long. "Sorry if I'm being boring again."

Ilya sighs and joins Shane on the bed. "Why are you telling me this?"

"Who else am I gonna tell?" Shane asks.

Ilya says nothing. He doesn't even look at him.

"It's...not just being gay. It's you. It's this," Shane says. He huffs a humorless laugh. "Being gay is one thing, but this fucking your soulmate is another thing."

"That's why it's a secret," Ilya says, gaze glued to the floor.

"I know that, but last time..." Shane swallows. He tries to get Ilya to look at him, but he actively avoids his gaze. "And for the record, I am sorry about last time, okay? I'm sorry I freaked out. But before that...it was nice."

"It was," Ilya agrees.

"And it felt like we were something," Shane says. "That science or the universe or whatever was right."

"We can't be something, Hollander," Ilya denies.

A cold, dark pit opens in Shane's stomach. The rejection stings, but he didn't come this far for Ilya to make the decision for them again. "Would you want to be, if we could?"

"We can't," Ilya shuts down. A period at the end of a doomed sentence.

"That's not what I asked."

Ilya finally looks at him. His eyes are bloodshot and he snaps, "What does it fucking matter?"

Shane flinches. "I don't think I can keep pretending I don't like you anymore."

Ilya shakes his head and picks at his shorts. "You *don't* like me."

Shane zeroes in on those words like a laser, ears perked. Ilya is pale and withdrawn. Mouth twitching, wanting to say more but doesn't. The lack of words on Shane's arm makes it clear Ilya believed that was true.

"Yeah, I do," Shane says. "I think I like you maybe a little too much. I read somewhere soulmates tend to do that."

Ilya shakes his head harder, growing angry. "Don't. Don't fucking do this, Hollander. I'm not..."

Shane waits patiently.

Ilya exhales and looks at him. "I wouldn't be able to go home again. Ever. Do you get that?"

"Because your family?"

"Because Russia! I would not be able to go back to Russia!"

Right. He couldn't find a single article about same-sex soulmates in Russia. He was horrified over why that was. "What would happen to you?"

"I don't want to find out." Ilya's voice cracks at the end.

"But would your parents..."

"My father is police. My brother is police."

"And your mother?" Shane asks.

"Dead," Ilya says stiffly.

"I'm sorry," Shane says, lost on what to say. That's horrible.

"I was young," Ilya says, waving off his apology. Waving off his mother's death like it didn't matter. Another thing to hold close and never let see the light of day.

"My father was not ever an easy man to live with. He is very set in old ways. Very strict, and my brother is much like him. My mother and him weren't soulmates, and she was very

young,” Ilya explains. “Now he’s sick.”

“Sick like crazy?” Shane asks.

Ilya tilts his head. “That too, a little, but no, sick more like...”

“Oh, like cancer?”

“Dementia.”

“That’s awful,” Shane says sympathetically. That was a lot to deal with.

Ilya’s mouth twitches, and his face turns pink. A stray tear falls down his cheek, and he turns away.

Shane spots the shift and the tear immediately. He reaches out to him. “Hey,” he says softly.

Ilya says nothing.

“Hey,” Shane says again, more alarmed. Ilya shakes his head, fighting back more tears. Shane gets off the bed.

“Sorry,” Ilya croaks through a choked sob.

Shane needs him to look at him and understand he’s not alone, so he climbs into Ilya’s lap. Ilya’s eyes are brimmed with unshed tears, and he looks at Shane with a painful sense of lost and raw emotion. Shane cradles his face and the back of his head. His fingers sink into his curly hair, and he kisses him.

Ilya chases his lips when he pulls away. Shane falls back into him, kissing Ilya harder and more passionately. Ilya’s tongue teases his lips, and the kiss deepens. It wasn’t like all the other times when they were horny and about to have sex. It didn’t involve any of that, just Shane providing comfort and security through touch that Ilya seemed to be starved for. It’s what he needed, and Shane was more than happy to give. More than willing to hold him.

Ilya breaks the kiss to put his face against Shane’s chest. His wet cheek on Shane’s shirt. Shane, slightly drunk on the evolved emotional intimacy, brings his face to the crook of Ilya’s neck. His hand cups the other side, while his free arm wraps around Ilya’s back. Completely enveloping Ilya with his whole body.

Ilya pulls Shane impossibly closer, arms made of steel wrap around Shane’s waist and locking. “моя вторая половинка,” he says shakily, rocking them both. “Я никогда не хочу, чтобы ты уходил.”

“You’ve said that before,” Shane murmurs. “I think.”

“Yes,” Ilya says hoarsely. They hold each other in the quiet hotel room.

Shane breaks the silence. “What does it mean?”

“I said.” Ilya hides his face in Shane’s shirt. His words come out muffled, but Shane can hear him all the same. “Soulmate. I never want you to leave.”

“But at the Olympics,” Shane whispers, stunned.

“Yes.”

Shane closes his eyes, heart squeezing painfully. “I thought you rejected me when you found out, and that’s why you didn’t tell me.”

“I’m sorry,” Ilya says. He kisses over Shane’s heart in apology. “I never wanted you to think that. I felt it important not to say that day, and then I never told you. I was scared.”

“It’s okay,” Shane says. He had a lot of time to think about a young Ilya telling a young Shane that they’re soulmates at a Junior Championship. The reaction was disastrous. Plus, after all the information he learned tonight, Shane understands how Ilya must’ve felt finding out he had a male soulmate while playing for Russia.

He kisses Ilya’s temple. “I mean, you should’ve told me eventually, but at the time I...I didn’t want to meet my soulmate. I just wanted to play hockey.”

A pause. Then Ilya laughs, shaking them both. “See? So boring, Hollander!”

It’s good to hear him laughing again. Shane laughs softly. “Yeah, well, I am the best player in the league.”

“You wish,” Ilya grunts. He stops laughing and kisses Shane’s jaw and then his lips. His expression turns crestfallen, and his voice comes out fragile. Shane can barely hear him.

“When you left, I thought you rejected me,” Ilya says somberly. “It is my fault for keeping secret, but it still hurt me. Then you got with Rose Landry after you found out, and I realized how badly I fucked up. I was sure it would never be a possibility, and it was why I was able to keep it from you for so long. Cannot lose something you do not have or ever will. I had little hope anyway, but seeing you with her. I-I don’t know right word. It hurt everywhere.”

Shane brushes a curl out of his eyes. “I’m here now. We both made mistakes. I, uh, bought a soulmate rejection book. I’m sorry I put you through that. We both did.”

Ilya nods, and then Shane’s words sink in. “Soulmate book? What was it called? *Silly Soulmate Lied, So I Became Straight?*”

“You’re a fucking asshole,” Shane groans. He shoves Ilya onto his back. He leans on his hands, hovering over Ilya. “I can’t believe you’re my soulmate.”

Ilya is beaming at him. Shane blushes. Ilya runs a finger tenderly over his cheek and nose, admiring his freckles. “I cannot believe either.”

Ilya brings him down for a kiss, switching positions so he’s on top. Ilya helps him out of his clothes, kissing every inch of exposed skin like he’s never touched him before. His kisses are persistent, trailing from under Shane’s ear and under his jaw, going at a glacial pace down his

trembling body. He kisses his shoulders and biceps, paying special attention to his left forearm.

“My name is Shane Hollander,” Ilya murmurs. They both watch as the words form on Shane’s skin. He smiles in fascination and awe.

Then Ilya traces the letters with his tongue, and Shane moans. “Fuck, Ilya.”

“Mm. Call me what I am.”

Shane frowns. “What?”

“Call me ‘soulmate’ while I fuck you,” Ilya says. His smile turns devilish. He moves to lay between Shane’s legs. He kisses the head of his cock, and Shane curses. “Make up for lost time. Say it.”

“*Soulmate*,” Shane gasps.

“Good boy.” Another kiss and lick. “Good soulmate.”

Ilya doesn’t let up on the matter. He makes Shane call him that while he kisses and caresses his body. There wasn’t one part of his body that Ilya didn’t kiss. Every beg and plea - Shane had to say *soulmate, please*. He moaned it as Ilya sucked him off. Every time he added a finger in his hole - Shane had to cry out *soulmate*. By the time Ilya fucks into him, Shane is a shaking mess and only aware of one single word.

“*Soulmate, soulmate*,” Shane sobs. His legs hang over Ilya’s shoulders, folded in half as he fucks him. Ilya kisses Shane’s knees, eyes trained on his face. Sweat is building on his forehead, fucking him deeper and harder. Shane is clutching his own legs, and Ilya intertwines their fingers. It’s oddly romantic.

Ilya changes the angle, and Shane whimpers when he finds that bundle of nerves that light him on fire. There’s really no way to meet his thrusts in this position with his legs this close.

“Oh, you were meant for this,” Ilya says. His thrusts turn sharp, driving into him, making Shane keen and cry out. “Meant for me. Should’ve known this way. You were meant to take my cock. Nobody fucking compares to you.”

If Shane wasn’t painfully hard and mere minutes from his orgasm, mind blank and floaty, he would make a sarcastic comment. His tongue couldn’t form other words, dry and useless in his mouth.

It was also insanelly hot to think about.

Ilya suddenly takes his left arm and brings it to his lips. Holding Shane’s heated gaze, he runs the flat of his tongue over his forearm. He snaps his hips, pounding into Shane at a ruthless pace. “Say it.”

“Soulmate,” Shane cries out, clenching around Ilya and making them both shudder.

Ilya fucks him slow and deep, each few thrusts grazing his prostate. He takes Shane's arm again and bites down. Shane's eyes roll back.

"Fuck!" Shane shouts. He comes hard between their bodies. "Soulmate. Oh my god."

Ilya fucks him through it roughly, hard and fast, all restraint gone. Shane's eyes are heavy with exhausted desire. He tilts his head up for a kiss, and Ilya stretches down to bring their lips together.

Shane kisses the corner of Ilya's mouth. "Come for me, soulmate."

"Fuck, Hollander," Ilya groans. Five more thrusts and he comes hard with his sweaty cheek against Shane's knee. He breathes deep, catching his breath while Shane does the same. Ilya gazes at him. "My soulmate."

"I am," Shane sighs with a loopy smile. Ilya kisses him and pulls out. Shane winces at the ache. Ilya whispers an apology and retrieves wet cloths to clean him up. Once they're both reasonably clean, Ilya pulls Shane into his chest.

They cuddle for almost half an hour, exchanging innocent kisses and touches. Considering they've never done this before, it's all new and exciting. Shane feels giddy looking back at Ilya and then at his arm wrapped around him. Ilya is gently stroking his hair. He's warm and cozy.

He gives the hotel door a glare. He needs to go. It's getting late. It would be so easy to give in and fall asleep.

As if Ilya could read his mind, he presses sleepy kisses on Shane's nape and neck. "Stay."

Shane turns to face him. He caresses Ilya's jaw, who kisses his palm and fingertips in return. "I have to go."

Ilya shakes his head. "When will I have my soulmate for as long as I want?"

Shane's stomach twists, but his heart beats louder than the disappointment trying to stir. There are still so many obstacles to face, and it's going to be difficult. "I don't know. As soon as possible?"

Ilya kisses him, long and gentle. He nuzzles into his neck. "Okay."

Shane puts on his clothes, moving slower than the times before. He gets to the door and turns back to find Ilya watching him with a thin smile. "What?"

"Nothing," Ilya says. "Goodnight, Shane."

Hearing his first name sends a pleasant buzz through him and butterflies in his stomach. "Goodnight, Ilya," he replies.

He gets to his room still smiling like a loon.

Chapter End Notes

i know what i did at the end hehe

Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

yall this is a bitch to update on phone with all the italics. thank u so much for the support, and i REALLY hope you enjoy. it took me awhile to update bc i knew this chapter was going to be a lot. i knew i wanted to make the changes i did, and i was going to work to still make everything flow well.

if i ever confuse you on why something is italicized - whether it's their soulmate marks, thoughts, or just emphasis - please let me know. i feel like i do a good job explaining which is which though.

soulmate mark - shane acknowledges it or his arm tingles
thoughts - i mean maybe im not very specific but if they're stringed together with other sentences then it's a thought
emphasis - just one word or two words usually

warning - self harm but it's from an anxiety attack and shane didn't consciously mean to.

there are two (2.5) major(?) changes. if you actually care about canon and me following the tv show, might want to read end notes for explanations and spoilers! :)

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

I bet Shane Hollander is looking especially terrible right now.

Shane rolls his eyes. Boston is playing on the screen. He's at Hayden's house with a couple other teammates. The camera panned to Ilya, who was talking to Marlow. He has no idea what they could be talking about that would lead to Ilya saying that. Possibly something about Montreal and playing against them in two weeks. Shane is a little nervous over Ilya talking about him so casually, but Marlow laughs, unaware of anything besides the facade of the rivalry between Rozanov and Hollander. The effortless taunts that come easily, no matter that they weren't playing against each other.

As if Ilya could hear his anxious thoughts, Rozanov takes that moment to look at the camera and *wink*.

He definitely knew Shane was watching and freaking out over him talking about him to a teammate. Talking about his soulmate without a care in the world. He definitely did that on purpose. The lie and Ilya's annoying habit of getting under Shane's skin makes him blush and cover his arm with his sleeve. Smug asshole.

"I hope Rozanov doesn't get any more ice time," Shane tells Hayden because he can be an asshole too. The camera is off Ilya, but Shane can imagine the grin he's making. The corresponding lie.

Hayden laughs. "He is being more annoyingly chatty lately. Smiling a lot. Maybe he got a girlfriend."

Shane fiddles with his hands, both pleased and disgruntled at Hayden's guess. Ilya has been smiling more, ever since the All-Star Games. He's more mouthy, but not really in an antagonizing way. The chirps were thrown out leisurely, ranging from general banter that was playful and witty jibes at hostile players. He hit all the marks because everyone expected Ilya to say whatever that comes to mind. The taunts had just increased in numbers not heat.

Girlfriend. Shane's lips pinched. "Maybe."

"That poor soul," Hayden scoffs. "I will send her flowers for putting up with the guy."

"He is a lot to deal with," Shane says. "It takes a lot to shut him up."

Hayden laughs. Shane smiles sheepishly.

Ilya can't look at his arm with all the gear on, but Shane knows from experience that it doesn't stop the rush of adrenaline and tingles from your soulmate lying. Especially for them and how on the ice, the lies are more for getting the other's attention than anything else. Shane hadn't understood at first why Ilya lied so much during games, but now Shane knows Ilya's second glances and beaming smiles were because he was getting Shane's attention without Shane realizing it.

Shane didn't touch his phone during games. He had to wait for the game to end and head to the locker room. Last week, after a game against Boston, Shane grabbed his phone.

Shane: I can't read your lies during games.

Lily: I know.

Shane: Then why do it?

Lily: You think of me, yes?

Shane stared at his phone.

Shane: Yes

Lily: Good.

Shane narrowed his eyes. Back when he didn't know Ilya was his soulmate, he noticed his soulmate lied a lot whenever he played. He thought his soulmate had impeccable timing. Turns out it was the only time Ilya could get away with lying without having to worry about Shane catching on. He could say anything, and Shane couldn't read it.

Shane: Are you trying to fuck with my game?

Lily: I am trying to fuck my soulmate, not game. Who cares about a game when I have stunning, boring bratty man with freckles to play with?

Shane sputtered and dropped his phone.

Lily: I lie, you think of me. It is...what's that experiment called? The dog and bell. By Russian.

Shane: Pavlov, and fuck you.

Lily: Am I naked when you think of me or just shirtless? Do you get hard?

Shane: Neither. Stop bothering me.

Lily: You love me bothering you.

Shane blushed.

Shane: Fuck off.

Lily: My soulmate is so mean! So vicious. It ok. He is cute. He gets away with it. Never change.

The game was going smoothly. Ilya was skating circles around his opponents, talking nonsense and smiling like he was in a permanent state of euphoria. Shane can relate.

There was still a lot to deal with. They can't exactly come out and announce that they're soulmates. The league has painted the perfect picture of them as rivals. Made money off pitting them against each other. If the truth got out, it would all blow up under their feet and bury them alive. Soulmates are put on pedestals, as long as they fit the specific stipulations and hidden guidelines.

Two men do not follow the rules.

Above all else, Shane wasn't out yet. He only recently acknowledged his sexuality, and is not ready to tell anyone else. Ilya was scared about Russia and never being able to go back home. It was an endless mountain of hang-ups and blockades. Shane had no idea where to even begin.

For now, in their safe circle, Shane smiles while he watches his soulmate chase after the puck.

Shane's smile falls. He can see the moment Ilya realizes it too. A defense player was going too fast, with high momentum and power. He slams into Rozanov, whose head hits the board with a hard smack. Hard enough for his helmet to fall off. Rozanov falls on the ice.

Ilya doesn't move right away. Shane's heart pounds in his caving chest, vocal cords shriveled up. He sees a faceless figure hover over him. The player who hit him. He mouths *Rozanov* and gives his shoulder a small shake. The audience is silent, broken by concerned whispers and murmurs. Medics are called, and Marlow throws the other player into the boards with an angry shout.

A rookie, Shane is pretty sure. He hears someone in the distance confirm. Some rookie trying to prove himself. Shane couldn't give a fuck. He can't hear or see much of anything. He thinks someone says his name, but Shane doesn't register it. His world honed in on the tv screen.

He doesn't think he's breathing. He's drowning, being yanked deeper into the freezing darkness. His ears ring, and his left arm hurts. Panic shoots through him. His arm was burning.

What happens when someone's soulmate dies? Does it hurt the other person? A sign or indicator that half their soul is *gone*? Poof? Ripped in half and leaves them bleeding out?

Someone grabs Shane's arm, yanking it to the side. Shane jumps at the sudden, violent contact. He pulls out of his trance to find Hayden there. He's holding Shane's wrist, where Shane stands two feet from the tv. Hayden has a complicated, unreadable expression on his face. It wasn't accusatory or judgmental, just an even blend of fear and astonishment.

Shane pulled his sleeve up without knowing at some point. His left arm is bleeding from his nails digging in. Blood coats his arm, but he doesn't feel it. He doesn't even feel the wet towel Hayden uses to clean him. Shane turns back to the screen. A medic was looking at Ilya.

Rozanov's leg moves, and he opens his eyes. He grimaces, and he says something.

Shane's arm tingles. This time it's painful.

I'm not fine.

The medic looks at Ilya in alarm, but Ilya shakes his head and says something else. He gestures with his arm, and he slowly gets to his feet with the medic's help. Everyone cheers and claps at his bravery. Shane's eyes are wet with tears. Okay. Okay. He's fine.

"Shane?" Hayden calls, and it sounds far away. Above the surface Shane almost froze to death. "Buddy, are you okay?"

Shane swallows. He nods. He's trembling and holding back tears. He nods again because it's all he can manage to do.

Hayden's eyes flicker from the game to Shane. "Rozanov is fine. It was just a hard hit to his chest. His head and ribs have to be killing him."

Shane swallows again, choking on the lump at the back of his throat. He nods. He pictures the words he wants to say, but they don't reach his tongue.

"He's walking," Hayden continues. Voice steady and calm. "Unfortunately he's talking, but he is. He is okay. Do you... Do you want your phone? You left it on the couch."

Shane looks at where Hayden is pointing, but it's like he's standing outside of his body. A body that is too heavy to move and refuses to cooperate. Ilya being slammed into the boards keeps replaying in his head, and different endings take root. One in particular of Ilya never getting back up. Taken from him before they could properly enjoy this new level of their relationship. Finally on the same wavelength.

Hayden is watching Shane a little too closely. He's practically staring at him with an intensity Shane isn't used to seeing on him. It wasn't condemning, nor was his tone reproachful. His eyes are still soft and open, scrutinizing but not accusing.

Shane searches for some sort of excuse that would make sense as to why he had a panic attack to Ilya, his arch rival, getting hurt. He comes up empty.

Hayden retrieves his phone. Shane takes it gratefully, still unable to form words. Hayden pats his shoulder. "Tell me if you need anything, buddy."

Then Hayden leaves for the kitchen without another word. No accusation. No world shattering discovery. No cold shoulder.

Shane: Are you okay?

Lily: Yes, I am fine. Head hurts. Shoulders and ribs hurt. Fucker weighs like an elephant.

Lily: Are you okay?

Shane peeks over at the kitchen. Hayden is laughing with Jackie.

Shane: I think so.

+++++

I do not want my soulmate to come over.

Shane finishes brushing his teeth. He whispers in the mirror. "I want my soulmate to leave me alone."

He gets no response. Shane pushes down the pang of disappointment.

"Boston's Lily is texting you," Hayden says walking to the door, emphasizing his amusement. "Have fun!"

Shane goes red. He hurries out of the bathroom, going on autopilot and turning on *deny, deny, deny*. It didn't matter that Hayden knew *something* was going on. It's quite clear whenever Hayden tries to ask, but ultimately backing off with a loose shrug when Shane clams up.

"It's not..."

"I don't care!" Hayden says louder. He slides on his headphones and leaves the hotel.

Lily: What time do you leave tomorrow?

Shane: Early. Why?

Lily: What are you doing right now?

Shane: Nothing. At the hotel.

Lily: Come over?

Shane scoffs. He grabs his jacket and puts it on.

Shane: I can't! We have a game tonight!

Lily: Come over. Not for long. An hour?

Shane: No! Come on, it's a terrible idea.

Shane grabs another jacket and ties his shoes. He heads to the door.

Lily: Everything we do is a bad idea.

+++++++

Shane is seconds from pressing into Ilya's side, craving his warm touch and smell, when Ilya's phone rings. Shane is breathing heavily, having just gotten off and sweating. Ilya seemed tense when he first got there, and whatever had been occupying his mind faded away once they tumbled into bed. The first ring of Ilya's phone makes him tense again.

Ilya reaches over to look at his phone. He taps on the screen and sets the phone down. He groans and falls back into the pillows. He catches Shane watching him curiously.

"My brother," Ilya answers the silent question.

"You can take it if you want to," Shane offers.

Ilya's eyes widen, and he shakes his head. "No, I don't want to."

Ilya looks at the wall, gaze far away. His phone has been ringing a lot lately, and Ilya got more tense each time.

“Is everything okay at home?” Shane asks. “Your father?”

“Enough,” Ilya cuts him off. Softening the blow, he pats and rubs Shane’s thigh. “Okay?”

“Enough what?”

“Questions. You have too many of them,” Ilya says.

Shane smiles nervously. “I’m sorry.”

Shane watches Ilya’s face, trying to read him. The little giveaways on his features. The way Ilya struggles to meet his gaze. The furrow of his brows. Licking his lips. He fidgets more too. Ilya has every right to keep to himself and have secrets. He opened up a lot during the All-Star Game weekend, so it makes sense Ilya might be feeling vulnerable. Shane is often told he asks too many questions. This isn’t news to him, but he can’t help wanting to be there for Ilya.

There’s a silent pause, and then Ilya looks at him. “It’s okay.”

Shane smiles. “I wasn’t clear. I’m sorry in advance for tonight’s game. We’re gonna destroy you guys.”

“Oh.” Ilya frowns and nods. “So you are the asshole.”

Shane laughs. “No, it’s still you.”

Ilya makes an exaggerated pout. “No, not me. You are the asshole. Everyone must know this.”

Ilya sits up on the bed. Shane’s face hurts from laughing. “Everyone! Shane Hollander is an asshole.”

“You’re the asshole all the time,” Shane retorts between laughs. Ilya grins and moves to hover atop of him. His necklace skims Shane’s chest when he kisses him. Shane runs a hand through Ilya’s curly hair. “I have to be a little bit of an asshole to keep up with you. You know, as your soulmate and all.”

Ilya tilts his head from side to side, lips curved down. He pecks Shane’s nose. “I suppose so. Make it, er, even. Just like being boring, but it is more difficult. You make it look so easy. I read the New Yorker, and I get very sleepy.”

Shane giggles - a sound he can’t believe he makes. Ilya’s eyes soften. “If I’m as boring as you say, then what do you think it says about you that you’re my soulmate?”

Ilya kisses Shane’s cheek, and nuzzles his face. Shane smiles. Ilya kisses his brows and the corner of his lips. He cups his face, and his touch is grounding and incredibly tender.

“Lucky, Hollander,” Ilya whispers. “Very fucking lucky.”

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The rumors are true. \$1,000 for every goal scored tonight.

Shane chuckles and shakes his head. Not a fucking chance.

+++++++

No, no, no, it's not true. I said you fuckers owe me \$1,000 for every goal I score.

Shane glares at the lie. Asshole won tonight. He scored one more than Shane, and Boston won. Ilya played harder in this game. Shane easily kept up, but it was in the way Ilya skated faster, stole more pucks like some sort of hell angel, and made it his personal mission to test and overwhelm Montreal's goalie that convinced Shane that Ilya had some sort of underlying motivation. Ilya always plays like the champion he is, but the intensity tonight was dialed higher.

Shane was going to ask him about it, but Ilya never texts him back. He didn't text Shane the whole night or the next day. Shane knows they saw each other before the game, and maybe post-game plans were the reason behind Ilya wanting him to come over so badly, but Ilya didn't mention anything.

Shane tries not to worry. Maybe something came up. He wishes Ilya would've texted at least once.

“I wasn't expecting you to text me tonight,” Shane whispers into his pillow.

Nothing. Shane tries not to let his concern morph into anxiety and doubt. Las Vegas comes to mind. The six months Ilya went ignoring Shane. The crippling anxiety and misery, and the rejection that consumed him. That was a time when Shane theorized they were soulmates. If Ilya does it again after they both opened up and confessed how much they mean to each other, Shane doesn't know what he'll do. He might go insane. He might actually murder Ilya with his own hands.

Then cry. Then kill Ilya again.

It's the next day when someone mentions Ilya.

“Hey, did you hear about Rozanov?”

Shane's ears perk, and he goes straight to JJ. He just got out of the shower after their game. "What about Rozanov?"

"Well, he did not fly with the rest of the team to Nashville," JJ explains.

Shane's stomach twists with dread. "He flew separately?"

"He did not go to Nashville at all."

Hayden raises a brow. "Well, he didn't get hurt last night, did he?"

"Not that I know of," JJ says.

"No, he didn't," Shane says, a little too fast and confident.

Hayden gives him a look. "Maybe he's sick."

"He's not," Shane says. He pauses. He pointedly looks at Hayden. "I mean, he didn't seem sick."

"Who gives a shit?" JJ scoffs. "ESPN is just saying he did not go to Nashville. Calm down."

Shane cannot do that. He takes out his phone.

Shane: Are you okay?

No response. Still no response hours later. Shane can't put down his phone. It stays glued in his hand. Shane stares at the screen, begging for Ilya to tell him what's happening. He doesn't need to deal with whatever happened alone. He has Shane. Comforting each other and offering a shoulder to lean on are what soulmates do.

It must be bad, because there aren't any articles about it. Normally, a sneeze could make fans worry about their bets. Ilya Rozanov disappearing out of thin air should have the reporters going nuts. If they aren't, they must know the reason and respect Boston's wishes for discretion.

Shane decides to do what he's never thought to do before. He calls Ilya. Ilya doesn't answer, but he hopes Ilya sees that he called and is worried about him.

Shane is in the middle of reading when his phone rings. A video call. Shane hurriedly answers. He throws the book to the side. "Hey. Are you okay?"

"You wear glasses?"

Shane immediately takes them off. "Just for reading. Where are you?"

"Home," Ilya says. "Put them back on, please."

Shane frowns. "Boston?"

"Moscow." Ilya has a grin on his face.

“Oh. Are you okay?” Shane asks.

“I will be better when I see you in your glasses again,” Ilya murmurs.

Shane rolls his eyes. Dodging questions is an art form for Ilya. He sighs and puts his glasses back on. “Happy?”

Ilya’s voice comes out low, tired. “Happier.”

“Is your father?” Shane asks, uncertain how to approach.

“Yes, dead,” Ilya confirms.

Shane’s heart drops to his stomach. “Ilya... I’m so sorry.”

“What are people saying about me?”

“Nothing. The media is being super secretive,” Shane says. “And the Raiders haven’t-“

“Good,” Ilya interrupts. “I will be back by the end of the week.”

“You should take more time than that,” Shane suggests kindly.

Ilya narrows his eyes. “Why? So you can catch up to me in the scoring race?”

“I’m being serious,” Shane says. “You know, you can talk to me about whatever. I want to help if I can. It’s sort of my job...”

Ilya’s lips twitch and doesn’t reply right away. He searches Shane’s face, as if taking him in. Shane doesn’t see a man who just lost his father. He’s seen Ilya cry, and this wasn’t it. This is layered indifference. Feelings are hidden beneath the surface, but Shane can’t tell which ones. There are bags under his eyes, but he doesn’t look very sad. Exhaustion fits better.

“Take off your clothes.”

“What?” Shane scoffs.

“I’m also being serious,” Ilya says, casually. He sits down on a couch. He leans the phone on something. “If you want to be good soulmate and help me, take your clothes off.”

Shane isn’t sure how this will help, but he has a hard time saying no to Ilya. He obviously needs a distraction. Shane is happy to be one. He takes off his glasses and shirt. Ilya does the same.

“Glasses back on,” he instructs. He taps right below his eye as if to demonstrate.

Shane does so. Ilya sighs. Shane watches the way his hand sinks into the waistband of his pants. He unbuttons them and wraps his hand around his cock. Shane does the same. He’s not fully hard yet, but it takes no time around Ilya.

“Beautiful,” Ilya says. Shane blushes, stroking slowly. “You are very beautiful.”

“You like my glasses that much, huh?”

“I do,” Ilya says truthfully. His breathing grows heavy. “With or without glasses. With or without clothes. You look gorgeous all the time.”

Shane smiles and bites his lip. “Come on.”

“It is true,” Ilya says. “Your freckles. I am nuts about them. I will kiss every single one.”

“That will take a long time,” Shane moans, imagining Ilya’s lips on his cheeks. “I don’t get why. I’ve never liked them.”

“No,” Ilya groans. “No, no. They are stunning. Only thing I liked about you when we first met.”

“*When we first met?*” Shane says, exasperated. He huffs a surprised laugh. “You were a fucking dick to me.”

“Soulmate or not - nothing would’ve worked out without those freckles.” Ilya’s arm starts moving faster, pumping his cock. Shane copies him and lets out a whimper. Ilya smirks.

“Oh, fuck you!” Shane curses. “Nothing would’ve worked out if I hadn’t lied that first time.”

“Because I was being an asshole,” Ilya grunts. “You love me being a dick and my actual dick.”

Shane glares. It’s getting hard to focus on the conversation. He was almost there. “Whatever.”

“And praise,” Ilya says. “You love praise. I could get you off on praise alone. All wet for me.”

Shane turns pink. “Yeah, well, so do you.”

Ilya shakes his head. “No. I know I am good. I do not care what people say. *You* like being good. You follow instructions so well. The hotel in Vegas. You were a good boy.”

“*Oh my god, Ilya,*” Shane whines. He remembers that night. Ilya telling him to show off, give him a show. Shane had opened himself up for him, legs parted wide with his fingers fucking his hole. Ilya couldn’t look away. Shane felt powerful that day.

Shane clenches his fist and strokes faster, body tensing on the blankets. It’s getting too hard to hold his phone. He leans it on his nightstand. “I-I want you here. I want to see your face.”

“Fuck, Shane,” Ilya moans.

Ilya brings the camera closer and seeing his face was somehow more intimate than seeing him fist his cock. Here he can see his blue eyes and the desire in them. His curved lips and the moles on his face and ears.

“You are beautiful too,” Shane says breathlessly. “Your hair. Soft to touch. Your crooked smile - that’s all I can think about. I love your eyes. I love you looking at me.”

“I’m always fucking looking at you,” Ilya says. His voice comes out strained, moments from coming. Shane wants to see him fall apart. He wants Ilya to make him fall apart. “I can’t stop sometimes. My soulmate is so fucking stunning.”

Shane moans when he finally comes. Whimpers fill the room, and he spills on his stomach. “*Ilya.*”

Ilya jerks himself off, coming with a guttural groan. Shane watches his face, jealous over not being there. He wants to kiss those panting lips, and steal his breath away. He wants to make him come by blowing him. He craves the weight of his cock on his tongue.

Ilya falls back into the couch and mutters something in Russian. Shane smiles. “It’s sexy when you speak Russian.”

Ilya’s mouth tugs to the side, amused. “Is it? Not ridiculous?”

Shane grabs a kleenex to clean up. “Yeah. Not ridiculous. I like hearing it.”

Ilya’s smile is soft, and it warms Shane’s heart. The silence gets too overwhelming. Ilya wasn’t looking at the camera anymore.

“I’m so sorry, Ilya,” Shane says.

Ilya makes a throaty noise. “I will be back in a few days. I should go.”

Shane nods. “Okay.”

“Goodbye, Hollander.”

“Wait.” Ilya looks at him. “Call me, okay? Or text. About anything. If you need me. I want to help you the best I can.”

Ilya stares at him. Blue eyes shining, not with tears but with a raw nerve unshielded by his usual walls of fortitude. The mountain of layers is gone, letting Shane see deep sorrow.

“You did,” he says sincerely. “Thank you.”

He hangs up, and Shane lets out a deep exhale.

+++++

Ilya doesn’t lie the whole week. Shane isn’t sure how to interpret that.

Once upon a time, Shane didn't understand lying. He didn't see the point. He knows better now, and how telling the truth is sometimes no better. Not when he manipulates others to believe in one thing over another. He did that for so long, and he still falls into that habit.

In Ilya's case, he lies to survive. While Shane wishes Ilya hadn't kept the truth about them being soulmates from him, he knew it wasn't simple. He did it for tons of reasons. It doesn't lessen the betrayal, especially due to Ilya orchestrating Shane's part in not lying, but Shane understands the dangers Ilya was under. Shane had his own problems, including himself as his worst enemy.

Shane worries for Ilya. It's troubling with the lack of lies, considering he's back in Russia where he was the least safe. Although, he's never lied much when he's in Russia. Not in recent years. Shane can't decide if he should be happy or sad about it. Does he not care anymore, and says exactly what's on his mind? Or does he care too much, and says nothing at all? How little does he make himself be?

Neither reason sounds better than the other nor hopeful, and all Shane wants to do is hold Ilya and beg him not to go back.

+++++++

Lily: Are you alone?

Shane: Yeah.

Lily: Can I call you?

"Hey," Shane calls out to Hayden from the hotel door. "I'm just gonna..."

Hayden doesn't look away from the tv. "Have fun!"

Shane: Yes.

Shane hurries to the empty stairwell, and answers Ilya's phone call. He sits down and forgoes saying hello. "How are you?"

"Okay." A pause. "Not good. Probably bad."

If Shane could reach through the phone to hold Ilya, he would. "How's your, uh, family?"

"At their worst. My brother is..." Ilya sighs, struggling to explain. "I don't know. Scared. It makes him terrible, and it makes me terrible back."

"Is it very upsetting?" Shane asks. He doesn't want any miscommunication here. He needs to know how Ilya feels.

“Yes, but maybe I’m upset about the wrong thing.”

Shane frowns. He knows about Ilya and his complicated relationship with his father. His absence must still hurt - in a familiar obligation sense and not sincere loss. “You mean not your father?”

Ilya struggles once more to explain. “I wish it could be different. I wish he could know me, or... I don’t know. I don’t know. English is too hard right now.”

Shane gets how hard it is to put words together. Sometimes it was impossible to get his thoughts across without confusing or offending anyone. The pressure to please people who didn’t understand him acted like tight wire in his throat, and he would give up. He doesn’t want Ilya to worry about making Shane happy.

“I wish I spoke Russian,” Shane says regrettably.

“Yeah, you could probably learn it in a week,” Ilya says. “No accent. Perfect. Bonjour.”

Shane laughs. “That’s French, Ilya.”

“Yeah, I know, Shane.”

Ilya tells him he’s outside walking alone. He sounds miserable and tired. Shane hates that he’s alone in his own country, where his family is from. Where he should be feeling whole. Instead he’s dealing with his father’s death by himself. All of his pent-up emotions stretch him too thin, suffocating him, all while stuck in a taxing environment he’s supposed to call home.

Shane once again feels incapable of comforting someone. It hits harder, digs agonizingly deeper in the cold chasm in his chest that he can’t help his soulmate. He’s useless here, and he hates it. Learning Russian is his next priority.

“Hey, uh, I have an idea,” Shane murmurs. “How about you tell me everything that’s on your mind, but in Russian? I won’t understand, but maybe it’ll help.”

“I can lie,” Ilya offers quietly.

“Don’t worry about that,” Shane says. His heart raced, touched that even though Ilya had all the weight in the world on his shoulders, feeling crestfallen and dejected, he was still offering Shane that open connection. The mark would translate Ilya’s words, but Shane wasn’t doing this for his own benefit.

“Okay.”

Ilya begins talking, getting everything off his chest in stammered, choked breaths. Shane doesn’t know what he’s saying, but he can hear the pain in his voice. The woven bone-deep frustration and layered misery unravel with every broken word and guttural noise. Ilya’s voice wavers, and Shane tightens his hold on his phone, wishing it was his hand.

Ilya’s tone is gut wrenching, angry and exhausted. Shane closes his eyes, imagining the sharp, upset words. The way his throat seizes, working around tears that won’t fall. The

sadness that was tangible and heavy.

Ten minutes later, Ilya stops. “Okay, I’m done.”

Ilya sounds a degree lighter. “Do you feel better?”

“Yes, thank you.”

“Maybe you could teach me Russian someday,” Shane says.

“Yeah. Okay. Only useful phrases.”

Shane chuckles. “Like what?”

“I don’t know. Like.” Ilya thinks. “*Harder please. Yes, sir.*”

Shane blushes. “Fuck you.”

“No, more like: *Fuck me, please.*”

“How about,” Shane says, exasperated. “*I wish you were here right now? Or, I miss my soulmate. He’s too far away?*”

Ilya doesn’t reply right away. When he does, his voice is soft and warm. Unconflicted and settled. “I wish I was too. I miss my soulmate.”

+++++

Shane can breathe better when Ilya comes back. A major piece of his being had been missing, and it made Shane play terribly. He made naive and stupid calls, and he couldn’t focus. Ilya was a piece of him, literally in the scientific sense, and he felt like one of his limbs was missing. He was unbalanced, head unclear, and movements sluggish. He’s thankful for his team to get them through the next week.

His heart beat against his ribcage at the first sight of Ilya on the ice. He was moving before he could think better of it. He skates right to him, forgetting their stupid rivalry and antagonistic facade.

“We still on for tonight? After?” Shane asks.

Ilya is stretching his leg. He looks up at Shane and nods.

Shane’s nerves are on a wire, sparking under his skin. He wants to kiss Ilya, touch him to make sure this is real and that he is okay. For now, all he can do is give his front door code.

“Front door. Brave,” Ilya teases.

Shane looks away. “Fuck you.”

Ilya’s mouth twitches. “Later.”

Shane goes to Hayden and drinks some water. Hayden peeks over at Rozanov. “What was that about?”

Shane shrugs it off. “Oh, I just offered my condolences.”

“Oh, yeah. That’s nice.” Hayden makes a penitent expression. “Fuck, I should have done that. What did he say?”

“Told me to fuck off,” Shane says. From the corner of his eye, he sees Ilya’s shoulders shaking in laughter. There’s no way he knew what Shane said. Just the thought of Shane lying about Ilya makes him laugh.

Hayden shakes his head and gives Rozanov a side-eye. “Jesus, what a dick.”

“He’s not that bad. It’s mostly an act,” Shane defends, as casually as he can muster.

Hayden turns back to Shane. His gaze flickers from Shane’s arm and back to Shane’s face. “A pretty convincing one.”

Shane looks away. There was a good chance Hayden knew and wasn’t bringing it up. Maybe they should finally have this conversation. After the game. “Yeah, well, let’s make sure we win this one, right?”

“Fucking right,” Hayden agrees. He taps their helmets together and skates off.

Doing a face-off with your soulmate is absolutely thrilling. There’s a buzz in Shane, spiraling through him like a breath of fresh air. Adrenaline and pressure builds, skyrocketing with unrestrained excitement. Two souls, competitive and forever at the top, playing against each other. Two power sources with equal parts combining. Two matches joining into one gigantic, endless blaze.

Ilya smiles at him, all too knowing, feeling the same thing. The frenzied anticipation. The thrill of the chase. The blood rushing in their ears. Shane gets the puck and races off.

One mistake. One distraction. One peek over the shoulder. It was stupid, really, to risk such a move, but he does it. He looks at Ilya, feeling alive and whole.

Then he’s hit, and he crashes on the ice.

He thinks he hears shouting, but he’s not certain. Angry shouting from a familiar voice. Shane lays motionless, body tight and painful. He can only see blurry, bright shapes and loud screeching. Medics appear and tell him not to move. He wasn’t planning on it.

“Hollander?”

Ilya. He tries to say the word and fails.

“Is he alright?” Ilya asks. He doesn’t sound like himself. He sounds panicked.

“K,” Shane tries to say. It comes out as a whisper. He gets put on a spinal board, and he starts to panic too. What if he was fucking paralyzed?

“Rozanov, please stand back.”

Shane needs someone to tell Ilya that he’s fine, even if he’s not. He can’t stand hearing him so worried, especially with all these people around.

“Is he alright?” Ilya asks again, farther away. When there’s no answer, there’s a shuffle and loud scraping of skates. A shove and a commotion. “Is he okay? Fucking tell me! *He’s my fucking-*”

“Get to your bench, Rozanov,” one of the medics orders. “I’m not gonna tell you again.”

Ilya sounds so scared. It hurts to hear. Shane uses all his energy to say, “I’m not fine.”

Anything can be the truth if you make yourself believe it. *He was fine*. He has to be fine. *Fine* doesn’t have variable definitions if you focus on the one you mean and negate the others. He uses his remaining mental strength - the same tactic he’s used his whole life - to communicate, and manipulate his connection to Ilya to tell him he is fine. *He is okay. He’s breathing. He can move his toes. Thank god.*

The commotion stops, and Ilya’s shadow disappears. The medics don’t argue, but instead tell him to stay awake.

“Okay,” Shane mumbles. “My parents...”

“Your parents, your coach is calling them, okay?”

“Okay.” Shane winces at the light, and just in case he wasn’t adamant with his lie. “Tell him I’m fine. I’m okay.”

“Tell who?”

“He’s gonna worry,” Shane slurs.

“Your coach is calling your dad.”

Shane closes his eyes. They are very heavy. “Not him. Ilya.”

“Who? Hey, Shane, you really need to keep your eyes open, okay?”

+++++

Shane can't remember the last time he's been to the hospital. He's broken bones before due to hockey-related incidents, but he couldn't name those times right now. His head is pleasantly buzzed and weighs heavy, while also weighing nothing at all. The bed he was on was the most comfortable bed he's ever laid on. Nothing hurts or aches, and he feels fantastic.

Then Ilya shows up, and everything is perfect. "Ilya!"

Ilya shushes him. His lips are enticing, and his hair looks soft. "I, um, I just wanted to... Are you okay?"

"Concussion and a fractured collarbone," Shane lists. He smiles wide because nothing important was wrong and Ilya was here. "Out for the playoffs, but..."

Ilya finishes for him. "Could have been worse."

Shane wiggles his toes. Ilya was right. Shane leans back on the pillow. "Could have been worse."

"Marlow feels terrible," Ilya explains. "He did not mean to hurt you."

Shane shrugs, uncaring. He can't really remember who Marlow is. Ilya was still standing at the door. "I know. Part of the game. We all get our bell rung eventually, right?"

"Right."

"Hey." Shane's cheeks hurt from smiling. He wants Ilya closer. "Hey!" he drawls, louder.

Ilya hurries over. "Okay, okay. Shh."

Shane reaches for him, and sighs contently when Ilya takes his hand. "Yes. Bet-ter. Mmm."

Ilya watches him. "You scared me."

"I'm sorry I didn't text you last night," Shane apologizes.

"No, it's okay," Ilya says. He tenderly runs a thumb over Shane's cheeks.

Shane smiles into it, melting into the soft touch. "I was excited about last night. I'm mostly mad at Marlow for fucking that up."

Shane laughs, getting his tongue tied.

"He feels really bad."

The words fly over Shane's head. "You know, I had a whole plan to ask you something."

Ilya shakes his head. "Maybe it's better if you just rest now."

"I was gonna ask you--"

"Hollander."

Why does he sound so sad? Maybe this will make him happy. “Will you come to my cottage this summer?” Shane smiles loopy at him. “Don’t go to Russia.” He shakes his head. “Come to my house. We’ll have so much fun. It’s so private. No one will know.”

“Hollander, you know I can’t do that,” Ilya says remorsefully.

Shane groans. “We could have a week or even two. We’d be completely alone. Together. Soulmates should always be together - never apart.”

Ilya searches his face. His eyes are beautiful. His moles, his nose, his hair. All handsome features. Butterflies flutter in Shane’s stomach.

“Maybe. Maybe.” Ilya gives him a strained smile.

Shane’s heart races in satisfaction. The door opens. “Uh oh,” Shane says.

The nurse says something, and Ilya responds. Shane’s head is still floaty. He hears Ilya say he’s going to leave. Shane pouts for a second, and forces his tone to be professional. “See you next season.”

Ilya walks to the door. “Get well soon, Hollander.”

Ilya makes a shushing gesture, before leaving the room. Shane doesn’t understand why. He wasn’t being loud. The nurse comes over. Shane beams at her because his soulmate was just here.

“Hello!”

+++++

“How’s jerking off?”

Shane sputters. “Ma’am, I’m at my parents’ house, so...”

“So, constant?” Rose teases. “Endless?”

Shane laughs. He can’t wait to get rid of the sling. “Pretty much. Um, how are the reshoots going?”

“Fine. I mean, this movie makes no sense,” Rose complains.

“At least you’re getting paid properly this time,” Shane tries.

“I miss being kidnapped. I regret shapeshifting,” Rose sighs.

“My parents keep asking if you’re gonna come by this summer.”

“Well, I still might! They can’t keep me here til September. I’m gonna lose my mind.”

Shane smirks. “I don’t think that’s what they mean.”

“Well, just tell them,” Rose says.

“Rose...”

“Just do it. Tell them I’m gay and you got sick of being my beard,” Rose says.

“I can’t lie to them,” Shane refuses.

Rose hesitates. “Um.”

“More than I already have,” Shane corrects.

“You have a soulmate who is a man, and who you’re dating now,” Rose says. “And you haven’t told them.”

“It’s not a lie,” Shane argues. “I haven’t told them I met my soulmate or anything. We’re not technically dating.”

“I think they’d love it,” Rose reasons. “You finding your soulmate or you being my beard. And then they’d have to keep my secret. My big lesbian secret.”

“They probably would love that,” Shane says. “The second one, anyway.”

“Third period’s starting,” Yuna calls out.

“Coming!” Shane replies. “Okay, I gotta go, but let me know what you decide about Labor Day weekend.”

“I will,” Rose promises. “You let me know when you and your soulmate stop being so stubborn. I love you.”

Shane shakes his head. That’s not happening.

“Literally meant for each other, by the way!” Rose sings, amused. “In the stars and everything. You’re pissing off Fate.”

Shane blushes and hangs up. He joins his mother on the couch, where she’s watching Boston vs New York.

“He’s playing hurt. It’s his ribs, I bet,” Yuna says, referring to Rozanov.

Shane knew that. He doesn’t know how *she* knows that. “How do you know that?”

“Am I right?”

“I don’t know,” Shane lies.

“Your mother’s a witch,” his dad comes in. “Okay, the Raiders have lost. Dinner to celebrate.”

“Dad!”

“What? We don’t hate him anymore? I can’t keep up!”

Shane’s face turns pink. “No, we do, just...”

“Rozanov went to see Shane in the hospital,” Yuna explains, getting up.

“Oh, so now you like him,” David acknowledges.

“Well, now I hate him less,” Yuna corrects, amused.

A flicker of relieved pride sparks in Shane. He feels bad for Rozanov for losing the game, but he’s glad he can’t be hurt anymore. It also helps to hear his parents get off Rozanov’s back. It was hardly a definite shift, but it’s good there’s a thread of hope that they won’t hate Rozanov when they find out about him and Shane.

Years from now. Hopefully sooner. Everytime he imagines it happening, sitting his parents down with Ilya, a flood of panic and terror drowns him, and he turns into a statue.

Trapped in stone as time passes by, miserable and scared. He doesn’t want to be like that. He’s terrified of being stuck, but there isn’t a way out of this stagnant part of his life. Not one he sees anyway.

Shane: My mom thinks the Admirals are going to win.

Lily: No way. Scott Hunter is 100,000 years old.

Shane grins.

Shane: He’s not that old.

Lily: And he’s almost as boring as you.

Shane: At least you have a type.

Ilya sends a devil emoji.

Lily: I like my soulmates with freckles, glasses, slow hockey player, and boring.

Shane’s smile falls. He frowns, and he types quickly.

Shane: Fuck you, I’m not slow.

Shane: And you have one soulmate, asshole.

Lily: And aren’t I lucky?

Shane's frowns wavers. The smile wins.

+++++

The New York Admirals are going to win the Cup.

"I told you." Yuna grins. "Who are you texting?"

"Hayden."

"Oh, how's the baby?"

"Great."

Lily: Why the fuck is Hayden written on my arm?

Lily: Are you saying I'm Hayden? Do you hate me? Pick any other player who is not Montreal's fifteenth best player.

Shane bites back the laugh.

Shane: I text him all the time. My mom would believe I was texting him.

Lily: How often do you text him? More than me?

Shane rolls his eyes. The Admirals' win is announced.

Shane: My mom was right.

Lily: I'm so irritated.

Shane: Come on, he's a nice guy.

Lily: He's hot, so...

Shane sends an angry emoji. He probably deserved that.

The Admirals celebrate their win. Scott kisses the cup, elated with triumphant joy and unleashed victory. The win is well-earned, and something Scott Hunter has worked very hard to achieve. Shane is happy for him.

When the camera pans to Scott Hunter staring out into the crowd, Shane is confused. He must see someone he recognizes. He was standing on the ice, building up confidence before motioning for someone to join him.

Lily: What is he doing?

Shane: I don't know...?

It was a man coming down the stairs with Scott encouraging him. A man. This couldn't mean-

Shane is frozen in his chair, watching as Scott opens the door to let the mystery man onto the ice. He takes his hand and drags them to the middle of the rink.

Then Scott kisses the man. On the lips. In front of *everyone*.

What the fuck?

Shane stares at the screen, unable to process it. The scene keeps hitting a wall in his mind, and he wasn't completely sure he was awake or if he was hallucinating.

Scott Hunter just kissed a man on tv.

Shane's heart is racing. His phone rings, and he instantly leaves the room to answer Ilya's call.

Shane is smiling, nervous and shocked. "What the--"

"I'm coming to the cottage."

Chapter End Notes

1. the show doesn't include anything about how hayden finds out about them. i created my own scene because i was a little disappointed they didn't show him connecting the dots and finding it out himself lol they're together all the time, and hayden's brain eventually comes online. also i just love writing about hayden and shane's friendship. he's helped shane through panic attacks before - trust me. i made it happen a little sooner than canon.

2. ilya gets hurt. he gets slammed into the boards. shane freaks out. ilya isn't harmed harmed though. he walks it off.

3. i combined the video calls when ilya is in russia. i really wanted that small sex scene with shane in his glasses. hehe

Chapter 10

Chapter Summary

Ilya's POV + Cottage!

Chapter Notes

COTTAGE EPISODE IN ILYA'S POV!!! because i had to and it was very fitting. i wanted to project bc me and ilya match.

the last 20 minutes of the episode will be in shane's POV in the next chapter. it wouldn't have made sense with all my focus on shane and his relationship with lying and then just not write his coming out scene with his parents.

enjoy!!

Ilya stands in the middle of his hallway closet. The house is stagnant and suffocatingly quiet. There's a cold draft sending a chill in the large space. No amount of clothes shield Ilya from the cold, and his bare feet are void of sound on the wooden floors like a ghost.

The closet is small, and the house is large. He doesn't look in this closet anymore, defiantly avoided even looking at it. Things in here are what he needs - not wants and can never give away. Plus it has an unnatural darkness that's disorienting.

He grows dizzy, staring at the black suitcase sitting innocently on the top shelf. It collected dust over the many years, hardly ever used by Ilya. Two letters and a symbol are painted into the side with dark nail polish, drawn on with hope and opportunity.

IR <3

Ilya has two other much larger suitcases stored in the garage. He interchanges them over the season for out of state games. They have identification cards on the side with his name and phone number. Wear and tear from over a decade of travel.

This one still looks brand new with a total of two uses. Three after this trip.

Ilya takes a deep breath and carefully hauls it down to take it to his bedroom. He opens it on his bed and begins to pack clothes to tide him over for two weeks. Shane told him he has a

washer and dryer, so he decides on six shirts and three sets of pants. He grabs his toiletries, shoes, headphones, and other miscellaneous items.

He zips the suitcase and puts it on the couch for the morning. The doorbell rings, and Ilya goes to the front door. He opens it. "Svet."

"Hello," Svetlana beams in Russian. She kisses Ilya's cheek and walks inside. She goes straight to the kitchen to grab a drink.

"What are you doing in town?" Ilya asks. He leans on the counter.

"Huge party with big client," Svetlana explains, excited. "Going to Caribbean to meet with another right after. I think I can sell one more over summer, and I can take the rest of the year off."

"You trick another poor bastard dressed like that," Ilya says, gesturing to the new outfit he hasn't seen her in before.

"It is their fault they are so easy," Svetlana laughs. "You have two fancy cars, and you do not drive more than once a week."

Ilya smirks. "But I look good, yes?"

Svetlana giggles and goes to the living room. "Are you going somewhere?" she asks.

"Yes," Ilya says, stiffly.

Svetlana scrutinizes the suitcase. "This is cute. I have not seen it. Where are you going?"

"Leaving the country," Ilya says. "Taking a boring trip."

Svetlana raises a brow. "With Jane?"

Svetlana is too perceptive for her own good. They have known each other all their lives. She was his closest friend, witnessed every big and small milestone in his life and vice versa. She was there when he was drafted, when he made his first big purchase, when he moved to the states. He was there when she made her first huge sell, and when she bought her condo.

She was there when Ilya's father died. She stood up for him against his brother. They are each other's strength and stone fortress. She's never used him or belittled him, and she was gentle when Ilya needed her to be. She can tell exactly what he needed, and she gave it without asking for anything in return. She was his first love, and he was hers. He couldn't have moved here without her. He couldn't have done many things without her.

Which is why his next words come out unfiltered and terrified. "Jane is my soulmate."

Svetlana's eyes widen, but other than that, there is no indication she's surprised. "The same Jane you have been talking to for a decade?"

Restless, Ilya turns on the tv. A random rerun of a hockey game is playing. "Yes."

Svetlana nods. "Is he more handsome than you?"

"There is not a single man more handsome than me!"

Svetlana laughs and pulls a throw blanket over her lap. She smiles at him. A soft one, meant for him. "What silly lie caught you?"

Ilya keeps his gaze on the screen. "My lie did not catch me. It was Jane's." He swallows. "Both times."

"Both times?"

"He lied to me when we met," Ilya confesses. "I did not say. Then he lied two months ago, and he saw the lie on my arm."

"How did he react?"

He's thankful she doesn't ask for other details, but she knows him too well. "Bad. He left. I was here on the couch."

She's watching him now. "Ilya..."

"It is okay," Ilya murmurs. "I lied to him for a long time. I deserved it."

"You were scared," Svetlana objects kindly. "You are idiot for lying to your soulmate, but you knew what could've happened if people were to find out."

"Yes," Ilya says, voice hard. "But he has same issue. He wouldn't have told."

Svetlana narrows her eyes, studying him. After a moment, she asks, "Is he mad at you?"

"No. He said sorry. I said sorry."

"You beat yourself up for no reason," Svetlana says. "You can be happy. That is what you deserve. Why are you being mad for him?"

"Because I almost ended things the last time I saw him! Then he got hurt," Ilya retorts, ashamed. His tongue tastes like lead paint, and his eyes burn. The pressure rises in his chest. "He does not know. It'll be another lie--"

"He does not need to know every stupid thought you have," Svetlana chastises. Her face is pinched with frustration. "You are his soulmate. He is yours. You two made mistakes, but now they're fixed. Do not throw your happiness away because you think *you deserve it* because you do not. Let him show you this. Do not need to listen to me."

"You can tell me again," Ilya jokes, but it falls flat to his own ears.

Svetlana cocks her head. Her expression is complicated, divided thinly by fond irritation.

"You are mad you almost break Shane Hollander's heart, and he got injured. You think you

should tell him you were going to end things. Why? So he'll be mad too? You both be miserable and ruin romantic trip."

Ilya's neck cracks, turning it so fast. "You know it's Shane?"

"I do now," Svetlana says, not bothering to hide her smugness. Her voice softens. "Go have nice time with him. Hold hands. Cuddle on couch. Have picnic. Kiss. Have sex. Do it all over again. Be happy. Both of you."

Ilya stares at her. Her brown eyes are imploringly kind, even while she's scolding him, demanding passage through his stubborn skull.

Ilya's voice is tight. "I can never go back."

"There's nothing there for you," Svetlana argues gently. "Everything is here."

Ilya looks away. He can't breathe. He hurts. Everything is one thing. "Yes."

And he can't bare to lose it.

Svetlana looks over Ilya's shoulder at the couch. The presence of it is vast and heavy. Ilya swears he's drowning.

"She is with you always," Svetlana whispers.

Ilya meets her eye and finds open understanding and eternal patience. He never figured out what he did to earn her friendship or love. She stood by him through good and bad, often being the only good thing in his life. The only escape.

"She would want you happy," Svetlana says. "Shane makes you that way. Let him. For you and her. Tell him how you feel. Be yourself - completely yourself. The charm, the vulnerability, the funny, and all the parts of you. It is time to be nothing but honest. Plan for future."

Ilya does not have a habit for truth telling. He combines lies and truth with perfected ploys. The idea of letting anyone in to see all his faults and guilt, see for themselves how Ilya truly is without his walls up, is fucking terrifying. He's honest with Shane now - always has been due to circumstances - but he's held himself back these past couple of weeks. He wanted to tell Shane everything. Tell him things he's never revealed to anyone. His thoughts, wants, and desires.

His mother. His mother who didn't get to meet her soulmate.

Ilya's arm tingles. A sensation that's been occurring more often than usual. It seems like both of them are still wary of the truth. He reads Shane's lie. He frowns.

"What the fuck is a silent retreat?"

+++++

Svetlana suggested a hat and sunglasses for a disguise. It works well enough. Nobody recognizes him at the airport, which is a relief. He wouldn't know what he'd say if someone asked why he was in Ottawa rather than Russia.

He spots Shane's car in the parking lot. He stuffs his suitcase in the trunk and gets in the passenger seat. He can feel the buzz of Shane's nerves as he sits. He has to fix that.

"Is this a jeep?" Ilya asks.

"No, it's British," Shane says, defensively. "Practical. Good in the snow."

Ilya nods. "Okay."

The ride is quiet for a bit, both of them nervous. It's clear Shane was anxious, but not so much in a bad way. He calmly drove down a long road with the music quietly playing, and he was sparing glances at Ilya when he thought Ilya wasn't looking. It was cute.

"Are you hungry?" Shane asks. "It's about a two hour drive, but we can stop for something if you want."

"No, I'm okay," Ilya declines.

"I think you're gonna like the cottage. It's, uh, relaxing."

Ilya grins. "Ah, is that what we are going to do? Relax?"

"I hope so," Shane says, surprising Ilya with his sincerity. "I would like to relax with you. For once."

It's time to be nothing but honest. Clearly, Shane was doing that.

"I bought groceries, so we don't need to leave, or not leave much if we don't want to--"

"Thank you for inviting me," Ilya interrupts. The truth weighed heavy on his tongue, and he wanted to be free of it. If Shane can be open, he can be too. He can push himself for Shane, tell him exactly how he feels.

Shane nods, and a portion of anxiety sheds from his shoulders. "I'm glad you're here."

"Me too, but," Ilya inhales. A nervous smile of his own spreads across his face. "Also, like, terrified, yeah?"

The admission makes Shane relax in his seat. He stops clenching the wheel. "Did anyone recognize you? At the airport or anything?"

"No, no. Not that I noticed," Ilya replies.

“Cool.” A pause. “The cottage is super private, so we don’t need to worry about anything.”

“Not even your parents?”

“No. I told them I was on a silent retreat, like a meditation thing.”

Shane doesn’t finish speaking before Ilya breaks out in laughter. Shane looks at him, confused, and Ilya laughs harder. Svetlana told him what a typical silent retreat was, and Ilya could see now how Shane thought the lie was convincing. How has he gotten away with lying so long? No wonder his lies are short, blunt, and equivocal. Anything longer than two or three words, or any detail at all, is a dead giveaway.

“What?” Shane asks. “Does that sound fake?”

“Yes!” Ilya laughs, face red and stomach pained. “Ah. It would if it was anyone but you.”

Shane blushes under his glasses. He is adorable. Ilya takes Shane’s hand in both of his, affectionately caressing on his lap.

The cottage is in the middle of nowhere, hidden behind the trees on a gravel road. The entire thing is made of windows and stone structure. Ilya gets out of the car and goes to grab his luggage, but Shane beats him to it. “I can carry my own bag,” he complains.

“How are your ribs?” Shane deflects.

“*Fine*, I can take my bag.”

Shane gives him an admonishing look. “I can’t believe you played with those bruised ribs.”

Ilya groans. “Whoa, you can’t?”

Shane opens the front door. “Okay, maybe I can.”

Shane takes off his shoes, and Ilya copies him. He walks to the massive wall of glass windows, giving him a beautiful view of the woods and lake outside. The whole place was nice and orderly, clean and smells like pine.

“Your real estate fetish really paid off, huh?” Ilya teases, impressed. The sun felt good on his face, open and refreshing after a plane ride.

“I didn’t buy this. I had it built,” Shane explains.

Ilya turns to him. “Oh, I know.”

“I can give you a tour, if you’d like, or I could make us some lunch,” Shane offers. He gestures vaguely and walks into the kitchen. “There’s plenty of food. Also, I bought you cokes, though the water here is really good. I have my own well. You can see it. In case you’re thirsty.”

Ilya walks over to him in front of the glass window. He has his hands in his pockets, and Ilya is sure Shane could go on and on about his cottage. Ilya has other plans: to take advantage of every minute he has with him.

Ilya cups Shane's cheek, pulling Shane's gaze from his mouth to his eyes. Ilya's other hand goes to his neck, craving the all-too familiar sensation of Shane that screams *safe* and *mine*. He leans in for a kiss, hungry for affection he had dreamed about for months.

Ilya sighs into it, fully realizing in that moment how badly he missed Shane. He missed touching him, the tentative press of his mouth, and the way Shane always lets him take the lead.

Heart pounding, Ilya guides Shane backwards to the couch. Shane pulls away to walk down the steps, grinning wide. Once they're on solid footing, Shane pulls him back in, cupping Ilya's neck and jaw, as Ilya's hands roam over his waist and ass. Shane leads them to the couch, and they almost knock over a lamp. Ilya lands on his back, and Shane follows him down.

They quickly recover with Shane sliding one leg between Ilya's as the kiss deepens. Ilya grabs Shane's ass while Shane hovers over him, kissing him with a hunger coated in giddy excitement. Ilya brings his hands to Shane's front to start removing pesky clothes.

Shane blushes. "Wait, um, it's been awhile, so I might not last long."

"Yes, same, but we have two weeks," Ilya says, breathing heavily, eager to get his hands on him.

"Yeah, cool," Shane says lamely. Ilya tries again to unbutton his pants. "Wait, same?"

Ilya doesn't know why Shane is grinning. "Mm."

"You said 'same.' You haven't been with anyone lately?"

"No," Ilya grunts. He finally works the button undone and sinks his hand inside.

Shane doesn't seem like he noticed. "Not since..."

"No, not since," Ilya hurries, horny and hard. "So can we..."

Shane is smiling wide. "Really?"

"Hollander, it's not a big deal, okay?" Ilya says. "You know I'm not lying."

"Yeah, but it's been--"

"Months! Yes, I know," Ilya shouts, frustrated and fighting a smile. "So can we fuck now, please?"

Shane finally kisses him. "I haven't either," he admits. "Not since the last time."

Shane presses closer and thumbs Ilya's cheek, leisurely studying him. Taking in the time and privacy they have in their own world. He kisses Ilya like he can't hold back anymore, and Ilya is helpless when it comes to Shane. He kisses back just as tenderly, falling into the slow pace Shane set. It hasn't caught up to him that he was at Shane's favorite place in the world. He was here because Shane wanted him to.

"I have an idea," Shane says.

Ilya makes a face, and Shane ducks his head to muffle his laugh. It is an adorable laugh, and Ilya will let it slide. "*What?*"

There are crinkles around Shane's eyes. "For the next two weeks, let's just be honest with each other about what we actually think and maybe how we really feel?"

Ilya sees a speck of worry on his face, as if the prospect of the complete truth was crossing the line. Shane was asking for two weeks with no pretty lies or ambiguous answers. No tricks or manipulations. The honest truth.

Ilya was both scared and relieved. He was already planning on doing that to the best of his ability, but it was more serious with Shane's request and the fact he was going to do the something.

If he was going to try for anyone, it was going to be his soulmate. "I will try."

Shane's face is glowing. "Really?"

"Yes," Ilya says bluntly. "I am soulmate. You know when I lie. I am liar. You are liar. We will try. I will do anything if it will make you touch my dick right now."

Shane laughs when Ilya puts his hand on the tent of his pants. "Should I show you to your room?"

Shane will be the death of him.

"There's two guest rooms downstairs," Shane explains. He takes Ilya's hand and walks them past the kitchen to the hall. "So plenty to choose from."

They go back and forth about a room with Shane acting like a tour guide. Ilya requests an ensuite bedroom with a view and a king-sized bed. Shane leads them to his bedroom with their fingers laced together.

He lets go of Ilya to look away sheepishly, hands behind his back. "This is awkward. This room isn't available to the guests."

Ilya copies his stance and walks closer, crowding his space. "Mm. Disappointing."

Shane lowers his voice, sounding professional. "I'm sorry, sir. We'd really like to accommodate you, but--"

Ilya pushes him onto the bed and clambers above him. He wants him now. The sir was the last straw. He pins Shane's arms to the pillows.

"Sir, I'm just a bellboy!" Shane exclaims, pretending to fight. "You can't treat the staff like this."

Ilya uses his whole body to hold him down. He leans in close, pulling back when Shane tries to steal a kiss. Shane continues to struggle, smiling wide, legs kicking out. "Oh, I think I know how the staff likes to be treated after all these years."

Shane stops fighting, melting into the blankets, and he tilts his head, eyes softening and looking pleased with himself. Ilya kisses his lips and moves to his neck. He lets go of Shane's wrists to squeeze his biceps. Shane's submission is delicious, keeping his hands where Ilya wants them without saying anything.

"Wait," Shane says. Ilya pulls off. "Wait, wait."

Ilya immediately climbs off, allowing Shane to climb off the bed. He watches as Shane grabs something. He clicks a button to make the shades come down for privacy.

"Uh, no," Ilya argues. He reaches for the remote, and Shane hands him it. He clicks one of the other buttons, and the shades retreat. He grins and tosses the remote over his shoulder.

He pushes Shane against the glass. If Shane has a problem, he doesn't look it. He's smiling too, and he kisses back enthusiastically. Ilya's hands find his chest, squeezing his pecs through the fabric.

Shane reaches for him. Ilya intercepts with his hands grabbing his jaw and face. Shane brushes his hair, giving into him, eagerly giving Ilya control. His eyes fall shut, trusting Ilya completely. The displayed trust and submission makes Ilya finally kiss him, unable to hold back anymore. He slides his tongue inside to taste his teeth and the roof of his mouth.

Shane grabs for him, cupping the back of his head and fingers sink into his hair. He kisses back with the same intense need, trying to follow Ilya's mouth but then tilting his head as Ilya goes for his neck. Ilya holds Shane's waist to keep him on his feet, as he bites the soft skin of his neck and below his ear.

Ilya jumps back when Shane suddenly goes for his throat, scraping a hint of teeth in the same spot. Ilya is ticklish there, and he puts his hand on Shane's shoulder. The minute he does, Shane drops to his knees.

Ilya curses at the gorgeous sight. Shane works his pants open, more confident than the first time a lifetime ago, besides for the urgency and hunger radiating off him in waves. His pupils are blown and lips parted, as he gets his hands on Ilya's cock.

Ilya's forehead hits the glass, hands lightly running through Shane's hair just for that connection he's longed for since the last time. He needs to touch him in any vicinity, craving that closeness so badly it hurts.

There's something about reuniting, clashing together after being forced apart by life. Their two unbending souls are always seeking and reaching like magnets. He could always feel Shane. It didn't matter how much distance divided them. He swore he breathed when Shane breathed, heart beat matched per beat, as his mind fought against his restraints to fuse with Shane from far away. They are forever in sync and destined to match in every conceivable way.

Ilya is fixated on Shane's gorgeous face when he takes him in his mouth. Everything was too much and not enough, buzzing under his skin and driving him crazy. His chest expands and clenches, nerves shot with the thrill Ilya once tried to fight off. Now, he doesn't need to, and his fortitude was slipping, gripping his control with a vengeance.

+++++

"When did you first start to like me?" Shane asks. Another question to the long list of inquiries. He was taking advantage of their agreement. "Outside of soulmates."

Ilya takes another bite of his burger. He inhales the fresh air, thinking it over or pretending to be. He doesn't need to speculate.

"You shook my hand twice," Ilya states. "In alley."

Shane scrunches his face. "That's it? Why?"

"It was not, er, something meant to happen?" Ilya tries. He struggles for the right word. "Not meant to say? What is the word?"

"Scripted," Shane suggests patiently.

"Yes! That. Unscripted. I thought you were playing game with me or trying to be intimidating. You did not have secret plan. You had crush on me. It was very cute."

Shane smiles, not bothering to deny it. Instead of commenting on the last part like Ilya thought, he focuses on the first half. His smile falls. "Is that what you thought when anyone talked to you? That they were trying to manipulate you."

"Junior Championship was very competitive. It was normal to push," Ilya says.

"Oh." Shane looks genuinely offended and confused by the information. It was the same expression when Ilya asked why he didn't cut the recipe in half. "Yeah, I just wanted to talk to you. Your stats were impressive."

Again, Ilya laughs, and this was the most he's ever laughed in years. "My stats were impressive. Of course you'd be attracted to that. Competency is what gets you going, yes?"

"Shut up," Shane grumbles into his drink.

Ilya grins.

Shane glances at the four remaining burgers. "I should have cut it in half. Ordinarily, I would give the rest to my parents, but that would probably ruin my whole silent retreat lie, I guess."

"Yuna and David, yes?" Ilya asks. Shane nods. "And?"

"And what?"

"Tell me about them," Ilya prods.

"What do you want to know?"

"I don't know," Ilya says. "I don't know anything. I know your mother is Japanese or something. Probably where you get your looks."

Shane blushes. "Half of them, yeah."

"And your dad is, what, boring?" Ilya pokes fun. "Is that where you get your boring from?"

"He's not boring," Shane defends.

"So, he's exciting, reading the *New Yorker*?"

"He's normal, okay?" Shane huffs. "He works for the Treasury Board of Canada."

"Crazy!" Ilya gasps.

"Fuck you! He played hockey for McGill."

Ilya dramatically gapes. "Whoa. McGill? What the fuck is McGill? Is McGill a town?"

"It's a really good school," Shane says. "My parents are great."

Ilya fiddles with his napkin. "Do they know?"

"About you? Of course not."

The words sting, but Ilya should've expected as such. "No, about you."

A pause. "No."

"Would they not be good about it?"

"I don't know," Shane says honestly. His shoulders tense, and his face contorts with stress lines and discomfort. "I mean, no, they'd be fine. I'm sure they would be, but, I don't know. We haven't talked about it. Sometimes I think I would have told them already."

An even longer pause. Shane wasn't looking at him. He has issues with eye contact, but this time was different. Ilya frowns. "Oh, this is my fault."

“No,” Shane says weakly. Ilya’s arm tingles at the same time Shane tries to explain further. “Well, I mean, kind of.”

Ilya can see his anxiety levels rise, and he decides to push his own hurt feelings to the side. He goes for a joke to rile him without being too harsh. He puts a comforting hand on Shane’s thigh. “I think you can tell your parents you’re gay without giving them a list of all the guys you’re fucking.”

“I know, I know,” Shane mumbles. “They’re soulmates, so it’s not as if they would argue against it. They can’t be too angry that I didn’t - that I couldn’t do it.”

Ilya looks at him, lost at what he’s implying. “Shane.”

“Anyway, it just doesn’t really matter. You done?” Shane begins collecting the burgers and plates.

Ilya nods and withdraws his hand from Shane, feeling suddenly useless and cold in the sun.

+++++++

“Do you really think I’m boring?” Shane asks.

Ilya doesn’t look up. He arranges the cards in his hand. *Bullshit*. He didn’t understand stupid game. They can’t lie, and that is how to win. In order to circumvent the rules, they are to nod or shake their head instead. They are both frustratingly good. Shane was better, but Ilya won’t admit it.

“Yes.”

“Oh.”

“Boring is good,” Ilya murmurs. “I want boring. Boring is nice. I play this boring game with you.”

Shane’s face brightens, and a smile tugs on his mouth. He puts down three 4s.

“Bullshit!” Ilya shouts.

Shane flips the cards. Three 4s.

“This game is fucking bullshit,” Ilya snaps. Shane laughs. “You Canadians do not curse anyway. Do they know you play this?”

“Yeah, I talked to all of them,” Shane says with a straight face. “They said it’s okay.”

Ilya brings his forehead to the table to hide his amusement. His shaking shoulders give him away.

+++++++

“So, we just sit here and look at it?”

“Yes,” Shane sighs. “We just sit here and look at it.”

“Canada is fun,” Ilya says dryly.

“Shut up!” Shane looks from his arm to Ilya. A grin grows on his face. “You aren’t lying. Careful, you’re using my tricks.”

Shane’s phone beeps. He reads the text and chuckles. He puts his phone down. Ilya raises a brow. “It was just Rose.”

Ilya narrows his eyes, shoulders going stiff. “Mm. Just Rose?”

“She’s just checking in,” Shane justifies. Ilya turns to face the fire. “You’re not jealous, are you?”

“No.”

“Ilya, I’m gay,” Shane says flatly.

“Yeah, not so gay you can’t fuck Rose Landry,” Ilya grumbles.

“Oh my god. It was, like, twice,” Shane says, sounding too pleased for Ilya’s taste. “And both times were complete disasters. I’m not sure she’s looking for a repeat performance.”

“Oh, disasters like how?” Ilya asks, intrigued to hear how terrible it was.

“I’m not going into details,” Shane refuses.

Ilya purses his lips. Fair. Fair.

A terrifying sound ripples in the air, startling Ilya. He puts his hands up to fight whatever the hell that was. “What the fuck was that?”

“A loon?” Shane says, fighting a smile but failing miserably.

“A what?”

Shane is fully smiling now. “A loon. It’s a bird,” he explains.

“Sounds like a fucking wolf,” Ilya argues.

“It’s a bird, trust me. You’re so scared,” Shane teases.

Ilya checks the area. “What kind of bird makes a noise like that?” he accuses.

“A loon! A fucking wolf?” Shane exasperates.

“Stupid Canadian wolf bird,” Ilya mutters, still ready for an animal to rush at them.

Shane covers his mouth with his hands and replicates the sound. Ilya looks at him, unimpressed and annoyed, especially when Shane beams with pride.

“Oh, so now you speak bird too.”

“Fluent.”

“I hate you,” Ilya says.

Shane meets his gaze, smirking. “No, you don’t.”

Ilya rolls his eyes and looks at the fire. *Stupid soulmate mark.*

+++++++

Fire is witchcraft; Ilya is convinced. It’s the only explanation for why he starts to spill all the dreadful secrets and painful memories he buried for nearly two decades. Everything he kept hidden for so many years and weighed on his shoulders and rib cage like an anvil. It was all coming to the surface.

Ilya blames witchcraft and Shane’s hand in his hair.

“I’m sorry about your family,” Shane says. “Even if they suck, you must miss them.”

Ilya hates that he kind of does. It was stupid, but the lack of harassing phone calls, slurs, and demands made him a bit disoriented. It was similar to his childhood years, waiting for a bomb to go off and being too powerless to stop it. Nothing can prepare him for that sudden, horrifying explosion that will throw him off and steal all the good out from under him. It was the not knowing that scares him, or perhaps it was knowledge that his brother truly despised him and wanted nothing to do with him after all this time.

At least with the abuse, the world wasn’t quiet. He wasn’t alone with his thoughts to remember the aches.

“My mother didn’t suck,” Ilya admits quietly. “She was great.”

Shane’s hand on his back goes still. “How did she die?”

“By accident,” Ilya says, and internally flinches because *Shane’s arm will tingle*. He wonders if Shane remembers the lies Ilya’s father forced him to say. “She accidentally swallowed a whole bottle of pills.”

“How old were you?”

Maybe he didn’t, or maybe he was trying to pretend he didn’t. Maybe a third option - letting Ilya talk. “Twelve,” Ilya answers. “I found her.”

The memory of her clutching her left arm flashes in his head. How tears stained her cheeks, mourning her life and never getting the chance to meet her soulmate. Instead, she was forced to marry an awful man much older than her.

“I don’t want you to think she was weak,” Ilya says.

“I don’t.”

“She wasn’t.” Ilya’s eyes burned. “She was so funny and beautiful. She was so sad, and my dad was so hard on her. She never-“

A wolf bird screeches in the distance. Ilya jumps from where his head rests on Shane’s lap. “Motherfucker!”

Shane places a soothing hand on his shoulder. “Do you want to go inside?”

“No,” Ilya declines. He was comfortable during an uncomfortable conversation. The heat from the fire was nice, and the sounds of the forest and lake were relaxing. For once, he was disarmed, wounds open in the open air. The reprieve was startlingly nice, and he felt a little better to share the burden.

Shane slips his hand into his. “She never?”

“She never met her soulmate, and I did,” Ilya murmurs. “She would be happy for me - I know this. It does not help the pain.”

“The pain?”

“Guilt,” Ilya tries to clarify better.

Shane rubs his knuckles with his thumb. “I don’t think she would want you to feel guilty.”

Ilya stares at the fire. He doesn’t blink because if he does, the tears will fall. If the tears fall, Shane will say other boring, ingeniously correct things.

+++++

Every night at Shane's side, Ilya sleeps harder than he's ever done. Not in any of the hotels, or his Boston home, and especially not in Russia. Here in Shane's cottage, he's relaxed, and safe from all the troubles outside. Including his own internal turmoil, and he's quickly learning Shane is more than willing to bare the weight with him. He was happy when Ilya revealed another piece to him, like he was building a puzzle of Ilya's life. A puzzle he found worth solving, minding the sharp edges with ease.

Ilya still can't believe the beautiful sight he wakes up to. After all this time, he finally gets to see Shane waking in the morning. He forces down the rising pressure of chaotic emotions. "I like you."

Better to say these easy three words than the much harder ones that could ruin everything.

Shane smiles, eyes dark with sleep and hair ruffled. There's an imprint on his cheek from the pillow or his hand. "I like you too."

He likes all the sides of Shane Hollander. This one is becoming his new favorite - body loose, features contorted with sleep, and voice deep. Not in a rush to start the day, but moving at an unhurried pace, fine with staying in bed for another hour.

Though he really likes Shane's competitive side.

"You can't pick Montreal," Shane argues.

"Yes, I can," Ilya retorts. "I've always wondered what it would be like to be a Metro. You know, historically, they're the best team in sport."

"Better than the fucking Yankees."

Shane's phone rings before they can hit play, and Ilya considers throwing the damn thing into the lake.

"Oh, fuck. It's Hayden," Shane says.

Definitely throwing the phone into the lake.

Shane notices his disgruntled expression. "He just had a baby. I haven't talked to him in weeks."

Ilya has never cared about anything less. He groans dramatically and tosses the controller onto the table.

"You're a baby," Shane says. He answers the phone, ignoring Ilya's exaggerated flop onto his back. "Hey, buddy."

Buddy. Hayden is not Ilya's buddy, yet he has to deal with him too? Unfair. Ilya gets two uninterrupted weeks with Shane. Metro's 15th best player isn't going to ruin that for him.

He presses into Shane's side, gaze roaming over his face and to his groin. He touches Shane's knee and walks his fingers over his thigh, appreciating the firm muscles found there. He

thought he was being good, not pushing his shorts out of the way.

Shane slaps his hand away.

Ah, the game is afoot. His pout morphs into a mischievous grin, getting an idea to steal Shane's attention from terrible Hayden. He deliberately brings his hand up, letting Shane see as he makes to reach for the front of his shorts. Shane's brows furrow, trying to concentrate on his conversation, all while he tries not to be into Ilya reaching for his cock. Ilya hears him stammer out a response. He grins when Shane grabs his wrist to push away. It's such a fleeting, weak pushback. It's comically endearing to watch him try to stay firm but failing.

Ilya presses his hand to Shane's clothed cock, feeling it harden. He palms him, and starts to stroke, keeping an eye out for genuine fear or anxiety. Shane's reaction is nothing remotely negative. Shane's mouth parts, hips unconsciously rocking into him. Shane again moves as if to block Ilya, but there is no meaning behind it. Ilya strokes firmer, and his cock is fully hard.

Shane makes a weak excuse to Hayden before putting him on mute. "What are you doing?"

His scathing glare has cracks right on the surface. It's cute how much he tries to hide how turned on he is.

"I think you know," Ilya says.

"Please stop."

Ilya looks at his hand in Shane's shorts, and the bulge straining the fabric. "I don't think it's what you want."

Lie. Ilya urges. Tell me you don't want to. Tell me pretty lie about not wanting this while I hold your hard cock.

Shane doesn't take the bait. "Later, okay?"

Ilya can see the concealed nonchalance in Shane's face and body language, and the way he clutches his phone. His pupils are dilated, and he's doing that thing he does when he's fighting against his own desires. It is entertaining to watch him want to lie, when he can't.

"Okay, I make you a deal," Ilya declares. "I won't touch you, but if you get hard--"

"I won't get hard," Shane says defiantly.

"Okay, so no problem then," Ilya replies easily.

Shane stares at him, challenge glowing like the fire last night sparked in his brown eyes. He's breathing harder. "Ilya..."

"Shane."

Shane moves to sit on top of the couch, legs spread wide, and goes back to his phone call. He makes a decent attempt to be attentive to the conversation. Ilya places his chin on Shane's

knee, taking the opportunity to appreciate the beauty of the other man. He pouts at him, faking his own share of nonchalance, but he knows he's failing. He kisses Shane's knee, smelling the soap they both use.

Ilya brushes his fingers over Shane's inner thigh, grinning when Shane stumbles over a word. He does it again, stirring the heat expertly. Shane's cock is hard, and Ilya fits between his legs.

Ilya gives Shane a thumbs up, and he gets an exasperated, flushed glare in return. Ilya smiles wide, as he ducks his head and frees Shane's cock from his shorts. Ilya swallows him down, relaxing his throat and working his tongue over the head.

Shane grabs his shoulder for balance, doing a somewhat good job at not moaning outright. His breath hitches when Ilya sets a rhythm, bobbing his head with fervor. He takes him deeper and hollows his cheeks. Shane's fingers dig into his back.

Ilya slaps Shane on the cheek. Shane slaps his arm, stuttering out vague, breathy responses. His eyes are closed, mouth parted in weak gasps. Ilya doubles his efforts, sucking Shane's cock, nose pressing to his stomach when his head bobs. He uses every skill he gained over time to drive Shane insane. His tongue, throat, and lips work in tandem, all while Shane fails to create a proper sentence.

He cups Shane's cheek, then slaps him again. Not a full slap or hit - but loud and surprising. Shane's cock is hot and heavy in his mouth, twitching each time, contradicting the way he's trying to fight. Shane uses his free hand to try to stop Ilya, but gives in to the pleasure and grasps Ilya's shirt as he folds into himself. His legs spread wider, inviting him closer.

To be a total shit, Ilya tries to get his fingers in Shane's mouth. Shane's words are slurring together, and he mindlessly grabs Ilya anywhere he can reach. "Jesus," he moans.

Shane barely mutters an excuse before he puts the phone back on mute. He curls in, grabbing Ilya's shirt and his hair, as Ilya goes faster. He deepthroats him, only letting up a little when Shane finally comes with a loud groan.

Ilya falls back on the couch, satisfied and grinning. Shane tucks himself away and gets back to Hayden. Shane puts his foot on Ilya to pin him in place.

"Sorry, I just had - someone was at the door."

Ilya's arm tingles, and he laughs as quietly as he can. He caresses Shane's leg, and it's getting to be really maddening how badly he always wants to be touching Shane in any capacity. Shane grounded him, and he was desperate for the peaceful balance only he could give.

Shane hangs up and climbs into Ilya's lap. "Fuck you, fuck you. Why was that so hot?"

"Because you like to be bad," Ilya purrs.

Shane's smile softens, and he cups Ilya's cheek. "Hey, that's not what this is. You and me. Maybe it was at first, but not now and not for a long time."

The sincere tone comes out of nowhere, stealing all the air out of Ilya's lungs. His heart races at the words he's desperate to hear. They settle inside him like a warm blanket, soothing the fears that spiral constantly inside his head.

It was too much. He makes a joke about Shane loving Hayden. Shane groans and goes back to the game. Ilya drums Shane's leg, letting his coiled adrenaline and nerves rush out in a safe way that doesn't risk him getting hurt.

He should be honest, and he is. He trusts Shane to be patient with him, just like he's always been. More than he deserved.

+++++

The conversation starts out easy enough. Ilya tells Shane he was thinking about joining a Canadian team for citizenship. He never wants to go back to Russia, and it was important to get a plan made to avoid it altogether. The second option was marrying Svetlana because she's an American, and it would be easy to get citizenship with her by marriage.

"Is she, I don't know, someone you'd want to marry?" Shane asks.

"We are friends. We would be fine." Shane doesn't look at him. "And it would be for the passport," he gently reminds.

The laws on international soulmates are unstructured and flawed with many requirements and loopholes. It is said that the soulmates of Canadians automatically gain citizenship, but it fails to mention how long the process is. Laws regarding soulmates only just started five years ago, and they're too feeble to rely on.

"You could find someone you'd want to marry for real and still get passport," Shane says, voice strained.

"Maybe, but," Ilya sighs.

"But what?"

"I have this problem."

"What's the problem?" Shane asks, breathing hard.

Ilya sits up to meet his gaze. "I like women, yes?"

Shane looks like he'd rather punch a wall than answer. "Yeah, I know."

"And everywhere I go, I'm surrounded by beautiful women, and they love me."

Shane cuts his gaze. "Sounds rough."

“Yes, it is.” Shane wasn’t looking at him. “Listen. These women, they’re so sexy and fun, but I am always thinking about this slow fucking hockey player with beautiful freckles and who was meant for me.”

Shane blushes, and his smile is back.

Because he can’t help it, Ilya adds, “And a weak backhand.”

“A *weak backhand*?”

“Yes, very weak,” Ilya says in disappointment. “My soulmate is so boring, and he drives this terrible car.”

“It’s a normal car!”

“I am always wishing that these women were him,” Ilya says. “Constantly I am wishing he would give shitty lie just so I can feel him. I don’t care what these women tell me, because I am too busy looking at my arm. It’s a terrible problem, huh?”

Shane swallows. His eyes are wet, glistening in the low-lit room. “Do you want that problem to go away?”

“Mm mm.” Ilya shakes his head. “I don’t ever want this problem to ever go away.”

One second - two seconds of silence.

“Don’t marry Svetlana,” Shane tells him. “Just don’t. I know it wouldn’t be for love or whatever. Just don’t.”

Shane is always serious, but never this serious. Nobody has ever made him feel the way Shane does, like he was irreplaceable or special. Shane wasn’t begging or pleading. He was ordering Ilya with tears in his eyes and a broken voice.

“You’re mine. If I have to share my soul, I only want you to have it. Nobody else.”

The declaration steals all the air from Ilya’s lungs. He lays on the couch, painfully still in case this was a dream. He didn’t want to shatter it.

“We can figure something else out, okay?”

Ilya nods.

His voice almost doesn’t reach above a whisper. “Okay.”

+++++

Ilya is half awake when Shane tells him the plan. Ilya isn't confident he heard or processed it all. Apparently, Shane wants him to join the Centaurs. The team can afford him, and he and Shane can change the narrative of their relationship. Shane suggests announcing their friendship by starting a charity, and they would play against each other. They'd be two hours apart all year round.

It's all nonsense - good nonsense - but it doesn't truly stick until Shane starts talking about them retiring one day and being together. Without a hitch or hesitation, Shane speaks like they're going to be together for that long. He expects a *future* with Ilya without a hint of uncertainty. Grass is green. The sky is blue.

Shane and Ilya will be together long past retirement.

"You really think that far ahead, Hollander?"

"I do," Shane says, voice even and strong. "About this.

"And is that what you want?" Ilya asks because he has to be sure. He has to know this is real, and he's not going to lose this. "To be together?"

Shane's fingers find his cheek. "So much. So much it scares me."

The absence of the tingle on his arm cracks Ilya's chest in two. Too much air. Too many lights. Too much eye contact. Too many emotions rush inside. Too much of everything.

Shane wipes a tear off Ilya's cheek. Shane softly uses his chin to get him to look at him. He's smiling.

Ilya is *gone*. He kisses Shane, heart beating, out of breath. He moves to hover above him, vision turning blurry with a round of mortifying tears. He kisses Shane's chest, his lips, and his neck, repeating scary, too heavy words into Shane's skin. They don't fit in his mouth anymore, filtering out in a desperate chant and plea.

Don't leave me. I will never recover.

You do not just have your half of our adjoined soul. You have both. You've had it since I learned about you - before I met you. Mine is so ugly. Make it pretty again. Keep it safe. I don't want it.

Ilya brings their foreheads together. "I love you."

Shane looks from his mouth to his eyes. "Holy shit."

Fuck. He should've kept talking in Russian. He ruined this already. He sucks in a breath. "I mean, no I don't--"

Ilya glances at Shane's arm and watches in terror as his half-formed lie scrawls on his skin.

Shane doesn't look at it. "I love you too."

“Fuck, Hollander,” Ilya sobs. He sticks his face in the crevice of Shane’s neck.

Shane’s fingers find his hair. He kisses Ilya’s temple. “Oh my God, I love you so much.”

Tears fall down Ilya’s cheek, getting on Shane’s bare chest. Shane pulls him impossibly closer, and kisses his forehead. Ilya unravels completely, feeling torn apart in the best way.

“Does it feel like agony for you too?” Shane asks.

Ilya goes to nod, but changes his mind. “Not anymore.”

Shane will protect him. He’ll keep his heart and soul safe.

+++++

Maybe it’s from the years of having to differentiate footsteps that makes it very easy to locate Shane. He could tell when it was his brother in the hall going to his room, or his mother coming to say hi, or his father’s heavy feet going to bed after a long day of work. The weight, the echo, the stride, and pace. Sometimes the smell of alcohol gave him alarm bells, and Ilya could quickly pretend to be dead asleep under all the covers.

Shane’s footsteps are steady. They’re not loud or quiet. They are perfectly in the middle, boring and composed. He’s not worried about angering anyone by breathing or taking up space. He didn’t have to read the room, at least not in the way Ilya does. They both worked to recognize tones and patterns - Shane out of necessity and Ilya out of survival.

“We have a lot in common,” Ilya says in Russian. He looks out at the lake and the sunrise. His mother’s favorite time of day. “Not likes or dislikes, but things that matter. You would like him.”

He stops talking five minutes before Shane joins him. The careful slide of the door. The clink of mugs. Shane hands him his coffee; brewed it the way he likes it. He wraps a blanket around their shoulders, cuddling into his side to enjoy the view. Ilya puts out his cigarette and gives the sky a look.

See?

+++++

Making love is a stupid phrase. It’s sex.

Except sometimes it's not. Sometimes it is making love. Sometimes the whole world could be burning around them, and if Shane wanted him to keep going, Ilya would.

"How did we let this happen?" Shane asks.

"We were both very stupid and irresponsible," Ilya explains easily. He adjusts his leg, sinking his cock in deeper into Shane.

Shane looks down at their joined, sweaty bodies, and the way Ilya was rocking into him with languid thrusts. "This is real though, right?"

"Yeah," Ilya breathes. English is impossible. All he can do is nod and kiss Shane's left forearm where there is no trace of a lie. Shane makes him breathless all the time, but especially while he fucks him.

Shane pulls on his hair, eyelids fluttering shut. "Please fuck me."

Ilya goes a few degrees harder, but his pace remains slow. Dragging it out, savoring every second he has his soulmate in his arms. If Shane has an issue, he doesn't say anything, understanding the new and different change of tone. They don't have to hurry, not in Ottawa in Shane's private cottage.

Afterwards, Shane surprises him yet again.

"What was your mother's name?"

Ilya turns to him. "Irina. Why?"

Shane kisses his pec, and it feels like an apology. "I was thinking we could start a hockey school. Like a summer camp for kids, and give the money away to mental health organizations like suicidal prevention."

Ilya stares at him, speechless.

"It was just an idea," Shane says, failing to read his stoic, pale face.

Ilya swallows thickly, urging his tears to stop. He has not laughed or cried as much as he does here. "She would have loved you," he whispers, voice shaky. "Like I love you."

Shane smiles and cups his face. "Say it again in Russian, please."

Ilya does, and he says goodbye to his heart.

Shane takes it with him.

Chapter 11

Chapter Summary

The end!!

Chapter Notes

holy fuck guys i'm done!! wow!! first finished fic with hollanov. that's crazy. it's been such a fun ride, and i want to thank you so much for all your kudos and comments. i appreciate you guys so much for supporting me. i hope you guys enjoy this last, short and sweet, chapter.

Ilya's feet poke out from the water from where's balancing on his hands. The clouds hide the sun, but Ilya has gotten quite the tan since he first got here. He is beautiful, even when he's acting like a child at a swimming pool. His wondrous and playful side was one of Shane's favorite endearing qualities about him. He's witnessed this part Ilya hides from the world a lot lately.

"Is this where you do yoga, or up there?" Ilya asks from the water.

"No, I do it inside. The producer wanted me-" Shane stops. Realization dawns on him. "Wait, you saw that?"

Ilya shrugs and runs his hands through his wet hair. "Yeah, it was very good. I needed help sleeping."

"You're an asshole," Shane says.

"How's the water?" Ilya asks, swimming closer.

"You're in it," Shane says, confused.

"Yeah, but I want to know how you like it," Ilya says. Shane stares at him apprehensively, spotting a lie underneath but can't feel it. Sure enough, Ilya splashes Shane, covering him in water.

"Fuck you!" Shane shouts. "What if my phone was in my pocket?"

"Ah, it's not. You left it on the table," Ilya reassures. "It's been ringing all morning."

Shane rolls his eyes, shivering in the cold wind. It was probably Hayden calling for a more thorough catching up. Shane honestly can't remember what Hayden told him on the phone. He was too distracted by Ilya. "You're still an asshole."

Ilya swims to the rock Shane is perched on. Shane fights a smile as Ilya kisses his ankle. Ilya stands and licks his lips, and his hands grip Shane's thighs. Shane puts his hands on Ilya's arms, falling into that automatic need to touch when Ilya is close. His skin is freezing, and Shane uses him for balance.

"Give me kiss," Ilya says with his teeth bare.

"You're cold," Shane grumbles, and leans in anyway to kiss him. Ilya flops back into the water. Shane wipes the water off.

It's close to dinner time, and they head back to the cottage. Shane gives them both towels to dry off and shield from the cold breeze. "Do you want pasta from last night or hot dogs?"

"Hot dogs."

"Okay, they're gonna have to defrost a bit," Shane says.

Ilya grins. "So we have a little time."

Shane blushes. "Maybe. What do you have in mind?"

"Nothing that'll take too long," Ilya murmurs. He presses Shane into the glass window. He cages him in, and Shane's hands are already caressing his neck and jaw before leaning for a kiss. Shane's back softly hits the window, and Ilya goes with him, not allowing any space to separate them. His hands roam down Shane's body, kneading his ass over the swim trunks. Ilya's fingers are wrinkled from the water, and they're both cold and wet. It's perfect either way, doesn't at all dwindle any of the heat starting to stir in his gut. They probably smell terrible, and Shane will definitely want to shower before doing anything. Maybe they could take a shower together...

Ilya's eyes are a dark blue when he breaks the kiss. His smile is small but tender, and Shane smiles in return. He still can't get over the fact he's at his most favorite place in the world, where he feels the most himself and safe, and he's with his soulmate.

But then Ilya's smile falls, and he jumps back. His hands rip away from Shane's ass like he was burned, and he grabs Shane's arms. He's looking past Shane's shoulder, and Shane follows his gaze.

His dad is staring at them. He has something in his hand, and he's looking at him and Ilya. Shane is frozen where he stands, and he watches in horror as his dad rushes out of the house.

"Oh, fuck." Shane closes his eyes because this can't be real. This can't actually be happening right now.

"Maybe you should..." Ilya tries.

He really doesn't want to do anything. "Yeah, yeah, yeah."

Shane doesn't move. Ilya tries to get him to look at him. "Do you want me to?"

"No, no," Shane stops him. He opens the sliding door with arms that weigh ten times their actual weight. Shane stumbles through the house, legs feeling like both jello and iron, uncertain if he wants to catch up with his dad or delay the inevitable.

His dad drives off before Shane can get to him. Shane clutches the towel and watches as his life collapses in front of him.

He's both hot and cold, and he throws the towel off his shoulders. He can't fucking breathe, and he stuffs his face into a pillow. "Fuck. Fuck, this is a fucking nightmare."

He pulls himself off the couch, but he keeps his head down, desperate for some sort of stabilization. His head is spinning, and he watches with his eyes closed as every single possible ending to this fucking nightmare pounds in his mind. His heart is beating too fast or too slow - he's not certain. He's nauseous and dizzy, and he slowly stands straight.

"Shane," Ilya says quietly.

His legs are unsteady. His body doesn't feel like his own. "Oh, fuck, this is a fucking nightmare."

Shane takes a deep breath, but it does nothing. He closes his eyes and puts his hands behind his head. The room is spinning. "Oh, what the fuck am I supposed to do?"

Shane puts his head on the wooden post, a little hard, and it hurts.

"We should go talk to him," Ilya calmly suggests.

"Yeah, what if he doesn't want to talk to me?" Shane pushes off the wall. "What if - Fuck, my mom!"

Shane is pretty sure he's about to topple over, and he puts his hands on his knees.

"Hey, hey, hey, they will talk to you," Ilya reasons.

"Yeah, but I fucking lied to them," Shane argues, standing up again. He stares at the floor with his hand squeezing his hip for something to ground him with. "For so many years, I fucking lied to them, and now my dad just walks in on me with my fucking soulmate. Who I lied about not having met."

Shane still can't make eye contact, but he needs Ilya. He doesn't know what for, but he's fucking scared and everything hurts. "This is my fucking nightmare."

Ilya is watching him with concern and poise, and it's the way he's not freaking out that pulls Shane to him. He looks him in the eye. "This is my actual fucking nightmare, Ilya!"

“Okay, Okay.” Ilya nods, maintaining composure. The sunlight cascades over his curls and bright eyes, and he shouldn’t look this good while Shane is having a fucking panic attack. “Then maybe it’s time to wake up, yes?”

Shane closes his eyes because everything is too much right now. The wind outside is too loud, the sun is too bright even with the cloud cover, and his heart is beating too fast. Ilya is making too much sense, and he reaches for him. He clings to Ilya, and Ilya holds him close. “Fuck, I’m scared.”

“Yes, it’s scary.” Ilya rubs his back soothingly. “But you’re brave.”

“Shut up.”

“You are, you’re brave,” Ilya implores. “My soulmate is very brave.”

“I feel like I’m gonna die,” Shane mutters. He pulls back from the hug. He stares at Ilya’s necklace. “So much for easing them into it.”

Ilya looks at the front lawn. “Maybe...maybe he didn’t even notice. Hmm?”

There was not one ounce of confidence in his voice. Shane gives him a long look, before he chokes out a laugh. It’s enough to break out of his panic and find a goal in the chaos to level him. “Okay, I’m gonna get changed. I’m gonna drive over. And then...and then fuck! What am I gonna say?”

Shane rests his forehead on Ilya’s. Maybe this fucking soulmate connection can transfer some damn courage.

“Do you want me to come with you?” Ilya asks tentatively.

Shane’s head springs up. “Would you?”

Ilya almost looks offended. “*Of course.*”

“Okay,” Shane sighs. He rests his forehead back on Ilya’s. “Okay.”

Shane is becoming more like himself, and he goes a little lightheaded now that he wasn’t on survival mode and fighting for air. His legs give out, and he clings to Ilya as he squats at his feet. He presses his cheek to Ilya’s clothed thigh, and he lets Ilya’s soothing hands in his hair and shoulders shut off his anxious thoughts.

Ilya does it again in the car. He covers Shane’s fidgety hand with his own, planting sweet kisses on his knuckles, and the weight pushes back his remaining frazzled nerves. The mollifying physicality combined with the pleasant tug of his soul intertwining with its other half makes his head buzzy, and he’s grateful the drive is only one long street.

It’s not until he’s standing in front of his parents that he begins to freak out again. He holds himself together, at least does his best at it, and watches as his mother side-eyes Ilya like the stranger he was. More proof of how little his parents knew their son because Shane lied to them for so long.

His dad is trying to apologize, as if this whole thing was his fault. “It’s okay, Dad. I’m sorry. You shouldn’t have found out that way.”

“Found out what, exactly?” Yuna asks.

Shane rips off the bandaid. “I’m gay. Which I was gonna tell you soon. I’m sorry I didn’t tell you sooner.”

His parents are speechless. He can’t remember the last time his mom has been unable to articulate words.

“Yeah, and this is Ilya,” Shane awkwardly introduces. “Rozanov. But you already know that.”

“Hi,” Ilya says flatly. Shane hasn’t seen him nervous before.

“He’s visiting and we’re, uh.” Shane’s head goes blank. Should he say soulmates? That is too much, right? Too shocking? He can’t breathe.

“Lovers,” Ilya finishes, giving him an out.

Shane grimaces. That’s worse. “No, Ilya, that’s gross. We’re soulmates?”

Yuna’s mouth falls open, and he catches her glancing at their exposed forearms. “But you hate him.”

“No,” Shane says. “I mean, I get that, but no, I actually, uh, I love him.”

His mom is looking at him a little bit like a stranger, and he hates how true it was. In this case, they are strangers because he hid this from them forever. It wasn’t even necessarily about Ilya and soulmates, but the fact he was gay and never told them this huge part of himself.

Nobody is saying anything, and Shane can’t look at anyone. “I did not want this to be how I told you. Uh, I’m sorry. Can we just sit down, please?”

Yuna makes them all coffee, and they gather at the kitchen table. “I think we thought maybe you were gay.”

Shane’s stomach drops. “You did?”

David cuts in. “I think we thought it was certainly possible.”

“For how long?”

“Mm, for a while, I guess,” Yuna says honestly.

“We both know you pretty well, Shane,” David says. “I mean, what we did not suspect was that you were so friendly with Rozanov.”

“Ilya,” Ilya gently requests.

“Ilya, sorry.”

“I know, it’s a long story,” Shane says.

“When did this happen?” David asks. Shane and Ilya don’t answer right away, too unsure how to go about this. Then David’s eyes flicker with realization. “Wait. The All-Star game. You two had so much chemistry. You were in sync, moved in tandem like a machine.”

“No, it was before then,” Shane admits, staring at the corner of the table. When they ask when it all started, Shane has to paint a picture for himself to explain the timeline correctly. “Since our, uh, rookie season.”

Yuna’s eyes widened. “Since your rookie season?”

“No, it’s not true,” Ilya argues, very serious. “You lie first time before that.”

Shane shakes his head. “Not helpful.”

“Before?” Yuna again asks for clarification, more shocked.

“The summer before,” Ilya says, as if Shane wasn’t the one who lied. “You lie about them waiting for you. My arm tingled.”

Yuna’s voice grows grave, flabbergasted at the news. “So you’ve been in love since-”

Shane and Ilya both say *no, no, no, nothing like that*. Ilya says a little too much, and Shane freezes in horror, reeling as Ilya stammers out a weak attempt to explain *fuck buddies*. He doesn’t know if he’s relieved or stunned when Yuna nods in understanding, as if any of this makes sense and wasn’t traumatizing. Unfortunately, David wasn’t reading the room.

“Lovers,” his mother tells his dad.

“Okay, no one is allowed to use that word again,” Shane pleads.

The air is getting thicker by the time Yuna switches coffee for alcohol. Shane swallows a sip of vodka and grimaces.

“I mean, you never let him win, did you, Shane?” Yuna asks, worried.

The question might as well have been a stab to the chest or a car running him over. He’d rather have Marlow slam him into the wall again. “Do you let Dad win at cards?”

“I’d rather die,” Yuna says.

“I let him win,” Ilya says suddenly with a straight face.

Yuna sucks in a breath, stupefied, eyes widening and mouth gaped. David looks more shocked than when he caught them making out.

"No, he didn't," Shane hisses. He slams his arm on the table and yanks on his sleeve to reveal Ilya and his horribly timed lie. Yuna sighs and slumps in her chair once she reads the treacherous words. "That's not funny."

Ilya chooses that minute to drink his vodka, hiding his amusement.

"So is your plan to, what, just keep doing this in secret until you both retire, or?" David asks.

Ilya looks at Shane, letting him decide. "Probably. I don't know."

"Probably, yes," Ilya admits.

"Oh, no, that's sad," Yuna says sympathetically. "You two are soulmates. You shouldn't have to hide or be reduced into anything less."

Ilya looks away. An ache grows in Shane's chest. "I know. We know. We just can't come out and, like, announce it."

It's quiet, until David turns to Ilya. "Ilya, I gotta say, I'm surprised. You have such a reputation as a ladies' man. There are lots of people who do not let the mark dictate who they spend their life with or change the way they live. There is nothing wrong with that, of course."

"Mmm. It's not untrue," Ilya agrees carefully.

"Ilya likes both," Shane explains.

"It's true, I've been with many women, but I have only been in love with one person," Ilya says with a sincerity that makes Shane's face warm.

His mom peers at Shane's left arm to see the truth in Ilya's statement. Her gaze softens.

"Same here," Shane says. "Only one."

Shane hates dealing with this without touching - hates going long without physical contact with Ilya in some way. It gets painful. He brings their feet together. Ilya nudges back. Butterflies flutter in Shane's stomach.

Yuna excuses herself to go outside. After a moment, Shane grabs her coat and follows her out the door. She smiles at him with eyes brimmed with tears, and he helps her put on the coat.

There's so much to say, but he has no words to put together. Nothing clicks. No words are good enough. How many times has his mother told him he's not a liar? She was confident her son always told her the truth, when really all he had to give her was half-truths and diversions. He tried to be a liar, even though he didn't want to be, and then he couldn't stop because he needed to fit in. He desperately needed to fit in, click into place with everyone else around him. Be the best at hockey, find his soulmate far into his career, marry her, and have kids. All the normal things. It's all he ever wanted, and he failed. His soulmate was a man, something he had no control over, no matter how hard he tried. He didn't want a life without Ilya.

“Mom,” he croaks. “I need you to know that I did really try. I tried really hard, but, um. I just can’t help it, and I’m sorry.”

His vision is blurry, and he stammers out random words that he thinks sound good. He guesses they’re adequate to explain why he tricked her, and how badly he wanted to make her happy.

His mom shakes her head, eyes wet with tears. “Oh, no, you have nothing, *nothing* to apologize for.”

Shane shakes his head. His eyelashes are wet on his cheeks.

“Look at me,” she pleads. “Look at me.”

Shane looks everywhere but her. When he finally gathers the courage, he meets her watery gaze. “I’m sorry that I made you feel like you couldn’t tell me. I’m sorry I made you feel like you had to hide your soul from me.”

Shane swore his chest cracked in two, and all the pressure that’s built up his whole life rushes out. It pulses under his skin, giving him space to breathe.

“Hey,” she says softly. “I am so, so proud of you. Okay?”

She’s nodding, and all he can think to do is copy her. The boulders on his chest slip off his shoulders, giving way under his mom’s nurturing gaze and acceptance. She asks him to forgive him, and he melts in her hug. He felt light.

“I forgive you, Mom,” he tells her shoulder. “I love you.”

“I love you too,” Yuna tells him, holding him tight. “So much.”

She pulls away to check on him. She wipes at his tears. “Are you okay?”

Shane nods and wipes his eyes.

“All right.” She exhales one deep breath. “Okay, enough. All right, what’s the plan?”

Yuna is in her element during dinner. Ilya inhales his pasta like it’s going to run off, while she explains emergency statements in case anything leaks. She makes plans to reach out quietly to premium brands, listing each one and the opportunity they’d both be interested in biting into if done right. Shane tries to reel her in, but there’s no point once she has a list of objectives. Shane and her were the same in that department.

“I know a few good lawyers who specialize in soulmate residency and expedited immigration,” Yuna goes on. “We could get Ilya Canadian citizenship in six months? Eight at the most. Of course, you have to provide evidence and bond authenticity. Three witnesses can replace actual photo or video proof.”

“Mom, can you just take three steps back, please?” Shane begs, overwhelmed. “I’m not gonna come out or anything yet.”

Shane looks at Ilya, who smiles with pasta sauce on his face. He doesn't know how he can eat during a time like this.

"We just want a future. I don't know," Shane finishes.

Yuna gives Ilya a complicated expression. "You play in Ottawa?"

"Yes. We would be closer, and with the charity," Ilya replies, before taking another large bite.

Yuna doesn't look much happier. "And you have no loyalty to Boston?"

"Jesus, Mom!" Shane groans.

"What? They drafted him." Yuna turns to Ilya. "You would leave Boston for Shane?"

Ilya nods like it was simple. "Yes."

Yuna makes a face. Shane sighs. "Mom."

"Loyalty is important," she explains like they were arguing over two things that held the same amount of importance.

"He's trying to be loyal to me, not Boston," Shane says. She makes another face, and Shane groans. Ilya is laughing into his food. "My mom cares a little too much about hockey."

"Now I see where you get it from," Ilya teases.

David brings up Scott Hunter, and Shane learns Ilya talked to him after the award show. It was all becoming a little real. His dad mentioning Scott Hunter, and how he came out as gay. Ilya saying he talked to him at one point. Maybe not about him and Shane, but the fact they had some sort of conversation is mind boggling and unexpected. He's sitting with his parents and Ilya at once, talking about the future and what all needs to be done. It was still a lot to process. Reality hits him all at once.

Shane's ears ring, and the utensils are too heavy. He scoots his chair back to put his head on the table. He needs to focus on his breathing, calm his rapid thoughts and anxiety threatening to pull him apart.

He didn't realize everyone stopped talking.

"Shane," Ilya says. Shane can't get his mouth to work. "Shane," he repeats, slightly more concerned.

"I'm okay," Shane gets out. "I'm just freaking out. I'll be okay in a second."

"Hey, hey, hey," Ilya says calmly. He rubs circles into Shane's back. "We're good here. Your family is here. Your boyfriend is here. You're good here, okay?"

Shane pauses. *Boyfriend*. It didn't hold as much weight as soulmate, not as important or pressing, but it was a title that meant relationship. *Soulmate* was a precursor, including

prearranged obligations and duties. It was expected to be with your soulmate.

They already chose each other before accepting their soulmate bond. But boyfriend? That was a choice and a new separate promise.

“My boyfriend?”

Ilya fidgets in his seat, probably didn't mean to say it or think much of it. “I mean, yes. I think so, probably.”

Ilya brings a hand to Shane's chin to kiss him. Shane's stress flows from his shoulders. Ilya is right. Everything is okay. He can breathe. He has everyone he loves in this room.

It's not until they get in the car to drive back to the cottage to enjoy the rest of their time together, that it hits Shane how real this is. How possible everything might just be. He can have his soulmate and his family. He can have it all.

His heart and soul are full. They pound away, thriving and alive.

They can do that. They're safe with Ilya.

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