

In You, I Find Me

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](https://archiveofourown.org/works/76598631) at <https://archiveofourown.org/works/76598631>.

Rating:	Explicit
Archive Warning:	Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings
Category:	M/M
Fandoms:	Heated Rivalry (TV) , Game Changers Series - Rachel Reid
Relationships:	Shane Hollander/Ilya Rozanov , Shane Hollander & Ilya Rozanov
Characters:	Shane Hollander , Ilya Rozanov , Yuna Hollander , David Hollander , Connors (Heated Rivalry) , Cliff Marlow , Alexei Rozanov Andrei Rozanov
Additional Tags:	Alternate Universe - Mob , Russian Mafia , Mafia Boss Ilya Rozanov , College Student Shane Hollander , Kidnapping , Misunderstandings , Falling In Love , Idiots in Love , Slow Burn , Slow Romance , Blood and Violence , mafia violence , Oral Sex , Anal Sex , Gay Sex , Rough Sex , Love Confessions , First Love , Gun Violence , Ride or Die Relationship , Light Angst , Angst and Hurt/Comfort , Emotional Hurt/Comfort , Eventual Happy Ending , Eventual Relationships , Unconventional Families , Drama & Romance , Action & Romance , Unrequited Love , Shane Hollander loves laptops , Blood and Injury , Major Character Injury , Injury Recovery , Secret Marriage , True Love
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2025-12-28 Completed: 2026-01-27 Words: 57,275 Chapters: 14/14

In You, I Find Me

by [loveleclerc](#)

Summary

“You have no idea who your parents really are, do you?” the Russian asked seriously after a few minutes passed of them staring at one another, though it was really more Shane glaring and heaving while Ilya calmly observed him with an unsure glint in his eye.

“I have no idea what I’m doing here and what you want with them. If this is some kind of stupid business dispute, I have bad news for you, asshole. I don't know about their business, I don't even know what their business is, and I've never been involved in their business,” Shane seethed as slowly as he possibly could so Ilya could understand that he genuinely had no idea of what was going on. “Now will you please untie me and take me home? I don't even care if you knock me out again, just fucking let me go!”

Ilya set the glass down to the side of him on the black leather cushion and rose from his seat, unfolding gracefully until he was towering over Shane with cool indifference. He bent slightly, leaned in close enough to Shane's face that he could smell the vodka the Russian man had been drinking, then said easily, “I think I will keep you, actually.”

Notes

While this work of fanfiction is inspired by the 'Game Changers' series written by Rachel Reid, most aspects of Shane and Ilya's story have obviously changed for plot purposes. Please note that this story does revolve around a mafia universe and will contain mafia related themes. Reader discretion is advised.

Chapter 1: Chapter One



Shane sat down at the small coffee table with a huff and buried his face in his hands as soon as he was certain that his giant mug was secure on the cardboard coaster he'd been given.

The vanilla latte was steaming in the cold winter air of Montreal, but Shane was too busy digging his palms into his eyes as he tried to shake away his exhaustion. He was in his final year of university, finals were in a week, and he'd never studied so hard in his life for the exams he'd have to take for sports therapy.

He pulled his hands down from his eyes and looked around the small coffee shop he'd made himself comfortable in while snow fell silently outside the massive front window he was next to. A few other students were bundled up like him in sweaters, scarves, and jackets with textbooks or laptops in front of them. Their faces looked as equally drained and tired as he probably did. Shane sniffled and reached behind him to grab his own laptop so he could pull up the course material he needed to study for the most—advanced anatomy.

Shane grumbled to himself as soon as he pulled up the review slides that were supposed to help him with the final while also reaching for the latte that would aid him in getting through it. The coffee shop was warm inside, soft jazz played overhead, there were soft murmurs of conversation that weren't too distracting, and yet Shane found himself slightly agitated as he scrolled through the slides of body parts.

He hadn't always wanted to go into sports therapy. For a long time, Shane had wanted to be the one *playing* the sport. He'd played hockey for as long as he could remember and had been extremely excellent at it too. His last year of high school, he'd taken a hit that finished his career for good and guaranteed he'd never be back on the ice in a way that would get him noticed by anything professional. The other player had been taller, heavier, stronger, and determined to prevent him from scoring anymore in the game he'd been participating in.

One minute, he'd been flying down the ice with the puck on his blade and the next minute, he'd been slammed against the boards at the world's most awkward angle with one leg crumbling in an inhumane direction from the force. Shane honestly didn't remember much. He'd passed out pretty much instantly from the pain apparently and had woken up in the hospital with visible rods in his legs that nearly made him lose consciousness again.

His family had been quick with thinking and encouraged him to continue with a career in sports, just not playing it. So Shane had applied to a few universities that weren't very far from his hometown of Ottawa—within three hours at least—and had been accepted into his first choice out of the lot. Nearly four years later, Shane was getting ready to graduate with his degree and rejoin the world of hockey in a far different way than before.

Shane blinked at the screen when he realized he'd zoned out and sighed to himself. If he wasn't going to study here, he probably wasn't going to study anywhere. He reached out to grab his coffee and took another steadying sip while being as mindful as possible not to burn his tongue. His mother was coming up this weekend and he wanted to make sure he could actually taste her cooking rather than the scalded roof of his mouth.

In the end, Shane closed the laptop and grabbed his phone instead to scroll through his contacts until he found the very woman he'd been thinking of. With a quick tap on the screen, Shane dialed his mother's number and brought the phone up to his ear while his other hand remained wrapped around the warmth of the coffee mug.

They'd drawn a cute little picture in cream on the top of it of a leaf and Shane wondered how someone learned to do that. Maybe he could learn to do that. If he cared enough. The phone connected only a moment later and the familiar voice of Yuna Hollander greeted him with a cheerful cry of, "Shane! How are you?"

Shane smiled to himself and nervously glanced at the other coffee shop patrons, careful of his volume so he didn't disturb anyone in whatever they were focused on. It seemed like a lot of people were having an easier time studying than he was then. "I'm good. Avoiding studying," he admitted softly into the phone. She laughed at that and teased, "Sounds like something your father would do."

Shane leaned back in his chair and tucked his face into the soft scarf he had around his neck as his eyes traced over the wispy steam coming off of his coffee. "How is dad? How are you both? You're still coming here this weekend, right?" he asked as he tried to scramble for conversation. He hadn't really called for a reason, but he wanted someone to talk to right now instead of reading boring words that made his head spin.

"Oh, we're all fine, honey. A little busy with the business, but nothing we can't handle. I'll be there this weekend, of course! Do you want me to bring anything? Do you need anything?" Yuna quickly asked as she went into 'mom mode'. Shane just laughed and shook his head before realizing she couldn't see his response.

"No, no. I'm good. Just wanted to make sure you're still coming with the snow and everything. The weather is only getting worse," he huffed. Yuna hummed thoughtfully at that and assured him she'd be able to make it despite the snow, then inquired about where he was as the sound of someone knocking over their coffee mug and shattering it on the floor startled a gasp from Shane and other patrons.

Shane watched as staff hurried over to help the woman who'd knocked over her coffee and answered tiredly, "Coffee shop. Figured I'd try to get some studying done with caffeine, but it's obviously not working."

"Maybe you should try to head home early with all the snow? It's going to be getting dark soon," Yuna pointed out while Shane stared at the growing puddle of coffee on the shop floor. He should probably be a good person and go help out, but another worker soon joined with a fresh towel to sop up the hot coffee while the patron and other employee picked up shards of mug from the floor. He worried at his bottom lip and flicked his gaze to his own barely touched coffee.

"Yeah, okay. Coffee isn't really my favorite anyway," he confessed. They parted ways with promises to go to their favorite restaurant when she arrived that weekend and that Shane would be slow during his walk home. She didn't want him to hurt his leg *again* in something stupid like snow. Shane pulled out a few bills to drop next to the coffee he didn't drink and dumped his laptop bag into his backpack before standing from the chair with a soft grunt. The wooden chairs they had at the coffee shop weren't exactly comfortable.

He pushed open the door of the coffee shop and braced himself for the cold weather that greeted him as soon as he stepped outside. Snow battered his face and Shane wrapped his scarf tightly around his neck while also tugging down the beanie he wore so his skin barely

felt the icy sting. He trudged through the wintery air across campus and mentally counted down the minutes until he would be back in his apartment.

It was a humble but nice thing, where Shane lived. He didn't have any roommates, had his own bedroom and bathroom, and had been given free reign with decorating, though he hadn't really been sure what to do with that. He'd had his parents hire a decorator instead that they knew and found he didn't really mind the modern decor they'd gone with, even if it looked like something that had just been pulled from a catalogue.

It was all crisp greens, black accenting, and dark wood which, he had to admit, was probably a little overboard for a college kid. Shane knew that he came from a well-off family. He knew that his parents ran a business, that it was stuff he didn't really care about, that they never pushed him into following in their footsteps, and that he was taken care of for whatever stage of life he was in. If that meant getting a couple nice apartments along the way or a few contacts that could help him put his life together, he appreciated it.

Shane trudged up to the front office of the apartment complex and slapped his key fob against the callbox to unlock the main doors. The woman working behind the desk, a college student likely going into marketing or something, glanced up at him boredly before looking away.

He gave a tight smile, not really much fun himself, and headed to the elevators with a huff of cold breath as the heated air from the complex seeped into his bones. Shane leaned his head back against the elevator and closed his eyes the entire ride up as jazz played from one of the speakers overhead. It wasn't his favorite kind of music, but it sure seemed to be the complex's favorite considering every space in the entire building played the same tune except for the hallways and actual apartments.

As he stepped off onto his floor, Shane fumbled with his keys to find the brass key that would unlock his front door. For some reason, there were a million fucking keys the complex required residents to have. A fob for the main entrance, a clicker for the underground garage, a brass key for the front door, a silver key for the mailbox... Shane grumbled to himself as he flipped through it all and finally landed on the gold key.

He shoved it inside of the lock and—

It was unlocked.

Shane froze at the feeling of no resistance when he turned the key and furrowed his eyebrows. Had he left it unlocked when he left for class that morning? Fuck, had he really been that stupid? He could've sworn he'd locked it behind himself, but now he wasn't sure. He had really wanted to just get through the snow and finish the damn hour long lecture over sports psychology.

With a pissed sigh to himself, Shane shook his head and pushed his way into the quiet apartment. If anything was stolen, it would just worsen his day, so Shane shoved his shoes off of his feet and dropped his bag before facing the space he called home with worried eyes. His nervous heart settled in his chest at the sight of everything in place the way it should be with absolutely nothing touched or even slightly moved. Shane let his shoulders drop as he padded towards the kitchen for a ginger ale that he preferred far more than coffee.

It was there where he stopped in his tracks and his entire body went cold.

There were two men standing in the middle of the kitchen dressed in crisp ebony suits, dark sunglasses, and guns at their sides. His father had taught him about guns when he was little—which ones were for hunting, which ones were for police, which ones were for war—and the sight of the solid black handgun in both of the men's hands sent a frightening thought to his brain. They were holding Glock 17s, a 9mm semi-automatic pistol used by law enforcement, military, civilians, and desperate men who wanted something without talking.

Shane swallowed hard and tried to think quickly about what to do. He'd never been in this situation before, obviously, and knew that any sudden movements would probably get him immediately shot and killed. He did the first thing he could think of then and spoke with quiet shakiness, "Just take whatever you want and I won't say a word."

One of the men cocked his head to the side and raised his eyebrow before commenting something to his partner that was definitely Russian. His voice sounded amused and Shane didn't like that. He also didn't like not knowing what the man had said. "I'll do you one better," the man who had been spoken to suddenly piped up. Shane jerkily turned his eyes to the other man. He didn't have a Russian accent, he actually sounded Canadian, so Shane stared at him in a mixture of confusion and fear. "You come with us, don't put up a fight, and no one has to get hurt."

"Cliff, come on. That is so boring," the first man who had whispered quipped. Unlike his friend with the Canadian twang, his accent was absolutely Russian. They each had dark hair both on their heads and faces that matched the inky fabric of their suits and sunglasses, so Shane couldn't really get a good idea of what either of these men looked like when he gave their descriptions to police. He wasn't going to go down without a fight. He might be scared shitless, but he wasn't weak.

Shane sprang to the right to hide behind the kitchen counter, ripping open his backpack to tug out his laptop at the same time the men swore and lurched forward to follow him. Shane grabbed his laptop with both hands and swung it as hard as he could around the corner of the kitchen counter as the first man, the Russian, found him first and lifted his gun.

He crunched his laptop hard against the man's wrist in a downward plunge, watching as the gun went scattering on the floor at the same time the Canadian man cried out, "He wants him alive!" Shane didn't know who *he* was, but he wasn't in any hurry to find out.

He scrambled forward to grab the gun that had dropped only for two hands to grab his ankles out from under him and pull him back. Shane screamed behind clenched teeth and kicked backwards as hard as he could, slamming his sneaker-clad foot into the same Russian man who he'd previously hurt.

The Russian yelped and released him in favor of clutching what was definitely a broken nose while Shane resumed his crawl forward for a desperate grab at the gun. The Canadian man beat him to it, however, and kicked it out of his reach. Shane let out a grunt of frustration and tried to scurry backwards to avoid whatever the other man was going to do to him, but all he saw was the butt of the gun coming hard towards his head and then pitch black.

Everything felt terrible when Shane eventually came-to. His head was throbbing, his eyes were sensitive to the dim light around him, and his limbs felt like they weighed a million pounds. He groaned as he tried to sit himself up in whatever chair he was slumped over in and found that his arms had been tied behind the back of his chair while his ankles were restrained to the bottom of the legs. He blinked slowly and winced as warm orange light greeted his vision.

He had no idea where he was, that was the first thing he could distinctly realize. The second was that it was night outside because the massive window next to him hadn't been sheltered by curtains and revealed a sprawling estate below. There was a gravel path for cars that led to a horseshoe shape at the front entrance of whatever home he was in and stone columns about waist-high held flickering glass lanterns atop of them.

Hedges protected the estate from anyone looking in or out along with towering trees and a wrought-iron gate at the end of the gravel driveway. A few black cars were parked at the peak of the horseshoe and Shane noted that there were two men pacing slowly outside by the white stairs leading up to the front entrance of the home. The guns they wore around their necks looked heavy and comically large.

Shane swallowed and felt tears sting in his eyes. Whoever had been in his apartment hadn't wanted to kill him, but to take him here—wherever *here* was. Shane really didn't want to know where he'd ended up and what fate was waiting for him, though he was certain he'd figure out one way or another whether he liked it or not. Sure enough, the sound of ice clinking in a glass nearby pulled Shane's hazy vision away from the window and to the scene in front of him.

There was a man reclined in the middle of a black leather couch directly across from him. His face was neutral, if not a little severe, and he was watching Shane closely with sharp hazel eyes. He was devilishly handsome with golden curls, angular bone structure, full lips, high cheekbones, and a smattering of beauty marks on alabaster skin.

The black button up he wore was rolled to his elbows, revealing thick forearms adorned with a range of different tattoos scattered about them, while the top buttons were undone to display the gold crucifix chain he also wore. He swirled a clear liquid in the glass he lazily held by his side and pressed his lips together as if he'd found something distasteful.

Shane wondered if it was *him* the man found distasteful.

"You broke Levi's nose," the man finally said, his voice thick with a syrupy Russian accent that went straight to Shane's gut. He flared his nostrils and refused to break eye contact with the man across from him as he answered bravely, "Good."

The man cocked an eyebrow in amusement at the response and let his eyes drift away from Shane to the open window he'd been looking out of. "I agree with you. He didn't follow orders well. Marlow said he was going to shoot you, probably." Shane was a little surprised that his captor was agreeing with him that it was good he'd broken one of his goon's noses, but that didn't make him relax with his current predicament.

"Who are you?" Shane bit out. The man frowned slightly at the question, like he hadn't expected it for some reason, and brought the glass to his lips to take a sip of whatever he was drinking while Shane breathed shallowly in the chair.

"I figured you would have seen my picture at some point. I guessed wrong it seems," the man began once he swallowed his drink without a sound or face. "I'm Ilya Rozanov, Grigori's son. Though he's not running the business anymore... I am." The look that the Russian man gave him after, *Ilya*, was one that suggested Shane would know immediately who he was. When Shane just furrowed his eyebrows in further confusion and looked around like he was lost, Ilya's smug expression faltered slightly.

"Your parents did not tell you about me?" Ilya wondered smoothly.

"Why the *fuck* would they?!" Shane exclaimed in hysteric exasperation. "Where am I? What the fuck do you want?"

Now Ilya was frowning as deeply as Shane was. "You are Shane Hollander, yes? David and Yuna Hollander's son?" he asked uncertainty. Shane reeled back as if he'd been hit and wondered where the hell he was right now. Had he fallen into some kind of alternate universe where he *wasn't* a random college student with an average life?

"*Yes!* What the fuck?!" Shane cried out. He tugged at the bindings on his wrists and ankles while Ilya stared at him in bewilderment. How did this asshole have any right to be confused? He was the one that had gone and stolen Shane away and tied him up in some unknown place surrounded by guns, the Russian language, and the color black.

"I am confused," Ilya stated.

"No shit," Shane hissed. "Look, I don't know how you know my parents, or me for that matter, but you obviously fucked up because I have no idea what it going on right now or why you'd know who we are! Did—Did someone tell you we were, like, *important* or something? Because we aren't! My parents run a fucking business doing I don't even know what and I'm a college student trying to go into sports therapy, you *asshole!*" Ilya's face began to blanch across from him, though his expression remained perfectly closed off.

"I'm sorry. Your parents do... what?" Ilya finally asked. Shane began to tug vehemently against the restraints as anger overtook him in place of fear. This was so fucked up. Whatever was happening right now, he just wanted to get it over with and go home and forget this had ever happened. He didn't even want to go to the police, he just wanted to go. He let out a hiss of rage as the rope around his wrists burned his skin and Shane finally decided to let it go, slumping into the cool leather of the chair with a glare aimed right at Ilya Rozanfucker.

“My parents run a business, you fucking asshole! They’re, like, entrepreneurs, I don’t know! If you’re so interested in them, ask *them*, because I never wanted anything to do with it. I don’t even *know* what they really do. You kidnapped the wrong fucking person to ask these questions to or whatever the fuck you’re doing!” Shane barked as he leaned forward against the restraints.

Ilya blinked.

“And your parents are David and Yuna Hollander?” he checked again.

Shane let out a legitimate scream of frustration and shouted, “*Yes!*” before throwing his head back and hitting it against the black leather behind him. He winced as soon as the injury from Cliff’s, or whatever the guy’s name was, gun made contact with the spine of the quilted chair. Ilya downed the rest of his drink in one harsh toss back and clenched his jaw.

“You have no idea who your parents really are, do you?” the Russian asked seriously after a few minutes passed of them staring at one another, though it was really more Shane glaring and heaving while Ilya calmly observed him with an unsure glint in his eye.

“I have no idea what I’m doing here and what you want with them. If this is some kind of stupid business dispute, I have bad news for you, asshole. I don’t know about their business, I don’t even know what their business is, I’ve never been involved in their business, and I have no desire to learn whatever their business is,” Shane seethed as slowly as he possibly could so Ilya could understand that he genuinely had no idea of what was going on. “Now will you please untie me and take me home? I don’t even care if you knock me out again, just fucking let me go!”

Ilya set the glass down to the side of him on the black leather cushion and rose from his seat, unfolding gracefully until he was towering over Shane with cool indifference.

He wore an impeccable black get up of the before noticed button up, sleek dress pants, and polished dress shoes. Shane swallowed at how intimidating he really was when he was at his full height, then felt himself shrink further into the chair once Ilya began to stride over to him.

Ilya Rozanov bent slightly, leaned in close enough to Shane’s face that he could smell the vodka the Russian man had been drinking, then said easily, “I think I will keep you, actually.”

Chapter 2: Chapter Two

Chapter Notes

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

One week earlier

Ilya watched as the mahogany coffin sank into the ground before a giant marble pillar bearing his father's name. He took a drag of his cigarette and stared behind the dark tint of his sunglasses while a priest recited hymns and prayers in Russian alongside all of the guests that had cared to attend. Andrei was nowhere to be found, but Ilya couldn't say he was surprised considering his brother was a waste of space traitor. Any man there at the funeral would probably pull a gun on him and kill him, no questions asked.

Ilya blew out the smoke that had filled his lungs and settled a deep nervousness in his veins. As the new heir to the Rozanov household and family business, Ilya was now in charge of everything. Every shipment, every contract, every negotiation, every man and woman working for him, every problem, *everything*. He felt the immense weight of it all on his shoulders and found it a little astonishing that he was actually standing upright with a plain look on his face.

Any display of weakness around here could be the nail in his own eventual coffin. He twitched his lips a little at the thought and stayed for the rest of the ceremony as expected until the last crumbs of dirt were tossed onto his father's casket and the final prayer was spoken. Ilya turned away from it all with cool indifference and began to head back in the direction of the Moscow estate that belonged to his family.

Marlow caught up to him, his best friend and right hand man in the grand scheme of it all, and walked alongside him in supportive silence. If anyone knew the true stress Ilya felt at that moment, it was Marlow. They trudged through the large corridors of the home while others followed behind, eager to indulge in whatever catering one of Ilya's many associates had prepared for the after service.

Ilya had no intention of sticking around to hear people's sympathies while they drank his good liquor and talked up the father he cared little for. He calmly ascended up the double staircase in the center of the home with Marlow in tow and padded towards the large office where all of his personal and important business was conducted behind a bullet proof door and a handful of powerful locks.

"Well that fucking sucked," Marlow grumbled as soon as they entered the office and shut the door behind them. Ilya snorted and dropped himself into the leather chair behind his desk with a deep inhale to steady his thoughts. He pressed the end of his shortened cigarette into the nearby ashtray before reaching inside of his suit jacket to retrieve another one from the opened pack he had.

"Yeah. And now we have this shit storm in Montreal on top of Andrei and Novosibirsk. I cannot catch a fucking break," Ilya sighed into the empty room. Marlow frowned as he

deposited himself into the chair opposite Ilya and reached for the decanter of whiskey along with one of the few glasses set up on the mahogany desk.

“Wait, what’s going on with Montreal?” Marlow asked seriously.

It had shown up in his morning report when Ilya ate his breakfast, a quick breakdown of anything that had happened during the few hours he slept or while he was busy handling other business, that a certain supply route through Montreal had been cut off thanks to Andrei.

Ilya preferred the gun trafficking side of the business, but drugs had been his father’s primary choice. In the end, it had been his mother’s as well. Ilya didn’t enjoy that side of their family’s business in the slightest. Canada, however, had a few good suppliers that Grigori had liked to do business with and Andrei knew just as well as Ilya that a lot of their family’s money came from those suppliers.

Andrei *also* knew how desperate the Korenev family in Novosibirsk was to have the *same* suppliers. As soon as their father had taken his last breath, Andrei had fled with all of the Rozanov family’s trade secrets just to get a little bit of money and a higher status with the Novosibirsk family than he would’ve had here considering it would be Ilya who inherited the power Grigori had.

As soon as Ilya had read the report that the route through Montreal was no longer accessible thanks to his bastard of a brother, he’d begun to do research. The family that approved of any kind of illegal transfer of substances, whether it was guns or jewelry or drugs or money, was the Hollander family—David and Yuna Hollander.

Their business was primarily money laundering, and based on what Ilya knew from his father and his research, Yuna Hollander was the brains behind the operation of converting their funds from said criminal activities to a legitimate appearance, like brands or businesses. David worked more behind the scenes with operations, accounting, and reasoning. Either way, nothing was getting in or out of Montreal without the Hollander family knowing of it and profiting off it in some way.

To have them and their abilities suddenly gone, Ilya was looking at a massive cut in profits from Canadian drug trafficking. Cuts in profits meant cuts in everything else like alliances, salaries, protection, status, and a handful of other things that made a mafia family successful. As tiring as the lifestyle was, and as much as Ilya wished he could step away from it, the Rozanov family was one that ingrained the idea of honor into family brains from an early age.

“Andrei cut our route through Montreal—said something to the Hollander family that got us fucked,” Ilya informed raggedly before he took a drag of his cigarette. Marlow groaned and let his face turn to the bookshelf lining the wall to the right of them where a handful of volumes over languages, geography, history, psychology, and business lined the shelves.

They stewed in silence for a minute before Marlow asked, “Have you spoken with Connors about this?” Ilya shook his head at the mention of his other close friend and tilted his head back against the plush leather of the chair.

Marlow set his glass down and muttered something about going to find the mastermind himself before leaving the room with a silent click of the door. In the emptiness of the quiet office, Ilya closed his eyes and took in a deep breath to steady himself while his cigarette burned between his fingers. It had been a whirlwind of a week that he was still clawing at to keep up with.

With his father dead, Andrei gone, a good number of associates defecting alongside his brother, and a conflict added onto the list of others, Ilya's head was spinning. Not even the warm embrace of Svetlana had been able to ease his mind these past few nights. He had a lot of work to do, someone new into power always did, and his current vices included a good amount of cigarettes and hard liquor.

It wasn't the best, but it had to do for now until things got easier to manage.

The door opened again and Marlow returned with a solemn Connors at his side minutes later. "What's up, boss?" Connors asked smoothly as he followed Marlow's lead and sat in the other available chair across from Ilya. Ilya opened his eyes reluctantly and sat up in his seat so he could reach for the file that was sitting to his left on the top of his desk. He tossed the file over to Connors and raised an eyebrow in invitation for the man to open it up and take a look.

He and Marlow then sat in watchful silence as they observed Connors read through the information, frown, press a finger to his thoughtful lips, and flip between different pages of details. Eventually, Connors sighed and tossed the file back on the top of the desk with a perplexed expression. "Sounds like we need to make contact with the Hollanders," Connors reasoned.

"We tried. They responded that the deal they cut with Novosibirsk and Andrei was better. We don't have the money right now to entice them back, not with that route down and my father dead and new associates to hire. We have to think of something else," Ilya explained begrudgingly. Andrei had really fucked them over with this one. As much as Ilya didn't care for the drug side of the business, it brought in a shit ton of money. They couldn't afford to lose that route or potential alliances in the future around the Montreal area.

Connors cocked his head and stared at Ilya hard. Ilya stared back at him, waiting for Connors to voice whatever thoughts he was coming to terms with. "They have a son," Connors said. Both Ilya and Marlow blinked at Connors, not following where he was going, and watched as Connors shifted uncomfortably in his chair.

"Look, I wasn't a fan of your father's methods, that's for damn sure, but you had to acknowledge that they definitely worked in times of need. We could just, you know... take something of theirs for leverage," Connors carefully unfolded. At that, Ilya raised an eyebrow and crushed the end of his half burnt cigarette into the ashtray so he could give his undivided attention to Connors.

Marlow also sat up a little straighter in his chair with a harsh look. "You want to take their *son*? Try and use their own family against them? Come on, Connors, you know that as soon as you give the kid back or whatever that they're going to raze us to the ground. They won't let that shit fly," Marlow argued.

Connors shrugged and turned his attention to Ilya. “Your father has done it before. How did he avoid that outcome?” he asked.

Ilya hummed and bobbed his head from side to side as he tried to recall the handful of wives, girlfriends, or daughters his father had plucked from opposing families to use for leverage. He hadn’t been as kind as Ilya would be, if they ended up taking the Hollander’s son that was, but it had worked because his father had offered an alliance with benefits afterwards.

Prime example A—Grigori had been warring over territory in downtown Moscow with a family called the Volkovs. They had a daughter, Mila, who had been two years younger than Andrei. Grigori had no problem grabbing her from a restaurant she had been leaving, keeping her in the house while he negotiated with her family to get the land he believed he was owed, then offering a marriage agreement to join the families together and share the wealth.

Andrei was now a happily married man to Mila Volkov, if happily meant snorting half of their supply and getting into no good together.

“He made a proposal that benefitted both families and left no hard feelings, or as little as possible, that kind of thing,” Ilya revealed boredly.

“So let’s come up with a plan. We take the kid, negotiate with the parents, then offer them something they need so they don’t come and kill us all,” Marlow laid out, as if it was as simple as that. Connors just snorted and rose from his chair before making his way to one of the books on the nearby shelves. He searched for a moment, then pulled out a large brown volume filled with information about the families the Rozanovs had worked with during the duration of their power.

“There’s a problem there, Marlow. The Hollander’s son? He’s not a *kid*, he’s Ilya’s age.”

Connors tapped on the open page he had found and pushed it between all of them so Marlow and Ilya could lean in and look at the information provided by whoever did the external information supply. Shane Hollander had been born the same year as Ilya, so the term ‘kid’ did in fact *not* apply to the situation Marlow had tried to picture. Ilya just pursed his lips and sat back in his chair thoughtfully.

“We can still take him. We just have to get him off guard, put him under, and keep him unconscious until he gets to Moscow. The Hollanders may feel the hit a little harder if their son is so far away from their influence,” he acknowledged.

Connors nodded and looked between Ilya and Marlow. “You want me to put it together then? Get some intel, follow him around, put together a formal capture plan?” Ilya sniffed and nodded once. Shane Hollander would have to do for now.

Six days later, Ilya found himself on the tarmac of his personal runway strip waiting for his private jet to pull up beside where he stood. The stars and moon had already climbed up into the sky a few hours ago, but Ilya found himself wide awake and anxious. He watched as the black jet eased its way forward from where it had touched down and gave him a wide berth while it came to a gradual halt.

Marlow and another man named Levi, someone who was always up to carry out a nasty plan of sorts, had been the ones to get the job done in Montreal. If they'd done exactly what was expected, both men would be returning to Moscow with another person in tow and Ilya was eager to see if they had succeeded in doing so. If they hadn't, Ilya wasn't sure what backup plan they'd be able to come up with.

The information that Connors had unearthed about Shane Hollander seemed rather uneventful. He was a college student at the Université de Montréal getting his undergraduate degree in kinesiology, though Connors had been able to figure out that sports therapy was what Shane Hollander's intended career choice was after graduation in the spring. He was close with his family, had played hockey for a long time growing up before suffering an injury, and had two close friends named Hayden Pike and J.J. Dagenais who were in the same program as him.

Connors hadn't uncovered anything about Shane Hollander's ties to his family's business, but Ilya attributed that to them being rather good at covering the illegal side of their family dynamic.

The stairs slowly descended from the side of the jet once it had parked completely and Ilya watched with a stony face as Levi descended first with a large bandage taped across his nose and dark rings beneath his eyes. Levi met Ilya's expression with a glowering one and grumbled, "Kid broke my nose," before looking over his shoulder at the limp body of Shane Hollander being carried by Marlow down the steps.

If he'd been able to injure one of Ilya's men, then there was something else to be learned about Shane Hollander—he was a fighter. Ilya cocked his head to the side and waited patiently as Levi passed him to get in one of the black SUVs parked behind Ilya while Marlow continued his descent. Finally, Marlow stood in front of him and held up the arm that was tucked behind Shane Hollander's back so the unconscious man's hand could roll forward and show itself under the light of the moon.

Oh. Shane Hollander was... *stunning*.

Ilya swallowed down the lump that formed in his throat and looked away quickly so he could focus back on Marlow rather than the attractive captive belonging to the Hollander family. "He broke Levi's nose?" Ilya inquired with suspicious humor. When he glanced back down at the unconscious face of Shane Hollander, he didn't see a man capable of hurting another person. He saw someone soft, sweet, and inoffensive. Then again, he was unconscious.

If anything, though, it just made Ilya laugh internally at Levi harder.

Marlow snorted and followed behind Ilya as they piled into the family cars with Shane Hollander in their grasp and a story of what had happened on their lips. Marlow recalled how

they had gotten access to his apartment by claiming to be family to the stupid receptionist, how they had indulged in a couple of cans of ginger ale while they waited for Hollander, and how the confrontational interaction between the three of them panned out.

Ilya marked Shane Hollander as not only a fighter, but a scrappy fighter as well based on Marlow and Levi's accounts of the encounter. When they eventually set Hollander up in one of the estate's lounges and Ilya got to hear for himself just how emotionally *touchy* the Montreal family's son was, Ilya found he quite liked Shane Hollander when he was in combative situations.

He also had to acknowledge after their conversation, however, that Shane Hollander was apparently a fucking idiot.

Or, well, not an *idiot* per se, but definitely of no use to Ilya in discovering what the Hollanders could possibly need in exchange for easing the tension between their families after their son's return. So Ilya now stared at the man across from him, tied up in his chair and glaring at him with chocolate brown eyes, freckled cheeks, and parted lips that looked unfairly kissable.

Ilya set down the glass of vodka he'd tossed back on the black leather beside where he was sitting before unfolding himself from the couch. If what Shane Hollander said was true, that he didn't know a single thing about his parents' business and had never been involved in it due to lack of interest, then Ilya had kidnapped the family's son for absolutely no reason.

Hollander swallowed hard as he watched Ilya rise to his feet and slowly make his way towards him. In Ilya's mind, he was trying to figure out what to do quickly before Hollander caught on to his internal panic—did he give him back? Did he kill him? Did he continue with the original idea to use him as leverage anyway and bullshit his way through everything? With each foot he set in front of the other, the layouts of a plan began to unfold in his mind.

When he stood in front of Hollander's tied up body, he stopped and bent down to lean in for a closer look at his handsome captive's face. He had to say, David and Yuna Hollander had made quite a beautiful son, one that Ilya would absolutely go for had he been a rare free night and looking to hook up with someone. The flickers of his feisty personality as well just intrigued Ilya further, like a grumpy kitten.

He wanted to know more.

He watched as Shane Hollander eyed him warily, yet never lost the fire behind his gaze from the situation he was in. That pleased something inside of Ilya too. "I think I will keep you, actually," he decided out loud as Hollander waited for him to speak. Ilya observed the way Hollander flinched at the verbal choice and furrowed his eyebrows in bewilderment, something he'd done quite a few times since ending up in the Moscow estate.

"*Keep* me?" Hollander questioned, clearly stunned by the choice. "You... You can't do that. I have finals in a week and I graduate in the spring and I have a life in Montreal and I don't—I don't *know* anything for whatever it is you're trying to do here, asshole."

Ilya just jutted out his lip in thought and nodded to everything Hollander said, contorting his face into something that the Canadian man would think was consideration to what had been said. In the end, he just shrugged his shoulders and said, "I will keep you anyway. I'll have Marlow bring you to your room here and we can chat more in the morning. I have a feeling you will have more questions for me when the night is over."

He left the room then with a shocked Shane Hollander staring after him, completely slack in his bindings while his skin went pale. While Marlow handled transferring Hollander from the lounge to one of the secure bedrooms that would no doubt be posted with guards both outside of the room and the window, Ilya made his way to his own bedroom with a spinning brain. He needed to figure out what to do with Shane Hollander and he needed to figure it out fast.

If the Hollander's son wasn't aware of what his family did, that was a problem. A smart Shane Hollander was a useful Shane Hollander. Why his parents hadn't told him the extent of their business or what they really engaged in for a living, Ilya didn't know, but he sure as hell figured that Hollander was wondering what his mother and father did *now*.

If he could be the one to share that information, get Hollander in on the game, maybe even get Hollander to understand why he needed that shipment route... then maybe Ilya could benefit from this capture after all. Ilya shut the door behind him and leaned heavily against the door.

Educating Shane Hollander in the world of illegal business between powerful interconnected families across the world was just another thing he'd be adding to the list, but Ilya couldn't really think of anything else to do with the Canadian. He couldn't keep the man locked up in the bedroom all day, though he couldn't exactly have Hollander tagging along with him in the mafia aspect of Ilya's life either if he didn't know what the fuck was going on.

There had to be a balance then. Ilya would keep Shane Hollander close, explain what his family really did and why Hollander had become involved, expose the man little by little to the lifestyle as he adjusted and learned, then do his best to get Shane Hollander on his side with understanding why the Rozanov family needed Montreal's help.

If he could also somehow get the entire Hollander household to help in getting rid of the nasty problem that was Andrei and Novosibirsk as well... Ilya didn't let himself get too far ahead with his thinking.

He pushed off of the door and began to unbutton his shirt with a heavy sigh as he made his way towards his bed. If he called her, Svetlana would come and cradle his head in her lap and talk about nothing without any questions asked, but Ilya wasn't in the mood for company at that moment. All he could think about as he collapsed onto the king-sized mattress was how he was going to get Shane Hollander to even *listen* to anything he had to say tomorrow.

Ilya would invite him to a private breakfast, explain the situation, offer to tell him about his parents, introduce him to his closest men, and go from there. If Shane Hollander didn't seem interested or wanted space or went off the rails, then Ilya would just send him back to his rooms and try again the next day. He knew he didn't have the time and that would be a risky strategy for getting Hollander involved, but there was something inside of Ilya that truly believed he would eventually give in or get interested.

So he pulled the covers over himself and closed his eyes in the darkness of the room. He had a few meetings tomorrow and some drop-ins he needed to make with distribution warehouses, established associates, and potential allies over the next few days. He wouldn't be taking Hollander with him to anything, even if it was fun to imagine the aghast expression Hollander would have on his face each time.

While he was gone, however, Ilya wondered what he could do to keep the Canadian man entertained at least. Maybe Levi would like a round two? Maybe Ilya could watch through a camera?

At that, Ilya snorted and rolled over onto his side with a final huff of settling down. He was both excited and nervous about the fact he had Shane Hollander in his home, though he wasn't sure if it was because he now had a chance at possibly winning his disputes or that someone new and riveting had entered his life in a time of uncertainty. He supposed he'd start figuring that out tomorrow over a tense breakfast.

Chapter End Notes

trust me, I'm doing some world building here. the romance will come people xx

Chapter 3: Chapter Three

Chapter Notes

last chapter of world and situation world building before we get into the fun stuff ;)

“Let me fucking go! You—fuck—get *off* me!” Shane shouted as he fought against the hands dragging him by his arms to the empty breakfast table. They forced him down into one of the chairs with unimpressed expressions attached to hands that had manipulated his body from the bedroom to the dining room he was currently in. He shook them off with glares and nervously settled in the upholstered chair he had been deposited in.

Shane still wasn't entirely sure what was going on. He'd been locked into a bedroom last night with dinner brought to him, but Shane hadn't touched the food or anything other than the thick sheets he'd covered his body with in a poor attempt at protection. There were men under his third-story window with guns and shadows of patrolling men under the crack of his door, so Shane had decided to simply tremble in the bed with quiet tears.

He'd come to terms last night after losing his anger that the situation he was in was rather frightening. He'd been kidnapped from his home and brought to an unfamiliar place that appeared rather dangerous if the guns, polished outfits, and serious conversations were anything to take note of. The only thought that plagued him the most was the one swirling in his brain about his parents. It had been what had kept him up for most of the night.

Ilya Rozanov had said, “You really don't know who your parents are, do you?” and it had sent Shane spiraling internally ever since. Who were his parents to this man? Why did he think Shane was of any use here? Why did Rizanov even *take* him?

Shane shifted uncomfortably on the seat and ran a nervous palm over the back of his neck to settle the goosebumps that had lifted on his skin from the cold prick of nerves. The other door to the dining room suddenly swung open and Shane straightened, watching as Ilya Rozanov himself strode into the room with seemingly little care that he had kidnapped someone.

“You made it,” Rozanov greeted while he pulled out the chair on the opposite side of Shane and coolly sat down. The guards that had escorted Shane in now positioned themselves at both of the doors with a stoic silence, preventing the room from anyone entering into it... or trying to exit.

“I didn't have much of a choice,” Shane seethed out in response. Rozanov dipped his head in acknowledgement and reached into the front pocket of his black slacks to pull out a pack of cigarettes that appeared to be running rather low. Shane couldn't help it when he snarked, “Smoking is bad for you, you know.”

Rozanov stopped in pulling one of the slim white sticks out and set his sharp gaze directly on Shane with parted lips. “Really?” he asked with sarcastic seriousness. Shane just huffed and crossed his arms before looking away to the window at his left that showed the back yard of the estate he was in. It all looked different in the daylight with green hedges neatly trimmed, stone benches set up throughout the gravel pathways, lamps turned off but glistening under the cold winter sun, and tall trees swaying in the distance to protect the property.

In the center of it all, a marble fountain with the statue of a woman in the middle of its frozen pool caught Shane’s attention. It wasn’t turned on considering it was winter and the water wasn’t going anywhere due to temperature, but Shane admired it all the same. As much as he didn’t want to admit it, the home where he was residing really was rather nice and one he’d honestly enjoy touring if it wasn’t so hostile.

“You must have questions for me,” Rozanov spoke a moment later as he pulled up the silver dome in front of him and revealed a hot breakfast that Shane hadn’t even paid attention to. When he flicked his eyes down, sure enough, there was a silver plate cover in the center of his placemat with matching cutlery on either side of it. He eyed it warily and heard his stomach growl in hunger, a reminder that he hadn’t eaten the night before.

Rozanov had no problem digging into his own meal as he cut through a thick cut of ham and piled a fried egg onto a nearby piece of bread before jamming it all into his mouth. *Jesus, the man had an appetite, didn’t he?* Shane hesitantly pulled off the cover and made note that the meal in front of him was the same as Rozanov’s. With an uncertain press of his lips, Shane reached for his silverware and delicately picked it up to begin cutting into the food.

“Where am I?” he asked nervously as he bisected his conjoined fried eggs into two separate entities and pushed the soft yellow yolk with the end of his fork—over hard, the way he liked. He frowned at the realization. How did they know that?

“Moscow, Russia,” Rozanov responded plainly. Shane felt his heart skip a beat in his chest at the information and he hurriedly shoved a bite of egg into his mouth to stop him from thinking too hard about the fact that he was in an entirely different country on the other side of the ocean. “You are in my family’s estate, safe and protected.”

Shane swallowed the food and slowly met Rozanov’s gaze, a little caught off guard to find he was already being watched by the Russian man. “Why...” he began softly before backtracking on the question he really wanted to ask. “Why am I here? Why *me*?” Shane finally managed to get out. Rozanov sighed and set down the fork he had been using as he considered the question that Shane had asked him. For a while, the only sound that filled the room was their breathing and Shane’s silverware lightly scraping against the porcelain of the plate as he gathered more food.

“My father died a little over a week ago. In his death, I was made heir to the Rozanov family and all of its illegal involvements. You can call it what you want—gang, mafia, mob—though *your* parents prefer to call it a business. My brother, Andrei, fled to another family after my father’s death, and with him, information about the trade routes we use. *Your* family happens to oversee one of those routes. Unfortunately, Andrei has seen to it that the Montreal route your family manages now belongs to his new home and not the one he grew up in. We thought you might have information we could use to get it back, but...”

Shane connected the dots as he breathed shallowly in his seat at what he was being told. “But I don’t know anything,” he whispered, finishing Rozanov’s sentence. The Russian clenched his jaw while refusing to look away from Shane’s confused eyes. He just gave a curt nod at Shane’s conclusion and lifted his other hand still holding the burning cigarette to his lips while the other mindlessly toyed with the fork he had put down. “My parents...” Shane trailed off.

Rozanov watched him closely, remaining quiet and rather still as he waited for Shane to ask whatever question was forming in his brain. If Shane was being honest, he felt completely scattered. For all he knew, this could be some massive power game Ilya Rozanov was trying to play where he spewed a bunch of lies at Shane and hoped he’d be naive enough to believe it just so he could turn around and use that power against Shane and his family.

On the other hand... Shane really didn’t know anything about the business his parents ran. He’d always figured that his lack of involvement in their business was because he had no interest, and that was wholly true, but they hadn’t really been forthcoming in what they did either. It was always talks of meetings, traveling, and agreements that would probably bore Shane, so he’d never pushed in trying to learn or know more. He’d always just... gone along with it.

It would make sense though, wouldn’t it? Why his parents had him learn so many languages? Why they always seemed to have connections in different industries? Why he never had to want for anything? Why he always knew just enough but not enough? Why no one ever really laid a hand on him, except for in hockey when he’d gotten his injury and the player who had done it—

Moved to Vancouver and didn’t make any other hockey teams.

Shane swallowed the lump of emotion in his throat and felt his eyes burning at the flood of realizations, feelings, connections, and thoughts racing through his brain. When he met Rozanov’s eyes again, he found the same calculating look in the Russian man’s expression, but no deceit or smugness.

“My parents are the mafia?” he choked out in a hushed breath. Rozanov lifted both of his eyebrows at the question and shifted in his seat with a huff of sarcastic humor, probably at the wording Shane used in his question.

“They prefer the term business, but... yes. Your family oversees a rather large trade route between different countries for illegal activities, not only Russia. My family just happens to be one of them who depends on that route. With Andrei fucking that up now, we had to turn to some rather deparate measures to get it back. I do apologize, by the way, for bringing you into this. This is a method my father used when he was alive and I don’t really care for it, but the success of my family and the people who work for it relies heavily upon the route your parents control,” Rozanov explained seriously.

Shane set down his own silverware and felt his appetite disappear almost as quickly as it had returned just minutes ago. He blinked at Ilya Rozanov a few times, observing the man across from him who relaxed in his chair and lazily smoked his cigarette, then flicked his gaze to the two men guarding the doors with plain expressions. They didn’t even regard him. They

simply stood there with their guns in hand and stared blankly out of the windows across from where they stood.

“What are you going to do with me then? Are you... going to hurt me?” Shane asked nervously as his eyes trailed over the sleek weapons that the guards seemed to have no issue handling. Rozanov shook his head quickly and frowned deeply at the suggestion, like it actually upset him that Shane had questioned such a thing.

“No, absolutely not. I am many things, Shane Hollander, but my father I am not. Had it been Andrei who was in this position, he would have, but he is not and he never will be. The only person who will suffer from this all will be my brother when I fix this. For now, you are a guest here. You will have food, clothes, comfort, protection, all of it,” Rozanov explained easily.

At that, Shane’s eyebrows furrowed in confusion and he couldn’t help but blurt, “Why? Why not just let me go home then? I’m not any use to you and all you’re doing is putting a target on your back with my parents now if they are who you say they are. I mean, how do I even know you aren’t lying to me?”

Rozanov snapped his fingers then and Shane could do nothing but watch as one of the guards by the farthest door suddenly left for a few minutes before returning with a leather encased binder. The Russian man opened it with a sigh, like he was put out by what he was doing, and flipped through a few pages until he found whatever he was looking for. With a soft grunt, he lifted himself from his seat and casually approached Shane with the open binder in his hands.

“I thought you might ask, so I had a good man of mine put this together. These are detailed records of every dealing we have had with your parents since my father, Grigori, was head of this family,” Rozanov informed. He set the binder in front of Shane and stood behind him as Shane anxiously leaned in to peer down at the papers.

He shifted with discomfort at being watched so closely by the Russian man who had kidnapped him, but his curiosity outweighed his tribulation. Shane carefully placed his hand on the page to steady himself and skimmed over the dates, profits, commentary, and documentation of every single interaction the Rozanovs had with the Hollanders for the past ten years.

Shane felt like the rug had been pulled out from under his feet while his mind spun. This was real. Ilya Rozanov wasn’t lying to him. Those were his parents’ signatures and addresses he knew and dates or times that correlated with instances where his parents had done important business meetings or gone out of town. His mouth suddenly felt impossibly dry and Shane struggled to pull in steady breath into his quivering lungs.

He was such a fucking idiot.

Shane pushed away the binder while his bottom lip trembled and thanked Rozanov internally when the Russian man snapped it up and handed it back off to the guard that had retrieved it for its removal from the room. For a long time, Shane simply sat in the chair at the table with shaky breath and shuddering limbs.

“I cannot let you go home because you can still be very useful here, Hollander,” Ilya spoke after a few tense minutes passed within the quiet room. Shane hadn’t even realized that they were alone, that the guards had left, until he flicked his watery eyes up from the blurry space he’d been staring at to Ilya’s serious ones. “I can tell you everything you want to know about this—your family, what they do, why they’re important, how they can help me, how I can help them.

“As long as you are here, I will do my very best to keep you safe and teach you about the world you’ve been kept hidden from. I can help you understand all of it. It is my hope, Hollander, that we can benefit each other here. You help me get the trade route back with your parents without them coming for my ass when it’s over, I can help you with whatever you need in return—anything you want,” Rozanov bargained.

Shane licked his lips and uneasily stuttered out, “I-I don’t want anything. I don’t *need* anything.”

Rozanov just stared at him without looking away, like he was capable of reading every single thought Shane had and going through every single memory the Canadian man possessed. In the end, he simply nodded his head and carefully unfolded himself from the chair while Shane watched him with parted lips and shallow breath. “If you think of anything, or if you decide just learning about your family is enough to help me, just ask for me, Hollander.”

And with that, Ilya Rozanov departed from the breakfast table with half his food left behind to turn cold.

Shane soaked in the magnificent marble tub in the joined bathroom to his bedroom and wrapped his arms around his legs. He’d already bathed, getting rid of the grubby layer of filth on his skin that had come from being kidnapped and deposited somewhere strange, and now sat with his thoughts racing inside of his mind.

He rested his chin on top of his knees and closed his eyes while trying to come to terms with everything he had been told to him by the Russian man who had swept him away from Montreal. His parents were in what one would absolutely consider a mafia and they had apparently been doing business with the Rozanovs, along with a multitude of others, for years while Shane simply waltzed around unknowingly in life.

In a week, he was going to be taking his final exams to move on to the very last semester of university before being dumped into the real world. If the Rozanovs knew who he was and the family he was a part of, what other mafia families knew about him? He shuddered at the thought of being on his own without really knowing who he was, how he could defend himself, or what possible enemies his family, and by extension him, had.

Shane bit down on his bottom lip and tried to think about what he could want or need in exchange for Ilya Rozanov's help. Maybe protection once he left? Like, on top of whatever he was going to ask from his family? Or maybe the ability to call in a favor whenever he needed it later in life that couldn't be refused? God, he was bad at this. These were probably such shitty ideas compared to other things people had likely asked of the Rozanovs.

Either way, it was the best he could come up with and Shane knew he was going to accept the offer that Rozanov had given to him. He refused to be ignorant to the life his family lived, a life that he was very clearly a part of whether he liked it or not. He was here after all, wasn't he?

Shane unfolded from the tub and tugged at the drain, sighing to himself as he pulled his tired body from the tepid water in favor of grabbing a warm towel. The same man whose nose he'd broken, Levi, had been the one to hand him a stack of new basic clothes when he'd returned to the bedroom after breakfast.

Levi hadn't said anything to him, except for an introduction of who he was, and had sniffled hard while refusing to make eye contact as he handed off the clothes stoically to Shane. It had filled Shane with a little bit of pride to know he'd riled the man so much from their last interaction that he didn't want to even look at him. All in all, Levi was the only other name Shane knew aside from Ilya's, Ilya's father, and Ilya's brother. He'd seen a dozen men all dressed in the same black suits with weapons attached to their bodies throughout the estate, but he had yet to really meet or talk to anyone except for Ilya.

He wondered if Ilya would let him talk to his parents if he was going to be staying here for a while.

Shane wrapped the towel around his waist and yanked open the door to the bedroom with a frown on his lips at the thought before the sight of Ilya himself sitting on the end of his bed made him yelp and jump backwards. "What the *fuck!*" Shane gasped as he clutched the doorway of the bathroom tightly and slightly hid his half-naked body from the Russian man. Rozanov just raised an eyebrow at him and lazily dragged his gaze up and down Shane's body—no shame and full of appreciation for what he saw.

Shane could feel his cheeks turn hot at the attention and he tried his best to shuffle even more behind the wall while keeping his head jutting out. "I know I said I would wait for you to come to me, but I got bored," Rozanov explained with a tone of seeming disinterest, like he wasn't affected by the fact he was having a conversation with a stranger clad only in a towel. "Not to mention everyone here is so serious. You are a breath of fresh air. And nice to look at, apparently."

Shane couldn't help the scoff that escaped his lips before he countered sarcastically, "Yeah, having someone you kidnapped in your home tends to make things a little more interesting." He ignored the last quip about his looks by the Russian man, though his cheeks had heated considerably. Rozanov just shrugged and sat back on his palms as he stared at Shane and blinked, obviously waiting for him to say something else.

With an uncomfortable shift of his weight from one foot to another, Shane gripped the spot where his towel overlapped around his hips and said, "I thought about your offer. To, um,

teach me and get me caught up on everything with my family and I... I'd like that, yeah. B- But I have some conditions."

Rozanov sat up to brace his elbows on his thighs then and nodded, still not saying a word as he watched Shane nervously stand in the doorway of the bathroom in his stupid towel and wet hair. "I'd like to keep doing my classes for university—I have finals I need to take online next week—and I'd like to be able to explore the estate. I can't stay in this bedroom forever. And I... I'd like to be able to talk to my parents," he listed off as bravely as he could. At the last request, Rozanov pressed his lips together in distaste and shook his head slowly.

"I cannot grant the last one, but I can grant the first two. I can give you free access to my men for you to talk to, and I have a friend here, Svetlana, that you can talk to as well if it's company you're wanting. You know I cannot let you speak with your parents, Hollander," Rozanov reasoned.

Shane flared his nostrils and demanded, "Why? Do they even know you have me?"

Rozanov snorted at the last part of that question and rose to his feet before gradually making his way to the window that overlooked the front of the estate. He slid his hands into the pockets of his black dress pants and remained quiet for a moment as his hazel eyes roamed over the landscape that Shane had also admired quite a bit since his arrival. Finally, Rozanov turned slightly and dragged his eyes up Shane's body once more, though his gaze was a little... sad looking.

"Oh, yes. They know where you are," he murmured. "We received some rather heated letters from your mother along with a good amount of threats. Must feel very nice to know you have parents that love you so much, hm? However, if you talk to them, it defeats the idea of a ransom. They cannot know how you are or else they will be less willing to work with us," he explained softly.

Shane's anger deflated and worry filled him instead. "They don't know I'm okay?" he asked nervously. Immediately, all he could think of was his mother in tears at the kitchen table with his father comforting her, promising her fallacies that Shane wasn't injured or worse. That thought alone made Shane glare at Rozanov.

"They know you're alive and in our care, that you're unharmed and very much alive, don't worry," Rozanov assured. "I haven't said anything more than that about your case. They know what I want in exchange for the route to be given back, but they don't know you'll be learning anything about them or this life while you're here."

Shane swallowed hard and picked at the dark wood of the bathroom entrance while Rozanov began to slowly make his way towards the bedroom door. "You will have free roam of the grounds, but I will assign a guard with you at all times unless it is to use the bathroom. I will get you a computer for you to complete your coursework, but it will be coursework only. Any man you see, you can speak with, and I will call Svetlana as well to visit with you.

"Tomorrow morning, we'll start with your lessons, Hollander. I won't be able to join you for dinner tonight, but expect to share meals with me from now on. I understand the beginning of our new relationship isn't... typical... but I'd like to be friendly," Rozanov said as he reached

for the door knob. He hesitated as he reached for it and looked over his shoulder instead at Shane, giving him a final once over. "Until tomorrow, Hollander. I look forward to our alone time." With that, Rozanov opened the door, winked at Shane, then left without another word.

All Shane could think was, *What the hell have I gotten myself into?*

Chapter 4: Chapter Four

Shane Hollander flipped quietly through the file Connors had put together on Yuna, David, and himself with a rather worried looking expression. He hadn't said anything to Ilya in the five minutes since he'd opened the manilla folder full of their information, but Ilya was in no rush to make Hollander speak. He simply observed with his head cocked to the side while the sound of pages turning filled the silent office they were in.

While Hollander kept himself occupied with the reports he was reading on his family, Ilya admired the man across from him with rather dangerous thoughts. He'd seen Shane Hollander half naked the day before, raging in a chair upon their first meeting, and unconscious in Marlow's arms off the private jet, yet he never once appeared anything other than beautiful to Ilya.

His cheeks were covered in freckles, his lips had a perfect bow at the very top, his lashes were long and dark, his bone structure was soft yet defined, his skin was naturally tanned and flawless, and his eyes... *Oh*, his eyes. Rich chocolate brown, so expressive, large and doe-like. Enchanting. There was no other word to describe the eyes that Ilya couldn't look away from.

Sure, his body was fantastic as well with noticeable muscle and clear athleticism hidden beneath unending smooth skin, but Ilya admired Shane Hollander's eyes like no other. When they suddenly flicked up and met his gaze, Ilya felt his heart skip a beat in his chest. Hollander sighed heavily and gently closed the file in front of him before murmuring, "You know more about them than I do."

Ilya shrugged and reached for the fresh pack of cigarettes he'd been given by one of the many men roaming the estate. He tugged out a new stick and lit it with ease while Hollander watched warily, very clearly disapproving of the habit that Ilya had picked up in his early teenage years. "We have to know as much as we can. If we don't, it can come back to bite us in the ass. Keep your friends close and enemies closer, that type of bullshit," Ilya explained.

Hollander shifted in his seat and glanced back down at the manilla folder. "So my parents make the majority of their money from money laundering? What is that?" he asked nervously.

Ilya sniffed and leaned forward to reopen the file and flip a few pages until he landed on the list of operations the Hollanders currently controlled. "Your parents control more supply routes in Montreal than just the one I no longer have access to. They move things for other families and themselves like drugs, jewelry, guns, and information but they make it look like they're getting their money from real businesses—businesses that don't actually exist."

Ilya swept his hand down the list with a raised eyebrow. "All of these transactions with income show that they are tied to a business in Montreal, yes? But the business is not real. Is fake. The real money is coming from illegal things. They hide it from law enforcement.

Basically. Make it look real,” he finished. He sat back in his chair and drew in a deep drag of his cigarette while Hollander’s eyes skimmed over the list.

“That’s a lot of fake businesses,” he whispered.

Ilya laughed and combed a hand through his curls. “Yes. It is. You can maybe understand now why this route is important for me. It brings in part of my family’s income, yes, but it also keeps me connected with other trades and other people,” Ilya sighed. Hollander pressed his lips together and collapsed into the soft leather of his own chair while the room settled back into momentary silence.

Ilya watched as Hollander turned his attention away from the folder to the window at his right. Below them, two guards were sitting down in the middle of the backyard to play a game of chess while others slowly patrolled around them. Ilya didn’t mind the short breaks his men occasionally took. It kept them satisfied which kept them willing to continue in their protection of him and his home. An associate who was happy was an associate Ilya didn’t have to worry about.

He, on the other hand, had quite a lot to worry about. Which was why he enjoyed the easy morning with Hollander across from him. “Tell me something about your parents that isn’t in the file,” he requested suddenly. Hollander turned his attention away from the window and blinked in surprise, then shuffled a little in his chair.

“Uh, should I do that?” he asked with a nervous chuckle. The sound sent a pang of something soft to Ilya’s stomach and he couldn’t help but smile at the sudden shyness from the man across from him.

“You tell me something, I tell you something. How about that?” Ilya offered. Hollander nodded slowly and fiddled with his fingers in his lap as he thought of something while Ilya patiently smoked. When it seemed like he was struggling to come up with a fun fact, Ilya took the lead and said, “My father used to be police.” Hollander’s eyes widened in delight and the grin that split across his face stole the breath from Ilya’s lungs.

Stunning.

“Really? How did he get into all this? That’s crazy.”

Ilya shrugged. “He saw how much money the ‘bad guys’ were making and decided to become one.”

Hollander snorted and sat up a little straighter in his chair while his eyes wandered aimlessly around the room, clearly amused and now searching a little harder for something to say about his own parents. “Okay, um, my dad played hockey for a really good school in Canada, McGill, and my mom once convinced me to try a microbial diet when I played hockey. Oh! And they also got me a French tutor when I was little so I’m fluent in French,” Hollander revealed eagerly.

To Ilya, they were the most boring facts in the entire fucking world, but to see Hollander so clearly excited by what he had come up with, Ilya couldn’t help but grin back at him and nod

to show his appreciation. “Wow. Definitely not in the file,” Ilya teased gently. Hollander blushed at that and dipped his head, a rather endearing moment that only made Ilya more intrigued by the Canadian man.

The room fell back into silence, though this one was far more comfortable, while Hollander flipped through the pages of the file once more with a less concerned expression. “I just can’t believe they were able to hide this from me for so long, er, well... maybe not that. I can’t believe I was so oblivious to all of this,” he finally confessed.

Ilya could feel the warmth of the cigarette burning close to his fingers and hadn’t realized that he’d stopped smoking it while he and Hollander had been indulging in light conversation. He snubbed the cigarette out into the ashtray beside him and rose from his chair while sucking on the inside of his cheek in thought. “Have you ever shot a gun before?” he asked abruptly.

Hollander sputtered at him and nervously looked around, like a gun was suddenly going to appear pointed at his head or resting peacefully on the desk. “N-No!” he stammered, clearly caught off guard. “I mean, my dad *taught* me about guns but I-I’ve never shot one.”

Ilya strode over to the office door and tugged it open with a smirk before looking back at the Canadian man who was staring at him from his leather chair. “Well come on then, Hollander. I said I was going to teach you about all of this, didn’t I?”

Shane stared at the paper target on the other end of the shooting range that Rozanov had in his home and felt his hands tremble slightly around the heavy weight in his hands. Rozanov stood beside him with his arms crossed over his chest, silent yet strong in his stance and observation. “Just like I showed you,” the Russian murmured while Shane pointed the barrel of the gun at the center of the paper target.

Shane shivered at the huskiness of Rozanov’s voice and shook his head slightly to focus. Before he could psych himself out of it, Shane pulled the trigger and jerked back while the bullet whizzed past the target and made itself a smoking hole in the solid concrete behind it. He frowned at the miss but Rozanov didn’t seem to care one bit.

“Again. Is automatic,” he ordered calmly. This time, Ilya pushed away from the wall and gently adjusted Shane’s stance with rough, yet gentle hands. His breath and body was so close to him, his skin warm against Shane’s, and Shane had to swallow down the whimper that threatened to escape his throat at the close contact with the Russian man. Why was someone so dangerous so enticing to him? It wasn’t fair that Ilya Rozanov looked so good, sounded so good, and felt so good.

He took in a steadying breath to cool his heated cheeks and fluttering stomach, then kept the position Rozanov had put him in once the man let go and returned to his place against the wall. The last shot hadn’t been too bad. He’d been off, a little too far to the left, but the height

had been okay if he was aiming for one of the rings closest to the stomach of the printed upper body on the target paper. He could try again, maybe a little steadier even.

With a soft sniff, Shane balanced himself on his feet and focused on where he wanted the bullet to go while Rozanov remained still. He pulled the trigger and watched as the bullet tore through the bottom right of the paper instead of where he had been aiming. He huffed out a disappointed breath and dropped the gun before looking behind him at Rozanov with upset eyes.

Rozanov regarded him closely and jerked his chin towards the target. “You shifted where I put you. Again. For every shot you make that hits the target, I tell you one thing about myself,” he bargained.

“Asshole,” Shane grumbled under his breath despite his heart stuttering in his chest with excitement at the prospect of learning more about Rozanov.

He lifted the gun and adjusted his aim for the third time, breathing in slowly while his index finger caressed the trigger, then pulled it when he felt like it was exactly where he wanted it to be—where Rozanov had put him last time. The bullet went through one of the lower rings of the target and Shane turned to raise an expectant eyebrow at Rozanov. The Russian just grinned and said, “My drink of choice is Coke, not vodka.”

Shane nodded slowly and replied, “Mine’s ginger ale. I don’t really drink much if I can help it. If I have to, I’ll have a beer, but ginger ale is what I prefer.”

“Noted. Again.”

Shane turned back to the target and fell into an easy rhythm of aim, shoot, look at Rozanov, respond, repeat. When the clip eventually emptied, Rozanov handed him a new one without blinking an eye and gestured for him to continue. By the time Shane went through his third clip and Rozanov had run out of fun facts to give about himself, they had spent a little over an hour in there and Shane learned quite a good deal about the Russian man at his side.

He liked dogs quite a lot, he had also played hockey as a kid, the crucifix necklace he wore was his dead mothers—though he was unwilling to provide further information on that, the only thing he knew how to cook without burning the estate down was a tuna melt, his brother wasn’t picked as the one to lead before his father’s death due to a gambling problem he had, Svetlana was the daughter of a famous KHL goaltender, and he had a rather large amount of fancy sports cars that some would assess a waste of money.

Shane had responded in kind that he didn’t mind dogs, hockey had been his life until his injury, he’d never worn jewelry before unless watches counted, he loved to cook and thought he was rather good at it because of his picky tendencies, he was an only child who had been doted on his whole life, J.J. and Hayden were sons of every day families like he thought he had been, and he drove a reliable car of a British make that did well in the snow for all it might be considered boring.

The one fact about Ilya Rozanov that had flustered Shane the most, however, was the fact that Ilya Rozanov was very openly bisexual. Shane hadn’t been willing to say that he himself was

gay, though a part of him wondered if Rozanov already knew considering the detailed files his family had on him and his parents. Either way, knowing the man beside him was also very much into men suddenly opened up a whole world of fantasies in Shane's brain.

As he handed the gun off to Rozanov with the last little bit of information slipping out of his perfectly plush lips, the Russian man just winked at him and shoved the last clip he had on his person into the gun without another word. He lifted the weapon easily with one hand then, never looking away from Shane, and unloaded each bullet perfectly into the printed head on the paper target while Shane's lips parted in awe at the effortlessness.

Look, Shane wasn't going to stand there and deny that Ilya Rozanov was a handsome man. He was downright sinful to look at with his golden curls, sharp hazel eyes, full mouth, angular jaw, and perfectly sculpted body. Shane didn't want to acknowledge what his thick, syrupy accent did to him either. But right then? That right there with the gun? That pushed Ilya Rozanov to a whole new level of sexy in Shane's mind.

He'd never found *guns* to be sexy, absolutely not. They were scary, menacing, lethal, and severe. His father had only taught him about guns for his protection, and while Shane knew that the shooting range had been a fun way of getting Shane out of his shell while also learning about one another a bit, he also acknowledged that firing the weapon had been a serious thing to do should it ever be someone else he was pointing at.

Ilya Rozanov shooting a gun made the action look like the most careless thing in the world with all of his confidence, muscle, and danger. Shane swallowed hard as the stray thought of *I wonder what else he can do with those hands* drifted through his mind. His cheeks immediately turned hot at the consideration and Shane had to duck away from the gaze to avoid letting Rozanov see how flustered that had made him. *This man kidnapped you, by the way* he tried to remind his traitorous brain.

The buzzing of a phone suddenly sounded between them and Rozanov was quick to place the gun back in its place upon the wall beside them with other weapons and ammunition that Shane had been too nervous to handle. He answered seriously in Russian, turning his back to Shane, and the lightness that had been in the room only moments ago disappeared while Shane stupidly rocked on his feet during Rozanov's clearly important call.

Maybe he could learn Russian while he was here.

The call didn't last long, though Rozanov appeared irritated when he hung up and shoved the phone into the front of his slacks. "Alright, fun is over. I have meetings I need to get to and you have boring school work to do. You might be the only man I have ever met that wants to do work when he has a reason not to," Rozanov huffed.

Shane glared without menace at him and mumbled, "Not all of us want to be mafia heads." Rozanov just smirked ruefully at that and headed for the door, holding it open with one hand while the other gestured for Shane to go first.

"I'm going to leave you with a good man of mine, Cliff Marlow. You can ask him for anything you need this afternoon. He has your computer for school and... if you want

someone else to be boring to, he will be your man until I am with you at dinner,” Rozanov explained.

Shane rolled his eyes at the comment about him being boring, but it wasn’t anything he hadn’t heard before. His friends had always teased him about his rather plain personality along with his random hyperfixations that had been present his whole life.

When they stepped out into the hallway of the first floor, Shane stopped dead in his tracks at the sight of the other man who had been there when he’d been kidnapped. “Hollander, this is Marlow. Feel free to call him Marley. He loves it,” Rozanov introduced with a shit-eating grin. He clapped Marlow on the shoulder, then turned to Shane and gave him a once over of approval. “Good work today. I will see you later for more one-on-one.”

With that, Rozanov nodded curtly to Marlow and headed down the hallway at a stride that suggested he had somewhere important to be. Shane nervously flicked his gaze to Cliff Marlow and swallowed down his nerves, not even relaxed enough to feel flustered by Rozanov’s comment at working together one-on-one again. Marlow appraised him with his eyes as well, then held out the silver laptop that Shane hadn’t noticed in his hands.

“Roz gave you permission to use his office. I’m at your disposal this afternoon,” Marlow finally spoke. Shane hesitantly took the computer and quipped back, “No plans to kidnap anyone else?” Marlow snorted and shook his head, clearly humored by the subtle dig from the Canadian man.

“No. That’s the last time I do that shit. I thought the flight from New York was bad when I first came here, but Montreal is another beast,” he revealed with mild humor as he turned to head in the direction of the staircase in the main entry. Shane followed behind and gripped his new computer, furrowing his eyebrows as he processed what Marlow had said.

“You’re from New York?”

Marlow glanced over his shoulder and nodded. “Yeah, a lot of us are transplants—sons or brothers or cousins or whatever of allied families. It’s like those old medieval times situations where you send over one of your kids in good faith to show you’re friends with another house or whatever bullshit that is. I don’t know. I didn’t do too good in school,” Marlow tried to analogize.

Well, Shane wanted to correct. *Well in school*.

“So you just... left your families and came here? Willingly?” he pressed further as they clambered up the marble stairs, their footsteps echoing through the massive estate. The wooden walls around them were dark but polished with portraits and landscape art lining them. Plants, pottery, statues, and lamps littered espresso stained side tables while guards hid in each shadowy corner with every intention of going undetected. All in all, it was a rather moody home, though Shane was rather intrigued by the evocativeness.

It might not be what he’d pick for himself, but for the new world he was in? It felt mafia-esque alright.

“Yeah, we aren’t all kidnapped around here,” Marlow snorted. “Sorry about that, by the way. That’s not, uh, how Ilya likes to do things. A lot of the guys who left with his dick of a brother weren’t fond of the approaches Ilya wanted to take for the future of the family business and believe me when I say that Ilya wasn’t super pleased with the whole captive idea. It was all he had though—but much more Grigori and Andrei’s style,” Marlow rambled.

Shane couldn’t help the little smile that tugged at his lips as the thought of Rozanov actually contemplating whether or not to kidnap him was a good idea. For all Shane knew, Rozanov was completely on board with it and had no issue having Shane as a captive in his own home. Now he knew otherwise. Maybe Rozanov wasn’t *that* dangerous after all.

Marlow pushed into the Russian man’s office only a moment later and assumed their new spots without any fuss. Shane made himself comfortable in what he figured was Rozanov’s chair on one side of the desk while Marlow plopped down on the other side in one of the smaller upholstered seats with a heavy grunt. He tilted his head back and warned, “Just don’t watch any porn and we’ll be fine here,” before closing his eyes to apparently get a much needed nap.

Shane opened up the computer with heated cheeks at the quip and stared for a moment at his reflection in the dark screen. Today hadn’t been a bad day. What Rozanov had said about him being a guest there, about him being protected and safe, it had been true so far. He’d enjoyed spending time with the Russian man and practicing his shooting in the little range Rozanov had made for himself in the home.

He’d also sincerely appreciated the openness Rozanov had promised with his parents. What he had learned today in those files about his family was more than he had learned in an entire life of living with them. Part of him felt betrayed by being left out from who his family really was, but at the same time, he hadn’t exactly been jumping at the idea of being a part of their business. Though, it wasn’t *really* a business, was it?

He couldn’t help but recall all of the information Rozanov had given as well about himself, particularly about the crucifix he wore on his neck that had belonged to his mother. Shane hadn’t asked what her name was and he certainly hadn’t asked how she had passed, though the look Rozanov had given him suggested that the Russian wouldn’t tell him even if he had asked. Shane shifted in the chair and found that it was the kind of seat that was capable of swiveling all the way around without stopping.

He eased himself around to face the window overlooking the back yard and let his eyes drift to the statue of the woman in the middle of the frozen fountain. Shane blinked when he realized it was snowing outside. Soft clumps of white snow had piled up on the shoulders and head of the woman belonging to the fountain... as well as the shoulders and head of the man standing in front of her.

Ilya.

He had his phone pressed to his ear and his free hand was moving expressively while he spoke to someone on the other end, though Shane could make a pretty good guess it wasn’t anyone who had something good to say. He cocked his head and simply watched the Russian

man in silence while he stood in front of the fountain, guards scattered around him, and had a heated conversation that Shane couldn't hear.

Shane couldn't help but wonder if Rozanov actually liked the position he was in. He had mentioned that Andrei hadn't been chosen to lead because he had a gambling problem, that he didn't approve of the old methods the Rozanovs apparently had for doing things, that the business was one that belonged to his family rather than him—

I am many things, Shane Hollander, but my father I am not.

As he studied the man from afar, his gaze softening despite his eyebrows knitting up in deep thought, Shane wondered how far that sentiment went. It might be Rozanov's goal to educate Shane and slowly integrate him in the world of the mafia, but Shane had a new goal of his own. He wanted to know *everything* about Ilya Rozanov.

He wanted to know about his childhood stuffed animal of choice, what car he liked driving the most, what music he listened to when he was sad, what memory he first had in his brain, what his skin felt like after a close shave, what comfort meal he'd pick if he was sick, or if he'd ever really been loved by someone without falsehood or out of fealty to his family.

Watching from the second story window as snow silently fell beyond it, Shane stared hard at the frozen statue of the woman with gentle features and took in an unsteady breath as he acknowledged her stony features were subtly present in the one of the man growing increasingly heated in front of her. She loomed over Ilya Rozanov like an angel might do in a story as it watched the comings and goings of life below—wholly silent but ever watchful.

Shane was hopeful at that moment that maybe at least one person had truly loved Ilya Rozanov before. He wondered if someone would again one day.

Chapter 5: Chapter Five

Chapter Notes

just a reminder that this is a slow burn fic :.)

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

Shane sat stiffly in the backseat of the SUV, watching as the city streets of downtown Moscow whizzed past him in all of its unique blend of architectural styles. Ornate cathedrals, utilitarian housing blocks, sleek skyscrapers, romantic arches and towers—all of it was a beautiful testament to the eras, leaderships, and cultural impacts Russia had experienced in its long life. The snow on the ground was thick, but people walked through it all the same in massive coats, thick boots, fluffy hats, and woolen scarves.

Shane was happy to be inside of the heated car and not out there with the everyday civilian. “Where are we going again?” he asked, turning to Rozanov who sat next to him on his phone. The Russian man didn’t look up from whatever he was typing and murmured back, “Sergei Vetrov’s. His daughter is Svetlana who will be giving you Russian lessons soon.”

Shane huffed and fell back into the seat with a subtle pout on his lips at the thought of more work being handed to him. Rozanov had told him at breakfast that morning, two days after he’d gotten the opportunity to read the file on his parents, that he would be tagging along to a low-risk business meeting in the city with an old friend. If Shane wanted to really understand the kind of world his parents lived in, then this would be a good place to start for hands-on learning.

Rozanov shoved the phone into the front of his black slacks and sighed heavily before leaning his head back and closing his eyes. He wore a white button up today beneath a long wool overcoat, perfectly dyed in an inky black color that the entire Rozanov organization seemed to favor with their apparel. Shane felt stupid in his blue jeans, white hoodie, and navy puffercoat.

“Sergei has said he has information about the family Andrei is with in Novosibirsk. It is important we follow up, even if the information may not be important or good for us,” Rozanov explained tiredly.

“Okay,” Shane grumbled. He turned his attention back to the streets of Moscow and watched as they slowly began to morph from modern clusters of buildings and shops into spaced out housing blocks into frozen countryside with larger homes scattered beyond the road they were on. Rozanov fell into soft conversation in Russian with the driver of the car while Shane propped his head up on the palm of his hand and lazily reviewed course materials in his brain for his exams.

The first ones opened up tomorrow and Shane had been spending the majority of his alone time at night going through slideshows, notes, videos, and journals over the different course content he was expected to master. He felt ready, but also overwhelmed at the same time. He let himself fade out from the car ride and drift in his thoughts of school until the car came to a stop outside of a brick home that was two stories tall with neat landscaping and large windows.

It looked pleasant enough—comfortable, nice, traditional. Rozanov pushed open his door and stepped out with ease into the snow while Shane hurried to follow. He didn't want to be left behind with the guards who had been tailing them in a car of their own. He hurried to catch up to Rozanov's side and watched with wide eyes as the front door opened and a tall, lean man with greying hair greeted Rozanov with eager Russian.

They shook hands, exchanged pleasantries in the foreign language, then followed one another inside of the home while Shane awkwardly hung back. The interior of the estate was just as neat and proper as the exterior. Bland furniture, family portraits, a smattering of accent pieces on the walls and tables, nothing really special. Shane shoved his hands into his pockets and nervously glanced over his shoulder at the armed guards who had followed him and Rozanov in.

Oddly, he found comfort in their familiar presence despite the fact they stared straight past him with neutral expressions and heavy weaponry around their necks. Shane tore his gaze away and found that Rozanov had led the party into a spacious office for further conversation, though they had yet to acknowledge him or say anything in English.

When they sat down in plush chairs across from Sergei Vetrov and continued to do so—ignoring his presence and discussing in Russian—Shane realized what this was. He was welcome to be a *part* of the meeting, but he wasn't *actually* a part of it. Rozanov didn't trust him fully with that yet, whatever information he was learning from Vetrov, and Shane understood. If this was something that had to do with *his* family's protection or success, Shane probably wouldn't want to let a man he had just recently struck a tentative agreement with be in on whatever was going on either.

So Shane settled back in the chair, flicked his eyes between the two men while they spoke casually around cigarettes and tumblers of liquor, and settled in for an unknown amount of time with Russian in the air.

Maybe he really did need to learn the language.

Shane found himself collapsing in a private booth at the back of a restaurant roughly an hour after leaving the Vetrov estate. His thoughts were racing after Rozanov had carefully revealed in the backseat of the car on the way to the restaurant that his brother hadn't just fucked Rozanov's family over, but apparently other families in the Moscow region too. Vetrov had

simply shared the knowledge he was privy to from speaking with other mafia-oriented families that weren't as powerful. Vetrov himself was more on the rigged gambling side of things, especially betting on set-up hockey games.

Shane wouldn't say it out loud in the back seat of the car to Rozanov's face, even if he figured the Russian man would agree, but he thought that Andrei Rozanov was quite the douche.

His cheeks warmed at the internal thought he had while Ilya Rozanov himself sank down into the soft burgundy leather of the booth and sighed heavily. He pinched the bridge of his nose as he tilted his head back and remained quiet, simply breathing and reclining while Shane observed him. The muscles in his throat were so strong, a thick and pale column of power that led straight to a sharp jawline covered in stubble.

Why did he have to be so handsome? Couldn't Shane have been kidnapped by some ogre instead? That would make all of this so much easier to turn a blind eye to. Shane could no longer be ignorant to the world his family was involved in, not after the meeting he'd sat in on today—even if he didn't understand a single word said. Whether he liked it or not, he was now just as mafia related as his parents were. Or, well, maybe not *as much* as his parents, but definitely a part of it like them.

"I can hear you thinking," Rozanov groaned despite having not opened his eyes or shifting from where he sat.

"I just... I was just thinking that I'm really *in* it now, aren't I? I mean, the stuff I sat in on today... if I told anyone where I had been or who I was with, it could get me in trouble," Shane revealed nervously. Rozanov moved at that and let his hand drop from where it had been resting on the bridge of his nose. He opened his eyes with slow blinks before settling his gaze on Shane, his hazel stare sharp and serious.

"Probably, yes," Rozanov said honestly. Shane nodded and shifted uncomfortably in his seat. This was what he had wanted, right? He had wanted to know and learn and no longer remain oblivious to the world his parents lived in—the world they apparently controlled quite a good amount. Shane paused for a moment to toy with the silverware that the restaurant had set out for them at their table.

"Can I... Will you be honest with me for a moment?" Shane asked softly. He didn't lift his eyes from where he was staring aimlessly at the white table cloth in front of him, but he caught Rozanov's nod out of his peripheral vision. "Do most families that work with my parents, or, like... People who are mafia related themselves that work with my parents, do they know about me?"

"If they are smart, yes. So the majority probably do," Rozanov confirmed. Shane bit down hard on his bottom lip and ran the pad of his thumb over the blunt edge of the butter knife, feeling its serrated curve bite at his skin.

"So, if they wanted something from my parents, they could also have done what you did? Use me for leverage? But... they probably wouldn't have treated me the way you are right now, right?" he continued. Rozanov didn't respond at first to the direction Shane was going

in with his questions, not until Shane finally looked up at him with worried eyes and found that Rozanov's own expression had turned dark.

"No. They probably wouldn't have. You would probably be dead with a lot of them by now."

Shane felt his heart drop inside of his chest at the thought. His eyes searched Rozanov, looking for *something* in those hazel eyes that were staring back at him, before he croaked out, "Why are you treating me so well? Why are you letting me in on all of this? Why are you... different?"

Rozanov licked his lips and leaned forward to brace his elbows on the table between them, disturbing the flicker of the candle set in the center of the white tablecloth. "I am not the man my father was and I am not the man some of the others in this world are. I will keep my family successful and in power, but it will not be done through torture, unnecessary killing, or bribery. It will be done by showing respect, following through on my word, remaining loyal, and being honest."

His tone was so sincere and stern that Shane had no choice but to believe him. He was about to open his mouth to question why that was, what in life had made him choose that path in this lifestyle rather than the one so many others seemed to take, but a waiter approached to hand them their menus and welcome them in. Rozanov ordered a bottle of wine for the table along with a ginger ale—subtly giving Shane the option of drinking with him or not.

Shane picked up the menu, thankful for the distraction, and decided quickly on a salmon dish that looked good. When the waiter returned with his ginger ale, two empty wine glasses, and a bottle of red that Rozanov had easily chosen, Shane nodded his head in agreement to have some of the alcohol poured for him.

He felt like he needed it.

Rozanov raised an eyebrow at him in subtle amusement, but said nothing as they ordered their dishes and fell into a comfortable silence once the waiter was gone. It was Shane who broke the quiet first. "What position did you play in hockey?" he asked as he reached for his wine glass. Rozanov's lips curled up into a sly grin, something that Shane had barely seen before.

"Center. You?"

Shane blushed and answered slowly, "Center."

"Ah. We would have been rivals then, hm? Competing for the same spot on the same team or against each other on a different team," Rozanov played along. Shane just snorted as he took a sip of his wine and found that it wasn't bad at all. It was smooth, smoky, and rich. He didn't mind drinking it. "How did the injury happen? In hockey?"

Shane set the wine glass back down and licked his lips as a sinking feeling filled his gut. He wasn't really a big fan of talking about the injury, but they were getting to know one another, right? That's what this was. "I got hit into the boards at a bad angle. Broke my leg at the knee. It was, uh... basically bent the complete other way. Like... backwards," Shane

recounted with a grimace. He'd passed out as soon as it had happened from the pain, so he took other people's words for it when they told him what it looked like.

Rozanov groaned at that in pain, as if he was experiencing it for himself, and took a large gulp of his wine to swallow down his own distaste at the image. "Fuck, Hollander. That's bad."

Shane laughed softly and nodded. "Yeah. Bad's an understatement."

The rest of the dinner consisted of just that—easy conversation, recounts from growing up, quips and teasing remarks, stories of getting in trouble, fond memories that left their stomachs aching from laughter, and thoughtful conversation about everything and nothing all at once. By the time both of their plates were empty and their second bottle of wine had run dry, Shane was pleasantly buzzed with a permanent blush on his cheeks and a happy smile stretched across his lips.

Rozanov handed his card off to the waiter without even looking at what the bill came out to be as his gaze hadn't left Shane's face all night. "You did well today. Proud moment for me, like I have taught a student well," Rozanov ribbed gently. Shane rolled his eyes and hiccuped into the back of his hand while Rozanov grinned at him.

"I didn't even talk and I couldn't understand a damn thing you said, asshole. All you've taught me is that my parents are mob bosses, I'm an idiot, Russian is a hard language, and your brother is a dick," Shane countered. Rozanov, for the first time in Shane's presence, *laughed*. Really *laughed*. His smile was wide and toothily, dimples on full display, and resonance of humor loud and joyous. Shane immediately joined in, but pressed his face into his hands to hide his blush.

"Okay, is time to get you home I think. You're drunk," Rozanov declared with delight. The Russian man helped Shane to his feet and linked his arm with Shane's, offering him gentlemanly support, before walking them through the nice restaurant towards the car waiting for them outside. Rozanov eased him into the back while Shane swatted at him and swore he wasn't that drunk, then followed in beside him with a smile.

Shane closed his eyes as soon as the car started moving and simply listened while Rozanov spoke in Russian, yet again, with the man driving the car. The language was so thick, so decadent, so seductive. He swallowed hard at the last descriptive word that came to mind and wondered what Rozanov would sound like in bed if he spoke Russian. Shane's cock twitched in his pants and he immediately flung his eyes open to focus on something else like the snow outside in the night.

He couldn't be having thoughts like that. Absolutely not.

Shane spent the entire drive home doing his best not to listen to Rozanov speak Russian while his eyes followed the clumps of snow piled up on the side of the road. Snow was safe. Snow was boring. Snow was cold. His cock softened sadly inside of his jeans.

When they pulled up to the estate, passing through the gates and hedges that lined the gravel path, Shane felt relief at the fact he'd get to put some space between himself and Rozanov.

He could smell Rozanov's cologne with how close they were and that, at some point, had also become something he needed to ignore. He smelt smokey, spicy, and rich—like a scent that could be plucked only from a forest covered in rain after a fire.

God, he was stupid when he was drunk. No, *no*, he wasn't drunk. Probably.

Shane stumbled as soon as he tried to exit the car once it stopped and Rozanov was quick to reach out and grab him before he could land face first. "Woah, easy. Come on, Hollander. I'll help you to your room," Rozanov insisted. Shane huffed but allowed himself to be carefully guided out on the other side of the car and helped up the marble steps of the estate. Lit up at night, the exterior of the three-story cream colored stone home was stunning.

With numerous windows, ivy crawling up its sides, and gaslit lanterns lighting it up, it looked like something that would be featured in an article titled *The Timeless Charm of Russian Country Estates* or something silly like that. Shane was just thinking drunkenly right now. Okay, yes, he was drunk. Sue him.

Rozanov walked him without saying a word through the open foyer, up one of the two double staircases in the entry way, and down the hall to where his bedroom was. His touch burned through the fabric of Shane's hoodie and coat.

"I think we will keep you with your ginger ale from now on," Rozanov murmured in amusement as he set Shane down on the edge of his bed with a rather sloppy stumble. Shane just rolled his eyes and swayed where he sat on the edge of his mattress. He lifted his eyes to look up at the man standing in front of him and simply stared at how handsome Rozanov's face was.

There really wasn't a man like him that Shane had ever seen before.

His hair was so lovely to look at, those perfect golden curls, and his lips were even more devastating to behold. So plush and full and soft and rosey. The smattering of beauty marks across his pale skin were mapped by Shane's eyes like one might a connect-the-dots puzzle, though he found no hidden shape between them. Just a whole lot of attractive Russian.

"Do you see something you like?" Rozanov all but purred at him with a smirk.

Shane hadn't realized he'd been leaning forward and angling his head up until Rozanov spoke. That being said, the Russian appeared to have also bent forward a little to get closer to Shane's space. "Such a curious little thing, hm?" Rozanov all but whispered. Whatever was happening between them, Shane couldn't escape it. He felt like he was being pulled in without being able to drag himself back, but he was in no hurry to do such a thing either. He and Rozanov were growing closer and closer, lips parting and breathing shallowing and eyelids drooping until—

Rozanov's lips were on his.

Blame it on the wine, the easy conversation, the relationship that was growing between them, whatever—Rozanov was kissing him. He was kissing Ilya Rozanov. His eyes closed the final fraction they needed for darkness to take over, and then all Shane could do was focus on the

feeling of Ilya's mouth pressed hotly against his. He let out a pathetic, soft sound of pleasure at their connection and shivered when Ilya responded in kind, though his moan was far more confident.

The Russian man's hand came up to gently grasp Shane's jaw, keeping him firmly in place as he pushed his tongue into Shane's mouth and devoured the wet heat he found inside. Shane reached out with trembling hands to grab the open sides of Ilya's wool overcoat and pulled the man impossibly closer so they could push their lips and tongues against one another's.

The sounds they were making of pleasure, desperate and approving and *so so* hot, went straight to Shane's cock. When Ilya broke off only slightly to tilt his head at a different angle and capture his lips once more, Shane immediately reached up with his left hand to bury his fingers in the back of Ilya's golden curls while his cock jolted with arousal in his pants. God, he might come in his pants like a teenager. A distant part of his mind was screaming at him that this was a bad idea, but he didn't care in the slightest.

All that mattered was the press of his length against the zipper of his jeans and the passionate thrust of Rozanov's wet tongue against his own. He was about to lean them back against the mattress with a tug at Ilya's coat when the other man suddenly tore himself away with a swear in Russian. Both of them were panting heavily, staring at one another with heavily lidded eyes and blown pupils.

"You will murder me."

That was all Ilya breathed out before he turned quickly with a pained expression and strode out of the room, closing the door carefully behind him without a second glance back while Shane stared at the empty space now in front of him. His lips were still parted and his mouth was still wet from the spit he had exchanged with Ilya Rozanov. His cock gave one final jerk of desire before settling for a second time that night without being attended to.

Shane swallowed hard and shakily rose to his foot to begin tugging off his clothes while his thoughts raced inside of his head. He had just kissed Ilya Rozanov. He had just kissed the man that had taken him from Montreal and enveloped him into this new world that Shane hadn't even really known of just days ago. As he crawled into bed with stunned eyes that weren't truly seeing, Shane came to a few sudden realizations.

He still wished to know everything about Ilya Rozanov.

He liked spending free time with Ilya Rozanov.

He appreciated that Ilya Rozanov was honest with him.

He was extremely attracted to Ilya Rozanov.

He wanted to kiss Ilya Rozanov again. And maybe more.

He stared up at the ceiling of his bedroom and repeated the mantra of realizations again and again in his brain until his eyelids fluttered shut and the wine did its other job—blissfully knocking him out into the land of dreamless sleep where the Russian man with devastating hazel eyes and soft golden hair couldn't haunt him.

The next morning, a note was handed to him at breakfast by Marlow in place of Ilya, sparing him from having to look at the Russian man and acknowledge that what they had done last

night had crossed some kind of unspoken line. It had kept him away from going to the breakfast table earlier and Shane had moped about in bed for as long as he could until his stomach began to growl in protest.

He'd been disappointed, he realized, when he eventually made it downstairs and found that Ilya wasn't sitting at the other end of the table, nor was his spot made up for food. So he took the note that Marlow handed to him and ignored the mixture of letdown and anxiety rolling in his gut. Shane opened the note regardless with furrowed eyebrows and read the brief letter that had been written in elegant, perfect handwriting. Of course.

Shane,

Something important has come up in Novosibirsk in regards to Andrei. I had to go. This was too dangerous for you and I refused to bring you with me. I'll be back as soon as I can. Read the files I left out for you in my office after breakfast and learn some Russian with Svetlana this evening. Good luck on your finals.

Last night is not over.

Ilya x

Chapter End Notes

warning: shit is about to hit the fan—protective Ilya Rozanov incoming ;)

Chapter 6: Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

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

Shane woke to the sound of doors slamming open and yelling in Russian echoing through the halls. He had finished two of his exams and collapsed into bed for a nap after lunch—some kind of dumplings that kitchen staff had steamed and Shane had eagerly devoured—before passing out with a full stomach and a warm body. The blankets were just so soft, fluffy, and delightful against the cool air of winter that seeped in through the cracks of the home.

Now, however, he was anything *but* comfortable. Shane shot up in bed, eyes wide and ears perked, and listened to the commotion going on through the house. His heart lurched inside of his chest and he scrambled to remove himself from the bed sheets as his mind filled with all of the horrible possibilities for what could be going on.

Was Andrei attacking them? Had he come to ambush the estate at a time when he knew Ilya would be away? Shane swallowed hard and ran to the bedroom door to lock it before he whirled around and scanned the room for a hiding spot. He wasn't going to be defenseless, that was for damn sure, and he wasn't going to put himself in a typical place where someone would easily find him either.

Under the bed was stupid, behind the bathroom curtain was even dumber, and in the closet was just plain idiotic. In the end, Shane grabbed the laptop he had taken his exams on from the edge of the bed and fled to the bathroom where he could lock a door for a second time. There was cabinetry by the side of the sink that extended all the way up to the ceiling where towels and toiletries could go inside and Shane quickly made his decision.

He tore open the cabinet door and found that the top shelf was completely bare considering no one could reach it if they were standing flat on their feet. Shane hurried to toss the computer up and into the shelf, wincing at the loud thunk it made that probably promised a lot of damage, but it was himself he cared about more in the end.

Shane stepped onto the toilet beside the cabinet and processed for a moment at how this was going to work. He'd rather be injured than killed, so his best bet was to full on send it and launch himself upward, then scrabble with his hands and his feet on the shelf below until he could push himself inside. He'd done yoga a lot when he played hockey and after his injury, so he considered himself a rather flexible man.

He could do this, right?

The sound of something crashing and more shouting on the other end of the wall pushed him into action. He lurched forward and managed to get his upper body into the top shelf, though it came with an immediate flair of pain to the spot just beneath his ribs where the shelf bent him in two. Shane hissed and squeezed his eyes shut before reaching out with sweaty palms to pull himself forward into the shelf using the sides.

His feet kicked behind him, sometimes toeing off the shelf below, until his hips made it to the top shelf. He brought himself to a crouching position where he rested on his knees, then awkwardly turned little by little with his face mashed against the side of the cabinet while sweat dripped down the side of his face. Shane didn't care. He wasn't fucking dying today to Ilya Rozanov's dick of a brother.

As soon as he settled with facing outward, his body mirroring that of how a cat might loaf on a couch, the sound of the bedroom door attempting to be bashed open outside filled his ears. Shane reached out and pulled the cabinet shut until it fell closed naturally and his fingers were free from being pinched.

In complete darkness, Shane listened to his heart race in his ears, his breathing shudder in the tiny space, and the bedroom door burst open with the sound of splintering wood. There was more Russian, rapid and muffled through the layers of the walls, and then the rattling of the door handle for the bathroom. Shane choked down the lump in his throat and fumbled behind him through his legs for the computer he had thrown in before him.

He slid it forward and clutched it firmly, finding it ironic that he was yet again defending himself with a laptop from unknown assailants. It didn't take long before the bathroom door splintered as well and the panicked Russian was filling the small space. Shane listened as the bathroom curtain was yanked back, then the cabinetry under the sink.

He steadied himself, readying for a fight, and threw his laptop as hard as he possibly could towards the person on the other side of the door when his hiding spot was finally revealed. The laptop collided with the top of a man's head with a crack, then—

"Che za khuynya!" The familiar voice of Ilya hissed in pain below him while his recognizable body staggered back, flailing for a grip on the wall while the other hand came up to clutch where Shane had drunk.

"Oh my God, oh my God, I'm so sorry!" Shane cried as he peered out from where he was hiding to see Ilya leaning against the wall and swaying. The hand that had flown to cradle the top of his curls was doing its best job at holding together the new gash Shane had brandished upon him with his laptop. Blood was sticky in his curly blonde hair and Shane felt sick at the sight that he'd hurt Ilya under the assumption it was someone else grabbing for him.

"Fuck, shit... Fuck, okay. Come on, Shane, come on," Ilya grunted as he lowered his hand eventually and reached out, his eyes swirling with a mixture of fear, pain, and desperation. *"We have to go, Shane. How the fuck did you get up there? Was that a computer? Blyat', eto bylo bol'no. Iisus Khristos..."*

"I'm sorry!" Shane whimpered as he grabbed Ilya's hands, grimacing at the bloody palm that grasped his, and allowed the man to help him down with steady arms.

"Yes, yes, I know. Come on. We need to go. Your parents are coming with Andrei's men. We cannot stay," Ilya urged. What? His parents were coming? With Andrei's men? Shane's blood ran cold and he blinked furiously as his mind tried to comprehend what Ilya had just told him. They were obviously coming for him, but if they were coming *with* Andrei's men as well, Shane couldn't help but think he might be the only one to survive the raid.

Shane held on tightly to Ilya's hand as the Russian man led him out of the bathroom and hurried them through the bedroom that had been torn apart in the search for where he was. Ilya had been looking for him. Ilya wasn't going to leave without Shane, even if it meant Ilya got hurt, or worse, because of it. He allowed himself to be rushed down the flight of stairs leading to the main entrance of the home and watched with wild eyes as Ilya's men sprinted through the halls with briefcases, file boxes, weapons, random papers, and even family portraits.

"Read this," Ilya said suddenly as they scurried down the front steps of the estate. The Russian man tugged a letter out of the front of his dress pants, crumbled and torn just a bit on the side, then shoved the letter towards Shane while his brain was still trying to comprehend what was going on. He dropped Ilya's hand and blinked at the letter as he opened it, noticing immediately that the note was in his mother's handwriting.

Rozanov,

You took my son. That is unforgivable. He knows nothing of this world, nothing. You should have left him out of this the way it should have been. Thanks to you, he's now entirely in a world he doesn't belong in, nor does he have a place in. I swear to God, if you have hurt him or worse, there will be no end to you and your family's suffering. He's meant to be a student, worried about grades and graduating, not a slave trying to survive to a man desperate to live up to his father's disgusting legacy. You Russians are all the same. We will get you first, then we'll kill your brother. The Rozanovs will have no place in this world. I'll make sure of that.

Yuna Hollander

Shane realized he had been standing there in the middle of the gravel while Ilya's men swirled around him and loaded up SUVs with whatever private information they had managed to get their hands on. His stomach felt... odd. He felt like he was going to throw up, but also that it was completely numb at the same time. His hands were hot and cold all at once while his heart had grown heavy in his chest.

Thanks to you, he's now entirely in a world he doesn't belong in, nor does he have a place in.

Shane thought maybe he *did* have a place in it. He'd gotten better at handling a gun, learned what his family really did for income, memorized some important names that both the Hollanders and Rozanovs did business with, attended a meeting entirely in Russian, and even started doing some independent research on common types of mafia businesses. He wouldn't by any means consider himself *part* of the mafia, but... he had a place here with Ilya Rozanov.

Ilya had done nothing *but* help him be part of it all.

He hadn't hidden one thing from Shane about the lifestyle since he'd been taken from Montreal. Sure, the way he'd gotten here was a rather drastic measure and one Shane still got a little riled up over, but he wasn't hurt or threatened here. He was... welcomed. Ilya had been accommodating, had given him privileges, had included him in mafia-related things, had let him mingle with his men, and had even opened up about himself.

Okay, okay, so Shane wasn't *really* invested. He wasn't making deals, planning out alliances, defending his turf, monopolizing on people to get what he wanted, or doing dirty work that would make most people cringe, but... he was here. He was alive. He was learning. He was... right next to Ilya Rozanov.

"Come on, Shane. We have to go. *Pozhaluysta*, please," Ilya urged as he tugged open the back door to the SUV in front of them and looked at Shane with desperate, dark eyes. Shane swallowed and balled up the letter to shove into his joggers before he clambered into the back seat with a determined gasp of air into his lungs. Ilya followed immediately behind him and began to bark orders at the driver who promptly peeled out around the other cars lined up.

"Where did you get that letter?" Shane asked tightly as he grabbed the strap of the seatbelt and held on tight. Ilya reached over to press his hand over Shane's chest, keeping him in place, while the other gripped the passenger's seat to help him stare out the window.

"Svetlana. Intercepted me on the way to Novosibirsk in Dzerzhinsk. My driver was in on it. He was meant to give me the letter, let me read it, then kill me on the way to the meeting while your family and Andrei's men raided my home to take you back. Had it gone correctly, I would currently be getting shot in the back of my car halfway to Novosibirsk while your family and Andrei's men grabbed you," Ilya explained without looking back. "It did not go correctly for them. I made it back before they got here, but I don't know how much time we have until they show up and realize their plan didn't work."

Shane nervously glanced at the driver of their car, but found that it was Marlow and a man in the passenger's seat that Shane had seen in passing—Connors, he believed. He hadn't talked with the man personally, but Marlow was apparently very good friends with him. He sucked in a shuddering breath and asked, "Where are we going then? If we can't stay—"

The sudden shout of, "*Lozhis' seychas zhe!*" from the front seat followed by Ilya all but tackling Shane into the leather backseat of the car filled the air followed by the ricocheting of heavy gun fire. Shane yelped and grasped onto Ilya tightly, his eyes filling with tears while his breathing picked up in panic, as the car swerved heavily to avoid whatever was coming down the road.

The ballistic glass of the car crackled from the attack, but remained firm thanks to its multiple layers and polycarbonate fusion. Gunfire was returned around them along with shouting in Russian, screaming, glass splintering, metal colliding, and rock pelting the side of cars. Shane was gasping for air, desperate to pull it into his lungs, while Ilya laid on top of him and screamed at Marlow in the language Shane had been surrounded by for over a week.

Eventually, they floored it on an open road free of gravel and tore off into the Russian countryside away from the chaos. Ilya eased them back up once the coast was clear and pulled Shane close against his side, whispering soothing words to him that fell on deaf ears. Shane stared forward hysterically without really seeing, lungs wheezing with distress from the scenario he'd just been a part of, and promptly passed out into the Russian man's lap as Ilya lurched to catch him.

Everything was quiet and warm when Shane woke hours later in an unfamiliar bed. It was nighttime based on the way the room was completely dark with the curtains open around the window beside him. He blinked and groggily sat up, ears pricking with interest when the sound of a door softly closing somewhere registered.

“Ilya?” he called hesitantly. Footsteps came next, then the familiar shape of Ilya filled the entry frame of the room Shane was laying down in.

“Shane. How are you feeling?” Ilya asked softly before he padded over to carefully sit down on the edge of the bed. Shane sighed and settled back down into the fluffy pillows while he tried to remember what had happened. The letter from his mom, the shouting in the car, the gunfire, Ilya protecting him.

“I’m okay, I think,” Shane murmured. He tentatively pulled back the covers after a moment of silence passed between them, a silent invitation for Ilya to join him in the bed, and was thankful when the Russian man accepted without making a fuss. His cheeks heated as Ilya shuffled around beneath the comforter and sheets until he was comfortably facing Shane in the darkness.

It was Shane who acted out of bravery, reaching for Ilya’s hand so he could gently take it and pull it up to cup the side of his own face. When he let go, Ilya’s warm palm remained and sweetly stroked the curve of Shane’s cheekbone.

“Thank you for covering me,” Shane whispered into the shared space between them. He blinked slowly, adjusting to the darkness, and focused on the sharp angles of Ilya’s face. The memory of their kiss from the night before filled his head along with the promise from Ilya’s note that it wasn’t over between them, whatever was building.

“Your mother was right in her letter. I should have left you out of this. I do not want to be my father. My father was awful,” Ilya admitted softly. Shane nuzzled into the feel of Ilya’s hand and shook his head, careful to keep Ilya touching him.

“I wish that you hadn’t *kidnapped* me, yeah, but... at least you’ve been honest with me. And you’ve included me in everything. I don’t...” Shane trailed off as he tried to wrestle with the thought that tore through his brain. Was he horrible if he admitted this? He loved his parents, more than anything in the entire world, but some part of the letter had hurt him. He wasn’t sure if it was the wording or phrasing or subtle implication, but *something* in his mother’s writing had burned him.

“I don’t think I would have gone with them anyway. Not when I... Not when I’m starting to want to be on your side,” he finally confessed. Ilya sucked in a sharp breath at that and stilled his thumb from where it had been lazily touching him.

“There is no need for you to be loyal to me, Shane, not after what I have done to you. I will not treat you any different if you are really on your family’s side. I still need you and cannot

give you back, but it will not hurt my feelings or make me behave differently towards you if your full loyalty is with them,” Ilya assured. Then, after a moment, “You have a good mother.”

The shift in atmosphere was subtle, but noticeable, at that moment. Shane slowly reached out to find the gold crucifix that Ilya wore around his neck and gently clasped it between his thumb and index finger. Ilya made no sound or movement to suggest he was uncomfortable with the action. “What was your mother’s name?” Shane asked quietly.

Ilya blinked once, twice. “Irinia,” he answered, just as soft. “She was great. Like your mother.” Shane remained quiet, feeling like this was something Ilya needed to get out—something he’d been wanting to tell someone for so long without any reason to. “She was so funny and beautiful. She was so sad. My father was so hard on her.”

Shane turned his head to the side and placed a gentle kiss to the inside of Ilya’s palm where it still rested on his cheek. “How did she die?” he asked once he felt like it would be okay to do so. It was very quiet in the room, wherever they were, but Shane felt like they had privacy—that this was just for them and no one else. That anything could be said here.

“To the rest of our world, *our* world, by accident,” Ilya said. Shane could sense that what he had said wasn’t true. “She accidentally swallowed a whole bottle of pills. I found her. I was twelve,” he continued blankly. His eyes had glazed over and his face had gone expressionless, like he was doing his best to ignore the real feelings he had about it all.

“I’m so sorry, Ilya,” Shane murmured. He knew his words could do nothing, fix nothing, but it was all he could manage as he thought about a young Ilya in an already harsh lifestyle finding something, *someone*, he loved just... gone. Ilya took in a slow, steadying breath, then refocused his eyes on Shane.

“Your mother loves you. She will do what she must to get you back. I am in her way. Where we are is safe, but it might not be for long,” Ilya said, carefully shifting them away from the tense conversation they’d just had. To Shane, it wasn’t over, but he accepted that Ilya wanted to move on for now and he allowed the conversation to change to something else despite his racing heart.

“We need to come up with a plan then. We can’t just continue to flee every time my parents or your brother gets close. Where are we?” Shane questioned. He took the opportunity to reach up and grab Ilya’s hand that was on his face, lacing their fingers together between them, before he twisted his neck and glanced out the window behind him. All he could see was the dark silhouettes of trees swaying under the frosty moonlight.

“We’re at my private cottage in Ladoga. You don’t have to help me with this, Shane. This isn’t your fight. If anything, you should be trying to avoid the fight, go back home to your family,” Ilya sighed. He squeezed Shane’s hand, then let it go and rolled over onto his back. Something hot lit up inside of Shane’s belly, the same feeling from earlier when he’d read his mother’s letter, and Shane channeled that flame into his next words.

“You don’t get to decide that. Yeah, okay, I chose to stay out of what my parents did my whole life and go about my business, I get that, but I’m choosing this now. I want to be a part

of this. I want to help you and that's my choice. I don't need my parents to pick that for me, even if the way this started probably makes them think I'm trying to escape. I'm not. So we need to tell them that, we need to explain what's really going on, and we need to make a plan so you're not the dead brother in this situation," Shane spat.

Ilya slowly turned his head to Shane and looked at him, *really* looked at him, before raising an eyebrow in amusement. "Who are you and where is Shane Hollander?" Shane just rolled his eyes and smacked the Russian man gently on the chest.

"I mean it, Rozanov. I want to help. I don't... I'm not ready to go home. You might have dragged me into this, but I'm the one digging my feet in to stay. So we need to come up with a plan and we need to get my parents in on it. I could write them or something, really get them to listen, and maybe we could, like, get them on our side to take down Andrei and get the route back for you," Shane reasoned.

Ilya gave a small smile and asked curiously, "You would do this for me? Just to help me make my money back and keep my status? Not for any other reason?"

Shane shrugged. "Yeah. I mean, I think there's a whole lot more to this than just money and status if we're being honest. I think this has to do with proving a point that you can be your own person and run your life the way you want to without turning into your father or brother. You can do something, build something, handle something while also being a good person. Like your mom."

The room was still for just a moment too long to be comfortable, then Ilya was rolling on top of Shane, boxing him in with his arms, and leaning in to capture his lips in a desperate kiss. Shane moaned immediately at the contact and reached out to bury his fingers in Ilya's curls. The Russian hissed when Shane hit a sore spot—the place where he had hid him with the laptop—and Shane murmured a quick *sorry* before their lips were locked back together.

He moved the hand that had touched Ilya's injury to his back instead, clawing at the fabric of the plain grey t-shirt he had on. Ilya thrust his tongue into Shane's parted lips and ground his lower body into Shane's as soon as Shane welcomed the intrusion into his mouth. The room was filled with hot gasps, moans of appreciation, wandering hands, and rocking of hips to meet one another.

"This is a bad idea," Shane whispered when Ilya pulled away from his lips to trail his wet mouth down the side of Shane's heated neck.

"Talk about it later," Ilya all but growled back. His teeth nipped at the sensitive flesh at the base of Shane's throat and Shane couldn't help but whimper as he grasped Ilya's back with tight fingers and pushed his hardened cock against the Russian's. How they'd gone from such a sentimental conversation to a heated make-out session, Shane wasn't sure, but he wasn't complaining in the slightest. When Ilya pressed his hands under Shane's shirt and murmured, "Off," into the juncture of Shane's shoulder, he was helpless to comply.

They both sat back, each of them tearing off their shirts to stare at one another, and an imaginary line was very visibly drawn between them. If they crossed it at that moment, there would be no going back. Whatever this was between them, it would continue full speed

ahead like everything else going on around them. Shane swallowed hard, reached out to hook his hand behind Ilya's neck, and pulled him back down to reconnect their lips into a hard kiss.

Line crossed.

Chapter End Notes

time to get spicy ;)

Chapter 7: Chapter Seven

Ilya was dreaming. He had to be as he stared down at the half naked body of Shane Hollander in his bedroom at the private cottage he'd gotten for himself years ago. Every warning alarm was going off in his mind that he was indulging in something dangerous, but then Shane hooked a hand around the back of his neck and pulled him in to connect their lips. It all went quiet inside of his brain.

Ilya had kissed many people in his life—women and men—but none of them had felt as perfect as Shane's lips against his own. His skin was warm and smooth, muscled yet soft, as he ran his hands everywhere they could reach on Shane's body. He couldn't get enough. At some points, he was grabbing Shane's jaw to keep him in place while at other times, his hands were running up and down the sides of Shane's torso with dotting touch.

His fingers curled into the shorts Shane was wearing and tugged gently, giving Shane the opportunity to either accept or deny what he was silently asking. Shane eagerly shucked his shorts and briefs down while Ilya pulled back and watched with dark eyes and panted breath. *Fuck, he was beautiful.* Stretched out in front of him, completely naked with the moonlight cascading over his skin, Shane Hollander looked like a vision from one of Ilya's heated dreams.

"Stunning," he praised softly. Shane's blush was noticeable, even in the darkness, and Ilya was quick then to get his own pants off so he could crawl back on top of him and capture his lips in a hot kiss. He trailed his lips slowly down the side of Shane's jaw, sucking dark marks into the Canadian man's skin as he worked his way lower and lower.

Shane whimpered at the attention and spread his legs open to accommodate Ilya's body as he moved his kisses from Shane's collarbone to his belly button to the sensitive spots inside of his thighs. *"Please,"* Shane moaned as Ilya toyed with him, mouthing at every spot on his body but where the other man needed him most.

"Tell me what you need," Ilya murmured into the crook of Shane's thigh, mere centimeters away from where his balls hung, heavy and full and soft. God, he smelled so fucking good too. So heady and warm and rich with arousal. Ilya could feel his mouth salivating at the sight of the cock that lay arched in front of him.

Smooth, tan, and curved to leak against the toned skin of Shane's lower abdomen, Ilya felt like he was going to come into the bedsheets just from the sight alone.

"You, Ilya. *Please*, I need you," Shane begged deliciously. And, well, who was Ilya to deny the gorgeous man in front of him? He wasted no time lurching forward and wrapping his lips around the head of Shane's cock, tonguing at the weeping slit, while Shane gripped the sheets beneath him and released a sharp cry of pleasure. Ilya sank further down, wrapping his tongue around each bump and ridge of Shane's cock, until he nosed at the small thatch of dark hair at the base of Shane's length.

"Fuck, Ilya," Shane moaned, his fingers sinking into the Russian man's golden curls. Ilya just tightened his grip on Shane's thighs to keep him in place before he rose back up with his mouth and began to set a punishing pace of swallowing Shane down. The sounds echoing into the room above him only spurred Ilya on—needy, desperate, satisfied.

He swirled his tongue around the tip of Shane's cock with each bob upwards and hollowed his cheeks to increase the pressure, then relaxed his mouth with each stroke downwards of his mouth until Shane was hitting the back of his throat. Again and again, Ilya sucked Shane from root to head all while twisting his head, lapping at the precum dripping from the man beneath him, and digging his fingers into Shane's thighs.

"Fuck, fuck, I'm gonna... Shit, Ilya, I'm gonna cum. I don't know if I can—"

Shane's warnings of release and frantic slapping at Ilya's shoulder fell on deaf ears as the sudden burst of hot, tangy cum exploded on Ilya's tongue. He swallowed it down like a greedy man, starved for it really, and continued to lick languidly at Shane's cock until the man beneath him whined and squirmed from sensitivity.

Finally, Ilya released him with a soft pop of his lips and lifted himself up so he could look down at Shane's blissed out face. He had a thin sheen of sweat on his flawless skin, his full lips were parted to draw in breath, his freckled cheeks were covered in a thick blush, and his eyes were hazy with lust. *"I-I'm sorry I came so fast. It's been, um... it's been a while,"* Shane admitted shyly.

Ilya just smirked and crawled upwards to kiss him, silencing any thoughts the Canadian man might be having of embarrassment. *"Is okay,"* he whispered against Shane's lips. *"Was hot. I will not last long either, probably. Has been a while for me too."* Shane just huffed out an amused breath, licked his lips, then glanced down to find that Ilya was still hard and dripping onto Shane's stomach between them.

In the next moment, Shane was reaching out to press his hands on Ilya's chest and roll him over onto his back, hungry and high on ecstasy from his own release. Ilya complied with no resistance, though his humored grin remained as he watched Shane settle between Ilya's open legs with his own hanging off the edge of the bed. Ilya's cock was thick, uncut, and heavy compared to Shane's photoesque length.

With dark veins that ran along the shaft to his rosy hidden tip to his thick undercolumn that jolted once from Shane's rapt attention, Ilya figured it was probably intimidating to look at. Shane's wide eyes only confirmed that assumption as he tentatively reached out to wrap his hand around the silky flesh and gently twist down to pull back Ilya's foreskin. The exposure of the weeping head of Ilya's cock to the cool room made Ilya groan into the open air, *"Fuck, Shane,"* before tossing his head back into the pillows.

"I've never, uh, done this before. Blown someone, I mean," Shane confessed nervously.

"Don't care. I'm already close. Anything you do will be good, just do something," Ilya pleaded raspily. Shane didn't need to be told twice as he leaned in and grasped the base of Ilya's cock with one hand while the other slid between Ilya's strong thighs to cup his balls.

Ilya couldn't help the groan that slipped out of his lips at the gentle touch—so uncertain yet sweet. He couldn't remember the last time he'd been handled so gently.

And then the warm mouth of Shane Hollander was descending upon him and Ilya swore he'd died and gone to heaven. He was sloppy, obviously inexperienced as he had warned, but his eagerness more than made up for his lack of technique. It was as endearing as it was seductive. At the end of the day, the hot, wet mouth hungrily blowing him belonged to none other than Shane Hollander—the man that Ilya was absolutely starting to grow far too fond of.

There wasn't anything to *not* like about Shane. He was quirky, intelligent, funny without really trying to be, polite, grounded, and genuine. He was a calming, steady presence to have around and Ilya didn't want to think about the fact that one day, possibly soon, Shane wouldn't have a need *to* be around anymore. Ilya ignored that line of thought and focused back on the blowjob he was currently getting.

His stomach was already starting to tighten with release as Shane repeatedly throatied him as best as he could, taking as much of Ilya into his throat as he could manage while tears pricked in his eyes from the length. “*Fuck, Shane. I’m so close,*” Ilya hissed as Shane tongued at the head of his cock around his foreskin. *Jesus Christ.*

Shane seemed to take that as a challenge, however, and picked up his pace even more until he was bobbing keenly on Ilya's cock. His warm palm rolled Ilya's balls gently while swallowing down inch by inch of Ilya's shaft until he choked on it and caused his throat to spasm tightly. Amazingly, that was what seemed to do it as Ilya swore in Russian and tried to pull Shane off of him.

Determined and stubborn, Shane remained with his mouth on Ilya and swallowed the thick, sudden spurts of cum that seemingly had no end in sight. Ilya's stomach was tight with release, his fingers equally so in Shane's silky hair, and he grunted through the entirety of his orgasm while Shane dutifully swallowed it all. There was no question of whether they were going to spend the rest of the night together once Shane pulled off with a shy wipe of his thumb to his bottom lip. Ilya wasn't going to just let him leave after the frantic blowjobs they'd just given one another, absolutely not.

He breathed heavily, completely spent from the head he'd just gotten from the man he craved more than anything these days, and watched through droopy eyelids as Shane hesitantly met Ilya's eyes. It was clear he was searching for some kind of confirmation that he'd done a good job, and Ilya was helpless to do anything other than reach out, grab him, and tug him down so Ilya could curl around him.

“Who knew Shane Hollander had a mouth like that on him?” Ilya teased into Shane's ear. “So fucking good.” The Canadian just laughed bashfully and swatted at him playfully with an embarrassed *shut up* as he snuggled closer. Ilya pressed a few lingering kisses behind on Shane's neck, then listened to the way the room descended into quiet calmness with both of their breathing patterns evening out.

Shane was the one to fall asleep first, comfortable and safe in Ilya's arms while the Russian man remained awake with racing thoughts. He'd hold onto Shane for as long as he could. Ilya

knew have to give him up eventually, he couldn't keep him here forever, but Ilya was selfish when it came to the Canadian man in his arms. If he could have this, if even for just a brief moment in time, then he would have it all.

It was the happiest he'd been in a long time.

When Shane trudged into the kitchen the next morning, bleary eyed and a little lost due to the empty space next to him in the bed, he wasn't surprised to find Ilya sitting alone at the kitchen table with papers in front of him. Shane blushed as the memory of the night before flashed through his mind, but he was determined to focus on their morning and what it might entail instead of the unknown place they'd taken their relationship.

Ilya looked up as soon as he heard Shane's footsteps and offered a soft smile before turning his attention back down to the papers in front of him. "Good morning," he greeted raspily when Shane pulled out the chair across from him and sat down. "I'd offer you coffee, but I know you don't drink it."

Shane ducked his head at the call out, secretly fond that Ilya knew that about him, and shrugged. "What are you reading?" Shane asked as he picked at his fingers for something to do. Ilya sighed heavily and sat back before pushing the papers towards Shane in a gesture for him to go ahead and take a look. Shane pulled the papers towards him and blinked a few times as he tried to grasp the information written in a mixture of Russian and English.

The report was startling.

Andrei had been quietly stationing men in Montreal as soon as he'd gotten them to shut off trade with Ilya. But it wasn't just that information that made Shane's heart lurch in his chest—it was the fact that Andrei had no intention of just *using* the supply route from the Hollanders. He planned to kill Shane's parents and take the supply route for himself after receiving their help.

Shane glanced up at Ilya in panic, but the Russian man just stared back at him with a clenched jaw and hard eyes. He dipped his gaze back down to the report, silently urging Shane to keep going. The rest of it detailed the aftermath of the raid on the estate—quite a lot of damage that would need to be repaired—but no serious information had been taken. It seemed as though Ilya's men had managed to grab just about every important document or file in the chaos before everything descended into chaos.

They recommended that Ilya stay away at his private cottage, that some of his closest men do the in-person meetings back in Moscow with associates to continue business, that Ilya speak with the few men they'd taken for questioning that belonged to Andrei, and, if Ilya wanted... They could station men of their own in Montreal despite the high risk. Shane eventually handed the papers back with trembling fingers and looked up at Ilya fearfully.

“They have captives from Andrei’s side?” Shane questioned to make sure he had interpreted that correctly. Ilya nodded slowly and crossed his arms. “Would they know more about this plan? This plan to... take over Montreal? My parents?” Ilya took in a slow breath, his eyes never leaving Shane’s though his expression morphed into something grim, then nodded once more.

“Probably, yes. I will go interrogate this morning. It will be messy. You will not go with me. I do not want you to see that,” he informed carefully, frowning deeply as images of mafia questioning sessions no doubt flashed behind his eyes. Shane had to agree that he didn’t want to go and see what *interrogation* meant to Ilya, not when he had such fond images of the Russian man across from him from last night.

He shifted uncomfortably in his seat and tried to imagine Ilya hurting another person for information but decided rather quickly that he didn’t want to imagine it at all, so he simply nodded and reached out a hand instead for Ilya to take. “It will take a few hours, but then I’ll be back. I will find out what I can about your parents, Shane. About Montreal. Talk to me about the plan again that you had,” Ilya said, steering the conversation away from where it had gone.

Shane sniffled and shrugged yet again as anxiety about his home coursed through his veins. “I think if I sent a letter to my parents and explained what was really going on, they’d switch sides. If I told them about what Andrei did after your father died, why he’s working with my family, what he plans to do to them *after* this is over... I think they would join your side of things and get rid of Andrei for good. We could team up.”

He cringed immediately at the last phrase he used. It sounded like he wanted to put together a team of superheroes like a movie franchise, not two mafia families. Sure enough, Ilya’s lips twitched in amusement while Shane turned red with embarrassment. “You *know* what I mean. I write the letter, tell them you had to take desperate measures with me, that Andrei is the fucking worst, and that I’m safe and happy and on your side. So they should be too,” he urged.

Ilya raised an eyebrow at the last sentence and squeezed Shane’s hand slightly. “You are? Happy? With me?” he asked in that syrupy Russian accent that sent a shiver down Shane’s spine. Shane licked his lips nervously and nodded.

“Yeah, I mean... You’ve been really good to me. I’m happy here. I, um... I *am* sorry about hitting you with the laptop, though... And I do need another one for the other three finals I have to take...” Shane admitted while Ilya’s grin only grew wider. It wasn’t the first time Shane had seen Ilya smile with all of his teeth and dimples, but it stole his breath just the same as it had when they’d gotten tipsy together and talked about so many random things.

It made him feel like maybe things could be okay. That they could solve this together and have a lot more smiles like that in the future. *Future*. Shane quickly shut down that line of thought and dialed back into the conversation they were having.

“Mm, yes, you are very good with a laptop as a weapon. I wish I did not have to find out for myself, but is okay. I will heal,” Ilya chuckled. “Write the letter, Hollander. I’ll see about the

laptop while I'm gone." He began to pull away from Shane's grasp and rise to his feet, but Shane gripped his palm and tugged him back down with a silent look of request.

Fuck it. He wanted to talk about the future.

Ilya cocked his head to the side in curiosity at Shane's small action, but he sat down again anyway with his lips still tugging upwards affectionately. Shane squirmed slightly in his seat, mustering up the courage to continue with the trend of having tough discussions that morning, then finally inquired stupidly, "And, um... about last night. I... Are we okay? Like, you wanted that as bad as I did? The, uh, blowjobs?"

Of course, Ilya just rolled his eyes at him and continued in his prior action of rising to his feet while his hand slipped out of Shane's. "Yes, I wanted it as bad as you, Hollander. So much so, I came like a teenage boy. I'd like to fuck you too, if that's what you're asking," Ilya informed bluntly. Shane immediately choked on his own air and coughed, *so much for tough conversation*, as Ilya winked at him before turning away from the table.

"Wait, *wait*," Shane sputtered, quickly getting to his own feet so he could follow the Russian man back in the direction of the bedroom they had shared the night before. Ilya glanced back at him with a smirk and casually pulled off the grey henley he was wearing while Shane gawked at him. He hadn't really gotten a good look at Rozanov last night because it had been dark and shadowy, and his face had been focused somewhere else, but seeing him now in the daylight was like some kind of sexy fantasy he never thought would come true.

All thoughts of Andrei and his parents and Montreal and interrogation flew out of the window as Shane stared at Ilya Rozanov.

From his wrists to his collarbones, the man was littered in tattooed ink ranging from quarter sized to a full sleeve on his left arm alone. Shane caught the sight of a bear on one of his pectoral muscles, a young woman in the middle of his sleeve, Roman numerals on the side of his ribs, and a smattering of other random objects—snakes, roses, daggers, eyes, Russian words, moths, all kinds of things that probably meant something to him.

And then it was all abruptly covered by a black sweater. His gold rings glinted in the morning light through the window above his knuckles, but that was all that remained to suggest that Ilya Rozanov was an intimidating man to behold. Well, that and his facial expressions.

"You see something you like," Ilya stated smugly. "Maybe if you ask nicely, you can see more when I come back. Maybe I will let you touch."

Ten minutes later, and after a small makeout session against the dresser, Shane was waving goodbye to the black SUV parked outside of the cottage and receiving a similar farewell from the Russian man driving. No one else was with them here. It was just Shane and Ilya. Shane had wondered if that was safe, them being alone after everything that had happened, but Ilya had quickly calmed him by saying they weren't *actually* on their own—they just weren't sharing a space with anyone.

If Shane really cared enough and wanted to look, he could go exploring in the trees surrounding the property for men set up in tents or others in nearby residences. Shane did not

care enough to go looking and decided to take Ilya's word for it instead... even if it crept him out a little bit that there were men hiding in the landscape around him.

Shane eventually found his way back to the kitchen after locking the front door behind him and glanced at the nearby papers that Ilya had left behind. Well, now was probably a better time than ever to write the letter to his parents while he waited for Ilya to handle business. It took a few minutes of rifling through the kitchen drawers until Shane was back in the wooden seat at the table with a pen and a yellow notepad.

He sniffled and tried to think about what to say in the letter that would convince his parents he was safe, of sound mind, and desperate to get their help for Ilya. Eventually, his hand began to write.

Dear Mom and Dad,

You're probably going to think that I was forced to write this letter or that someone is writing it on my behalf, but that isn't true. To prove it, I'm going to admit something to the both of you that will convince you it's me. Remember that trip we took to Japan to visit great-grandma when I was little and she had that jade tea set that she loved a lot? And her dog, Akachan? It wasn't Akachan that broke the tea set. It was me. I was trying to practice one timers with the baseball bat she kept in the closet but I ended up losing my hold of it and it went right into the tea set. I lied.

The scar on my shoulder wasn't from hockey, either. I lied about that too. I tried wrestling once with another kid on my 14U team and landed on a rock that tore my shoulder open. I thought you'd think it was cooler if I said it was from hockey. It hurt either way. Believe me yet?

You need to believe me with what I'm telling you next. I'm on Ilya Rozanov's side and I'm not going anywhere. His brother, Andrei, is the one you need to watch out for and I'm going to stay with Ilya until Andrei is dead. You don't understand. Andrei has problems, lifestyle problems that don't match with the field of work we're all in here, and his father didn't pick him for succession of the family business. He picked Ilya.

As soon as their dad died, Andrei took off along with a handful of inside information about the Rozanov business. He's been intentionally screwing Ilya over out of spite. He's going to do it to the family he's with in Novosibirsk too. They only welcomed him in because Andrei has the connections—the connections to our family and our supply route.

He's stationing men in Montreal without you knowing. Or, if you do know, then you need to act on that immediately. He doesn't just want to monopolize on the supply route our family controls, he wants to take it for his own. And once he gets that? You'll be on his kill list too, just like Ilya and the Korenevs.

Ilya can't let that happen. He isn't his father and he isn't his brother. He's doing his best to avoid conflict, he doesn't like bribery or shitty leverage over others (I'm going to touch back on this), and he's been nothing but welcoming to me. He's taught me everything. I know what our family does. I know what I've been left out of. I get that I didn't really want to be involved in it and I didn't have any interest, but to be in the dark for so long on how my family really

makes its money and operates? It just led to exactly what you didn't want—me involved anyway.

Ilya had no other choice in taking me. He needs our route in Montreal and he knew you'd get more involved if he grabbed me. It's more than money to him; it's connections to other people and opportunities and a future where he isn't haunted by his father's choices. I support him. I'm not going anywhere. I'm alive and healthy and taken care of and he's even taught me things. He's becoming someone that means a lot to me.

Please. We need your help. He needs your help. You can't trust Andrei, but you can trust me. If you want to support a Rozanov, it needs to be Ilya. Please respond fast. We don't know how much time we have until we're hit again. I don't know how much more Ilya can take. I won't let him do this alone.

*All my love,
Shane & Ilya*

Chapter 8: Chapter Eight

Ilya whistled as Shane hit the fourth bottle lined up on the fallen tree with perfect aim, the green glass exploding into a million pieces in the snow around it. He clapped slowly while Shane turned around and beamed, obviously proud of his practice, before handing the gun in his hands off to Ilya. “Not bad. Better,” Ilya praised as he tucked the gun into the back of his pants and rubbed his cold palms together.

It was snowing at the cottage, thick white flakes that fell without any sound, so both he and Shane were bundled up as much as possible for the daily shooting practice they’d begun. On top of language, geography, business, and negotiation lessons, the past week had been filled with shooting. Shane had quite the shot and impeccable aim. Ilya figured it was from his years as a hockey player that were helping him, but Shane just shrugged and said they were two completely different things.

Along with his aim, Shane’s Russian had been improving. It was still very basic with the alphabet, phonemic awareness, blending, and common words, but Shane was getting better. Even if ‘better’ sounded like he had a mouth full of cotton sometimes. But it made Ilya smile and warm a little bit inside whenever Shane tried to speak to him in his first language.

Shane had also been reading all of the reports alongside Ilya and sitting in on virtual meetings with those of his men who had gone back to Moscow to continue business. A few families had pulled out from doing business with him due to threats from Andrei, but others had agreed to alliances or trade *because* Ilya wasn’t associated with his brother anymore. It was a trade off, one that didn’t bring in as much profit as Ilya hoped, but he figured things would steady out once they got Montreal back.

Ironically, Ilya had also found out for himself from the men he had brutally interrogated that things weren’t actually so great on Andrei’s side either. While the Hollanders were opening up the supply route to Andrei and assisting in trying to bring Ilya down, they were by no means making it *easier* on Andrei and the Korenev family in Novosibirsk. In fact, they’d put a higher tax on any shipments belonging to Andrei that went through Montreal and they offered no men to fight alongside Andrei and the Korenev family—they were there for Shane only.

The men that Ilya had gotten himself bloody for had also confirmed that Andrei already had men secretly stationed in Montreal within the Hollander’s network. They had given names, descriptions, and duties of the men who were in Montreal which Ilya had made Connors write down. The list had been sent to Yuna and David alongside Shane’s letter, a gift from him to say he was on their side.

They’d had yet to hear back from Shane’s parents however. So, in between everything else going on, Ilya and Shane spent time together with shooting, Russian, geography, business, and negotiation lessons. They’d also shared quite a few heated makeout sessions and another exchange of blowjobs in the walk-in shower that had made Shane nearly rip out Ilya’s hair with how hard he’d been holding on from pleasure. Ilya’s head was still sore from the grip...

and the wound from the laptop that Shane had bashed on him. Ilya just grinned whenever he thought about it—such a fierce little thing, wasn't he?

At night, when things got quiet and the world turned dark and still, Ilya found himself wrapped up in Shane in a way he'd never experienced with another person. They somehow always found their way to the couch with thick blankets draped over them as Shane studied Russian or anatomy or sports psychology or something boring like fucking birds. Ilya would usually just recline himself on his phone and switch between reading over business messages or staring at Shane and whatever he was doing.

His stomach had started a new habit of flipping whenever he admired Shane for too long. From his smattering of freckles to his dorky smile to his beautiful brown eyes, Ilya could get lost in the Canadian man. And it wasn't just his looks that Ilya was attracted to, it was him—the way he wanted to learn new things fast, the way he struggled sometimes with matching vibes of a conversation, the way he huffed and puffed like an angry cat whenever Ilya intentionally riled him up, and the way he got so flushed with delighted embarrassment whenever Ilya complimented him.

There were a million things that enamored Ilya about Shane Hollander and he wanted to discover a million more. He *liked* Shane. Very much so. That was a very dangerous thing to feel as a man in his position. If anybody found out how he was *really* starting to feel about the only son of the Hollanders, anybody who wanted Ilya to fail or suffer or hurt, then Shane would be the first thing they would take from him to make him fold.

Ilya had laid awake some nights, long after Shane had fallen asleep next to him in the bed they wordlessly agreed to share, and imagined endless scenarios where Shane was taken, hurt, starved, maimed, or worse by his enemies. He had pictures that flashed through his mind of blood, bone, tears, screams, begging, and so much more that his stomach turned violently inside of him and he nearly lost his dinner that he'd eaten before bed.

On those nights, Ilya pulled Shane a little closer to him and whispered in Russian to his sleeping partner promises of keeping him safe, even if he wasn't sure he could honor them. He'd do everything in his power to prevent those situations from coming true and part of that involved training Shane in self defense with a weapon, teaching him common words in Russian used during mafia meetings, and role-playing negotiation scenarios in the living room.

A buzz in the back pocket of Ilya's jeans pulled him away from the sight of Shane tilting his head back and sticking his tongue out to catch one of the many falling snow flakes after their shooting practice for the day. He unlocked the screen and felt his heart skip a beat in his chest when a message from Levi came through that Shane's parents had responded via letter and left it in a hand belonging to one of his men stationed in Moscow—or, what remained of that man.

He couldn't really blame them. He'd quite literally stapled the letters from him and Shane to the chests of the two dead adversaries he had questioned that belonged to Andrei. Shane had nearly passed out when Ilya had returned from that interrogation covered in blood and calmly stated, "It isn't mine," in reference to the red liquid coating his skin.

“Your parents responded,” Ilya informed when Shane eventually closed his mouth. The Canadian man whipped his head around to blink at Ilya and immediately demanded to know what they said. When Ilya admitted that he wasn’t sure because it had come in the form of a letter, Shane hurriedly grabbed Ilya by the wrist and practically dragged him back to the cottage with determination in his step.

Ilya was glad to follow. He’d go anywhere Shane went.

It didn’t take long until Levi and Marlow were pulling up to the cottage with said letter in tow and expressions of uncertainty on their faces. Marlow hadn’t liked the idea of trading off letters, knowing that it would probably mean losing a man or two with communication between rivals, but Ilya wanted to honor Shane’s idea and decided it was a risk he was willing to take. He’d have to write a message of his own to the family of whatever man he’d lost just to get this letter.

Maybe send a substantial amount of rubles as well...

Shane snatched the letter from Levi as soon as he handed it over and tore open the envelope while Levi shot a look at Ilya that said *seriously?* Ilya just smirked at him, raising his eyebrows as he pointedly looked at the crooked way Levi’s nose had set after Shane had dealt with him. “Ilya,” Shane called softly. With that, Ilya shook both Levi and Marlow’s hands and turned to the man that had called for him so anxiously.

Ilya strode over to where Shane was standing while the other two men packed themselves up in the car and made himself comfortable by Shane’s side. His hands were trembling as he held the letter, but Ilya was able to make out what Yuna and David had written back. It was short and blunt, leaving no room for argument despite the tall request they had put into ink.

Rozanov,

If this is our son and what he has said is true, we will help on the condition that we see him in person alive, unharmed, and with the same words he has written verbalized on his lips. We will meet at the Moscow shipyard on Monday at midnight. No men, no weapons, no nothing. Fail to do this and we will continue with our original goal of killing you all. Our son is ours.

Yuna & David Hollander

“What do we do?” Shane asked nervously as he looked up at Ilya with those lovely doe-eyes that made his heart skip a beat in his chest.

“There is no choice, Hollander. We are going to see your parents.”

Shane rubbed his sweaty palms on his jeans for the hundredth time and did his best to steady his shaky breathing as Ilya drove slowly through the barren shipyard shrouded in darkness. It

had been hours of driving through Russia to finally get back to Moscow, but Shane wanted nothing more than to retreat back to the cottage in Ladoga and hide away from the dangers surrounding them. Ilya, on the other hand, appeared cool and collected as he scanned the yard of new and old ships.

When the glint of something finally flashed in their headlights, the paint job of another car parked and waiting, Ilya reached over to take Shane's hand in his own. "It will be okay. Is just us," Ilya assured. But how did he know that for certain? How did he know that Shane's parents weren't actually waiting with a handful of armed men ready to shoot him down and steal Shane away and finish it for good?

Well, when Shane thought about it, he knew it was something his parents wouldn't do. They weren't those kinds of people—the ones who went back on their word. So he squeezed Ilya's hand in appreciation and watched as the dark silhouettes of his parents became more and more focused as they drove forward and parked their own car. "You'll stay by my side, right?" Shane asked nervously.

"Of course," Ilya promised.

With that, Shane hesitantly let go of Ilya's hand and opened up the car door to step into the freezing cold winter air of Moscow. He shivered immediately and pulled the thick coat Ilya had gotten for him closer to his body before rounding the front of the car. He met Ilya again and grasped his hand, linking their fingers together, then began to walk forward. He could see the tight expressions of his parents as they walked across the concrete in the headlights of the cars.

"Hi, mom. Hi, dad," he greeted weakly once they stopped a few paces away. Shane's heart was thundering in his chest and he was convinced the only reason he hadn't passed out was because he was holding onto Ilya for support. "Um, this is Ilya. Rozanov. But you know that already," he fumbled terribly.

"Hi," Ilya added shortly beside him.

"Shane, honey, it's time to come home where you belong. We can put all of this behind us and move on with our lives and forget this ever happened," Yuna said, ignoring the introduction of Ilya and the fact that Shane was holding his hand. Shane blinked a few times, caught off guard, and quickly shook his head.

"What? *No*, no, that's... that's not why I'm here. We're here to talk about—"

"—I don't give a *damn* about Ilya or Andrei Rozanov. You need to come home. *Now*. Let me and your father handle this," Yuna cut off sharply. David reached out to put a hand on her shoulder, but Yuna simply shrugged it off. Shane felt unsteady, uncertain of where to go from here and how to continue if his mother wasn't going to listen to what they had to say.

"Are you seriously not going to hear us out? Because I'm not going anywhere. I meant what I said in my letter. I'm not leaving Ilya's side. He needs help and we can help him. Okay, so we all got off to a bad start with each other, I get that, but this is important," Shane articulated as seriously as he possibly could. "Mom, Andrei is going to kill us all if he wins."

“Yuna,” David urged gently. “Let’s hear him out.”

Yuna swallowed hard when she looked at her husband, then turned her hard gaze to Ilya before finding Shane’s eyes once again. Shane squeezed Ilya’s hand in a subtle request for him to start talking and, thankfully, Ilya seemed to catch on as he cleared his throat softly before speaking.

“My father was not a good man. When he started to get very sick, he told me and my brother that I would be the one stepping into the head position of the family business. Andrei is bad with money and what he spends it on. He gambles and takes from his own supply. I was the more trusted son of the two, even if my father didn’t like it.

“The day he died, my brother took everything he knew about the Rozanov business. He fled to another family with the promise he would be highly valued there. He cut off our family for status, the route that brought in a good bit of our money—your route—and took a handful of men with him. We were left to figure it out. Shane was the best thing we could come up with.

“It was not something I was proud to do, to take him, but it was our best shot. You can imagine my surprise, maybe, when I am delivered a man who knows nothing about what his family really does or anything about this world. I have taught him, worked with him, and explained everything to him honestly. If we do not get help, or that route back, I will lose more men, more control, and a future that I would really like to change for my family.

“Even if Andrei kills me and takes it all for himself, he will not stop there. He has men in Montreal waiting to strike, and men in Novosibirsk too so he can even get rid of the Korenev family. He cannot be trusted and he needs to be stopped. We need your help. Your son has chosen the side he wants to be on,” Ilya concluded as smoothly as he could. Shane leaned into him for support, proud that he’d managed to get the idea across in a steady manner.

“So you just expected us to, what? Go in guns blazing and kill Andrei and the Korenev family because they betrayed you? That’s what this is about? You kidnapped our *son* for petty discourse in *Russia?!?*” Yuna shouted.

Shane shook his head and took a step forward. “This isn’t about me being kidnapped anymore! I’m past that and I’m alive and happy and healthy, mom! This is about Ilya and—and... the fact that *you* betrayed *me*. ”

Everything went quiet between them as Yuna blinked at him, obviously stunned, and Ilya carefully coaxed him back to lean against his side. Shane swallowed hard and continued once he’d calmed slightly. “You told me *nothing* about any of this. I just thought the whole time you were entrepreneurs or something. I get that I didn’t want to be, like, super invested in anything but I should’ve *known*. You really didn’t think that, at some point, someone would come and get me for leverage over you? I didn’t know anything! At least Ilya told me!”

He didn’t stop there either. “And to say I have no place in this world? That back home is where I belong? That I should be left out of it and act like it never happened? That’s insane! I *am* in this, I *do* belong here, and I am where I think I belong. With Ilya. Defending Ilya. If you aren’t going to help us, then we’re going to go somewhere else and find people who will.

Get over the kidnapping, mom. It's not like you didn't take things from me either. Come on, Ilya."

Shane tugged at Ilya's hand, already turning around to head back to the car while a million emotions coursed through his veins, but the call of, "Shane, wait!" from his mother behind him made him stop. He warily faced her once more, tentatively meeting her eyes, and watched for himself as her own feelings warred clearly across her expression.

"Are you... You're sure about this? About Ilya? You're not being forced to say any of this and... his side is the one you want to be on?" she asked.

"I share a bed with the man for fuck's sake! I'm a grown adult!" Shane cried, his cheeks burning a little at the admittance of how close he and Ilya actually were. He hated to also admit that he couldn't really look in his mom's eyes when he said it. "Yes, I'm on his side. It would really fucking help if you were too."

Yuna looked at David, distraught on what to do, but David was simply staring between Shane and Ilya with a look in his eye that said he'd already made up his mind. Shane mouthed *please, dad* and waited until his father eventually sagged his shoulder with defeat and met Yuna's gaze. "He's our son, Yuna. If this is what he wants, we help him. Look at him. He's fine. He's strong. He's grown. There's no point in denying the fact he's a part of this too," David said resolutely.

Yuna pursed her lips and crossed her arms before fully facing them once more. She slid her harsh stare to Ilya and growled out, "If you even *breathe* in a way that suggests you plan to hurt our son or us when this is over, you're dead. Do you understand me?"

"Yes, ma'am," Ilya agreed immediately. Yuna shifted from one foot to another, clenching her jaw, then reached up to press something inside of her ear before muttering, "Stand down."

Suddenly, the sound of at least a dozen weapons dropping around them in the darkness echoed through the vacant shipyard. Shane felt his stomach sink when he realized that they hadn't actually upheld their deal to come alone and defenseless, but he and Ilya had. He frowned deeply at his mother and glanced up at Ilya who just raised an eyebrow in amusement... then did the same thing in Russian.

Shane's jaw dropped when the noise of guns being lowered reverberated yet again.

"*You asshole,*" he hissed.

Ilya just winked at him with a smirk, then turned his attention back to Yuna.

"Are you willing to meet with us in Ladoga tomorrow evening? Make a plan of this?" he asked, switching into business mode while Shane pouted beside him. Ilya squeezed his hand playfully to pull him out of his sulking and rejoin the conversation as Yuna and David nodded. It was a quick exchange of the cottage address with Shane's parents, everyone tensely shaking hands with uncertain eyes, and then Shane was back in the warmth of the car with just him and Ilya side by side once more.

“That did not go so bad,” Ilya admitted while he started up the car. Shane rested his forehead against the cold glass of the car window and hummed in agreement, though he wished that he hadn’t had to fight so hard to get his parents to understand why they should be on his and Ilya’s side. Ilya reached across the dash and murmured, “Sleep. Is a long drive back.”

Shane didn’t need to be told twice. He’d give anything to quiet his thoughts. One minute, his eyes were closing and Ilya was turning the heat on full blast, and the next, the car was jostling over a gravel road while the lit up silhouette of the cottage fell upon Shane’s face. He blinked slowly, caught off guard by the sudden passage of time despite feeling like he’d just closed his eyes, but welcomed the sight all the same.

“We’re here already?” he questioned in awe.

Ilya nodded with a hum. “You snored. Whole ride.” Shane blushed instantly, his entire face heating up in embarrassment, and he was quick to grumble *shut up* to the Russian man next to him while also half-heartedly smacking him in the chest. Of course, Ilya had to take it a step further by hurrying around to Shane’s side of the car once they parked and lifting him exaggeratedly into a bridal carry as soon as he tried to get out.

“Put me down, *put me down!*” Shane cried out in disbelief, squirming in Ilya’s strong arms while his cheeks grew impossibly hotter.

“No. Sleeping beauty needs to be carried,” Ilya teased with a wide grin. Shane just huffed and gave up the fight as Ilya strode towards the front door, not even the slightest bit out of breath or exhausted by carrying a grown man. He carried him all the way to the bedroom, dropping him unceremoniously onto the bed, then promptly crawled over top of Shane to capture his lips in an eager, slow kiss.

“Tonight was good, Shane,” Ilya murmured once he pulled away and gazed down at him with soft eyes. There was a gentle smile on his lips that made Shane’s heart warm inside of his chest and he couldn’t help but grin back as heat worked its way across his cheeks. “We will talk more with your parents tomorrow and everything will be taken care of. Now, the real question is... do we want to celebrate this tonight or tomorrow?” he asked suggestively.

Shane’s cock immediately twitched inside of his jeans while his stomach tightened in anticipation. The sleep that he had felt only minutes ago in the warm car was replaced by something hot, yearning, and twisting. They hadn’t had sex yet, not full penetrative sex, but if that’s what Ilya was trying to express they do to celebrate...

He let out a shuddering breath and whispered into the small space between their open mouths, “Now. I want to celebrate now. Please.” And, really, who in their right mind would say no to sex with Ilya Rozanov?

Chapter 9: Chapter Nine

Shane pulled his shirt over his head in a frantic movement before eagerly finding Ilya's lips again. He reclined against the pillows, one hand hooked behind Ilya's neck, and found that the Russian man had also gotten rid of his top while he'd busied himself with his own. Ilya groaned in approval into his mouth once their heated chests connected and Shane burned inside as Ilya touched him all over. He trailed his palm from Shane's jaw to his neck to his chest to his side, as if he was mapping the skin with his fingers and committing it to memory.

"You are so pretty, do you know that?" Ilya murmured against Shane's mouth, his lips tugging into a small smile when Shane just huffed at him and grumbled, "Shut up." That didn't stop Shane from sinking his fingers into Ilya's hair, though, and panting into the open air with a blush high on his cheeks as Ilya trailed his kisses down. Each press of Ilya's soft mouth against Shane's sensitive skin made him twitch and writhe on the bed.

He started to get particularly fidgety when Ilya left hot, open mouthed kisses just beneath Shane's belly button, above the waistband of his jeans. He could feel his cock jump with excitement and strain at the attention from the Russian man who was so close, yet so far away. Shane could feel Ilya smirking as the bulge in the front of Shane's pants grew more prominent, but Shane couldn't find it in him to care.

All he could focus on was the movement of Ilya's hands from his slim waist to the button and fly on his jeans just a few inches below. "Breathing so hard for me," Ilya teased softly. "Tell me what you want. Is it this?" Ilya moved one hand down to cup the front of Shane's jeans, palming him through the rough denim fabric, and Shane whimpered loudly at the contact. His stomach tightened with need and he nodded quickly, his fingers tightening in Ilya's curls.

"That's all you want?" Ilya practically purred.

"N-No, I want... *Please*, Ilya. I want *you*. Please touch me. *Anything*," Shane begged pathetically. His eyes were closed, protecting him from having to witness Ilya's reaction to his pleading, while his eyebrows furrowed and his lips parted to draw in uneven breath. Ilya simply hummed and undid the button on Shane's jeans with one hand before slowly drawing down the zipper. It felt like sweet torture.

As soon as Shane was exposed to the cool air of the bedroom through the thin fabric of his briefs, however, Ilya dove right in with his mouth and began to filthily drag his tongue over the black cloth covering his cock. Shane moaned loudly and threw his head back against the pillows as his legs drew up, bending at the knees, while his toes curled deeply into the bedsheets beneath him. Ilya's hands slid up and down the sides of Shane's jean-clad thighs while he teased at Shane's throbbing length through the cotton textile.

Shane was seconds away from crying out, "*Just take my pants off already!*" when Ilya's fingers hooked into the top of Shane's jeans and briefs and yanked both down roughly. Shane yelped at the sudden exposure and let his eyes fly open in shock at the abrupt change in temperature. His length slapped up against his stomach as soon as it was released and began

promptly weeping over the space below his belly button where Ilya had kissed him only moments ago.

Ilya shuffled back until his feet touched the bedroom floor, though his hands never left the waistband of Shane's clothes. He simply tugged and tugged until Shane was lying bare on the top of the bed with only his white crew-length socks on his body. Ilya beamed at whatever he saw while Shane blushed heavily at the attention and fought the urge to cover himself up with his hands. The sun hadn't crested over the horizon yet, but the sky outside was lightening enough that Shane knew his nakedness wasn't hidden in the darkness.

"Mm... so pretty," Ilya repeated. Shane just kicked a foot at him impatiently and pushed himself backwards on the bed to watch as Ilya spurred into action by removing the rest of his clothes. Shane had sucked Ilya off three times now. He knew the weight of Ilya's cock, the feel of its veins and ridges in his mouth, the taste of it in his throat, and the size of it around his lips. Having Ilya inside of him though, *really* inside of him, was going to be very different but wholly welcome.

Ilya fell on top of Shane and crawled over him with hungry eyes. His own leaking head left a trail of sticky precum on Shane's skin the further up he moved, but Shane didn't mind at all. As soon as Ilya's length collided with his own and slid over it with silky touch, all thoughts of how he was going to possibly take every inch inside of him went out the window. He was going to take it all or he would die trying.

Shane's hands curled over Ilya's shoulders once the Russian was settled atop of him and he wasted no time connecting their mouths once more, though this time with more tongue and swapping of heated breath. Ilya rocked his hips against Shane and grinned as soon as he managed to pull a wanton moan out of the Canadian man's throat. "So responsive. How sweet," he praised breathlessly.

"Are you going to fuck me, or what?" Shane growled, embarrassed by how Ilya was calling out his neediness. Ilya just growled in approval before gently slapping the side of Shane's hip in a quiet request for him to roll over onto his stomach. Shane was quick to obey and even found himself a little surprised when he shuffled up onto his knees with his shoulders still low so the perfect view of him arched and ready was presented to Ilya.

"Fuck," Ilya groaned, the 'uh' dragged out slowly as he marveled at the sight. His hands reached out to stroke both globes of Shane's ass, then crack down his palm on the right cheek with a pleasant sting. Shane lurched forward with a gasp, but immediately pushed back as soon as Ilya's palm smoothed over the mark. "Have you ever played with your ass before?" Ilya asked gruffly, his thumbs stroking closer and closer to the pucker between Shane's spread cheeks. He was a little mortified at the fact it fluttered with anticipation, but Shane managed to nod anyway in an answer.

"Y-Yeah, I... I've, like, fingered myself. And I have a, um... a toy. A dildo. In Montreal," he admitted flusteredly. Ilya stopped for a moment, then crawled over Shane's back with dark eyes and parted lips.

"What color?"

“Fuck off, come *on*, Ilya!” Shane hissed, pressing his ass back so it collided against the front of Ilya’s hips. The Russian just chuckled in amusement before he pulled away and reached towards the nightstand for a bottle of lube and a condom that Shane hadn’t known was in there. He swallowed hard and allowed himself to slip back into his needy headspace as Ilya cracked open the lube, dripped the silky liquid onto his fingers, then tossed the bottle to the side.

There was a pause where Ilya warmed the cool coating on his fingers, and then they were on the very place where Shane had never been touched by another person. He shuddered at the feeling and did his best to relax as Ilya took his time, rubbing the pads of his fingers over Shane’s hole in slow circles to ease the tension he was carrying. “Relax for me, Shane. I’ve got you,” Ilya promised softly.

His other hand slid up the curve of Shane’s back before resting at the base of his spine at the same time his middle finger began to sink inside of Shane’s body. Shane buried his face into the pillow, nerve endings singing at the gradual intrusion, and let out the most pathetic sound he had ever made in his life from pleasure. Ilya cooed at him in response and, if Shane’s face hadn’t been red before, it certainly was after that.

“Good boy,” Ilya praised. Shane fisted the sheets hard and pressed back onto the digit inside of him, welcoming Ilya in further until his finger was fully sheathed within him and curling down to stroke the bundle of nerves that only Shane had ever managed to find. His moan was louder then and stars danced across his eyes as Ilya continued to stroke what he found with shuddering breaths of his own.

When Shane fully relaxed and gave into the pleasure that Ilya was delivering, the Russian began to pump his finger in and out until Shane also accepted that with ease. One finger thrusting inside and curling soon became two, then three. By the time he felt fully stretched and tingly with ecstasy, Shane’s stomach had tightened to a level of warning that promised he’d come soon if Ilya didn’t give him a moment and withdraw his fingers. “I want you to fuck me, please, I’m close. I won’t last long, Ilya, *please*. Come on,” he keened breathlessly, twisting his toes and fingers into the sheets while Ilya carefully retracted his fingers and wiped the remainder of the lube over Shane’s hole.

He heard the crinkle of the foil package being torn open, a slight snapping down followed by skin working over skin, then Ilya’s steady palm was back on his tailbone. He rubbed his hand in a gentle circular motion and murmured, “So beautiful.” Shane swallowed thickly and felt the blunt head of Ilya’s cock press against his stretched entrance. He willed himself to remain as open as possible and sucked in a choked gasp when Ilya pushed slowly into him.

It was unlike anything Shane had ever felt before—a pinch of pain yet a feeling of absolute fullness. He could feel Ilya everywhere within him while his body actively worked to adjust around the length pressing deeper and deeper into his body. He doubted he could even clench if he wanted to. Shane gripped the bed sheets until his knuckles turned white while he let out shuddering, raspy little gasps to cope with the pleasure and ache.

When Ilya finally stilled, every inch stuffed within Shane, he asked carefully, “Is okay? I need to stop or slow down?” Shane dropped his head between his shoulders and shook it while he panted thickly.

“N-No, I just... *fuck*, I need a minute,” he whimpered. Ilya bent over slowly so as not to jostle Shane too much, then began to pepper soft kisses down the back of Shane’s spine while the cool metal of his mother’s crucifix scraped over Shane’s heated flesh. Shane moaned softly and leaned back into the press of Ilya’s mouth, then murmured, “Okay. I’m good.”

Ilya left a final parting kiss on his shoulder blade over the scar he had, then pulled back so he could rest on his knees and grip Shane’s hips. He drew himself out slowly, along with a guttural moan from Shane that made the Canadian man’s face heat instantly with embarrassment. Shane didn’t have time to remain that way, however, when Ilya pushed back inside with his first real thrust into Shane’s body.

Shane felt the air physically leave his lungs as he took the first stroke, then the next, then the third. His body slowly acclimated to the feeling until it was an easy slide in and out and his moans weren’t from being overwhelmed or getting used to the fullness, but rather from ecstasy that came with every nudge of Ilya’s cock against the sensitive spots inside of his body. Shane held on for dear life when Ilya really dug his fingers into Shane’s hips and began to drive home.

Short sounds of pleasure escaped Shane’s lips with each snap of Ilya inside of him and he watched through hazy eyes as his cock bobbed between his open legs and drooled onto the bed sheets beneath him. “*Fuck*, you’re so tight,” Ilya growled as he picked up the pace and reached down with one hand to grab Shane’s length. As soon as Ilya made contact with his swollen cock, Shane cried out and let his upper body collapse completely so he was face down in the sheets with his ass fully up.

Ilya stroked him in time with his thrusts, filling him over and over while his rough palm worked Shane’s dripping length. It was too much and not enough all at once. “Turn around. I want to see you,” Ilya suddenly demanded. Shane blinked at the sudden stilling of Ilya’s moments and let out a high pitched whine in protest, but then Ilya was rearranging them in a way that the Russian man was sitting against the headboard, Shane was in his lap facing him, and Shane was sinking down thanks to gravity on Ilya’s cock once more.

He wove his fingers into the back of Ilya’s curls at the base of his neck and lifted himself up with strong thighs while Ilya gripped the meat of his ass to help him up. When Shane slid back down onto Ilya’s cock, both of them moaned loudly into one another’s open mouths. Their eye contact was dark, desperate, and hot. They breathed each other’s air, swapped sounds of approval at the sensations both of them felt, stole kisses whenever they thought to do so, and eventually found a rhythm that brought them right back to where they had been.

Ilya began to jerk Shane again when Shane became steady with his rising and falling, his eyes never leaving Shane’s face, and praised him in Russian that Shane couldn’t fully decode. He knew the words *good*, *yes*, *fuck*, *I*, an unknown word that sounded like loo-blue or something, and *you*, but that was about all he could make out in his dazed state.

Their hands grasped one another wherever they could touch and Shane could feel his release growing closer and closer. He clenched hard around Ilya’s cock with each down stroke, the tip of Ilya’s length hitting his prostate over and over again. He tried to warn him as best as he could that he was about to come, but Ilya either didn’t hear him or didn’t care as he continued to curl his hand up and down while Shane rode him.

Shane came with a shout only three thrusts later and pulled Ilya close to his chest as he threw his head back in ecstasy. Ilya's tattooed arm curled around his back to support him in his last few lazy motions, and then Ilya was pressing himself in as deep as he could go while his cock twitched inside of Shane's body. Hot cum spurted from Shane's cock and coated the inked chest in front of him, though Ilya didn't seem to mind at all as he simply grunted hard with each gush of his own release into the condom he wore within Shane's body.

Neither of them spoke for a good amount of time while they rode out the aftershocks of their orgasms and held one another atop the damp bedsheets beneath them. It was Ilya who caved first as he let his forehead drop to Shane's shoulder and muttered, "You drive me crazy, Shane Hollander," then that same *I loo-blue you* phrase from earlier that Shane didn't know. He couldn't help but grin anyway to himself while he still tried to calm his breathing. He ran his hands over Ilya's back and slowly began to lift himself off of Ilya's cock, hissing softly at the loss that came while Ilya moaned at the sensitivity.

Once Shane was off of him completely and simply sitting in his lap, Shane reached up to cup the sides of Ilya's face and meet his eyes. "You drive me crazy too, Ilya Rozanov." Their lips met in a sweet kiss, slow and full of meaning, that seemed to go on for eternity until their skin became tacky with dried cum and their lips grew swollen from contact. They regretfully pulled away to clean up with washcloths, toss the used condom, and reset the bed, then found themselves roughly ten minutes later under the sheets with the cool air of the morning soothing their flushed skin from a window they'd opened.

Shane realized with a bright shock as he lay curled around the Russian man that he *liked* Ilya Rozanov. *Really* liked him. The four letter word that thudded in his heart threatened to travel up to his brain and change the phrase really like to something else, but Shane refused. There was no possible way. He'd never been *in love* with someone, but he was certain it took longer than a month and a half to be in love.

Besides, how was he supposed to know if these feelings would continue after this situation they were in came to a resolution? What if the singular reason why he liked Ilya Rozanov was because he was the only man around that Shane had? But that couldn't really be true, no. He liked Ilya for a handful of reasons outside of that. He liked his dry humor, how smart and quick he was with his thinking, how he genuinely thought about others around them and how they felt, how he wanted to be a better man than his father.

He liked that Ilya took him seriously. He liked that Ilya wasn't too big or strong to say no to cuddling, how Ilya always found time for him, how Ilya had torn apart a bedroom looking for him to keep him safe, how Ilya had been gentle with him during sex. Shane curled closer to the tattoos on Ilya's chest as he draped his arm and leg across Ilya's lower body. The Russian man just pulled him close and nuzzled his nose into Shane's hair.

"Was okay for you?" Ilya asked softly when a few moments of silence passed between them. Shane blushed hard and grinned against Ilya's skin.

"It was great," he admitted bashfully. Ilya chuckled and reached over with his other free hand to pull his cigarettes and lighter onto the bedsheets. Shane watched with lazy eyes as Ilya pulled out one of the slim white sticks, placed it between his lips, then lit it swiftly with his

lighter like he'd been doing it all his life—he probably had. “When did you start smoking?” he asked.

Ilya drew in a long breath from the cigarette then grasped it with the insides of his index and middle finger to exhale the white smoke out of the corner of his mouth away from Shane. “Mmm, probably fourteen or fifteen,” Ilya answered honestly. “My brother got me into it.”

Shane bit down on his bottom lip and asked, “Was Andrei always like this? Like... not that great towards you? Or was it just this decision by your dad that made him a dick?” Ilya snorted at that and turned his amused gaze to Shane who glanced up at him curiously. Ilya took another drag of his cigarette and sighed.

“He wasn’t always like this, no. We had fun together growing up. He taught me how to tie my shoes, how to shave my face, how to ride a bike, how to talk to girls... We were close. When my mother passed, things became more serious for our family. My father remarried because people thought he would be weak from it and my brother and I handled it differently. Andrei followed in my father’s footsteps, had his own arranged marriage, and turned to gambling and drugs. I was more... sensitive. I followed along but... I spent a lot of time with friends, trying to avoid them both, making allies of my own.”

Shane nodded and thought about his own friends back in Montreal. They were probably freaking out if they hadn’t already with his disappearance. He had no idea if he’d be back in time for the beginning of his last semester either and a small part of him wondered if he should go back at all. What if... what if he stayed in Moscow? With Ilya? *No*. No, that was insanity. He couldn’t. He had a life back home, a career to pursue, friends to see, a family to be with. Ilya Rozanov couldn’t change that.

“How long do we have until my parents get here?” Shane asked a minute later.

“Not for a while. We have time,” Ilya informed softly.

Good. He wanted nothing more than to stay in this sweet moment and enjoy it for as long as possible, even if his heart screamed at him that he was in love while his brain tried to reason that he wasn’t.

Shane fiddled with his glass of ginger ale while Ilya eased himself down into the seat beside him. Shane nervously glanced up to meet the suspicious eyes of his mother, though his father seemed to be more on the confused side of feelings than skeptical. “So, run this by us again?” David pressed once everyone was seated with their drink of choice at the kitchen table. They had both left their men outside of the cabin so they could talk frankly amongst each other, but Shane wasn’t going to lie and say he didn’t wish to have some extra reinforcements beside him at that moment.

“We want to attack Andrei and the Korenev family in Novosibirsk within the week. I have already sent letters asking for help from other families I am allied with and have all heard back positive responses. We want to attack, we want to take them down, we want to give the territory to someone who can be trusted, and we want to establish a new partnership,” Ilya recounted briefly.

Yuna stirred her coffee with her spoon and pursed her lips, clearly already having thoughts about the idea that were soon to be vocalized. Shane stared at her and finally asked her bluntly, “What? You obviously have something to say.” She shrugged and lifted her coffee mug to her lips, taking a long sip of it while everyone waited for her to get to whatever she was inevitably going to say.

“I just think...” she said once she placed her coffee mug back down on the table, “that you are going to need a lot of men on your side to attack the Korenev estate. We’ve been there and they are not messing around with the men they have, or the armory. If we’re attacking, we’re going to need to have a solid plan, and I want your guarantee, Ilya Rozanov, that my son will *not* be involved in that attack.”

Shane opened his mouth to protest, but Ilya cut him off with, “Of course. He will stay here and be kept safe.”

What?

Shane whirled around in his chair to stare at Ilya with wide eyes, but the clenched jaw and dark eyes set on Yuna told Shane that Ilya wasn’t going to argue on this. He was really going to leave Shane behind, after all of this, to go finish what Andrei had started—alone. The hurt that grew inside of Shane’s heart was sharp and unmistakable, even if he knew that he wasn’t exactly trained in the art of ambush attacks or warfare or killing someone else without feeling. He wanted to do something. He wanted to be by Ilya’s side. He wanted to help.

Shane slowly sat back in his chair and listened as the conversation went on around him. They talked about the layout of the estate, estimated men in participating, what weapons would be needed, required ambush strategy, and everything else that would need to be known if they wanted to pull off this plan. Shane glanced sidelong at Ilya and let his mind wander to a plan of his own.

Ilya Rozanov might be smart when it came to being the head of a mafia family, but he was an idiot if he thought Shane was going to stay behind and let this go on without him. His personal safety be damned, doing nothing was the last thing that was going to happen.

Chapter 10: Chapter Ten

Chapter Notes

CW // we are going to start moving into more of the mafia related themes with our main characters facing injury and distress. this fic does have a happy ending, however, so keep in mind that this will NOT be a hurt and no comfort/ resolution fic <3 it will all be good!

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

Shane sat outside of the office where Ilya and his parents were meeting and huffed loudly. Marlow and Connors sat next to him, typing away on their phones to most likely deal with business in Moscow that Ilya wasn't able to reach while they were in hiding. Shane let the side of his head drop into the palm of his hand and glanced over at the two men who sat casually in their chairs like they had no problem being left out of the conversation going on within. Shane sure had a problem with it.

“How do alliances form between two mafia families?” Shane asked abruptly. Both men glanced up immediately and looked at each other before meeting Shane's gaze once more. “Like, if they weren't allies before or maybe enemies who decide to become allies, how does that work? Is there, like, *'give me five million dollars and it's done'* talk or... how does it work? Because that's what they're doing in there, right?”

Connors was the one who shifted forward first to engage in the conversation while Marlow warily glanced at his partner. “There could be a lot of agreements set up to establish an alliance. Maybe it's a money amount, access to new suppliers on both ends, an arranged marriage like what Andrei did, the creation of a joint business, or an accord to split up land and get more territory after taking out a mutual enemy. It's rare that one person gets more than the other if you're trying to make an alliance. It's more like showing you can respectfully work together and see one another as equals,” Connors explained.

Shane nodded and flicked his eyes back to the closed door. “What do you think they're agreeing on? Considering you guys kidnapped their only son for leverage and everything, it's probably going to have to be something big on Ilya's end. He wants the trade route in Montreal reestablished but he's going to have to give something and apologize for me,” Shane pointed out.

Marlow raised an impressed eyebrow at that and nodded. “Knowing Rozanov, he'll probably give up some personal names that your parents can do business with and get a good profit from. It'll hurt to share that information since Roz likes to keep his dealings as private as possible, but he'll do it. He'll probably hand over a few guys to Montreal in good faith too, maybe even hand out some real estate in Moscow to your parents so they can plant people here to watch over us.”

Shane pursed his lips and shifted in the chair. “This is such bullshit. Obviously everything is fine between me and Ilya, there shouldn’t need to be that much given up just to say *I’m sorry*,” Shane huffed.

Marlow snorted and looked at Connors. “Yeah, everything’s *great* between you and Roz,” he teased suggestively. Shane’s cheeks immediately heated in embarrassment and he quickly flicked off the older man while giving his best glare that probably wasn’t actually good considering the two men just laughed harder. He went quiet again as he stewed over what Marlow and Connors had said about alliances. Shane didn’t like the idea of Ilya handing over information or land or people that were important to him just to avoid his parents coming back and deciding to take him out too. He and Ilya were good. They were very good. Couldn’t their friendship, or whatever the fuck they were calling the *thing* going on between them, be enough for his parents?

The door opened and Ilya slipped out with a tense jaw. He looked at Shane first and jerked his head in the direction of the office. “Your parents would like to speak with you,” he said formally, no room for argument. Shane frowned harder when he noticed the agitation in Ilya’s gaze but he didn’t comment on it as he rose to his feet and entered the office while Ilya closed the door behind him. Shane stood in the entryway, already silently fuming, and stared at his parents as they shifted in their seats to turn and look at him.

“What did you make him give you?” Shane demanded.

David glanced pointedly at Yuna who pursed her lips and turned back around. Apparently a conversation seemed to have been had between them before Shane came in. “We didn’t rob him, if that’s what you’re wondering. Why don’t you take a seat?” David welcomed gently, extending his hand to the open chair on the other side of the desk. Shane glanced nervously between them before deciding to comply and rounded the desk to sit where Ilya had. It smelled like him. He found comfort in the lingering scent and ignored the way his heart swelled in his chest.

“We came to an agreement. We’ll give him men to help him attack the Novosibirsk estate and bring down Andrei. We’ll reestablish an alliance and give him back access to the trade route that was cut off. In exchange, we take fifty percent of profits from product sold using the route and he marries the daughter of the Landry family, Rose, to prove good faith.”

Shane’s heart stopped beating inside of his chest.

“You remember the Landry family, don’t you? We’ve worked closely with them for years. We kind of hoped you’d end up with Rose, but... Anyway, if he breaks either of those things, we have the right to take him out and reinstate someone else in his position we trust,” David laid out. Shane was shaking his head before he even realized he was doing it.

“N-No, you can’t... you can’t *do* that. Ilya needs those profits, he needs that money from that route. He can’t pay his men and stay protected and keep up status and work out new deals without that money. And you can’t *make* him marry someone—he doesn’t even know her. That’s not right, he can’t—you can’t *do* that.”

“He’s already accepted, Shane. And you aren’t his keeper, either. I know you think you’ve made a nice friend here with him, but you’re going to come home once this is over and move on and start a normal life for yourself like you planned for years. We’re doing enough here with helping him in this because you’ve asked, but that’s all we’re doing. He should be so lucky we aren’t killing him afterwards for taking you, harmed or not harmed,” Yuna finally chimed in sharply.

Shane’s eyes were filling with tears in a panic he couldn’t describe. Ilya wasn’t just a nice friend. He was *more*. He’d gotten to know the man in charge around here and he liked him, he liked him a hell of a lot, and they had schools in Moscow. He could finish his degree here and get a job in Moscow and learn Russian and make better friends with Ilya’s men and—

And what?

That question alone made Shane suck in a sharp, wet breath of air.

What *did* he want? What did he want *here* that was suddenly so much more important than the life he had in Montreal? Montreal was home. His family and friends were there. Safety was there. Everything he knew was there. What had changed so quickly? What had made him suddenly so willing to give everything up and completely change his future?

The chance to be included in something bigger than himself without question? The opportunity to get close to someone he probably would have avoided in Canada? The feeling of being so valued when he felt so low of himself? The fact that he hadn’t even wanted to go into sports therapy at all and had just picked something because it was what was expected of him after his life had been ruined with hockey and now he found something he cared about? The startling realization that he was in love with a man he’d barely known for more than a month but wasn’t ready to stop knowing?

All of it boiled up into one catastrophic emotion, *panic*, and Shane didn’t know what to do with it. Sometimes, when his emotions grew so big and became too heavy, Shane just... shut down, and that was what he did in that very moment. So as his parents began to carefully explain to him what was going to happen when they attacked the Novosibirsk estate in five days, Shane went completely mute and stared at the space between his parents’ heads.

He didn’t want to go back to Montreal. He didn’t want to finish his stupid degree he hated studying for. He didn’t want to be left out and pretend his life was normal and forget that a whole other world existed on a different continent that he was a part of. He wanted to find something new here, see this problem and maybe a million more through, stay by Ilya’s side, master a third language, become something important to people, and figure out what he *really* wanted with his life.

“Shane. Are you listening?” Yuna called out to him.

He quickly met her eyes and hurriedly wiped away the tear that fell at that exact moment onto his cheek before anyone could catch it. “I understand. Excuse me,” he whispered. He rose before they could say anything and fled the room, pointedly ignoring the three men that were talking softly around the table, and hid himself away in the bedroom in the hopes that no one would bother him even if he figured Ilya would come after him eventually.

He tore off his clothes and padded to the bathroom where he slammed the water on for the shower and stepped under the frigid water before it even had the chance to heat up. Only under the safety of the stream could he finally let out the tears he'd been holding in. What was he even crying for? The fact that he was losing Ilya or the fact that he was losing himself? Everything he'd known about what he was going to do with his life had just crumbled within seconds when he really took a chance to be honest with himself.

The Université de Montréal, sports therapy, and French had all been safe choices for him when playing hockey fell through. His parents had been pleased with his choices, had backed him up on everything, had paid for whatever he needed, had kept him reassured and pliant. Now, though, Shane could acknowledge he'd only *ever* done it all because it kept his parents agreeable with him.

The thought of losing their favor on top of losing hockey had been too much at the age of sixteen. Even when he had told them he was gay, there had been a huge part of him that lived in fear of their possible reactions and that was saying something. That only made him cry harder under the water of the shower.

Sure enough, the sound of the bathroom door opening and closing signaled that Ilya had come for him. "Shane?" Ilya called softly.

"Go away," Shane murmured miserably, his words thick with emotion. There was a pause, some shuffling of clothes, then Ilya was under the spray behind him and wrapping gentle arms around his torso. "I don't want to go home. I want to stay here. With you," Shane finally admitted wetly a few minutes later. Ilya placed a few steady kisses up the side of Shane's neck and slowly shook his head.

"No, Shane. You have to go home. Things will be unsteady here after and I can't guarantee that I can keep you safe. The other mafia rings here in Russia... they will take chances while we are rebuilding in Moscow, and... *fuck*, I wish I knew how to say this better in English," Ilya huffed.

Shane sniffled and argued weakly, "I know what you're trying to say. They're going to try shit while you're weak, kick you while you're already down. I get it. But don't I get to choose? What if I want to stay here, even if it gets shitty, because it means that at least I'm with you? I want to know everything about you, about here, about this. It's the first thing in a long time I've actually felt a part of and I don't... I don't want to give it up. I don't want to give you up."

The shower was quiet as Ilya tucked his head over Shane's shoulder and rocked them gently in the shower, his tattooed arms glistening under the water. "Shane. This... what I do... there are things that I know you would be uncomfortable with seeing and doing. You could keep following me to meetings and talking with me about plans for the future and waiting for me at home while I take care of dangerous business, but is that really what you want?"

Shane shrugged and slowly turned in the shower so he could slide his hands over Ilya's shoulders and press their foreheads together. "I couldn't do the hurting and the dirty stuff and the negotiating in Russian, I get that, but I could do other things. I could keep records and

monitor transactions and organize meetings and take notes and do all the boring stuff no one else wants to do. I could help and be by your side and—”

“—But is that what you *want*?” Ilya pressed.

“I just want *you*,” Shane pleaded. He tilted his head up to finally meet Ilya’s eyes and let all of his emotions be seen by the Russian man in front of him—the hurt at his parents controlling Ilya’s fate, the disorientation of not knowing what his own future held, the fear from loving someone so fast so soon. Ilya’s face was firm yet gentle as he reached up to cup both sides of Shane’s face and wipe away his tears of internal agony.

“Okay,” Ilya whispered simply. “Okay.”

Shane had been up all night thinking, plotting, planning, and finalizing while Ilya slept soundly next to him in the bed they shared. The decision he’d come to was a serious one, but one that was something he could live with if it worked. He’d have to time it perfectly, he’d have to get at least some help, and he’d have to act fast before Ilya left for Moscow with his parents. Shane slid out of the bed while Ilya continued to doze beside him and padded to the kitchen that was abandoned in the darkness of the early morning.

He found the laptop that had been given to him, his second one thanks to the attack he’d delivered to Ilya in the bathroom, and opened it up to find the necessary paperwork he was looking for. It took some solid research considering they were in Russia, but he was determined and on a time crunch, so his efforts were calculated and direct. Ilya was a mafia boss, after all. He could probably get away with cutting some corners here.

There was a printer in the home office Ilya had and Shane wasted no time printing out his findings, stapling it, signing his name in the respective places, then setting the packet off to the side where he could grab it for Ilya later.

When he slipped back into bed beside the Russian man, the sun was just barely starting to rise in the sky and Ilya happily welcomed him with warm arms and a lazy smirk. “Mmm, I want to fuck you before I leave,” he said in that husky morning voice that made Shane weak in the knees. Shane just whimpered and allowed himself to be rolled onto his back languidly by Ilya’s sleepy hands while his inner anxiety flared beneath his skin.

Their sex was slow and meaningful as the sun crested the horizon. Ilya rocked into Shane with deep, deliberate strokes while his strong arms boxed Shane in on both sides to keep him focused on his blissed out face. Their breaths were hot in the shared space between their open mouths, their eyes drooped and heavy with passion, and their skin damp with sweat from the early exertion of the day.

When Ilya came inside of Shane with a strained groan, Shane lurched upwards to capture his lips and wrap his arms around the Russian man's neck. They kissed for an unknown amount of time, not that Shane cared, until Ilya softened enough to slip out of Shane's spent body and Shane's cum on his stomach turned tacky and cold. They shared a quick shower together just as the sun began to filter in through the bedroom window and Shane could feel his nervousness spike inside of his veins—returning tenfold despite the nice distraction of morning sex.

Ilya was about to leave for Moscow and Shane had to act. This had to work.

He tugged on one of Ilya's sweaters along with a pair of his own joggers after they toweled off from their wash and hurriedly padded to the kitchen where the packet of papers was. Shane had deliberately printed the forms in a small font that Ilya would likely struggle to read anyway if he really wanted to pay attention to what was written. Thankfully, the first page with the title at the top of it didn't require signatures either, so Shane flipped to the few pages where Ilya's name was needed and bit down on his lip when Ilya finally exited the bedroom.

Shane's parents were already waiting outside in their own car along with Marlow who was anticipating Ilya, but Connors leaned against one of the nearby walls to watch as Ilya tugged on his shoes and Shane shifted his weight from one side to another. Good. One person was here.

"Oh, Ilya, real quick," Shane finally forced himself to speak up. The Russian man turned his soft gaze to Shane and raised an eyebrow as he laced his dress shoes. "I, um, thought it would be better to be safe than sorry and printed out some forms that would allow me to start my next semester of university online before transitioning to in person. We don't know how long this is going to last, right? So I just thought, it might be safe to, um, have paperwork ready. I don't want to drag my parents back inside to sign it and I just need another signature, like a guarantor or something, to say that I need the online start. For university," he rambled.

Ilya frowned at how fast Shane was talking, obviously not following super well like Shane kind of hoped, but he nodded anyway and quickly glanced at the clock on the wall before trudging over to the kitchen table where Shane was standing. "Okay, sure. Is good idea, probably. Where do I sign?" he asked.

Shane was quick to point his finger at the signature lines and rush from one page to another before Ilya could read over what was written exactly. His blood was both hot and cold in his body as he watched Ilya ink his name repeatedly and sign a fate for himself that he had no idea of.

When he glanced up at Connors who was still observing from the nearby wall, Shane let his gaze linger and stared at the man with determination. Connors had narrowed his eyes, his jaw set and firm, and his expression was one that said with silent certainty *I know you're up to nothing good*. But then Ilya was pulling away and cupping the back of Shane's neck to pull him into a parting kiss full of tenderness and Shane's eyes fluttered away from the man who was practically glaring at him suspiciously from across the room.

Please help me.

“Levi is staying with you to make sure you are safe while we’re gone. Be good. We’ll be back in four or five days if everything goes well,” Ilya murmured against Shane’s mouth. He was smiling at him, so gentle and sure, and Shane’s mind chanted with a hissing tone *traitor traitor traitor* over and over at him.

“Be safe,” he managed to say without choking up. “I’ll miss you.”

Ilya just grinned wider and kissed the top of Shane’s forehead before he turned to grab his overcoat off the wall and head towards the front door. Connors stayed behind like Shane hoped. Shane licked his lips and slowly approached the man who had yet to follow his leader out the front of the cottage and whispered, “Please,” as he hesitantly extended the stapled documents out to the man with trembling hands. “It’s the only way I can protect him.”

Connors’ hard exterior shifted to something of confusion as he carefully took the packet of papers and read over the title typed in bold, capital letters. His entire face went slack with shock and he immediately looked back up with jarring concern. “Shane—”

“*Please*. You said it yourself that this can... this can help. He’ll give away too much if I don’t do this and I’m a Hollander too,” Shane begged, his voice barely audible. “Ilya *runs* Moscow. You can get these papers filed and official without all the other steps necessary for—for normal people. *Please*.” He could hear the tremor in his voice, feel the hot sting of tears building in his eyes, but he stood still in front of the man he barely knew and prayed to all that was holy that Connors wouldn’t press him too hard on this or deny him what he wanted.

“Do you understand what you’d be giving up in doing this?” Connors questioned in quiet argumentation.

Shane swallowed hard. “I’m not giving up anything.”

He watched from the front window of the cottage five minutes later as Connors strode to the SUV that was waiting for him with the packet of papers securely tucked inside of his suit jacket. Levi closed the door behind Connors once he slipped inside, then stood back as the cars slowly began to pull away from where they were parked and travel down the gravel path. When Shane could no longer see the cars and dusty wind they kicked up in their trail, he turned away from the window and numbly shuffled over to the kitchen table.

It was done.

The pen that Ilya had used was still resting on the smooth wooden surface along with Shane’s laptop that he had used just hours ago to print off the necessary legal paperwork for his own private plan. The signatures alone bearing the Rozanov and Hollander names would bypass any normal process it would take to file and officiate the documents, but Shane hoped the presence of Ilya’s right-hand man would help as well in finalizing his scheme.

The door shut loudly, startling Shane from where he was standing at the kitchen table staring at the pen. Levi casually made his way to the kitchen and shoved his hands in the front pockets of his slacks before leaning against one of the countertops with an unamused expression. “You know,” Levi began, “I thought you were an idiot for actually making peace

with being kidnapped and becoming fuck buddies with Rozanov, but I gotta say, Ilya's the bigger idiot for thinking he's going to win this attack and keep you out of it."

Shane's heart stopped cold in his chest as he turned to look at Levi.

His vision went slightly blurry and his breath caught in his lungs, but he remained where he stood and didn't move a single muscle while Levi's words sank deep into his mind. Levi cocked his head to the side and sighed deeply, like he was upset about what he was going to say next. "I actually thought you were pretty smart, too. I mean, the whole broken nose with a laptop thing hurt like fucking hell and I'm not over that, but it was smart. I really don't know if I should thank you or make fun of you then for keeping Roz so distracted that he hasn't seen what's been going on for the past month or whatever that you've been here."

Shane's spit was hard as he swallowed it down his suddenly dry throat. "What are you talking about?" he managed to choke out in a hushed whisper.

Levi frowned and set his hard gaze upon Shane, staring at him like he was the stupidest man on the planet. Shane wondered if he was in that moment. "You don't think Andrei fled with *all* of us, do you? He had to leave *some* people behind. He couldn't take us all to Novosibirsk and I didn't mind staying back if it meant his bitch of a brother got what he deserved in the end. You were unpredictable, yeah, but a blessing more than anything really. Man, Andrei was thrilled when we relayed the news that Ilya liked you—like, *really* liked you. Meant his baby brother finally had something he'd be scared to lose."

Shane realized with a sudden shock that Levi's Russian accent was gone. In its place was something distinctly Canadian. A hint of Montreal lineage. His breathing was becoming shallow and his heart was thudding loudly in his chest.

"Shane. Andrei *knows* they're coming. He *knows* you got left behind. Do you know how long it's going to take Ilya to drive back to Moscow, rally up whatever stupid fucking allies he has, and haul ass to Novosibirsk if he doesn't want to be detected at an airport? Two or three days," Levi said urgently, like he *needed* Shane to understand just how fucked he was now that he was alone.

"Do you know how long it's going to take me to drive you to St. Petersburg, fly privately to Novosibirsk, and let Andrei have his way with you before Ilya even knows you're gone? *Six hours.*"

Shane took a slow step backwards, his palm flat on the kitchen table, then another and another until his fingertips touched the cold metal of his laptop. Levi glanced down at Shane's hand and grimaced, as if he was saddened by the choice that Shane was quietly making. "I really don't want to shoot you, Shane. Andrei doesn't want you injured—that's his job—but I'll do what I have to. I really need you to come with me."

Shane watched as Levi reached into the waistband of his slacks and easily pulled out the gun from his side, a fluid motion that suggested he had no problem following through on the action he apparently didn't want to do.

“Why?” Shane asked severely, his eyes dark and words quivering on his tongue. “Why are you doing this?”

Levi’s look was sympathetic. “I really need this money, Shane.”

Shane grabbed the laptop without another thought and threw it as hard as he could in Levi’s direction before darting away from the kitchen at the same time a single gunshot rang out. He scrambled around the kitchen counter, staying low as tears poured down his cheeks in pure terror, and sprinted as hard as he could. His hand barely touched the front door of the cottage when another gunshot rang out, a searing pain ripped through the same knee he’d injured with hockey, and the world faded around him into nothingness.

Chapter End Notes

oops...

Chapter 11: Chapter Eleven

Chapter Notes

CW // we are going to start moving into more of the mafia related themes with our main characters facing injury and distress. this fic does have a happy ending, however, so keep in mind that this will NOT be a hurt and no comfort/ resolution fic <3 it will all be good!

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

Ilya sat in the middle of the large conference room that had been rebuilt in his Moscow estate the next morning and listened dully to the conversation going on around him. It was one of the few rooms that had been finalized in its refurnishing after Andrei and the Korenev family had trashed and torched the place. He looked around the room with tired eyes at the men and women seated at the oval table that had agreed to come together in his aid.

Shane's parents and Svetlana's father were the most notable ones, but he was relieved to see the faces of the Alipov, Paltsev, Dashevsky, and Volcek families as well that he had written to in hopes of getting their help. They had been discussing for the past three hours the best strategy of attack with maps of the Korenev estate laid out in front of them on the mahogany wood. The Hollanders had fifty men in Moscow, Svetlana's father could provide forty, and between the other four, a total of about three hundred men were going to be called on to serve. That didn't include the hundred or so Ilya could part with, much to his chagrin.

He let his mind drift to Shane and the uncomfortable fact that he'd only been able to spare Levi to watch over the Canadian man. His forces were too thin and too weak right now, not to mention he needed Marlow and Connors by his side for this. Even getting together a hundred men to send to Novosibirsk was putting him in a rather terrifying position. If he lost even half, or all of them, being able to protect his business and the ones he cared about would become a hell of a lot harder.

In all actuality, Ilya didn't really care if they decided to surround the house in the middle of the day and start firing all at once or ambush under the fall of night in targeted places on the property. He just wanted Andrei dead, his trade route open again, and all of this behind him. He had so much he wanted to do, so much he wanted to change, and he hadn't really been able to enact any kind of transformation of the family business since the death of his father.

All he'd done was get on the Hollanders' bad side, fall in love with their son, and scrap together a shitty team of other mafia bosses to kill his brother. Ilya bit down hard on his bottom lip and sat up in his chair when the sound of Yuna arguing with Sergei Vetrov registered to him a little too well.

“Alright, enough,” he finally snapped in Russian. Everyone went quiet and turned to look at him as he clenched his jaw. He glanced at Svetlana who nodded to him, understanding that the speech he was about to give was going to need translating for Shane’s parents and he trusted her to do the job. As soon as she shifted her body towards Shane’s parents and smiled tightly, Ilya began.

“We don’t have time for this, so we do the safest option which will save as many of our men as possible. We go at night and target the side entrances where they have less men stationed for patrol. We send our best first to clear a path into the estate as quietly as possible, then send in two hundred of our men, one hundred on each side. The other hundred stay outside, pick off stragglers, and watch for anyone who tries to run or alert anybody else.

“This isn’t going to be a competition for who can kill my brother first, either. This is get in, get out, leave no one alive. I want all of them dead and no one leaves until we’ve swept the place twice and are certain they’re wiped out. When that’s done, we leave fifty men behind, or whoever we can spare, to make sure anyone else who decides to show up and check things out meets the same fate.

“We come back with Andrei and the Korenev family in body bags, we break up the territory, we call it a day. This doesn’t have to be a complicated mission, but it doesn’t have to be a shit show either. We need communication at all times, we need as much ammunition as we can get our hands on, and we need a plan for what this is going to mean when it’s over. Can everyone agree to this?” he asked, wrapping up his plan while Svetlana finished quietly translating to Yuna and David.

Everyone nodded and chimed in that they could stock their men, get them to the estate by tonight, and be ready to go before the moon even reached its highest point in the sky. Ilya nodded and was about to move the conversation on to how they would break up the Korenevs’ illegal business ventures between all of them when the conference room door slammed open and a wild looking Marlow charged inside.

“It’s Shane,” Cliff said immediately. “He has Shane.”

Ilya furrowed his brows and asked exasperatedly, “Who? *Levi*? I know this, I left him with ___”

“*Andrei*, Roz. Your brother has Shane,” Cliff barked. Ilya blinked once. Twice. The words didn’t register to him at first, then they seemed to register *too* well as his hearing shifted to a high pitch ringing and his eyes went out of focus. Every part of his body felt completely numb at those four words. *Your brother has Shane*. He was faintly aware of Yuna standing up, shouting, waving her hands around, and David also rising to his feet with a stern voice of his own, but Ilya was... empty.

When strong hands suddenly grabbed his shoulders and shook him roughly, Ilya turned his attention to the wild gaze of Yuna Hollander who was bent over directly in front of him, fury evident on her face. “Where is he?! *Where is my son?!*” she demanded with tears in her eyes. Ilya was struck by how similarly Shane looked like her when he also got emotional. “Ilya Rozanov, I swear to God, if he *kills* my son!” she roared.

Ilya snapped out of whatever daze he was in as a new emotion of liquid hot rage flowed through his veins, stamping out the ice that had been there only a moment ago. “Everyone out,” he ordered immediately. Yuna let him go and stepped back, though her countenance was still vicious as she stared at him in a mixture of spite and desperation. David held her from behind, his own expression solemn and severe.

The conference room quickly cleared out of everyone but Ilya, David, Yuna, and Cliff.

“Where is he? Does Andrei have him or Andrei's men?” Ilya asked seriously. Cliff handed his phone off to Ilya who had no problems striding over to Shane's parents so they could all read what was on the screen. It was a frantic message from a man named Ivan, a younger man that answered to Connors and his part of operations for the Rozanov business, who had apparently been left behind in one of the makeshift set-ups bordering the cottage per Connors' request.

Ilya pulled up one of the two pictures that had been sent to Marlow by Connors and began to read through the screenshotted messages alongside Yuna and David.

Ivan: *I just heard two gunshots from the cottage, sir. I'm alert and watching.*

Connors: *Standing by.*

Ivan: *Levi's exiting the cottage. His mannerisms appear rushed and frantic.*

Ivan: *Levi's pulling the remaining car around from the back.*

Ivan: *Call Rozanov immediately. Shane's unconscious and bleeding heavily. He's being dragged out the front door by Levi. They're entering the car. Levi's taking him somewhere.*

Connors: *Fuck. He's in a meeting and I'm taking care of something at the registry office. I can't get a hold of him. I'm going to get Cliff involved.*

Ivan: *I've entered the cottage. There's a large pool of blood by the front door; two shell casings evident near the kitchen. There's a note on the kitchen table with blood on it.*

Ilya's heart was frantically pounding in his chest. Shane was hurt. Shane was seriously hurt and he hadn't been accessible as soon as it had happened. He was eight hours away in fucking Moscow of all places. He clicked on the other attached image Connors had sent along with the messages and let out a shaky breath as he read what had been left behind in Levi's handwriting.

My wife is sick. I need the money and I know you don't have it right now, Ilya. I didn't want to shoot him, but I aimed somewhere that wouldn't kill him. He's in Andrei's hands now. — Levi

“Get me my fucking phone,” Ilya seethed to Cliff as he stepped away from the now sobbing Yuna Hollander beside him. He clenched his jaw as David held his wife, whispering words of false promise that things would be okay while she fell apart in his arms. This was on him. This was all on him. If he hadn't fucking kidnapped Shane in the first place, gotten him involved here, and left him alone with someone he hadn't watched close enough—

Cliff left the room to find Ilya's phone as Ilya took his seat at the oval table and all but collapsed into it. He grabbed his mother's crucifix with one hand while the other painfully tugged at his curls. There was no choice. They had to leave tonight, they had to drive like hell, they had to attack, and they had to retrieve Shane. There was no telling, however, if they'd be leaving with the man he loved walking by his side or swinging in a bag.

Ilya clenched his jaw and closed his eyes. For the first time in a very long time, he parted his lips and began to pray in Russian to his mother and the deity above that he wasn't even sure existed but his mother had believed in. If there was any kind of divine intervention in this universe, Ilya pleaded with all he had that it kept Shane alive. For the sake of Shane's mother, father, and himself, Ilya *begged*.

Ilya sat in his office, two hours before they were intended to get on the road, and stared at his phone in front of him with dried tear stains on his cheeks. He dangled a nearly full glass of vodka with a cigarette in one hand and watched the dark screen with piercing eyes. If he had done the math correctly, Shane would have arrived in Novosibirsk an hour or so ago by private plane. He figured that's how Andrei wanted him transported considering the drive from Ladoga to Novosibirsk was longer than the drive from Moscow to Novosibirsk.

He'd contemplated flying himself to Novosibirsk, but they couldn't fit every man and woman on one plane, nor would that option keep their ambush hidden as they were still going to go forward with the attack at night scenario. Andrei would be alerted immediately if four-hundred-something Moscow mafia members touched down in Novosibirsk and then this would all be for nothing.

Ilya brought the vodka to his lips and swallowed a rather large mouthful before shoving his cigarette into his mouth next to inhale deeply. Before he could lose his courage, Ilya reached out and grabbed his phone from the table. He unlocked it swiftly, found the contacts app, and scrolled until his brother's name appeared in front of him along with the screen that informed him he was calling. This was a risk he was willing to take.

He tossed the phone onto the office desk after jamming his finger onto the speaker button and waited. It rang once, twice, three times, four times. He was about to really and truly start trashing the office if his brother didn't pick up, but the drolling dial tone suddenly cut off and a heavy sigh filled the room that didn't belong to him. "I wondered when you'd reach out," Andrei greeted in Russian casually on the other end. Ilya felt his blood boil at the apathetic tone spilling out of his brother's disgusting lips and he gripped the glass of vodka so hard, he swore he heard a crack.

"What the *fuck* have you done to him?" Ilya didn't recognize his own voice—the sinister freeze that left his tight throat and clenched jaw. Andrei hummed and shifted loudly enough that Ilya detected the movement. The sound of footsteps echoing on hardwood floors filtered in next, then the muffled sound of someone crying. Ilya knew instantly that it was Shane. He

rose to his feet and swallowed hard, the glass of vodka slipping out of his grasp and tumbling to the carpet beneath his feet.

“I haven’t done anything yet. Levi unfortunately got started with that for me, even though I asked him not to. All he’s done is cry since he got here. It’s annoying. Did he do this when you took him? Or did he immediately start sucking your cock?” Andrei asked offhandedly.

“Don’t fucking talk about him like that,” Ilya hissed.

“Or what? You’ll kill me?” Andrei snorted. It was quiet for a moment, then another disappointed huff. “Levi shot him in the knee, so he won’t be walking anytime soon at least. Would you like to talk to him before he can’t speak anymore?” Andrei wondered. Ilya felt his bottom lip tremble and he’d never felt so helpless in his entire life. Even when he had found his mother dead, it had been different from this—he couldn’t even see Shane. He couldn’t even see the man he loved.

He couldn’t mouth to Shane that it would be okay, that he was there, that he had him. All he could do was picture Shane in his head and the image that blurrily surfaced in his mind was one that sent hot tears spilling down his cheeks all over again. He refused to make a sound that let Andrei know how affected he was.

“Here, let’s see what he has to say,” Andrei decided before Ilya even had a chance to say yes.

There was another muffled sound of panic and a yelp before shuddering, wet breaths became bright and clear in Ilya’s ear. “Shane? Shane,” Ilya called desperately.

“I-I’m here,” Shane whimpered. “I’m here.” A pause, then, “Levi... Levi was in on it. He shot me in my b-bad leg, Ilya. My leg from college. I can’t—I don’t... I’m going to die here, aren’t I? *Oh my God.*” The crying started in earnest all over again and Ilya frantically looked around the office, like there was something here that would make this better or save him from the agony he was in.

“No, no, you’re not going to die. It’s going to be okay. I’m here, *moya lyubov’*, I’m here. Talk to me, where are you?” he asked in a state of pure distress. He just wanted Shane to keep talking. He had to keep Shane on the line. He had to know he was alive.

“I-I’m... I don’t know. I don’t know, it’s like... it’s like a b-big empty ballroom or something. It’s just me and your brother. I’m glad he doesn’t look like you. I don’t think I could h-handle it if he looked like you, Ilya,” Shane whimpered. Ilya clenched his jaw and shook his head, thankful at least for the fact that Andrei had dark hair, a fuller beard, and quite a few more pounds on him.

“Are you on speaker phone?” Ilya asked, quiet and desperate.

“No,” Shane whispered.

“Andrei speaks English but barely and not well. He keeps a gun on his right side, just a little bit behind his hip. I know you’re injured, but if you have to defend yourself and you can, I need you to get that gun, *moya lyubov’*. Can you do that? Can you do that if you have to?

We're leaving in a little over an hour. I'm coming to Novosibirsk," Ilya said as reassuringly and steadily as possible.

"I can t-try," Shane sobbed weakly. Ilya nodded.

"Okay. Okay. You stay alive for me, Shane Hollander. You stay alive and—"

"—W-Wait, no, *no*, I'm not done. *I'm not done!* P-Please, *don't—!*"

"—Shane? Shane!"

"Times up," Andrei hissed.

The line went dead and Ilya stared at the dark screen of his phone once more. In the next instant, he snapped the useless piece of technology up in his palm and hurled it at the wall, watching as the screen shattered into hundreds of tiny pieces. He slumped over the desk, cigarette burning dangerously close to his fingers, and sobbed.

Ilya wasn't going to make it in time to stop Andrei from hurting Shane. Even if he didn't kill him, he was going to be cruel, and there was nothing Ilya could do about it. He cried until his throat turned hoarse, salt dried out his skin, and his eyes swelled from pressure. When he had nothing left in him but a pathetic wobble of his wet bottom lip, a soft knock came to the office door.

"Go away," he croaked roughly. He wasn't ready to see or talk to anybody after the hell that was the phone call he'd just had with Shane. For all he knew, it could've been the last time he'd heard Shane's voice and it had been pleading words of fear on his lips. The door opened anyway and Ilya looked up with the best possible glare he could manage to find Connors peering in with wary eyes.

"Everyone's ready to go, Roz," Connors said quietly. Ilya sniffed and rose to his feet, hurriedly wiping off his face and smashing out the cigarette that had died once it reached the filter. He licked his lips and nodded, though found he could say nothing as his friend simply observed him from the entryway. Connors moved first by stepping the rest of the way inside and closing the door behind him. "How much do you love him?" he asked.

Ilya felt like he'd been slapped by the question. He knew that he felt deeply for Shane, that their short time together had opened up something warm and soft inside of his heart, but he hadn't actually voiced his affection plainly to anyone. After everything that had happened today, was there really any hiding for how Ilya felt? There was nothing he wanted more than Shane. Even if he had agreed to marry whatever woman Shane's parents required in order to save his own life and business, Ilya wanted no one other than Shane by his side.

It was selfish to want him when he should have a life of safety, quiet, and peace. Those things would never fully exist in his life if Shane stayed with Ilya, and yet, Ilya greedily wanted Shane to accept that anyway. He'd already stood up to his parents and said as much, though Ilya highly doubted he'd still be feeling that way after spending time with Andrei. Ilya grimaced at the thought all over again and shook his head.

"I love him very much. I can't think about him with my brother or else it's just... it's too much," Ilya breathed out shakily. Connors pursed his lips together and jerked his head in the direction of the window behind Ilya.

"There are roughly four hundred people packed into cars, trucks, and bikes ready to end this. We can get him back, Ilya, but we have to go. You have to pull yourself together if you want to get him back. This is more than just family betrayal or business now," Connors explained slowly. Ilya sucked in a deep, steadying breath and rolled his shoulders as he tried to come back to a state that suggested he hadn't been weeping alone in his office. He nodded once he felt ready, if he could ever feel ready after that call, then followed behind Connors when the man gave him a curt dip of the chin in agreement and opened the office door.

Ilya numbly strode through the hallways of the manor, some fixed and redecorated and others still ripped to shreds or burnt, and eased himself down the stairway so he could join in on the mobilization of people. The sight of Yuna and David standing close to the open front entryway made Ilya pause for the briefest of moments on the stairs and he knew, as much as it killed him, that he had to let them know about the phone call. They were livid with him, he knew that too, but this had to be done.

Ilya continued the rest of the way down without much feeling and muttered to Connors that he'd rejoin them in a moment, to go ahead and start sending people off on the road, then made his way as bravely as possible to Shane's parents. David saw him first and immediately squared his jaw while his lips morphed into a thin line in an attempt to appear stoic, even though Ilya had seen the dismay in his eyes only seconds ago.

Yuna turned to confront whoever David had seen and Ilya hated himself even more when the sight of Shane's mother, eyes red and skin pale, greeted his vision. She still had a hint of something vile and angry hidden within her gaze, but there was no fight in her posture as she limply faced Ilya where he stood. "We're ready to go," David said in lieu of greeting when Yuna said nothing.

"Good. I am too." There was an awkward pause as they all looked at one another and Ilya mentally prepared himself for what he was going to say next. It was going to be tough to admit that he had spoken to their son and knew without a doubt that he was in Andrei's grasp, but it had to be known. He opened his mouth to say just that when an unknown man, definitely an associate belonging to the Hollanders, stepped in to let David and Yuna know that their car was ready.

Ilya took the cowardly way out immediately and nodded at the same time they did. No. No, he wouldn't tell them. He wouldn't tell them that Shane was hurt, that he was afraid, that he thought he was going to die. He wasn't going to let them in on those few moments of fear between the both of them when Shane's parents already looked like their world was ending. Ilya couldn't do it. So he followed behind them as they exited the manor and trekked quietly to one of the many cars lining the teardrop driveway leading up to the front of the home.

Ilya reached out to shake David's hand as he walked them to their car, though Yuna ignored it and clambered in without another look back.

“I will do everything in my power to bring Shane home. I care about your son very much. He is very important to me. I want him alive and safe as much as you do,” Ilya stated as fearlessly as he could possibly manage. David stared at him for a long time, to the point where even Ilya shifted in discomfort and just barely stopped himself from looking away to avoid the unsettling feeling building up inside of him.

“Yuna and I could only have one child,” David revealed suddenly. “We thought about adopting, but we decided in the end to just focus on making Shane the best person we could. All we have is Shane, Rozanov.” David paused to let his words really sink in and resonate with Ilya before he continued seriously, “Promise me when we get through this, because I know Shane will still want to be with you when this is over, that you’ll *never* let something like this happen again, that you’ll love him the way we do and treat him like he deserves, that we can trust you with our only child—with all we have.”

There was no hesitancy when Ilya boldly swore, “I promise.”

He would rather die.

Chapter End Notes

we're coming to the cottage? nah, baby, we're coming to Novosibirsk >:3

Chapter 12: Chapter Twelve

Chapter Notes

****TW//** Violence, blood, injury of a major character, implied maltreatment of a captive, death of minor characters

As Ron Weasley once said, "You're gonna suffer, but you're gonna be happy about it." ;)

Side Note: I have decided to change the names of Alexei to Andrei and Marleau to Marlow to better represent their book characters and have made appropriate changes to previous chapters and all chapters going forward xx

Shane sat slumped over in the same chair he'd been in since Levi had dumped him at the Korenev estate. If he hadn't thought it before, he definitely thought it now—Andrei Rozanov was the worst man he'd ever encountered. He blinked slowly, his breathing slow and wet, and stared at the arm that hung awkwardly at his side. He'd taken enough anatomy courses and physical therapy classes to know that his arm, just like his knee with a bullet still in it, was completely fucked.

If he really wanted to get specific with it and ignore the agony that his brain had been scrambling to cope with for the past two days or so, he could go through every broken bone and create a treatment plan for someone in his situation. But even breathing was painful, so Shane decided to focus on that instead. Aside from the arm that would absolutely need rehabilitation to use, his collarbone was numb from the inevitable fracture he'd received and his ribs were, for lack of a better term, annihilated. He was certain there were one or two cracked, possibly fully broken, but he wasn't certain.

Shane hadn't moved from the slumped position he was in considering it was the only position he'd discovered that hurt significantly less than others. That wasn't really saying much though. He blinked again lazily and watched as a drop of blood fell from his caked nostril onto the denim of his jeans. There was a dark brown puddle that had formed just above his unharmed knee from the red liquid slowly seeping out of his injured nose. It wasn't broken, but there was a gash on the bridge and damage inside that had resulted in the steady oozing.

He had all of his teeth at least. His eyes weren't swollen either which was a silent blessing. He could still see what was going on, even if he really didn't want to. Everything hurt. Everything screamed at him. Everything protested with even the slightest movement he'd made. Shane had grown up playing hockey—good hockey—so he knew how to take a beating and breathe through pain and mentally overcome his suffering, but he had to admit that this was far beyond anything else he'd ever experienced.

Torture, he'd come to discover, was excruciating and long. He wouldn't wish this on his worst—okay, no, that wasn't right. He *would* wish this on Andrei if it meant he got the chance to watch. He didn't think he could hurt anyone the way he'd been hurt like this, though. Shane swallowed thickly and tried to move one of his fingers in his injured arm with no luck. Instead of movement, a sharp jolt of torment shot up to his equally miserable collarbone.

He sucked in a shuddering breath which angered his ribs and sent more tears to his eyes. He'd been crying silently nonstop since this all began. If he was being honest, he was surprised Andrei had kept him alive this long. He figured, if he was to have an evil mind for a change, that Andrei would probably keep him alive right up until Ilya was almost there, then finish it. Shane let his mind drift to the man he loved. The thought of Ilya was the only thing that brought him comfort in his pain.

In Russia, an everyday normal person couldn't just sign marriage papers online and send them in the mail and make it official between two people. They had a thing in Russia, the zigzags or zags or something or whatever, that required in-person appearances to complete the necessary paperwork along with an affidavit of no impediment, an application form, passports, witnesses, and finalization with an officer approving everything along the way.

If the person trying to legally get married in Russia *also* happened to be the most prominent mafia boss in Moscow with close connections to politicians, businesses, forgery artists, and other sneaky individuals... that changed some things. Shane had put it all together the morning before Ilya left.

He'd frantically searched *what marriage documents do I need for Russia if I live there?* on his laptop and began printing, scanning, copying, and finding everything he needed for someone to *technically* get married at the Civil Registry Office had they been there in person with the bare minimum. He'd printed a copy of the marriage application form online, scanned their passports that had been tucked away in one of the office drawers like Ilya liked to do, and managed to find a website that could translate every piece of paper into Russian for whatever poor individual was coerced into notarizing it all.

He didn't stop there, though. He printed documents that confirmed their single status and lack of divorces for both of them, provided proof of his stay with Ilya through a hastily typed up recount of his time in Russia that Ilya himself had—albeit unknowingly—signed in confirmation, and even made copies of the original reports Ilya had shown him of the Hollander family businesses in Montreal to provide further mafia-related leverage for their highly illegal marriage.

Everything was there in one giant stack of papers that Shane had hurriedly put together the morning before Ilya left. When he'd handed the papers off to Connors, he'd seen the recognition and understanding in the man's eyes of what was being asked. The bolded words on the front page were in Cyrillic, but Shane had translated them from the English version that said OFFICIAL RUSSIAN MARRIAGE APPLICATION—MOSCOW.

Connors was smart. He would flip through the pages, he would see what Shane had put together, he would understand what was being asked. He would see to it that it was done by whatever means necessary, whether that be money, blackmail, or even what Shane was

currently being subjected to. Even if he didn't survive this, Ilya would be legally bound to Shane and, in turn, the Hollander name. He wouldn't allow his parents to hurt Ilya after all of this, even if he wasn't alive to ensure it.

Had he known he was going to be kidnapped for a second time and beaten beyond sense by Andrei Rozanov? Absolutely not. But the action had been done out of a deep sense of care for Ilya and his wellbeing all the same. So Shane watched the blood drip from his nose, tried to move his finger again, and took in a shallow breath as he thought about the Russian man he loved.

It was nearing nightfall outside, a fact that Shane only knew because one of Andrei's henchmen hadn't closed the drapes all the way on one of the nearby windows, and no one had come to see him for a solid few hours. Shane had also had the pleasure of meeting the Korenev family, the bland looking individuals who had welcomed Andrei into their home and given him a shit ton more power than they probably initially anticipated.

Boris and Natalya Korenev were unremarkably plain. They were a little older, likely in their mid forties, and appeared to have lived a life of little emotion as their faces didn't twitch one way or another and their eyes showed no sign of anything as they conversed or observed. They looked like people who had grown up during hard times and never knew good times—wholly unaffected by the world around them and the people in it. Shane partially wondered if they didn't mind giving control to Andrei considering they seemed so uninvested in the world they surrounded themselves in.

He also wondered if they'd even care if Andrei or Ilya were to shoot them dead. It might be the first joy they'd ever feel, really. They hadn't stayed long to watch Andrei have fun with Shane. They'd simply spoken in hushed Russian with those unseeing eyes, stood politely to the side, then murmured something else before turning away and leaving their guest to it.

The sound of muffled commotion outside the room Shane was in slowly registered to him once he managed to pull his thoughts away from the assholes keeping him hostage. He lifted his head as best as he could without causing too much pain and shifted his eyes to the double doors that Andrei entered and exited through. A set of feet running down the exterior hallway came next, then everything seemed to go quiet before the first stifled gunshots rang out through the manor.

Shane lifted his head further and let his breathing pick up despite the shocking pain that wracked his body as a result. Ilya was here. Ilya was here and he was coming for him. Shane swallowed hard and licked his chapped lips as he slowly shifted his body in the direction of the double doors. His ankles were bound to the chair he sat in, but he could at least make himself as accessible as possible whenever someone from Ilya's side found him.

He listened as everything went on around him, his eyes flitting over the walls and doors while his brain tried to make sense of what he was hearing, and determined that people had entered the estate with every intention of firing to kill. Shot after shot rang out until they became overlapping and all at one alongside shouting in Russian, screaming in distress, and footsteps thundering on hardwood.

Shane didn't know how long these things were supposed to take. Minutes? Hours? Days? He really hoped it was on the shorter side because, on top of the pain and everything, he was starving and dehydrated and in desperate need of a shower. He sat, listened, stared, and struggled to find anything that could tell him what was going on. Was Andrei losing? Was Ilya? Levi had said that the Korenevs and Andrei knew Ilya was coming to attack, but had he meant that in the *'They know exactly what day and time they're attacking'* way or the *'They know Ilya will attack for taking you'* way?

The entryway he'd been watching suddenly burst open and all hope Shane had that it would be Ilya coming through the other side vanished. The wild and angry eyes of his brother met Shane's gaze instead, and then he was stalking forward with vicious intent that made Shane whimper and push back as far as he could into the chair he was in.

"How many men he have?" Andrei demanded as his hand shot out and gripped Shane's injured shoulder. He cried out immediately in agony, stars dancing across his eyes from the misery of it all, and shook his head.

"I d-don't know! *I don't know!*" he swore through a sob. *Please don't kick my injured knee again. I think I'll pass out if you kick it like you did last time,* he thought pathetically to himself. Andrei released his shoulder with a hard enough shove that Shane's chair went tilting. His eyes went wide while his toes scrambled to find the floor, but the push was just a little too much as the chair tipped backwards and crashed against the hard wood with a crack.

Shane yelped at the hard collision with his aching ribs, busted knee, and mangled arm, and did his best to breathe through the excruciating pain coursing through his body. He was sobbing loudly but he didn't care. Ilya was definitely here. He had to stay awake, he had to fight a little longer, he had to remain alive. Andrei coming in here to demand information probably meant that something wasn't going the way he hoped which was a good thing for Shane.

"You know he get help? You know?" Andrei pressed in his broken English. Ilya's was so much better, so much smoother. Shane allowed himself a small bit of comfort in acknowledging that Ilya was yet again different in some way from the monster of a brother standing in front of Shane. When he looked upon the face of the man he loved and listened to the honeyed words that spilled from his lips, Shane would only ever think of Ilya and never of Andrei Rozanov.

"N-No, *no*. I-I didn't—you've had me *here!*" Shane explained through sniffles and groans. God, he sounded pitiful. He'd always considered himself to be strong with his emotions, or at least around people he didn't know, but there was a certain threshold he seemed to have for keeping it all in when pain was involved. Andrei didn't appear to like the answer as he practically roared in displeasure, spinning around on his heels to run his hands through his hair and yank on the curls.

He began to spit things in violent Russian that Shane couldn't easily follow, so he simply closed his eyes and allowed himself the opportunity to cry against the hardwood floor as he dreamed of Ilya. Everything hurt. He was so tired. He just wanted to go home—Moscow, Ladoga, anywhere that wasn't fucking Novosibirsk. If he had it his way, he'd never step foot in this godforsaken city again. The sound of footsteps rapidly approaching him made Shane's

eyes fly open once more and he hurriedly began to protest when Andrei grabbed the chair and yanked it back up to a seated position while Shane all but wailed at the movement.

Andrei speaks English but barely and not well. He keeps a gun on his right side, just a little bit behind his hip. I know you're injured, but if you have to defend yourself and you can, I need you to get that gun, moya lyubov'.

Shane gritted his teeth and took in as deep of breaths as he could manage to both build his courage and work through his misery. He lifted his chin in challenge, his dark gaze meeting the furious eyes of his captor, and murmured, "You will never be half the man Ilya is." He could tell that Andrei didn't understand what he had said because of the low volume, and the English, he had deliberately used and Shane knew he was taking a risk on whether or not Andrei would care enough for him to repeat it.

Thankfully, the idiot growled and reached out to snatch up Shane by the jaw, forcing his head back uncomfortably as Andrei stood taller and hissed out, "What?" Shane winced, but indulged the man anyway with as much venom as he could possibly muster. He hoped he would make Ilya proud with this.

"Tvoy brat... luchshe... tebya," he said in slow, deliberate Russian. *Your brother... is better... than you.* Andrei's eyes went wide with rage, but it was all the hesitancy Shane needed as he shoved his good hand into the side of Andrei's pants, yanked out the gun he found there, shot it blindly four times into Andrei's gut, then continued to fire between himself and the Russian man now staggering backwards.

Shane squeezed his eyes shut tightly and discharged the weapon without stopping, his head tilted to the side to avoid the sound while his mouth clamped down in a fierce grimace, until the magazine ran out and only empty clicking filled the room. Shane shivered alone for what felt like ages. His grip on the gun was tight, probably turning his knuckles white if he cared to look, but he refused to drop it.

Only his frightened breathing echoed around him as his adrenaline began to crash and the realization of what he'd just pulled off sank into his bones. He slowly opened his eyes and jerkily shifted his gaze to the side of him until the sight of Andrei's lifeless body on the floor came into view. Shane whimpered and hurriedly looked away. He didn't want to see it.

The gun clattered to the floor without him intending to drop it, but his body suddenly felt horrendously weak. He'd killed a man. He'd killed a bad man, yes, but he'd taken a life all the same. His breathing picked up, his heart raced manically in his chest, and his thoughts began to spiral with the gravity of his actions. Everything hurt. Everything was cold. Everything was frightening. Everything was too much.

He slumped over in the chair, promptly threw up on the floor beside where he was sitting, then cried as the pool of blood belonging to Andrei Rozanov silently extended to touch the bottom of his left foot.

Ilya tore through the estate with zero emotion. His body was thrumming with energy and coiled tight like a spring. His gun was an extension of his arm and the trigger just another finger on his hand. The gear he wore was tactical, black, and heavy enough to keep him tied to the ground instead of somewhere else in the world. He stepped casually over fallen bodies, rounded corners with sharp eyes, and fired at anyone he encountered without flinching. All he could think of was Shane and the fact that no one had found him yet in the massive property.

Their plan had gone well with the initial ambush, but the Korenevs and Andrei had been well prepared. They had anticipated that Ilya would attack within the few days following Shane's capture, though their assault at night with about three hundred more men than likely expected had sincerely caught them off guard. So Ilya worked his way through the bastards keeping him from Shane while the men on his side followed eagerly in his path.

There was blood coating his skin that wasn't his own. He'd had a few close encounters that had required some hand to hand combat in order to disarm whoever he was up against, but the soreness on his forearms and cheekbone from one solidly landed punch felt numb now as he ascended up the stairs. He kept his gun extended in front of him and fired as soon as he spotted movement, ignoring any instinct to hesitate or wait to see who it was.

Ilya just continued on. His heart thrummed to the beat of *Shane Shane Shane* as he rounded the next corner on the second floor and came face to face with the man himself that had brought his Canadian lover to Andrei's cruel hands. Levi looked frantic and unsteady as he smacked Ilya's gun to the side at the exact same time Ilya pulled the trigger. They both watched the heavy object clatter on the hardwood floors and skittered off to the side from the force of being fired.

"*Disgrace*," Ilya growled venomously once he turned his attention back on Levi. He reached down to pull one of his combat knives from the side of his thigh harness and held it up in silent challenge while Levi did the same.

"I did what I had to do," Levi hissed back. For a moment, neither of them moved, then Ilya launched into action, channeling every ounce of hatred he had in his body towards the fight he was about to engage in. Their scrap was one of quick reflexes, huffed breaths, practiced dodges, and blocked swings. They moved down the hallway with Ilya pushing Levi hard while the lying snake backed up repeatedly to avoid being caught by Ilya's blade. There was only so far Levi could go, however, before he was both physically and metaphorically backed into a corner.

Levi brought his knife in a harsh arch through the air towards Ilya's throat, but the Russian man simply dropped his own knife from one hand to another before using his newly free arm to block the swing and thrust his weapon upward into Levi's lungs. The sound of shock confirmed that Ilya had struck true while Levi jerked back and hit the wall behind him with a clatter. Ilya stared deeply into Levi's eyes, his jaw clenched and gaze burning, to watch as the light began to fade.

“No money in the world could have bought you freedom from my revenge,” Ilya sneered in cold Russian. Levi dropped the knife he had been holding, but Ilya was quick to snatch it up halfway through its descent to the floor and redirect the sharp metal directly into Levi’s heart. A punched, wet gasp left Levi’s lips and Ilya stepped back then to watch as the man slid down the wall, weakly grasping at the handles of the knives to no avail, before sagging heavily.

Ilya continued to step backwards, his eyes never leaving Levi’s body, until he found where his gun had fallen on the floor from being disarmed. Shouts of command, echoing gunshots, and cries of pain filtered in around him from the attack still very much going on, but Ilya simply held up the gun and fired three times into Levi’s drooping silhouette to make sure he really wasn’t getting up.

Four gunshots in rapid succession to the right of him pulled Ilya from the moment he was in and instead to the hallway that was empty at his side. He sniffled hard, steadying himself, then lifted his gun again as he pressed forward. There was no one on the second floor, or at least, not in the hallways, as the majority of the opposing men were battling Ilya’s people on the first floor still or firing out of upper story windows. He pressed forward cautiously anyway and reached up with one hand to activate the communication walkie on his right shoulder.

“Marlow, this is Rozanov. Anything?” he asked quietly.

“Negative. Try a different channel,” Marlow responded breathlessly, the sound of active fighting filtering in around his voice. Ilya switched the dial on his walkie and repeated the question to four other men only for all of them to have the same response—nothing for Shane. Ilya opened the first door in the hallway he encountered and quickly looked around, hoping to find any sign of his lover or Andrei. It was empty and quiet.

He pursed his lips and backed out before going to the next door that was shut. There was a man shooting a rifle from the window that hadn’t noticed his entrance, so Ilya took him out quickly without any fuss and returned to his search. The third door was actually a set of double wooden entries and felt different as he grasped one of the gold doorknobs to enter. The sight that greeted him filled him with both relief and horror.

Shane was sunken in a blood-caked wooden chair with the lifeless body of Andrei sprawled out in front of him in a pool of dark liquid.

Shane.

Ilya dropped his gun immediately and sprinted for the man he adored without a second thought. He collapsed onto his knees in front of Shane and reached out frantically to grasp the sides of his lover’s face and assess whether he was alive or not. Shane blinked heavily with glazed over eyes while wet, shuddering breaths escaped his lips. Ilya’s heartbeat shifted to a new tune of *alive, alive, alive*.

Ilya hadn’t been aware that he was talking until Shane whispered back to him, “I’m o-okay. I’m okay. I love... I love you too. I l-love you too...” Ilya went to wrap him up in his arms

only for Shane's sharp cry of anguish to stop him instantly in his actions and force him to pull back with wild eyes.

"*Moya lyubov'*... My God..." Ilya breathed out when he fully evaluated the state that Shane was in. There was blood everywhere mixed with dried sweat, tears, grit, and sickness. His nose had a deep gash on the bridge of it, his eyes were swollen and red from crying, a bruise was blooming on his left cheek, his right arm was horrendously mangled beyond belief, the matching collar bone definitely didn't look okay, both knees were bloody—though one was significantly more stained in his jeans than the other, and his body was bent in a way that suggested his ribs had been affected by his ordeal.

Ilya flailed for the walkie on his shoulder and rapidly spat out, "I have him. Second floor, right corridor, third door. I need help. I need... I need a lot of help."

Shane whimpered and asked nervously, "That b-bad, huh?" Ilya just cupped his cheek again gently and connected their foreheads together while Shane melted into his touch.

"I've got you. You're safe. I love you. I love you. Hold on for me a little longer, yes? I'm here, Shane. I'm here," he soothed as best as he could. His own body was shaky and his heart felt like it was going to wither away in his chest from the sight of Shane in front of him. He couldn't even say that he would kill whoever did this to him, because one look over his shoulder at the silhouette of his brother, and Ilya knew Shane had done it himself. He felt so many emotions in that moment as he held Shane and heard the thundering of footsteps rushing down the hall behind him.

Pride, fear, shame, rage, love, relief, anguish, anxiety. All of it swirled around him while Shane simply cried softly into his touch and released soft sounds that reflected a mixture of agony and alleviation. He had to get Shane help. They couldn't make it back to Ladoga in a timely manner and they certainly couldn't drive Shane all the way back to Moscow in his current state, but they had to find *some* kind of help for the man he loved. Ilya felt he might die if they didn't help Shane.

Ilya carefully let go of Shane's face and pulled back once a group of men on his side entered the room and immediately took positions to defend it. Marlow was one of the few on the scene and he also seemed to be as affected by Shane's condition as Ilya was if the sudden whiteness of his face and widened eyes were any indication. "He needs Mikhail. Find doctor Mikhail and get us somewhere we can go—somewhere we won't be found," Ilya ordered roughly.

"We're going to have to drive, Roz," Marlow stated, his dilated eyes stuck on Shane in shock. "Can he...?"

"Those are *orders*, Cliff!" Ilya shouted. That appeared to snap Marlow into action as the man immediately turned around and reached for the walkie on his shoulder with a barrage of questions for whoever was on the other line. Ilya focused on the bindings around Shane's ankles and whispered soothing words in both English and Russian to the Canadian man as he worked to free him. As soon as Shane was no longer tethered to the chair, Ilya reached out and murmured, "I have to pick you up, Shane. Is going to hurt. I'm so sorry. I'm so sorry, forgive me."

Shane began to sob in interest, but he had no fight in him as Ilya curled his arms around Shane's back and under his knees to lift him into the air. The ragged scream of pain that Shane let out only cracked Ilya's heart further inside of his chest, but it was necessary. He had to get Shane out of the house, he had to get him help, and he had to get him safe.

"You shoot any threat you see and you keep us safe! We need to get back to the cars!" Ilya commanded of the men around him. They all responded with *Yes, sir!* and made a tight formation around Ilya and Shane as they began to flee the estate. There was still gunfire, still shouting, still bloodshed going on around them, but Ilya paid it no mind as they hurried back down the stairs, ducked around gunfire, and fled through the estate towards safety.

"Car is ready with Mikhail and there's a hotel in Tulinskii thirty minutes away we can hide out in," Cliff barked behind Ilya as they moved. Ilya was pretty sure Shane had passed out from the pain of being jostled in his arms based on the way his body had turned to dead weight within Ilya's grasp and his pained sounds had gone quiet, but all that mattered was getting him to safety with adequate medical care. So Ilya nodded curtly, sent a *thank you* to whoever was listening up above, clutched Shane a little tighter to his chest, and ran.

Chapter 13: Chapter Thirteen

Shane's eyelids were heavy as he slowly blinked them open. His surroundings appeared fuzzy while his hearing filtered in muffled sounds that slowly grew in clarity. He was vaguely aware that his body felt numb, even when his brain told him that he'd been horrifically brutalized the last time he'd been conscious. He made a soft noise of confusion as he attempted to make sense of what was going on around him, then the warm contact of a gentle palm against his cheek was there and everything felt a little better.

"Ilya?" he whispered, his voice scratchy and dry.

"Shh... Easy, *moya lyubov*! You're okay. I'm here," Ilya's soft voice responded. Shane blinked a few more times and waited impatiently for the foggiest of his vision to clear. Slowly, the sight of Ilya's haggard face began to materialize with definition mere inches in front of him. It was the best thing Shane had seen in days and he couldn't help it when the tears of relief began to well up in his eyes. "Are you in pain? Mikhail—"

"No," Shane choked out. "No, I'm... I'm so happy to see you."

Ilya nodded once he understood and began to pet his cheekbone fervently with his thumb while Shane came a little bit more into himself. He looked around the room slowly and began to piece together the fact that they were in a hotel of some kind. There was another queen sized bed beside the one he was occupying, though bags of medicinal equipment covered the plush comforter along with sprawled out papers, guns, and dirty clothes. He shifted his attention to the sofa across from the other bed and let out a shuddering breath of relief at the sight of his parents asleep on the cushions, leaning against one another like they hadn't rested in days.

Marlow and Connors talked softly by the front door of the hotel room, someone was washing their hands in the nearby bathroom, and two men with rifles stood at attention at the window overlooking whatever city or town they had found themselves in. "Where are we?" Shane asked once his gaze found Ilya's once more. He was a little stunned to discover that Ilya himself looked like he hadn't slept and that his skin held evidence of tear tracks alongside his red eyes.

Ilya had been crying.

"A town called Tulinskii, about thirty minutes away from downtown Novosibirsk. We're safe. They're dead, all of them. We didn't pull our men out until we were certain no one was coming or going," Ilya swore. "You were very brave, Shane. I'm so proud of you. I'm so happy you're alive and here. I was so worried. When I heard that they—that they took you —"

Shane blinked rapidly as tears began to swim in his vision over the way Ilya was getting choked up in front of him. He'd never seen Ilya cry or show this kind of emotion, this kind of distress, before. He reached up with stupid coordination to wrap his fingers around Ilya's wrist and steady him while Ilya dropped his head and buried his face into the sheets beside

Shane's otherwise limp body. If anybody in the room caught on to the fact that their leader was silently sobbing into the bed his lover was reclined in, they didn't show it or comment on it.

Feeling a little helpless at the scenario playing out in front of him, Shane did his best to murmur reassuringly, "I'm okay. I'm okay," until the person washing their hands in the bathroom stopped and entered the room.

It wasn't a man Shane had seen before, so he tensed automatically which drew Ilya's attention away from the private moment they were sharing. He instantly felt guilty for his reaction when Ilya had been so unguarded, so trusting of the space they shared, but the man that had intervened seemed important as Ilya straightened himself out by fixing his posture and hurriedly wiped his free hand across his face. As soon as he deemed himself somewhat presentable, Ilya dipped his head towards the man then turned his attention back to Shane.

"Shane, this is... this is Mikhail Andreev, one of the doctors I keep on hand for myself and my men if we face injury. He saved your life and I owe him everything," Ilya introduced with a rather wobbly voice. Mikhail didn't acknowledge it, nor did Shane. "Mikhail, will you, um... Will you tell Shane about his injuries please? I don't—I don't think I can do it," Ilya confessed through a clenched jaw.

Mikhail nodded easily and shifted his focus from Ilya to Shane. He was an older man, probably in his later sixties, with neatly groomed facial hair that matched the white comb-over atop his head. He was lean, tall, and immaculately clad in a suit that probably didn't need to be worn at a time like this, but screamed of dressing habits. He carefully made his way over to Shane's bedside and stood next to Ilya's bent form before glancing at the mobile vitals monitor that Shane hadn't noticed in his first glance about the room. Whatever he found seemed to please him when he turned his attention to Shane and smiled.

"Good evening, Mister Hollander. My name is Mikhail and I've been responsible for your care these past few days," he greeted professionally. Shane balked at the idea that he'd been out for a few *days*, that he'd been unconscious and unknowing of what was going on around him while everyone else had ended a familial battle, likely returned to their respective places, and waited for Shane to wake from the comatose state he had been in. Shane just nodded to convey that he was listening and slipped his grasp on Ilya's wrist down to his hand so he could link their fingers together for support.

Ilya squeezed his palm to show that he wasn't going anywhere.

"You have some very intense injuries, Mister Hollander, and you're very lucky to be alive. My biggest concern is your knee at the moment which did require some rather rudimentary surgery regarding your patella, the ligaments there, and the nerves surrounding that bone. I did the best that I could with the time and instruments I had, but you're going to need a better look at it in a genuine hospital setting when you're able to return to Moscow. I can, however, tell you right now that recovery is going to be very difficult and you'll likely have trouble walking comfortably on that leg going forward. I'm very sorry," Mikhail explained with gentle effectiveness.

His analysis left no room for argument or questioning on what had happened or what was going to happen with Shane's knee, so Shane simply nodded once more and remained quiet. He was going to have to go through it all over again—surgery, rehabilitation, frustration, pity, the whole lot. Mikhail made it sound as if it would be that way forever as well, that it would never really go back to the way it had been, and that scared Shane more than he was willing to show. Before he could dote on it for too long, Mikhail continued and Ilya pressed a quick kiss to the back of Shane's hand.

“Aside from your knee, my other main area of concern is your right arm which was also in very poor condition. All fingers are broken, you have a fracture in both your ulna and radius bone, your humerus is, for lack of a better phrase, snapped in two, and your collar bone is also cracked significantly. Amazingly, no shattered ribs, just rather bruised, and your nose is also intact which is really remarkable. Again, you're very lucky to be alive, Mister Hollander,” Mikhail finalized with a sympathetic look in his eyes.

Shane swallowed down the lump in his throat and nervously looked at Ilya who was staring back at him with nothing but pure devastation in his eyes, like he had suffered right alongside him and also understood the gravity of Shane being alive right now. “I was very scared,” the Russian man murmured to him. Shane nodded and jostled his hand for comfort before turning back to Mikhail with an expression of uncertainty.

“Why do I feel okay then? I mean, am I on a lot of drugs?” he asked.

Mikhail laughed softly at that and nodded. “Morphine, yes. I was able to stabilize your injured arm, for the most part, with a brace and sling. I wrapped your ribs, your knee is also wrapped with a brace, and your nose has a numbing cream on it with a bandage. Like I said... shoddy work. Definitely not my best. You'll receive better care in a hospital once we can transport you. For now, I'll continue with the morphine which you'll likely need another round of in an hour or so.”

Ilya turned to look over his shoulder and said in place of Shane, “Thank you. Thank you so much.” When he turned back to the Canadian man, he leaned forward, careful so as not to disturb Shane too much, and pressed his lips against Shane's with too much emotion to convey properly. Shane kissed him back just as meaningfully and nearly whimpered when Ilya eventually pulled away. He was okay. He would be okay. He had Ilya with him, a doctor who had gotten him mostly stable, and a team of men whose priority was to keep him safe.

On top of that, he had his parents who appeared to be rousing on the couch from the conversation going on in the hotel room. Shane mentally prepared himself for the discussion that was about to be had along with parental fretting for his wellbeing and watched as his mother stretched with a slight grimace, blinking slowly to come to terms with the world around her. As soon as her eyes landed on Shane, she hurriedly rose to her feet and slapped at David behind her to encourage his own consciousness faster.

“Shane, *oh my God*,” Yuna cried while tears filled her eyes. Shane smiled as best as he could and watched as she rushed across the room to the other side of his bed once she'd given up hope on getting Shane's father up faster. He groaned softly when she instinctively wrapped him up in a hug that made everyone else in the room hiss with sympathetic pain, then hurriedly pulled back with wet sorries while tears poured down her face. Her hands moved to

his cheeks then, turning him this way and that as she looked him over and inspected him to make sure he was really alive and breathing.

“I’m okay, mom. Seriously,” Shane grumbled over her fawning. David eventually rose from the couch due to the commotion of talking, and being slapped at, and eventually found his way to the side of the bed as well once Yuna had deemed her son okay enough for her taste. Shane stared at both of them with soft eyes, thankful that they were here and not somewhere else, even if they could be a little overbearing at points. Ilya was still holding one hand as Shane reached out with the other to take his mother’s.

“As soon as you’re okay enough to travel, we’re heading right back to Montreal. We’ll find the best surgeons we can, we’ll get you a spot with the best physical therapy clinic, and we’ll get you right as rain. You can finish your last semester in the fall to focus on healing, okay?” Yuna rushed out while he ran her thumb over the backs of Shane’s knuckles.

Shane licked his lips and anxiously glanced at Connors who was leaning against the television stand beside Marlow. The man raised an eyebrow back at him before dipping his chin slightly to answer the silent question Shane was asking of him. A mixture of relief and nerves bubbled up inside of Shane when he realized he was going to have to break the news to his parents that he was married... and to Ilya, the man he was married *to*.

“Um, actually...” Shane began hesitantly.

“Oh, *no*. No you don’t. I don’t care anymore what you want or what you feel. You’re coming home and that’s final. I refuse to let my son stay in this fucking country one minute longer than is absolutely necessary,” Yuna hissed. Shane shifted, flicking his eyes between Ilya, Connors, his dad, and his mom, before settling back on Connors with an expression that asked *Are you sure it’s real? I’m not going to be talking out of my ass when I say this?* Connors just smirked in confirmation.

“Mom—” Shane tried again.

“No, Shane. That’s final. You’re coming back to Montreal where we can watch you, *actually* watch you, and—”

“—*Mom*—”

“—hire protection that will make sure you aren’t kidnapped. Which, by the way, leaving *one* man to watch over my son? And a traitorous one? Do you even vet your men or—”

“—Mom, I’m married!” Shane blurted before he could stop himself. The entire room went deathly silent as the words rang out in the air. Shane slowly turned his wary gaze from his parents to Ilya beside him, wincing when he found that the Russian man was staring at him very intently, his skin pale and his eyes zeroed in fiercely on Shane, though Shane couldn’t really tell if it was confusion or betrayal that was evident in Ilya’s eyes. Maybe both.

“You’re *what?*” Yuna whispered.

Shane bit down on his bottom lip and shrunk in on himself, deciding in the end to turn his own attention to his feet at the end of the bed so he didn't have to actually look at anybody. "I, um... I'm married. Legally. To Ilya," he explained haltingly. "Connors took care of filing the paperwork in Moscow for me, or, well, he was supposed to while you guys were back and then everything happened and I, uh... I guess he was able to do it anyway. I, um... I tricked Ilya into signing the documents." He flicked his eyes back to Ilya briefly. "I'm sorry."

There was another awkward silence that only made Shane curl up more as shame, guilt, and humiliation washed over him at all once. Before he could sink too much further into the negative tide of emotions, Ilya squeezed his hand gently to get his attention and let go of Shane's palm so he could gently cup Shane's cheek instead. When Shane cautiously met his gaze, he was surprised to find that all of the severity that had been there moments ago had morphed into something tender and devastated.

"Why did you do this, *moya lyubov*?' Talk to me," Ilya whispered gingerly. Shane felt the tears start up all over again and he couldn't help but suck in a shuddering breath between his wobbling lips as the small kindness Ilya was showing him settled every feeling of dismay and disappointment boiling within him.

"I didn't want you to suffer after all of this. I didn't want you to have to marry someone you didn't want or owe my parents half of your earnings through Montreal when you need that money for your people, for the future you want to build without Andrei and your father. I didn't... I didn't want you to keep losing," Shane admitted timidly. Maybe that had been a poor way to phrase it, but his words seemed to strike something deep within Ilya as the man just tutted at him then leaned in to gently press his lips against Shane's for a second time since he'd woken up.

"You alive and safe is worth everything, my love," Ilya murmured against his mouth. "I would pay or do anything just to know you still walk the earth. That is winning to me." Shane sniffled hard and clumsily wiped his face with his loopy hands, thankful when Ilya tenderly pushed them away so he could use his own thumbs to clean up the wetness trekking down his face. "You are my husband then? Legally?" Ilya pressed unsurely.

Connors chimed in after Shane jerkily nodded with a resigned but humored explanation of, "Made sure it went through myself. I forked out a shit ton of cash and nearly had to cut off a poor registry guy's hand in order to get it done, but it's done. In the eyes of Russia, you and Shane are married. I just hyphenated your last names, though. Sorry, Mister Hollander-Rozanov."

Shane laughed wetly and leaned into Ilya's palm when it rested once more upon his face. It took him a moment to register that his parents hadn't said anything, so Shane mustered up all the courage he possibly could to pull away from Ilya's comforting touch and confront his mother and father next. David seemed resigned to what was happening, if not a little touched based on the way his lips were curving slightly at the corners and his eyes were soft, while Yuna's lips were pursed and her eyes were harsh on both Shane and Ilya.

"So this is it, then? You choose him? After everything he's done to you, put you through, you're going to stay married to him and never come home again?" she asked shortly.

Shane quickly shook his head and did his best to sit up a little further in bed, even if his body protested in dull pain due to the morphine starting to slowly work its way out of his system. “No, mom, that’s—of course I’m going to come home again. Of course I am. I just... I want to stay here at the moment. I want to heal here, I want to be with Ilya, I want to just... I don’t know... live for a little while without feeling like I need to do something to make you happy or proud,” Shane admitted.

“This is the first time I’ve actually done something for me. It’s been a hell of an experience, I know, and it didn’t even start with my choice really, I get that, but... this is important to me now. I want this. I want Ilya. I want... what I want. That doesn’t mean I’m leaving you or Montreal or all of my old life behind, it just means I’m ready to start something new—something on my own terms.

“I did this for Ilya, yes, but I did it for me, too. It took two signatures to complete those documents, and I was the one who put it all together. I wouldn’t have done this if I didn’t mean it. I... I love Ilya. I love him a lot. I don’t care that I’ve only been here a short time. I know that I love him and I know that I want to stay. Even after everything,” he concluded as bravely as he possibly could. It wasn’t easy for him to stand up to his parents or even voice opinions that people might not agree with, but he had to do this. He had to.

Yuna licked her lips and turned her attention to David then, the both of them silently sharing a look that Shane couldn’t decipher. It was a non-verbal language they shared, one that could only be created over many years of marriage, but whatever conversation they seemed to have apparently was one of resignation as Yuna turned back to him and sagged her shoulders in defeat.

“Okay, Shane. Fine. I don’t like it and I don’t want to be so far away from you, but I can’t stop you from doing what you’re set on doing. If you want to stay here with Ilya and stay married and do your healing here, then... fine. Fine,” she huffed. Shane could tell that she obviously wanted to say more, that she was disappointed in his choice and would likely try to continue to sway him in the future to think differently, but he shook her hand instead of picking another fight to show his gratitude for what she’d said.

Yuna just sniffled and squeezed it back wordlessly. They could talk more about it at another time, have their little hash in private where Shane could say or convey more to her that might get her to understand his choice. She was upset, rightfully so, and Shane wouldn’t leave her that way forever. It just had to be for now with the circumstances they found themselves in.

“So... What’s the plan here then?” David suddenly asked once the room fell back into silence for a while. Shane looked to Ilya uncertainly, then to the doctor and the other men in the room who were actively working to keep him safe. It was Mikhail who spoke next, causing all heads to swivel to him while he sat down on the couch with a heavy sigh.

“We get Shane help. That’s the absolute first thing we do. I’ve done what I can here with the sling, the braces, the surgery, the morphine, the wrapping, but that’s all I can do. He needs genuine hospital assistance in Moscow where we have more men to keep him secure, which means we need to transport him. With Andrei and the Korenevs gone, I vouch for a private jet if possible. We don’t have to hide air transportation anymore in Novosibirsk, so I can keep

him comfortable on the flight and en route to a trusted clinic. After that, we go from there,” he reasoned.

Thankfully, everyone seemed in total agreement as the somewhat tense atmosphere of the hotel room shifted to more caring, more worried, and more genuine. Everyone there wanted Shane to be okay, regardless of what came afterwards. Shane looked to both Ilya and his parents, gripped both of their hands a little tighter, and secretly thanked the universe that he was alive. He didn’t ever want to experience anything like this again in his life, but he was married to a mafia boss now and life would never go back to what it was.

All he could do was continue to live, continue to surround himself with people he loved, and continue to find a future for himself that he was content with. That began with getting the fuck out of Novosibirsk, but he could do it. He could heal with Ilya by his side, with his parents just a phone call or plane ride away, with these fiercely protective men he called friends surrounding him.

Shane looked at everyone as thankfully as possible before shifting his gaze to his parents once more. “I, um... Do you mind if I spend some time with Ilya? Alone?” he asked nervously. The question was extended to everyone else only a moment later when he let his eyes swoop around the room to connect with Connors, Marlow, Mikhail, and even the two men still guarding the window. “I feel like we probably need to talk about, you know... the marriage thing,” he explained embarrassingly. He could tell that Yuna really didn’t want to go anywhere, but David gently grasped her arms and muttered something gentle to her that gradually had her stepping away with jerky nods.

“Okay. We’ll be right outside,” she agreed warily. Shane forced a small smile at her in gratitude and watched alongside Ilya as every single person filed out of the room and into the hallway just beyond the door. As soon as he heard the exit click shut behind them, Shane turned his attention to Ilya and bashfully met his gaze.

“I’m sorry about... about tricking you into signing the forms. I had been talking with Marlow and Connors about things that could be done for alliances between families and Connors had said arranged marriages and I just... I knew what I had to do, even if it meant going behind your back,” Shane explained. “I’m not ready to go home, I can’t imagine you married to someone else, and I hate the idea of you owing my parents when you’ve already given me so much. I couldn’t do it. So, I... We’re married.”

Ilya gave him an amused look through tear-swollen eyes with a small, timid grin and countered, “Yes, I’ve found that out.” Shane dipped his head with a blush and bit down on his bottom lip as he waited for Ilya to say more. Surely he was upset with him, wasn’t he? Shane had more or less taken Ilya’s choice of being married to him, or even married in general. There had to be some kind of animosity for that towards him. “You look like you’re waiting for me to yell at you,” Ilya eventually stated.

Shane shrugged and tucked into himself slightly. “I kind of am,” he admitted.

Ilya shook his head and let go of Shane’s hand so he could reach out and cup the side of Shane’s face instead. “I’m not going to. While it would have been nice to know I’ve had a husband for a few days, I understand why you did what you did. You’re very selfless, Shane

Hollander. If you want to annul it, we can, but I don't mind this. I don't mind being a married man to you. I think maybe we need to figure things out with each other when there isn't a threat or pain or leverage involved, but I'm ready to do that. I want to do that with you," Ilya reasoned.

Shane felt his heart thump hard in his chest as he realized what Ilya was saying. He wasn't mad. He wanted to make this work, he wanted to be with Shane still, he wanted to figure out whatever came after all of this. Shane pressed his cheek into Ilya's palm and breathily questioned, "So what do we do now? Where do we go from here?"

Ilya hummed and stroked the pad of his thumb over Shane's cheekbone. "I think we get you home to Moscow, *moya lyubov'*, and get you fixed up. I think we get you some rehab, let you rest for a while, and spend time together without a weight on our shoulders. I think I do what I want with my family business now that I can. I think I get on good terms with your parents. I think, maybe, we try to start building a life together that we both want. What do you think?" Ilya answered softly, his tone hopeful and certain.

Shane could feel tears welling up in his eyes, but he knew it wasn't from the subtle ache of his body indicating he needed more morphine soon. It was from the love he felt for the man in front of him, so willing to push on with Shane by his side despite everything that had happened between them so fast.

"I think I'd like that," Shane whispered, his words trembling with affection. "I think I'd like that a lot."

Chapter 14: Chapter Fourteen

Chapter Notes

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

THIRTEEN MONTHS LATER

Shane slowly made his way up the staircase, gripping the wooden railing that had just been repainted a few days ago for support as he attempted the ascent. The sounds of housework echoing faintly in the estate filled his ears, but it wasn't nearly as loud as it had been when he and Ilya had first returned to Moscow a year ago. Everything that was important had already been redesigned, refurbished, and redone. All that was left now were guest rooms, small offices, and a random living space or two. The smell of fresh paint, woodwork, and labor lingered around the home, but Shane didn't mind it one bit. It was a home that he and Ilya had worked together to create—something vastly different from the gaudiness it had been.

He looked down at the hinged brace that supported the sides of his knee for stabilization and grumbled to himself at how janky and heavy it was. With thick straps wrapped around his thigh and calves, metal rods that could extend and contract with movement, and a rather annoying squeak that came each time he bent his leg, Shane was entirely over the reinforcement he had to wear. He'd been cleared to be off crutches a week ago and was trying his best to take advantage of that fact, but sometimes he wished he could go back to them just to avoid that godforsaken—

Squeak!

Shane growled as he lifted his leg to the next stair and pressed on despite his annoyance. Ilya was in his second-floor office and Shane was going to stop at nothing to see his husband after the intense home therapy he'd just received in the gym he and Ilya had wanted constructed within the estate. He was still sweating from the different activities his physical therapist had wanted him to do, but he didn't care. He wanted to see Ilya and he knew that Ilya wouldn't mind what Shane looked like... or smelled like.

So he hobbled himself up the stairs until he reached the second floor, then continued on down the hallway with a rather terrible limp as he pressed his palm against the wall for support. It would still be a long time before Shane was walking without a brace and additional help. His arm, ribs, and nose had completely healed within the year, though he still felt a twinge sometimes in his collarbone when he laid on it wrong or moved in an abnormal way. It was just his knee that was left catching up with the rest of his healed body.

The sight of the mahogany door framed by two familiar guards came into view once Shane rounded the corner to his left and he watched as the two men dipped their heads at him in formal greeting. "You don't have to do that, you know," Shane said as he grew closer. "We're friends. You're allowed to just smile back to me and say hi." Connors and Marlow glanced at each other like what they had just heard was amusing, but they looked back at Shane anyway and did exactly what he had suggested.

“Hi, Shane,” they both drawled out with wide, ridiculous smiles that made Shane blush and flip both of them off.

“Just let me in, you assholes,” he grumbled. Marlow was the one to open the door for him with a low rumble of a chuckle, but Shane just ignored him as pettily as possible before his slightly agitated mood vanished at the sight of Ilya bent over his desk. He was reading through reports sprawled out on the wood surface before him, a lit cigarette smoking between the fingers of his right hand, and was apparently so absorbed in whatever he was reviewing that he didn’t even look up upon Shane’s entry. Shane bit down on his bottom lip to hold back his grin, then purposely shut the door behind him loud enough that Ilya’s head jerked up in alarm.

“Jesus Christ, you scared me,” the Russian man breathed out as soon as he realized it was Shane. He hung his head and shook it, then glanced back up fondly and pushed his chair back in silent invitation. Shane smiled and made his way forward while Ilya reached out for him and took him by the hips once he was within reach. As soon as Ilya got a good enough hold on him, he eased Shane down sideways onto his lap and grasped his jaw to pull him in for a deep, slow kiss. Shane all but melted into the affection as he always did.

He left their foreheads pressed together once they pulled away from each other’s mouths and simply admired his husband in the afternoon sunlight. “To what do I owe the pleasure?” Ilya eventually asked as he reached out to push some of Shane’s stray hair behind his ear. Shane just hummed and wrapped his arms around Ilya’s neck while his eyes wandered over to the numerous reports in Russian on the desk.

“I came to save you, actually.”

“Oh? From what?”

“Mm, work. It’s so boring.”

“Boring is your speciality, *moya lyubov*,” Ilya teased. Shane just stuck his tongue out at him, then released him so he could lean in a little bit closer to the desk and read over the documents as best as he could. His Russian had been improving greatly between casually practicing with Ilya, having home lessons with Svetlana whenever she came over, and engaging in slow conversation with Marlow and Connors who had been in his position when they’d come to Moscow over a decade ago.

“What’s happening in St. Petersburg? I thought you fixed everything going on there with the shipping?” Shane questioned once he managed to piece together the few tidbits of information he’d translated. Ilya sighed and wrapped an arm around Shane’s waist so he could also lean forward without having the Canadian man slip off his leg. Ilya reached for one of the many papers that were laid out and handed it to Shane, signaling that everything he wanted to know was in that single report. Shane grasped it and slowly read through it, asking every now and then what a certain word or phrase was, until he got a better idea of the issue.

“Did you talk to my parents about it yet? They probably can get involved since this is product going to Montreal this time,” Shane pointed out. A few months ago, some of their shipping containers carrying illicit products out of Russia to the UK had started to turn up missing or

with partial supply, meaning Ilya and Shane had suffered some pretty great financial losses for the Hollander-Rozanov family.

Ilya had gone in person for a week to St. Petersburg to figure out the problem and take out whoever was deliberately sabotaging him, and the problem had been fixed for a while, but it seemed as if it was happening again—this time with his shipments to Montreal. Or, at least, that's what was being speculated with the reports. Ilya sighed heavily and waved his hand in the direction of his phone sitting on the edge of the desk that Shane hadn't noticed.

"I already called your mother. She said she'd send some people to look into it at the port and get back to me by the end of the day tomorrow. I don't know. Just more bullshit," Ilya grumbled. "But how are you? How is the knee? What did they say?" he asked, turning the conversation back to Shane even though that was the last thing Shane wanted to do. But he accepted the diversion anyway as Ilya had been a little overwhelmed with the business lately.

"It's fine. I'm fine. I just hate this stupid fucking brace. It squeaks every time I bend my knee and it's driving me insane. I don't know. Wiebe said it would probably be another few months before I'm out of it, and even then, it might be back to crutches to figure out walking without the brace. I don't really want to think about it," Shane explained exasperatedly. He just wanted to be normal again. Or, well, as normal as a person could be after sustaining two major injuries to the same knee in their lifetime.

Ilya hummed and reached up to press a comforting kiss to Shane's cheek before carefully easing him off of his lap and bringing both of them up to a standing position. "Would shooting practice make you feel better?" Ilya questioned with a smirk of amusement.

"You always know exactly what to say," Shane relented easily. Ilya just wrapped an arm around Shane's waist and walked with him as they exited the office, ignored the snickering idiots outside in the hallway, slowly went back down the stairs, and entered the fully restored shooting range stocked with just about every weapon someone could imagine firing. It had oddly enough become a place of comfort for Shane in his recovery. If he was upset or frustrated or sad, nothing felt better than taking out those negative emotions on pieces of paper with challenging rings. On days when he was bubbly, excited, and happy, however, no one could stop him from trying to perfect the craft or beat personal records with accuracy.

It had been nice to find something for him to do when everything else seemed like too much or not enough around him. Shane had managed to finish his degree in a mixture of hybrid and in-person classes through a university in Moscow that happily accepted his credits—with a little help from some Rozanov geared intervention—but he hadn't yet pursued a job in sports therapy, nor did he really want to. He knew that he wanted to work in a hockey-based environment and Moscow had a KHL team that would absolutely take him if Ilya had any say in it, but Shane wasn't sure about that either. It wasn't like he could move easily yet or speak Russian fluently.

He wasn't unhappy at the estate either, though. Shane had done a lot of tidying up with record keeping, particularly with creating a more organized system for filing information, and had even helped with budgeting and profits thanks to his deep dive into the Rozanov family paper trail of business documents. He learned the language of the country, practiced his shooting abilities, participated in rehab, managed the records, and attended home meetings by Ilya's

side whenever he wanted. The days weren't boring or lonely. Shane just knew that, eventually, he'd want more and he'd have to know sooner rather than later what that entailed.

Ilya picked up one of the many semi-automatic pistols displayed on the wall to the right of the entrance and handed it off to Shane with a raised eyebrow. "I want to see how much you've improved since the last time I watched. Let's see it," Ilya encouraged. Shane grasped the gun and checked to make sure the magazine was loaded before hobbling over to the hip-high barrier that prevented someone from easily walking into the range.

He held the weapon up with ease, aimed for the black circle in the center of the target across the room from him, then fired six quick shots with high accuracy and precision. When he lowered the gun to see his handiwork, a grin of pride worked its way across his lips while Ilya whistled beside him, clearly impressed with the cluster of holes that decorated the middle of the paper without any kind of deviancy.

"Wow. Not bad, Hollander-Rozanov," Ilya conceded. Shane just snorted and handed the gun off to Ilya so he could watch his husband blow him out of the water with his own skill. Of course, in true Ilya style, the Russian man fired without flinching and purposely showed off as he shot the shape of a heart into the paper around Shane's six bullet holes. *Asshole*, Shane thought to himself. *He never lets me win*. Ilya set the gun down on the barrier and turned to lean against it, crossing his arms over his chest in a display of pure humored arrogance.

"I hate you," Shane grumbled.

"No you don't. You love me," Ilya countered smoothly. Shane just rolled his eyes and turned to find one of the few resting chairs against the back wall that he could take a break on. The walking and standing were starting to get to his knee and he really didn't feel like trying to beat whatever stupid game Ilya had started. "You okay?" Ilya asked as Shane sat, his tone shifting to one of concern. Shane nodded as he all but sank into the soft upholstery and let his head loll back with closed eyes.

"Knee just hurts a bit. I'll be okay," he admitted. He reached down to fiddle with the silver band on his left hand, twisting it around his ring finger in a self-soothing technique, then opened his eyes to set his attention on the Russian man across from him. Ilya was staring at the action he was currently performing and Shane knew there was something his husband wanted to say before he even parted his lips. Ilya shifted slightly, flicked his eyes up to Shane, then glanced down at his own simple wedding ring that they had picked out a week after returning from the events in Novosibirsk.

"Have you thought anymore about letting your mother plan the wedding?" Ilya finally questioned. Right. The wedding that his mother wouldn't stop asking about planning whenever he had a phone call with her. Shane wanted to have an official wedding with Ilya, he really did, but the more that his mom pressed him about it, the less he felt like starting to put it all together. He'd been using the lame excuse of not being able to walk down an aisle on his dad's arm properly yet, but he knew that would only save him for so long.

"I have, I have. It's just... she just wants so much and I don't and I don't know how to tell her no when we just got her on our side a few months ago with the marriage and me staying in Moscow and not getting a job yet and... I want a wedding. I do. I want a wedding where I get to take your hand in front of our friends and family and say I love you and I do and make all the vows a husband should make, I just... I don't..."

"Shane. You have to tell your mother at some point," Ilya pointed out, his voice sweet and gentle despite the subtle jab. Shane winced but nodded anyway. He knew that. He knew he'd have to tell her that he and Ilya wanted something small, something focused more on them than a venue or an afterparty. Knowing his mother, she was all or nothing, and Shane knew he needed to tell her that her grandiose ideas didn't match their vision of an intimate celebration. Shane bit down on his bottom lip and weakly kicked at the smooth flooring beneath his feet.

"Okay. Yeah, I'll call her. Later, though. I just want to relax for a little bit," Shane confessed through a heavy exhale. Ilya nodded and pushed off from the barrier so he could slowly make his way over to Shane and kneel down in front of him. When he didn't say anything, Shane was forced to look up and meet the affectionate gaze of his husband. "What?" Shane asked nervously.

"I would very much like to take you to our bedroom and fuck you now," Ilya said bluntly. Shane's entire face went beat red as he sputtered at the statement, completely caught off guard by the change of conversation, but the twitch of his cock in his pants could be distinctly felt anyway and Shane knew he wasn't going to turn down sex. They'd really only been able to get intimate five or six months after Novosibirsk due to the extent of Shane's injuries, and even then, they'd been mostly limited to missionary because Shane couldn't exactly be on his knees.

That didn't mean they'd stopped, though.

"I-I... what... I mean—okay. Yes. Sure," Shane stuttered out with wide eyes. Ilya just chuckled at him and reached out in a silent request for Shane to stand. Shane knew exactly what Ilya was wanting to do, so with his flushed cheeks and racing heart, Shane rose to his feet and allowed the Russian man to quite literally sweep him off of them with a sharp yelp slipping through his lips. "You pick me up too fast!" he cried, trying his best to hold back his grin.

"Because I am eager to have you naked in our bed. Your knee is okay?" Ilya teased before checking in to make sure his arm beneath Shane's thighs wasn't a problem. Shane nodded as he wrapped his arms around Ilya's neck, hoping on while Ilya hummed in approval and shoved out of the shooting range to head in the direction of their perfectly refurbished bedroom. The soft sounds of housework and quiet conversation between guards filled the charged silence between them while the feeling of Shane's wedding ring on his left hand became heavy with meaning.

He tucked his face underneath Ilya's chin and smiled to himself in the private moment. He didn't have it all figured out yet—his career, his wedding, his leg, his husband's stupidly

complicated language—but one truth was very evident after everything that had happened in the past year and a half with the Russian man carrying him through their estate. In Ilya, Shane had found himself.

Chapter End Notes

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

[**a simple question; a solid truth**](#) (10841 words) by [**loveleclerc**](#)

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!