

Eurydice

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Eurydice

by [Karaxuno](#)

Summary

The command had sliced through him like a knife, and Shane had very nearly opened his mouth. It didn't just paralyse his jaw, his entire body locked up, shock rippling through him.

No matter how many comments were made, neither of them had ever been so evil as to order him so directly. Not since-

But then *Ilya Rozanov* had tackled both of them to the ground, flinging his entire body weight at them, skates flying into the air.

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AU where Shane just wants to play hockey but biology and shitty teammates make it nearly impossible. Ilya just wants to have some good competition on the ice. They make it work (eventually).

Notes

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

Chapter 1

Chapter Notes

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

There are hushed voices outside of the hospital room. Shane is used to hushed voices— his parents have adult conversations sometimes after dinner when he’s meant to be doing his homework. He’s not sure what they talk about, really, but he thinks it’s mostly about him. About hockey.

Shane likes hockey. He’s used to that too. He spends more time at the rink on skates than he does at home in his socks, but that’s the way he likes it to be. All his friends play hockey. All his idiot teammates too.

“Mom?” Shane calls, feeling suddenly like the little hospital room with painted lions on the wall might jump out and swallow him up. “Dad?”

For a moment, his calling doesn’t do anything. All the shapes on the other side of the blue checkered curtain stay very, very still.

And then it gets pulled back, and Shane has soft hands on his cheeks and a kiss on his hair.

“Are you okay honey?”

Shane squints up at her. He’s still not sure why they’re here. All that had happened was stupid Billy from the older team with his snotty-nose and sweaty hands had grabbed him. He hadn’t even punched him. And Shane hadn’t punched back, either. Billy had said something that made him feel angry. He wasn’t even sure what it had been, but it had made Shane’s belly feel hot and he’d screamed and pulled Billy’s hair and promptly thrown up on the ice.

Last time he threw up on the ice, he got chicken soup and a day at home. Why was this so different?

“I’m fine.” Shane mutters, “I want to go home. I didn’t mean to hurt Billy and I don’t feel sick anymore.”

For all Billy was jealous that Shane is a better hockey player, that Shane gets more attention, Shane knows he shouldn’t have pulled his hair.

“Oh that’s good sweetheart.” His mom coos, pressing another kiss to the side of his head. He doesn’t think he’s gotten this many kisses since he lost his first tooth on the ice. He’d gotten five and a double scoop of ice cream that night.

“Shane.” That’s his father, coming up on his other side and squeezing his arm gently. His father has always been a little softer than his Mom. Always lets her take the lead. Shane

knows why, too. He's known why for longer than he can ever remember not knowing. It just is. It's why everyone is happy. It's why everyone works.

"Shane, do you remember what Billy said to you before you got angry?"

Not this again. Shane rolls his eyes, "Dad." He mutters, "No."

His Dad nods, slowly, and then glances up over his head at his Mom. He always does that. Waits. Shane has never waited for anything in his life, or that's what his coaches tell him. He's always the first one ready in his gear, the first one on the ice, the first one to slice a puck into the net.

He always knew he was going to grow up to be like his Mom.

"It was an order, baby. Because Billy is a Dom." His Mom says.

Shane must make a face, because she laughs at him. It's quiet and tired-sounding. Shane's only heard her laugh like that a few times before. At his grandad's funeral, she'd laughed like that. When Shane broke his wrist last summer, she'd laughed like that. It means she's sad.

"I don't understand." He says, "Why are you sad Billy is a Dom. I don't care about Billy."

Again, his Mom laughs. It's even quieter this time, followed by a sniffle.

"We're not sad about Billy, Shane." His Dad cuts in again, Shane swinging his head back over, "You got angry at him because you're a Sub. You reacted to his order."

His Dad's fingers are drawing little patterns into the skin of his arm. They are not as soft as his Mom's usually are. His Dad used to play hockey too, he knows. He played as a little kid, and he played with his school, and then he'd stopped when he was fourteen. He'd stopped when he was fourteen for the same reason he is different to his Mom. Because his Dad is a Sub, too.

"I want to play hockey." Shane mutters, feeling more like his Mom as tears well up in his eyes. He scrabbles at them roughly, pulling his arm away from his Dad's grip, "I just want to play hockey, Mom."

"It's okay. It's going to be okay."

"But—" But Shane's Dad doesn't play hockey anymore. Shane knows all the names of the Ottawa Centaurs players, and the Montreal Voyageurs players, and he knows none of them are *Subs* either.

Subs don't play hockey. He is too young to know why, but he knows that they don't, and that's enough.

"No!" He yells, "No! I'm going to play hockey! Stupid Billy can't stop me and neither can *you*!"

“Do you understand levels, Shane?”

They’ve been here before. Shane picks tiredly at a loose thread in the cushion he’d pulled into his lap, and knows he has to say something in the next forty-five minutes, or she’ll tell on him to his parents again.

He looks up at his therapist, and nods his head. That’s all he allows. One nod. Short, sharp, singular. The kind of nod he might give a teammate when their eyes meet, both of them eyeing the perfect play.

“Good.” She says, “I’d like to start there today, if that’s okay.”

It’s not really a question. She bulldozes on through it anyways, explaining the categories one through ten, explaining the little blood test they use to determine what you are by the invisible hormones whizzing around your body. Shane knows all this already. He’s known since he was ten years-old and Billy Branson had tried to order him around on the ice, and his assistant coach had watched him flip the fuck out.

Because Billy Branson was a low-level. Shane doesn’t know what, he’d never bothered to ask, but he was low, he had to be. Billy Branson was low because Shane hadn’t bent to his command, and Shane was high.

He’d always been good at hockey. Better than good. A natural, a generational talent, even. Overachiever.

Good at hockey, good at school, and too fucking good at being a Sub, apparently.

“—and it’s hard to tell, when you’re still growing up and going through puberty exactly what score you’ll settle on—“ Her voice floats in and out of Shane’s awareness. He really doesn’t need this talk again. He knows what to do: every three months he comes in, ignores whatever lecture he’s given, lets them test his blood, and then goes back to class with tears in his eyes.

“—but your score has been the same the past two tests, so a third test at that score would have me pretty certain you’re set.”

A beat. She searches his face, catches his eye.

“Do you know what your last scores were, Shane?”

Of course Shane knows. Shane knows, and his Mom knows, and his Dad knows, and this stupid therapist knows, but that’s it. A lot of the other kids— *Doms*— brag about their levels. They come back from their tests with puffed up egos and sevens on their papers.

He wishes he was a seven. Or even a six. If he could wake up tomorrow and be a Dom, he wouldn’t even need to be a high enough number to brag about. He would take *anything*.

Instead, he takes a deep breath, nearly swallowing his tongue as he remembers how to open his jaw and speak.

“Ten.”

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“Hi. My name is Shane. Hollander. Uh, I wanted to come and introduce myself.”

Rozanov looks at him like he has some kind of disease, but he’s been looking at everyone like that all week so Shane tries not to take it personally.

He is tall up close, still ridiculously broad-chested even without his pads on. His blonde hair softens him a bit, haloing his head where it peeks out from beneath his beanie. It’s curly, which is surprising. It just feels too soft and boyish for an angry Russian Dom known for beating players he doesn’t like into the boards.

Maybe it’s why Shane had felt like he could approach him. Not that he says much in return. He is quiet in his assessment of Shane, eyes flickering up and down his body without hurry.

It doesn’t feel invasive. It feels assessing. Perceptive. Like he has some x-ray superpower and can see under the layers of skin and bone that make up Shane’s body to what he is really made of. What gets his blood pumping, his adrenaline flying, his mind whizzing.

The answer is predictable, considering where they are. It’s hockey, of course.

Another part of his brain worries the same way he does with any new person: worries that Rozanov can tell he’s a Sub. But he can’t. Nobody can. As far as anyone is concerned, Shane is neutral. Boring. Completely ordinary, with no inclination to be one way or the other.

He is not rash enough to pass as a Dom. He cannot form a command from deep in his chest no matter how hard he had tried in the mirror every night after Billy *fucking* Branson.

Equally, he finds it not in his nature to submit. No matter how many times they tell him, doctors, nurses, therapists... the tests might say it is, but the tests are just numbers on a screen. There has never been a command Shane has itched to follow. He has never gone weak in the knees or trembled. Commands are a dime a dozen in hockey. Jokingly, seriously, maliciously. It’s against the rules, *technically*, but lots of things that happen in locker rooms and during brawls are against the rules.

So he is boring instead. He keeps his head down and he doesn’t breathe a word about his scores and he plays hockey, because that’s all he ever really wanted.

When he shakes Rozanov’s hand and laughs breathlessly at his cockiness, that doesn’t change. The world doesn’t slip away beneath his feet. Nothing happens at all. They just talk about hockey, and Shane walks away on steady feet.

Shane hadn't been involved in the conversation. He's a rookie still proving himself on the ice, so nobody really bothers with him unless he's done something to speak about. And he is very careful never to do anything that needs speaking about.

Practice starts in ten minutes, and rather than pulling on his pads or taping his sticks, Drapeau is wandering around shirtless and laughing. He does it a lot. It's almost like he takes pleasure in spreading himself through the room, possessing it with a puffed chest and his abs out. It's ridiculous, they all have abs. Even Shane who is, according to Sub pamphlets, *hormonally predisposed to slower muscle growth*, whatever the fuck that's meant to mean.

Shane knows he's not the only one it annoys. In his periphery he can see Pike rolling his eyes and turning away, blocking out the conversation as best he can. On his other side, J.J. Boiziau doesn't look up from his skates, but there's a wrinkled frown on his face.

But nobody speaks up, because why would they? There's no Subs here, are there? It's easier to let it go, to not fuck up the team dynamic. Shane learnt that one very early on in hockey, but only after he'd earned himself a black eye.

The peacocking continues for a few minutes, slapping his buddies on the backs until he reaches Miitka, who is having a low conversation with Comeau.

"Oh yeah, Mitty? Going to take her out and tell her to **kneel**?"

The command jerks Shane, tugging sharply at his gut, making him want to gag. Drapeau's command feels brittle, kind of nasally like he's all stuffed up after having a cold. The reaction it pulls out of Shane is not to follow, but to fight. The muscles down his neck burn, zipping off down his arms and legs.

Miitka looks only vaguely uncomfortable, shrugging off the command like a real Dom should, "Fuck off Drapeau. Unlike you I have class, and I don't issue orders on a first date."

"Yeah yeah **shut up**." He laughs, turning on heel and finally, finally making his way back over to his stall. It is far away from Shane's, and that can only be a good thing.

At his back Miitka yells "Not shutting up!" To prove he's not following the command, and everyone else around them laughs too, tension broken.

Shane can't listen to it anymore. They have eight minutes to go now, and he sticks his earphones in. He'd rather listen to anything but this.

The first video he pulls up on YouTube is a hockey news piece, unsurprisingly. Also unsurprisingly the topic is Ilya Rozanov getting traded, again. Shane has seen plenty of other pieces on the other rookie over the year-and-a-half they've been playing in the league, and

most of them had been covering his quick trade from Boston to Colorado after their first season finished. A lot of people had been asking the obvious— *why?*

This new report is more gossipy than the ones last year. As it plays they talk about locker room disputes and not gelling with teammates. Of course they attribute this to him being too high a Dom, because what else could it be?

While it plays on, Shane thinks about the boy he'd met in Saskatchewan. He didn't seem like that at all. Not anything like Drapeau or Comeau or even Miitka.

The reporter is just wrapping up when Coach Theriault crashes into the room, already yelling about bag skates for their poor performance in the previous game, so the last thing Shane hears as he hurries to tear his earphones out is: *"So where is Ilya Rozanov going? Well, we have it on good authority he's in serious talks to become the new star centre and captain of the Ottawa Centaurs."*

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The party is kind of insane. Their locker room is going to smell like champagne for the next year, *at least*. The Cup is kind of insane, too. Bigger in person, heavier. Shane's arms had been so sore and so tired when he'd lifted it over his head, he had been sure he was going to topple.

Everyone had thought the game would be cut and dry— San Francisco were at the top of their game, chomping at the bit to earn their next title while Montreal had just lost their captain to a knee injury and Shane, with only two years of experience on the ice, had to rally the team together with just an *AC* painted on his shoulder.

Somebody ends up buying out a bar, probably because why the fuck not. It's way too big for the lot of them, but probably doesn't have enough alcohol if they all keep drinking like they have been the last few hours.

Comeau comes up to him first, Miitka lurching along with an arm slung around his best friend, "All it took to get you out with us was a fucking cup, eh?"

Mitty cheers and then slides off Comeau's shoulder and flops into the booth, legs tangled and arms loose. He's absolutely fucking wasted.

Shane, at least, still has more of his wits about him than Mitty. He's allowed himself a beer or two, because, yeah, he'd fucking done that. He'd won the Cup at the head of his team, bulldozing them to victory with a backhand shot even he thought he wouldn't make.

"Well, at least you know what you need to do for me to join you guys again."

Mitty laughs like it's the funniest thing he's heard in his life, and by some miracle known only to him and God he manages to stand and peel off to harass J.J. for another shot. He's

been in charge of the good vodka for the last two hours, doling it out as he sees fit.

Before he knows what's happening the two of them are back, squeezing into the booth beside Comeau, and Shane has a shot as well. It burns its way down into his stomach.

"Fuck yeah!" Comeau laughs, shaking his head and smacking his lips like the alcohol was riling him up, the burn bringing back his fighting spirit to celebrate a little bit more, "Come on, Boizy, hit me."

J.J. laughs in his face, tucking the bottle into his side with one arm. From where Shane is sitting, J.J. would also be cut off by any reasonable bartender, but he's certainly more sober than Comeau and Mitty.

"Man, you're so cut off. Your wife is going to kill us."

Comeau shakes his head again, lifting his glass, "She ain't going to say shit, Boizy, **pour**."

The command is sloppy. It comes out kind of half-formed, like he didn't have enough power left in his chest to make it through the entire syllable. Shane looks down and bites the inside of his cheek.

"Keep that shit to yourself." J.J. scowls, drunk enough that he can't hide his disapproval, "I ain't following your orders."

Comeau slaps his hand against the table, melting over it, probably barely able to tell that J.J. is angry.

"Ahh don't do that! It's just a little fun, we all like letting our dicks swing a little, don't we?"

"I'm neutral, jackass." J.J. rolls his eyes as he speaks, but despite that he pours a very small shot into Comeau's glass. Shane thinks that might be the end of it, but Comeau downs it immediately and keeps his mouth moving. How can he even form so many thoughts this drunk?

"Not my fucking fault." Is what he mutters, "Freaks, the lot of you. How can't you just..." He shrugs, making a gesture up his torso.

J.J. raises an eyebrow. He clearly means make a command, but if he's going to belittle his designation J.J. is going to make him work for it, at least. Shane likes that about him, he doesn't just go along with whatever the Doms on the team decide. He has his own opinions, even if sometimes his desire to fit in takes over.

"Go on J.J." Mitty heckles, laughing loosely, others turning their heads, "Give 's a go!" He slaps his chest, as if to mime where the command is supposed to echo from, "Real deep!"

J.J. takes his time pouring another shot before clearing his throat.

"Drink!" He barks at Drapeau, who has slithered over and settled into an empty chair, watching the spectacle. He spreads his legs and hooks his elbows over the back of the booth as if he can't help but take up enough space for two. He just looks like a bit of an idiot, really.

Perhaps even more of an idiot than J.J. looks, waiting for someone to bend to his not-command.

Drapeau doesn't even blink at it. In fact he snorts, "It's not fucking yelling, Jay, it's *ordering*." He snarks, reaching over and snatching the big bottle of vodka for himself.

"Oi!"

Drapeau just stares back at him, his face almost creepily blank, "Order me to give it back, then."

"Fuck you. *Give me the bottle.*"

It's not a bad try. He must do something right, because while Shane doesn't feel the telltale burn of it in his body, he does feel a little roll of his stomach, like it understands what the words were meant for.

Drapeau has no reaction but an irritating amount of smug amusement, and finishes the bottle into his glass.

"Oi, Cappy, your turn." Comeau cuts in, snatching the glass right out of Drapeau's fingers. He lifts it but doesn't drink. Shane is clearly meant to order it from him. He feels his face flush with heat, like it always does when he's the centre of attention— and everyone at the table is looking.

"Oh hell no." He shakes his head, "I'm not going to embarrass myself."

"Come on, Shane, don't leave me hanging!" J.J. protests.

Shane leans back in his chair. He can't. He already knows he can't, because unlike J.J. who was normal and satisfied with that, Shane had once been sixteen and desperate. But no matter how many times he'd practiced it in the mirror...

Drapeau smacks his lips, clearly unamused, "Don't be a pussy about it, Hollander, **order me.**"

Shane fights to keep his eyes level with Drapeau's, to not tense up too much and give himself away. He's not sure if he succeeds, because he tastes blood in his mouth. *Don't push* he wants to beg. *Somebody else make a scene and distract them.*

"I can't." Shane says, slowly, pronouncing every syllable clearly like he's some kind of phonics teacher.

"Too fucking right. Try!" Comeau slaps him on the back and Shane's body jerks with the motion. He hadn't expected that, and all the rest of his strength was being put into resisting Drapeau.

"Go on! Order him! **Speak! Order!**" The two commands quickly one after the other slam into him past the haze of beer and vodka. Somewhere behind J.J. he thinks he sees Hayden approaching, abandoning his drink on the bar and trying to see what's going on. Anyone who

is Dom or Sub in this room could feel it now, the orders stacking up on one another, starting to stifle the air with it.

“I can’t.” Shane feels like a broken record.

“Boo!” That’s J.J.

Shane thought he was better than this, but maybe only when he’s sober.

“Shut up!” That’s Drapeau again, who has set the shot down and is staring at Shane very, very intently. It is suddenly clear that he is not nearly as drunk as the rest of the team. “Order me, because you’re not a fucking sub, Hollander. Right?”

Shane swallows, lifts his chin. For a moment, he thinks he might get away with it. Hayden has stopped a few steps away from the table, and his jaw is hanging open. He knows Shane better than Drapeau or Comeau or any of them. He doesn’t need Shane’s answer to know that his face is betraying.

A few more seconds and Drapeau’s face hardens, the same realisation ticking away behind his eyes, “A fucking Sub! A fucking Sub playing fucking hockey—“

He remembers promising his Mom that he would be careful. He remembers the look of worry on her face when he said he’d signed back up for hockey again six months after Billy Benson. He remembers the absolute disaster it had been telling her he was going to let everyone assume he was neutral when he joined Team Canada, and then the NHL. Because there aren’t any rules against Subs in hockey, but there’s a reason they don’t play. This kind of reception and worse.

But for two years, it had worked. Fuck, it had *worked*. Shane just won the best trophy he can possibly win. He won it with two goals, an assist, and a terrifyingly fresh captaincy on his shoulders. It was an absolute breakout fucking performance, and there it all goes, in one shitty moment.

Next season is going to fucking suck.

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Shane stumbles into the locker room, memory guiding him more than his eyes. His vision is a blurry mess, because of course. He’s weak. That’s what they’ve all been saying since last season, isn’t it? He’s weak and soft and not suited for a game like hockey.

His helmet hits the floor hardest. His stick clatters, his gloves flop, but his helmet *thwacks* without remorse, rolling off to the side. He pulls at his jersey and pads, tugging with shaky hands. He is too hot. He needs to get out.

“Fuck.” He breathes, because it’s pretty much the only word his lips are capable of making now. He doesn’t even remember the last thing he’d said before all this.

Behind him the door swings open again, creaking and groaning on its hinges. The noise is familiar, this is his home locker room after all, but it still makes him jump, armour going back up. Whoever is chasing him cannot see him like this, he won’t allow it. He is Shane Hollander, hockey player. Not Shane Hollander, the weak little Sub who folds like a stack of cards.

But it’s not any of his teammates that are behind him, no sneers or jeers or snapped commands meant to tear him down, sink him further into the pit of his Submission; the jersey that follows him inside is not blue and white. It is red and black, shouldered over a large body, crowding into the room without asking for permission.

Ilya Rozanov had likely never asked permission for anything before in his life. He is Center, he is Captain, he is the epitome of all things Dominant.

Fucking fantastic. Shane can already feel the last of his control slipping, just wants to find something soft for his itchy skin and then probably the soothing voice of his mother for the ache behind his eyes.

She was watching the game, he knows it. She watches every game, barely takes her eyes off the screen if what his father says is correct. She’ll be terrified for him, waiting for his call. The crowd doesn’t know what they’ve seen, but she will. She will know he didn’t leave the ice in a fit of rage. She will know he dropped.

To get to her he needs to change. He needs to take off his skates and his pads and get his phone and keys from his stall. Which is behind him, by the door. Which is *also* behind the six-foot-three wall of fucking curly-haired hazel-eyed Russian.

“What the fuck do you want, Rozanov!”

He’s not sure where it comes from, all that rage, but it sizzles and crackles in the bottom of his stomach as he whips around, using his shaking hands to keep himself up as he tilts to the side, one side of his body collapsing under the mounting pressure. He swears again, probably, but he can hardly hear anything over the ringing in his ears.

Maybe it’s okay if he lets go now. He’d tried, hadn’t he? He’d tried so fucking hard. To play better, to train harder, to eat cleaner... he’d tried so hard to prove himself after they all found out.

Nothing seemed to matter to them. The comments had never stopped. The pushes in the gym, the elbows in the locker room. The comments whispered below visors when nobody was watching. The commands muttered in empty hallways. Nothing had been enough. Not even the memory of a winning goal for the Stanley Cup.

There’s a hand on his elbow and a deep voice pulling him back to the room.

His mother's voice has always been a tether for him, a safe place to find Submission, like he's still ten and freshly presented rather than twenty-three and a professional athlete. This voice is no different. It is soft despite the fact that it is deep and rumbled. Maybe if Shane leant forwards and found the source, he could feel where it vibrates out from, could lose himself in the frequency.

When he leans, it is more of a dangerous tilt. He can't hold himself up, so he has to be held. Two hands splay wide, resting over his ribs and under his armpits. Shane is floating, held up by hands that are not even vaguely familiar.

Fuck.

Shane tugs to get away, the syrupy slowness in his head finally catching up to him: those hands that are warm and big and encasing his ribcage belong to Ilya Rozanov. This is the man he had lost to tonight, the man who had bashed him into the boards more often than he could count, the man who would probably prefer to crush Shane's ribs so that he cannot play against them again.

When the hands fall away, so does Shane. His back hits the lockers with a clang and he winces. The pain gives him half a moment of clarity, does more for him than a muffled voice could ever. It should make him sick. It surely makes his teammates sick. When Shane is bashed into the boards, he doesn't falter. He flies. The pain sharpens something in his mind, uses his Submission for a different purpose. It's like doing a math problem and using the wrong method but getting the right answer.

"Go away." He manages to grind out, chest heaving. Rozanov is not touching him now but his hands still hover, waiting.

The man is sweaty. It makes sense, they've just played a long, aggressive game into overtime. Fat drops of it run down the front of his curls, sticking them to his forehead, darkening them.

"You are not okay." The man's accent is thicker than Shane remembers, not that he's had the pleasure of listening to it a lot.

Shane doesn't bend, still feeling the sting of the metal digging into his shoulder blade, "Fuck off."

"Your team hurt you—" Rozanov tries again, but the mention doesn't help. It just frays Shane's control further, slips him deeper away from where they are standing.

He remembers the goal Rozanov had scored, Shane all but breathing down his neck as he tried to intercept. But it had been useless, and the puck had gone in just before the buzzer sounded. 2-1 to Ottawa.

Hayden had been on the bench, J.J. on the other side of the ice, no one in Drapeau's path to stop him as he spit on the ice next to Shane's skate.

Would you play better if we fucking praised you? He'd demanded, twisting his fist all up in Shane's jersey, *Put you to your fucking knees where you belong?*

Comeau had come up the other lane, and Shane remembers... he remembers Rozanov turning away from the net, eyes tracing Gilbert's movements as if he's waiting for him to take a swing at Drapeau for being so vulgar.

But he hadn't. Shane had known he wouldn't. Shane had heard his blades and his laugh and known what was coming next. Or he thought he had. He thought he was ready for whatever comment was going to be made. Not—

No, he likes pain, don't you, Hollander? Lets everyone walk all over him to get off. I'm fucking right, too, aren't I?

Shane had looked him in the eye. Had snapped his mouth shut when Drapeau pushed off his chest and Comeau had floated in close. Still no Hayden, no J.J., just two Doms circling him like sharks.

*Yeah? No? Fucking **speak**.*

The command had sliced through him like a knife, and Shane had very nearly opened his mouth. It didn't just paralyse his jaw, his entire body locked up, shock rippling through him. For a moment, just half a second, Drapeau looks like he's shocked as well.

No matter how many comments were made, neither of them had ever been so evil as to order him so directly. Not since—

But then *Ilya Rozanov* had tackled both of them to the ground, flinging his entire body weight at them, skates flying into the air.

And then there had been too much happening, too many people dogging onto the pile. Rozanov's goalie had leapt in without an ounce of hesitation, pounding into Drapeau before he could get a good enough swing back. Then two other Centaurs. Then three other Voyageurs. Then Hayden had been pulling him away, but even his friend's careful hands had been too much too soon.

Shane's sob cuts through the locker room. He bites back on it, but it tears out of his chest regardless. His hands are shaking again, more violently, and he really doesn't know what to do. His shoulder is screaming at him to let up from the sharp metal, but if he does he's not sure what will happen. He will drop, that much is obvious, but he cannot drop in a room where Drapeau and Comeau can get to him. He won't.

"Please." Shane isn't sure what he's even asking for, but he finds it in the damp warmth of the jersey he pitches forwards into, screws his hands into like Drapeau had to his, "They can't — I can't be *here*—"

"Okay." Rozanov's arms have come around him again, but Shane isn't in his body anymore. He's a spectator, given to some faraway land where there's nothing but the buzz of white noise and the beat of his heart.

There's hands on his back, so he lets them mold him into place. There's someone asking him to walk, so he walks. There's a question about his locker combination, so Shane gives it

under his breath. There's many other things, and Shane just lets them happen to him. This wasn't a decision he made for himself, not by far, but somewhere his brain tells him that Rozanov is an enemy of the Voyageurs, so Drapeau and Comeau won't be there. It's enough.

-

There's a purring. Gentle, soft, surprisingly rhythmic. There's warm air around him, circulating not like a breeze but like an artificial environment. *Inside*, Shane thinks. Then he realises he is not panicking, and he must be one foot over the line still, caught in a place where he might be able to move his limbs and open his eyes, but he's not entirely in control.

The thought should scare him. He has never dropped so fast or so suddenly as today. He has never lost time. Instead, worry floats around his head and fades away.

When he opens his eyes, he realises he's sat in a car with the engine idling gently below his feet. They still have thick skating socks on them. And no shoes. He stretches his toes in the footwell, feeling the skin scratch against the fabric, then bump against the grey interior of the car. It feels... quiet. His head feels strangely quiet. He'd played a game earlier and that usually had him awake for hours into the night, thinking, stressing, planning his next practice.

Instead, his head is quiet. The night is quiet. Why is everything so q—

The driver-side door opens, and the same overlarge figure from earlier slides in. Rozanov. He's not in his jersey anymore, stripped down to his compression shirt and leggings. He at least has shoes on, though.

He smells like the cold and cigarette smoke, and Shane leans a little further away from the rush of chilly air coming through the open door.

"Ah." The man sighs, "Hollander. Took you long time to wake up."

Shane feels himself frown. It can't have been that long. It's still dark out. And it's definitely not the *next* evening, because he hasn't got shoes on. He can't have been anywhere without shoes, can he? That doesn't seem like him.

"Where are my shoes?"

Rozanov stares at him like he's grown a second head. "What?"

Shane looks back at his feet, away from the intense eyes of the angry Russian. Why did he have to make him angry? Why is Shane so bad at this? Maybe it's not just his teammates. Maybe he just makes every Dom angry.

"Hollander."

Shane's eyes snap up to Rozanov's again, something he can't help, doesn't want to help.

“Fuck. You are still down, yes?”

Shane just blinks at him, trying to frown as well. He had frowned earlier, but only a little. He wants to match Rozanov’s glare. He wants to show that he can disapprove as well.

“I’m...” Shane trails off, but as soon as he lifts his head, he just has to let it drop back against the headrest, “‘S too heavy.” He says before he can realise he’d not wanted to say that aloud.

Rozanov laughs, and that makes him feel a little better, makes him feel like maybe he could lift his head if he absolutely needed to, “Yes, still down I think. You are sweet down, hm?”

Nobody’s ever called Shane sweet before. Uptight, high strung, needy, even frigid. Nice, kind, polite, sometimes bland. But never sweet, he would’ve remembered that. Sweet was something reserved for people’s loved ones. Their partners, even their closest friends: the people they chose to keep around them.

The only time Shane has ever been chosen is for hockey, and even then it had been a lie. A carefully crafted, neutral lie.

He doesn’t mean to tear up but maybe they’re leftovers from earlier, when everything had seemed so loud and busy.

Rozanov seems to understand. He shushes him gently, with quiet words in a language Shane doesn’t understand. His hand rests on the edge of the leather seat, close enough to Shane’s shoulder that he is there, but far away enough that they do not touch.

For a long drawn-out second he thinks that Rozanov might ask him if it’s okay to touch, to soothe him in that way as well, but he doesn’t. It’s for the best. If he has to ask for it, for his touch, Shane might die of embarrassment. Something inside of him might shrivel up and finally fucking die, and Shane might be cured of being a Submissive. That’s what he’s always wanted, isn’t it? To just wake up one day and be normal.

Pressing his shoulder into Rozanov’s thumb doesn’t make him feel like that. It makes him feel good, without any other strings attached. His reason is elsewhere, but he can’t hold onto why. Right now it is just him and Rozanov and the soft lull of the engine beneath them.

The thumb jerks into action, swiping along the swell of Shane’s shoulder, kneading into the muscle. Suddenly, the touch that felt like it was his single, fraying tether to earth is no longer enough to keep him there.

He doesn’t want to float away, it is dark and cold outside. Shane pushes closer, at last managing to lift his head from the seat. It is still too heavy, but instead of tipping back towards the buttery leather headrest, Shane tips forwards.

He goes slowly, unsure if Rozanov’s grip on his shoulder will turn tight and push him back.

It doesn’t. It stays.

The centre console digs into Shane’s ribs, and the pinpricks of pain shoot tiny bolts of lightning up and down his insides, making him feel warm and cold at the same time. For a

second he wonders if he might be sick from it, it is so unexpected. Then his nose is against Rozanov's thigh, and he knows it is just the right side of intense. He can weather any pain if he is this close to his anchor.

His chin notches against the muscle of Rozanov's leg, head turning slightly to the left to find air to breathe, because he's not quite far gone enough to smother himself.

There's a hand on the back of his head then, and it is trembling. Shane leans into it, lets his eyes close as thick fingers sink into his short hair.

And he breathes.

Curled over the console, cheek on another man's thigh, he breathes easier than he ever has in any hockey locker room, maybe since he was ten years old.

He can hear Rozanov's breathing too, jerky and uneven just like the grip in his hair.

"I—" Shane inhales, shifting his arm beneath him, trying to move and look upwards. Instead, his elbow hits something and it bumps him forwards, and suddenly his face is not resting tentatively on Rozanov's thigh. No, his face is pressed firmly into the man's crotch, lips resting over the hardness he finds there.

Rozanov's hips jerk up automatically at the same moment his hand tightens in Shane's hair to pull him away, but Shane fights it. He pulls back on the grip, keeping his face where it is.

For a second they both just breathe again, that tentative peace reclaimed.

Then—

"Fuck, Hollander." And a thump of Rozanov's head against his headrest.

It is whispered, but Shane hears it. It floats in one ear and then clogs up his brain, rattling around and around until it's the only thing he can think of.

He sneaks another glance up, but all he can see is black nylon. All he can smell is sweat and tobacco. All he can feel is heat and the pulse of blood in Rozanov's cock.

Shane shifts again, more carefully, and presses closer. The leggings are very thin, and he can feel how Rozanov's cock hardens with every little movement. It is big. Not just regular Dom big, but... bigger than average. Another shift, and maybe he parts his lips a little. Maybe he tastes the salty sweat of the game against his tongue. Maybe he twists his neck, opens a little wider, feels the tip right between his lips. Maybe he gets bold, licks a stripe up the fabric and starts moving his lips in a careful, slow rhythm, all the while the hand in his hair twitches and tightens but never, ever pulls him away.

Somewhere, Shane thinks he wants to be pulled away. He wants to be dragged back up off the painful edge of the console, and he wants to be asked what the fuck he is doing, because that should be his reaction to this situation.

But it's not.

And before that thought can win out, there's something else dampening Rozanov's crotch. And a loud moan, followed by another string of curses that ends in Shane's name.

Shane blinks at it. He can't see much, just shiny black fabric darkened by saliva and— cum? His brain catches up, managing to wade through the treacle in his mind just enough to realise Rozanov just came in his pants. *Shane* made him come in his pants. All of a sudden, the console cutting into his ribs isn't pleasant and aching, it is sore and uncomfortable. The warm air against his skin feels humid and sticky.

He can't help the way he jerks up, inhaling air sharply like he hasn't taken a real breath since he lay down. Maybe he hadn't, because his lungs protest the breath, making him cough and splutter. He gets his hands beneath him, one either side of Rozanov's leg, and he scrabbles to get away.

What the fuck is he doing? Going soft for Ilya Rozanov, of all people? He's never done that before. He's not that person. He's not a Sub. Not like that. He—

Belatedly, Shane realises Rozanov still has a hand in his hair. He only realises when that hand tightens. The tug snaps his focus back to Rozanov, and Shane's stomach sinks. This is worse than he'd imagined. It's bad enough Rozanov could lead him into his headspace, but even now that he was up Shane's body moves with him, magnetised.

When Rozanov kisses him, his mind goes carefully blank. They meet halfway over the console, so there's no more pain. Rozanov's hand is firm, but not yanking. The kiss itself is... well, Shane doesn't remember the last time he was kissed like this. Rozanov certainly doesn't hold back. His tongue is insistent and searching, his teeth are careful not to clash against Shane's, and when he pulls back, he seals the deal with a little peck, then another. It is— Shane swallows sharply, feeling strangely chastised, even though not a single word was spoken.

He doesn't know when his hands had found Rozanov's body, but they are on the Dom's shoulders, squeezing. He lets Rozanov slowly, slowly lower him back into the seat before snatching them back to his side of the car, pulling his knees up to his chest and folding his hands in his lap. Without shoes, he doesn't feel bad having his feet on the expensive interior.

Rozanov exhales, hard, and looks out at the parking lot before them, hands now gripping the wheel.

"I got your bag." He says, still staring forwards.

Shane blinks, casting his head over his shoulder into the back seat. Sure enough, his duffel bag proudly pronouncing the number 24 sits on the seat, right next to another that is black and red, the Centaurs' colours.

"I will drive you home."

Shane can't speak. Can't bring himself to offer to call an Uber. So he nods instead.

Rozanov keeps staring out the windshield for a moment, until he finally turns to look at Shane, “Address, Hollander.”

Shit. Shane doesn’t hold his eye for long, moving his gaze down to his knees. He gives the address, no orders needed. He’s not about to make this harder on himself than it already is.

They pull out onto the road and Rozanov reaches into the main cubby of the console, blindly rattling around until he pulls out Shane’s phone.

“Rang many times. Had to turn off, was making you cry.”

He doesn’t remember that. Or maybe he does? Everything from the last hour is blurry in his mind. Had Rozanov snuck him down the service corridor? It seemed likely. Had he damn near sobbed himself to sleep? Fucking hell he hopes not, so maybe it’s for the best he doesn’t remember that part.

According to his phone the game finished two hours ago, and his Mom, Dad *and* Hayden had called. J.J. had texted. The assistant coach had also texted, unsurprisingly. Probably about the fine for skipping his media duties.

“Do you, um, mind?” Shane asks, lifting the phone. His voice is steadier than he thought it might be.

Rozanov’s eyes do not leave the road, but Shane can see how his lips curl up in a smirk, “No. I do not care about boring phone call. Carry on.”

Shane fights the urge to roll his eyes. That would be too normal, too... regular. Like they were facing each other down at centre ice still, not whatever the fuck they had actually done.

Hayden picks up on the first ring.

“Fuck! Shane where the fuck are you I’m coming to get you—”

“I’m fine. I’m fine, Hayd, please—“

“Holy shit I think I’m having a panic attack. What do you mean you’re fine? You disappeared! I came back to the locker room and you were gone!”

“Hayden.” Shane doesn’t mean to snap, but his patience is limited right now. Hayden can rant all this out to Jackie, not him.

Hayden breathes so heavily on the other end of the phone that the speaker picks it up, crackling. He speaks slower now, *“I was so worried about you. Please just tell me where you are and I’ll come over with Jackie right away.”*

“I’m—I’m at my place. Or I will be. It’s... please don’t come over.” He’s not sure he’s ever said that to Hayden before. Hayden and Jackie take care of him a lot when he wobbles. Shane spends more weekends at their house than his own, so he’s not surprised when Hayden sounds genuinely confused on the other end.

“Shane?”

“I just... Can you tell J.J. I’m fine? And coach that I’ll sort the fine out? And— uh, you know, my mom?”

“Fucking hell she’s going to kill me twice over when she finds out I lost you.”

“It would mean a lot.”

“Yeah. Of course. Look— nevermind. Just get some rest, okay?”

Shane hangs up, staring down at his dark phone screen. Then he sighs and drops it into his lap. He looks at Rozanov but the Dom doesn’t comment. He isn’t even smirking anymore, watching the road. He didn’t care, just like he’d promised.

It’s strange, seeing him with no chirp waiting on the tip of his tongue. Is that what Shane wants?

Fuck.

No.

He doesn’t know what he’d want him to say, so it’s probably for the best he just looks out the window and ignores him for the rest of the drive.

Half his body is hockey-bruised, and the ache behind his eyes is starting to return. He’s so fucking tired, he’s just going to sleep.

Chapter End Notes

Oh brotherrrrr I did not mean this to spiral so quickly out of control. This is not my usual shtick but I’m dipping my toes in the water so please be nice lol!

Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

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

“I will carry bags.”

Sleep is still tugging at Shane, and Rozanov’s voice surprises him.

The car is stopped, engine quiet. Shane’s house sprawls out in front of them, dark. His own car is missing from the equation, abandoned back at the rink. He finds himself coming to the terribly slow realisation that he will have to Uber back there tomorrow to retrieve it. Much earlier than he would usually arrive to make sure none of the other players see him doing it.

It doesn’t feel right: it makes Shane’s skin itchy again in the way he can’t scratch. He likes routine, thrives off it. Some days it feels like the only reason he gets out of bed is because he’s already lived through the day. He knows exactly who will be in it, where they will be, and what they will do.

Rozanov grabs the bags and then returns to Shane’s side of the car to open his door.

This is not routine, the way he is speechless and silent. Everyone knows he is the fastest player on the ice, and yet one drop is enough to make his brain lag so far behind. He needs to know how long it will linger for, if it might affect his game tomorrow, what he needs to do to feel right again.

Rozanov gestures at the front door. He looks at him so expectantly it makes Shane’s ears burn. He wants to slap himself on the cheeks, tell himself to get his act together.

Instead, he unlocks the door and leads the way inside.

He crosses his arms over his chest as he watches Rozanov finally enter his space. His eyes catch at the TV, the connected kitchen, the massive rug underneath his coffee table, but the rest of his face gives nothing away. Shane isn’t sure he’s ever seen it without a smirk before tonight.

It takes him a minute before he allows himself to really enter, like he’s certain now there are no Voyageurs hiding behind the curtains with their fists at the ready.

He sets both bags down on the armchair closest to him, one on top of the other.

“Do you have... favourite thing?”

“Like...” Shane feels himself trailing off, feels his arms squeezing around his middle, shifting upwards to be curled around his ribs. The pressure feels good, the tightness giving him something to breathe against, to fight.

“Blanket, heat pad, pillow. Favourite thing. *Aftercare*, Hollander.”

When Shane feels his cheeks heat up, he knows exactly how deeply his skin has flushed. As red as a fucking tomato, that is.

“I’m not a *child*.”

“I never say you were.” Rozanov just shrugs. He repeats, slower, “I ask if you have favourite thing.”

His words are not edging anywhere close to an order, and it’s like he knows already that he does not need to *order* Shane to get him to do anything. In one blinding and truly embarrassing moment, Shane realises that he doesn’t. All the way from the locker room to standing here, Rozanov had not given him a single order. So why the *fuck* did Shane bend for him? Why does he want to do it again?

“Um.” Shane shrugs, squeezing himself tighter. Should he be embarrassed to be so... easy? Rozanov must be high, but Doms who are high are supposed to prefer a challenge. They like the chase, the pushing, the sudden tip over the edge. They do *not* want whatever inexperienced mess Shane was below all his hockey gear and careful discipline.

Or that’s what he thinks. He’s never actually met anyone all that high, mostly doesn’t even bother to ask people what they are because he’s, you know, *not fucking interested*. He knows Hayden is about a six, and Jackie is about a five, and fucking Comeau is *seven-point-eight-two* exactly because he never shuts up about it. The rest, he is not so sure.

“Hollander.”

Shane’s attention snaps back to the room, just like it had before. *Never mind*, he doesn’t need to know Rozanov’s levels to be embarrassed. The way his body reacts is embarrassment enough.

Shane struggles to remember the question. *Aftercare*.

“Not really.”

Rozanov’s lips turn up, twisting his face into something probably annoyed. Why does he feel sick all of a sudden? Shane’s hands squeeze around his chest tighter, willing the feeling to go away. He’s *not* going to be sick in front of Ilya Rozanov.

“Do you want couch or bed?” He asks next, still with that stupid fucking frown on his face, as if he’s allowed to judge Shane for what he does and doesn’t have. As if he’s feeling totally normal right now. As if there’s absolutely nothing wrong with this situation at all, and Shane is just another one of his regular, revolving door of hookups.

Fuck. Him.

“I don’t- stop fucking asking me that!” The dam inside of Shane finally bursts. Anger crests over him like crashing waves. He thinks it will make him feel better. Yelling and fighting and pulling Billy Benson’s hair had made him feel better. But *fuck*, it makes him feel worse.

The nagging ring of his ears intensifies, pain travelling up from the back of his skull and pressing in behind his eyes. It comes on so suddenly he has to squeeze them closed, but there's no escape.

"It *hurts!*"

Hurts is an understatement. His head feels like bursting, and it's too heavy on his shoulders again. His fingers are digging into his sides, short little fingernails pressed in as deep as they can go.

And then nothing.

It keeps hurting, and he keeps squeezing, and Rozanov does nothing. Not that he wants him to. Or maybe he does. Maybe he's just human, and he'll let Rozanov do anything to him if it makes this pain go away.

All he'd wanted to do was play hockey. All he'd done tonight was play hockey.

Centre, face-off, win, breakaway, slap shot, fucking *miss*. He loosens his fingers, feels his shoulders drop.

Centre, face-off, win, pick his line, *slammed* into the boards. His head isn't so heavy, the ache is ebbing away, tide going out.

When his eyes open, time has moved on. Rozanov isn't standing in his living room anymore, but he's not run for the hills either. He has moved into the kitchen, is gently stirring a teaspoon around one of Shane's mugs.

He slinks past Shane again, carrying it in his left hand.

"Come here." He says without turning to look. He is busy settling himself on the edge of the coffee table, lowering the mug carefully as to not spill anything over the edge.

Shane goes. It isn't an order but it may as well have been for the way his body snapped to attention, too frayed to resist. He doesn't know what Rozanov's command sounds like, but he thinks he would feel it right down to his bones. Would that finally scratch the itch under his skin? He wants to know if his belly will burn and his muscles will tense, or will everything loosen up like this, start to feel weightless?

"Sit down."

His words are direct. They leave no room for interpretation. Shane sits right where he is, smack in the middle of the sofa.

"You have favourite show, yes?"

Shane nods once, a sharp bob of his head, "Hockey."

Rozanov rolls his eyes and smacks his lips as if to say *typical*. Maybe it is. But he had asked, so Shane had answered. He doesn't understand why there's disapproval there, lingering. He'd

come, he'd sat, he'd *answered*.

Shane lets his body slump. His cheek squishes against the arm of the sofa. If following isn't good enough, he may as well stop trying. He's cold anyways, and pulling his knees up to his chest keeps a bubble of heat trapped close to his body.

The TV flickers through five different channels before landing on a hockey game—he counts them.

The cameras are zoomed in, following the puck.

Back and forth. Back and forth.

“Okay.” Rozanov sighs, because he's still annoyed at Shane. He doesn't want to be here, Shane isn't being sweet anymore, and he wants to celebrate his win with someone else, probably. Can't be much fun celebrating with a Sub who doesn't know how to be good.

“Is okay now? No more... hurt?”

There's still an ache behind his eyes, but it *is* better. Shane can keep them open without pain, can let thoughts filter through his head without getting confused. He just nods, not even really looking away from the screen.

Back and forth. Back and forth.

“Good. Okay. Is okay.” Rozanov says, like he's trying to convince some secret third person in the room. He says it hurried, too, each word tripping over the last. He's in a hurry to leave Shane, obviously.

Backhand. Goalie dives. No point.

Rozanov is still. He's standing a little in the way of the screen, hip and thigh obscuring the left side, but Shane can't bring himself to speak up. If he had felt tired in the car, he feels exhausted now. All twisted up and squeezed, energy wrung out of him.

It's not a bad feeling, really. Not as bad as the sharp drop from earlier. Just a quiet one. Everything has gone gentle and rhythmic, almost like the puck he's watching. His breathing, his heartbeat, the ring in his ear: it's all steady.

Whatever Rozanov was waiting for, he obviously doesn't find it with Shane. He lifts a hand as if to touch him but lets it drop, swinging loosely at his side.

“Good night, Hollander.”

Play resumes. Back and forth. Back and forth. Shane doesn't watch him go.

There's a spot on the wall that is marked up with something. It's tiny, barely even visible. Is it a speck of dirt, or is it a neat little pinprick where they used to hang something? Beside it sits the trophy cabinet, tall and proud. Is it solid wood? Custom built?

"Is there something distracting you, Hollander?"

Yes. No. The answer is complicated, and Shane really doesn't want to talk about it.

Still, there is a different elephant in the room they haven't addressed yet, and this is more than a decent opening to bring it up.

"You uh... you haven't asked." Shane isn't sure why he keeps his voice low. The season hasn't started, there are no prying eyes or listening ears: it is just him and Coach Wiebe behind a closed door in a private office. But Shane is habitual, and speaking about his designation is something he has always spoken about quietly, if at all.

Wiebe catches his eye, bends his neck to the side and puts his head in front of Shane's gaze.

"About your designation? That's none of my business, Hollander."

His voice is level the whole time. His hands stay clasped calmly on the tabletop. His eyes still bore into Shane's head. They don't even narrow, not even slightly. Nothing about him changes.

It makes no sense whatsoever. *Everyone* cared, that was sort of his problem. Coach Theriault had cared a little too much, or Shane wouldn't be sitting here in this plush centaurs-red armchair, discussing the final terms of his trade to Ottawa.

He supposes he should be glad he got one season out of the Voyageurs after they knew the truth. He got the *C* on his shoulder as well, because after winning the cup it was impossible for them to pick anyone else. *Bad optics* was the phrase that had been thrown around by the PR managers.

So long as he was winning, nobody could complain too much.

So long as he was winning, there would be too many questions to trade him away.

But without a third back-to-back cup, Shane is out. Cut off. Up shit creek without a paddle.

Shane coughs into the back of his hand, still distinctly uncomfortable. "Montreal thought so."

"This isn't Montreal." Wiebe argues, pretty succinctly.

Shane already knows that: Ottawa is a far worse team and that trophy cabinet is pretty empty. One season with Rozanov at the helm had certainly increased their win-rate, but they were nowhere near the playoffs yet.

It makes them desperate enough for Shane, who might be a walking scandal if anyone ever leaked his designation to the media, but is maybe good enough to justify wanting anyways.

It's a compliment, really, being good enough for a team to take that risk. At least for a bit of a pay cut, if he can swallow it, but he's not too prideful to know that this might be his only option. Better to take a pay cut than to give up on his entire life.

"I don't care what you do in your spare time, so long as our medical team clears you as level-headed enough to play."

That, Shane knows he can be. Maybe he's been a little distracted this summer, not practicing as much at the cottage or following his macrobiotic diet as diligently, but that's all totally completely *fixable*.

"I am." He says, sitting up that little bit straighter, because this is what he knows. Hockey. There is almost nobody in the world better than him at hockey, "I've won that cup twice already. I'm going to do it again."

-

"So you were tested when you were... twelve, yes?"

Ottawa's team doctor is a short, red-faced man whose name-tag calls him *Terry*. There's nothing wrong with him at all. In fact, he has been unfailingly polite for all of the last eighteen minutes they've been sitting in his exam room.

The very first thing he had done was politely greet Shane with a handshake, welcoming him to Ottawa. Then he'd asked all the usual questions:

How is his house-search going? *Fine thanks*.

Does he have any family nearby? *Montreal is only two hours away*.

Is he excited to get on the ice again? *Fuck yes*. They'd even shared a smile over that one.

But now—

Shane doesn't feel so much like smiling anymore when he reluctantly answers with an almost inaudible, "Mm-hm."

Terry looks over at his computer screen, typing in the answer. The title of the file open reads: ***Shane Hollander, 23, Male, Submissive***.

Now there is another box with the answer: *early presentation, 10-12 y/o* typed out in blocky, pixelated font.

Something about it brings him back to being a teenager again, sitting in doctors offices not unlike these, being asked questions not unlike these.

One time, when Shane had been thirteen and having a particularly shitty day, he'd just screamed at the nurse. No wind-up, no prior warning. His butt had hit the exam chair and he'd just started screaming.

The nurse had given up and called his Mom in to take him home.

Terry probably won't do that, though, so instead of scream, Shane bites his lip. *Hard.*

"Okay. I can see the Montreal team didn't put much focus on your designation, did they? No regular drop tests were logged in their notes."

They didn't. They didn't test him because there's no use in testing someone who is supposed to be neutral. The fabric of his jeans is rough against his palms as he presses them in, tightens his grip.

"I play hockey."

Terry looks up over his glasses at him, silent. Perhaps he thinks Shane has a lingering concussion, stating the obvious like that. Shane barrels on anyways, swallowing back against his dry throat, "I play hockey. I don't need to be... *tested.*"

The word makes him feel sick. Like he's some kind of experiment. Something that needs to be monitored. Handled.

"Ah." Terry nods, nods like it all makes sense, turns back to his computer and starts typing again, "So it was a voluntary refusal?"

"I didn't *refuse* anything."

He knows his voice is rising, teetering closer and closer to that shrill scream from years ago, but he can't help it. His stomach hurts and there's a dull throbbing somewhere unidentifiable, rattling his body.

Terry turns back from the computer. He is a Dom, it's obvious by the way he carries himself. Shane isn't even attracted to him— the man looks old enough to be his grandfather— but he's so messed up in the head he feels *satisfied* that he got his attention, even if it's disapproving. It's not what he's really craving but maybe it helps, shocks his system like a defibrillator.

"Well, I take a more serious approach to drop tests than Montreal's team. Everyone has one at the start and the end of the season."

"Everyone." Shane echoes him.

"Yes. Dom and Sub. All I need is a prick of your blood to measure your hormone levels. Fluctuations can be detected in your system for about six months. They have a good memory."

Shane nods. Ignores the joke. It's not funny. Maybe it's funny to little kids or players high on morphine, but not to Shane, who is dead sober and distinctly uncomfortable.

All he can think about is that the past six months have been *shit*. He wakes up with a headache more often than not, takes more anti-nausea pills than meals, and— well. He knows exactly when that little machine is going to say his hormones spiked.

“Right.” Terry claps his hands together, rolls his squeaky little chair over to Shane, “May I?”

There's no way out of it, so Shane lifts his arm. He knows how this goes. Terry wraps a hand around his wrist and takes a fresh needle from the packet.

The blood is dropped carefully onto a paper strip, which is in turn inserted into a black machine that resembles a blood sugar monitor his diabetic friend in high school used to have.

“While we wait, when was the last time you went into subspace?”

Subspace. The word stops Shane in his tracks. *Subspace*.

“Why.”

Even Terry's natural politeness is wavering now. His smile is a little pained, head tilted to the side, “So I know if the reading is accurate. Nothing more, nothing less. I won't judge you for what you do in your spare time, Shane. Nobody will.”

It's not true, but Shane doesn't argue. The reading might not be so bad. Finishing the season early in defeat had been terrible but it had meant more time to spend with his parents. His Mom had steadied him when he'd really needed it, talking to him slowly and petting his hair, sometimes even curling up behind him in bed.

It kept him from dropping, yes, but it was never enough to find a *headspace*, which is what Terry really wants to know. She'd never been able to do that, had never really tried past the age of thirteen or fourteen when it was clear she was doing more harm than good.

So he knows what the answer is.

“Three months.” He looks down at his hands as he says it, squeezing his fingers together, enjoying the pressure of them being tightened again.

Terry says nothing, and that's probably worse than anything else he could have done.

Shane knows it's a long time for most people, but he's never been *most people*. Before three months ago, the answer would probably have been far more dire. More like *I don't really remember* or *I'm not sure*.

Thankfully, the machine has good cosmic timing. It beeps to say the test is complete, and Shane can move his head to look at it, keeping his eyes down.

There's a little graph on the screen, and Shane doesn't have to be a genius to understand there's a little spike a while back, and then a very sharp decline ever since. In fact, where the

marker sits now is quite close to falling off the bottom of the graph, which cannot be good news.

“Right.” The man hums, “I can see that drop three months ago. Is that a normal timeframe for you? Do you feel fine otherwise?”

“Yes.” The lie is easy, he doesn’t care what Terry thinks of him. He wants to get out of here and far, far away from that stupid little graph.

“Okay. Well that’s everything, then. I’ll email out my report within a week, alright? Suggestions for diet, recovery, etcetera. Coach Wiebe will be able to see them as well, but not any of your private health information.”

Maybe he nods, maybe he doesn’t. Shane just feels numb as he slips off the end of the bench and leaves.

He just about makes it to his car before stumbling over his own feet and having to catch himself on the hood. He bites his lip sharply, willing it to help him, but when the fog finally rolls in, it doesn’t go away quickly anymore. He fumbles for the door handle but misses, so he has to try again. And again.

His legs feel apart from him, wobbling and buckling like a baby deer in a nature documentary.

Something is pressing between his eyes, too. Sharp, firm. It’s not real, he knows. It’s temporary, a headache that will eventually fade. But that is harder to remember when it hurts so much he has to lean his forehead against the car.

A shadow cuts out the light behind him. He blinks. Again. Then again. Then— he whips around so suddenly the world tilts on its axis.

Rozanov is less than an arm’s length away, holding both hands in the air like Shane is a loaded weapon.

“Hollander?”

Shane groans, clutching his stomach. It’s rolling over itself, the pain from his head throbbing through his insides. He stumbles with it, and the ground really does drop out from under him.

For a moment, he is falling.

Then there is an arm clamped around his waist and he’s being guided backwards, set down on the car seat.

Rozanov crowds the doorway, and his hands hold Shane up at the shoulders. They keep him from falling again, from his head swinging back and smacking against something. He wishes Rozanov had let him fall. Maybe a concussion would be good for him, would rattle everything around in his head until it’s the right way up again.

“You are down again.”

Shane just about catches onto the words. He doesn't feel down. It's a terrible, confusing kind of down if that is what this is.

The hand on him makes him feel better, miraculously. With the touch, Shane is able to open his eyes again.

Rozanov is not looking at him, though. His head is cast back over his shoulder towards the rink.

Tears form in his eyes. He'd made Rozanov angry last time, and he hadn't stayed then, and he doesn't want to stay now either. When will he ever do this right? He doesn't have practice, he knows he's not perfect, but it's meant to be in his nature to please. To be good.

Rozanov swears. He's definitely angry again. It must be *Shane*-

"You can stand?"

Shane stands so quickly he narrowly avoids hitting his head on the edge of the car, feeling the rubber of the seal brush against his hair.

Rozanov opens out his hand, "Keys."

Before he asks, Shane couldn't have remembered where his keys were for the life of him. But when Rozanov says the word, his entire mind narrows to the heavy weight in his pocket. *Keys*. He scrabbles for them, fingers feeling clumsy and thick.

Their fingers brush when Rozanov takes them out of his palm. His lip even twitches up, the tiniest start of a smile. Shane leans into it, pressing their palms together. This is better. Rozanov is happy with him. No more cursing, no more frowning.

"Okay. Let's go. Over here."

Rozanov's car is different from last time. The interior is a tan, coffee-cream colour with matching stitching. Smaller, with no back seat. It has low doors and shaded windows, and Shane melts into the leather. It's cold against his skin. It feels good. Distracts him.

"I need you to be still. Relax. I will be quick, okay?"

Be still. Shane can be still, if that's what's needed from him. He is always able to do what's needed from him. Skate faster, turn quicker, hit the puck harder. He can do any of it. That's why he'd barrelled his way through juniors and Team Canada and right into the NHL.

His hands rest on his thighs, and his fingers do not tap nervously, do not fidget and fumble. They are completely still, because that's what he was told to do.

He looks straight forwards, staring at Rozanov's retreating back, watching him duck into the rink. No matter how many people pass by, how many birds flutter around the hedges, he doesn't move his neck.

After a while, his eyes start to ache again. When had his headache ebbed away? He hadn't taken any medication since early this morning, but somehow he had forgotten it was there. The new wave hits him softly, not nearly as blinding as before. It seeps out and down to the base of his skull, more nagging than anything.

It makes his eyes flutter, wanting to close.

Another few minutes, and he lets them. Maybe the command had eased, the words no longer weighing on him. It had been a command, hadn't it? A Dom had asked him to stay still. That was what a command is: an instruction from a Dom. Or it wasn't. No, a command is something else, something inescapable. If it had been a command, Shane would still have his eyes forced open. Maybe. He's not so sure anymore. His head *really* hurts.

His shoulders relax back into the seat. They stay where they are but they... relax. He had been told to relax too, hadn't he? The memory was blurry in his mind, but the voice had been clear.

Rozanov had touched his hand, too.

It had felt good.

It had—

The rush of cold air hits Shane with a strange sense of *deja vu*.

Rozanov slides into the seat beside him. This time he doesn't smell like cigarette smoke. He smells like the citrusy maybe-lemon maybe-lime air freshener from Terry's office, and he has a tiny bandage on his finger that matches Shane's own.

When Rozanov reaches out and touches him, it is a surprise. This is not *deja vu*. Last time, Rozanov had not touched him, he had hesitated. Shane feels warm all over. He had stayed *still*, and he had *relaxed*, and now Rozanov was going to make him feel good again.

Two fingers hook under his jaw, tilting his head up. They are calloused, a little crooked, and firm as they move him.

This time, whatever he is looking for, he *does* find it in Shane, and he does not leave. This is not like three months ago at all. Tears come to his eyes again.

"Is okay. No tears this time, yes?"

Shane sniffs, shakes his head, "No tears." His voice is scarily hoarse, mumbled under his breath around a tongue that feels too big for his mouth.

Rozanov smiles at him again, and Shane will happily never cry again if he keeps getting that smile.

"Good. No tears. Will ruin beautiful Italian leather, yes? I do not care about rental car, but this one is from personal collection."

Of course he has a collection of sports cars. It fits his image perfectly.

“No tears.” Shane repeats, sniffing harder, blinking quicker, willing with everything inside of him for the endless well of them to dry up.

When Rozanov’s hand disappears from under his chin, maybe one or two slip out, but he scrubs them away before the Dom can see.

The engine roars to life louder than the last car, quicker to action.

“Instead of tears, we talk.” Rozanov glances away from the road, “Yes? You tell me about last game you watch.”

Shane follows his instructions without question. He swallows, shrugs, shakes his head, “Montreal replays.”

Rozanov smirks, “Study over summer? You are nerd, Hollander. Is terminal.”

Suddenly, Shane is overtaken with the thought that Rozanov is not just an asshole on the ice, playing it up for the cameras and his image, but he is actually *such* a little shit. And then he realises he isn’t crying anymore, and *he’s* smiling, and he might actually like it. He likes this volleying back and forth, he likes the way it clears his mind and gives him something else to focus on.

“What are you thinking in pretty head?” Rozanov pokes at him again, smirk set on his face still like it’s permanent. He quirks an eyebrow, too.

And, well, Shane tells him.

“You’re an asshole.”

Rozanov’s teasing little smile is nothing compared to his grin. It’s all teeth, “Ah! Maybe not so much of a nerd. I knew you have chirp potential.”

Rozanov swings his car around like a go-kart for the next ten minutes before parking it surprisingly neatly. He hustles him into the unfamiliar house, rumbling instructions lowly whenever Shane freezes up.

Which he doesn’t really, only stumbling at the last hurdle. Literally. When Shane tries to sit, his feet finally give out from under him. He hits the edge of the sofa cushion and slips off, legs buckling.

The hardwood is cold against his knees, hurts against old breaks and bruises. Part of him wants to keep falling: there is further to go, he can slump to the side and give up entirely. Part of him wants to fight it, tries to, damn muscles won’t move.

And then one small but rapidly expanding part of him wants to be *still* again, because it feels like it’s what he should be doing— this is what Subs do. They kneel. Shane isn’t sure he’s ever knelt for anyone before. It’s not that it feels unnatural, it’s more that it’s unfamiliar. He’s

never felt so boneless and out of body, like his head has been dunked under water. It hits him the moment his body freezes there, kneeling.

His eyes look up in search of Rozanov's.

He is staring back, frowning.

Fuck.

“Ah ah, no, not down there. Come, up here.”

Shane's legs might feel like jelly but his arms are strong so he just about manages to leverage one on the coffee table and one on the sofa arm, heaving himself up again. He tips forwards, flopping very ungracefully over Rozanov. Their knees knock, limbs all bent up and crooked, but Rozanov is gentle with him. He organises them one by one; a knee on each side of his hips and his arms tied neatly away behind Rozanov's neck.

A blanket is drawn up over his back, tucked in around his sides, swallowing both of them whole.

“Shhh... settle, yes? Sleep it off. Is best way.”

Sleep. Another wave of déjà vu rolls over him, calling him back to that first night three months ago, but it is too slow. His brain is already halfway through switching off, lights flickering out, nobody home.

-

Shane wakes up slowly. Always has. Opening his eyes always seems like such an effort. He shifts, searching out the warmest spot on his mattress, trying to find his sheet to pull around him. Why is there no sheet, has it slipped off the—

Shane snaps to attention. He jerks back, very nearly toppling himself over in the process. Two hands grip his hips bruisingly tight in an effort to keep him upright. Two hands that are becoming dangerously familiar, that are finding their way over new parts of his body every time they meet like this. *Ilya Rozanov's* fucking hands.

His entire body is shaking, but he's not sure what to do about it. All he knows is his last clear memory was being at his medical check, and then it had all just... blurred. Somewhere there was a parking lot, and a car *again*, and now whatever this was. Wherever this was. Because it's not Shane's new apartment, and he needs to leave. Now.

What if someone saw them? A fan at the rink, a neighbour on their porch? What if Shane said something to Rozanov he doesn't remember, something private or secret or just really fucking embarrassing?

Oh god, his lungs are giving up on him.

A thousand more thoughts fly through his head. He will need an Uber. He needs to find his phone. His keys. Shoes. He needs to make sure Rozanov doesn't tell anyone but he also needs to never speak to this stupid Dom ever again he—

Shane doesn't realise he's actively tugging against Rozanov's hands until they tighten around him further. He bucks up from where he is straddling the Dom, a hand shoving at his chest. He will burst onto his feet on the sofa cushions and topple the damn thing if he has to, he just needs to get out he just needs to *leave*—

“Stay.”

Shane stops so suddenly and so instinctively his entire body locks up, not moving even a twitch. It's like they're playing *red light green light*, and Shane is not about to find out what happens if he loses.

Just about the only part of him not frozen is his brain. It empties for a moment, worries falling away to make space for the command, and then fills up again with more thoughts. Slower thoughts. Random thoughts.

First, that his breathing has evened. He is taking slow, punched-out breaths, his lungs jerking into motion every time they need air rather than heaving and puffing as if there's not enough oxygen in the room.

Second, it is that Rozanov's order is strong. It had come deep from inside his chest, a slight rumble chasing it up out of his throat. It is not loud, particularly, or even very cutting. Unlike a lot of the orders Shane has heard before, he does not bark it. He just... says it.

He says it like he expects Shane to stay.

And so he stays.

Below him Rozanov cocks his head slightly to the side, lip twitching at the corner, as if maybe he wants to apologise.

Shane wants to move his hand, take it away from where it sits on Rozanov's chest, but he can't. He can't even look down at it, because his eyes are caught where they had been when the command was said. Staring directly into Rozanov's.

He can feel his cheeks flushing with heat.

That, of all things, makes Rozanov smile.

The fact that Shane's cock is hard in his shorts, and because of the way he'd thrashed it is now pressing into Rozanov's thigh... *that* is probably what makes the smile turn into a wolfish little smirk, teeth and all.

There must be something wrong with Shane's brain. Every time he is around this man, he is so desperate.

The order is fading now, not such a hot, sizzling brand behind his eyes. He doesn't need another order to push his shorts down over the swell of his ass to free his cock, and he definitely doesn't need an order when Rozanov uses his ridiculous muscles and lifts his hips off the couch to do the same.

He spits into his hand and shifts his body closer, pressing them together shoulders-to-hips so his hand can wrap around both of them, pressing his cock up to the underside of Rozanov's.

"Fuck fuck fuck." Shane grunts and groans and stuffs his head into the crook of Rozanov's neck, because it's too much. The room is too bright and their skin is feverishly hot and the spit isn't quite enough to make it a smooth glide, but the slight roughness feels right.

Rozanov rocks with the strokes, jerks.

"*Fuck!*" Shane comes much too quickly before Rozanov, but he doesn't have enough room in his head to be embarrassed. If anything, it makes him want to do better. He wants Rozanov to come as easily as he did last time, rutting into his face and coming into his pants.

Pleasure still sizzling up and down his bones, Shane shoves back from Rozanov's chest, bending himself in half to take him into his mouth. The back of his head ends up pressed against Rozanov's stomach and his spine protests the stretch, but the cock in his mouth is reward enough. Heavy. Warm. He cannot reach to take it all, but that doesn't stop him from trying.

He slides his head up and down as smoothly as he can. The tip of it is blunt, just as thick as the rest of him, and Shane can't help popping off the length to lap at it. He draws a circle around the head with his tongue before breathing a last shuddering breath and taking it as far down his throat as he can manage.

It does not occur to him to go slowly, or try to be sensual. It definitely doesn't occur to him to pace himself. He strains, hollowing his cheeks as he pushes back down.

Rozanov's moan feels like it echoes off the walls, punctuated by a sharp thrust upwards. Shane chokes, gets half a mouthful of precum and spit before he has to pull back.

He coughs, then again. There's a hand in his hair, mussing and petting. Apologising. He's pressed so close to Rozanov's cock that it rests against his cheek, long and hard and still throbbing. He had been right when he'd thought it was big. Eight or nine inches, at least. Paler than the rest of him. With Shane's spit and drool laved over the skin, it looks almost pornographic.

His break lasts less than ten seconds. The moment he can catch enough air, he is eager to sink back down onto it. He hasn't learnt his lesson, either. Each bob of his head goes deeper, licks further, hollows his cheeks a little more now that he knows it drives him crazy.

One thought. He wants to make Rozanov come.

He wants it so badly it surprises him when it actually happens.

The hands on his hips tighten to a bruising pressure. Moans stop being restrained. Hot cum hits the back of his throat. He chokes again and he has to pull away, back straining as it comes unfolded. The rest of Rozanov's release spills on his chin, then dribbles down his neck. He wipes at it, starts to lick at the tangy taste on his lips, but there's a hand around his throat, pulling him in, and then Rozanov kisses the rest away.

-

When the command wears off, Shane can still feel the tendrils of his panic twisted around him. It is no longer insistent and building, but it is there. It's in his lungs, burning from their earlier effort. It's in his brain, too, all his thoughts clamouring to be let out and run wild without a Dominant to hold them back.

Shane shifts, wincing as his skin feels raw and scratchy against the couch cushions.

Rozanov's hand on his hip tightens slightly as if he thinks Shane might be making a second break for freedom. It quickly loosens again, as if his second thought is that he can't actually keep Shane here forever.

He doesn't let himself think about that either: what it would be like being here forever.

Shane moves again after a few minutes, and then again. He needs to shift his knee before it locks up. And then he needs to twitch his toes, and then his calf is going numb, and then-

"Hollander." Rozanov exhales his name in a rush of breath, like it is simply too much effort to speak anymore, like the command had just as much of an effect on him as it had on Shane. He makes it look like a herculean effort, lolling his head to the side to look at him, "Is there something you need?"

Shane feels himself scowl, "No."

Rozanov rolls his head back, staring off at the rest of the room, the dark TV and the blank walls, "Okay then. You will have no problem sitting still for rest of afternoon like good boy, yes?"

He doesn't like it when Rozanov looks away. Shane feels his scowl deepen. "If I can get off your lap." He spits, "I'm not a- a *cat*."

The tone works, the burst of anger draws him back in, catches his attention. Rozanov doesn't turn his head again, but his eyes cast back over to Shane. He grins, too. All his grins seem to be toothy and wide. Spread from cheek to cheek.

"No, you are kitten. *Kotik*. Kitten angry at world, with blunt little claws."

His anger doesn't feel blunt when it is pressing at him from all sides. It feels razor-sharp. Shane sniffs, suddenly feeling very overwhelmed. His vision blurs, but not because he is

maybe-concussed, maybe-dropping. No, these are just regular, boring old tears. The salty, wet kind that spills over your eyelashes and drips onto the Dom beneath you, making even more of a mess.

“Is okay. Is okay.” Rozanov is quick to sit up, eyes blowing wide, “No lap, yes?”

“It’s-“ Shane doesn’t even know. He feels like an idiot, and he feels cold and exposed and- *ohmygod* his cock is still out. It’s resting against his thigh, softening, covered in two separate puddles of release. He has never felt so disgusting.

Rozanov must follow his gaze, because almost as quickly as Shane realises what is wrong, Rozanov is lifting him up off his lap, setting him to the side, and leaving the room.

Somehow, that’s worse. Shane’s stomach twists, because now he is cold and disgusting and *alone*. More tears fall, no matter how much frowning or sniffing he does to try and hold them back like he’d promised, he simply can’t.

Rozanov returns with two things: a damp rag and a clean pair of shorts.

He doesn’t ask Shane to stand, even if that would be easier. Maybe he knows it would be useless. Maybe he thinks Shane will collapse into a kneel again. Maybe he *would*.

Rozanov sits down across from him on the coffee table, brow furrowed just a little as he makes soft strokes of the rag against Shane’s skin. For the first time, Shane thinks that perhaps Rozanov just has a frowny kind of face. Maybe he is not simply upset whenever his lips turn down. Maybe there is more to him than hockey and anger and Dom.

He eases Shane’s shorts off before helping him with the new pair. He doesn’t really need help; the command to stay is long eased out of his system now, so Shane takes charge of getting them up over his butt and settling them around his hips.

They fit, just about. He runs his fingers down the fabric, finding them soft and cottony rather than the slippy moisture-wicking fabric of more expensive athletic wear. He runs a finger down each of the three stripes on the side. The fabric is bobbled, too. They’ve been well-loved.

“Okay?” Rozanov asks, drawing the attention back to himself, like always. All Doms do it, even when they don’t mean to. They demand attention, and they expect entirely to receive it.

Shane doesn’t really mind, not like this. He blinks and jerks his head up, shrugging.

“Don’t lie, Hollander. Cannot help if told lies.”

“Don’t tell me what to do.” Shane can barely make himself sound disapproving. The words snap from his teeth against his will, but the tone is flat.

Rozanov doesn’t seem to notice. Or if he does he chooses to ignore it, instead raising a single eyebrow, “You want order instead?”

Shane flinches. “*No*.” That, he snaps with force.

Rozanov stares. Then, for once, relents.

Without an order given, Shane is left to sit on the couch and watch Rozanov potter about in the connected kitchen. He has an electric kettle and he flicks it on, lifting one arm up to grab two mugs, and then his other hand reaching down to a pot on the counter.

Tea, Shane thinks. He is making him tea. Again.

While he watches over the back of the sofa, he thinks back to that news run he'd watched a long time ago, the speakers contemplating if Rozanov was too mean for a locker room. If he issues commands like they are nothing, if he screams and yells, if he reacts violently to every slight.

That is not what happens behind closed doors.

The man is making him tea, just because he'd cried.

Nobody would ever believe him.

"Is okay to ask now?" Rozanov asks, task complete, two steaming mugs of green tea set on the coffee table. They are still steeping, colour slowly darkening, and neither of them reach for a cup yet.

Or that is, Rozanov does not reach for his, or give an order for Shane to drink up.

"Ask what?"

Rozanov's face frowns again. Now he has realised how expressive Rozanov is, Shane knows this frown is definitely not the same frown he makes when he is fighting on the ice. This one is different, less harsh, less gnashing teeth. It is just a little wrinkle between his eyebrows, a tilt of his chin backwards. Concern, maybe.

"Why I have found you twice, dropping?" He says it as if it is the most obvious thing in the world.

Shane looks down at his hands. He doesn't have an answer. Not any that Rozanov would like.

A hand snakes out, squeezes his knee, "Is not healthy. You had appointment earlier, yes? What did doctor say about your levels?"

The words *private health information* echo between his ears. Not even the league or his coaches are entitled to that information. Even Terry isn't entitled, if Shane refuses. He definitely doesn't have any obligation to give it to Rozanov.

"Nothing really." He says anyways, "Um. They just asked when I last went down to calibrate it, or whatever."

Rozanov hums as if he understands. The hand slips away from Shane's knee, "Was too long ago?"

Another burst of anger. “Fuck you. I’m *not* needy.”

The hand returns. Shane breathes out.

“Did not say that. Even if you were, needy is not a bad thing.” He shrugs, tips his head to the side, “Can be very sexy.”

Shane thinks if he just stops answering, maybe he can escape this situation with at least some of his pride still intact. They don’t need to talk about this— what is sexy, what is not— because it doesn’t matter. They’re not Dom and Sub. They’re not even friends. They’re just... an accident.

His silence does not help. Instead, it might actually make it worse. Because Rozanov is like a dog with a bone.

“You do not see drop partner enough now you are in Ottawa?” He asks.

“I don’t...” Shane feels a little helpless as he answers. He really doesn’t want to humour this. Would he be this open if he wasn’t so close to his headspace still? “I don’t have a partner.”

Rozanov blinks like that surprises him too, “You use service?”

“No!” Shane bursts, panicked. The idea makes him sicker than sitting in a doctor’s office. A stranger, touching him like this. Unthinkable. Never happening. He’d rather die. “I don’t need... all that.”

Rozanov stares at him, face entirely slack.

“What?” Shane can’t look. He actually can’t bear to look and see Rozanov’s face scrunch up when he reacts. He keeps his eyes firmly pressed down, staring at his hands.

“No.” Rozanov must shrug, because it jerks the hand on Shane’s knee. He shifts it, swipes his thumb over an old bruise, “I just think maybe you are stupider than I thought.”

“Hey! What the fuck?”

“Do not *hey* when you are Sub in Dom contact sport without a partner!” Rozanov growls.

Shane inclines his head and leans away. *Sub in a contact sport*. Because that’s all Shane is, a Sub. That’s all it ever boils down to. He knows— he *knows*— that Rozanov doesn’t think he’s a bad player, or that he’s not suited for the game. That much is obvious in the way he’s treated him. The moment he found out Shane was a Sub, he could’ve gone to the media. At the very least, he could’ve *expressed concerns* to an official in the league.

But he hadn’t.

The words still grate on him, though. They still make him feel wholly inadequate. Because to the entire world, Shane’s very existence is wrong. *Subs don’t pack on as much muscle, Subs get emotional, Subs can’t handle being hit without folding, Subs judgement is askew around so many Doms*.

None of those statements are true. Subs can handle just as much as anyone else can, they just need... they need this. They need somewhere safe to fall apart in afterwards, somewhere they can let go.

Doms need it too, crave it just as much, or they wouldn't feel the need to shove orders in everyone's faces. But it's more palatable, being in control, so nobody questions it. Nobody ever questions their right to play, their hookup habits, or their needs.

"It's not my fault!" He protests, "I don't have the time, I don't even know what I like because I missed all that to play fucking hockey, which I *love*, unlike being a Sub which I *hate* and if any one of my teammates had found out I needed help I'd have never heard the end of it!"

There are more tears, because they never really seem to dry up.

"Ottawa is not like that." Rozanov presses closer. He can't seem to stay away when there are tears. His hands are insistent and firm on Shane's body, roaming over little patches of land, claiming the long planes of his torso. If the touch didn't cool his skin so perfectly, Shane might have the willpower to slap them away, "They are good team. You need subspace, they would know this."

He doesn't. He doesn't need it. He doesn't *need* anything, because he's dragged himself this far without it. But.

"Maybe."

The admission is torn out of him in a sob and a fresh well of tears. Dragging himself had hurt so much. He had given up so many things. The childhood he never finished, the crazy teenage years he never got to experience. He missed the fumbling, the exploring, the process of settling into his skin. He is just as experienced now at being a Sub as he had been at ten years-old.

"But I- I can't." It sounds lame.

"You can't." Rozanov repeats. His accent twists the words, makes them sound even more ridiculous.

"I don't know *how*." Shane amends, "What if- what if they don't understand? What if I can't go down because I'm too high? What-" He hiccups, "What if I just... *can* 't?"

The hand slowly stroking up and down his ribs pauses. Shane doesn't like that. He can't handle that rejection right now. He leans into it, insistent, like that might make it move again.

He knows he is doing this all wrong. He knows he is not saying the right things, acting how he's meant to act with a Dom. Rozanov is probably about ready to chuck him out into the cold.

But, actually, Rozanov is the one who suggests it.

Shane's eyes fly back open, and he expects to find a joke there, another tease, another smirk, but there isn't one. Rozanov is being serious.

“You can.” He says, “You want to go down. You do not really know how and your brain is slow to catch up, but when you *are* down, you want to be there. With me, you *can*.”

He sounds so *sure*.

“You have many worries. You cannot tell anybody because of hockey, this I get, but you are a big blubbering mess without headspace, Hollander.”

Shane feels like he should protest. Feels like it shouldn’t be this simple. The solution to his entire life’s problem shouldn’t just fall into his lap.

“I- It was a one time thing. Orders don’t- they don’t do anything to me.”

Rozanov leans in close, closer than before. He is smiling again now, no teeth, lips tugging like he’s trying to tamp it down, “Oh, *kotik*, when I give the order to stay, you felt it head to toe.”

Shane blinks, “No I didn’t.” He argues, probably petulantly.

Rozanov grins, leans away. Shane misses his heat.

“Ah. I see. You are high sub. You do not bend easily. Is no problem, I am very persistent.”

“I don’t *bend* at all.” Shane mutters, but he is pretty succinctly ignored. Rozanov keeps speaking over him, louder and more, well, *persistent*. The light reflects off his eyes, making them look like they are dancing.

“I already know your big scary secret.” He says, “And I am big handsome Russian hockey Dom with no partner. You cannot say is not perfect.”

Big handsome Russian hockey Dom who will be Shane’s *captain* in a few short weeks, and Shane argues as much. It is valiant of him to try and make a final stand, but even he knows the excuse is weak.

Rozanov shrugs, humours him one last time, “Maybe it has never happened before, but that doesn’t mean it should be forbidden. Need you at your best so I can win cup. Not all of us have two. Very selfish of me, really.”

His grin is what can only really be described as *shit-eating*, because if one thing is obvious, it is that Rozanov finds himself completely hilarious. Probably in both languages. Shane suddenly forgets all the reasons this is probably a really bad idea.

This chapter was meant to cover two other scenes but they'll have to go into chapter 3 because this is already 9k words!! ... sorry?

well done on the boys managing blowjob number 2. They will make it to some REAL TASTY spice next time, scouts honour 🙌 (I was never a scout, but I really do promise) just had to get this plot business out of the way first!!

Next chapter over the weekend bc I have a date with my keyboard on Friday night 😊

Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

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

Rozanov's body is tense, top to bottom.

"You are here?" He asks. His fingers stretch out then recoil back into his palms, clenched.

Shane knows what he's asking. They've talked about this bit. They've talked about it all: things Shane might like, things he absolutely will not like, what to do if *god forbid* something goes wrong.

Rozanov seems intent on keeping his exact plans close to his chest, but Shane feels better knowing that he's guided the way. Less like he wants to turn on his heel and run for the hills.

A real Sub would not run away. A real Sub would want to please his Dom. Above all else, a real Sub would want to be good.

Being good will get him into Subspace. Or maybe Subspace will *make* him want to be good. He's not entirely sure which way around it will happen, only that later he will probably find out.

But that is later. Right now... right now his head is clear. He has eaten, hydrated, and come in comfortable clothes as instructed. The bedroom is private, with the curtains drawn. It's a good a start as any.

He swallows.

"Here."

"Okay. And if you float away, what will you do?" Rozanov asks his questions in the tone of a drill sergeant. Short, clipped, and straight to the point with an intensity that is bordering on angry.

Shane knows the answer to this too, "Ask for help."

"And if you cannot speak?"

"Tap three times."

"How many times?"

Rozanov is *prowling*, there is no other word for it. He is drawn up straight and tall and incredibly tense. With every question answered, he draws a little closer.

His steps are slow. His eyes don't stray. He has one single focus.

An arm's length away from him, Rozanov's eyes soften. He gives Shane the slightest smile, boyishly crooked. It's enough. It reminds him that this isn't just any Dom. This is Rozanov. If there is any positive to be taken from his drops, it is that Rozanov was good with him. He didn't take advantage of Shane's inexperience, and didn't push his limits without asking.

"Three." This is harder to force from his lungs. He already feels breathless, soaking in the attention on him like oxygen instead of taking in air through his lungs.

Rozanov is less than a step away now. If Shane leaned forwards, their noses would bump.

Uncertainty still lingers in the air, and it's his fault. Rozanov is not reaching for him, not speaking to him, not doing anything at all but waiting. Further away, the eyes on him had felt less intense, less personal. This close they feel like they're pinning him to the spot, completely unrelenting.

But uncertainty is a hard feeling to shake. It sinks into your bones, the doubt growing like a fungus.

Hockey, he thinks. *He is doing this for hockey.*

He wants to be stable, to play well enough this season to prove Montreal wrong. He wants his parents to worry about him less. He just—he wants to feel like every day is less of a fucking *battle*.

So maybe he is less uncertain than he thinks. He is uncertain how this will feel, or if he will be any good at it, but he knows he is safe to find out.

Shane nods. Faint. Subtle. But a nod nonetheless.

Rozanov exhales. He is close enough that his breath blows over Shane's face, scattering the ends of his hair, drying out his eyes. Shane blinks, rapid and surprised. When he'd imagined their first touches tonight, it had mostly been more rushed sex and heavy hands, not this. This isn't even really a touch, it's the ghost of one. Slow. Drawn out. *Frustrating*.

He cannot reach subspace with only a breath. He wants something else. *More*. And that's... well that's not a thought he's ever had before. Like a hard check into the boards, it punches a sharp gasp out of him.

Rozanov's answering smile could only be described as wicked. It stretches along both cheeks, takes over his whole face. Shane can almost hear the gears turning in his head. He is learning, too. Learning what Shane likes, what makes him tick.

They are learning together.

"It is warm in here, yes? Take off jacket."

It is. He could've sworn it hadn't been this hot in Rozanov's house last time. He reaches for the zip of his hoodie because it really is too warm, no other reason. Even Rozanov is just standing there in a t-shirt. It would be ridiculous to keep it on.

He shrugs it off his shoulders and turns to hook it on the rack, but his t-shirt catches on something. Well— Rozanov grabs him. His fist scrunches into the fabric, tugging it taut. And he looks absolutely fucking *delighted*.

“For me?” He asks, letting go when Shane turns back around to face him.

His arms fall by his sides, fingering the hem Rozanov had just pulled on. He hadn’t meant to wear this shirt in particular, hadn’t really thought about it at all.

The package of all his new team merch had arrived yesterday, and he had meticulously washed, dried, and folded it all, laying the new clothes neatly in his dresser. When he’d gotten dressed this morning, it had been the first one within reach.

The Centaurs shirt doesn’t have any numbers on it, just red stripes on the arms and the logo on the back.

“Fuck you, it’s my team too now.”

Rozanov shrugs, “Is more mine though, no? I am captain and all. Maybe next time you wear my jersey.”

It’s flippant. A throw-away comment meant to be a dig. Shane shouldn’t start imagining it immediately.

Maybe Rozanov likes the idea of claiming his Subs, seeing his name marking them his. He’s the kind of Dom who would like a tease, probably. A confident Sub who would parade around the house with *81* plastered all over them. Someone who would sink to their knees and do whatever he asked without hesitation.

Shane doesn’t fit the picture, but maybe he wants to.

“Ah ah ah.” Rozanov tutting brings him back to the present. It is jarring. He suddenly feels a bit dizzy, like he’s not sure which way is up and his eyes might roll back in his head at any moment.

He hadn’t meant to get distracted. He doesn’t want Rozanov upset with him.

His stomach clamps down, trying to hold him steady, trying to pull him back. It’s a knee-jerk reaction, his body tearing itself away from even the slightest tug of subspace. If he goes there, he will not be in control anymore.

A throat is cleared, “You do as I say today. I did not say think.”

Shane’s head snaps up. He knows his eyes are wide and he can feel his hands clenched at his sides even though he doesn’t remember clenching them, “I—“

“Sit down.”

Shane scrambles to do as he is told, heart thudding in his ear with every step he stumbles over. He drops onto the end of the bed, bouncing with the force. For one single moment his

body is loosening up, giving way to the feeling. Then it snaps shut again and Shane's knees lock, thighs clenching together.

"Tell me." Rozanov is taller than him now, much more than just an inch or two. He crowds close. Shane has to tilt his head back sharply to catch his eye. It doesn't help with the lightheadedness, with the ache in his stomach.

"Tell— tell you?"

"Yes. Tell me what you think. Tell me what is making you hard like that, Hollander."

There should be a rule about how casually someone can mention something so intimate about your body. Shane gapes. His mouth half starts to form the words *I'm not hard*, but then he looks down. No more words come out, just half-formed stammers and stutters.

Eventually, he lowers his eyes. Gives up. He can't. He is no good at this.

Rozanov hisses a breath through his teeth. He tuts, *again*. Shane is coming to despise that noise. It's a noise of disapproval, and he doesn't want Rozanov to disapprove.

A hand comes out. Shane only just catches it in his peripheral vision as it stretches, fingers splayed, and raises.

When it finally touches him, Shane jerks like he's been slapped. Rozanov's hand is curled around his throat, and that is possibly more shocking than any hit could be. His thumb and forefinger rest right under the hinge of his jaw on either side.

It tightens, almost imperceptibly. Pushes Shane's head back, angles it up.

"I will order."

It's a threat and a promise all wrapped up in one. It makes Shane's heart try to beat out of his chest, wild and sudden and making him feel dizzy again. It doesn't make sense, there's no pressure on this throat. No pain there, still enough oxygen going to his brain. He shouldn't be lightheaded.

He's just— *oh*. That buzz in his brain, that fuzzy, disorientating feeling of the ground shifting below you. Somehow, this is better. Somehow with Rozanov's hands on him, guiding him, his body doesn't fight back. It relaxes.

He can taste it on his tongue now. *Subspace*, closing in. Like honey and sweet-tea.

There must be something in his silence that tips Rozanov off. Maybe his eyes are glassy or his pupils have blown wide. Either way, something gives him consent to carry on, shows him that what he is doing is finally pushing Shane down. Or maybe it's up. Whichever way it is, it's in the right direction.

Rozanov bends over just a little, leaning down far enough that his other hand can rest on Shane's thigh. All five fingers knead into the muscle, gripping him tightly. He feels himself grow desperately hard, but he still can't look.

With another touch comes another nudge closer to subspace.

“**Tell me.**”

Shane wants to. *Oh god he really wants to.* His teeth chatter.

Rozanov moves quickly, getting his palm pressed flat and squeezing Shane’s cock through the fabric of his sweats.

“I can’t!” Shane moans. His lungs protest the shout. His legs fall open, loose. His neck arches, strains into the hand holding it up. Every inch of him is an exposed nerve, every touch on his body is a throb of pleasure.

The command doesn’t roll away. It bears down, heavy and stifling in the room, waiting.

Shane’s entire body clenches, begs him to stay silent. It doesn’t know the difference between the locker room and the bedroom. It doesn’t understand that Shane is doing this for his own good.

"Hollander."

"I can’t! I can’t I can’t—"

Oh god, he’s going to be sick. He’s going to lurch forward and puke onto Ilya Rozanov’s feet. He’s not sure he’d ever recover from the shame.

"Hollander, just *tell me.*"

Shane trembles. His lips stumble over the first word, choked and tangled in his throat, "B-Being good. I want—I want to be good."

Suddenly, Rozanov’s hands are gone. Both of them. Shane follows the touch away with a punched-out whine, bucking his hips. His stomach does a flip, pooling with heat. It burns through whatever anxiety is left in his body, leaving him empty.

That was... he had followed an order. For the first time in his life, Shane has followed an order. And it feels... good? His brain is quiet. His stomach settled. He still has all ten fingers and toes. It is different, yes, but good.

“You are already good, I will show you.” Rozanov floats back into his awareness, bending over Shane a little bit further, “Lay back, *da*, good boy.”

Suddenly, Shane’s freshly-hollowed stomach is filled again with all kinds of other feelings. They’re too much, impossible to name, and he is engulfed by them entirely. All of them are sweet.

His back hits the mattress. It feels like heaven beneath him—he’s not sure he could have held himself up for one more single second.

Deft hands grab his hips. He shivers, jerks. Rozanov pulls down his sweatpants and boxers all in one swipe, tugging them off his ankles and throwing them away to the side.

Shane tries to push up onto wobbly elbows, “I like to fold—“

Rozanov’s hand clasps around his neck again, finding home. The grip is tighter, now. More insistent. Shane is not supposed to move against it, that much is clear.

Rozanov’s eyes have gone dark. His pupils have eclipsed the soft hazel, and now they are just black. He isn’t so tense anymore, but he is twice as focussed. Intent, maybe. *How deep is he in his own headspace*, Shane wonders. *How quickly does he come undone? Is Shane doing it right? Having the right reactions, making the right noises?*

The sudden anxiety makes him shift, a sinking feeling in his gut. It is more familiar than any of these new feelings. He notices it immediately, feels it snatch him back from the cusp of the headspace he is teetering on.

Clearly, Rozanov notices as well.

“Still thinking.” His voice is deeper, slower, molasses-thick, “What do I have to do to make you stop, ah?”

Shane can’t speak. He doesn’t know whether to curl towards him or away. He swallows a whimper.

Rozanov shifts his weight. Shane is given the choice to have this throat squished, or surrender to the push. He is pressed back into the sheets, elbows folding below him, lying completely flat. He is not sure what he is expecting next, but it is not for Rozanov to stretch over him and reach for something.

The drawer of his bedside table rattles, slides open. Then again as it closes. When he leans back, Shane sees what it is: a small length of fabric. Black. Silk. *A blindfold*, his brain supplies.

A blindfold.

It’s not scary. It can’t hurt him, really. Not the way a paddle or a belt could. It can’t strap him down or strangle his limbs like ropes might, either.

But it makes his heart speed up again regardless, because this is *new*. Orders are familiar. He’s heard countless. Dominance itself is not unfamiliar to him either. However, *objects* of Dominance are new.

The hand around his throat loosens, thumb stroking gently along his jawline in slow, careful strokes.

“Hollander.”

Shane’s eyes know where to go. They slip from the blindfold back up to Rozanov. He is still crouched over him, knees pressed against the edge of the bed, hips bent.

“Are you here?”

Is he? That dragging, fuzzy feeling remains, tickling at him, but only slightly. It has receded over the last few minutes, shrinking away when the anxiety blossomed.

He can feel the sheets against his skin, *smooth, cold*.

He can feel Rozanov’s body heat pressing into his, *warm, safe*.

His cock is softer but still hard, *waiting, wanting*.

There is nothing scary about a piece of fabric, he reasons. It doesn’t change anything. There is still the fresh memory of his first few moments in subspace, the feeling of his body finally relaxing. He wants that back. It was *his*.

He nods, “Here.”

Rozanov snaps back into action like somebody has flicked a switch. He moves in close again, shifting one knee up onto the bed, pressing it against Shane’s crotch. The soft fleece of his sweatpants feels so much rougher against the sensitive skin between his thighs, against his cock. Shane moans into it. He can’t arch his neck off the bed so he twists, writhes. His mouth falls open and head goes flying off somewhere else where stars spark behind his eyelids.

Rozanov, the bastard, just laughs. Warm and chesty, he laughs under his breath, “Maybe I do not need blindfold. Maybe all I need is—” He punctuates his words with another shift of his knee, grinding it up into Shane.

Shane pushes down to meet it, *hard*, coughing when he nearly swallows his tongue around the hand on his neck.

“No.” Rozanov muses, ignoring him, giving him a scant few moments to recover, “No, it will look very pretty. You want to look pretty, hm?”

Pretty. If Rozanov likes pretty, Shane will be pretty.

Something taps him on the chin. It is a tiny touch, but it jolts his focus back to the room again. He feels like a bungee jumper. One moment he is plummeting down into the canyon, and the next he is back up in the sky.

It’s an exhausting effort to pry his eyes open again.

Rozanov’s finger floats in the air above his face, poised. His gaze is still completely unwavering.

“I ask you a question.” He prompts, tapping again, firmer, his bottom lip this time, “I do not like to repeat.”

Shane’s brain struggles to keep up. “Yes!” He yelps, lips brushing against that damn finger as he speaks, “Pretty. Yes. Fuck, anything, *yes*.”

Rozanov smiles. He is happy. He is happy, and Shane will be pretty for him because that will make him even happier.

The blindfold goes over his eyes and then around the back of his head. It takes two hands to tie and adjust it. Shane's neck feels strangely empty, cold and deserted.

Touch. Sound. Taste. That's all Shane is left with.

The room feels a lot bigger without the walls around him. Everything seems like it could slip away from him at any moment. He only knows which way is up because Rozanov has him nestled firmly under the cradle of his body. *Touch.*

He doesn't have time to dwell on the worry, because his shirt is being removed, and there's hot breath on his chest.

His nipples ache as they harden. They don't even need to be touched. Rozanov teases him about it, croons under his breath. *Sound.*

"So cute." He murmurs in the moment before he takes one into his mouth.

It's cruel. Shane spasms. He thinks he sees God. This time he can arch off the bed, hands flying up, grasping onto whatever they can find. Rozanov's arms, his shoulders, eventually his curls.

Yes. All ten of his fingers sink into Rozanov's curls.

The sucking is enough. More than enough. But then there's teeth, too. Rozanov nips at the hard bud, tugging at the skin until it stings.

"Fuck. Stop, no, keep— *ohmygod*—"

His teeth pop off. He dives back down, tongue lapping and licking at the pain.

"I—" Shane's breath trembles. He doesn't have a single word. His head is empty. There's nothing to do but feel.

Again, Rozanov kisses his nipple. He trails over the entire pec with his mouth, teasing the skin, kissing, sucking, pulling.

"Such a pretty pair of tits." The words are pressed into Shane's skin with more kisses and nips, winding his way up Shane's collarbone and neck like he's mapping out a constellation.

"All of you is pretty." He says, teeth on Shane's pulse, leaning away, taking his heat with him, "But these..."

A hand scoops Shane's other pec, rolling his palm over it, squeezing. At the same time, he presses his lips to Shane's. Coffee and mint. *Taste.*

His lips mouth at Shane's until they part just enough that he can grab the bottom one between his teeth and pull.

Shane keens, jerks, suddenly not sure which part of him to lean into, which sensation he wants more.

There's a rustle of sheets, a shift of weight on the mattress. Shane is helpless to do anything but wait for whatever is coming next.

Eventually, something wet lands on his other pec. If Shane wasn't flying so high he was on Jupiter, he might be offended that Rozanov has just spat on him. Then, of course, his tongue takes over. He spreads it over Shane's nipple, draws it in long strokes up and down, teasing the bud to be hard.

He bites. Shane screams.

He releases. Shane sobs.

His other hand is working slowly, kneading into the well-kissed skin of his other side, pressing into the bruising ache he left behind.

Everything is so sudden when he cannot see. He cannot follow where Rozanov is going, cannot watch his face to gauge his reactions, cannot use them to decide how he is going to respond.

He is just working off instinct, nothing more, nothing less. Being good is at the back of his mind. He is not trying to please him or act like a real Sub. Maybe later, he'll realise that was the lesson Rozanov was carving into him, one *bite-and-kiss* at a time.

Right now he is just to survive without imploding entirely.

"You are missing out." Rozanov is still pressed against his chest, grinning into his skin. He groans, sounding impossibly more needy and impatient than Shane feels, "So good for me."

Fuck. *Yeah*. He likes that. He rolls his body into that, into the flutter of his stomach. Like this, Dominance does not make him want to fight, he wants to *fuck*. Perhaps those two feelings are closer than Shane ever realised.

As he moves, his cock rubs incessantly against Rozanov's thigh. It's not enough. He needs more, he needs so much more.

"Ah ah." There's that fucking *tsk* again. Suddenly Rozanov's thigh is gone, shifted away. "Is not for you. Is for me. Your pleasure comes from me. Yes?"

Shane swallows.

An open hand taps his face, firm. He twists towards it as it leaves him, but it goes too far.

"Yes, *yes*." He rambles, hoping that will bring it back.

It doesn't. He answers, but he is still alone on the bed. As alone as someone can be with six foot and three inches of Dom crowded over them can be, anyways.

“Good. Pretty head still works. Good boy. Come here.”

Shane feels Rozanov leave in a rush of air. That’s all the clue he gets.

For a moment he just breathes, confused, lying on his back, swimming on the massive bed.

Good boy.

The words sink into his bones. There is no other way to describe the feeling. Every inch of his body feels like warmth, every twitch of his muscles feels twice as easy. He has been good. It didn’t matter that he whined, or he paused, or sometimes he forgot to answer. Every mistake was forgotten. Forgiven. Rozanov thinks Shane is good. A Dominant says he is good. Shane is good.

“Hollander.”

The voice comes from his left, warning him, dragging him back to his body.

Shane turns his head, stretches out a hand, but there is nothing. He rolls onto his side, stretching his reach further. Still nothing. He whines in frustration, wants desperately to pull at his blindfold, but he knows that would be wrong.

Rozanov put it on him, so only Rozanov should remove it.

He manages to get his knees under him, even if they wobble. His hands hold his aching chest up, just about. From there he is lost again, not sure where to go. He doesn’t know which way he had been facing earlier, and he doesn’t know which way he is facing now. The door is in front of him, maybe. That doesn’t really help if he’s still not sure where Rozanov is. Would he have gone towards the chair in the corner by the window? Is he standing at the end of the bed?

His mind feels slow. Every thought has to wade through a thick, syrupy mess. He turns, then turns again. When he stumbles, knee twisting in the sheets and getting stuck, he hears a groan. It’s only slight, and maybe he’s imagining it, but it comes from his right.

He turns towards it, magnetised. It echoes in his ears, takes over the only sense he has left to guide him. He doesn’t know why he is panting, has hardly done anything, but he is, and he can’t stop. His head drops, mouth open, trying to catch his breath.

Another groan. Maybe a curse. Louder, reverberating through Shane’s head.

“R-Roz-“

“**Don’t speak.**”

The order is rushed, cutting. It pulses through Shane’s muscles, fires them up, makes him push to move quicker. The quicker he moves, the quicker he can find Rozanov again. The quicker he can have those hands on him again, the quicker he can feel complete again.

He crawls because there is no other option. The mattress is soft and gives way under his knees.

It feels like forever before his hand finally brushes warm skin again. He lifts it, reaching out, clutching the limb. It's Rozanov's thigh, that much he is certain of. He moves his other hand out as well and finds the other. Rozanov has his legs spread wide over the covers. Shane can imagine the picture he is making, reclined against the headboard, naked, strewn out.

Rozanov had never even left the bed. He had Shane spinning in circles and he was half a foot away the entire time. He should be embarrassed, but he isn't. Or he is, but he is too turned on and too adrenaline-fueled to do anything but collapse in relief.

His cheek lands on Rozanov's thigh, hand slipping away. His hips roll to the side, knees curled halfway to his chest, and then is neatly cocooned between Rozanov's legs, tired and... happy. He is happy, too.

Rozanov shifts, covers crunching beneath him, his voice leaning closer, filling the space around him, "Very good job, *kotik*. You found me."

Found you, echoes in Shane's mind, but the command is still weighing over him, keeping him silent. He doesn't mind. It's like a warm blanket. It means he knows what to do, what not to do. It makes everything so simple.

"Do you want reward?"

Shane hums. Twists his head, tries to look up at Rozanov before realising that his eyes are not closed, and he is still blindfolded.

"Is okay, speak."

Shane's mouth falls open, "Yes."

"Good."

Shane feels the nudge against his shoulder, the gentle push to move again. He's not sure how he manages it, but he does. Rozanov has him roll onto his belly, closing his legs a little so Shane has something to rest against, to hold him up.

"You did very good job last time, but practice makes perfect."

Rozanov leads his head where it needs to go, tip of his cock tapping against Shane's top lip before pressing into his mouth. He opens as wide as he can, wanting Rozanov to see how it moves along his tongue, how it slides down into his throat.

It bumps the back, and Shane breathes through it. It slides a little deeper, and he feels himself choke up, gag reflex taking over.

"Relax."

The command was meant for this throat, but his entire body sags under the weight of it. *Simple.*

His head is pressed down the last inch, and his nose nestles against Rozanov's pubic hair. He smells of soap and sex. Shane wants to bury his whole face in it, be wrapped in that smell.

But he hasn't been told to do anything. So he does nothing. *Simple.*

It doesn't take long. Rozanov slowly lifts his head back up, guiding Shane the whole way with a hand tight on the back of his head.

"So fucking eager." He mutters. Shane flies. He hums again, hollows his cheeks as Rozanov fucks him back down, because he knows that was good before. Drove him crazy.

It does. Rozanov's hand tightens, his chest punches out a laugh. He sounds half-mad, gasping.

"Suck, again." This time he is more urgent. Shane sucks. He feels the head deep in his throat again, smells the soap and feels the hair tickle his nose. The command to relax is waning and he coughs, drool bubbling around his lips, a hot drop of it falling down his chin, off onto the sheets somewhere Shane can't see.

He whines. It's not a protest. He whines because the rock of their bodies is making his own cock jerk, abandoned below him. He is rutting into the sheets, but it's not enough. He needs more. He needs a hand or a mouth or *fuck*, he'd even take a pillow. If Rozanov ordered him, he would do it. Anything.

"Fuck, fuck—" something in Russian, louder, "Off, off—"

Shane feels dazed. His world feels narrow, nothing to see, nothing to make him understand. All he knows is that there isn't a cock in his throat anymore, and he wants it back.

He whines again. Petulant, maybe. Upset, definitely.

"I know. Yes. Spit. Hurry. Spit."

Shane spits, then spits again for good measure. He'd said it twice, anyways. Then there is a cock in his throat again, and it doesn't really matter.

The hand on his head squeezes but doesn't guide him. The pace is his. He can tease up and down the vein along the bottom. He can press his tongue into the tip, put just enough pressure on the slit that the hand in his hair squeezes again.

And then—

Shane's leg jerks. His knee kicks up. Rozanov is bending over him, leaning down. And his arm must be stretched over Shane's back, because his hand is between his ass cheeks, because there's a *finger* pressing at his hole.

The hand on his head moves, taps his cheek twice, stern.

Shane doesn't have to be told. He is good. He has been *very good*, Rozanov said so. He bobs his head a few times, not taking it all the way down, only half-focussed. The rest of his mind is behind him on the finger tracing his rim. It is damp from the spit and surprisingly gentle as it swirls around, waiting for him to relax.

He knows it's going to push in, knows Rozanov doesn't do anything halfway, but it still makes him jump. The pressure is blunt, but not unpleasant. The finger is not big, so it slides in without much resistance.

Rozanov wastes no time pressing it up against the wall of his hole, sliding in and out, in and out, nearly in time with Shane's head. He goes deeper with each thrust, testing.

When he finds what he's looking for, Shane jolts so suddenly he nearly impales Rozanov's cock down his throat again.

So much happens in one moment: his world feels twice as big, with twice as many sensations. He moans, and the moan makes Rozanov's cock twitch. His prostate explodes with pleasure, and he pushes his ass back into the feeling, then suddenly away again when it's too much.

There is nothing gentle about how Rozanov chases him, bending over further to reach, keeping his finger pressed to that spot, fingering it in tantalisingly slow circles.

Shane is simply reduced to moaning around Rozanov's dick. He can't keep his mouth closed anymore, can barely swallow, and there's an ocean of drool and spit gathering around his face.

But he doesn't want to come off. He wants to keep going, was put here and told to keep going.

The same moment he has the crushing and desolating thought that he might not be able to make Rozanov finish like this is the very same moment that he is pulled back off Rozanov's cock.

His cheek hits Rozanov's thigh again. The corner of his blindfold is crumpled up and a tiny slither of light filters in, shocking him against the world of darkness he's been living in.

In it, he sees Rozanov's hand curl around his length, stroking up and down, collecting rivulets of drool to ease the way.

His finger has left Shane's ass, leaving it to twitch.

"Touch yourself."

It doesn't need to be an order for Shane to obey. His own hand flies to his cock, hips shifting back so he is lying on his side again.

His hand does not move in time with Rozanov's, it is quicker and more jerky. He just wants to come, *now*.

When he does it's his last thread, snapped. His hips buck into nothing, other palm pressing relentlessly into the mattress, scraping and scratching at it. He's not sure where he goes next but wherever it is, there is complete silence.

He cannot see, he cannot hear, all he can do is feel. His head is stuffed with cotton-wool, softening all of his thoughts, and the pleasure is so intense even his toes seize up.

He is only half aware of when Rozanov comes because a lash of it hits his face, warm drops splattering over his cheek.

He's not sure how long they lie there, still, but he's not ready for it to end when it does. Rozanov slides down the bed, tugging at the back of the blindfold. Shane is utterly boneless to stop him, so he just screws his eyes closed to stay in that sugary silence for a little while longer.

Nothing is bad in the silence. It just is, and he is, and Rozanov is.

It's easier to come back when he is taken into Rozanov's arms and cuddled close. It feels less like he has to come back to face their bland, harsh reality right away.

He can't help that his head drops into Rozanov's shoulder. His lips fall open, and maybe he mouths at the skin there a little bit just because it feels right. It's solid. Real. There's nothing tangible in that silence, as nice as it is.

An arm is around his back, curled over his hip, tucked under his thigh. Both his knees are loosely tucked to his chest, with Rozanov's other hand wrapped around his ankle. It's surprisingly grounding. It is not a spot Rozanov had touched before, not a spot he had used to draw Shane into all these gooey feelings.

Separating out what's happened is the hardest part. His thoughts are muddled, out of sync, and he takes his time organising them in his head, filing them away. Some bits are clearer, some bits are more hazy, and some bits are still lingering.

Tell me. Don't speak. Relax. The orders roll over in his mind. There's satisfaction there. He had followed them all, been praised for them all.

Are they still stuck in Rozanov's mind as well? Had he gone somewhere so... spacey? He seemed so in control, start to finish. He couldn't possibly feel the same way as Shane had. He wants to know what it feels like, the signs he should look out for. There's no use to their arrangement if Rozanov can't get to a headspace with him, after all.

Later, he thinks. That's for later. He was told not to think.

He sighs, moving his lips away from Rozanov's neck.

“M here.” He mumbles, belatedly, realising that Rozanov was speaking to him. Had been murmuring into his ear for a little while, coaxing him back, “*Here.*”

He slaps around a little blindly, but eventually he finds Rozanov's hand and covers it with his own, squeezing.

Rozanov's relief is palpable. He exhales so hard his chest deflates. "Took you long time."

"No." Shane protests, "'M fast. Skate fast. Come fast." Laughter bubbles up from him without permission. God, he feels high. Or maybe drunk. Both. Neither.

Rozanov returns his laugh, sounding just as breathless. Maybe he had reached his headspace after all. At the very least he sounds sated and relaxed from his orgasm.

"Was not insult." He says, "Was very good for me. Stayed with me until the end."

He did. Shane had done that. Bounced back and forth between falling and flying, but always found Rozanov in the middle, steadying him.

"Mm." He agrees, thoughts skittering elsewhere, not really able to focus for long, "Sticky."

Another laugh.

"Shower, yes? Then food. You ask for ginger ale, fridge is full."

Shane feels himself being shifted, being moved, and then being lifted. He's not sure his arms around Rozanov's neck do absolutely anything at all to help the Dom lift him, but at least he tries.

In the mirror, he catches his own eye. He looks like a mess. He sees his own flushed face, his messy hair, maybe even a lingering glassiness in his eyes.

When Rozanov shifts him down, grunting and helping him stand on his own, his attention is drawn away.

Rozanov coaxes him close with an arm around his waist and kiss on the side of his head. Then his chin. Then finally, *finally*, his lips.

Together, they fumble towards the bathroom.

"Here?" Rozanov checks, one last time.

Shane nods. Everything still feels slow and syrupy, but it's fading. It had all been so different from a drop, where you collapse into it like gravity is twice as strong. Subspace was... nice. Steady. Right now, he doesn't want to be anywhere else in the world but here, even if he is messy and sticky.

"Here." He rasps.

The locker room is quiet, but Shane isn't stupid and the doors are not soundproof— it had been plenty loud before he'd come in.

The door had squeaked on its hinges, announcing his presence, and every single eye in the room had fallen on him. Mouths snapped shut, busy hands paused.

“Um,” For a moment, Shane had completely forgotten every word he'd ever learnt in English or French, “Hi. I'm Shane.”

There had been a few muttered *hellos*, a few nods of acknowledgment. One player with the name *Hayes* blasted across his shoulders had pointed out the three empty lockers around the room, giving him pick of the litter. Shane had simply chosen the option closest to where he was standing and crowded into it, busying himself.

Since then, it has been quiet. Not silent, *thank god*, but quiet. Conversations were happening around him at a hushed volume, and he is getting the distinct, uncomfortable feeling that they are about him.

But if playing with Montreal taught him anything, it is how to weather a storm, no matter how angry, violent, or downright awkward it can get.

His phone is dark in his hand, but he pretends to fiddle with it anyways, clicking in and out of random text threads. There's nothing new to reply to, but the rookie in the next stall over peering at him like a zoo animal doesn't know that.

Hayden had wished him good luck earlier this morning. His message had been accompanied by a picture of his old locker, empty and abandoned with his name tag still stuck over the top. At least he hadn't been easily replaceable. That is the only thought he allows himself to have about it.

His Mom had sent him the number for an interior designer to sort out his new home, pointedly not mentioning anything personal. Since the summer, they've been avoiding the elephant in the room. Not one single mention of hockey or Doms in weeks. And his mother *eats-sleeps-breathes* hockey.

And speaking of Doms, *Rozanov*— well. Rozanov hadn't texted him in two days, not since their session. Not since the lazy afternoon they'd shared, Shane propped up on the sofa sipping on a cold ginger ale, suddenly alert and asking a thousand questions. Namely, how exactly they were going to keep this a secret.

Rozanov had been very unimpressed. He'd bumped their knees and drawled, *what, teammates cannot have their captain's phone number now?*

Shane had nearly swallowed his tongue to stammer out a reply, *That's not—*

Relax, Hollander, I tease. If it makes you feel better, I will have codename. Like spy. Very on brand, I am Russian.

So, his new drop-partner *Lily* hadn't texted him since. Not that Shane had texted either, but maybe it still stung a little bit.

He's not sure how he's meant to approach another meeting anyways. It's not like he's experienced with this kind of thing. He's not— even casual sex. It's just not him. That's Rozanov's thing.

He doesn't need it quite yet, but the itch will return, no matter how much he still wishes it were not true.

On one hand, he can already feel the addiction settling in. Subspace is something else entirely. There aren't words.

On the other hand, he doesn't want to be a slave to this for... what, the rest of his life? Until he's old and retired and his hormones start to decline? God, he needs to google the average age of hormonal decline, start some kind of countdown.

The locker room door swings open again with that grating squeal, distracting him from the mess of his thoughts. For the best, probably.

Of course, his peace doesn't last long, because the person clattering into the locker room late is Rozanov himself. He is bundled up in a hoodie, toque, and sweatpants, black from head-to-toe aside from the red slashes on his duffel bag.

Everyone seems to promptly forget they were tiptoeing around Shane, because they all clamour to speak first, yelling for their captain.

"Man of the hour!" Somebody yells.

"Haven't seen you all summer you fucking hermit!" Somebody else heckles, drumming their fists against the metal of the lockers.

Shane is pretty sure he even sees a dirty sock thrown in Rozanov's direction, which is as disgusting as it is endearing.

He's not sure what he expected, really. Rozanov had been so sure his team were good people, were accepting and kind. Wiebe had been the same.

Rozanov replies to all the cheers in kind, even going so far as to knuckle-scrub one of the rookies' heads. Luca Haas. He laughs and yells and unsuccessfully shoves at the brick wall that is Ilya Rozanov's chest.

When Rozanov lets go, Haas is grinning from ear to ear, looking a little crazed. *Bright-eyed and bushy-tailed*, is probably the best way to describe it.

Perhaps they get it from their captain. His presence has charged not just the rookies, but the whole room. Conversations are louder, smiles are wider, Shane has to fight back his own.

And then Rozanov is abruptly standing in the stall next to him, chucking his duffel into the already messy explosion of pads and clothing strewn about it.

He is quiet. Focussed on his own tasks. For a second, Shane thinks he won't even get acknowledged.

Then, "Hollander. I see you came to senses and finally moved to better team than *Montreal*."

He says it like the word is a disease. Or perhaps just something disgusting, distasteful. The others in the locker room are probably expecting it: the classic Montreal-Boston rivalry shining through. But Shane thinks maybe, just maybe there is a bit of disgust in there that's more... personal?

He shifts, turning to face Rozanov. This, he has no problem doing. It feels right. Whether they are lying in bed or standing in the locker room, he will never just roll over and let Rozanov win an argument. "You know, historically, Montreal has been the best team—"

Rozanov pretends to yawn. His jaw opens so wide it audibly pops. The noise he makes is twice as loud as any reasonable yawn, and it completely drowns out Shane's voice. At the same time he peeks one eye open, as if he *needs* to know that Shane is reacting.

He is. Shane knows perfectly well that his scowl is fuelling the smug grin growing on Rozanov's face.

"Oh, sorry." Rozanov offers a shrug, "You were speaking? Did not realise."

"*Asshole*."

"That's his love language. You get used to it." Somebody finally chimes in, and Shane loosens just a little bit more as he swings around to look at the guy. *Barrett*, his locker pronounces him as. *Troy Barrett*. He doesn't have a dissimilar reputation from Rozanov, from what Shane knows of him.

But Shane also knows that reputations can be deceiving.

"What is, *love language*?" Rozanov parrots, nose scrunching up like the words grate offensively on his tongue, "I speak Russian because is best language. No need for others."

"*Va chier!*" Somebody heckles, somebody with a terribly thick Quebecois accent, and Shane has to put a hand over his face to stop himself from laughing.

Rozanov doesn't waste time looking confused, only takes the declaration for him to *go shit* like it's a badge of fucking honour.

"Thank you!" His voice booms, swinging his arms out around him, turning, catching the eye of every player in the room one-by-one, "I like this aggression, yes! If you keep it up, we might really beat Buffalo next week? Eh? *Eh?*"

It's the third game of the season and their last home game for a while, so the energy is pretty scattered. Some of the players are all hyped up, big bundles of energy ready to hit the ice and hear the crowd cheering for them. Others are slower to the starting line, following their little routines, checking off their list of superstitions and good-luck charms.

Shane has always leaned more towards the superstition side of things. Game days make him feel sick. Itchier than ever and cold right down to his stomach. It's just a fact of life, nothing he can change. He'd tried. The only thing that settles him from the moment he leaves his house is meticulous order.

In Montreal, Hayden had been used to this fact. He had stayed by Shane's side while he fiddled and ordered every object in his stall until his chest felt loose enough to breathe, never commenting.

Rozanov watches him now, as well. He should probably be hustling them along, already giving speeches and encouragement, but he is not.

He is watching Shane.

"Do you have to?" Shane asks, lifting his phone and moving it slightly to the right, making room for his folded sweater.

Rozanov shrugs one shoulder. His other is leaning up against the wall their stalls share, pad cutting awkwardly around his shoulder as it refuses to bend.

"No." He says, "Is funny ritual. You always do?"

Shane hums. Grabs his jersey, pulls it over his head, "Yes."

"For good-luck?"

Left arm, right arm. His body knows what to do already, he doesn't even really need to think about it. The jersey is not blue and white this year, but that doesn't make a difference.

"No." He turns, finished, "No it just... settles me, I guess."

Rozanov's head bobs. He leans away from the stall, shrugging again. Whatever Shane has said, it has satisfied the burning curiosity in his eyes, and now he is clattering to the middle of the room, taking his place surrounded by his team.

Shane refuses to hide behind anyone as the speech goes on. He stands shoulder-to-shoulder with Boodram and Dykstra as if they are Hayden and J.J. He refuses to let anyone feel like he is going to be a passive force in this team.

Not that he is in much danger of it. Currently, according to the scoreboard they have hanging on the back of the locker room door, he is leading the team in goals, assists, and just about everything else except for the one record Rozanov holds over all their heads—the one that's hastily scribbled onto the board as *fuck-ass chirps*.

He's okay with not holding *that* record.

They tumble off the ice, and the energy sticks all the way to the media circus, then seems to drain out of him all at once. His body is sore in at least ten different places, and he got his bell rung pretty good in the third period; he's still reeling.

He didn't realise just how tense his shoulders were until the hot water hit them, but they had been.

He feels his thighs loosen, his hands unclench, rolls his neck in the good way that makes it pop and unstick after having his helmet weighing it down for so long.

The quiet helps, too, the white noise of the others in the lockers chatting, the drum of the water against the tile. Bood is whistling somewhere close by, finishing up his own shower with a smile on his face.

Shane turns, reaching for the soap dispenser.

Rozanov is two stalls over, Hayes sandwiched in between them.

The tension between them feels sour. It sticks to him like a piece of old gum, seeping into his pores. When he tries to shake it off, it only stretches and sticks back into place.

Media was hard. Every other question was about his trade. Rozanov had eyed him the whole time, too, big arms crossed and creasing his suit blazer, watching from the sidelines with Harris.

The world had seen a captain overseeing his team, of course.

Except now they're in the shower, it's clear Rozanov hadn't been watching him as his captain.

Shane bites his cheek. This is not the time. Everything is stacking against him. The pain, the pushy media, Rozanov's intensity. All of it has set off another wave of anxiety, stronger now, and at this point, dropping is a pavlovian response. His body had done it once, and then twice, and now he cannot escape it. When he panics, he drops. It is an effective way to release him from worry, that he can agree on, but it comes with its own set of consequences.

Shane's eyes lift from the floor. The self-inflicted jolt of pain starts his body moving again, removing him from his thoughts.

As he looks up, he almost unconsciously tilts his body to the side, searching out Rozanov. That is probably pavlovian too, the way his body already knows where to look when a drop is close.

Rozanov's gaze is still. He does not look anywhere but Shane's eyes. His hands still work to clean himself, distracted and absent as they pass over his sides, his chest, his stomach.

Shane would watch, would melt into the way his Dom is putting on a show, if he wasn't so transfixed on Rozanov's face. He moves his mouth slowly, accentuating his soundless words. Somehow, the silence makes each syllable louder, brain working hard, understanding coming to him slowly.

When he puts all the pieces together, it feels like every muscle unclenches just a little bit more.

Turn. Around.

Shane wants to. Or his body wants to. Fuck, it betrays him so easily. He can already feel the sweet emptiness of his head, ache bleeding away.

The rest of him is not so sure. *Not here, not now*, he thinks. Not while he feels like a tired, uncoordinated mess, and will probably screw up. What he really wants is to pop a few pills and lie in bed staring at the ceiling until sleep takes him away.

He looks sharply down at the floor, and keeps his feet where they are. It was not a command, and his muscles don't protest, at the very least.

"Well. That's me, guys. See you later, losers." Hayes grabs aimlessly for his towel, getting it secured before he lifts both hands and cheers, "Wait, never mind, we fucking *won!*"

"Yeah. Bye." Shane doesn't look up. Can't look up. If he looks up, he will not look at Hayes, he will look at Rozanov.

"Goodbye, goalie Hayes who did not score any point." Rozanov himself chimes in. He sounds lazy and tired and completely normal. Fuck him.

"Fuck you, Rozy! Next time it'll be Hollander anyways."

It will. Shane has already replayed the moment he missed his last chance to beat Rozanov to a hat-trick in his head thrice over. He knows exactly when he made the mistake, exactly what he needs to do next time to win. When they play Toronto in two days, he will be ready to add more tallies to the scoreboard.

That, of all things, coaxes his head up. He smiles at Hayes, genuine. And then the man is gone, chattering loudly behind the door to whoever is left in the locker room.

In his peripheral vision, Rozanov is making an exaggerated show of looking from the closed door and then back to Shane. It is slow, pointed. His eyebrow twitches. It is a disgustingly smug face, the exact kind of face he makes on the ice, not the kind of face he makes with Shane.

"What?" Shane growls. He will not bend to hockey faces. It does not draw him in, for anything other than a fight.

“I ask you to turn around. You do not remember? Hit too hard during game?”

His feet move without his consent, turning. He is facing Rozanov head on now, all of him on display. When did he do that? When did his brain lay down and listen? Half a second ago, he had jerked with the red-hot need to *disobey*.

The words tumble out of his mouth even as he turns, because his brain is always the last thing to give in. His body has no problems slipping away from him, the traitor, “Fuck you.”

“I do not think so. Turn other way.”

The calmness in Rozanov’s voice makes it worse. There shouldn’t be authority there when he is speaking so blandly. He may as well have been asking if Shane has an extra roll of stick tape he can borrow.

Disobedience doesn’t just taste sour, it tastes like something rotten. Too-ripe fruit, a spoiled sweetness. Shane grimaces, and turns. He crosses his arms over his chest. “I’m staring at the wall. What the fuck am I meant to do staring at the *wall*, Roz.”

Roz. That had been a new development, something he’d latched onto with the rest of the team. Something a little less formal than *Rozanov*.

“Bend over.”

Shane, alarmed, whips his head around to look at Rozanov, because he actually can’t believe his ears. This man is crazy. Practically asking to get caught.

“What?” He yelps, eyes flicking to the door. Hayes has disappeared, and so has his voice, but that’s not a guarantee, “I can’t. What if someone comes in?”

Rozanov gives a noncommittal jerk, “They all already shower. Just me and you, Hollander. Bend over.”

He says it like it is simple.

He must have been thinking about this for the past half hour, at least, if he had counted every one of the team as they showered, checking them off on a list inside his head. How long has he really been imagining this for? How long has he been thinking about getting Shane bent over? Since the media? The game? The lockers?

Shane’s breath is picking up. He knows he’s flush all over, and it’s not from the heat of the water. He also knows, intimately, that Rozanov is not actually ordering him to do anything. If he wants to leave, the door is not locked.

He *should* leave. He should turn back to the soap dispenser and finish his shower. This is absurd.

Rozanov is still pinning him down with his gaze, lazily drawing shapes over Shane’s body. His cock is semi-hard, hanging between his legs, one hand fisted at the base.

He doesn't seem worried Shane is going to leave. Fuck. Because he *isn't*.

The heat in his cheeks is starting to feel like a fever. Shane draws his eyes back up Rozanov's body. If the Dom can take an eyeful, so can he. Then he slowly, slowly tilts his body towards the wall, catching himself against it with one hand.

"Mm..." Rozanov groans. He has never sounded happier, "Is good view. You are missing out."

"Fuck. You." Shane bites, head dropping further between his shoulder blades as he says it, back bending just that little bit more.

Rozanov laughs, chesty and short, before he speaks again, "Look at me."

Shane lifts his head, and is once again faced with the view of Rozanov naked top to bottom, hand fisting his cock. It looks even bigger with the whole picture straightened out, tilted to the side. He feels like he's gaping, but doesn't know how to stop.

"I..."

He swallows. He knows— they both know when the rope has snapped.

Rozanov's smirk is unbearable, but it is not his hockey smirk any longer. There's that little wrinkle between his eyebrows, that little twitch of a smile underneath.

"Say it."

He doesn't know how to speak. He's tongue tied. If he tried to walk away now, his legs would be like jelly and get tangled up beneath him. He knows the feeling in his head, too. There's a buzz, a slow build, and far ahead of him is a very, very steep drop. The game is simple: Rozanov will coax him as close to the edge as possible, without tipping him over.

It would be too much responsibility for Shane, leaving that balance in his hands. But Rozanov wears it like he wears skates. Well-practiced, confident.

Shane shakes his head.

Rozanov smiles, cocks his head, jerks his cock once, "Are you ready now? To be good?"

It's taunting. They both already know. It's like the air in the room is bearing down on them, pushing them together. Shane nods anyway. He is helpless to do anything else. He's ready. He's ready to let it all go, the game, the bruises, the media. He's ready to have someone twist and tug and pull at him in all the right ways.

A firm hand, until he isn't panicked anymore.

He's ready.

"Say it."

Trust is the difference between this and everything else that came before. The command hits him like a blunt smack, shuddering through his body. With trust, he doesn't tense and hold and let his muscles burn. He relaxes into it.

His lips work twice as fast as the rest of him, "I want to suck you off." A beat, "Please."

Rozanov's answering grin is familiar. All teeth.

"Polite, but you say it yourself. Cannot touch you. Cannot have anyone seeing."

Shane groans, squeezes his eyes closed. Why had he ever said anything so stupid. He's never speaking again.

Rozanov chuckles.

"Is okay. I have plan. Spread your legs."

Shane does, just a little. His movements are unsure, unsteady.

"Wider."

He does, instantly, and in turn drops his shoulders lower, arches his back more.

"Good. Spread your cheeks. Touch yourself. I want to watch."

He does exactly as he's told. Spreads his cheeks with both hands first, then pushes a single finger in. It's wet with the water, which helps ease the way, but he keeps having to remove it and re-wet it until there's room for another.

With two he can find his prostate, plundering around in his own asshole for the spot Rozanov seems to always find within moments. When he does find it, he knows. They both know. Anyone too close in the locker room would know as well, because his moan echoes off the walls.

His forehead crashes against the tile. It hurts, of course it does. But he is elsewhere, now. Leaving his body. Falling. Behind him, Rozanov hisses in a sharp breath.

"Look at me."

Shane twists. Rozanov is touching himself in earnest now, too. His hand makes long, arcing strokes up and down his length. He wishes it were him. He wishes there wasn't an unlocked door between him and the team. He would do better than Rozanov's hand. He wouldn't even be picky. Rozanov could fuck his face if he wanted to, or lean back and let Shane do all the work.

"Keep touching yourself." Another stroke, "Keep looking at me." A mother thrust, a twist, "Stay where you are." A jerk, a thumb catching a bead of pre-cum from the tip.

Shane keeps moving the fingers in his ass. It is slow, hard without lube, but every brush of his prostate and answering twitch of his cock brings him closer to his release.

“Please.” He mumbles, shuddering as he presses both fingers into that fleshy spot inside of him, curling once, twice, before the friction turns painful and he has to pull them out again, “Roz. Roz I can’t come like this.”

Somewhere, he is probably aware that his words are pitiful. More than a little pathetic. But as he chews through his bottom lip, flutters his eyes with every jerk of pleasure, Rozanov looks more and more incensed.

“Roz-“

Rozanov shoots a hand out behind him to steady himself as he comes. Thick white streaks of it paint his fist and drip through his fingers. What he doesn’t catch splatters onto the tile and washes down the drain, evidence erased.

Shane shudders like he feels it too. Then whines impatiently, again. He has been asking, pleading, *begging* and still nothing.

Rozanov’s head is tilted back. His eyes are only half open, his jaw lax. Shane sees his moment to win, to get the puck in the net.

“*Help me?*” He asks, hoping he sounds just pathetic enough for Rozanov to go back on his word about not touching him. He asks because he knows, intimately, that everything he asks for, he receives. It is one of their rules. If Shane needs something, he asks. If Shane needs something, Rozanov gives it.

It’s a strange kind of thought, that maybe he has some kind of power here, in the thick of it. Orders are one type of power, yes. But this is maybe better, because Rozanov curses like a man possessed, and then without warning he’s behind Shane, hands roaming over his ass, squeezing the muscles, one hand slipping forwards to touch him.

“Keep going.”

The water from his body is dripping onto Shane. Their skin is sticking, slapping. He mutters into Shane’s ear, suddenly not just deep but rough and hoarse, “Fucking perfect. Take your fingers so well. Showing everything off for me. I can’t wait to fuck you.”

His other hand slips away from Shane’s ass, presenting it to Shane’s face. He doesn’t ask. His thumb pushes between his lips, sliding in and pressing his tongue down. It’s salty, covered in release.

Shane rears back against his own fingers, then forwards against Rozanov’s hand, and he doesn’t last long after that. He comes in one long string of cum and moans, and then before he really knows what’s happening again, Rozanov has righted him with steady hands, and is standing back in his own cubicle.

Shane feels frozen to the spot, eyes paused on the single tile right in front of him.

Bood whistles as he walks back into the room, “Sorry guys, forgot my shampoo.”

Shane has no idea where the bottle is. Has no idea where Bood is. He's not even entirely sure where his own feet are. It is just him, and the aftershocks vibrating through his body, and the one single thought to just not fucking move.

The door shuts with a *thud*.

The breath trapped in his lungs explodes outwards, shoulders dropping, forehead tilting forwards to press against the tile. He wants to sink to his knees, because he's not sure his legs can hold him up for much longer. Only it doesn't annoy him, or scare him, or make anything other than a pleasant buzz settle under his skin where that damn itch used to be.

"Hollander?" Rozanov's voice echoes off the tile.

Why is it so loud? *Everything* is so loud. The water running, his bones creaking, his heart pounding. He groans, presses his forehead harder against the tile, feels his nose squish under the pressure. He just needs a moment. He is so overwhelmed, so...

"*Here.*" The word is half-sobbed, ripped from him, instincts insisting he answer.

This isn't caring for his health. This isn't Rozanov spotting when he's on edge and helping out. This isn't learning how to be a real Sub, dipping his toes in the water. This is— well it's all of those things, but it's also something else that doesn't have a name. Something that makes his heart race and his cheeks flush and apparently want to bend over in the middle of the team's showers.

He is so completely, utterly *fucked*.

"Shh... is okay now." Hands paw at him, gentle in places they were firm just minutes ago, "You were good, Hollander. Have never had such a good listener under my hand before. I am so lucky."

He leans forwards, and Rozanov catches him. Later. He will be worried later.

Chapter End Notes

I feel like that escalated quickly, lol.

Also I NEVER see it addressed in these AUs so I snuck it in for no reason at all but when Shane talks about hormonal decline he's basically on about menopause but for subs/doms, so they don't get as freaky when they're old. lol.

Next chap Monday!

Update: I was not happy with the flow of this chapter so deleted the scene where Shane and Ilya speak during the interviews.

Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

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

“How does it feel to have so many consecutive wins under your belt in this new season, Shane?”

The reporter is far off in the distance of the room, and Shane can't see her face past the flashing cameras and bright lights. It's probably for the best. He can feel the weight of her comments, the questions she isn't asking. If she was allowed to be so crass, the question would definitely be more along the lines of *how does it feel to actually win, on such a terrible team? Is it just dumb luck?*

Words twist in his throat the way they always have in front of crowds, but he leans into the microphone anyways. He's played hockey for long enough to know that his silence will only be taken the wrong way by these vultures, give them more ammunition. *Don't make waves.*

“Proud, mostly. My teammates have put in a lot of work to help me gel with my line, and that's obviously paid off.”

He knows the answer is fine. Perfect, even. Some PR manager somewhere is listening to this and taking study-notes. Despite that, he finds himself glancing slightly to the side, off into the wings. Harris gives him a subtle thumbs-up. *Good.*

“So would you say your transition to the Centaurs has been smooth?”

This question is better. Simpler. The reporter is closer to Shane, somebody he can actually see: a young guy who looks more than a little out of his depth. Shane nods at him, “Absolutely. No transition is without a few hiccups, but they've really made me feel welcome here.”

“Hiccups? Do you mean giving up your captaincy to Rozanov?”

A familiar voice echoes from the back of the room, *again.*

If he was paid to be honest with the press, he'd tell her that he hasn't even thought about it once. Not since leaving Montreal, anyways. Definitely not since he and Rozanov became involved in such an intertwined way. They play— well. They play together like they've never played apart, and there's something more than a little terrifying about that level of compatibility. For their opponents, anyways. Tonight's outstanding game proved that; their early season win-streak proves that.

Rozanov is a good captain, a good man, and a good Dom. Shane doesn't know a captain in the NHL who he would trust more to win them that Cup, including himself.

But that's not what he's paid to say.

Harris clearly agrees, because in the corner of Shane's eye, he is making a very exaggerated cut-throat gesture. Really, he should have gone to drama school. He missed his calling.

“Not at all, no.” He answers.

“Speaking of Rozanov, you two were pitted together as rivals during your rookie years, have you experienced any issues playing with him specifically? He’s known to have a... difficult personality.”

His earlier thoughts circle back to him: vultures. Conflict. *Drama*.

Harris is making that gesture again.

“I wouldn’t say *known*.” Shane surges forwards in his seat, leaning in closer to the microphone. Something hot sizzles in his stomach, something big and red and angry and... protective? Suddenly, Harris and what he's paid to say is the last thing on his mind.

“There have been rumours because of past trades, yes. But I can assure you that none of the Centaurs feel that way, and neither do I. Rozanov is our *captain*. We’re going to win a cup, and we’re going to do it under his leadership, because we trust him completely.”

The woman finally pauses, letting up in her barrage of questions. Clearly, that hadn’t been what she was expecting him to say. The feeling is mutual, to be honest. Maybe she had expected a quick, PR-approved answer about teamwork. Maybe even begrudging respect. Certainly not an aggressive, sharp defence of his character.

Part of Shane wants to feel embarrassed, wants to take it back. Making waves just gets more eyes on him. More scrutiny. He cannot afford more scrutiny, not when his trade is still the talk of the hockey world.

The rest of him doesn’t regret a word of it.

“It would be your third cup.” Someone else calls out, taking the silence as their permission, “Montreal has fallen off significantly since your departure, they had a terrible showing on home ice tonight. Will you be ready to play against your old friends soon?”

One long, deep breath, and Shane leans forwards again. *No more waves*.

“Plenty of guys have been traded before me, and plenty will be after.” He answers.

“So there’s no love lost between you and Montreal? There has been a lot of speculation about your sudden trade—“

Shane doesn’t let him finish. Whatever he thinks he knows, whatever he has heard from a friend-of-a-friend-of-a-WAG, Shane wants him to shut the fuck up, *right now*.

“This is about hockey.” He insists, voice overlapping the reporter’s in a way he’s not sure he’s ever allowed himself to do before either. Today is full of firsts. In the corner of his eye, he can see Harris has completely given up, and is instead gesturing wildly to someone from

management. It would be funny if Shane wasn't the cause of it. He's pretty fucking sure this is called *making waves*.

"We're not here to dwell on past events. I know you'd like nothing more than to dig into my personal life, but I find that very off-putting. Does anyone have an *actual* question about my plays?"

Every other hand in the room raises.

-

The noise from the locker room spills out into the hallway, over-stuffed and overlapping. The old hallways are all brick-and-concrete, so the noise feels like it's exploding around the entire building all at once.

Shane doesn't hesitate as he bumps his shoulder into the door, pushing it open with a great creak.

He didn't think it was possible, considering they were already breaking the sound barrier, but the team gets even *louder* when he enters. Winning looks good on them. A real chance at the playoffs this year looks good on them.

"There's the man of the hour!" Hayes is always the first one to speak, always charging ahead of the others, both on the ice and in the locker room.

Barrett makes a *whoop* noise, clapping his hands together once, twice. It's pretty much the best you'll ever get out of him, as quiet as he is.

"What a fucking hat-trick, Hollander!" Bood calls, because when his kids aren't around, he swears like a sailor.

The same sentiment is echoed by the whole team, too many voices at once to pick out anything specific, which feels pretty good. It feels good to be celebrated, yes, and it feels good to be winning, yes, but mostly it feels good to have a team that celebrates so *genuinely*. Tonight they beat Toronto 4-2. Shane's hat-trick was more than impressive, a late-game comeback for the Centaurs, and yet he has no doubt that his reception would be the same if he scored nothing at all.

"That deserves a fucking beer and a few ribs, man, come on, *come on*, Hollzy! Barbecue and Bood's!" Dykstra has both his hands on Shane's shoulders from behind, shaking him around like a rag-doll before propelling him off into the centre of the room.

Hayes catches him, throwing an arm around his neck and dragging him in close, yelling in his ear. Clearly, they have given up playing nice, and have now resorted to guerilla warfare to get him to show his face at team events.

“Fine! Fine, *okay*.” Shane can't help his laughter, it's contagious in a locker room like this. He does his best to shake off Hayes' grip before one of them trips over and rolls an ankle. Win-streaks do not continue with core players on the bench for rolled ankles, “I will come!”

“Finally!” Bood grins, punctuated by the loud slam of his locker door closing, “It starts at seven, don't bring anything or you'll offend my wife, and have fun. Those are the only three rules.”

Behind him, each of the three rookies holds up one finger above his head. One very specific finger. Shane has to avert his eyes, just incase Bood doesn't see the same amount of humour in it as the rest of them. Getting the rookies in trouble with the Alternate Captain is just plain mean, too.

“Not true!” Thankfully, Rozanov picks his moment to distract them all. He is still red from the hot shower, skin flushed and damp. He'd probably kill anyone for suggesting he has rosy-cheeks, but... well, the evidence is standing right there.

There's something wild in his eyes, too. Something big and excited and bolstered by their win. He might have played on three other historically better hockey teams, but he is just as proud as the rest of them for each and every one of their wins.

"I am told every time I cannot teach the children Russian words!"

“Because we googled them and they were all insults!” Chouinard heckles. One of his gloves sails over Haas' head and hits Rozanov's shoulder before thumping to the ground.

Shane quickly steps in before it can be launched back, snatching the offending item off the ground and stowing it at the bottom of his locker. He can have it back tomorrow, if he's nice.

“For hockey purposes!” Rozanov is not deterred by Shane standing between them. Being taller, he simply yells over the top of his head, “They must know how to call Hunter old dinosaur in as many languages as possible, no? We play Admirals next week, is important.”

Something bumps Shane's shoulder. He shifts with the movement, pulling his body in closer to his stall. It's not the biggest locker room ever, and they often crash into each other like bumper cars.

Another jolt and he glances up. The culprit is *Rozanov*, obviously. Shane should have guessed. He has his head bowed and both hands are fiddling with his hoodie strings. Tying, untying. Tying, untying. His eyes are elsewhere, still locked on his duffel bag.

Shane refuses to stare. The whole team is still here. He turns back to his own bag, packing it up in the order he always packs it in. Shoes, shirt, socks, jersey. No exceptions. Except... maybe one. When his bag is zipped and his locker is tidy, Shane takes a moment to stretch. His arms go up, and then they go down, and if he *accidentally* bumps Rozanov back as he lowers them, who's to blame him?

In the corner of his eye, he can see Rozanov grinning.

The sheets are damp. Sweat, drool, it doesn't matter. They are damp. They stick to his face, getting caught and scratching against his cheek.

The room is getting colder. There's a window open, somewhere. He can feel the breeze along his back. Underneath the thrusts and the jerks, it's making him shiver.

His knees are creaking. He can almost feel the give of his bones as they are pressed forwards and then released, forwards and then released.

The hands on his hips are nice, though. They are dry and warm and just the right side of too-tight. They're holding him up at this point, taking his weight and holding him still as Rozanov fucks into him from behind.

For the last few minutes, Shane has been holding onto that feeling. Being under those steady hands. He does not have to worry about any of these things, these boring, human things like how comfortable he is. It is just him, and Rozanov, and no more thoughts.

But that's not true, really.

There are words, somewhere, dirty talk being whispered into his ear, but Shane's brain is barely catching onto any of it. Mostly there's the squeak of the bed, the rustle of the sheets, and somewhere in the distance the quiet buzz of an appliance.

Shane is not really in the room, but he is not in that silent faraway place where everything feels right, either.

Rozanov is in *his* place. Shane has watched him go there a lot, now. Learned to notice the moment he finds it, buried deep inside of himself. He thinks, maybe, Rozanov's place is also silent. Different from Shane's silent, but still silent. The kind of silent where you feel totally in control. Like the chaos of the world vanishes, and it is just him and what he wants. Just whatever feels right.

In that way, their silences are the same. They feel right.

Shane is not a selfish person, or he doesn't like to be. So when Rozanov reaches that place, he desperately wants him to stay there. Doesn't want to do anything to disrupt his peace. Call it Submission if you want, maybe it is.

So instead of speak he claws his fingers into his palms, digging tiny little moons into the skin, and tries to hold on. He thinks if he holds on Rozanov will enjoy himself more. And if Rozanov enjoys himself more, Shane will get such good aftercare. And he will definitely enjoy *that*.

They will cuddle on the couch, he thinks, all their limbs knotted together into one big ball. He will press his head into Rozanov's hands and practically wag his tail when he scratches just the right spot on his scalp.

There's ginger ale in the fridge. Tuna melts were mentioned. Shane is pretty full from Bood's snacks, but he could eat a sandwich or two.

He will enjoy all of that. It will be worth it.

Another jerk and Shane falls further into the sheets, hands tugging where they are tied behind his back. The silk didn't hurt a minute ago, but maybe it does now. It has bunched up around his wrists, and he can feel the line it is cutting into his skin. He doesn't need to look back and see, he can feel it like a vice-grip.

The pace changes, suddenly, and one of the hands on his hips disappears. Gone in a second, so easy to remove. His hip is cold in its wake. Rozanov isn't leaning over him anymore either, no chest plastered to Shane's back. Instead he is retreating, pulling away.

The second hand goes and suddenly, Shane is alone.

Alone. Cold. Wet. Far from his headspace.

It is terrifying.

He has never once considered saying it before. The idea of being disappointing usually burns him from the inside out, acidic. The thought of saying it now should make him anxious. But in that one moment, he has nothing to lose. He is alone, and he is blindly searching for any way to fix it, but he cannot move because he is tied, cannot think because he is confused, cannot do anything but use his voice.

Once he has had the thought, it burrows in, too deep to extricate. Then expands. Suddenly, he is alone. Suddenly, what felt bearable before, feels utterly agonizing now. The possibility of silence is gone, and a large, steep drop appears before him.

If you float away, what will you do?

Ask for help.

"Stop! Help. *Help*, Roz—" He babbles, not even entirely sure what he is saying. All he knows is that everything had gone from *so* much and veered very sharply into *toomuch*.

Disappointment finally claws at him, ripping up even the smallest shreds of headspace he had left.

Anxiety chews into his stomach, rabid and all-consuming.

He is on his back instantly. The hands floating around his body rip away the silk around his wrists, and then find home again on his cheeks. They are solid, something to hold onto as he gasps for breath. Shane's fingers clasp around Rozanov's wrists, squeeze, dig in. He will not fall. He will not fall. Rozanov is here, and he will not *let* him fall.

The thought elbows into his brain, taking up space, manning its post.

He will not fall.

“Look at me. Look at me, Hollander.”

It’s too much. Shane shakes his head, pulls away. He doesn’t want to look. He knows all of Rozanov’s looks. The good, the bad, the ugly. What if he sees a bad one? What if he is upset? What if it was Shane’s fault? What if—

“*Eyes.*” It’s not an order, but maybe it borders on one, a single word snapped right from the chest, “*Here.*”

Eyes. Shane opens them.

Here. They focus, meeting Rozanov’s. Rozanov’s, which are so wide and terrified that his pupils have become tiny like pinpricks.

Somehow, seeing fear there helps. There is no anger, no disappointment, no sense of crushing failure. Rozanov does not want him scared, or falling, or hurt. He wants him happy. Always keeps him happy, helps him want to be good. Being a Sub is not just being good, it is having a Dom who helps you get there.

Because Rozanov is a good Dom, just like Shane is a good Sub.

And Shane is a good Sub, because he'd followed the rules.

If you float away, what will you do?

Ask for help.

Shane feels his whole body slump all in one quick second. His forehead tilts with the exhale, bumps against Rozanov’s. “Okay. It’s okay. I’m here.”

He’s not lying. There’s warmth now; resting underneath Rozanov’s body blocks out the breeze. Wherever the wet patch on the sheets has gone, it’s not touching him. His restraints are discarded, and he can hold onto Rozanov to steady himself.

What he isn’t expecting is laughter. Rozanov’s chest heaves, breathless and strangled and like there’s a weight on his chest fighting back against it. He overbalances, straddling Shane’s body as precariously as he is, so the sudden movement makes him tip forwards. Shane gets squished into the side of his arm, flattened under his large chest.

Rozanov turns it into an embrace. Hugs him with both arms now, pushing out the last molecules of air between their bodies. He swears, too. *Well*, Shane doesn’t actually understand the word because it’s a Russian word, but he understands the *tone*. Nobody would mistake that for anything but a curse.

Shane gives him a few minutes before he moves, curling back into Rozanov as best he can given his situation squished beneath him. He is, at least, able to move his head enough to

have fresh air to pull into his lungs and space to speak.

“I’m okay.” He mutters, “Thank you. For stopping.”

Rozanov still doesn’t move his head. He presses closer, if that were even something that was possible. His head tucks in further, lips pressing soft kisses wherever they end up resting. His shoulder, his neck, the side of his head. He is not discriminating.

Shane shifts again, this time managing to get his knees under him and curl them up, stretching the sore muscles before they cramp.

That is when he notices something else.

“You’re still hard.”

That, at last, has Rozanov peeling back. He is frowning, a real knot between his eyebrows that looks difficult to undo. He shakes his head, “Does not matter.”

Rozanov seems sure, but not mattering is subjective. Shane already got his orgasm, teased out of him when his hands were being tied and orders were being slung about. Rozanov didn’t get so much as a hand on his cock until much later. It mattered to Rozanov that Shane was satisfied, so why shouldn’t it matter to Shane that Rozanov is satisfied?

Shane knows he is frowning back as he speaks, “I’m here. I just— just, tell me I’m good. Keep looking at me. Don’t... please don’t let me feel like I’m alone.”

It is easy to voice what had gone wrong, now. Subspace and the fear of dropping has faded to the back of his mind, leaving him with a clear head. Rozanov is touching him all over, plastered to his skin like he can press warmth and happiness back into him. And Shane wouldn’t discount that thought just yet, because it seems to be working.

Rozanov is slow to agree, but Shane can see the cogs whirring away in his mind, busy. First he is contemplating how bad he thinks the drop was, obviously. Then when his eyes start trailing up and down Shane’s body, he is contemplating how he can resume. Perhaps Shane is not quite so naturally good at reading people, but he has had a lot of practice with reading Rozanov. At least, a horny Rozanov.

Slowly— ever so slowly— Rozanov reaches out a hand to brush his knuckle over Shane’s cheek.

It is welcome. More than. Shane presses into it, wanting more than anything for Rozanov to see how welcome his touch is.

It is the right thing to do, clearly, because it spurs Rozanov on like nothing else, instantly bringing confidence back to his movements. He shifts up onto one hand, balancing his weight on it. His other still drags down Shane’s face, past his neck, over his collarbone, all the way down to his hip. It squeezes, just slightly, five fingers slotting into the little red marks they’d already left.

Shane doesn't have to be told what to do next. He thinks maybe that if he doesn't offer himself up on a silver platter, Rozanov will still be too terrified to eat his fill. So he parts his thighs, spreads his legs. He bends his knees slightly, making room for Rozanov to settle in.

His cock is harder now, pressing insistently against the inside of Shane's thigh. The skin there is milky white, and the deep red of Rozanov's cock stands out against it, bold.

Shane bites his lip, tugging his knees up a little further, lifting his feet and getting his ankles locked around Rozanov's waist. If simply alluring him won't work, he is not afraid to get physical. Rozanov's body is familiar to him now, he knows how to play it like a fiddle. He flexes, pushing his hips up.

"*Roz.*" He whines from the top of his throat, high and keening. He tilts his chin back, flutters his eyelids, "*Roz, please.*"

In some ways, this is exactly what he had always thought Subspace was. An act. A role to play. Something he had to think about, perform.

Like this, he doesn't mind performing. But weeks ago, when they were beginning their arrangement, he wouldn't have been. His movements would have been clumsy, his anxiety spiking... a *mess*. He'd have been a mess.

Rozanov is so twisted up and caught inside his own head, he either doesn't know the difference—he has lots of experience with Subs, so seems unlikely—or it's simply enough to plummet him back into his own headspace regardless.

His pupils blow wide, and Shane knows he has him on the edge of it.

He presses a kiss to Shane's cheek, head dropping into the curve of his shoulder as he lines himself up.

He slides back in slowly, the way he might if Shane wasn't already over-stretched from being fucked. Like any slight discomfort might set him off again, might have him calling out for help. Like he is afraid to break him.

"Here?" Rozanov checks, halfway.

"Right here with you." Shane nods, lifting his head, pressing a messy kiss to Rozanov's chin, the only part of him he can reach.

When the last inch slides in, Rozanov groans. He turns his head to the side and bites down on the noise, almost like he's embarrassed to let go again. It's... weird. Shane isn't sure he's ever seen Rozanov hold back. Not on the ice, not in the bedroom. He is intense. Nought-to-sixty.

Shane lifts a hand, takes Rozanov's cheek, pulls him back.

"Look at me." He whispers, rasps really, his voice still a little more than wrecked, "Look at me. Help me get back there?"

Help.

Maybe it's a dirty move, asking for help. Maybe not. Either way, Rozanov groans again, and this time he does not look away.

The moan vibrates through Rozanov's whole body, quivering down to his toes. There isn't a part of Shane that isn't pressed close enough to feel it. He sighs, more than happy to go boneless, to melt into a puddle of sloppy, blissed-out Shane Hollander as Rozanov's thrusts pick up.

"So good." He grunts, squeezing his ankles behind Rozanov's hips, dragging him in closer, closer, closer, "*Fuck*, Roz, Rozanov, there's nothing like it. Feels so big. *God*—" He stretches his neck, rolls up into Rozanov's hips, "*—fuck you.*" He laughs, "F-fuck your cock, your hands, Roz, put your *fucking* hands on me—"

Rozanov jerks out of rhythm, like he hasn't noticed his hands floating away again. They snap back to Shane like this time he is the drill sergeant, like he is built only to give and give and give, like if he does not fill Shane's every need, he will be broken.

Shane loves it. Really, he's surprised by how natural this feels, no headspace, just sex. It is good sex. Great sex, even. They know each other's bodies, their rhythms, their *oh fuck yesses*.

But they don't have sex. They fill each other's needs, yes, and they have sex, yes, but not like this. They're not... in a relationship. They're not neutrals. This isn't their equilibrium.

But nothing he's saying to find their headspaces is *working*. Rozanov's body is moving on muscle memory, not instinct. His hands and eyes keep floating away from Shane. That has never happened before, either. Rozanov is focussed, intense. He doesn't... stray. He doesn't fly away.

It is suddenly very clear that this is not getting either of them closer to anything but an orgasm.

In a last ditch effort to do *something*, Shane flings a hand out, snatching up the length of silk that had been abandoned somewhere to his left.

He all but shoves it at Rozanov, who pauses, thrust abated midway.

Shane focuses on his breathing. Slow. Steady. No sudden movements. He lifts one leg, then the other, pushing them closer to his chest. He arches his back, lifts his arms above his head. His wrists press together.

Before Rozanov can ask, before he can panic or refuse, Shane looks him directly in the eye, clears his throat, and says with all the confidence he can muster, "Here."

It's like a dam breaks.

Rozanov shifts to his knees, getting both hands free to grab the silk. He is quick and efficient as he ties it, wrapping the loop around Shane's wrists and then through a bar on the headboard, locking him down.

“Rules.” He breathes, shifting Shane’s body, manhandling him with little softness, but so very much care.

One knee goes further up into his chest, pressed in as tight as it will go, muscle protesting the stretch.

“Ask for help.”

Shane’s voice wavers, but he just about manages. The other knee follows. Pressed. Pushed.

“Tap three times.”

Rozanov crowds in again, simply making room for his big body by forcing Shane’s to accommodate him, thighs parting as widely as they will go. Shane is nearly bent in half. He can feel the stretch *everywhere*.

“Good. One more.”

Shane’s mind goes blank. Suddenly, all that control he had of the situation, all that pushing he had to do to get Rozanov to switch back on... gone. Already, he feels like he can taste how quiet his brain is getting, like sugar and molasses, clogging up his thoughts, making them slow.

“I— I don’t— there isn’t.” He’s not sure he’s making sense, but it’s all he has left to mumble.

Rozanov doesn’t seem to mind. He kisses the confusion away from his lips, “One more.” He repeats. His tongue laps into Shane’s mouth. Maybe he can taste the sweetness too, maybe he knows Subspace is close by just from one little kiss, “Do not come until I say.”

Suddenly, Shane is very aware of how hard he’s gotten in the last few minutes.

“I will fuck you, I will touch you, but you do not come. You come, you lose. Yes? You come, no more silk, no more kiss, just hand—“ He lifts his hand, as if to show Shane the threat he is making is real, “—on bare ass. You understand?”

It’s so many words. Shane’s head is swimming now. He can barely keep his head above water, and he’s more than pretty sure the current is carrying him out to sea.

Pain is new. Pain has never been used in their space, has only been on Shane’s list of *maybes* since the start. Perhaps Rozanov has forgotten. Perhaps in his haze he is pulling on memories with other Subs, what they wanted, what they liked.

Shane doesn’t care. He doesn’t care because he groans when Rozanov starts thrusting again. He doesn’t care because he’s too busy mumbling, “Yes yes yes *yes*—“ under his breath.

Rozanov sets an unforgiving pace. Clearly, he is ready to chase his orgasm again. Which he is free to do, but Shane is not.

He tries to focus on other things. He thinks about the way his muscles are stretched, the backs of his thighs burning. He thinks about the way his hands are tied, silk biting at his skin,

pressing down, anchoring him to the moment. It's... nice. Rozanov doesn't have enough hands to hold him everywhere at once, so it's more than nice, even, to feel the pressure and the hold in so many places at once.

Shane pulls on the fabric, tensing his biceps. It tightens the grip. It feels good. Too good. Another deep, piercing thrust into his prostate, and the pressure on the sensitive skin of his wrists, and—

Shane screams. Actually, really, seriously, screams. His body spasms. If Rozanov had neighbours, they'd probably be calling the police.

Rozanov's hand is solid around the base of Shane's cock, clenching.

Shane can't help but look down, eyes locked in on the tip of it. He shivers, quivers, every tiny almost imperceptible movement his body is capable of. The pressure on his prostate is intense and drawn-out, Rozanov's cock still brushing it inside his ass.

And then the tiniest little dribble of something pops out the top of his cock.

Shane can see his chest heaving. It is twice the size when he breathes in, practically concave when he breathes out. He can't seem to calm himself.

Rozanov is not helping. He is staring at the tip of his cock, watching the few little drops of cum spill over and dribble down.

The gears are whirring in his head again. Shane can always see it. He is wondering if Shane has come. He is wondering if those two little dribbles *count*.

A sharp sting cuts across his thigh.

Shane yells, trying to roll away from the feeling, then immediately trying to roll back into it. He doesn't know what to do. He is trapped. He is tied and squished and all bent-up and there is nowhere to go.

Tears well in his eyes, and they do not wait around for anyone. They well, and they flood, and they fall. Everywhere. His entire face feels wet because they zig-zag and drip randomly as his head jerks from side to side.

The hand grips the spot it just set aflame, unforgiving as it kneads the flesh.

"When we are in locker room, cannot take my eyes off your bruises." Rozanov mutters. His hips are moving slowly now, his thrusts hitting deep and long, making sure every single inch of his cock is felt by Shane, "Cannot stop thinking, I want to put them there."

Shane can't seem to stop crying. He's not even entirely sure what he's crying about. The sting of his thigh has calmed, and the slow thrusts are easy on his body. But still, there are tears and pain and pleasure.

Maybe it's just the echo of it in his body. Maybe it's the ache working its way up his chest. Maybe it's the fact that his brain has gone quiet, and there is nothing in the world but him and

Rozanov, so everything he feels is twice as intense.

And then finally, finally the hand on his cock releases.

Another thrust, and Shane is drawing himself in again, “I can’t— I can’t—“

“Tell me.”

“Please!”

“**Beg for it.**”

“Rozanov *please!* Please let me come, *please* I’ve been good I want to be good! Let me be good. Let—“ A hiccup, “Let me be *good.*”

“**Come.**”

They come together, that's all he knows.

His mouth falls open in a silent scream. There are no other words for it: his jaw goes lax, his throat spasms, he tries to cough but cannot, tries to moan at the same moment but cannot. It is sweet torture all the way down to the bones in his toes.

When his hands are released, they fall limp above him on the pillow, fingers stretching and clenching.

When his knees are eased down one at a time by coaxing hands and gentle kisses on the joints, Shane can’t help but wince.

He is spread-out, hollowed-out, and his skin is filled with cotton rather than bone and brain.

Something is drawn over him. It is thin but weighty. A blanket, maybe. Shane pushes at it, hands grabbing for something else. Someone else.

“You are cold.”

The words mean nothing. Shane is not cold. Shane is not here. Shane is... he will sit in this quiet space for a little while.

The cover is drawn back up again, but something takes one of his hands, tugs it out to the side and keeps it there, captured. It takes nothing out of Shane to just sit with it, let it be. He does not need his hands. There are no hands. There is just a blank ceiling he cannot focus on, and a place in his head where there is nothing at all.

Nothing is a little cold, though. Shane blinks, using his other hand to reach for the sheet, tugging. He drops his head to the side. The movement jerks his body, restarts the part of his brain that had completely shut down for a moment, the part that takes him away, the part that he has to be careful with so he doesn’t fall into the dark place he kept dropping to before Rozanov.

Eyes blinking open, he can see Rozanov sat on the edge of the bed, one knee cocked up onto the mattress. He has Shane's hand clasped in his lap. Both of his are caressing it softly, smoothing over the skin, running up and down the lines of his palm reverently as if he can read what they say about his future.

"Mmghph..." Shane tries to move his lips, but they just blow out air and nothing more.

He watches as Rozanov lifts his hand, kisses the back, then lowers it. "Try again." He urges. His voice is low, spoken under his breath like a plea rather than an order. He sounds hollow, too. Like headspace had set him alight and then burnt him out: no more orders left in his chest, no more anger bubbling under his skin. Just Rozanov, again.

Shane smiles. Grins, really. Probably stupidly.

"*Huh-ere.*" He gargles, just that little bit more coherently, "Here...."

Rozanov kisses his hand again and pulls his other knee back up onto the bed. Shane moves to sit up, to mirror him.

"No, no don't sit—"

One good thing about having meticulously worked all the commands out of a Dom is that they cease to be able to order you around. At least for a little bit, while they're dead-tired. So Shane ignores Rozanov telling him to lie back down, choosing instead to throw his arm around Rozanov's neck. He uses it to heave himself up, even if the Dom does most of the work, strong hands automatically shooting out to catch him.

Shane teeters, their foreheads bumping again, but he doesn't care. He's too happy to care. He smiles into it, pressing a kiss to Rozanov's lips. Then again. It makes Rozanov's face relax, straightens out all the untidy wrinkles and frown-lines.

Shane cocks his head, noses brushing, "Are *you* here?"

Rozanov hums, shakes his head, "Is not a concern."

"It's *mine*." Shane cannot believe what he's hearing. He knows his own face must be filled with those same untidy frown-lines and wrinkles now, but he doesn't care one little bit, "I have concerns. If you enjoy yourself. If you find a headspace. It's not all about me, Roz."

A beat.

"I am here with you, Hollander." He allows.

Shane takes a slow breath, dragging in enough air to speak for the first time in maybe twenty minutes.

“Roz?”

Rozanov hums, glances over from where he’s hanging out the back door, cigarette balanced between his fingers. He hasn’t seemed in a rush to speak, either. As he hums, a little puff of smoke floats out into the misty, wintery air.

His eyes are bright. In this light he looks so... different. There had been a hint of it in the bedroom when his face had relaxed, but that was nothing compared to this. His body is completely loose, languid, as he stands there, melting against the doorframe. His hair is damp, slicked back from his shower. A hoodie sits sagging on his shoulders. His shorts peek out from below the hem, dropping to just above his knees. His feet are bare, tucked just inside the door, a few inches from the damp outside patio.

It is nothing like how he is in his headspace, either, when he is pulled taut like a guitar string, ready to snap at any given moment.

Shane had worried maybe he had snapped, earlier. Been pulled just that little bit too tightly, worried that little bit too much.

“It was... okay, right? To— it was okay?” Shane almost can’t bare to look at Rozanov when he is so open and blank. Instead, he looks down at the marble counter. His fingers find the top of his ginger ale can, flicking at the pull-tab. “I don’t want to disappoint anyone.”

Anyone. As if Rozanov is just anyone. As if Shane is going to leave here today and make a pit stop at five other Doms on the way home, trying for repeat performances. As if Rozanov is just practice for the real thing.

He is not.

But he knows he could. Should, even. He knows they are not in a relationship, he knows his place. Rozanov surely does not hide the fact that he still spends time with other Subs. The tabloids eat up a new story about it every weekend like clockwork.

Rozanov drops the cigarette onto the patio, letting it steam out on the damp ground. He breezes back into the room, padding in on bare feet. One of his hands cups Shane’s cheek, runs up into his hair, holds him still. At the very least, his touches are confident again.

The kiss he plants on Shane is soft. Unhurried. Like they have all the time in the world. “No.” He murmurs, all warm breath and a tongue that laps into Shane’s mouth, “I am proud.”

He leans away, takes his heat with him.

Closer, Shane can see the delicate swirl of emotion in his eyes. There are too many to count, mingling and mixing, all his complicated feelings, laid bare.

Mostly though, Shane sees just how tired he looks. The way bags hang heavy under his eyes, how maybe his muscles aren’t actually relaxed, maybe they are just too heavy to hold up any

longer. Maybe he doesn't think Shane is someone he has to pretend for, any longer.

"Good boy, yes? You take what I give you and tell me when it is too much." Rozanov inhales suddenly, sharp, like the warm inside-air has surprised his lungs. He blinks, slow, and when his eyes open again, they are a little bit red, "Maybe I fall a little. Maybe seeing you fall scared me. But you helped. *Very* good boy."

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"Can I ask you another question?"

"Mm." Rozanov's hum this time is not curious and quiet, it is simply sleepy. His hand has been working slow circles into Shane's lower back for a little while, slowly tapering off.

Shane feels better now, with his head on Rozanov's lap, legs curled up into his chest, the TV on with hockey playing quietly in front of them.

It started raining properly outside a few hours ago, and Shane has used it as an excuse not to leave. He knows he should, but maybe he wants to be selfish for once. If Rozanov noticed the shitty lie about not wanting to drive in the rain, he has not commented. He has not rushed him out or made any pointed offers to drive Shane home himself, either.

Maybe he thinks Shane needs more care today, after his near-drop. Whatever the reason, Shane has a full belly and as many scratches and massages and kisses as he wants. He doesn't know *anyone* who is a good enough person to pass that offer up.

"Why do you never ask me to kneel?"

Rozanov's hand pauses, then stops entirely. Shane can't help his twitch, the way he rolls his back to ask for it to move again. It does, but Rozanov doesn't answer for another long, quiet few minutes. Shane doesn't mind waiting. His eyes are focused on the puck, chasing it back and forth, following each tap of the stick, each pass, each blunder. Not a single pressing thought barges in. He just waits.

"Is..." Rozanov starts, tentative, the way he used to speak when he knew less English, "Is something that should be given. Not taken."

For all his years surrounded by Doms, Shane had never heard it spoken about like that. He knows kneeling is meant to be a private thing, an intimate thing, but it's also something that is spoken about so casually. Something expected. Something that should be ordered out of Subs, because not giving it willingly is rude. Something Doms deserve, simply by existing. He vividly remembers a conversation where Drapeau joked with Mitty about ordering it out of his girl.

He is not surprised Rozanov disagrees with Drapeau, really. Probably should have expected it, even.

Rozanov's next question does surprise him, though, because usually all the questions come from Shane.

"Have you thought about it?" He asks.

Shane hums back. If it's okay for Rozanov to take his time, to mull over his answer, then he figures it is okay for him to do as well.

Except Shane doesn't really need to mull over this one. He already knows the answer, because this is why he'd brought it up. Because when Rozanov's command rumbles through a room, Shane's knees lock up and his head conjures up all kinds of images.

"I guess... I guess I've felt it, maybe. Wanting. But I don't know if that was *subspace* or *me*. I don't... it's hard to separate, sometimes."

After that, there is a long, long silence. Much longer than before. The hand on his back pauses again, the pads of his fingers pressing in. Then,

"Wait until you are sure."

Shane lifts his head, rolling over onto his back. Somehow, he knows something is wrong. Something in the air has changed. Rozanov isn't lounging, anymore. He is not lazily falling asleep. He is sat up straight, staring directly at the hockey game in front of them.

"Roz?" Shane's voice feels small. Concern seeps out of him at the edges. He reaches for Rozanov's chin, pinching it between his thumb and forefinger, angling it down.

Rozanov closes his eyes. Not screwed-up tight and trying to push back tears or anything. Just... closed. Shane's stomach rolls. *Rozanov doesn't want to look at him.*

"You remember what I said about orders, yes?"

He does. He remembers the lecture, the long speech given before their first scene. Orders aren't there to force him. They are there to help him. Help him be open, do hard things, find his headspace amongst the chaos. Directions, is maybe a better word. Like a compass that always points north, they lead to subspace.

"Yes." Shane nods, waits until Rozanov's eyes peek open before he releases his fingers, "That's not my problem, you know that. God knows I can fight them off."

It's odd. The muscle burn would probably be alien to him now because he hasn't experienced it in a while, but there was a time when Shane battled through orders daily. Hourly. It's not something you ever forget.

"Not that." Rozanov shakes his head, shrugs, and finally, finally looks down at him. Really looks. Eyes wide open, soft hazel colour winning over his pupils, "It's just... important you are here because you really want to be."

Shane blinks, then blinks again. The statement feels so heavy, so loaded, he doesn't know what to do with it. What do you do, when someone hands you a weapon like that?

"I am." He finds himself insisting, simply because it is the truth. Shane wants to be here. He finds Subspace here, yes. He is safe here, also yes. But he wants to be *here*. He wants to watch Rozanov smoke his cigarette out the window. He wants to cuddle on the sofa afterwards. He wants to trade chirps back and forth while they cook. He wants every little bit of Rozanov he can get. He can never admit it aloud, but he can admit it to himself.

Rozanov closes his eyes again. He inhales sharply, almost a hiccup. "Maybe I clean up." He says, moving to push Shane away, "Tuna melts make big mess in kitchen."

An excuse for escape, if Shane has ever heard one.

"Roz." He frowns, refusing to shift his weight, refusing to move so that Rozanov can run, "Roz, are you dropping?"

Rozanov freezes. That is the only way to describe the way his body tenses, going bolt-straight in his seat. "No. *No*."

Shane stares at him, shrinks back just a little. What annoys him the most is that he's not actually *sure*. He can't read Rozanov like a book the way he does to Shane. If Rozanov had been dropping since the bedroom, Shane had missed it entirely, too wrapped up in feeling sorry for himself, in thinking he'd already fixed this problem with a little Submission and an orgasm.

That makes him feel awful. Possibly worse than when he was nearly-dropping. He is supposed to take care of Rozanov, too. Maybe not always, not when they started this arrangement, but now he is. Everything about them is a careful balance. Hollander and Rozanov. Sub and Dom. Give and take.

"Help me understand."

Help. Shane knows what he's said. It's the second time he's played dirty today, but he's not ashamed. Maybe before today he didn't really understand the power that Rozanov had put in his hands by giving him this rule, but he certainly does now.

Rozanov looks at him like a wounded animal might. Wide-eyed. Still. Resigned, even.

"My mother." He says it like it's being wrenched from the deepest parts of his chest. His throat catches on each word, starting loud and trailing off, "She... she did not want the orders she was given. Made her body hurt, made her skin sore, made her head sad."

Shane just listens, keeps still. With wounded animals, it is important not to startle them. They will try to run away even if it injures them more.

"She took pills. For the ache. For the sad. Both kinds. All the time."

First, Shane thinks about the little bottle of headache pills he keeps in his nightstand. The second one in his duffel bag. The third in his glove compartment.

His next thought is how incredibly glad he is that he's so neat, and he has never left any of these out in the open for Rozanov to stumble upon.

Finally, he thinks that he hasn't taken a single pill since Rozanov offered to help him. That's the worst thought, because all of a sudden, the ground is shifting beneath Shane, and he is coming to quite a few terrible and heartbreaking realisations all at once. Rozanov was not born compassionate. Or maybe he was, but he was not born helping every bruised Sub that dropped by accident. That was a quality he had developed, after watching the bitter end of a life led like that play out.

"She..." Shane swallows. He doesn't know how to say it. How does he even begin to say that aloud?

Rozanov takes pity on him. He doesn't make him say it. He just confirms with a single nod, "Is not bravery, to be so sad. Is just... sad."

Shane can't take it anymore. To hell with wounded animals, this is not a wounded animal. This is *Rozanov*. His Dom.

Shane snakes a hand out from under his blanket, lifts it, and swipes his thumb over Rozanov's cheek. He is as gentle as he possibly can be, brushing away the tears.

"Your father--"

Another nod. This time, though, Rozanov inhales shakily, and reaches for him in return. His hands are firm as he tugs Shane around, settling him into place. They end up flipped, Rozanov lying back against the sofa arm and Shane laid out on top of him, chin resting on Rozanov's chest.

Like this, Shane is the grounding weight.

Shane isn't sure what his smile is like, whether it is watery and sad, or tight and pained, but he can feel it tugging at his lips, emotions driving the way. He presses a kiss to Rozanov's hand, letting his lips linger as long as he can.

"You're not your father." Shane keeps his words quiet, as if it is not just them in the room. His lips trace each syllable into the back of Rozanov's hand, brushing and puckering over the skin, "I know I am safe with you."

Rozanov sniffs, says nothing. Maybe there are more tears, maybe not.

Silence doesn't feel right. Shane thinks a self-help grief book would tell him to just offer his comforting presence, to not be too overbearing, to not make the story about himself.

But something under his skin is itching, and Shane is supposed to be learning to follow his instincts, to be comfortable in his own skin.

It is hard to move his lips away from Rozanov's hand, but easy to move them to Rozanov's belly.

A kiss. A peck, really. Placed just a few inches above his belly button, into the softest skin outside what's between his thighs. One of the very few kinks in his armour.

“You’ve never given me an order I didn’t want to follow.” Another kiss, higher, between the swell of his pecs, words whispered into his sternum. “Never taken anything I wasn’t ready to give.”

It is all true. It is all true, and the way Rozanov’s tears are falling quicker and fatter now, Shane feels like maybe he didn’t know. Maybe he didn’t ever let himself think. Maybe— no, definitely— he doesn’t take enough credit for just how fucking *good* he is. How kind. How reliable. How safe.

“You take care of me.” Shane presses yet another kiss, this time finding a mole on the side of his chest. He’s not sure he’s ever kissed this one before, not sure he’s ever run his fingers over it and committed it to memory. “You settle me.”

Another kiss, another mole.

“You— you said it isn’t my job, to take care of you. But you give me *so* much, all I wanted to do was help.”

Rozanov makes a choked-up sound, aborted. His jaw is tense, muscle twitching. His chin trembles, and his teeth are clamped over his bottom lip, unrelenting.

The tears are impossible to hold back, but he is holding onto his sobs like a dead man with his treasure. It is pointless. Shane can hear them anyways. There’s nobody else to hear. But pride will not let him.

Shane doesn’t realise he is worrying his own bottom lip between his teeth until Rozanov lifts a shaky finger to tug it out with his thumb.

The thumb gets stuck there, resting, quivering, pressed just into the bow of his lip.

Shane kisses it. Rozanov shudders with his whole body, cuts back another half-sob that gets valiantly pressed into his other hand, which has shot up to cover his mouth. The thumb tries to move away, but Shane kisses it again, then again.

“*Stay.*” He murmurs, “Do you remember?”

The thumb hovers. Waits. Slowly, slowly lowers back to his side.

Shane lets his chin drop as well. It falls back down onto Rozanov’s skin, nestled into his sternum. It feels heavy again, weighed down by the gooey, thick honey that comes with Subspace.

It is faraway still, only just bleeding back into his head, but it is there, insistent, familiar.

“I wanted to stay so badly, but I didn’t know how.” Shane finally feels the prick of tears in his own eyes. Later, he will blame it on the fuzz of Subspace. For now, he shifts his head to the side, presses a kiss to the very corner of Rozanov’s pec, under the base of it, below his nipple. The first spot he can reach from his resting place.

He kisses it, then kisses again, breathing there, nose pressed into the muscle. He smells like sex and warmth, like the cologne he uses, like the cigarette from earlier, like the cold outside air, like the very particular mix of everything that makes him smell like *Rozanov*.

“*Speak. Order.*” He whispers, “*Shut up.*”

The memories flash behind his eyes, every single one of them in bold colour and definition, carved into him like some sick survival instinct, reminding him who, and where, and when, “They hurt my head. Made me want to scream. Fight.”

Rozanov’s chest rises, then collapses. Rises. Collapses.

“*On your knees where you belong.*” That one, Rozanov knows. That one he had been there for, had reacted to, had set off the long, winding chain of events that led them here to this very couch. “You were there when he said that.”

Shane shifts, laps at the spot he had been worrying between his teeth, “*Would kissing my skates make you play better?*” He tastes salt drop down his tongue, his own hot tears, “In the locker room. Versus Denver. Before the game.”

Another sob, louder, more insistent, not able to be bitten back.

“*Do you like it when the other team is rough?*”

Shane has to pause. He hates it, but he has to. He has to close his eyes and scrub at his tears and draw air deep into his belly.

When his body can move again, he reaches for Rozanov’s hand, pressing it in against his side, sliding it down to his second rib, “Second period. Toronto. I had the bruise for weeks.”

Somehow, that is the breaking point. Rozanov hushes him, uses both his hands to yank him closer, snatching any space between them away, just like earlier.

His face is wet, pressed up against Shane’s.

“You don’t have to.”

The words are uttered like a prayer.

Shane licks the salty tears away from his face, presses his thousandth kiss to Rozanov’s collarbone, “I do. I want you to *know*.”

I want you to see me, Shane doesn’t say. I want you to feel like I’m here. I want you to know how good you are, when you don’t even realise it.

I want you to know me.

Shane’s hand is clumsy back through Rozanov’s curls. His vision is too blurry to see them properly, but he can feel them against his fingers the same as always. Real. Solid. Grounding.

“Doms need to be told they’re good too, right?” He asks, using his other hand to scrub furiously at his eyes, to clear any semblance of vision he can.

There isn’t another way to describe how Rozanov looks other than *cracked open*. Because that’s just it. Shane understands now. For all his big personality, his confidence, his bravado, Ilya Rozanov didn’t think he was worth pulling away from the edge, didn’t think he deserved Shane’s effort, Shane’s care, Shane’s sacrifice of his own headspace for a little while.

He doesn’t think he’s *worth it*.

Before Shane can speak again, can spill every last secret from his chest and say something so very fucking stupid and way too intense, Rozanov drags him in close again.

This time, he wants to kiss Shane.

“*Ya.*” He kisses him, “*Tebya.*” Again, “*Lyubylu.*”

Shane doesn’t know what it means, but that’s not unusual. He can barely even hear the words as they are whispered through the salt on his cheeks, pressed into the fragile skin of his neck, but it sounds warm. It sounds pushed out of him in a shock of breath. Whatever it is, it feels good.

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“—to put our best foot forwards—“

“—players all the time, I get it, but with a team as strong as this we need *focus*—“

Shane snaps to attention, eyes moving from where they had been resting against the wall to Wiebe’s serious face. The team is huddled around him, all padded up and rearing to go, and Wiebe is looking around at each and every one of them.

For a second his gaze lands on Shane but then he’s looking past, carrying on, “Shane’s line is going to—“

Shane already knows the plan. He’s revised the tapes, sat hunched over Wiebe’s desk during every lunch hour for the last week to discuss it, and practiced their manoeuvres over and over and over again until his muscles felt like jell-o.

There might be players around him who want the win more than him, who have never won so much in their careers and desperately want their momentum to continue, but there is no one on this team who is half as prepared as Shane is.

Even Rozanov standing to Wiebe’s left, leaning down on his stick with the *C* printed all over his jersey, is not as prepared as him.

“—everyone clear?”

Shane plugs himself back into the room quick enough to yell at the top of his lungs, “*Go Cens!*” In time with the rest of the team.

There’s cheering, whooping, a few whistles and barks, but that is largely it. Every speech has been given, every word that needs to be said has been said. Now all they have left to do is play hockey.

That's Shane’s favourite part.

He shuffles to his stall, rooting his hand around in his duffel bag, reaching for the roll of stick tape he knows he threw in there this morning. While he’s rooting around, his fingers knock the little bottle of pills he keeps for his headaches.

The locker slams next to him and when he looks over it’s Rozanov, the man offering him a smirk and a wink. Shane would feel embarrassed if Rozanov didn’t smirk and wink at literally everything, including but not limited to people, animals, and inanimate objects.

“Is okay for me to chirp about Mr fossil man now? Or is he national treasure in archeology museum?”

Shane looks back at his bag, grabbing the stick tape and leaving the bottle of pills, making sure he covers them with his shirt. When he gets home, he’s going to bin them. The ones from his glove compartment are already gone, tossed into the trash can outside the rink.

“You should save your best content for the ice, don’t waste it on us.” Shane shrugs, turning and following him out of the locker room, the two of them bringing up the rear of the team.

Bood is leading the way, an *A* on his jersey and a massive fucking smile on his face.

Rozanov’s answering grin is nothing short of boyish, “Ah, I have much better do not worry.” He turns his head to talk to Shane over his shoulder, and it’s a small miracle he doesn’t trip and land on his face when he’s not looking where he’s going. It’s an unfamiliar arena, after all.

They all spill out onto the ice, early fans crowding in around the boards to watch them warm up. Shane takes his time, knowing that he won’t be going on the first line tonight. No, that’s all for Rozanov. Mostly because he is their best foot forward to gain momentum early on, but *also* because they know he will irritate Scott Hunter into missing the puck when it drops. Nobody is in any doubt of that. When your team isn't stacked with fifteen cup-winning veteran players, you’ve got to utilise what skills you have.

Shane feels a little bad, of course. He isn’t a regular chirper on ice, and he likes Scott. They’d been shoved together a few times when he was a rookie— All-star games, press events, the works. He had always been decent. Not as domineering as the rest of the veterans, not as boisterous and overconfident as most of the Doms.

“Ahaha!” Naturally, Rozanov looks like a kid on Christmas when Hunter skates over to *them* during the warmup. “I can hear your old knees cracking from here.”

It’s not his best. Maybe he was taking Shane’s advice about waiting until the puck-drop to really get under his skin. Or maybe his chirps need warming up just like his legs.

Scott eyes Rozanov like he is something personally offensive. His face is sour. Eyes narrowed, frown firmly in place, “I’m not here to talk to *you*.”

You. You, said like Rozanov is dirty, diseased.

“Oh. I am not wanted. I understand. See you at centre ice, Hunter.” Rozanov cuts him a similarly gloomy, dirty look before skating off over to Bood and Dykstra, far away enough that he cannot be accused of listening in, potentially starting a fight before the game has even begun. If that happens, it might be a new record for Rozanov.

It doesn’t stop him from watching them, though. Shane can feel his gaze, hot against the side of his head. He’s been awfully... clingy, lately. *Clingy* might not be the right word. *Protective* isn’t right either, but it sure feels like it from Shane’s end. Rozanov is fine with the team, generally, but any time an opponent so much as breathes in Shane’s direction, they are chirped, distracted, and slammed into the boards without remorse.

It would be amusing if it wasn’t so damn confusing.

“Protective much?” Hunter mutters.

Shane tenses, because he might be thinking it, but if anyone else starts to get the wrong idea, they’re fucked, “*What?*”

He knows full well that says it a little too sharply, and Hunter’s eyes narrow just that little bit further.

“Oh, I’m not—“ He holds up his hands, a mocking surrender, “I just mean you’re his shiny new weapon, right? He helped build the Centaurs basically from scratch, and now he gets *Shane Hollander*.”

Shane snorts, but doesn’t refute it. He is good. He knows this. If Scott wants to believe Rozanov is protecting his star player, then so be it. It’s better than the truth.

“Played the Voyageurs last week, you know.” Scott adds, after they’ve been quietly warming up together for a few minutes.

Shane remembers. He watches every Voyageurs game, usually multiple times. There’s nothing wrong with staking out the competition.

“Yeah, I saw.”

“Drapeau was a fucking dick. Don’t know how you ever put up with him. He made my skin itch. Ended up with a headache, too.”

Shane feels his mind already going elsewhere. He doesn't need to talk about his old team with Scott Hunter. He doesn't need to tell the man why he left, and he doesn't need to discuss how fucking shit they're playing without him. He knows. Nobody ever lets him forget it, and he can never tell them the truth. He lowers down further towards the ice, feeling the tightness in his hamstrings finally give way, "Yeah. Him and Comeau."

Over Scott's shoulder, Rozanov is watching them again. He is speaking to Barrett, an intense look on his face, but his eyes are not on Troy.

Shane tilts his head. Rozanov blinks. Winks. Looks back at Troy like nothing is amiss.

Scott straightens up, big head blocking out Shane's view of Rozanov, "Exactly. Hey uh," For a moment, he looks like he's carrying the world on his shoulders. He looks heavy. Weighed down. For just one single second, he looks exactly how Shane feels, exactly how Rozanov looks when he's not pretending to be fine. Then, "It'll be nice to have some real competition tonight."

Shane watches him skate away, and thinks absolutely nothing of it.

Chapter End Notes

This chapter is unedited because I simply did not have time as I had work stuff dumped on me today 😊 if you see a spelling mistake or something that makes zero sense, no you didn't (jk pls let me know)

I will edit before the next chapter but nothing will change just regular grammar and maybe a few words here or there 🥰 I'm like 95% happy with it.

Regardless: *chapter count update* I kept having to split the early chapters bc I have so much to say about this verse. Hopefully somebody is happy about that bc my iPad, keyboard, and poor fingers will not be!

Next chapter over the weekend <3

Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

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

“Ah, sorry, do not fuck losers—“ Rozanov’s foot blocks the door with a *thud* and a rattle. His hand shoots out to close it fully, but Shane is faster. He is always faster. He gets a hand splayed on the wood and locks his elbow, holding it open.

The moment he hits it, Rozanov relents. Unlike the hundreds of different hotels they have stayed in during their careers, the push and pull of their relationship is familiar. The door swings open and Shane doesn’t hesitate to duck inside. Rozanov is already moving backwards, making room for the two of them in the entryway.

“What are you doing? I was in the hallway for *ages*! Anyone could have seen me!”

Irritation sparks in his gut, but it doesn’t stick. Mostly, he can feel the warmth of Rozanov’s body heat, the *burn* of his gaze on his skin, and Shane just feels at peace.

Rozanov shrugs, “Is only players on this floor. They are all tired. Passed out in bed with teddy bear.”

“Don’t be an asshole.” Shane bites. He kicks off his shoes, gently toeing them up against the wall, two orderly soldiers, “Not tonight.”

Tonight. Tonight because they *lost*. The Admirals played the entire game start to finish like a well-oiled hockey-playing *machine*. Even Scott Hunter with all his surprising friendliness before the game— at least to Shane— put his stick down at centre ice and then played like he was flying all night.

Historically, the Admirals do better at home games like pretty much every other team, but that does very little to ease the sting. Shane wouldn’t be surprised if Rozanov is feeling it more acutely than him, too. He is their Captain, he shoulders so much responsibility for each game, so much extra pressure.

The team had not felt like celebrating tonight, of course. They had marched in quiet unison back to the hotel, and every single one of them went straight to bed, just like Rozanov says they did.

Well. Except for Shane, who had spent forty-five minutes in the shower trying to burn the itch out from under his skin with scalding hot water, then tossed and turned for another hour before giving up.

Texting Rozanov had been a moment of weakness. They already had plans for later in the week, back home in Ottawa. But then Shane had spotted the bottle of pills lying on the bedside table, and reached for it.

His hand had paused mid-motion. The guilt had hit him at about a hundred miles an hour, straight in the face. Suddenly he did not just feel itchy and sore, but nauseous as well. Bile had risen in his throat, had made the headache thrumming at the back of his skull migrate to the spot right behind his eyes.

But without a pill, there was only one other option. He's not even quite sure how he had managed to type the text message out, but he had. Small miracles.

Now Rozanov only shrugs, passing by Shane without so much as a glance. There's a little glass on the table by the window, and he saunters towards it. Or maybe not saunters. His movements are less confident than normal, less prowling. From behind, it is clear from the tension in his shoulders he had given up on sleep as well. They are haunched and knotted, tense all the way down to his clenched hands. Exhaustion is heavy in his movements, too. It looks like he is Atlas holding up the world as he lifts the little crystal glass.

Pressure, Shane thinks again. If he had that same pressure on his shoulders, he would be flattened by it. The fact that Rozanov is still standing is testament to just how strong he is.

"What are you drinking?" He asks, not liking the way the silence stretches out between them, or the way Rozanov's attention has disappeared.

Rozanov turns around just to look at him like he's an idiot. Shane kind of feels like it. He feels his cheeks flush and he knows the answer before Rozanov gives it. *Vodka*. Obviously. But at least they are facing each other. At least Rozanov's gaze is back on him, rather than faraway out the window, lost in his own head. It's much more Shane's habit than his to zone out like that. It's unusual. Different. A little unnerving.

"It's good?" Shane follows up with. It is less of a stupid question, he thinks. Rozanov often bemoans about the lack of quality vodka in the west.

In reply, he just shrugs again, "Acceptable. You ask a lot of questions tonight."

Shane feels his cheeks go hot, just like they always do. He clears his throat and looks down at his shoes. It shouldn't be embarrassing to admit by now. They have been doing this, whatever it is, for nearly a year. Longer, if you start counting from the first time Shane went down with him. So why does he feel so incredibly tongue-tied? Why is his heart beating in his ears?

"I feel... *off*."

There. It's out in the open, now.

"Off." Rozanov stares back at him with no discernible reaction. His lips are pressed in a thin line, and his eyebrows are relaxed. No frown lines, no smile lines. "*Explain*."

It's not an order, but maybe it's close to one. His voice drops an octave, starts rumbling from his chest rather than his throat.

The words spill out, not from Shane's chest, but from his heart. Because there is a silent order there, in Rozanov's question. An order to be honest. They can't fix it, if Shane isn't honest.

He has learnt that lesson before.

“I just... I don’t know. I felt great before the game, I’ve been feeling great in general—“ He stops himself there, lips frozen around the last syllable. That thought, Rozanov doesn’t need to know. The thought that finishes *because you Dom me so perfectly*. The compliment might go to his head. Shane also might die of embarrassment.

“Maybe I’m just taking the loss hard. Montreal’s stats are down, but they’re still doing better than us. Every loss feels... personal.”

Rozanov listens. He doesn’t have to, but he does. Shane feels less like he’s trapped in the cage of his head when he has someone to speak his mind to. Someone who understands hockey from his perspective, especially. His Mom knows hockey, but only from the audience, from a manager’s lens. Not a player.

The glass is set back on the table with a *clink*. Rozanov leans back on his heels, hands finding the pockets of his sweatpants, “Progress is not overnight. This is Centaurs’ best season ever in history of club, you know this?”

You’d have to be deaf and blind and *completely fucking oblivious* in general to have not realised that by now. The locker room is full of it, team hang-outs are full of it, somebody *always* brings it up at practice— yeah. They all know.

Having it pointed out does make Shane feel a little better, though. It’s not all down to him, but, *yeah*, he has made a big difference. Wiebe took a chance on him, and so far he has been delivering.

But Rozanov is not done.

“You made it possible.” He says, “You are strong centre, give me longer breaks, less shifts. Means we all play better. Every win is personal, too.”

He’s... well, he’s right. Shane expects so much of himself sometimes that winning gets written off as average. To feel good, he must manage a hat-trick or a complete shutout.

Shane feels his shoulders droop, the very last of his post-game adrenaline leaving him. Now there is just the throb of his skull and an unfamiliar hotel room. It loosens his inhibitions, just a little bit, “Fucking hell, my head hurts.”

He hears Rozanov move, then feels the back of his hand against his forehead.

“No fever.” He murmurs. His hand leaves Shane’s forehead cold, and strangely empty.

Shane opens his eyes just a crack so that he can glare at him, “Not that kind of hurt.”

Rozanov’s face twitches. Amusement? “I...” He looks down at his drink. There’s half a mouthful left in the bottom, but he only swirls it around, doesn’t move to finish it, “I cannot fuck you tonight, Hollander.”

Not amusement. Guilt? Irritation? Shane isn't sure. Either way, he kind of already knew that would be the answer. In general, Rozanov is very forward with his wants. He will approach Shane in the lockers, in the showers, in the parking lot. He will text.

When Shane had heard nothing tonight, he already knew that the Dom had no gas left in the tank after their game, just as exhausted as the rest of them. Being here with him now has only confirmed that.

But he had wanted to be here anyways. He had known that Rozanov of all people would speak sense into him, would settle whatever part of him was struggling to wind down.

There had been a thought, faraway, that he should call his mother. She should be his first call when he feels sideways, after all. But she isn't.

Shane feels off and like a compass that always points north, he had stumbled his way *here*. Here, there is no judgement. No prying questions about why he feels the way he feels, or if hockey caused it, or if his teammates are good to him, or— or *anything*.

There's trust, mainly. If they have built anything over the last few months, it is trust. Shane knows that he can let go. That nothing bad will happen to him, so long as Rozanov is there.

Maybe that's what makes the decision for him, in the end.

Trust.

"Not like that."

His body moves before his brain, like always. The feeling of being guided by his instincts is all-too familiar now. He rises from his chair, tucks it back into place, all the while with Rozanov watching him.

It's okay, Shane isn't embarrassed, he wants Rozanov to watch.

His knees hit the floor one after the other, cushioned by his sweatpants and the soft carpet floor. He keeps his eyes locked to Rozanov's, waiting for any sign that this is too much, that he should stand up and fuck off back to his own room.

But Shane isn't asking him to give, tonight. Shane is just asking him to be. To sit. To breathe. To watch. Sometimes that's all it takes.

"Like *this*."

His voice is not just quiet now, weak. Wobbling. The words are barely audible, even in the silent room.

A beat passes. A moment. A very *charged* moment.

Rozanov shifts in his chair, sits up that little bit straighter. Then slowly, ever so slowly, he opens his legs. He makes room.

Shane breathes out. He moves forwards, an awkward shuffle with the fabric of his sweats snagging, but he manages. He settles back on his calves, finding somewhere comfortable to rest.

“Is this okay?” He hates how nervous he sounds. He should be able to do this confidently. He *wants* to do this, wants to make it perfect. Sure, he hadn’t exactly planned it all out, but kneeling is meant to be instinct.

Rozanov blinks, takes a breath, then lifts his hand and takes another sip of his drink, like he was trying to put off an air that the sight of Shane on his knees hasn’t affected him at all. Like it is business as usual. But Shane has eyes, and he isn’t anywhere close to the fuzziness of subspace yet, so he knows what he can see. He looks... well, he looks choked. Like his throat has closed up and his mind has emptied.

Like the fall to subspace, but decidedly *not*.

“*Da.*”

Shane knows that word by now. Rozanov uses it by accident almost constantly, a slip of the tongue. *Da, he is coming to Bood’s. Da, his weekend was good. Da, Wiebe had already told him about the gym times.*

It loosens Shane’s grip on his own thighs, makes him breathe easier. He wants this. He wants this more than anything. He’s not sure since when, all he knows is that he’d felt wrong, and now he feels right.

And Rozanov wants it too. He didn’t know how badly he needed that confirmation until he gets it.

The breath leaves his chest all at once, “Okay. Good.”

He is forced to lower his eyes as finds a comfortable spot to rest in. He finds one quickly, like it really is natural. It is a spot he has found before in other positions: jaw hooked on Rozanov’s knee, cheek pressed into the meat of his thigh. He likes this spot, it is warm and comfortable and he can feel it when Rozanov twitches his leg and starts to get antsy. It’s his spot, somewhere nobody else gets to touch.

Oh, he’s sure no less than a hundred Subs before him have touched it. But it’s his now, in these quiet moments when they’re not chasing something else, not hurrying through orgasms, and that’s what matters.

This is even better than an orgasm, anyways.

As he sits there, it takes a long time for the ache in his head to ebb away, but when it is finally gone there is frightening clarity. He feels weightless, but not in the heart-thumping, adrenaline-pumping way a quick drop into subspace feels. It is so very much gentler. Calmer. Like he is floating on his back in the lake beside his cottage, currents rocking him this way and that without any real sense of direction. There’s no panic— the current isn’t strong. Just steady. A constant.

He's not sure how long they sit there, together, but it must be a while because eventually Shane's knees start to ache no matter the way he shifts his weight, and his sleepiness starts to catch up with him to the point where he's worried his eyes will close and he will start to drool on Rozanov's leg.

He really doesn't want to move, but he knows has to, so he does. He lifts his head just a little, casting his eyes up Rozanov's chest and to his face.

His empty glass has been abandoned on the table, hands relaxed in his lap. His head is tipped to the side, resting against the wall. His eyes are open, awake, but they are lidded, pupils blown wide.

He blinks, then blinks again.

Shane can't keep the smile off his face. He looks so... *light*. There are lots of hard angles to his face, jawline, cheekbones, chin. But like this, in dim lighting and pillowed silence, Shane can see the smile lines on his face and the gentle curl of his hair as it falls over one eyebrow.

"Better?" Shane asks.

Rozanov's smile in return is pained, that much is clear. But he doesn't look upset, really. Overwhelmed, maybe? His eyes stay half-open, and his lips stretch in a way Shane has never seen before. They wobble. Maybe his skin even darkens a little in a light blush.

His hands move, helping Shane to lift himself off his knees and gently onto his feet. The both of them rise together, big bodies pressed chest-to-chest in the small space between the chair and the table.

Shane can't hide the wince when he moves his knees, taking his first step.

Rozanov looks more than pained by it, he looks *wounded*.

"I should have gotten you a cushion." He hushes, staring down at Shane's clothed knees like they personally have backstabbed him.

"It's okay." Shane shrugs, "I wanted to."

"I—" Rozanov lifts his hand. He pauses a few inches from Shane's arm.

Shane feels like this has happened before. *Deja vu*. He feels like at the time, he didn't know what was happening, was too dropped and exhausted to understand that if there's one thing Ilya Rozanov is terrified of, it is being vulnerable.

Shane gets it now, or he thinks he does. Doms do not do well when they are out of control, just like Subs do not do well when they cannot let go of their control.

And there is no feeling more out of control than being vulnerable. Trusting someone not to make fun of you, not to hurt you, not to kick you when you're down.

So Shane pushes his arm into Rozanov's touch. The fingers clasp around his bicep, pressing tightly into the muscle.

"Stay."

It's a bad idea. They both know it is. That's why he's not ordering him. He's *asking*. Shane wishes it was a command, because he wouldn't have to do anything but obey. Instead, he is left to fight against the feeling of panic travelling up his body.

It is one thing to want to stay. It is another entirely to be offered.

"Rozanov-" Something. He has to say *something*.

"Ilya."

Shane pauses, staring blankly at the man. Ilya. He knows it's his first name, has known it since before he met the man. He says it differently from the way the reporters do, though. His accept wraps around it, thick. *Il-ya*. Two syllables. He likes it. It sounds unique, to him. Softer than he's expecting. Gentler.

All the other feelings rising in his body are not gentle. *Ilya*. The word smacks him in the face again. *Ilya*.

He had given this to Ilya. He had given all his firsts to Ilya, now. There isn't anything left to give. No final straw he is holding onto for another Dom, for his future partner.

That is just it: he is ruined for any other Dominant.

When he closes his eyes and imagines his future, all he can see is Ilya. When he curls up and imagines a session with his Dom the hands on his body never change, always hockey-crooked and too-large. The eyes boring down into him are always hazel. The smell is always cologne and lingering tobacco.

Ilya had asked him to be sure. To wait before he knelt, before he offered the last piece of his Submission to someone else.

Shane he hadn't rushed. Or it hadn't *felt* like rushing. He hadn't dropped to his knees a week ago when they'd talked about it. They'd been to practices and team-hangs and played games since, no kneeling.

He can't believe he gave that to Ilya. *Ilya*. The name is so intimate. Nobody on the team calls him that. It'd always Roz, Rozy, Rozanov. Cap, *mon capitaine* to the right person.

Not Ilya.

Never Ilya.

Except for now, with Shane.

“*Ilya*,” It tumbles out of him differently, harsher and more grating in his accent, “You know I can’t.”

No matter how much he wants to, he can’t. If he stays, this will all be too real. If he stays, Ilya might put him down sweet and slow, keep the worries at bay, but after, he will burst up gasping for breath. He will surface a different person. Somebody who could never let Ilya Rozanov go.

He has to pull his arm away, has to draw it back into his chest to protect himself. Shane misses the touch like he thinks he would miss a limb. It feels wrong standing here now, with no point of their bodies touching.

“Yes.”

Shane misses the way he says *Da*. The way he shows more of himself in a single word of Russian than any chirp he can make up in English.

It’s not fair, it should be wrong to have to hide like this.

But nobody knows Shane is a Sub. Maybe if the team knew, it wouldn’t be so bad. He could go to Ilya’s room for an hour or two and kneel, claiming it was the pressure of an away game getting to him. He could have this, maybe, in a world where it wasn’t so secret. But that’s far away and dangerous, because that’s not the world they live in.

Shane has to be realistic. Pragmatic.

He turns towards the door, but just can’t resist casting a final look over his shoulder, feeling his feet not wanting to move any further.

Ilya is watching him, sat on the edge of the bed. He does not look happy, but he does not look sad, either. He is simply watching, waiting for Shane to make his decision.

It’s for the best, he thinks. This is what Ilya told him they were. Casual. Drop-partners.

“Night.” Shane says. Rozanov. Ilya. He can’t make up his mind, so he says neither.

“Good night, Hollander.” His voice is flat. Tired, probably.

Shane steps out into the hall, and his feet take him back to his room, and then back into his empty bed with the twisted-up sheets.

He still can’t sleep.

-

Ilya appears late to practice, hopping onto the ice while the rest of the team are mid-warmup.

Shane stands next to Haas, leaning deep into his stretch, rookie silently copying his movements. There hasn't been much chat this morning. Shane would like to think it is only because they're so tired from the flight back from New York yesterday, but he has an inkling that it's more to do with their captain ignoring them all since then.

The silence is like self-flagellation for the team. Like they don't deserve to chat and yell and be boisterous if they lose. Like if their captain is ignoring them, then they should be ashamed of themselves.

Shane already felt bad for every one of his missed shots during that game but now it's eating him alive—he knows why Ilya is angry. And it has nothing to do with any of their teammates.

That being said, Shane knows why, but he doesn't know *why*.

Whatever had upset him happened right before Shane left. Happened when his face closed in on itself and his body turned away from Shane. And as far as Shane could see it was for one of two reasons.

One, he wanted Shane to stay, and Shane made the wrong choice by leaving. This doesn't make any sense. No matter what Shane wants, Ilya is not his. They don't stay. Ilya had offered he stay a few times before, and it had never been particularly serious that he'd refused. They play, and they let themselves have quiet moments of aftercare, and then they leave.

Which leads him to reason two: he wanted Shane to use his name to make it real. It. Them. *Us*, he thinks. Was there a chance, a real chance, that Ilya wanted something else from Shane?

As he gives his pep-talk to the team now, Shane feels himself frown, and then feels with every line as it gets deeper and deeper. Beside him, Haas is chewing on his bottom lip, eyes looking anywhere but Rozanov's. Hayes is staring resolutely at his skates. Bood is mirroring Shane's frown.

The pep-talk is not much of a pep-talk. More a long and angry rant about how they need to fuck Chicago next week. Maybe this kind of speech worked on Boston, but it doesn't seem to be working on Ottawa.

"Okay?" He is demanding, going from player-to-player with his eyes, lingering on each and every one of them, "I say, *okay*?"

Murmurs ripple around the group in response.

"Fine." He clears his throat, "Scrimmage. Two teams. I am captain one. Hollander—"

Shane's head snaps up. At some point, his eyes had found a spot on the ice, unfocused and faraway. Now, they meet Ilya's steadily. It's not hard. He wants to drink them in, to see if he can catch any peeks of the emotions hiding underneath.

Wherever these emotions are, they are not present. Ilya is nowhere to be seen. Instead, Rozanov's burn into his. "You are captain two. Take half. See you on centre ice."

-

Shane's body hits the boards with a crack. There's the thud of his limbs, yes, but the sound he hears loudest is the crack of his helmet bouncing off the plexi-glass, sending him reeling.

Rozanov does not linger. He makes use of Shane's distraction and speeds off with the puck. It scores him the winning goal, because of course it does. He has been playing this so-called friendly practice game like the rest of them are bowling pins, there only to be knocked around. Shane should be glad this is the only time Rozanov has managed to get the upper hand on him, to box him in enough to be body-checked.

Shane moves away from the glass, steadying himself by leaning down on his stick. Fuck, his head is reeling. It wasn't a particularly hard hit, and probably a legal one at that, but it knocked the air out of him.

Bood travels up from behind, turning in a circle, lifting Shane's head with his hands, eyeing him for a concussion. The move is well-practiced from so many years on the ice, even if Shane knows in this case it is unnecessary.

"I'm fine." Shane mutters, batting his hands away.

Bood's face twitches and he clicks their sticks together, like he can somehow apologise for Rozanov's bad attitude.

"What's gotten into him today?" Hayes asks on his other side, floating closer. There's no reason to stay in position anymore when Rozanov's team has already won.

Not that they look very much like winners, loitering in a small huddle on the other side of the ice, muttering under their breaths and watching Rozanov's back like he might start tackling *them* next.

"Maybe that Sub he's always texting broke up with him." Chouinard cuts in, needling his way into the small gap between Hayes and Shane to bump shoulders with them both.

"You think?" Shane asks. He turns his shoulder to bump back, but his eyes are still following Rozanov's team. They have accepted Rozanov himself back into the fold, and the celebration finally picks up a little when he scrubs Haas' helmet with his knuckles, but there's still something in the way he's holding himself. Something Shane doesn't see out here on the ice very often. Something antsy, twitchy. Something that looks like he's being held taut, ready to snap.

"Well." Bood offers a shrug, "He'll be right as rain with a few burgers in him later. Eight o' clock, guys." His grin is almost normal before he skates away, Wiebe waving him over.

Probably to congratulate him. The points they had managed to score over Rozanov all hinged on his plays.

The rest of them shuffle to the bench, waiting to be called away for whatever drills were in store for them next.

Shane doesn't end up sitting next to Rozanov for the first half-hour or so, but then Harris calls Barrett away for a social media video, and Shane has to shuffle up a spot on the bench.

Despite trying his best to keep his distance, Shane's knees bump with Rozanov's. It's a small bench, and they're big guys.

Surprisingly, Rozanov doesn't seem to mind, because it's the first touch that has lingered all day. And, well, if he isn't being outright rejected, maybe this is salvageable. Maybe Rozanov is tense and angry because he needs something. Something Shane can offer him.

"You going to Bood's later?" He asks, keeping his eyes trained on the rookies Wiebe is coaching on the ice. It's more casual not to look, he thinks. Eye contact is not casual. Eye contact is prying, intimate.

In his peripheral vision, Rozanov glances to the side, eyes him top to bottom. He has done so a hundred times before, but this feels more like that first day in Saskatchewan than when they're in bed. He's not admiring, he's assessing.

"Yes." *Da.*

Shane breathes in, then realises that his lungs are aching. He had been holding his breath for god knows how long, possibly since their knees bumped. Instead of coughing, he takes a sip of his water, "Cool." He clears his throat, "I was thinking I might Uber."

Rozanov eyes him again, "Okay."

Shane frowns, turns his head. He's not sure what he expected but *okay* is definitely not it. He leans closer, lowers his voice, "If you're still tired, it doesn't *have* to be okay—"

"It is okay." Rozanov cuts him off, then immediately looks back down at his own bottle. "I am Captain. Team needs you to play your best, so is my responsibility to help you."

Shane's heart sinks. That is the same thought that has been constricting his brain for weeks. The same thought he has been keeping close to his chest. *Don't get too close. Don't get too attached. It's not real.*

But to hear it said aloud? To hear Rozanov say it to his face, sounding choked and quiet... *fuck.*

He is an idiot. Possibly the biggest one ever.

Rozanov had left for *both* reasons.

He wanted Shane to stay. He wanted Shane to stay, and use his name, so that they could be real. Shane had given him something Rozanov sees as commitment, something he thinks is special. He could have pushed him away, denied him. But he didn't.

Shane gave him something special, and Rozanov tried to return that.

Ilya. Ilya tried to return that.

And Shane had left. *Double fuck.*

He leans in closer, lowering his voice, "I'm *sorry* I left. It wasn't about you. I just thought—"

He doesn't get to finish.

"Space from me. You regret. Was too much. I am not your Dom. I understand."

Triple fuck.

"No! I—"

Barrett clatters back onto the bench, looking pleased with himself. Shane wants to curse any and every God for that timing. "Ilya..." He tries to duck his head, to catch Rozanov's eye.

Rozanov just chucks his bottle down under the bench— hard— and stands. Shane moves smoothly with him, Barrett just behind, all of them standing to attention ready for Wiebe.

How did he fuck this up so badly?

-

Everyone is already there when Shane arrives at Bood's.

He's not quite sure why he agonises over leaving his house to drive over, but... well, maybe he is sure. Maybe he just doesn't want to admit it. Admitting these things aloud only ever makes them more complicated.

He feels like it's his first day at the Centaurs all over again, muddling through a cloud of anxiety and uncertainty, not sure if there's steady ground beneath him.

Ilya will be there, he knows. Ilya who is still angry at him. Ilya who had tried to say something aloud, and Shane had ran away from.

The second Bood opens the door, he feels a thin layer of the anxiety wash away. Bood is smiling widely and he claps Shane on the shoulder the same way he does every day.

"Look what the cat dragged in!"

The team is spread widely through the open plan living room and kitchen, massive double sliding doors open to the patio where a few more are dotted about.

Chouinard is lounging on an armchair close by, and raises his beer in lieu of a real greeting.

Shane nods back absently, accepting the beer put into his hands by Hayes.

Haas and Dillon are two of the bodies outside, squabbling over who gets to kick around the soccer ball on the back porch. Haas trips onto his ass, and his head flies back, knocking right into Rozanov's leg.

Rozanov laughs at him, but seems to think that's his queue to exit the situation, and makes his way back inside.

His eyes find Shane's as soon as he steps into the house. Shane knows this because his own eyes do not stray either.

"Hollander." *Shane*. He wants to hear Rozanov say his name. "You came."

"Well I was invited, so..."

"You're always invited. Standing invite!" Bood yells as he passes through into the living room, dropping down very haphazardly onto the sofa, legs flying in the air, arms stretching over the back, completely relaxed.

It is the complete opposite of Rozanov. Rozanov looks exactly how Shane feels. Confused, hurting, bunched up from head to toe like he's preparing for a fight.

"I appreciate it anyways." His words are directed at Bood, probably, but Shane can't seem to make himself turn away from Rozanov, "Making room. I'm just not used to it."

Rozanov looks away first. His eyes move to the left, but only slightly. Instead of staring him head-on, he is now burning holes into Shane's cheeks. His cheeks that Rozanov has kissed countless times, has thumbed over his blush and his freckles and—

He doesn't realise he's said anything bad until the slight lull in conversation becomes a long, drawn-out silence that covers the whole room.

He glances to Bood and the others, more than a little confused.

"Montreal not really that close?" Hayes is always the one to push first, the one to bulldoze his way through any awkward tension.

Shane clears his throat, moving further into the room. Rozanov is behind him still, but he ignores it. He has to. What was he going to do, stare at Rozanov like an idiot all evening?

"Um... some of them." He shrugs, "Pike and Boizeau were great. I'm the godfather to Pike's twins, actually."

It's not a lie. He is. Hayden is a great friend, even if their relationship has been under a bit of strain lately. Schedules are even harder to match up with two cities worth of craziness to navigate.

"At least Comeau wasn't your friend. He's a dick." Chouinard comments lazily, lifting his beer in the air like some kind of cheer. Or maybe a salute. He looks pretty drunk and Shane isn't entirely sure.

Nobody cheers back.

Dykstra is the closest to him, standing by the fireplace. He guffaws and slaps Chouinard's leg. The *shut up* is silent, but they all hear it.

"Nah." Shane chuckles awkwardly. It's nice that they're trying to spare his feelings, but totally unnecessary, "He's a dickhead. Fucking hell I think he gave commands more than he spoke like a normal human being. Gave everyone a headache."

Suddenly, the group is frowning a little deeper. They all react in unison, gears visibly turning in their heads, calculating what it was really like to be a Voyageur.

"In the locker room?"

Shane swallows. Takes a big sip of his beer. Liquid courage and all.

Then, "Yeah. Wherever, really. It got worse when he was drunk, so. The only one who could stand him was Drapeau, but that's because he was the same."

The names taste like absolutely nothing on his tongue. If they do have a taste, it would be described as cardboard. Bland. Boring. They do not bring back old memories, do not make his head hurt. Even Shane is surprised by how little emotion the names evoke now. He knows they can't hurt him.

They can beat into him during games, sure. They can make snide comments wherever they please, but they can't *hurt* him. Not really. They can't torment him in the locker room ever again. They can't turn the whole team against him *ever again*.

"Fuck them." Barrett mutters, then follows it with something else under his breath that Shane doesn't quite catch. He is sure it is equally as scathing, if not more. He doesn't usually hold back with his insults.

"Management never gave him shit for it?" That's Hayes again. He has set his drink down, and his eyebrows are all knotted together between his eyes.

That question is harder, maybe. Management includes a wide range of employees at Montreal. The owners had just wanted profits. The PR guys had just wanted fans. The coaches, of course, had just wanted acclaim. Trophies.

The one thing they all had in common, however...

“As long as we were winning and not killing each other.” Shane says, followed up with, “Sorry, it’s bleak. You don’t want to hear about this.”

“No, we do.” Chouinard’s grin gives way to a smirk, “So we know who to hit next game.”

To that, Rozanov lifts his beer, and this time they all cheers enthusiastically in a way that makes Shane laugh. It’s almost as if they’re all trying to one-up each other, lifting their glasses higher, yelling louder. It takes them a good few minutes to settle again, all relaxing back into their seats. Trust their captain to rally them all together, even on a bad day.

“So... is that why you left?” Hayes asks, after. There will never be a day where Wyatt Hayes does not have questions.

“Yes and no.” Shane says, because that is also the honest truth. Leaving had certainly been on his mind. But leaving the team of his own accord had been nearly impossible, with his contract and all. “No, we were all just coping with it. But yes, because—“

Is he going to be honest about this, too? Looking around the room, does he truly trust every single one of those faces?

“—the moment Comeau and Drapeau found out I was a Sub, it was like fucking Christmas for them.”

That... well. That silences the room. He’s not sure what else he could have expected, slipping that bombshell into casual conversation.

His first thought is something along the lines of *oh god, I’ve made a big fucking mistake*.

His second thought is if any of them say anything negative, Rozanov might actually leap over the couch and punch them.

His third is that maybe he *wouldn’t*. They’re fighting, after all. Are they done? Shane isn’t sure. He needs someone to spell it out for him in big bold letters like he’s an idiot. Needs Rozanov to clearly state whether they’re fixable or not.

“What the fuck.” Chouinard, surprisingly, is the first to the beat. Or perhaps his drunkenness is just making his lips loose.

Shane is ready for the battle ahead. He sits up a little straighter, clenches his fingers into his thighs.

“Management knew you were a sub and still let them run their fucking mouths? How are you- *are you okay?*”

Shane laughs. Head back, hands on his stomach, he just laughs. Everyone looks at him like he’s a little crazy, and maybe he is. But this— this is absurd. For years he had suffered under the hands of that team, that management, telling himself over and over that this was just hockey, and he loved hockey enough to stay.

He'd told himself that being a Sub wasn't in his nature. That going down wasn't a necessity for him. That he wasn't interested in sex. That following orders was uncomfortable. That—well, so many other things. Too many to name.

What else had he been wrong about?

"I'm okay." He just about manages through jerks of laughter and bouts of heavy breaths to steady himself, "I might not be able to command them back, but nothing about those two little shits ever made me want to follow what they said."

Hayes blows out a breath, eyebrows suddenly coming undone from their knot, flying up to the top of his forehead, "Impressive, Hollander."

He can feel the ice breaking, slowly but surely. Other conversations rise in the room, mutters and murmurs. It's better. Easier. Shane doesn't feel so... watched.

"It's always been like that." He says, "Hockey, I mean. I still remember this kid when I was ten. First one to try to order me around. I pulled his hair so hard he cried."

This time, they all laugh together, not just Shane.

"Hollander is a badass! I'm here for it." Haas calls, laughing as Dillon elbows him and they get back to fighting in earnest. The poor soccer ball isn't even at the centre of it anymore, abandoned by the door.

"You must be high."

That isn't Hayes. It's not Chouinard, not Barrett, not even Bood.

It is Rozanov.

He slides down into a chair to Shane's left, throwing back the last sip of his drink before setting the glass down. He looks irritatingly comfortable, spreading his knees and taking up room.

And, well, as the saying goes: in for a penny, in for a pound.

"Yeah." He says, forcing himself not to shrink back, not to shy away, "I'm a ten."

"What the fuck!" Chouinard heckles again, "Actually? Not a nine-point-eight? Not a nine-point-nine?"

Shane shakes his head. His voice climbs an octave, his vision blurs as tears gather against his will, "Perfect score."

This is so much worse to admit. Or maybe it's the shock of what he's just done catching up to him.

The team know. The panic is hard to shake. They know he is a Sub, and they know he is a bad one. Or not— not bad. He is not bad. He is good.

Maybe now, he would call it *difficult*. He is hard to take down. He fights. He worries. Whether it's hormones in his blood or the sheer amount of hockey he has played since before he could walk: he fights, and it will always be his first instinct.

But he feels safe here. If he hadn't yesterday, he sure as hell does now. They will have more questions, he knows. He can see them written all over their faces. But they are trying to give him space. They are sharing glances over his head and exchanging mumbles that start to sound an awful lot like a plan to provoke Comeau at their next game against Montreal.

And that is finally, finally what tips him over the edge. His bottom lip wobbles, and he knows they can all very well see he's less than a hairsbreadth from crying. He can bite his lip, but if he screws his eyes closed, there will be no hiding the fat tears he can feel balanced preciously on his eyelids.

He clears his throat, "Sorry. I need a drink. One second."

-

The room slowly came back to itself after Shane had left. He can hear the chatter resume, the voices rise. His panic tries to follow, too, churning his stomach and climbing up his throat.

His body is prepared to fight. It learned its lesson with the Voyageurs. It is tensed up and waiting for the first command to hit him even if he knows, logically, that the Centaurs won't do *that*.

It's not their culture to tear each other down. He's had a lot of time to think about the Voyageurs and the way they'd treated him. And by now he knows it wasn't really personal. It wasn't about him being a Sub. It was about finding his weakness. Finding the hole in his armour and sticking it with a pointy object as many times as possible.

Rozanov's body is warm in the empty room.

It surprises Shane. His body jerks to the side as if cowering from an incoming hit, but the hands are not trying to touch him. They are grabbing for a new glass, and quickly filling it under the tap.

He has never really believed much in the phrase *so close yet so far* until this moment. The gap between them feels like a giant chasm with no end, but Shane can still feel his body heat like they are touching. It radiates off him, an added weight to his presence.

Shane tries not to hold his breath. He's not sure if he's managing, but he is trying.

"Uber?" Rozanov asks simply.

Too simply. Shane turns, and he knows the look he gives Rozanov is sharp, because he feels another stab of panic right in his sternum, "You said—"

“I know what I said.” Rozanov’s voice raises. His hand shifts too, pinkie pressing up against Shane’s, “I am... sorry.”

The touch should calm him. Instead, the panic in his chest only increases tenfold.

What the fuck had he just done?

“You. *You* are sorry.” Shane’s laugh isn’t humorous, it is just a quick exhale of breath that feels punched from him. Rozanov may as well have beaten him into the boards. “Is the world ending?”

“Hollander.”

“We don’t do that. You know I couldn’t. It wasn’t fair to ask.”

“Shane.” Rozanov’s eyes flicker towards the door, but that only spurs Shane on further. How dare he look away. How dare he come in here to talk and then not listen to what Shane has to say?

“Fuck. Fuck you. You knew it wasn’t fair and you gave me a *choice*. You always say I have the right to choose. But you weren’t happy with my answer so you threw it in my face! You’re not *just* my captain, you *asked*— you asked me to—“

“*Shane.*”

Shane. It’s his name. He’s never changed it. Shane Hollander, usually followed by *you know, the hockey player?*

He’s heard it in all kinds of accents before. Thick Quebecois accents, boring Canadian accents, any and every US accent available.

But never Russian. Never from Rozanov’s lips.

Rozanov stares at him in such surprise that Shane almost starts to think he’s hallucinated the word. He moves slowly, so very slowly, as if Shane might bolt. He tips his head down just enough that his lips press to the skin beside Shane’s ear.

“You need to **breathe**, Shane.”

Fuck, when had he stopped breathing? He can’t remember taking an inhale since he’d entered the room.

He wants to thrash away from the command. He wants to keep all this air inside him and never let it go, because it’s *his*. His muscles burn as he tenses up, putting off the inevitable. He could smack Rozanov, headbutt him, shove his knee up into his groin. It would be such a familiar feeling, to fight, to break free from the command. A muscle he hasn’t exercised in months.

But it’s not Comeau standing here, an inch from Shane’s face, ordering him back from the edge.

It's Rozanov. *Ilya*.

And then he breathes.

Chapter End Notes

🚩 Work has battered me this week and these scenes just would NOT come together how I wanted, but I'm tired of staring at the same words over and over lol. It will get heavily edited before I post the next, just a heads up. If anything major changes other than description/inner dialogue I'll put it in the notes of the next chap. 🚩

Next chap is basically 100% done bc it involves the scenes that I started this AU with haha so that will be Wednesday!! It's my fave one for sureeeee.

That is all!!!

Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

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

Shane isn't surprised when the door doesn't slam behind him, and instead a second set of footsteps clatter into his hotel room. He and Rozanov are the only players on this floor, after all. There's no-one around to see.

"I need to shower." Shane says without looking behind him. He is busy dropping his bags and kicking off his shoes by the bed.

Rozanov hums from behind him. His bags make matching thuds to Shane's as they're abandoned, no doubt haphazardly in the doorway rather than on a chair. Typical Rozanov. Shane turns, fully intending to whine about it until he moves it, but Rozanov speaks quicker.

"Is okay. I am very patient man."

That earns him a snort. Just like he is messy, he is also *very* impatient. Shane's never sure if it's a Dom thing to always demand what you want and expect it immediately, or just a Rozanov thing. And he's not afraid to say as much.

"We both know that's a lie."

Rozanov's smile is wicked. His entire face lights up, overhead light glinting in his eyes, teeth flashing. Nothing else makes him quite as happy as their push and pull. Not skating, not scoring a goal, not winning a game— this smile only happens behind closed doors.

"You call your Dom a liar? Not very nice, is it?"

Shane practically feels himself fly off to fucking space. Every single thought vanishes. *Your Dom*, said in the tone of a man who knows he is going to get exactly what he wants. Fuck him and his ridiculously stupid, ridiculously handsome smirk.

"You barged into *my* room. *That's* not very nice."

"We are not strangers. You are mine. So is really my room."

He is thirty seconds from going to his knees. Less than that. But the day has been long and airports always make Shane feel dirty, so he really *does* want that deliciously hot shower for his sore muscles.

Rozanov doesn't seem hurried. He is still smiling lazily and his hands are hanging at his sides. Somehow that's actually worse, because all Shane can picture is himself taking three long strides across the room and sinking to the floor. He can picture those limp hands moving back through his hair, across his cheeks, down the back of his neck.

He reckons he's about ten seconds away from folding like a house of cards when he snaps, "Shower." And turns on his heel, escaping into the bathroom.

The urge is still there, thrumming under his skin, but at least there's a physical barrier to hold back Shane's desire.

As his hand slips away from the doorknob, two fingers find the little switch of the lock, and they hesitate. It's not like Rozanov is going to say *oh well better luck next time* and disappear back to his own room—he's right outside, waiting.

In the end, he doesn't flip it.

Instead he flicks the water on to heat up and methodically strips down. Shirt, sweats, boxers, socks. They all go in a neat pile on the toilet seat before he finally steps under the spray.

It's everything he had been imagining while squished into the plane. Despite how much they fly, Shane's never been a fan. He doesn't like not being able to stretch his legs properly when he wants to, even in spacious seats.

The hotel's soap smells like chamomile and it swells in the room, sweet and fresh and a little bit earthy. He draws it over his body slowly, letting the suds gather. He works his way from his neck down, one hand stilling when he reaches his hips.

He's hard. Or maybe half hard.

He's not quite sure if he remembers when that had happened, but maybe his stomach had started to feel hot when Rozanov had started to tease him.

You call your Dom a liar?

Shane swipes his thumb over the head. Just to clean it, he thinks. This is a shower. That's not weird.

Not very nice, is it?

That fucking smirk. He has to bite his lip, choking down whatever strangled noise tries to rise in his throat.

You are mine.

Ah, fuck. Fuck it. Shane tightens his hand around his cock just slightly, feeling the delicious friction over his sensitive skin. One stroke, two. He is slow with it, languid. The hot water won't run out, after all.

A little whine squeaks out of him, escaping in a rush of air through his nose. Then again. Each time he draws his hand up and down his length, a tiny little sound escapes him.

Fuck fuck fuck—

"You make pretty noises."

The build of his orgasm, no matter how close, shrinks away. Shane whips around, the water beating down on the back of his head as he stares at Rozanov.

He's leaning his shoulder against the door frame, arms crossed.

Shane thinks he might die. Again his mind goes blank, words jumbling together in this throat. How long had he been watching?

Rozanov doesn't seem to want a response, thank *god*. He shifts, standing to his full height. For a moment it's a fifty-fifty on whether he strips off his clothes and pounces on Shane or if he walks away.

Then he takes a step back, and Shane is both a little bit relieved he's not going to get a thorough fucking in the shower— at least, maybe Rozanov can see that he really needs this space to relax right now— but also quite dissatisfied. He'd do pretty terrible things to see Rozanov all slicked up in the shower right now.

Of course he gets to see him all the time in the team showers, which is exactly why Shane knows how hot Rozanov looks completely naked, water dripping off the angles of his muscled body. And having that in *private*, where he could *touch*?

“Do not come.”

He almost misses Rozanov's parting words. His focus is mainly divided between the rush of the water and the red-hot stab of arousal in his belly.

Rozanov closes the door behind himself, and Shane sags back against the wall.

He can't come.

His dick is so hard it hurts, he has a hundred fantasies playing out in his head, and now he can't even touch himself. Logically, he *also* knows that Rozanov won't fuck him tonight because tomorrow is a big game. Ottawa versus Montreal. He won't do anything to jeopardise that. Is Shane a terrible person for wishing he would?

Thinking about the game ahead helps his erection ease, at least. He finishes cleaning himself quickly, drying off and wrapping the towel around his waist.

Rozanov is waiting on the end of the bed, looking down at his phone. When the door creaks and Shane's feet pad against the wooden floor, he tosses it aside, glancing up.

“**Come here.**”

The order sinks into his bones, wraps around him like a lasso in slow-motion. Every moment he stands there unmoving, it tightens. Tugs. If he waits long enough, it will feel choking, and then it will disappear, leaving behind itches and aches. It's been a long time since Shane had to completely break an order like that. These days he is just pushing for the fun of it, for the faces Rozanov makes, for the way a little playful resistance sinks him into his own headspace.

They both know Rozanov's orders are strong, after all.

When the rope feels like it's pressing onto Shane's lungs, he finally moves. His towel drops, but the moment he decides to obey, he cannot turn back to pick it up, body and mind focussed on one thing only.

Rozanov doesn't seem to mind. He hums again, the knuckle of his left hand brushing down the side of Shane's thigh. *You are mine*, he had said earlier. There's no doubt about that, with the way his eyes roam Shane's body without an ounce of hesitation.

"Very pretty." He says, finally, "Tell me."

The non-orders are the hardest. The ones that really make him work to be good.

Shane's eyes go to the ceiling. Beige. That weird popcorn texture that used to be popular.

"I'm..." He clears his throat. If he looks down, he knows he will see Rozanov staring back at him, silent and expectant. He knows the Dom will wait for hours if he has to. "I'm very pretty."

"Good boy."

Shane's eyes snap back down to Rozanov's. That's what he'd wanted. He'd wanted to be good, and he was. Now the praise is warm all over his skin, sinking in and melting his bones into a gooey mess.

Rozanov is smiling back at him in a way that can only be described as unbearably soft, "Not so hard to be good after all. **Lie down.**"

Shane moves slowly. First, he takes a step away from Rozanov, despite how wrong that feels. Second, he trails around the side of the bed, pulling one knee up onto it. He pauses there, halfway, considering. He'd been told to lie down, but he hadn't been told exactly how he was supposed to lie.

"I—"

"**Lie down.**" Rozanov's command presses in again, like a thumb into an old bruise.

Shane's body shudders against his will, and he blinks and he's lying on his back with Rozanov above him. He brackets Shane's body with his, knees on either side of his thighs, hands on either side of his head.

Still, his eyes roam Shane's body, utterly unrepentant. What the fuck he is looking for, Shane has no idea. And he's almost at the point where he stops caring, where the white-noise and fuzzy warmth settles in.

"Fuck, you are hard again." Rozanov laughs. Quiet, under his breath. Almost in disbelief, "So desperate."

It's ridiculous. He *knows* Shane is desperate, and usually easy to convince, and easy to take down and— well, and any other way he can think of to describe being utterly gone on Ilya Rozanov, but that's the unsaid part. The part they skirt around.

Shane tilts his head up, tipping his chin in the air. For his efforts, he is rewarded with a kiss. Quick, chaste, and comforting.

"I think..." Rozanov breathes, "Here."

For a moment, Shane is not sure what is happening. Here? That's his line. That's his check-in.

Then Rozanov moves his lips to a soft patch of skin just below Shane's collarbone, and he kisses that, instead. Then mouths the skin between his lips, pulling and tugging.

It feels too good. The pleasure of his kisses, the pain of his teeth nipping, the head-rush of Subspace making his eyes roll back.

It's a light headspace. One that is less of a blindfold and more of a veil, settling over him and keeping him relaxed. He's not sure how long it lasts, but long enough that he gets his fill and comes back easily.

Rozanov places his last kiss on Shane's shoulder and then snakes up his body to find a more comfortable position to lie in. He half sits up against the headboard, legs splayed out, curled over onto his side, where he neatly arranges Shane's limbs.

Handsy and insistent— just an inkling of domspace in the way he moves. In the silent focus, the dark gaze that lightens off just a little when they relax back into the pillows.

"Roz!" Shane groans, throwing his head back. He can't even look at it. One glance was more than enough. "They're going to see!"

Rozanov isn't looking, that much is clear. He presses a kiss to the side of Shane's head, but his free hand is reaching for his phone and scrolling through the messages. Distracted, he mumbles, "Is just tiny little bruise."

Shane stretches, slapping at Rozanov's phone.

"It's huge!"

The combination of his whining and his phone assault has Rozanov giving up, finally looking back down at Shane. The grin on his face tells Shane all he needs to know before Rozanov even opens his mouth. "Tell them Dom gave punishment for back talking. And I will make it bigger if you do not sleep. We have game tomorrow."

Shane might be doing his best to be more open with them, but the idea of telling the Centaurs anything about what he does in the bedroom... Shane would have to change his name and flee the country. An exhibitionist, he is not. He flops onto his side, settling down into the sheets, but he knows he's scowling.

“A massive hickey *and* I can’t come. I hate you.”

Another kiss is placed on the side of his head, just on his hairline, “Mm, maybe now, yes. But after game, you will beg for it so nicely.”

He will *not* think about that. He will not think about begging. He will not think about getting to come. Shane closes his eyes, trying to escape the images that are flashing past him. Begging. Cumming. Begging. Cumming. Begging—

“No I won’t.” He knows he’s being petty but... Shane bumps his hips backwards, feeling more than a little triumphant when he feels Rozanov is just as hard behind him, cock pressing into Shane’s leg.

Rozanov bats at his ass, but there’s no heat behind the swat, “I tell you to sleep. Do you want punishment after game tomorrow instead?”

New pictures fill Shane’s head. Begging. Cumming. Spanking. *Crying*—

As if he can read Shane’s mind, Rozanov laughs and pulls him closer, settling the two of them against the pillows.

-

The moment Comeau locks eyes with Shane, gloves dropped, stick abandoned behind him, Shane knows exactly where he will be heading. The game is over, and Montreal lost, and Ottawa will be moving onto the playoffs instead of them, and that means only one thing.

It’s Shane’s fault.

It isn’t, really. Everyone can see Montreal are playing like uncoordinated shit, and Drapeau being off-ice with a fucked up knee means their defence is like paper, but Comeau doesn’t see it like that. His dark eyes zone in on Shane, floating on the ice a little ways from the protection of his team, and it’s like some kind of lightbulb goes off in his head.

The first hit goes to Shane’s shoulder, missing his face and hitting his pad. Just like the team, his punches are thrown like *uncoordinated shit*. It’s his downfall: a sloppy first punch means Shane has time to react, to swing out of the way of the second, and by the time he reels back for his third, Bood is ploughing through his midsection.

The two of them sprawl onto the ice, clattering down in a spray of limbs and blades.

Two other Montreal players are a royal-blue blur as they start swinging too, not seeing anything but their own player go down. The loss is enough of an excuse to be angry.

Haas and Dillon turn scarily in sync, bolting to cut them off from piling onto Bood.

Shit, *Bood*. Shane has already lost his stick so he drops his gloves, grabbing at any limb he can find to pull Comeau away.

The big idiot has about three inches and fifteen pounds on Bood - not that either of them are small. Comeau swings an elbow back, that same big body giving him a weight advantage even more stark over Shane. That one finally hits. Hurts. Regardless, he's about to snatch Comeau's other arm when someone hauls him up from behind, hands under his shoulders.

It's better to not be on his knees, because he can swing more freely downwards and get more force behind him. Shane expects the hands on him to either melt away like an allies, or to throw him around like an enemy.

Instead they spin him around, pushing him against the boards, holding him back firmly. In his place, Chouinard is skating over beside the ref, yelling insult after insult to the man still grappling with Bood.

Shane jerks forwards to help again, but his chest hits Rozanov's hand.

“Stay.”

The command rattles through his bones.

It's not the command that shocks him, really. The shock is where the command comes *from*. Rozanov's eyes are sharp and intent, his jaw clenching right after as if it's shocked him too. Shane has never stayed before, never on the ice. He thinks again of Billy Benson and Drapeau and Comeau and everyone else he has ever refused to listen to.

But this time, this time he is compromised. He has followed this command before from those lips. He has folded like a stack of cards to this command, and he has done it happily. With a blurry grasp on reality and a stupid, faraway smile on his face.

The shock brings him back there, to that moment where his willpower bent, shooting down his spine like a bolt of lightning. That has never happened before; he doesn't know how to fight back against that.

So he stays.

-

The medics call after him, waving blood test results and yelling incoherently about drops and hormones. Shane ignores them all. He bursts into the locker room with a single-minded kind of determination. His mind is busy, and they are telling him to calm down, but he does not want to be calm. What he wants to do is scream and shout and punch. He wants to finish what he was doing with Comeau, he wants to prove he can fight back.

It is very different from how the team is feeling, that much is clear. They are sitting silently in a way Shane has never seen them before, lined up on the benches in front of Rozanov and Coach Wiebe as if they are schoolboys in trouble.

Shane goes for Rozanov before he can think what he's doing. The command has long since worn off now, slid off his back like water, and the familiar warm rage in his stomach is bubbling and crackling to be freed.

"What the *fuck* was that!" He screams, shoving both hands into Rozanov's jersey, twisting his fists into the fabric to push him back against one of the stalls.

"*Shane.*"

"Don't fucking *Shane* me right now." He snaps. Usually, somebody is pulling squabbling players apart by now. Somebody is dragging them away from each other and dishing out penalties. But nobody moves. Nobody tells Shane that his anger is wrong. That, if anything, is what takes the wind out of his sails.

Really, he is not angry. He is betrayed.

"I let you." He murmurs through gritted teeth, tears spilling down his cheeks, "I fucking *let* you--"

Let him in. Let him get close. Let him climb under Shane's skin and nestle into the space between his heart and his ribs.

Rozanov's jaw clenches again like it did during the game. Swallowing something else, maybe what he really wants to say. Shane would give anything to be in private right now and hear it. *Why? Why why why...*

Instead all he gets is, "I'm sorry, Hollander."

Fuck him.

"*Goddamn* right you are." Shane spits, and gives Rozanov one more jerk before his hands fall away, jersey crumpled and wrinkled in their wake.

He moves to grab his bag, quickly tearing away the last of his pads and stuffing them inside.

Still, the silence rings around them. Shane knows they can all see his hands shaking, the way he's chewing his lip, and he's never felt so much like a circus act before. Even in Montreal, swallowed by commands, he'd never let himself get so close to the edge. He's always found a way out, a great escape.

Fuck. Shane feels his forehead slip against the metal of the stall. He knows it's resting on the sticker that proudly pronounces *Hollzy*, stuck over the much more boring one that used to say *S. Hollander*.

He knows he's not a circus act, here. He is one of them. So he turns, already opening his mouth to speak, but the team is right there, reaching out. They're all standing half-dressed,

smiling at him worriedly.

“Okay, yeah.” Shane exhales. It’s like their strings have been cut: Haas is the first to reach him, grinning as he throws his arms around Shane. Dillon and Bood are next, followed by the rest of the guys dogpiling in. He thinks, somewhere, even Wiebe is joining in. With each added body, the heat in his stomach fades, acid in his throat settling.

And when he’s finished getting his head scrubbed or his arms pulled this way and that teasingly, he catches Ilya’s eye over the sprawl, standing apart.

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“I am very sorry.”

Shane turns, eyeing Ilya as he loiters in the doorway to the showers.

Shane is the last one left to clean himself because of the chaos, so everyone else is gone. Still, he’s not surprised Ilya is loitering.

“I... know.” He allows, slowly, turning and letting the water run off his skin, hot and beating. “And I know you won’t do it again.”

Ilya nods, looking almost offended at the prospect, “I saw Comeau, and I was not... reasonable, anymore.”

Shane gets it. He doesn’t, actually, but he kind of understands why it would hurt for him to see Comeau lodge an elbow into Shane’s ribs, given everything Shane has quite literally cried onto his body about his experience in Montreal.

“I can fight my own battles.”

He nods, “Yes. Da. Always. You are so fierce.”

Shane snorts, rolling his eyes, turning back to the spray of water, scrubbing down his shoulders and arms, willing away the lingering smell of sweat, “That sounds fake.”

When he turns back, Ilya is frowning, a tiny thing, just a little wrinkle between his eyebrows. It’s the way he always looks when he’s trying to figure something out in English, “Fierce?”

“Yeah.” Shane tips his head back, letting the water wash shampoo from the back of his head, feeling the suds roll down his body.

“Is not right English word? Brave and strong and a little like angry kitten.”

Shane feels his scowl deepen, head snapping back towards the man.

“Ilya.”

“Shane.” Ilya replies with a goofy smirk on his face, but there is something testing there. Something that is not sure it is allowed to be there after such a fight. Shane knows he needs to acknowledge it. Shallow and barely there, he bobs his head in a nod.

Ilya inhales sharply. His shoulder tilts away from the tile wall, and his spine straightens. The air shifts around them both.

“Come here.” He says, just on the right side of his voice, not quite a command. Usually, Shane would melt into it. He has no problems being good for Ilya with or without a command. But there’s something still so tentative about not issuing one right away even though Shane has told him it’s okay.

“No, you come here.” He teases, cocking his head and feeling his lips pull into a smirk of his own. It won’t work, but it’s fun. It makes his fingers tingle with excitement, anticipation.

“Shane.” Ilya repeats, and *that’s the fucking stuff*. His accent thickens, and his voice lilts, “**Come here.**”

Shane goes. He goes so fast he forgets that he’s naked and dripping puddles onto the floor. He tries to press himself up against Ilya, to kiss and paw at him because he knows that’s allowed, always, but Ilya holds a hand out to keep him away.

The whine he lets out should be embarrassing.

Ilya just smiles plainly, as if Shane can’t see his cock is hardening already. “Towel first.” He says, lifting it off the hook by the door and offering it over.

Shane takes it but doesn’t move. He feels like he has something to prove, here, by doing this. By making it difficult. Usually Shane is easy to please at home, then wily and quick on the ice. Now Shane’s will has been bent on the ice, he wants Ilya to work for it.

“**Dry yourself.**”

He lifts the towel, resisting the command just enough to make it slow, to not snap to attention. He pats at his chest, drying down the planes of his skin.

And then he stops. Technically, he was not instructed how long or how much of himself he had to dry.

“You know what I said, or do you not speak English anymore?” Ilya huffs, the edge of his lip starting to tilt up.

Shane smiles back, lifting the towel to do the rest. He takes his time. It’s not to be annoying, but he doesn’t like to be sticky and damp. Ilya knows that, so they stand in silence for a while, their headspaces buzzing between them like an irritating fly, not quite settling anywhere for long.

He ties the towel around his waist.

Ilya clicks his tongue, one hand fingering gently at the edge of the fabric. He shakes his head.

“Come, dress.” He calls, turning away and ducking back into the locker room.

It’s cute. He knows now that Shane will try to rebuff anything that isn’t a direct order, so he breezes away, not giving Shane the satisfaction of a reaction if he disobeys.

It only makes him follow more eagerly.

He reaches for his shirt lying on the bench.

“**Stop.**”

Shane stops.

“This.”

He turns his head, eyeing what Ilya is offering. A big swathe of red and black fabric, white numbers stretching over the back of it. It doesn’t take a genius to know whose numbers they are.

“It’s sweaty.” Shane protests.

Ilya shrugs like somebody has told him they have Pepsi instead of Coke, like he doesn’t have any skin in the game. It’s a good ruse, but it’s wearing thin. Shane can feel how his dominance is leaking into everything he’s doing. His posture is straighter. His voice is deeper.

“Be good, or no?”

Shane’s stomach does a backflip, or maybe an entire tumbling routine. He lurches towards the jersey. It goes over his head and span around twice to get it the right way around in his haste.

Ilya looks delighted. He is smiling for real now, eyeing Shane up and down like he’s a particularly tasty meal.

The jersey is a warm blanket around his body, and he finds himself squeezing the hem in his fists like earlier, scrunching it against his palms, itching for the pressure and the scratch against his skin.

Ilya notices that, too. His eyes follow the movement, and Shane’s eyes follow Ilya’s. Because what else is he meant to do, when he feels like he’s on the precipice of a cliff, about to fall? He holds onto his anchor, of course.

“Good?” He checks, breath stuttering in his chest.

Ilya nods, “Very good.” His chest rumbles the words. Thudding deep in his ear, his heart skips a beat. He likes being good. He wants it to be appreciated when he is.

Those two words are a tiny drop in the bucket of the praise Ilya is capable of giving him, but it's enough. Shane's hands loosen and he finishes dressing, because the command is still thrumming in his veins. Or maybe it hadn't been a command? Shane doesn't care. God, he doesn't care at all. He is falling, and Ilya is all around him, and it's perfectly fine.

"Where are you?" Ilya asks. When had he stepped closer? Why does he still smell like tobacco when it's been hours since his last cigarette? Cigarettes and cologne, the smell makes his head spin. Shane's entire body tilts towards Ilya, pulled towards him like north and south, like he knows Ilya will stop him from getting dizzy.

"Here." Shane breathes, "Right here."

That, he knows, is the right answer. It's what Ilya wants to hear, the reassurance he needs when they have each other like this, that Shane is tethered to him and won't float away from their perfect little bubble towards the bleak plane of a drop.

There's a hand on his, and he is being crowded back against the lockers, and then his eyes fly open-

Ilya is staring at him, intent. He does not look away, barely blinks.

He presses a kiss to Shane's lips. Chaste, pecked. Maybe a little teasing, making him think about what he might get later.

"Feel it."

Ilya's hand releases his slowly, leaving Shane's palm pressed between his legs, cupped around his crotch, feeling the smooth fabric of his slacks. It is skin-warm and throbbing. Only the thinnest layer of fabric sits between Shane's hand and Ilya's cock. He had suspected, maybe, if only because as his cock had been slowly hardening, it had pressed up insistently through the fabric, obvious. With his hand on it there's no doubt that Ilya has no boxers on.

He *wants*. He wants to trace the line of it with his finger and feel it harden fully. He wants to roll his balls between both his hands so that Ilya tips his head back and curses in Russian. Then, while Ilya is distracted, he wants to sink to his knees and let the head slide through his lips. He wants to lap at it with his tongue, spread pre-cum in slow, steady circles, before finally sinking down onto it, all nine inches pressing unforgivingly against the back of his throat. He wants it choking him, narrowing his focus to nothing but breathing in and out through his nose, nothing but making it feel good, nothing but *being good*.

Shane knows he makes a noise, a little whimper, but he doesn't really hear it. Instead he is focussed on the press of Ilya's hands against his shoulders, firm. He feels the bunching of the jersey as he is pushed down, and the cold floor against his bare knees.

For a moment, he just stares at the crotch in front of him, head empty.

Then, **"Hands on your thighs."**

Shane claws at his own skin, pressing each finger into the meat of his thighs.

Quick hands undo Ilya's belt and unzip his fly, slacks dropping until they catch on the swell of his ass, front tipping forwards, cock springing up without anything else to hold it down.

And fuck it looks like it should hurt, straining and red at the tip, a long vein bulging along the bottom.

Shane knows he's probably just as hard, but he doesn't think it would look quite as impressive laid out like this. He is not a ridiculous nine thick inches. He is, if anything, impressively average. A lot of him is, really. He likes it when he's not, like with hockey, like with being such a strong Sub, but clearly he is not that much of an overachiever because he is still down here on his knees. It had hardly taken much, really. A few smiles here, a few commands there. Maybe he should be more bothered. Maybe he should put up more of a fight, maybe Rozanov would think he was a better player if-

Two fingers tilt his chin up, a little jerk, just enough to catch his attention, to draw his eyes upwards again.

Ilya stares back down. Crowded away from the lights like this, his eyes look almost black, shadowed over and dark.

"Where are you?"

He wants to be stronger, he wants to stand on his own two feet, he wants to fall into a brawl with whoever he likes and not feel like he's being minded. He doesn't need to be minded, steered, shouldn't feel the impulse to answer his question, but it really doesn't feel like a question he can refuse. When he tries, his heart thuds in his head, a steady, blinding beat rattling his skull.

Ilya's eyes slip closed for a half a second, then looks down on him again, focus never waning.

"Is okay. I will fix." He murmurs. His other hand lifts, sliding around the back of Shane's head, sinking into the short strands, gripping them between his fingers, just the right side of too tight, tiny little pinpricks rather than real pain.

"Don't think."

Shane's brain empties.

"Suck."

The head pushes into Shane's lips, and he sucks the whole way down. Halfway, it meets resistance, Shane's throat trying to close up around it, instinctual fear settling in.

"Breathe."

He pushes air out through his nose, then in again. Ilya moves his head away, and then back. It's give and take, push and pull. He breathes out, and there's a cock in his throat. He breathes in, and there's the head of it resting against the tip of his tongue.

After a few thrusts, Shane flicks his tongue against the bottom, tracing that bulging vein. Just like he had imagined, he gets a perfect view of Ilya's head tilting back, his adam's apple bobbing as he swallows down Russian curses. Shane doesn't understand any of them. He doesn't care. Ilya is losing his usually vice-like grip on his self control, and it's Shane's doing.

He traces it again and Ilya pumps his head quicker, other hand finding his cheek, squeezing. Shane tilts into it, hollowing his cheeks, opening his jaw another half inch. The next set of curses are feral, spat out towards the ceiling before his head swings forwards, forehead pressing against the closed locker behind Shane's back, breath quick and panting.

"Fuck, fuck, fuck-" Finally, Shane understands. He understands the way Ilya's abdomen tightens, and his hips start to rut in and out of his mouth without any real pace, and both his hands squeeze harder, *harder*-

Suddenly, Shane is alone. His mouth is empty, jaw hanging open. Spit is dripping from his mouth, thick on his chin, dripping down his neck. The hands on his head are pulling him up, twisting him and turning him, utterly manhandling him into position.

His elbows go down on the bench, holding him up. His feet are steady under him, somehow, and spread wide. His shorts are yanked down, pulled low enough to slip over the swell of his ass but no further, covering the raw, pink claw marks he had left in his own skin.

"Say my name."

"Ilya-" Shane coughs, splutters, spit bubbling on his lips, throat raw and battered- *used*, he thinks. *Used*.

"Say it again."

Shane tries again, dragging in as much air as he can only to cough again, "Il-ya."

This time, trying is not good enough. Ilya's hand, big and hockey-crooked and brawl-bruised from earlier slaps his ass, spurs him on without the need for another command.

"Ilya!"

This time, he sings. The shock of pain and a sudden burst of pleasure rack his body, stomach twisting tight, tight, tighter, before it releases.

And he releases.

And somewhere behind him, Ilya grunts in the way he always does when he releases, too. Cum splatters against his ass, hot and claiming, branding him, painting him with white streaks of surrender. Because he has. He has surrendered to Ilya, utterly and completely.

He feels his legs buckling before he can call out to warn Ilya but the Dom is there anyways, catching him with an arm scooped under his waist, heaving him up with steady hands.

"Shhh..." Ilya murmurs into his ear, "Shhh... safe, safe." He whispers.

Shane knows it's safe. Every bone in his body knows it now, nothing left doubting.

"Here." He breathes, feeling his shorts pulled back up over his ass, the jersey straightened up on his back, "'M Here."

He finds his feet again with surprising grace, just like earlier. It probably comes from being so good on skates: it is much easier to balance on steady feet and concrete than tall blades and ice. Ilya keeps him close, though, knowing he does not like to be alone in the first little while afterwards. So while they leave, there's always a hand on him, a foot pressed to his, something to anchor him to the moment.

-

Shane wakes up in bed, curled onto his side. Outside the window it is dark, but Ilya is not in bed yet so he knows he cannot have slept longer than an hour or so.

He finds his mind surprisingly calm, all the bother and worry from the game gone. He stretches slowly from fingers to toes, pressing his body into the mattress and twisting the sheets. Any remaining itch under his skin they just about manage to scratch, the texture settling his brain, relaxing him further. It's not too much. There's no poking seams or uneven roughness. Just cool, smooth, high-quality cotton.

Eventually, he sits up and finds the jersey from earlier still wrapped around his body, claiming him in a puddle of red and black and *Rozanov*, 81, C.

The floor is cold against his bare feet but he endures it as he pads out of the room, following the trail he has walked many times before: the trail from Ilya's bed to the living room.

The Dom is sat on his sofa, phone in one hand, TV remote in the other. There's a replay of their game tonight on the big screen. Shane knows it was tonight, because the coverage is paused on a still of the fight. *The* fight. The exact moment where Comeau had dug a bony elbow into Shane's ribs, looking surrounded by swathes of the same red and black fabric Shane is still wearing.

"I'm here." Shane announces himself from the doorway.

The Dom's head jerks to the side, eyes cutting over the back of the sofa. He smiles, but only slightly. He is guarded again, not chasing his pleasure or working his commands through Shane's headspace. He is *Rozanov* again.

"Come, we order food. Cannot be bothered to cook." He beckons Shane over with one hand. It is as casual a movement as any, but Shane snaps to attention like Rozanov is his drill sergeant, marching over and setting himself on the other end of the sofa.

For a moment, neither of them speak. Shane stays still simply because he has not been told to do otherwise. Rozanov is poised, tense, waiting for something that isn't coming.

“I—“

“Look—“

They both blink back at each other, and Rozanov looks just as wide-eyed as Shane feels.

Before he can lose his nerve, Shane presses on with the only question that is still rattling around in his skull after their headspace in the locker room. It had cleared the haze in his mind, calmed the chaos of wanting to fight, settled the part of him that was bruised. But he is still thinking the same thought, “*Why?*”

Ilya is quick to answer.

“Because I saw my mother.”

Shane stops dead. Even his thoughts grind to a halt. Ilya is always so cagey about her. Whenever he mentions her, it is when emotions are sky-high and tears are being had.

“Because I stand there, and I win, and instead of Drapeau and Comeau all I can see is my father and my brother and instead of you all I can see is my mother.” His accent thickens the more his words get choked up, “And I turn and I fight and I see you run and I just know. I know.” He breathes into Shane's space now, “I know you are hurting, and I must help, and after it all I know you are *mine*. I just know. Really mine. My Sub. My... *Shane*.”

Ilya's.

Somehow, his tense words help break the ice again. Shane exhales, pushes the lingering commands out of his body like a detox, and he feels himself again. He is not waiting for his next instruction, he is not paused whenever a Dominant isn't looking his way. He is just Shane Hollander, the boring hockey player.

So he lets his body fold up and fall sideways, pressing himself against Ilya's body, cheek resting gently against the man's chest. After a few moments, Ilya's hand starts petting the back of his head, just his very fingertips tracing slow circles into the skin, as if he remembers pulling on it harder than usual, as if he feels like he needs to tend to the wound.

“Soup.” Shane mumbles, “Chicken soup.”

Ilya hums. Shane feels it more than hears it, the vibration rumbling through his cheek.

“I will get you chicken soup, *kotik*.” Ilya keeps his voice at Shane's volume, low and just for the two of them, even in the empty room.

Shane shifts, making himself as comfortable as he can, “Okay. Good.”

“Wiebe wants us to have a meeting tomorrow.” Ilya says once he's placed his phone down, satisfied at whatever he has ordered, “He is worried, I think.”

It is more than *think*. Shane knows for a fact Wiebe will be worried. He is a good man, one of the first truly good ones Shane had gotten to meet in the hockey world. He does not stand for

bullying, harassment, or commands volleyed back and forth in the locker room. Ilya had not quite taken it that far, but he had issued a command. No doubt the team's doctors will want to drop test them both.

It's all enduringly proper. The right kind of process. A formal meeting, testing, and paperwork. Shane has no doubt Wiebe will not approve of the way they had worked through their emotions tonight if he sees the leftover hormones on both tests and puts two-and-two together.

But they can't turn back.

Lying here, warm from head to toe with little circles being drawn into the skin on the base of his neck, curled into Ilya's body and breathing together, he realises that he doesn't want to turn back. If Ilya suggested they stop seeing each other now to salvage some semblance of a purely professional relationship, his heart would crack wide open.

Sure he is Shane Hollander, the boring hockey player. But he is also Shane Hollander, Ilya Rozanov's Submissive.

Shane reaches out the hand not trapped beneath his torso, stretching up to place it on Ilya's hip, thumb pressing into the skin. He presses a kiss to the first stretch of skin he can reach, just above his t-shirt collar. Then the hollow of his throat, then the bottom of his jaw, then the edge of his chin. Shane peeks up from below his lashes, knowing Ilya's eyes are on him.

"*Malyshka...*" He mumbles. It's not really a warning. Can it be a warning if it is said like the word is made of sugar and honey, melting on his tongue? If it is almost certainly a term of quiet endearment?

"What does that one mean?" Shane asks, pressing another kiss to Ilya's face, catching the line of his jaw and then the jut of his cheekbone.

Ilya thinks for a moment, stretching and shifting below Shane, tugging his arms free, wrapping them around his chest, close, "Mm..." He sighs, "Baby."

"*Baby...*" Shane echoes, feeling the way his cheeks pull away from his teeth, his aching jaw shifting as he smiles too widely.

Ilya rumbles and nods, lifting his head just slightly to be able to return at least one of Shane's kisses, smacking and firm on his cheek.

"Well—" Shane starts, throwing his leg astride and sitting up. Ilya pushes up onto his elbows, the two of them meeting upright, noses moulding around the others' as they press into a real kiss, searching, licking down into their mouths, teasing the others' lips with a nip, teeth clashing in a moment that makes them wince.

"Well—" Shane tries again, laughing as he has to use two hands to hold Ilya back, keeping their lips apart, "I think you should probably keep that one to yourself, in front of Wiebe."

Ilya snorts, "I will use *kotik*, yes? My strong, brave, feisty little kitten."

Before Shane can argue his side, there's a knock at the front door and he groans, throwing his head back. Ilya laughs, lifting him by the hips and tossing him back onto the sofa, sauntering away to collect the food.

The cushions are comfortable against his tired limbs, and Shane almost doesn't want to sit up again, even as he hears Ilya call his name, rattling around in the kitchen with dishes and cutlery.

"Shane?" He calls again, "Hurry, will get cold."

Shane groans. Nope, too comfy.

Ilya laughs again. It's not a mean laugh, not the one he uses on the ice against his opponents. Not even the boisterous one he uses with their teammates. This is a different laugh entirely. Quiet and lyrical, huffed under his breath like he can't quite believe it's his own.

"*Shane.*" He calls again, erring on the side of warning.

Then, when Shane still does not move, when his limbs keep him heavy and anchored down to the plush cushions instead and brain settles back into sleep, somewhere faraway calling him, so easy to slip back towards after such a chaotic night...

"Come here."

Shane moves without thinking, the aching in his body moved from the front of his head to the back, like the command is capable of reorganising him entirely.

He sits again without having to be told, dropping down into the chair that is set in front of a bowl of chicken soup. Ilya has something else, something bright red with green chunks and garlic bread on the side. It looks good, but not as good as the chicken soup will be. It will be warm and salty and homely. It will remind him of his mother caring for him when he was sick. It will make him want to float back to bed, cuddle up, and bury himself in the sheets again where nothing bad can touch him.

A hand brushes gently down the back of his head, slides over his shoulder, and then slips away as Ilya settles in his own seat, "You are here?"

"Just about." He nods, reaching for his spoon, "Wiebe." He starts again, because maybe now that they're not lounging around on the couch, pressed together tightly, it will be easier to focus.

"Does he want to see us separately or together?"

Ilya shrugs, dipping his bread in the soup then taking a huge bite, "He did not say. Maybe he says more to your phone."

Shane frowns. "He's not angry." Wiebe is not an angry guy.

Ilya shrugs, "I think maybe he is."

“Okay, he’s probably angry. But he’s probably angry that I was hurt, rather than at *you* specifically. He doesn’t know what I’ve told you. He wasn’t there when—“

When Shane had dropped, and Ilya had dropped, and somewhere in all that mess Ilya had opened up about his mother, and Shane had opened up about Montreal. There had been no getting off, no chased orgasms... nothing but Shane and Ilya and commands sobbed into his dominant’s skin, salty and hot. All the commands he can remember Comeau throwing around, all the insults, all the pain he’d absorbed, breathed through, lived inside of...

Even just the memory swings him towards subspace again. It was so sweet, so buttery and warm. That night sits in the back of his mind always, a steady memory, but it is not easy to think about without slipping just a little, without turning around and finding himself facing that blank place again, threatened by a drop.

Ilya’s hand presses over his, a pressure he didn’t know he needed until it is there, heavy and insistent.

“He will never be.” Ilya says, squeezes, “That was your pain. Now it is ours. Same for me. No one else’s, yes?”

Shane sniffs, nods, “Yes.”

“Good. You are such good boy, you do not even realise.”

Shane cuts his eyes towards Ilya over the table, trying to tell if he’s being serious or just teasing to lighten the mood, but there’s no twinkle in the Dom’s eye, and definitely no smirk on his face.

Shane feels the heat rise up his cheeks, always so quick to blush.

“Stop it.”

Ilya squeezes his hand again, and now, finally, there is a smirk sitting on his face, “I am Dom, do not tell me what to do.”

Shane rolls his eyes, and Ilya pats his hand before letting go, clearly deciding he is still with him in the room, not in danger of leaving him.

“Eat. Will get cold.” Ilya says again, moving back to their dinner.

Shane takes a sip of his water, first, as if to prove the words did not command him to do so, and then he eats.

-

“Hollander. I didn’t think you’d call back, but thank you, I appreciate it.”

It's early. Ilya is still asleep, body sprawled over half of the california king size bed he keeps in the master bedroom. It had been hard to leave him, but not because Shane was afraid to slip under. He'd not wanted to leave because the sheets were warm, and the clock was saying it was early, and Shane was bone-tired.

But routine discipline has gotten him this far in his career, so he is awake and making breakfast regardless.

"No, it's alright." Shane answers as he stands at the sink, watching the sun just peeking up over the bushes that circle the back of Ilya's house. The house was always so peaceful when he was alone, not needing to perform for anyone else. He had always felt the same at home when he'd wake up before his parents to go for a run.

Maybe he should go this morning, too. There's surely a few good trails around Ilya's house he could find. Maybe he could even convince Ilya to join him, show him the best one.

It takes him a long moment to realise that Wiebe is still waiting on him, giving him the space to say whatever it is he called to say. He is not always very patient, but today he is. There's no mystery why. Shane ducks his head, tugging at the jersey still covering his chest, twisting it up in his fist, "I just wanted to let you know I got your texts and I'll be there for the meeting."

"Good." Wiebe replies, "Good, I'm glad you're feeling up for it. Obviously, how it goes will be completely up to you."

Shane pauses, "Me?"

"Yes. It's a space for you to speak your mind, without the pressure of the team."

Speak his mind. Shane had been sure he was clear of any headspace when he woke up, but perhaps he was wrong. None of this makes much sense to him. Surely Wiebe isn't questioning Ilya's place on the team?

"Okay." He says to fill the silence regardless. He can't very well say nothing, or give anything away prematurely. They've talked about *their* issues, but not about what they were going to say to management. That's a whole other ballpark.

Speak of the devil and he shall appear, however... the sound of Ilya's footsteps padding out of the bedroom and down the stairs echoes in the quiet house.

"Thank you. I'll... be there. Bye."

He puts down the phone just in time for Ilya to yawn jaw-crackingly loudly and smack his lips, clearly searching Shane out while he was still half asleep.

"This early?" He complains, nose scrunching up as he sighs. It's cute. Soft. Ilya is so very rarely soft. Gentle, yes. Kind, yes. Soft... not so much.

Shane can't help but laugh. It's such a ridiculous picture, Ilya scratching his head with his eyes closed.

“Wiebe.” He says, “But he was pretty, um, held back maybe? I’m not sure. *Oh*—” Shane blinks, hands flying to Ilya’s shoulders as he is suddenly hoisted up and onto the counter, Ilya pressed between his legs, leaning up to kiss him.

“We have never had sex like this.” Ilya breathes, suddenly wide-awake, hands roaming Shane’s torso with as much enthusiasm as ever, “My jersey…” He mutters, almost to himself, “You will never take this off, yes?”

Shane laughs again. He really can’t help it. He is happy, sue him. Perhaps yesterday had been a bit of an emotional rollercoaster, but they’d come out of it stronger. They’d come out of it *together*. Officially. Dom and Sub. Boyfriend and boyfriend.

Most importantly, Shane and Ilya.

“Ilya.” He loves the way it sounds, the way his brain was so quick to adapt like it already *knew*, “Ilya! Stop it, I don’t want to go down before this meeting.”

Ilya sticks his bottom lip out. It’s boyish and pouty. A third laugh is startled from Shane’s chest.

“I will be careful!” Ilya’s protest is valiant, “It will just be sex.”

Shane kisses his pout, just because he can. It doesn’t distract Ilya, though. He is like a dog with a bone. His hands scrunch into the jersey again, eager. Shane pushes them down, squeezing, “No.”

Another kiss to Ilya’s cheek and he really does have to lean back, or he will get very foolish and over-happy and agree to fuck right here on the counter. His head bumps lightly against the cupboard door behind him, “I’m already… *slippy*.”

“Slippy.” Ilya repeats back to him, mouthing around the word as if it tastes new. His brow crinkles. It is just as devastatingly adorable as his pout, and Shane struggles to focus. He never struggles to focus. Except— well, except now.

“Um, like— like slipping over. Like socks on the hardwood. Ice on the driveway. *Slippy*.”

Again, Ilya forms the word around his lips, then grins, “I like slippy. Is fun word.”

Shane rolls his eyes, but he knows it’s more fond than anything else. His hand skirts gently down the side of Ilya’s face, down his pale skin, over his mole. It feels like awe, the bubbling unsteadiness in his stomach. He just can’t believe that Ilya wants him like this. Wants to be there to support him. There has not been one mention of the fact that he could make Shane cope with this alone. That they have a chance to keep their arrangement a secret, still.

Shane leans forwards again, the moment having stilled.

Their foreheads bump.

Shane looks into his eyes, pools of hazel and happiness, and he knows exactly what to say.

“I love you.”

That, of all things, is what makes Ilya’s hands freeze.

Then, “I know.” He noses at Shane’s neck, tucks himself in as close as he can go, not a single inch of space separating them. Shane isn’t quite sure where he starts and where Ilya begins, anymore.

“*Ya teba lyubyyu*. I love you too.”

Fuck it, they can have sex on the counter.

Chapter End Notes

Ao3 was down for maintenance so I hope I didn’t keep too many of you in suspense!
This is one of my fave chapters so I hope you enjoy!!

Also don’t ask why they flew to Montreal they just felt like it okay (aka I didn’t feel like changing it).

ALSO added an epilogue because this story has gotten out of control in my Google docs lol. 8 is really it though I’ve planned out all the plot points and scenes now 🗒️

Edit: NEXT CHAPTER ON THE WEEKEND!!!

Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

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

“Shane, how are you feeling?” Wiebe is the first one to speak, words already tumbling out of his mouth as he opens the door to his office.

Shane’s legs act before his brain, shooting up straight. They’d been ferried up here by the team’s nurse ten minutes ago. Waiting outside the coaching office has never felt so much like sitting outside the principal’s office, and he’s on edge. Ilya might like being in trouble, but Shane doesn’t. Not one bit.

“Alright.” He hears himself say, absently, “Good, with the win.”

It’s obviously not what he was asking, but Wiebe nods politely. His real focus, it seems, is not actually Shane. His gaze is planted firmly on Ilya.

The team sees each other more than they see their families. Shane is used to all of Wiebe’s expressions. His pride, his anger, his disappointment. The controlled blankness now is frankly unnerving.

Regardless, he opens his arm to gesture them both into the room.

“The nurse has let me know both of your drop tests are finished.” He continues.

Inside the room, there is a smattering of other officials. A woman who might be the team’s lawyer. The new assistant coach. The only two Shane can actually put names to are Terry and Harris. Terry is neutral like Wiebe, probably a skill he’d perfected long ago to keep patients calm. Harris on the other hand looks distinctly uncomfortable. Clearly, he is not used to being the sort of person who has to sit at a table like this post-disaster.

Shane doesn’t want to sit here, either. He’d rather the option to immediately run away and leave, but he doesn’t think that will help much. A man can dream, though.

Instead he compromises and sits in the chair closest to the door. Ilya sits beside him, of course, pulling his chair out at an angle beside Shane’s. He’s trying to be comforting, probably, but Shane just feels sandwiched between him and Wiebe and their intense, silent staring contest. Is this some kind of Dom thing he hasn’t discovered yet?

“Cool.” Shane nods, looks down at his hands. It feels safer than looking anyone in the eye, “And...”

“Right.”

Shane still isn’t looking, but he can hear Terry shuffling the papers in front of him, “Both of your levels are good. Particularly we’d been worried about you Shane, because your pre-

season levels were very low. This isn't uncommon for someone who ranks so highly on the scale as you, but clearly that was just a blip."

A blip.

Shane's entire life, all his ups and downs, all the hiding and worrying. The years of building pressure in his chest whenever he left the house. The routines he'd used to manage, the pills he'd used to cope... *sacrifices*. He'd made so many fucking sacrifices for so long. He could sit here and list them out one by one, but they'd be here for days.

But they're just a blip, apparently. Long gone, lost to old drop tests and hormones that only remember sixty days. Their memory can't be that good after all.

He should be happy his levels are good. Happy that Ottawa has made a difference— Ilya has made a difference. But he isn't. He is just... sad, maybe. It's not the right word, but it's close enough. The kind of sad you feel when you're grieving, all twisted up and knotted inside your gut, bitter and angry and wallowing in how unfair it feels.

He swallows. The sound is so loud in his ears, popping and crackling. For a moment, he worries that everyone else in the room can hear it— that they all know his anxiety is chewing him up from the inside out.

Under the table, something bumps against his foot. Then again, harder, pressing over the toe of his Reeboks.

He very belatedly realises that it's not just a figment of his imagination, and it's Ilya's foot pressing against his. Firm. Silent. Grounding.

Shane takes a deep breath, reaching as far into his lungs as he can.

And then all he says is, "Fine."

It is not fine, really. But Terry doesn't know that, and he doesn't know because Shane has never told him. Never told anyone. Wiebe knows some, has probably pieced together that even once Montreal knew, they had sat him down and told him very pragmatically that the media could never find out. The team know how bad Comeau and Drapeau had been to him, but that wasn't exactly news. They're assholes. Not just Ilya-assholes, but actual assholes.

But *none* of them knew how deep the shame had run.

A life with no partners, barely any friends, just Shane and an aching desire to play hockey.

Our pain. Ilya had said last night. *Not theirs*.

They have a right to know his levels, but if Terry says that they're fine, he's not going to say anything that might invite them to ask more questions.

Terry raises an eyebrow at Wiebe, but makes no further comments.

“Obviously there’s a media aspect to this situation as well, which is why we’ve called Harris in.” Wiebe valiantly continues, “Mostly, people seem to think you were simply overwhelmed by the fight and backing away. Your image as a calm player really helped that narrative.”

Narrative. Shane isn’t sure he’s ever felt more like he was being handled.

“It would help if we got you participating in the social media rounds today.” Harris joins in, taking this as his queue, “Ideally you as well, Rozanov. I know it’s sensitive putting you together for the shot, but so long as we can get you in the same video, maybe on the same team for a playful game.”

That doesn’t sound so bad. Shane knew he liked Harris. Not quite as much as Troy seems to like him, but enough.

“To be honest, the media mostly latched onto how angry at Shane you seemed, Rozanov, so we just need to quell any rumours that you aren’t still...” Harris clears his throat before offering, “Friends.”

Friends. What a way to describe them. It’s possibly worse than *blip*.

“Is fine.” Ilya cuts in, possibly to spare Harris from any more awkwardness, or possibly because he can sense Shane is elsewhere, lost in his own thoughts, “I will smile, I will laugh, whatever.”

Harris nods, then not-to-surreptitiously looks right back over to Wiebe.

“Great. I’m glad. Now, obviously we do have to talk about the elephant in the room.”

Shane suddenly revisits his initial idea of running away. He’s faster than everyone in this room, he could make it to the parking lot before anyone could stop him. If he couldn’t, though, he’d take just being buried six feet under right here on the spot.

“We know it won’t do to place blame. So we’d like to work forwards. I know I’ve been pretty relaxed about things like locker placement and not enforcing each player’s private gym time, leaving that up to you guys—“

“*Ohmygod* no I can’t do this anymore—“ Shane jerks forwards, running his hands down his face. He knows what Wiebe is about to say, and he can’t. He can’t have this discussion and pretend he needs to, what, be protected from Ilya? From the other Doms on the team?

“Shane—“ Ilya follows his movement, leaning forwards in his own chair.

“No.” Shane doesn’t look at him, waves him off, “I can’t. I need to stop this before anyone starts to suggest I need my own bathroom, or shower cubicle, or should wear earplugs—“

“All those things would be perfectly acceptable—“ Wiebe is really trying to be good about it. Maybe in a few days, Shane will appreciate what a good person he is, but right now he just needs this conversation to *end*.

“Ilya Doms me!” Shane practically yells. He should probably be glad they’re holding this meeting before practice, so there are no prying ears outside who could listen in.

Terry stops shuffling his papers. The new assistant coach stops tapping her pen. Ilya looks like he’s holding his breath. Only Shane’s half-ragged breathing punches through the air.

“Shit.” He mutters, because that’s not what he’d meant. Or, not how he’d planned to say it. Before anyone takes the wrong end of the stick with that statement too, he ignores the heat in his cheeks and corrects himself, “I mean, Ilya and I are in a personal relationship, and have been pretty much since I joined the team.”

Still, nobody speaks.

Slowly, Ilya’s foot taps against his. Once, twice, thrice. There’s a thousand things it could mean, or nothing at all. To Shane, it feels like *I love you*.

“Right.” Wiebe’s entire body looks tense. His face is all squished up in a frown. Shane can read between the lines. That one word absolutely translates to *what the fuck that is not what I expected you to say*.

“You have the results.” Shane starts again, because nobody else seems brave enough to speak up, and he’s already said the hardest part, “You don’t get higher level subs than me. I can… resist those sorts of commands. Ones thrown around on the ice. Comeau never held back with that sort of thing in Montreal, that’s for sure.”

He shifts, glancing sideways at Ilya. There is determination in his set shoulders and straight back. Strength. He is not hiding from the truth, not embarrassed by being linked to Shane so openly.

“Our relationship came out on the ice. It was a series of mistakes from both of us that we will not be repeating. And I have no interest in repeating the *private* conversation my Dom and I had last night with you three either. So. I think we all need to pack up, get ready for practice, and beat Detroit tomorrow afternoon. Any questions?”

In the corner of his eye, he can see Ilya is grinning now, barely managing to tamp it down by biting his bottom lip. Shane would be annoyed if he didn’t know Ilya so well. This is what he lives for, the challenge, the chase, the drama. There’s a reason he’s hated on the ice. Other than him being leagues better than most other players, of course.

A lot of Ilya translates from the ice to home. He loves Shane fighting back, too. He loves it when they chirp— will always answer with a sharp grin. He loves seeing him act more Dominant than half the guys on the team.

And then he loves seeing Shane come apart for him so easily afterwards, too.

Wiebe clears his throat, “Rozanov?”

Ilya’s foot taps Shane’s again, and he turns slightly in his seat, “I do not know about you, coach, but even with English as second language, that was clear to me.”

“Don’t be a smartass.” Shane can’t help but bite, rolling his eyes. A simple *yes* would have sufficed, and then they’d be on their way home sooner.

Ilya’s grin only widens, “Is not smartass, is picking my battles, *kotik*.”

The nickname strikes a chord. They’d already spoken about that.

“*Ilya*.” Shane turns his head.

At last, Ilya raises both his hands, allowing Shane the win and the final word. It shouldn’t be attractive, the shit-eating grin on his Dom’s face. Shane shouldn’t already be thinking about what they’re going to do later tonight, with no prying eyes on them.

“The team?” Wiebe cuts into his thoughts again, pressing the meeting forwards, “Are they… aware?”

If anything was the secret elephant in the room, that is probably it. The team had witnessed Ilya lose control of his commands. The public might have been a near miss, but half the players on the ice had been in that dogpile, close enough to hear it loud and clear.

“No.” Shane shakes his head, “They know I’m a Sub, so they know about my… levels. But nothing about Ilya and me.”

Because supposedly, Shane is high enough to refuse that sort of command.

“Right.”

This time, Wiebe sounds more confident. Sounds less like he’s floundering and more like he’s found a line through the enemies defence and is taking each stride with confidence.

“Well there isn’t much of a process for this kind of relationship, so we’ll have to make one.”

This time it’s Ilya who answers, and with a hefty dose of suspicion on the side. “Like what?”

“Like extra drop tests.” Terry cuts in again, clearly realising what Wiebe means before the rest of them, “To ensure the… *proceedings* are healthy, and dynamics aren’t getting muddled between work and home.”

“Absolutely not.” Ilya rears back, and he looks distinctly like a lion about to roar, bunching himself up, golden curls bouncing around his face like a scraggly mane, “What we do—“

“Will be private.” Wiebe cuts in, one last time. He sounds sure. It comes out in his coaching voice, completely decisive, like he knows that will help Ilya see reason, “Nobody will ever ask what you do behind closed doors. Because that is none of our business, just like with any other relationship.”

Ilya nods once, curt, “Good.” He practically huffs, still sounding offended by the prospect of — well, whatever he had been thinking. People prying into their private lives more than necessary. “There is reason for that.”

Shane would roll his eyes at Ilya's possessiveness over his Submission if it wasn't so endlessly endearing. As much as Ilya loves taking him apart, even loves teasing him about it, he holds onto the secret of it like it's made of gold.

The team asks, sometimes, when they're feeling brave. About *the sub he's always texting*. Shane isn't sure he's ever met a Dom so cagey about whether or not his Sub kneels for him.

It's nice. Well, it's nice when it's the team, and not when he thinks Ilya might actually launch himself over the table if anyone starts asking what Shane likes in headspace.

"Tests are fine." Shane interrupts, watching the clock behind Terry tick scarily close to the time he knows Dykstra comes to practice after dropping his girls off at their daycare, "A paper trail of healthy tests will be good in case the league ever questions it, right? That's what you mean? And the tests are harmless."

Terry nods, seemingly appeased by this answer, and lets the subject drop. Not without a slightly weary look towards a still huffing Ilya, however.

"And we'll do the PR." Shane glances at Harris, "No problems. We'll glue ourselves together today for when you take all the shots, alright?"

Harris nods quickly, jotting something down in his notebook. Ideas, maybe.

And then Shane can finally, finally glance back at Ilya, giving him his full attention. It's weird, sitting this close without worrying. Facing each other without worrying. And even—Shane reaches out quickly, before any remaining anxiety in his stomach can convince him to stop. Everyone in this room knows, so why pretend? His fingers splay over Ilya's knee, squeezing. Once. Twice. Thrice. *I love you*.

He thinks maybe he is right about what it meant, because the way Ilya looks at him is unbearable. Soft and fond and overwhelmed all in one look.

They get a few seconds before the moment has to be broken, and Shane pushes up from his chair. Ilya goes with him instantly.

"And Wiebe—" Shane says, pausing just as they reach the door, "Thank you. For looking out for me, even if you didn't really have to."

Wiebe nods once, "Don't think anything of it, Hollander."

-

The team takes their guidance from Shane the moment he steps out onto the ice in all his practice gear.

Ilya might be the one with the *C* on his shoulder, but it's clear the tables have turned for today.

Shane had kept a respectful distance in the locker room, keeping his eyes on his own side of the locker wall. Perhaps professional distance hadn't been the best approach, because now the team floats around him aimlessly, circling, and Ilya is the only one standing apart.

"Harris?" Shane asks, clearing his throat. He lifts his stick to get the man's attention while he helps the team photographer set up, "Where do you want us? We're doing a scrimmage."

He floats closer so neither of them have to yell. Also because it's a means of escape from the almost-overbearing Hayes and Bood, who keep pulling up on either side of him, squishing him between them.

They mean well, he knows. But they are also two relatively high Doms with annoying Dom-brains who just want to make sure Shane is okay. They are absolutely not aware how irritating it is to skate around with two people practically glued to your hips.

"Actually, since the *situation* is handled, I think it would be good to do a commentary video. I can mic you and Rozanov up. Here." Harris sets two little squares into Shane's gloved hand. They are small, grey, and have little mufflers slotted over the top of them. Microphones, duh.

Harris' assistant— or maybe she's the photographer?— helps Shane get his clipped to the collar of his jersey, and then turns to help Ilya, but he's just about managed by himself. Shane can't help his smile at Ilya's little focus-face, sliding his skates backwards to line up next to him, both of them facing the camera.

"This good?" Shane asks, propping his stick against the ice and tapping.

"Yes, a little closer. We're rolling. If we can get an intro first?" Harris makes a gesture between them.

Shane smiles, feeling Ilya shift beside him, their shoulder pads pressing in on each other.

"Are we just introducing practice?" Shane asks, keeping the smile on his face for the camera. Usually he is not quite so enthusiastic, but he figures the video won't be very convincing if he's scowling.

The maybe-assistant maybe-photographer mutters something in Harris' ear, and Harris relays it. Soon enough, Shane has Ilya's arm over his shoulders, and is holding both of their sticks, because that makes a better picture, apparently.

It's not so bad. Ilya is a little sweaty, but so is he. The weight of Ilya's arm is comforting, a type of touch they haven't ever allowed to spill out onto the ice. He's not sure they've ever shared more than a fist-bump with their skates still on.

They babble through the intro clip a few times, switching up who says what for Harris to pick the best version from later. That's not so bad, either.

When Ilya is finally allowed to remove himself and take his stick back, the rest of the team have already split themselves in half. Hayes and Bood are firmly on Shane's side of the rink, while the rookies and Troy have been shuffled over to Ilya's. The rest are scattered, waiting.

"Okay, Hollander, you are boring you already know rules." Ilya grins, tucking his chin down to speak to his mic, "Five minutes strategy talk."

"Oh please. Hayes, Goal. Bood, Dillon, on my line. Dykstra, we don't have a pair for you back there so you better be warmed up." He takes a breath, settling on his spot on centre-ice, staring down Ilya and his gaggle of players, "Oh, do you still need five minutes?"

His voice is sweeter than sugar. Not quite the tone he would use at home, pleading and gentle and probably calling out for Ilya, but it's close. It's mostly for the cameras, for the chirp. Maybe a little bit for the reaction it pulls out of Ilya.

The muscle in his jaw ticks. He mutters something that by the look on Haas' face is in Russian, because he clearly doesn't understand, and looks around at the other rookies as if any of them will have, either.

"Lines!" Ilya huffs, rolling his eyes and turning to them. Troy, with more experience, is already in position. Haas can't play right wing with him there, so tentatively picks his way towards the left. Holmberg and Young take up a defensive pair, leaving Chouinard to the goal, unfortunately for them. Shane knows how easy it will be to score on him if their defence lacks.

"You are asshole." Ilya says when they are alone at the circle.

Shane snorts, "I'm confident in leading my team to victory, Captain. Aren't you?"

This time, Ilya can't control himself to just a twitch. His stick-hand covers his own microphone, and his other scrumples over Shane's.

"You are asking for spanking, *moya lyubov*."

A jolt of something hot strikes down Shane's spine. He smacks his lips, swallows, leans back so that Ilya's hand has to fall away from his jersey before someone else notices.

"Later." He mutters, then flicks his stick against Ilya's, "After we beat you."

Ilya is grinning again now, but not too hard that he doesn't notice the puck drop. He does, because he beats Shane to it. If Bood wasn't ready and waiting, sliding it out of Ilya's hold and bumping their captain back by the shoulder, they'd already be a point behind.

Shane snaps his stick down, retrieving the lost puck and flying past Troy and Haas. Without Bood behind him, it's harder to find space around the defence, but one well-timed fake-out and slapshot has the puck sliding past them sans Shane, making good use of Chouinard's inexperience in goal to score.

"Fuck yes!" Shane grins, spinning back towards his team and clapping gloves with Dillon, who had slowed down Ilya after Bood.

“Is noble.” Ilya says, huffing as he leans down for another face-off, “Having team gang up on me so you can escape.”

Shane huffs, chewing on the edge of his mouth guard, “Take it as a compliment.”

“I am.”

Then the puck drops for the second time. Shane doesn’t win, and his team don’t react quite as fast, but they still manage to make a valiant effort at scoring.

It’s Haas who ends up taking the point, flying in front of Dillon, ducking around Dykstra, and making two shots on Hayes before the puck slips below the goalie’s thigh.

“Yes rook!” Bood can’t help himself, clearly. He cheers and pats the kid on the shoulders, all of them crowding around.

Ilya is a few strides back, standing next to the boards Shane had checked him into.

“He’s coming for your job, Cap!” Hayes laughs, shoving Haas towards them.

“Yeah, if you ever need a game off, he’ll keep your seat warm!”

Dykstra grins, shoving at Hayes, “You’re embarrassing the poor kid!”

“Oi! Stop it Evan, no! The kid looks like the cat who got the cream! He’s loving it!”

Ilya’s face scrunches up like he doesn’t quite get the idiom, and it’s only made worse by Haas laughing from beside them.

Shane hadn’t realised they’d all skated back to where Harris had set up the camera, and both he and Haas clock it as it pans closer, focusing.

“Sorry.” He flushes deep red. “I’m not here. Pretend I’m not here, it’s really for the best.”

“No, you laugh at Captain!” Ilya crosses his arms, “Do you know punishment for laughing at Captain?”

According to Ilya at centre-ice before the games began, it was a spanking before bed. Shane thinks that particular consequence might just be for him, though.

“Uh, bag skates?” Haas guesses with a frown and a cock of his head.

“A beer at my place for having the balls!” Bood yells from the background.

Ilya grins, and his stick clatters to the ground, and he dives at Haas.

Haas screams and pushes off the boards, the two of them speeding away until Ilya can grab him at the middle, hitting the boards on the other side of the rink with a thump.

The camera pans back to Shane, and he holds his gloved hands up in surrender, “We’ll try again later?” He offers. He already knows this clip is making it into the video, though.

-

“Gold. Absolute gold! Thanks for your time, you two.” Harris and his assistant are very happy on the sidelines, and Shane pants as he finishes his part of the last drill Wiebe had them running. For all their fun at the start of practice, they had really knuckled down in the second half.

Ilya is not far behind him, bringing up the rest of the team at the rear, tearing off his helmet to shake the sweat out of his hair.

Shane grimaces, leaning away, “You stink, Roz.” He huffs, “Go shake like a dog somewhere else.”

The grin he gets in return for the comment is wolfish and disgustingly self-satisfied, so maybe there’s some truth in the chirp after all. He cannot say whatever he is thinking aloud because instead of reply, his eyes trail down Shane’s body.

Shane has to look away, coughing and reaching for his water bottle.

“We’re all disgusting. You guys absolutely cannot come into my house like this.” Bood fills in after a little while of quiet panting and hydrating.

“Fuck you, we worked hard today.” Somebody else comments, setting off a round of cheers and laughter.

“I’m just saying, every single one of you better *scrub*.” Bood laughs, patting Dykstra on the shoulder as he skates past and is the first one to hop off the ice.

Shane watches them all go, feeling a certain responsibility in his *AC* to make sure they’re all in the showers getting clean first. And, of course, it gives him a scant few private moments with Ilya.

“I am dog, you are kitten.” He says.

Shane laughs, mostly because it’s not the explicit come-on he was expecting. Just a tease.

“Fine.” Shane rolls his eyes, pushing towards the boards, “Come on, boy.” He grins.

Ilya follows with a matching one.

-

“Here.”

Shane glances up from the game on the TV to see Ilya is the shadow leaning over him on the sofa, offering him a can of ginger ale. Beside him Dillon looks up, watching the exchange.

“Thanks.” Shane accepts the drink, cracking it and taking a sip. It’s his favourite kind, and he’ll need to thank Bood’s wife later for bothering. Nobody in Montreal ever bothered other than Hayden.

“Is no problem. Boring drink for boring player.” Ilya chirps, but it’s pretty half-hearted. He slots himself between Dillon and Shane, setting into the cushions with an exaggerated exhale.

Dillon glances over the back of his neck, meeting Shane’s eye. The question is clear. *You want me to make him move?*

Shane just shrugs and looks away, down at his drink. He appreciates everyone is tiptoeing around them for his sake, but it’s really not necessary and he’s been doing his best to show them that all day.

When ignoring the issue hadn’t worked before practice, and his chirping had been written off as a performance for the cameras, he had purposefully sat on Ilya’s bench in the locker room, chatting to him. Clearly that wasn’t quite enough, either.

Thankfully Dillon doesn’t have any time to comment aloud, because Troy takes that as his moment to arrive, the last one to filter back in after doing a quick turn-around at home, by the looks of it.

“Hey Barrett!” Hayes calls, lifting his sock-clad feet and waving with them, hands far too full of beer and Bood’s dog.

“Hey guys.” Troy calls back, per usual, but there’s something in his tone Shane isn’t sure if he likes. Something that wobbles, a familiar nervousness. He can’t help how his eyes snap to Ilya’s.

Ilya is already looking at him, brow furrowed. Clearly, he had heard it too.

“You are okay, Barrett?” Ilya asks.

Troy doesn’t take a seat. Shane recognises that feeling, too. The feeling when every bone in you’re body is telling you to run, to protect yourself. The feeling when you’re not sure if a seat is safe.

“Oh. Right. Yeah.” He flushes, and stares directly down at his feet, “Um. Sorry I’m late. I was... well, I got caught up with Harris.”

A beat.

Hayes laughs, as loud and boisterous as always, “Fuck, man, you said that like you were admitting to a murder. Whatever, Harris needs us all for media shit eventually. He was all over Hollzy today.”

It's not untrue, but he is too drunk to see that's clearly not what is eating at Troy.

"I mean—" The poor guy looks up at the ceiling, then down at the floor again. His hands clench, unclench. "At my house. Harris. At my house. Because he's my boyfriend now."

Troy is a Dom, Shane knows this. A low one he assumes, both from some offhand comments Ilya has made and the fact that he's never issued an order that Shane has heard. He's not sure if a one or a two is even possible— though perhaps that is hypocritical, because Shane's ten is just as extreme— but maybe he's a three or a four.

Harris is also a Dom. Somebody said he was a six-point-five, once. Maybe it had even been Troy who had shared that, Shane isn't sure. It's not a bad score. Average leaning towards high.

It's not... well, it's not forbidden, but it's definitely *different*. Two Doms. A Dom taking down another Dom. And Shane knows a little something about being different, so he makes sure he's the first to raise his can, "Nice one, Barrett."

Ilya is not far behind, winking at him with a grin. The others all chiming in with congratulations and quickfire questions that make Troy look very overwhelmed, in a happy sort of way.

Dillon stands and moves to sit with him by the fireplace, ribbing and teasing him relentlessly about how long he's been crushing on the *cute* social media manager.

It's... nice.

Shane can't even imagine what Montreal's locker room would have been like after that kind of admission. Hell on earth, probably.

Here, it is business as usual, and Shane can keep melting back into the sofa cushions, satisfied after a long day doing all the things he loves— hockey, chirping with Ilya, hanging out with his team. He's a simple person with simple needs, really.

The satisfaction doesn't last forever, though. He finishes his drink and pets Bood's dog when it passes by, and suddenly he feels a little restless, a little itchy under the skin of his hands. Maybe there's even a quieting of his thoughts, a gentle buzz at the base of his skull.

"You tired yet?" He asks Ilya under his breath, glancing to the side. He is very glad the Dom had not left his side, "Today... today's made me a bit, well, I don't know, *slippy*."

Ilya is listening politely, the picture of bone-deep tired and relaxed, until he hears that one word. Then his eyes snap to Shane's, "Slippy."

Shane nods, "Yeah. Slippy."

"Okay, let's go. Up. Go."

He's not sure what excuse Ilya makes for them leaving, but they're all well-used to Shane taking an Uber and Ilya offering to drive him home. Nobody bats an eye. If anything, it just

sells the story that they're still friends even better.

-

"Sit down."

Shane eyes Ilya from the bathroom door. It's almost like waiting for the other shoe to drop as he waits, trying to figure out what Ilya's game plan is. He never likes to tell.

His words aren't an order quite yet, so Shane ignores them, instead reaching to remove his hoodie and place it in the laundry hamper.

"You are not going to make this easy, are you?" Ilya groans, rolling his eyes, "Never easy, with your little claws."

Again with Ilya's favourite stupid metaphor. Shane knows he is scowling, and he knows he doesn't really mean it as he snaps back, "Stop it."

"Ah, shh..." Ilya grins, and doesn't hesitate to reach out, hand brushing back through Shane's hair. He's probably messing it up, but Shane doesn't care. It feels nice. "I am proud of you, you know."

"Really?" Shane's eyes snap back open, because something about how Ilya says it is just too suspicious. But he doesn't find anything other than genuine honesty on his Dom's face so he lets himself melt a little with the praise. Just a little.

"*Da*. Really. Is not easy asking for what you want."

"I know what I want. I tell you all the time."

He really does. He gives his opinions on their plays, he chats loudly with the team at hangs, he has no issue demanding ginger ales and whatever specific kind of takeout he wants after Ilya fucks him into oblivion. He had, not half an hour ago, told Ilya very succinctly that he was slipping into Subspace and wanted to go home.

"Sometimes, yes, okay. So what do you want now?"

Shane hesitates, because... yeah. Ilya is probably right. Irritatingly. They both know he isn't very good at deciding like *this*. He doesn't *want* to decide right now, even if he could. His body is not letting him collapse the way he wants to. It's stuck, and Ilya is going to unstick him. That's the point.

"I already told you."

"No, you said you feel slippy. I will fix because it is what you need from me. What do you *want*?"

His words find someplace close to an order. It wracks Shane's body, a shiver rolling down his spine.

"Kiss." He mumbles.

Ilya grins blindingly and uses two hands on his cheeks to tilt Shane's head up and kiss him. The heat pooling in his gut spreads with every second their lips are pressed together, blurring the world around them, until it is just Shane and Ilya and nothing else.

Shane follows him when he moves away. The moment isn't broken yet, his head so quiet, his thoughts so slow. If he stays close, it will not come crashing back in. Ilya will keep him safe and faraway from all his worries.

"You are so sweet." Ilya's voice is husky, maybe just as overwhelmed as Shane feels, "Nobody would believe me."

Shane snorts.

"What?" Ilya tilts his chin back, raising an eyebrow. If it is meant to be strict and Dominant, it is not. It is boyish and gentle, paired with a tiny little smile that makes Shane's heart flutter.

"Nobody would believe *me*. That *you're* sweet." He murmurs, letting his head drop into Ilya's shoulder.

Ilya chuckles. He allows the flop of Shane's body against his, hugging him closer. Shane's arms find a home around Ilya's waist, resting there, fingering at the hem of his sweatpants absently.

"It's only you." Shane's words are muffled by the fabric of Ilya's shirt, but he knows Ilya can still hear him perfectly well, "Only ever been down for you."

Ilya's roaming hands pause. They rise up Shane's back, shifting forwards to his head, dragging it back from his shoulder. He moves Shane as he wants, holding his head tilted slightly upwards so they can lock eyes.

"What?" Shane scowls. He was very comfortable. This is very rude.

"I am looking for how gone you are, *kotik*."

"Shut up, you already knew that." Shane is aware he is whining, but he doesn't care. He pulls away, detangling his arms and drawing them in around himself.

Without Ilya, the room is cold.

"You knew I was... inexperienced. *Different*."

Like Troy and his low number and his attraction to Harris. Different. He doesn't say *defective*. For a long time he would have, but not anymore. He has a sneaking suspicion that Troy would have said defective, too. That they have lots in common.

He knows, however, that if he says *defective* he will be in trouble. Besides, Ilya has well and truly shown him that he is not, in fact, defective. He is perfectly capable of Subspace. Of being gentle and sweet and good. Of being bratty when he wants to be. Of *everything* he thought he couldn't be.

Ilya exhales sharply. Perhaps he is thinking the same. Perhaps he is just overwhelmed at the reminder he is Shane's first Dom. His *only* Dom. A good kind of overwhelmed, he hopes. The kind that pulls him tighter, sharpens his focus, leads him to his headspace.

In the end, Ilya doesn't say anything. He kisses him again, one peck, then another.

"Sweet." He mumbles through it, "**Come here.**"

Shane isn't sure exactly what Ilya had meant by the command, but he is eager to obey. There isn't a single muscle in his body that burns with the need to fight back. So Ilya gets an armful of Shane, who presses in as close as he possibly can, kissing any skin he can possibly find.

"Okay." Shane breathes through an inhale, "Here."

He feels Ilya kiss the top of his head, like he just can't help himself, "**On the bed, kotik.**"

Shane rushes to comply, Ilya's arms slipping away as he puts one knee up onto the bed, then the other. He doesn't need to look back to feel Ilya's attention is entirely on him.

"**On your back.**"

Shane rolls over. Ilya wastes no time in climbing over him, covering him with his body like a heavy blanket.

"**Breathe.**" He uses one splayed hand to run up and down his belly and ribs. Shane's held breath explodes out of his chest, shuddering.

"Good. So good. Look how easy you follow my commands, hm?" Ilya murmurs, "Whoever told you that you aren't good was lying."

Shane knows it was himself. Over and over and over again, he had told himself he was not made for Submission. He had told himself that so many times by the time he joined the NHL that he had gone numb. The bruise of it is still healing, and Ilya jabs at it relentlessly whenever he can. Shane keens with the ache, not able to move an inch under the commands lying thickly on his skin.

Ilya shifts, putting his weight back on his thighs and knees to free his hands, tugging at his shirt, tossing it off the bed behind him.

"**Help me.**"

Shane moves to Ilya's shorts, pushing them down.

Ilya just about manages to kick them off without toppling over, then finally curls back over Shane. It's much better like this, he thinks. He likes to be close, to feel like they're climbing

inside each other's skin.

Ilya kisses him then, too, at last. He is heavy with it, pressing their lips together for *onetwothree* before moving back, "Thank you." Then again, *onetwothreefour*, "You take care of me so well."

Shane feels himself smile. He knows it is already gooey and soft, knows he is already slipping and sliding down into his headspace at even the lightest of touches. Sometimes, it is just that easy.

Orders fizzling out, he feels light enough to lift his head and kiss Ilya's jaw, "Again." He pleads.

Ilya waits for him to rest his head back on the pillows, then gives him what he wants. *Onetwothreefourfive*. Even better.

"Again." He scowls, insistent when Ilya tries to lean back. "Please."

His hands are still lingering down by Ilya's legs, so he grips them around Ilya's thighs, squeezing.

Another kiss is laid on him, *onetwothree*.

Not good enough. Shane opens his mouth to speak, to whimper, to cry out if he has to. At the same time, he digs his fingers deeper into Ilya's thighs, fighting the fall as it becomes steeper.

"Hands above your head, **now**."

The ground gives way beneath him, and suddenly Shane is not sure which way is up. He gasps as his hands smack up against the pillows as if yanked, and his spine arches to chase the feeling of his stomach dropping out of his body, clenching all the way down to his toes.

Ilya is crooning something lowly, something that tastes like praise in his mouth, and Shane is helpless for it, pushing back against the command, pressing every inch of him up against Ilya's body that he can without moving his hands.

"*Please!*" He cries, and maybe that is the only word he knows, because he says it again when there's a hand pulling his shorts down, and again when there's a tongue laving around his cock, and *again* when he's coming so hard he might actually see stars.

His breath is jittery and wild— that's the first thing he realises as he claws his way a little bit closer to awareness. Then he realises that Ilya has finished undressing him, warm hands exploring his body, eager and wanting, but also... waiting.

He blinks his eyes open and his vision is a little blurry so close, but Ilya is there smiling down at him, so it's okay.

"Good boy." He murmurs, "You are here?"

“Here.” Shane is not quite sure how he manages the word so coherently when his body feels like lead and his head is empty of thoughts, teetering on the foggy edge of Subspace. But Ilya is lying between his legs, and he is solid and real. Shane squeezes his thighs, closes his hips, wants to feel closer.

Ilya pets his hair with one hand, bunches up the strands between his fingers and squeezes, “You will not fly away again, yes?”

Shane shakes his head, “No. Here.”

“Good boy.” Ilya repeats, “You are very good tonight. You must want it very bad.”

Shane relaxes back into the pillows. Now he is not tumbling so violently, he can enjoy the buzz. The feeling of being cared for. The shocks of pleasure in his body. The fuzziness that makes him eager to please. The beautiful smiles Ilya offers him when he is happy. He can lean into it all.

“I want to fuck you, *kotik*, yes?” Ilya asks at last, still watching him.

Shane nods. He wants nothing else. He’s not sure there is anything else.

“Okay. Good. But first—” Ilya shifts down Shane’s body. He kisses a trail down, stopping briefly at his spent, soft cock sitting between his legs, “—I think I promised my bratty Sub a spanking.”

Shane barely hears him. His body does all the reacting needed. Arches into his touch, moans, reaches for any part of Ilya he can find.

Ilya chuckles, “I take that as yes. Roll over.”

Shane is barely given half a second to respond, and he needn’t have bothered. Ilya moves him first, grabbing his shoulder and his thigh to flip him then dragging him to the edge of the bed.

Shane’s bare feet hit the wooden floor and he jerks. There’s nowhere to go because Ilya is still manhandling him, dragging him over his lap.

Shane fumbles, trying to work out exactly how his body will lie. It’s not awkward, per se, but his head is nearly at the floor and he has to grip one of Ilya’s ankles to steady himself.

His hand smooths over Shane’s backside, steady and firm. Shane likes that feeling. It is not unfamiliar— Ilya often fondles his ass, regardless of whether they’re playing or not. It doesn’t hurt, usually. Sometimes he offers a warning smack, or even a little pinch. None of that *hurts*. Not really.

“Shane.” Ilya calls, reaching one hand down to Shane’s hair, tugging, “You understand rules? You yell, you cry, you scream, I do not care. But you must count. I will not hit again until you count.”

Count. He has to *count*.

“Shane?”

“*Here.*”

The hand in his hair is dropped and instead splays over his shoulders, steadying him.

“Good boy. You have no idea how long I have wanted to turn this ass red. You will not sit straight for a week.”

“That’s—“ *mean*, is what Shane would have said, if Ilya’s hand hadn’t smacked him at the very same moment. He is not dumb enough to think it wasn’t timed like that on purpose.

He jerks, yelps. It’s more surprise than pain. He’s half expecting the next one to come instantly, for the blows to rain down on his skin. But it doesn’t come. Belatedly, Shane remembers he is meant to be counting. Ilya will not hit him again if he does not count.

“O-one.” He mutters, turning his head back down, squeezing his grip on Ilya’s ankle. He knows his voice is small. Counting feels... it feels a little stilted. Awkward. New.

Ilya does not give him time to contemplate it for long. The second strike hits his other cheek. Shane jerks but doesn’t yell. He had been expecting the feel of it, the weight of his palm, the intensity of the sting.

“Two.”

The third is lower, towards his sit-spot and slapped across both cheeks. It feels harder—Ilya is not a weak man. Those bulging muscles he often admires might actually be the death of him tonight. Shane kicks out a leg, writhing. The only thing that keeps him from falling off Ilya’s lap onto the floor is the hand on his torso, now squeezing his hip.

“Three!”

Tears prickle behind his eyes embarrassingly quickly. Shane can take pain, he knows he can. Why is it so much more intense like this? Why is he gasping for breath every time Ilya’s palm bites into his flesh?

“Four!”

He nearly chokes on his tongue as the tears start to fall, obscuring his vision. It hurts. His skin is on fire, and by the way Ilya is crooning, *you take it so well*, he thinks his ass might possibly blush redder than his cheeks.

“Five!”

There’s a slight change to their position. Shane is moved closer towards Ilya’s chest, and suddenly the Dom’s very hard and very obvious erection is pressed into Shane’s belly.

By ten Shane is a mess. He’s mumbling each count, sniffing and sobbing and crying in earnest.

By fifteen he has resorted to pleading with Ilya, to filling every spare second of space between the hits with *please, Ilya. Please stop. Please, I've learnt my lesson. Please, it hurts. Please, please please.*

Twenty is the moment a dam breaks inside of him, and he really tries to get away. It's useless, because his legs are shaking and his entire backside hurts like a bitch and all of his muscles have been replaced with jelly.

Mournful, he chokes out, "Twenty-one!" As another slap strikes both cheeks at once, right in the centre. The skin there hurts the most, has seen the most glancing blows, and Shane howls for all he's worth.

"I'll never chirp again— *twenty two*— I'll never chirp again I promise just stop I promise—"

But the twenty-third blow comes no matter what he says, just like he knows it will. Shane drops his head again, fumbling over, "Twenty three." As his muscles give out again.

Twenty four, five, and six are quiet. He gives up begging. Just mumbles and cries and sinks into the rhythm.

The rhythm is nice, he can admit. Every hit is orderly and numbered. Shane likes order. His eyes closed a while ago, and the darkness is relaxing too. The world is quieter. He can't remember why he's here, anymore. There is nothing much rattling around his head other than that Ilya had wanted him here. That's enough of a reason.

Somewhere after twenty-eight, he realises he's stopped counting. And the moment he stopped counting, the hand coming down on him had stopped too.

Instead it pets gently at the side of his thigh, somewhere that hasn't been touched yet and doesn't hurt at all.

Ilya doesn't hurry him through continuing, either. He is quiet, waiting for something.

Waiting for Shane. Right. Shane sniffs, and rather than say a number, he mumbles around salty, tear-wet lips, "Help me up, please."

Suddenly, he is righted. He yowls of course, because he is sat back on his sore ass, but Ilya shushes him with a breathless laugh, "You did so well, *moya lyubov*."

The praise helps, maybe. He presses a kiss to Shane's sternum, too, even while both his hands clutch at hot skin, kneading fingers into the red-hot bruise.

Shane squirms, jerking his hips to escape.

"I think you will not chirp your Dom again very soon." Ilya laughs to himself.

Shane scoffs and bats at him but misses, hand flying off into the air beside them, uncoordinated and loose, "Fuck you. I'll chirp you all I want."

"Mm, then you will have very red ass every night."

“Good.” Shane humphs, slumping down over Ilya’s torso, hooking his chin on Ilya’s shoulder. His head is far too heavy to hold up all on his own.

“Good? What have I done. I have created horny submissive monster!”

Ilya’s laugh is so nice. Sweet, like Subspace. Coated in sugar that’s all melty and warm. Shane wants more. So much more. A lifetime more, if he can have it.

Ilya rolls them back onto the bed, shuffling up to the pillows and laying Shane’s head back against them. He kisses him, and time slips away. It’s warm and unhurried and he really does taste like something sweet, cinnamon maybe. He tastes like home.

It doesn’t go on long enough. Shane whines high in his throat, but it is drowned out by the sound of Ilya kissing down his chest. He leaves sloppy, wet kisses all the way down to his cock.

For a moment, he holds it in his palm instead of diving forwards. Then he presses a kiss to the weeping head that has Shane moaning, and moves away again. Not fair.

Ilya puts both hands on the inside of his thighs and parts them. Shane doesn’t move. He knows Ilya likes this part, like the opening of a present on Christmas. He opens Shane’s legs until the muscles resist, and then pushes them a little bit further, as if it’s just to see how far he can go.

The answer is quite far. He does a lot of yoga, focuses on stretches that open his hips and relax his thighs. Maybe not exclusively for this purpose, but the result is the same.

One finger pokes at his hole and Shane tenses, then when it does not move and stays there, blunt, he relaxes.

Ilya pushes it inside without another word. This, he would not rush. He has never ordered Shane to open his legs, to let him touch, to let him inside. He has never had to, and Shane knows, knows it so acutely, that Ilya never would.

“Still so loose.” Ilya coos, able to slide a second finger inside, quickly followed by a third. It presses in, finding the wall of his hole and after one push, his prostate.

Shane jerks into the feeling, then yelps when it’s too much and pulls away again. He can’t even watch, his eyes are rolled back up to the ceiling, exhausted and spent already but feeling so, so good.

The pain on his ass is not forgotten, but it fizzles out behind the pleasure.

Ilya presses into the spot again, but his other hand holds Shane’s hip tight to the mattress, forcing him to ride through the pleasure, to take what is given. It isn’t long until he’s babbling again, lips moving without his brain.

“Please— Ilya, Ilya fuck me, Ilya I need it, I really—“ He groans, “I can’t— I’m going to cum again— no— I want to cum on your cock—“

Ilya Ilya Ilya.

He knows he's said the right thing when the fingers have left his ass. He whines again, but it's for nothing. Ilya pushes him onto his side, hiking one knee up to his chest, pulling his ass taut. The skin stings, protests.

Ilya is a blanket behind him, one hand keeping Shane's knee pushed outwards, the other squeezing over his shoulder and—

He sinks in quickly, all the way to the hilt. He meets almost no resistance, and his thick, blunt tip scrapes along Shane's prostate. Perhaps later he will be embarrassed how he stuffs his face into the pillow and fucks himself back on Ilya's cock, grinding it deeper into that perfect spot inside of him, but he is not embarrassed now. He just wants more.

And Ilya gives it to him. He fucks in and out, setting a fast, uneven pace. They both know he will not last. He has been too hard for too long.

"So fucking good for me." He groans, "Take it all so fucking well, so fucking pretty, so fucking submissive, you just bend over for me, don't you?"

Ilya tugs on his hair, dragging his head out of the pillow, "Tell me." He breathes, his lips nipping and biting at the soft skin on his neck.

Shane's tongue feels tied.

"Tell me, or I will *order* you." Ilya growls, punctuating his words with a particularly deep thrust, pausing there, grinding his hips in slow circles.

Shane pants with it, moans with it, yells out with it, "Yes! I like being pretty for you I like taking it all I like being submissive I like bending over I like being fucked! *Fuck—*"

His head twists, eyes screwing closed, biting back down on the pillow as his own hips start jerking, forwards into his own pleasure, his cumming dick, backwards into Ilya's cock, once, twice, thrice— Ilya takes over again, pushing him onto his front, shadow towering over him from behind, chasing the end of his pleasure at the pace he needs.

Shane thinks his entire body is going to be set on fire. One hand presses against his back, flattens him to the bed. Each thrust smacks Ilya's hips against his ass, lighting up the bruises on his backside. The other hand squeezes the back of his neck. Shane doesn't need any more pleasure right now, and the pricks of pain all over send him flying away from the room, ascending to fucking heaven probably.

And then Ilya groans, and then there's heat inside of him, bursting, and Ilya is collapsing on top of him, spent.

Shane doesn't know where he goes, but he fights to pull himself back to the room. Ilya had wanted him *here*, not so deep in Subspace he couldn't remember his own name.

"Shane Hollander."

Above him, he feels Ilya's loose body tense up, "What?"

Shane turns his head to the side, makes room for fresh air and words, "Shane... Hollander..." He knows he's mumbling, tripping over his tongue, but it feels too big for his mouth.

"Shane..." There's a hand in his hair, just stroking, and that feels good. He will definitely stay here, if it's going to feel so good. He will not fly away. "Are you okay? You are speaking nonsense."

Shane snorts. It's not funny. Or maybe it is. His head is like cotton wool, stuffed to the brim but with nothing of substance.

He feels his body being bullied back over, and the light from the windows shines down on his face, warm. It's easier to breathe without a heavy body squishing into his, but it's also harder to remember why he is trying to stay afloat.

"No I—" Shane snorts again, flapping out a hand and trying to find Ilya. He's not sure where it lands but Ilya catches it and threads their fingers together. He thinks maybe there's a light kiss placed on the back of his palm.

"Was worried I'd forget my name. In— In space."

It felt like space. When he closed his eyes and came for the second time, it was like he was staring directly into a supernova, everything flooding him all at once. Pain, pleasure, it didn't matter. Everything was just *there*.

"Subspace."

Shane tries to huff, but his lips smack together instead. What isn't his Dom getting? Stars. Supernova. "Space space."

"I— You are okay?"

He can't help the grin he feels, splitting his entire face in two. His eyes even manage to crack open a little, and the view he is greeted with is magnificent enough to open them properly.

Ilya Rozanov, straddling his hips, hand clutched to his. His muscles are shining with sweat, straining and bulging like they are fresh off the ice. If anything is like space, his moles are like the stars, little constellations Shane suddenly wants to map. Maybe with his fingers now, tongue later.

"Here." He remembers to say, suddenly, because how is Ilya meant to know he is here if he doesn't *say* it? Maybe that's why his Dom is so worried. *His* Dom. When had he started thinking like that so casually?

"Here." He repeats, "Am good, cos 'm here."

Ilya's very serious, very frowny face melts, "Yes." He agrees, leaning down and slotting himself into Shane's side, eyes firmly on him with every tiny movement, "You are always good. Extra good today, yes? For holding on."

Shane can't help but preen. "I am." He declares, "Best Sub."

It's Ilya's turn to snort this time, soft and amused. There's *definitely* a kiss pressed to Shane's shoulder. "Of course, *moya lyubov*."

Shane knows that one. He laughs, turning his head closer to where he thinks Ilya's is, forehead bumping against his arm, nuzzling closer.

"You..." He trails off, "Sure know how to do a number on me. 'S rude."

"*Da?* You did not like?" Ilya asks, but Shane knows that this time he is just teasing. In fact...

"No. Not at all. Not the part where I came twice or where I forgot my name. Don't be smug." He doesn't need to be looking at Ilya to know he is smirking. Confirmation comes when Ilya kisses his forehead, and he's still smiling so hard that Shane can feel his teeth.

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"Hollander." Wiebe calls, opening the door to his office and gesturing them both inside, "Rozanov."

Shane enters first, not surprised to find Terry waiting for them at the table with two little black drop-test machines. One has a little label of *S* on the top, and the other *D*. It doesn't take a genius to figure out which machine Shane needs to sit in front of.

Ilya follows him inside dutifully, muttering hellos to their coach, but approaches his machine with about twice as much skepticism.

"Afraid of a little needle?" Shane asks, perhaps a little too teasingly if Ilya is, in fact, actually afraid of needles. He's never seen Ilya get tested before. Last time there had been concerns about Shane's emotional state, so the nurse had taken them in one-by-one downstairs.

Ilya snorts and slaps his shoulder, "*No*." He's definitely afraid of needles. Shane grins. It's nice to know he's human, at least. Sometimes it feels like he's not afraid of *anything*.

The two of them sit and wait for their turn with Terry. Shane is first, accepting the little prick of his finger and then the bandaid after. Ilya pointedly looks away when it's his turn, closing his eyes.

"Are these the new rapid testers?" Shane asks, eyeing them. Since their agreement to test regularly, he's been looking into the mechanics of it all. Ilya had teased him, but he likes to be prepared.

"They are, yes." Terry nods, and true enough after he presses the green button on them, both machines beep in quick succession, showing little graphs on their screens after barely thirty seconds of waiting, rather than the usual five-or-so minutes.

Shane is close enough to see the graph on his machine, but he wishes he wasn't. He can feel himself flush bright red, and looks away. Why did he look? Curiosity kills the cat. He knows better.

"What?" Ilya asks, suddenly frowning, because of course he would be concerned, he's not an asshole. Or he is, but not like that.

Before Shane can push him away, he is leaning over his shoulder to have a look.

Ilya smiles, but quickly bites his lip and looks away, as if that is going to do anything to hide his obvious smugness— no, smug isn't enough. He's more than smug. He's entirely self-satisfied. Gloating even, if someone can gloat so fucking silently.

On both graphs, the lines are steady. On Shane's, there is a slow decline last night, and then a sharp peak that he is still pretty much resting at. Ilya's shows a mirrored picture, perfectly matched. If anyone was in any doubt they took each other to headspace together, it was long gone now.

"Ah." Ilya shrugs, as if trying to pass himself off as nonchalant, "That is excellent score, no?"

"*Ilya.*" Shane groans. Is he doomed to be embarrassed forever? It wouldn't be so bad if the stupid graph didn't show that they'd done it *yesterday*. They have to take these tests every month, too. He doubts Ilya would be very impressed to be cockblocked by a little drop-test machine once a month. He wouldn't be surprised if the asshole made a game of it.

Terry huffs and rolls his eyes. Shane has never been more thankful for his easy-going and endlessly professional nature. He's getting a very good Christmas present this year.

"Yes, Rozanov, those are both excellent baselines, and very high hormone peaks. Impressively matched, too. I wouldn't suspect such a high sub to be able to snap that quickly —"

Okay, nevermind. Apparently professional curiosity about high-level Subs wins out above all else. Terry is getting coal.

Even though Terry cuts himself off with an apologetic glance, the damage is done. Ilya has simply never looked so pleased. Not even last night when they'd created that... *hormone peak*.

Shane would rather die than discuss this at all, and it looks a little like Wiebe might be up for agreeing to a murder-suicide pact because he's very pointedly *not* looking Ilya in the eye anymore.

"Okay, are we done?" He asks, feeling strangled. Is the oxygen slowly seeping out of the room, or is that just him?

Wiebe clears his throat, "Yes. This will go into the file, and we'll take another next month."

"Great." Shane pushes up from his chair, "Let me know what day next time, so I can keep this one on a leash?" He hustles Ilya up, shoving at him to get out of the room.

“Is good thing! You are *healthy*.” Ilya protests once the door to the office has closed behind them. “Healthy because of *me*.” And maybe this look isn’t exactly smugness... maybe he looks a little proud?

It’s not endearing. It’s *not*.

Shane rolls his eyes, “Yeah. Whatever. Come on.” He tries to move away, but Ilya doesn’t let him.

“You are embarrassed.” Ilya mutters, one hand clasp around Shane’s bicep, tying him to the spot, pressing him back up against the wall.

“No.” Shane knows he is being difficult, okay? He knows that he’s not meant to lie. He knows if Ilya decides Shane is being annoying enough, he will take him straight back over his lap for another bruising spanking. The threat to spank him every day had been empty and teasing, but he’s not so stupid to think Ilya isn’t going to take advantage of this new form of discipline.

It’s their *first* form of discipline, really. Shane is always happy to comply, after a little needling and fucking.

His ass needs a break already. He’d had to glare at Ilya for a solid five minutes over breakfast before he relented and agreed to let him use numbing cream.

Shane shrugs as he finally answers, “A little, maybe. I don’t know. I just don’t like being the centre of attention like that. And move, someone could see us.”

“Hmm.”

Ilya looks lost in thought, but seems to accept this as the truth because he listens, moving away to a more acceptable distance.

They both know their time before they have to come out as a couple to the team is numbered. God knows they have not been very subtle as of late. But neither of them want it to happen on *accident*. They want to say their piece at the right time.

Shane peels away from the wall, “What do you mean, *hmm*?”

“I mean, we will have to practice. With you as centre of attention. I have lots of ideas.”

Fuck, Shane wants to hear them. If he drops to his knees and asks *really* nicely, he thinks Ilya might actually share a few.

But unfortunately he is a realist, and he knows they have to go to practice first. Skipping is not an option when your sights are set on the Stanley Cup.

It doesn’t stop him from volleying a muttered, “I hate you.” In Ilya’s direction.

Ilya’s answering grin is back to being insufferably smug. “No, I don’t think this is true. Test says otherwise.”

Chapter End Notes

Fully intended to post this on Sunday but instead I took a few days off and then edited the previous chapters instead lol. I was happy with 1/2/3 but edited 4/5/6.

The edits were not crazy, just changing some of Shane's internal dialogue to fit his progression better (and grammar). I wouldn't necessarily go back and reread but when the work is finished I think it'll just read better.

Anyways enjoyyy!! We're so close to the end, next chapter ties everything up I promiseee ✨

Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

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

The Stanley Cup finals.

Shane has been here twice, and he has won twice. His track record is fantastic, because of course it is. He is one of the best players the league has, part of one of the most successful teams.

Or, *was*.

This year instead of sitting amongst a sea of montreal-blue, Shane is being swallowed by a pit of centaurs-red.

Hayden is not pressed up against his side, frantically texting his final words to Jackie like a dying man. J.J. is not muttering to himself in French. Mitty is not stretched out on the floor, taking up half the space to stretch his hips. Comeau is not peacocking around the room, yelling and howling and barking like some rabid, wild animal.

It should feel *wrong*. Except somehow it doesn't.

Shane misses Hayden like a lost limb, how could he not, but the rest... the rest is fine. Ilya is at his side. Haas is muttering to himself in German. Hayes is stretching. Bood is patting Chouinard on the back, laughing boisterously as they scuffle.

The whole team has been feeling the pressure for weeks, but right now none of them are worried. This is the furthest they have ever gotten in the playoffs. The fucking *finals*. No matter the result, every single one of them will go home happy.

Shane has always been an all-or-nothing kind of person, though. He knows he will only be truly happy with one result.

That's why his knee jerks up and down, shaking relentlessly. That's why his hands claw into his thighs. That's why his breathing is being tightly controlled. *In for four, hold for four, out for four.*

The game is set to begin soon, and the torturous wait will finally end.

Ilya clears his throat, and every eye in the locker room snaps to him. To their captain. The speech is short and sweet. Music to Shane's ears as his voice rises in volume, passion and aggression leaking out bit by bit as the seconds tick down.

His last words feel like a declaration of war.

Ilya is grinning, voice booming from the walls. Then they're moving, a sea of black and red crashing down the hallway towards the crowd. Shane walks at the back like he always does,

making sure every single skate is safely on the ice before his.

Far in front of him Ilya is leading the charge, shoulders set, chin up, ready. It makes Shane feel ready too. Last night he had knelt under the shadow of those shoulders in such holy silence, it hadn't felt real when he'd been pulled back up and coaxed into speaking again.

There is nothing silent about the room now. Fans screaming their throats dry, announcements booming over the mics, players clattering about the bench.

Shane finds his spot on the ice without needing to think about it. His skates know exactly where to go: stick down, eyes front, he waits at the centre of the rink.

Scott Hunter floats up in front of him. If he's surprised to see Shane on the starting line instead of Ilya, he doesn't show it. He lowers himself, straightens his stance, flexes his hands around his stick.

"No chirp?" He asks.

Shane moves his gaze down to the ice, to the exact point he thinks the puck will land. That's where he will take it, where he will swipe his stick and steal it from Scott.

"I don't need chirps to win." Shane says.

In for four, hold for four, out for four. He'd practiced those breaths last night too, with Ilya's hand on his chest. Pressing, relaxing, pressing, relaxing. He can feel the weight of the touch on him now, ghosting all over his body.

"Neither do I."

The puck drops.

Shane wins.

-

Everything after the buzzer was a blur. Shane can barely remember having his hands on the cup, but later he will open his phone and see a picture of him hoisting it above his head, a mindless grin on his sweaty face.

There had been hugs and cheers and pats on the back, too. The families who had made the trip to the game had flooded the ice. Not as many as a home win, but they will do that next year.

The celebration had followed them back into the locker room, of course. There was champagne to pop and an entire night of partying to be planned in the next thirty minutes.

Ilya meets him halfway across the room, striding over with a single-minded purpose. It is the most reminiscent of Domspace Ilya has ever looked outside of their bedroom. So tense and focussed. So utterly elated. So like he could conquer the world.

They'd conquered the hockey world, at least.

"Fuck!" Shane knows he is grinning like a maniac, because why wouldn't he be? "Fuck you! Fucking hell! We fucking won!"

Ilya's arms swing around his middle, hoisting him half a foot into the air and spinning them around. It feels like half the team piles on, some of them throwing themselves around Shane from behind, some of them around Ilya.

The world blurs again, and Shane locks his ankles around Ilya's waist. Ilya leans in close, smelling like sweat and pride and the anxious cigarette he'd had before the game.

When he kisses Shane, it's not that it's unexpected. It's just— there had been a plan. A carefully-crafted speech. A list of confident reassurances prepared for the team members who might resist the idea of a couple playing together.

In this moment, Shane can't remember a single thing they'd decided. He can't remember anything at all. Maybe he doesn't even know his own name anymore.

All he knows is they won, and he won, and Ilya won, and they did it *together*.

Ilya pulls away from the kiss quickly, too quickly. His grin is utterly infectious.

"A beautiful fucking goal from my beautiful fucking Sub!"

Oh yeah. Shane knows that, too. He knows he scored the winning goal with a textbook perfect backhand shot that he will use as his retort to Ilya's teasing every day for the rest of their lives.

"Fuck yes, Holl-and-er! *Holl-and-er! Holl-and-er!*"

Shane is pretty sure it's Hayes who starts the chant from where he is squished between Chouinard and Dykstra. It echoes through the room and sinks into his bones and *fuck it*— he kisses Ilya again, and this time he doesn't pull away.

-

"Hey Mom." Shane sighs, lurching forwards onto the sofa, muscles aching and exhausted after using the home-gym, "You know you don't have to keep calling. I know you're happy I won."

A beat. All there is is silence. Static, but not quite. Shane can feel his frown as he takes the phone away from his face to check the call is still connected. Maybe it had been a misdial?

“Mom? Is the line dead?”

Ilya enters the living room, his own face shiny with a thin layer of sweat, golden curls stuck to the sides of his face.

“*Shane.*”

She doesn’t say it, not aloud, but the tone is enough. Shane knows that tone. He has relived the memory of sitting in that hospital bed after Billy Benson a thousand times. The sadness. The shock. The *grief*.

“*Shane I’m so sorry—*”

His first instinct is to hang up on her. Hearing her say it would make it too real. So instead he stares down at the blank screen for a second. Then two. Then his fingers are moving faster than the speed of light, opening Google and typing in his name.

He knows before he sees it. He just *knows*. Seeing it is just a torturous confirmation, putting him out of his misery. It’s splashed on every news website and gossip page there is. It’s even trending on Twitter.

For the past few days, their cup win had been trending in all the usual hockey spaces. It’s a good story— everyone likes an underdog.

Today, however, his name is trending just about everywhere. Not his team. Not their win. *Him.*

The clip auto-starts on Twitter.

“And how do you feel about the Centaurs? They are the new big threat, it seems, winning the cup with Rozanov as Captain and Hollander newly minted as Alternate after just a few short months with them.”

“Oh. We’re happy for Hollander, definitely. It’s such a groundbreaking thing to do, isn’t it, a Sub playing hockey?”

The player is wearing a Montreal jersey, but it’s not Drapeau. It’s not Comeau. It’s not even fucking Mitty. Shane barely even remembers his face. That makes it worse: how *malicious* it feels. He had no skin in the game. And yet— yet there he is sat across from an interviewer, smirking like the cat who got the *fucking* cream.

He pretends it’s a slip of the tongue, makes a show of gasping and apologising, but the smirk never fades.

Shane feels the phone slide out of his hand. Maybe it hits the floor, maybe it doesn’t.

The room disappears around him. For one single lurching moment, Shane is nowhere. He is surrounded by nothingness. Even the chewing feeling of dread cannot follow him here. Just the sound of that clip repeating over and over again, skipping back to that last line like a broken record player.

A sub playing hockey.

A sub.

Sub.

Shane is, and always has been, a fucking—

Shane gasps. He gulps in breath greedily, taking and taking, barely leaving enough time to exhale between breaths.

There are hands on him, two solid anchors dragging him back from wherever *that* had been. Whatever twisted, terrible place his mind had taken him.

In some ways, it felt like Subspace. His headspace is empty. Dark. A kind of calm that is rare in his crazy life.

The quiet of this new place was not calming. It had felt vast and echoing, like an empty chasm stretching out around him. Cold, even, if the goosebumps wracking up and down his arms had anything to say about it.

“Shane.”

Ilya’s voice filters through slower than his touch.

“Shane, I need you to tell me what to do.”

Of course Ilya expects him to know what to do. Shane is a chronic planner. He overthinks every small detail. He writes lists of lists he needs to write. There’s always a statement ready on his phone, a PR-approved answer balanced on the tip of his tongue.

But not for this.

Shane *doesn’t* know, and his career is over and his head is swimming and Ilya is probably really fucking disappointed in him.

He’s hopeless. A failure. Winning the cup is a curse. Every year he pushes, and he wins, and then he also loses. What’s the fucking point?

“Shane, I need you to look at me.” Hazel eyes.

“Are you here?” No.

“Shane, I need you to speak.” No.

“Shane. **Speak.**” His muscles burn. Why do they burn?

“**Please.**” His jaw is creaking. He wants it to stop.

“No, no, please don’t cry. *Shh.* Is going to be okay. You have to be okay—“

-

Returning to reality from a drop feels a little like coming out of a deep sleep. His eyes feel glued shut, and his muscles feel heavy, and everything around him is warm.

It’s not a bad feeling, really. Not until he opens his eyes, at least. Opening his eyes is like releasing the floodgates: the entire world comes crashing down around him for the second time that day.

A sub playing hockey.

Even the thought, the mere memory of the words, threatens to yank him back underwater. His head rings with it, heartbeat pulsing behind his eyes rather than in his chest where it should be.

Perhaps that’s how he feels— like someone had turned him upside-down and shaken him around, dislodging everything from its rightful place.

“*Ilya.*”

That particular desire, at least, is still in its usual place. A deep-seated and aching need for his Dom when he is scared. A need to be close. A confidence that nothing bad will happen to him if Ilya is there.

“Shane?”

There’s a crack in Ilya’s voice. Something different than usual, high-pitched and maybe just as terrified as Shane had felt when he’d clicked on that video.

Despite the awful pain bursting behind his eyes Shane opens them again, suddenly more desperate to lay eyes on Ilya than he is to avoid the world.

He wants to touch Ilya. He wants to be so close that he can crawl into his skin and make a home there, a place where the news and the gossip can’t find him.

Shane can't remember when they had moved into the bedroom. He is lying back on the bed and Ilya is perched on the edge, hovering over him. His hair is all mussed up, and his eyes are red-rimmed.

Ilya had cried? Had Shane cried? Was it Shane's fault Ilya was crying?

"Ilya—" Shane feels his desperation grow tenfold. He springs up from the bed so fast he nearly smacks their foreheads together. Not that a concussion could make this situation any worse. Not knowing what was happening might even make it better.

The whole world knows he is a Sub. What the *fuck*.

"Shh... yes. Is okay. Is okay." Ilya repeats the words over and over in a quiet, mumbled mantra. His breath tickles against Shane's scalp, accent thick. It always gets thick like that when he's tired, when he's worried, when he's both.

While Ilya holds him, feeling slowly trickles back into Shane's body, aches wracking up and down his limbs. Sharp, bone-melting aches, the kind he gets after a particularly gruelling practice with bag skates until he puked.

"My body hurts." He says, because his brain-to-mouth filter is apparently not a priority for his body in survival mode, and it's one of the very last things to return.

Ilya doesn't seem to mind. He turns his head, the line of his jaw bumping against the top of Shane's head, "Orders." He says, "You did not... respond. I was very scared. I am sorry, *moya lyubov*."

"Oh."

There is nothing else to say. Shane hadn't been in control. He definitely hadn't been the one choosing to drop. His body took over to protect itself. Everything had just threatened to be too overwhelming, too sharply terrifying.

Of course he knows he is safe with Ilya. But driven only by instinct, his body had clearly felt otherwise.

How much had Ilya had to push to get him here, lying back in bed? How many orders had wracked through his body, pressing down on his lungs, tearing at his limbs?

In every aching muscle, Shane isn't just feeling his own pain. He is feeling Ilya's desperation. His panic. His dominance, clawing Shane back to the surface tiny piece by tiny piece.

Shane hadn't been shaking when he woke up, but he certainly is now. They are full body trembles that chatter his teeth.

Ilya wastes no time in squeezing him tightly, in surrounding him as completely as he can, as if he can press the panic out from between them.

"How about warm bath?" He suggests, cheek still pressed into Shane's hair, "We have essential oil."

Nothing has ever sounded better. Shane nods, the movement awkwardly jerky and unstable, “Yeah. Yes. Mhm. Okay. Thank you.”

There’s a kiss on his hair, then his forehead, a trail of Ilya’s lips as he stands, savouring every last second of their closeness. His left hand is the last thing to leave, slipping up Shane’s forearm, along the crook of his elbow, up his bicep, ghosting over his cheek and—

“Ilya?”

A near-silent hum. The burn of two steady hazel eyes into Shane’s.

“*Thank you.*”

That earns him one last kiss. It searches, slow and intent, like he is learning the shape of Shane’s lips all over again— hesitant pressure giving way to an edge of desperation.

And then he is gone, moving up and away and leaving Shane there, staring after him, wondering how the hell they are going to deal with this.

The bath is quick to run and his brain is more disorganised than Ilya’s locker, so he doesn’t get very far. The hot water fogs up the bathroom mirror and steam fills the room. By the time the whole house is smelling sweetly of lavender, Shane’s body is aching twice as bad, a silent plea for him to get in and relax.

Ilya steadies him with hands on his sides, urging him down into the water and then back against the wall of the bath. The help is unnecessary, but certainly not unwelcome.

Well. While it is not *physically* necessary, it is in other ways. Emotionally, definitely. The thing about drops is that they do not just disappear. They linger. Fester. Bury themselves deep into every crack. Shane’s legs might be steady, but his heart is still hurting. Tears gather. There’s a foreign, dizzying ache behind his eyes.

Holding Ilya’s hand makes everything ease, just slightly. Their fingers slot together neatly, hanging down by the side of the tub.

“It’s perfect.”

Ilya exhales like he had been waiting for the confirmation. Like a bath that wasn’t *just right* would have been the straw that broke the camel’s back.

“Good.”

A beat, a moment of hesitation that so unlike Ilya that Shane has to squeeze their hands again to remind himself this is still real. Though waking up from a dream right now wouldn’t be too bad, all things considered.

“Your phone has been ringing lots. I have not answered anything.”

Shane sighs, then offers a shrug. He is far too tired for words, and the steam is settling him almost too well. It is calling him towards a real sleep, a perfect eight hours of lingering

lavender and soft touches. Is that so much to ask for?

“Later?” He manages, even as his eyes slip closed.

“Is up to you.”

“I don’t want it to be. This fucking sucks.” Which is the understatement of the century, obviously.

Another stretching silence passes them by. Shane does not want to open his eyes. Perhaps if he never opens them again they can stay here forever, suspended in the memory.

“The only good part is *this*.” Shane finds himself filling the silence, fumbling over words too simple for his messy, complicated thoughts, “You. But it’s awful, too. You shouldn’t have to deal with this. With me, being such a mess—“

Ilya doesn’t let him finish. His tone is razor sharp. Not quite like an insult thrown on the ice — a snap of teeth fit for a feral dog— but they are undeniably firm. “You are mine. Is my job.”

Shane’s eyes fly open. *You are mine*. His body, of course, is wired to like the feeling of possession. But rest of him fights it, mind far too messy and busy to give in so easily. His already exhausted muscles tense, all bunched up and knotted.

“But it’s a *lot*.” He argues. That is fact. They can deny it all they like, but that doesn’t make it any less true.

Ilya’s face is irritatingly blank. He is not frowning or scowling or even smiling. He is just... watching.

Eventually he says, “If it was other way around, would you help me?”

“Yes.” Shane exhales, squeezing his eyes closed. The chance of sleep is long gone now. Everything is just so fucking messy now. What did he do in a past life to deserve this? “*Fuck*. I don’t know, Ilya, that’s a stupid question. We’re different people. I’d be just as anxious and probably still falling apart. All I’m saying is we deserved five fucking seconds to enjoy ourselves.”

That, Ilya has no argument for. His laugh is humourless, void of any joy or rumbling warmth it usually comes with. But it is a laugh. A laugh and a teasing tip of his head as he admits, “Yes, that is probably true.”

-

“I need to call my Mom back.”

Shane still feels... distant. His words feel slow and stilted, sapping all the energy out of him in order to push them from his throat.

"I need to call my agent. Farah. And Coach. Everyone is going to be making statements. I don't—I don't want the league to get to paint the narrative. I want everyone to know the truth. How shit it's been."

Ilya sets a bowl down in front of him and nods along.

Ice cream stares back at Shane from the bottom of the dish. Vanilla. Chocolate sprinkles. Caramel syrup. Shane's nutritionist would curl himself up into a ball and cry himself to sleep. The ice cream isn't even that kind made with coconut milk he treats himself to occasionally. No, this ice cream had *Ben and Jerries* written on the container, alongside cartoon pictures of cows and clouds.

It feels risky. Wild. Out of character. Different. Everything is going to be different now, isn't it?

"I'm sorry." He mumbles, pulling his knees up onto the chair with him, tucking them into his chest. They are a welcome pressure.

Ilya only frowns at him again. He hasn't smiled all day. Their lazy morning and teasing competition on the exercise bikes feels so far away. How could that have possibly been just this morning?

Shane doesn't give Ilya time to speak. He doesn't want to be interrupted. "You should be getting to celebrate our win. Domming someone. Partying. Not..."

Not this. Not tears and drops and ice cream. This feels more like a breakup than a party.

A breakup.

Once he has had the thought, it lodges in his gut, a sharp piece of shrapnel from the bomb that had just exploded his life. Is this too much for Ilya? Will this be their breaking point?

A hand snakes over the tabletop, squeezing Shane's with a confidence he feels jealous of.

"I am here." Ilya says. *Here*. As if he is not the Dom. As if for once Shane is leading the charge, and he is just following. Had he asked Shane for that reassurance during his drop? Had Shane been good and answered, or is the question still lingering in the air? Is Ilya sat here having these same doubts, wondering if this is where everything comes crashing down around them?

"I am with my Sub. I am exactly where I want to be."

Shane has to ignore the way his heart stutters. He didn't know it ten seconds ago, but now he does: he cannot leave this table without being certain. He cannot breathe until he knows if this is it. If they are going to be together. What are the words? *For better or worse. In sickness and in health. For richer or poorer.*

“People will talk. Now that they know, if we get spotted—“

“Let them talk. We won the cup. Who *cares*? We won, Shane.”

Safe to say Ilya is not going anywhere any time soon.

-

In the end, he doesn't outright say anything.

The league publishes a statement that asks for player privacy and not-so-subtly covers their own backs, pretending they had been managing his designation and taking care of him since day one. Only a select few people know that this is not the truth, but Shane doesn't bother to correct anyone. It works in his favour, their begrudging support.

Nothing with the Centaurs changes. Harris sends a text the length of a Jane Austin novel with options for the team's statement, and it takes Shane an embarrassingly long time to realise he's asking for Shane's *opinion*. Like his voice *matters*.

Ilya manages to wait half a day before posting a set of pictures to his Instagram, pictures that blur the lines between *are-they* and *aren't-they*. Breakfast in bed. Swimming in the lake. Laughing in the kitchen. All recent, all from the few brief weekends they'd managed to spend in the cottage. The cottage, where it feels like they can most easily be themselves.

Rumors get spread of course, and the internet goes crazy because of course, and nothing will ever stop it when it wants to explode, because *of course*.

It's not easy. But they manage.

-

“*Shane*.” Ilya groans, walking in from the bathroom. With him comes a cloud of soap and shampoo and aftershave, smells lingering in the air with the escaping steam. He doesn't need to ask what Shane is doing on his phone. He has seen it enough, the little frown Shane knows is etched onto his face whenever he opens social media these days.

“I tell you not to watch these things.” He mutters, flopping down next to him, damp and leaving little droplets of water on the sheets. They're white. Shane should tell him to move, to dry off *properly*, not the half-assed way he usually does, patting absently at his limbs and then getting bored.

He doesn't. He should, he knows Ilya is waiting for it, but he doesn't. Other thoughts whizz around his head, driving circles around his brain faster than Ilya drives his ridiculous sports cars.

Shane doesn't look up. He scrolls by another tweet, humming.

Ilya's hand claps around his thigh. His other hand plucks the phone out of his grasp, tossing it behind him.

Shane groans, head falling back against the headboard with a quiet thump, "I can't help it."

Ilya's answering hum is soft, but the way he mouths at Shane's skin, teeth and all, is not. The way he grips at Shane's leg, nails digging into the muscle, is certainly not.

"What do I need to do." His breath is burning against Shane's neck, "To take you out of your head."

It's not a question. Not really. Even if it was, Shane would not have an answer. It's been a week, and still his phone sometimes gets so many notifications. So many mentions and likes and follows and unfollows— it feels like he needs to keep up with it. It feels like he needs to *know*. If he knows what people are saying, he has control of what he says back. Of how he acts. Of what he will say when the season starts again, and he will inevitably have to take post-game interviews where his designation will be on full blast.

"*Shane.*" Ilya sounds exasperated. Tired and heavy, rather than teasing.

Shane understands. It's late. They're both exhausted from dealing with this. He tilts his head, reaching sideways to kiss the corner of Ilya's mouth.

"I want—" He shifts, lifting his hands from the sheets and taking Ilya's shoulders, "I need... *quiet.*"

"Okay."

Ilya's hands make quick work of moving him away, shuffling down the bed and then padding across the room.

The view is good, of course, a treat in and of itself. Ilya has never once been ashamed off his body, and certainly not of showing it off to Shane. Shane is not necessarily ashamed either, but there's always a little burn of shyness when he is asked to strip, to stand there and let Ilya watch.

Ilya flicks the lights down low, leaving only the bedside lamp left on. He closes the door. He closes the curtains, too, shuttering out any last inkling of the outside world.

Then his attention is turned back to Shane. Single-minded. Intense, but not in the busy way he looks sometimes when he's thinking of all the possibilities, all the ways he can have Shane. No. This is... well, it's *quiet*. He is slow as he moves. His eyes laze over Shane, slow and unhurried as he takes in his own view.

Shane realises, abruptly, that Ilya is in his headspace already. They haven't played much lately, he knows. Not since his drop. Not for any reason, really. Shane isn't afraid. Ilya doesn't seem tentative about it. They've just been busy.

This might be the first time ever that Shane has seen Ilya a little deprived. Apparently, he becomes like he's resting on a hair-trigger. He slips quickly and without fanfare. His limbs get heavy from the hit of it, rather than tense and poised and in-control like usual. His teasing dissipates.

He climbs back into bed one knee after the other, shuffling back against the pillows and reclining, leaning his head back against his arms.

Shane watches, intent, confused. Ilya is obviously waiting for something. Should he... be doing something? He shifts, moving up onto his knees, swinging a leg over Ilya's, settling down there, watching Ilya watch him.

"Where do you want me?" He hears himself ask. The words are swaddled in the fuzzy, warm feeling in his head, not quite sounding like his own voice.

Ilya lifts a hand, resting it over his hip and then further south, wrapping it around the base of his cock.

Shane shuffles back, watching as it hardens quickly. He can still feel Ilya's gaze burning on him.

"On your stomach. Get comfortable."

The words are not an *order*, not anything his biology forces him to follow. But they are something his Dom is asking of him. Shane thinks sometimes that he would never need an order again, really. Not with how perfectly Ilya takes him down, pushing in all the right ways, saying all the right things.

On his stomach, Shane settles between Ilya's legs, his chin bumping the top of his thigh.

Ilya's other hand curls around his cheek, thumb drawing invisible circles into his skin. It feels like he is brushing away phantom tears. Shane ran out days ago, even if the anxiety still swallows him whole sometimes.

"Just lie with me. Keep me warm. That's all I need."

Keep me warm.

The head of Ilya's cock is pressed to his lips. They part automatically. Shane's eyes flutter closed as the length slides into his mouth. He shuffles forwards, higher, taking Ilya as far as he can. When it hits the back of his throat he stops, letting his chin drop.

The weight is comfortable against his tongue. Familiar, of course. He has had Ilya's dick in his mouth a hundred times, maybe even a thousand by now.

But never like this. There is no orgasm to be chased. No buzz of thoughts deciding whether to lick or kiss or suck.

Just Shane and the comfort of being touched, *everywhere*.

Ilya's head is thrown back, resting against the headboard. One of his hands is curled around Shane's cheek still. The other rests against his shoulder, lax. Even his legs are curled around Shane, propping him up. Everywhere means *everywhere*. There's not an inch of separation between them.

Shane cannot speak, and Ilya clearly does not want to either.

So they sit in silence. In a bubble of leftover steam and dim lamplight and foggy headspace. It is... perfect. Maybe even addictive, because Shane never wants to move. Thinks he might beg for this over and over and over again every day for the rest of his life.

There is no other feeling like it in the world. A spacey, empty silence.

Quiet.

-

"You are okay?"

Shane hums from where he is perched on the edge of the bed, meticulously stretching out the muscles of his shoulders and working his aching jaw.

Ilya is sprawled around him from behind, all but plastered to his back. For the last few minutes he has been pressing featherlight kisses along Shane's shoulders and down the back of his neck. He has found his way back from his headspace, that much is clear, but he is dragging out their play as much as he can, savouring the gentleness that comes after.

Shane reaches back, leaning into the feeling of Ilya's hands. They feel heavy against his skin, and his words feel even heavier against the remnants of Subspace still thrumming in his skull.

"Yeah." Shane finds his tongue, "You?"

"Hard. Very hard." Jokes. Yes, his Ilya is definitely back.

Shane snorts, "Later." Later when they have more energy. Later when it can be fun and teasing and passionate. Later when they've actually slept a full eight hours for the first time in days.

Ilya answers him with a squeeze of his arms, "I know. Thank you. You... you are too good to me, you know. So happy to do what I need from you."

Subspace tugs at Shane sharply, giving one final valiant effort to drag him back. It doesn't matter if he slips a little, really, so he lets it loosen his shoulders a fraction more. He likes being pliant under Ilya's hands. He wants to draw this perfect moment out just as much as his Dom.

They settle back in bed without much fanfare, this time tucked under the covers and wrapped up so close they are one tangle of limbs.

Yesterday felt impossible. Today was hard. Tomorrow will be better.

-

Summer is nice. Summer is a good look on Ilya. Summer has the windows open and a warm breeze flowing through the cottage even-though the sun is setting, and the *pop* and *crackle* of dinner on the stove.

Summer also means sweatpants and bare feet and lounging around on the sofa, which Shane loves but absolutely will not admit to, even when Ilya needles him about it. What he likes about it, really, is getting to be all tangled up in Ilya. He likes the weight of another person on his chest, likes to stroke Ilya's curls while the Dom naps, likes everything about how simple it feels.

So, with Ilya moving about across the room in the kitchen, Shane had found himself not liking the sofa nearly as much, instead opting for checking his phone.

"That better not be more tweets!" Ilya yells, raising the wooden spoon he is cooking with. Shane feels his cheeks flame.

"It's—"

"Ah ah, my threat was real. I will bend you over every surface in house if I have to, Shane."

"Shut up." Shane knows his cheeks are still red. It's a hopeless cause, when Ilya says these things to get a reaction from him.

He shifts, walking around the edge of the sofa and hopping up into the kitchen, turning his screen towards Ilya, "Just look."

scotthunterofficial:

Two weeks ago, a player tried to tear down another player. Because he is in a way that nobody can help, or change. Shane Hollander has won the last three cups with two different teams. The year before that, I won my cup. So, by my calculations, the last four cups have been won with submissives on the team. Three of them with submissive captains.

If there is one thing that was correct from that interview— it is groundbreaking. Not for a submissive, not for a minority player. His achievements would be groundbreaking for any player, and I hope ground will continue to be broken, so that hockey can be the best it can be.

“Hm.” Ilya’s fingers clench around the little phone, eyes scanning up and down the screen, “I knew I liked old dinosaur.”

Shane can’t help but scoff, pulling the phone away, “You hate him.”

“Not true! I will spank.” Ilya raises his spoon again, but that threat is empty. Shane just laughs and bats it away. The tension seeps out of the room, an ease in the silence. Ilya keeps an eye on their dinner, stirring it slowly. He looks like maybe he wants to say something, brow furrowed, but it passes.

It gives Shane time to think. To reread the tweet still staring back at him from the phone screen. There’s a picture attached, too, snuck in at the bottom like an afterthought. Scott and another man, smiling into the camera, pressed up against each-other in the back of a car, donning tuxes and goofy smiles.

Had that been from the NHL awards? Had Shane been in the room, unknowing to the secret glances shared over everyone’s heads? He and Ilya had shared enough themselves. Shane knows the impossible weight of wanting to look over in a crowded room, of not being able to resist.

Before he can overthink it, he likes and retweets, turning it over.

“You know. I think he tried to tell me.” He says next, drumming his fingers against the kitchen island, “Once. Maybe. I’m not sure.”

Headaches. Muscle cramps. Itchy skin. There was nothing else it could be. Shane knows that, too.

Ilya keeps his eyes down on the stove, offering a one-shouldered shrug, the loose collar of his oversized hoodie slipping down his skin, “Who cares. Will take news off us. Maybe when we double date it will break the internet. His Dom is handsome man.”

In another lifetime, Shane is jealous. He is insecure of his place at Ilya’s side and he sickens himself to sleep thinking about all the others— Subs *and* Doms, because Ilya’s always been an overachiever— Ilya could be spending his time with.

As it stands, Shane scowls and bats at Ilya a second time.

“You *cannot* hit on his Dom.”

Rather than raise his wooden spoon again, Ilya just laughs. He never restrains himself here, behind closed doors. Just like how his sharky smile turns boyish, his barked laugh turns musical.

“Why not!” He whines like Shane is denying him much worse, like Shane is pulling away rather than creeping closer, “Old man is probably in hormonal decline. Young Dom like that needs better partner in bed.”

“Oh so now you’re high enough to Dom anyone?” He asks, tucking an arm around Ilya’s waist and pressing his nose into the sleeve of Ilya’s hoodie. Flowery detergent and garlic from the cooking and earthy from the lake. “He could be a seven or an eight, you know.”

Ilya doesn’t hug back. He throws his arms out, chin tilting back, “Psh, I can Dom an eight. I am Ilya Rozanov. I am nine-point-eight! One-point-eight percent more hormones!”

Shane laughs as they rock to the side, turning so he can wrap his other arm around Ilya’s chest. Somehow, he manages to paint a scowl on his face, even if he knows his eyes are still laughing, “I hate you. Maybe *I’ll* take Hunter’s Dom to bed.”

The wooden spoon drops to the counter with a clatter, and suddenly Shane can’t breathe for how hard he is being squeezed back, two strong arms like a vice around his chest. Shane doesn’t care. He presses as close as he possibly can. Everything about Ilya is skin-warm and perfect.

“Ah, no, he is not high enough for my ten.” Ilya grumbles. A kiss is placed on Shane’s forehead, “That I know. I am only one you kneel for.”

Shane has to tilt his head back to meet Ilya’s eyes. They are not clouded with headspace. With dominance or arousal. They are clear and bright, the reflection of the overhead light dancing in them. It’s not a declaration of possession. It is just a fact. The sun rises. A minute is sixty seconds. Shane Hollander kneels for Ilya Rozanov.

“Yeah.” Shane isn’t responsible for the way his tone changes, the rasp of his throat around the words as it chokes up.

Ilya stares back for a long moment. Neither of them move, just their chests rising and falling in time with the other’s. Like the rest of the time they spend with each other, it is not awkward.

Eventually, Ilya tilts his head to the side. His lips find Shane’s forehead again, slow as he puckers his lips and kisses him, lingering. “You are the only one for me, too.”

Shane snorts. He can’t help it. He squeezes the hand he has hooked around Ilya’s hip.

“Ilya.” He guffaws, “You’re high enough for anyone you want.”

That gets him a moment of genuine thought, a few inches of cold air between them as Ilya leans away, shuffling back to stand against the countertop. Shane lets his arms fall to his sides.

“Yes.” Ilya says, answering the question Shane had not asked, “Maybe. But that is not the point. You know why I get traded so much as a rookie? Was very confusing when I was high

Dom, but had no Sub my level. Nobody I found in clubs was high enough. Was so frustrated, kept trying to Dominate all the other Doms on team. Was very... messy.”

Messy. Shane thinks about all the pictures he’d seen over the years— Ilya, drunk. Ilya, with every Sub in Boston stumbling out of club after club. He even remembers, vividly, Ilya arguing with his own teammates in fast Russian when they met at the International Prospects Cup.

Something else makes Shane pause, pulls him away from the thoughts he will absolutely be sorting out later. He raises an eyebrow, “Even your captains?”

Ilya shrugs, arms crossed over his chest.

Messy, repeats in Shane’s mind. Is he... *embarrassed*?

Shane feels his grin return in full force, pulling at his cheeks, taking over his whole face. This is possibly the best day of his life, Scott Hunter be damned.

“Oh my god, you were just as much of a mess as me!”

Ilya’s face pinches, “Okay, let’s not go quite that far—“

“You were a *mess*!” Shane laughs. His head lolls back as he laughs. How had nobody ever noticed? The signs were all there. God, he was an idiot. “Wiebe had to save you, too.”

Ilya doesn’t seem to find it nearly as funny as Shane is. He scoffs and smacks his lips, but Shane isn’t blind, and he sees the little twitch of a smile he is repressing.

Despite that, Ilya moves back to his cooking, turning the heat back up with one hand and grasping the wooden spoon with the other. In the process, he shoulder-checks Shane, pushing him back against the counter. “Go away. I have changed my mind. I will find another partner.”

“*Never.*” Shane tilts forwards, leaning to catch Ilya’s eye, “I love you. Do you think if I asked Bood he’d tell me what you were like when you joined? I can’t imagine you trying to Dom him. Did you *order* him?”

Ilya’s smile breaks free, finally. He shoves at Shane again, this time a playful shove to his chest, “I am not *that* much of an asshole. Was more subtle. And did not mean it.”

He is not surprised when the hand shoving him does not retreat, instead gripping his shirt and tugging him close. Their feet bump and their legs tangle, Shane grabbing the edge of the counter to hold himself up.

Ilya uses his distraction to kiss his cheek, smacking and loud.

Shane hums, feeling a bubble of warmth inside his chest. It rises up and expands, engulfing him, burning down his limbs and up his neck to his head. It feels... weightless.

“Mm.” His tongue feels heavy, hard to move, “Do you mean it when you Dom me?”

“Of course. Always.”

Always, because they have always. They have forever, if they want it.

The Subspace tickling at him makes it easy. Makes his limbs fold and bend exactly the way they need to, lowering him slowly to the floor. His wrists cross behind his back, his chin tilts up, back straight.

There is nothing frightening or fast with the way Subspace eclipses him. His heart slows. His eyes blink slowly. The lingering smell of the honey from his tea is suddenly the strongest scent in the room, sweet and sticky.

Somebody drops something, maybe. The clatter is muffled, unimportant, so long as Ilya keeps staring down at him like that. Like the world has cracked open beneath his feet, eyes wide, lips parted.

“*Fuck* Shane, the chicken is half cooked—“

“That’s okay.” Shane slurs his words, but only a little. Only misses one or two syllables as his mumble comes out more like *s’kay*. His cheek rubs against Ilya’s leg, settling there, resting, “I can wait. This is nice.”

Ilya can barely get the words out either as his voice catches on every word of his reply.

“I love you, too.”

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The locker room is quiet. Hushed. The first practice of the season is always like this, no matter the team. It settles something in everyone, regardless of designation, regardless of levels, regardless of *anything*.

Because in this room, they are just hockey players.

And in this room, they are hockey players who might complain constantly about the game they love, but not-so-secretly miss it dearly during the off-season.

Shane’s head feels quieter than it has in weeks. All the tapes he’d watched over the summer, all the plays he’d noted down and committed to memory— he could finally put them into action. Standing there on the ice, surrounded by his team, listening to Ilya’s first captain’s speech of the season, he had never felt so sure that they’re going to go two-for-two this year. That cup is theirs.

Shane turns, reaching into the locker next to his. With two kit bags that are both Centaurs-red, mixups happen. Shane must’ve thrown his deodorant into Ilya’s this morning.

He finds the bottle on the top of the unfolded mass of clothes and pads Ilya keeps, only then glancing up.

Haas is looking at him from the other side of the room. Their eyes meet for not half a second before the rookie is glancing away, cheeks possibly redder than Shane's have ever gone.

Shane frowns, glancing back to his own locker. Sure, he knows the rookie has a little bit of hero-worship for him, but it was never more than that, was it? He can't remember ever feeling uncomfortable around Luca. Or feeling like the young Dom was actually trying to dominate him. No, that can't be it. Ilya would have noticed and nipped it in the bud. He's much better at reading social interactions like that.

"*What* Luca? Oh *shit*, Hollzy."

Shane's head jerks up, this time turning to face Hayes.

Hayes is not looking him in the eye. In fact, Hayes is pointedly staring somewhere *else*, eyebrows raised so high they're practically disappearing into his hairline.

Shane thinks his cheeks might actually be as red as Haas'.

He immediately scrambles for his shorts and snatches them up from the bench. It's not like him to forego underwear, but that's the last thing on his mind right now. The last thing on his mind when he'd *completely* forgotten what Ilya had done two days ago at the cottage, and completely forgotten that it had left evidence.

Big, yellow, bruising evidence, top to bottom, meticulously spread out over his ass.

Shane groans, scrubbing a hand down his face, "Please don't."

It's useless to ask. Ilya was standing right there, a look of delighted amusement on his face as he watches the scene play out in front of him. His grin is terrible. Ugly. Annoying. Stupid. Stupidly fucking *handsome*—

"Ah, do not be so embarrassed—" He coos, sickly sweet and decidedly teasing rather than sympathetic, his shoulder bumping with Shane's.

Shane bumps him back, pushing him away, making space around his locker that isn't taken up by an annoyingly large Russian hockey player, "Fuck off, Rozanov!"

"Yeah, looks like you've already made your point." Dykstra adds from Shane's other side. He sounds sympathetic, maybe, but also like barely-restrained laughter, "Whatever it was."

"I'm going to kill you." Shane mutters. He won't, of course, but he *will* be throwing out all the wooden spoons in the cottage effective immediately.

Shane should have seen it coming. It's their first game against Montreal since. Since the cup, since the outing, *since*.

It's not the first time he's played against Montreal as a Centaur, of course. They played plenty of games against them last season. This certainly will not be the last game they play this season either.

He is starting to think, however, that maybe Montreal is starting to wish it was.

Familiar faces cloaked in blue dot the rink, ordered back to their side of the ice by the refs. One is favouring his left side from a harsh slam into the boards. Bood. One has bloody gauze stuffed up his nose from an '*accidental*' collision. Barrett.

One is still lying on the ice, so dazed that he just stares blankly up at the roof, curled around the shoulder that Shane definitely just heard pop out of place. *Ilya*.

"Fuck you! Eh? You know what that means? You speak English, yes? What about French! *Mange de la merde! Décrise! Va chier mon tabarnak!*"

The accent is awful. The words are only vaguely recognisable as French words, and only if you're really paying attention. Shane is pretty sure Ilya doesn't even know what they mean, doesn't even know where one word starts and the next begins. He is probably just regurgitating any vaguely insulting phrase he has heard before, but it *is* amusing to listen to.

It can't go on forever, though. Eventually Ilya is peeled back by the refs, thrashing as he tugs and pulls to get the very last word.

The funniest part is that Shane doesn't even know this player. He might be donning the aching familiar Montreal blue and white, but he's a recent trade. He thinks maybe from Buffalo, or somewhere equally as terrible and dull.

Bood floats around behind him, their line purposeless without a puck to chase or players to fight. He taps Shane's stick in greeting, "What the fuck did that guy say to you?"

Shane jerks out of his reverie. He has the *AC* on his shoulder, he reminds himself. He should not have left his back line and goalie to fester, to waste these precious seconds when they could be strategising their next play. Ilya will certainly get a penalty. They need to have a strategy to make up for that.

While his brain runs a mile a minute for solutions and waving over the rest of their team, his mouth moves for him, "How'd you know?"

*Hey Hollander. Will you kneel for us when we win? Comeau says you cry easy. I'd like a picture of that. For my locker. **Kneel.***

Stupidly, it had been said in earshot of Ilya. A rookie mistake. The order had barely even registered with Shane. His muscles were already on fire from working hard, and it had been terribly obvious that this guy was a very low Dom and overcompensating for that.

Ilya had other opinions.

Bood makes room for Hayes and Barrett to huddle up on their side, still laughing, “He’s only like that when they’re dicks to *you*.”

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“Where’d you learn all that terrible French?” Shane is trying his best to sound disapproving, but he’s not entirely sure that it’s translating past the grin on his lips. Or his cock, hard and pressing into Ilya’s stomach as he perches on Ilya’s lap.

Equally, Ilya is doing a terrible job at pretending to be chastised. His hands are everywhere, roaming any square inch of skin he can find on Shane, squeezing and pressing into the soft flesh and packed muscle. Shane does not let out a terribly embarrassing squeal when one of those roaming hands squeezes his ass. He does *not*.

But he does keel forwards, pressing as close as he can to Ilya’s chest, nose pressed into the curve of Ilya’s neck, lips mouthing at an already purpling bruise. He’d gone into the boards earlier, *hard*. Fucking Mitty. Shane had narrowly cut off his path along the ice, unbalancing him and getting him sent to the bench with a knee sprain during the second period, but still.

Ilya mumbles and pushes at his head, fingers sliding into his hair to tug him away. Shane resists, but only for a moment. Then he lets himself be moved, lets himself be kissed.

Ilya grins into the kiss just the same, teeth scraping with a wince. His own grin is bright and boyish. They’d won, and they’re sharing a hotel room, and everyone *knows*, and there is not one single thing weighing Ilya’s shoulders down.

“You are right. Terrible language. I will never speak it again. Too confusing on the tongue.”

Shane’s hand twitches, glides across the smooth plane of Ilya’s bicep, fingers sinking into the muscle, “Oh, French is more confusing than Russian?”

“*Da*. That is yes. See? Is simple.”

Their hands continue to wander, words dying out. Ilya’s find a place to rest on his hips, fingers splaying over the yellowing patches of skin on Shane’s own body. He thinks they are from hockey, but he can’t be completely sure. Sometimes Ilya likes to bite and kiss his way over hockey bruises to claim them. Sometimes Ilya likes to take him in hand and make his own. Sometimes, Shane is not sure where hockey bruises end and his Dom’s bruises start.

What he does know for sure is that each of the bruises on his body are a trophy. A symbol. He gets to keep playing hockey. He gets to share his life with Ilya. He gets *both*.

“Mm...” Ilya’s noises turn thoughtful, and he presses the pad of his thumb into whichever of the marks takes his fancy. Shane feels the pressure on the just below his hip, bordering on the

swell of his ass. It tenses, pressing further into the muscle, pushing relentlessly until it gives.

Shane can't help but squirm as it aches. For a moment, he tries to pull away. His hands tense. He bites his lip. Then the the protest melts away. It almost feels like his brain melts away, too. Heat rises from the pit of his stomach all the way up to his cheeks, and his body slumps against Ilya's.

Somewhere, he knows the strangled moan being breathed into Ilya's cheek is from him.

Ilya's smugness is palpable. He moves Shane's head again, this time with no resistance as he moulds Shane this way and that, eventually tilting Shane's head back so their eyes can meet.

His pupils are wide. He is not grinning anymore, his lips set in a thin, focussed line. Shane is not curled up on his boyfriend's lap anymore. He is facing his Dom.

"Is it time of day where you remember to be good?" Ilya's voice is rumbling and quiet, spoken from his chest, a place that is deep and intangible. A place that makes every word he speaks relax Shane further, pressing into him as firmly as his hands.

Close to an order. To a Dom's voice. But not *quite*.

"Fuck you." Shane's brain is slow, but the words are familiar, part of their constant push and pull. He cocks his head, unable to keep himself from smiling as he declares, "I'm always good."

That makes Ilya pause. Just for a moment he looks soft again. Warm and cozy and emitting light into the room just by being there. Like a wilted flower, Shane would twist and turn in any direction to feel the sun's warmth.

Then it is gone. Ilya's face hardens again, settles. This, Shane wants as well. He craves both halves of their relationship, because how could he possibly not? It is almost overwhelming when he remembers how much he had resisted being himself. How much he had resisted Ilya. How much he had nearly missed out on.

"Yes." Ilya nods, shifting back slightly, making room in their embrace, "You know, I think this is true. So. What do you want as your reward, *moya lyubov*?"

Shane pauses. Ilya's fingers are still drawing firm circles into his bruise. The skin feels tight, warm. He is still achingly hard in his shorts. He knows what he wants, of course he does. He wants to feel good. He wants to fuck, he wants to play, he wants to do anything Ilya wants.

In the end, Shane doesn't even need his words to reply. All he needs is a tiny shake of his head.

Ilya exhales sharply. Harshly, like the wind has been knocked out of him. Shane can see the way he pushes out the air and sucks in the command, letting it build it in his chest.

"Lie down."

Chapter End Notes

So this took ages because:

a) I wrote this entire fic in like a month which was very hard 😓

b) I wanted to edit the previous chapters, which has now been done to an extent I'm 99% happy with

BUT IT'S DONE

Thank you to everyone who commented and kudos'd and kept me going through the whole thing, it's genuinely been the ultimate motivation 🥰 I hope you enjoy this very fluffy victory lap of a last chapter.

End Notes

Please keep an eye out for updated tags!!

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!