

we can keep it light, we're going somewhere

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](https://archiveofourown.org/works/77128916) at <https://archiveofourown.org/works/77128916>.

Rating:	Explicit
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	M/M
Fandoms:	Heated Rivalry (TV) , Game Changers Series - Rachel Reid
Relationship:	Shane Hollander/Ilya Rozanov
Characters:	Shane Hollander , Ilya Rozanov , Hayden Pike
Additional Tags:	Alternate Universe - College/University , Alternate Universe , College Roommates , Alpha/Beta/Omega Dynamics , Alpha Ilya Rozanov , Omega Shane Hollander , Angst , Nesting , Frat Boy Ilya Rozanov , Theater Nerd Shane Hollander , Heavy Angst , Smut
Language:	English
Series:	Part 1 of And They Were Roommates!
Stats:	Published: 2026-01-05 Words: 15,922 Chapters: 1/1

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by [summerandmazes13](#)

Summary

Ilya and Shane are roommates in college. They both try to pretend it doesn't mean anything when Ilya comes home to Shane randomly nesting in his bed after a few months of barely speaking, but when Shane presents as an omega, they can no longer deny their connection.

Notes

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

September

“Do you want to get breakfast together?”

Shane startled at his desk. He had barely woken up thirty minutes ago and was mid-ten-step skincare routine, spa headband keeping his hair out of his face, feeling ridiculous but ignoring it because he loved its functionality. He hated how it made him look, but he liked the length of his hair after letting it grow out this summer and needed a way to keep it out of his face.

He was sure it only made his shocked expression look even stupider as he turned in his chair to look at Ilya across the room.

Ilya was shirtless, lounging on top of the covers of his bed. He had navy sheets, because of course he did, and he never made his bed. Ilya’s side of the room was a stark contrast to Shane’s. Ilya’s side had clothes scattered everywhere, textbooks piled haphazardly, and trash all over his desk.

Shane’s side was sterile perfection. He made his bed every morning. He tidied up and wiped down his desk and dresser every day, making sure he never had any of his products or clothes out of place from where they belonged. He doesn’t think he’d ever seen Ilya wipe down his counters once since they moved in. Ilya sometimes took a whole week to put away dirty laundry and he liked throwing his clothes on the ground. It didn’t bother Shane as much as he thought it should.

“I’m sorry?” Shane stammered.

Ilya’s gaze was calm, unflinching, head tilted just slightly like he was asking the most casual question in the world. “Breakfast. Do you want to go together?”

“Yeah, sorry, I heard you. But why?”

Ilya twirled his phone, dwarfed by his big hand. Shane felt a fleeting twinge of envy. His own hands were so small in comparison. “Because is morning, yes? And I’m hungry?”

Shane flushed, turning back around in his chair. He needed to finish his skincare routine before his face dried up. He continued massaging product into his face, looking at Ilya in the reflection of the obnoxious light-up vanity mirror on his desk. “No, I know. I meant, why with me?”

Ilya shrugged, smirk tugging at his lips. “Do you not like me, roommate?”

“No! Okay, fine. Let’s get breakfast.”

Shane watched through his mirror as Ilya’s smirk softened into a smile. He jumped up, grabbing shirts from the floor, sniffing them lightly. He was probably trying to find the least

dirty one to wear. Shane grimaced but finished up his routine.

As they walked to the dining hall together in silence, Shane studied Ilya from his peripheral vision. This was the first time they were actually hanging out together and they had moved in three weeks ago.

They were random roommates. Ilya was an international student from Russia studying finance. Or business. Or economics. Something like that, Shane could never remember. When he saw on the housing portal that he had been paired with Ilya, he immediately reached out to him over email to try to introduce himself and get to know him before they spent the year together. Ilya had never replied.

He tried to find any form of Ilya's social media. He couldn't find a single account.

Once they got their food and sat at a table across from each other, they started eating in silence. Shane tried to ignore Ilya's heavy gaze on him, wondering what it was about him eating yogurt Ilya found so interesting. He couldn't take it any longer, so he asked, "How's your frat stuff going?"

Of course, Ilya had joined a fraternity as soon as school started. Shane couldn't remember the name of it, just as he could never remember Ilya's major. It was Beta Theta Sigma Alpha something or whatnot. Whatever. Shane didn't care. It seemed to take up a lot of Ilya's time. He was often coming home pretty late at night, presumably due to parties or hazing or whatever frats do, Shane wouldn't know. He didn't know how Ilya kept up academically, but he had to constantly remind himself it wasn't his business.

"Do you actually care, or just being polite?" Ilya asked.

Shane flushed. "No, I actually care."

"You are bad liar," Ilya said, amusement flickering in his eyes.

Shane couldn't argue, so he ducked his head and continued to eat his yogurt.

"Is okay," Ilya's voice cut through. "Busy, yes. Parties are fun, women are... beautiful."

Biting the inside of his cheek, Shane nodded. Truthfully, he hadn't given a lot of notice or thought to the women who attended this school. He was so focused on being the best student he could possibly be to make his parents proud. Acting was his dream, so of course he was a theater major, but his parents had been worried about the lack of stability. They were confident he would be a successful actor, because of his passion and talent, but he did understand the risk. So he was also double majoring in Kinesiology. Shane loved hockey, and if the whole acting thing never worked out, he would love to be a sports therapist for the NHL.

Ilya said something, but he missed it.

"Sorry, what?"

"I said, do you agree? That the women here are beautiful?"

“Oh.” Ilya looked at him with curiosity in his eyes that Shane didn’t like. Shane didn’t think he was completely straight, but he didn’t think it was that obvious. Sure he was a clean freak and had a ten-step skin care routine that he followed religiously every morning, but a lot of straight guys did that. Caring about your skin didn’t make you gay. “I mean, I guess. I’m more focused on my academics.”

Thankfully, Ilya didn’t push it. Instead, he smiled and leaned in closer. “And have you presented yet?”

“That’s personal!” Shane looks around to see if anyone had heard. It was a little busier than usual in this particular dining hall, but it seemed like everyone was wrapped up in their little bubbles. The question Ilya asked was definitely not one to be asking a person you barely knew, especially in a public place.

“I haven’t either. But I am 90% sure I am alpha,” Ilya said, brightening, voice thickening with excitement. His Russian accent deepened. Shane’s chest tightened.

Shane scoffed. “That’s not how that works. You have no way of knowing.”

“Yes. But deep down, I know.”

“I just said that’s not how that works.”

Ignoring him, Ilya pushed on. “And you? What do you think?”

“I don’t know. Not a big deal. I’ll be whatever I’m meant to be,” Shane muttered. But in all honesty, Shane hated thinking about it at all. He’d love to be an alpha and wouldn’t mind being a beta, but the idea of being an omega scared him. There was too much vulnerability there. He already knew he liked control, liked structure, liked being the one who decided. He needed it. The thought of being subject to someone else, of being so... submissive, made his stomach twist.

Ilya studied him, nodding slowly. It was like he could sense Shane’s discomfort. “Okay. You are very uptight. Since we came here, all you do is study.”

Shane frowned. He wasn’t sure if he was glad Ilya changed the subject, because this might be worse. “All you do is party.”

“Yes. You are boring and I am fun.”

“No, I’m disciplined. And ambitious.”

Ilya waved a dismissive hand. “English is not my first language and I study math. I do not know these words and I do not need to.”

“I mean like, I work hard and I have big dreams. I chase them.”

“Maybe try to chase a shot for once, Hollander.”

“Maybe try opening a textbook before midnight for once.”

“Maybe try having some fun. I promise it will not kill you.”

“Maybe... maybe.... fuck off.” Shane flushed as he failed to come up with a good comeback. Ilya grinned and shoveled some scrambled eggs into his mouth.

Breakfast continued in silence.

So much for a first hang out, Shane thought.

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A few days later, Shane spotted his roommate on campus before the other man noticed. He ducked his head, about to scurry away, but it was already too late.

“Hollander!” Ilya’s voice carried across the courtyard, loud and unapologetic. Several heads whipped around. Shane wanted to crawl into a hole. Attention was the worst. Also, why did Ilya never call him Shane? He hadn’t since they first met. And he didn’t even know how Ilya knew his last name. He wondered if it was a frat thing.

Shane pretended not to hear him. Ilya jogged over anyways. “Hollander!” He exclaimed again when he was a little closer. Behind Ilya, Shane could see a group of frat guys looking curious and confused as to who Ilya’s ditched them for. Shane took in Ilya’s baggy grey sweats and oversized dark green hoodie. He looked so much cooler than Shane, in his lame jorts, henley shirt, and glasses. He literally felt like a nerd.

“How are classes?” Ilya asked once he’d caught up to him. Shane gripped the straps of his backpacks tight and pushed his glasses up his nose.

“Um. They’re okay.” Shane wondered if Ilya was trying to put on a show for his friends, who were now idling and waiting for him to come back. Did he get brownie points for being nice to theater nerds on campus? Was he showing them that he was super popular and had friends other than his frat? Shane didn’t know if he’d call them friends, actually. He noticed the faint warmth of Ilya’s presence, the slight scent of musk and amber on the wind. It was subtle, but stirring. Like always.

Shane had gotten used to his scent after living with him for a few weeks now. That’s the only reason he could smell it so well, the only reason it was so strong every time they were next to each other. That’s what Shane told himself.

“Cool, cool.” Ilya scratched the back of his neck and kicked at the ground with his beat up Nike Air Force ones. If Shane didn’t know that Ilya was the most confident guy on campus he would almost assume that Ilya was nervous. “I like your glasses.”

Shane swallowed. “Thanks. You’ve seen me wear them before.” Shane wore them every night.

“I know,” Ilya said. “I just want to tell you that.”

“Ok. Thanks.” Shane already said that. He willed the ground to open up beneath him and swallow him whole.

“Anyway. There is party tonight. You should come.”

Shane could think of at least seven million other ways he’d rather spend his time. “No, sorry, thanks,” he said immediately, a quick dismissal. Shane didn’t do parties. “I have a paper due tomorrow.”

“Already?” Ilya said, incredulously. “It is week 3!”

“I know. School, right?”

Ilya swallowed, still looking nervous. “The party is, um... is date party. So... I need date.”

Shane almost fell over. “*What?*”

“*Da*, Hollander. But does not have to be dates. Friends can bring friends.”

“We’re friends?”

Ilya looked hurt. “I thought we were!”

Shane frowned. They definitely weren’t. Their only hangout had consisted of Ilya shitting on him the entire time.

Ilya had cooler people to hang with and better things to do. One breakfast, and now Ilya was asking him to a *frat date party*? “Do you not have anyone else to ask? I’m sure a ton of girls would die to be your date.”

Ilya rolled his eyes and said, “I do not want to bring anyone else.”

Shane sighed. “I’m sorry. I can’t come, I’m busy with school. Not all of us can be business majors. And... just party.... all the time.” Shane had meant it as more of a light-hearted, silly joke, but it came out way harsher than he meant it to. Fuck, that was bad. This is why he kept to himself and stayed in the room and tried not to talk to anyone ever.

Ilya looked a little hurt. “Ok. Just no is fine.”

“Sorry-“ Shane tried to apologize, but then one of Ilya’s friends was calling him back.

“I have to go. Bye, Hollander.” Shane hated the defeated look on Ilya’s face and wished he had the courage to ask Ilya to stay so he could explain himself, so he could tell the other boy he didn’t mean it like that. Instead, he just let Ilya walk away.

October

Shane had moved in before Ilya.

At the beginning of August, Shane's parents were in full panic mode, fretting over the room as if it were a five-alarm fire. His dad was awkwardly stretched across the bed, wrestling a fitted sheet into submission. His mom was struggling to hang posters of Shane's favorite hockey team, tape peeling and refusing to cooperate.

"What kind of horrible tape is this, Shane?" His mom had complained.

"Shane, can you maybe help me by pushing out the bed?" His dad had said at the same time.

And of course, Shane was panicking, rummaging through one of his many suitcases and throwing things out onto the floor. "Oh my God, oh my God, I think I forgot my favorite jeans at home. Guys, where are my favorite jeans?"

And then the door had clicked open and Ilya had stood in the doorway, taking up all of it in its entirety. He had a backpack, a duffle bag, one massive black suitcase gripped in one hand and a vape in the other. And that was literally all he had.

All of them froze, as did Ilya. Shane remembers thinking about how perplexed Ilya had looked in that moment. Well, right after thinking about how insanely *big* and attractive Ilya was.

Shane's mom had eyed the vape in Ilya's hand. Ilya noticed, sheepishly slipping it into his pocket. "Sorry," he said, and Shane remembers how all three of them had jolted in surprise at the deep and heavily accented voice coming from his new roommate's mouth. "I quit. I promise."

Shane had glared at his mom, a look that said, *Don't make me look lame in front of my new roommate!* And then came forward to greet Ilya. He had held out his hand. "Hi. I'm Shane."

A crooked smile had stretched across Ilya's features as he looked Shane up and down. Shane remembered feeling so impossibly small and vulnerable in that moment. Time stretched before Ilya finally gripped his hand. "Hi. We are going to have a lot of fun this year."

Shane didn't know what he expected from that statement, but definitely not this.

Ilya was always out of the room because of his frat stuff and because he had a million friends. He was extremely outgoing, likable, and sociable, despite his cool and hard exterior. They only ever saw each other in fleeting moments, when Ilya would stop by the room to pick something up and vice versa. They would always exchange a quick, "Hey," and acknowledge each other's presence, but it was never anything more than that. Shane was always awake before Ilya in the morning and asleep before him at night.

It was why things like asking Shane to get breakfast and inviting him to a date party were just... so fucking weird.

Shane had tried to put himself out there, really, he had, joining clubs and organizations, but it had been mostly futile. His workload picked up immediately, and he was deadset on not falling behind. He did have one friend, Hayden, another theater major, who lived in the building next door. He was friendly, approachable, and so easy to talk to. Hayden was so different from Ilya. Sometimes Shane caught himself wishing Hayden was his roommate instead. But Hayden didn't have that... presence, that subtle pull that kept Shane so intrigued. His scent didn't carry the way Ilya's scent always seemed to. Even when they were apart, it felt like the ghost of Ilya's scent followed him everywhere.

Again, Shane told himself it was because they literally lived together. Of course. Proximity did strange things to people. It didn't mean anything.

At least, that's what he told himself. Especially right now, with Ilya noisily opening their door at two am. Shane squeezed his eyes shut, trying to block out the hall light, burrowing deeper into his sheets.

Something was off this time around. Usually, when Ilya got home super late, he was pretty respectful. He would close the door right away, strip down to his boxers, and just get straight into his bed. Not tonight.

Shane noticed Ilya wasn't closing the door right away, letting the light come in and directly hit Shane. A few beats passed, and he started feeling a little annoyed. He was about to say something when the door finally clicked shut. Shane felt himself relax. Hopefully Ilya got right into bed and didn't cause any more ruckus.

Shane almost had a heart attack when he felt Ilya's breath on his face. He screamed.

Ilya, still standing, was leaning on his bed, staring right at him. He had crouched a little bit, as their beds were elevated to provide for more storage underneath, but still, Ilya was so tall he barely had to. His breath reeked of alcohol. Shane hated it. He never drank before and never really wanted to get into it. He knew he might have to eventually, considering he was in college now and it's what everyone did, but he wanted to put it off for as long as he possibly could. Shane lay frozen in position, not daring to move a muscle.

"What are you doing?" Shane gritted out through his teeth. His voice sounded hoarse from sleep. He could barely make out Ilya's silhouette in their dark dorm room, but the moonlight from the window was enough for Shane to make out Ilya's shit-eating grin.

"D'y'know what I first... noticed... about you, Hollander?" Ilya slurred. Jesus Christ. He was absolutely shit-faced. Shane had never seen Ilya like this.

"Are you okay?" Shane asked, actually starting to feel a little concerned.

"Mm... yes. But do you know?"

Shane swallowed. "No. What was it?"

“Your...” Ilya muttered something in Russian. Shane could barely make out the furrow in his eyebrows, and it seemed like he was searching for the word. “The... dots... on your face.”

“What? Acne?”

“No! Not even... you have none!”

“Then what?” Shane felt himself get a little defensive.

“They are dark. Dot dot dot dot,” and then to Shane’s horror, Ilya reached his hand out and started poking at Shane’s face. Shane froze and couldn’t seem to get his muscles to move. He hated when people touched him, and he especially hated when people touched his face. But Ilya’s touches were so light and careful, and his expression was one of awe, almost like he couldn’t believe what he was looking at. Shane was *so* confused.

“My freckles?” He mumbled. He noticed himself trying not to move his face too much. He kind of didn’t want Ilya to stop touching his face.

“Mmm.” It’s almost like Ilya read his mind. He took a light finger and started to slowly trace it down the slope of Shane’s nose. Then he brought it back up and traced over Shane’s eyebrows, almost like he was studying and mapping him. “Freckles. *Da*. They are cute.”

Shane had always hated his freckles. “That’s nice,” he breathed out softly. “Thank you.”

Ilya didn’t stop. “So cute,” he breathed. He continued tracing a light finger over Shane’s cheeks, then over his jaw, then circled his ear. “Hollander...” he whispered, leaning impossibly closer.

And then suddenly, Ilya shot straight back up. Shane hadn’t even noticed just how much Ilya had been crouching over to get right up in Shane’s face. Because Shane’s eyes had adjusted to the minimal lighting in the room, he could make out the fact that Ilya’s face had turned sickly pale.

“Um,” Shane said, and then Ilya gagged. He dry heaved. Shane blanched. He swore to fucking God if Ilya threw up all over him right now—

Ilya bolted for the door, running to their communal bathroom, Shane supposed. Thank God.

When Ilya came back, Shane hadn’t moved. He held his breath as Ilya closed the door and crawled right into his bed, dirty clothes still on and all. For a split second, Shane had an intrusive thought. He found himself wanting to help Ilya take his clothes off, to make sure Ilya’s sheets stayed clean and unsoiled. He wanted to make sure Ilya felt warm and comfortable in his own bed.

Instead, Shane rolled over and willed himself to sleep.

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When Shane got up the next day, Ilya hadn't moved an inch. His back was still turned to Shane and he was still in his dirty clothes from the night before. A nice pair of black jeans and a grey t-shirt. Ilya had moved in with barely anything with him, while Shane's family had to rent a U-Haul to get all of his stuff to their dorm. As a result, Ilya seemed to cycle through the same clothes over and over. Shane wasn't one to talk however, as he did the same thing, but mainly because he was scared to branch out and be more experimental with his style. Maybe they could go shopping together.

Today was Saturday, a rest day, so Shane didn't need to go to the gym today like he usually would have in the morning. He went through his routine as quietly as he could. He was pretty sure he could slam the door and blast music, however, as Ilya was out cold. He was even snoring a little bit, and Shane knew he only ever snored when he was exceptionally tired.

Shane went to the dining hall for breakfast and grabbed a Gatorade and pastry for Ilya. He wasn't quite sure how hangovers worked, as he'd never had one, but he knew from movies and TV shows that fluids and carbs would probably help.

He went back to the room and set them down on Ilya's desk. Ilya still hadn't moved. The room smelled like Ilya. It definitely would have been overwhelming if Shane wasn't used to it by now. Warm, musky, faintly feral. It was just so *Ilya*.

Shane noticed his comforter had fallen on the floor. As quietly as he could, Shane picked it up and draped it over Ilya's body. Ilya shifted a little bit and Shane froze. Oh God, Ilya was going to wake up and see that Shane was being a freak—

Ilya went right back to snoring. Shane scurried back to his side of the room.

He had to hit send to voicemail on a call from his mom, texting her, *Sorry! Ilya's still asleep*): *Don't wanna wake him up.*

His mom texted back, *What?? It's almost noon!*

Shane didn't reply. His mom texted again. *He doesn't seem like a good influence! Let me know if you want me to try to get you a room switch.*

Immediately, Shane texted back. For some reason, he didn't like that idea. *No mom. It's ok. Thanks.*

He threw his phone onto his bed and tried to focus on his homework.

An hour and a half-later, he heard a moan coming from behind him through his earphones. Shane felt too awkward to turn around, so he snuck a quick glance at Ilya through his desk mirror.

“I am dead,” Ilya groaned, voice gruff and hoarse from having just woken up. He moaned again, his back still to Shane. Shane would never admit it, but he loved how deep Ilya’s voice was. And he especially loved the way his thick accent wrapped around every word. It stirred something in him, low and quiet, a feeling he refused to name.

“I’m sorry,” Shane said, genuinely feeling sympathetic. “I got a pastry for you and Gatorade. It’s on your desk.”

Ilya shifted, finally sitting up and rubbing his eyes. His brown curly hair was a wreck, sticking up at impossible angles. His grey t-shirt was wrinkled and stretched thin at the collar. He looked exhausted and worn down. He looked like shit, and somehow, impossibly, he was still the most handsome guy at this school. “Gatorade... pastry?” His voice cracked a little, as he turned to glance at his desk. He gave a weak laugh. “Is very nice of you, Hollander.”

Shane bit the inside of his cheek to keep from smiling. “Do you want me to, uh, help you get some water too?”

Ilya glanced over to his side, at the desk, then back at Shane. “No. Is okay. But thank you.” He flopped back down onto bed, groaning again. “Why are you awake?”

Shane scoffed. “It’s like, 1pm. I got stuff to do. Homework, chores... you know.”

Ilya laughed, a little hoarse, and it was actually kind of warm. “Is Saturday, though.”

Shane rolled his eyes as Ilya continued.

“So uptight.” He paused, then added, quieter, “Thank you... for the pastry thing. You did not have to.”

Shane felt his ears heat up. “Um, yeah. No problem. I felt bad.” He fiddled with his pencil. “What happened last night?”

Ilya groaned. “Stupid hazing shit.” He didn’t elaborate further, so Shane didn’t press.

“Do you need to nap for longer? I don’t know how hangovers work but I heard it just takes time.”

“Ah, Hollander. So thoughtful. And nice. A little boring. Spending your Saturday doing homework and chores and babysitting.”

“Hey! I can take that pastry right back.”

“*Da*. Maybe it is poisoned.”

He rolled his eyes. Ilya gave him his usual lazy grin. He looked stupid, his face smushed into his pillow and his hair all over the place. Stupidly cute. Shane watched as Ilya took a deep breath, getting up and swinging his legs to the floor. He stood slowly, wincing a little, and rubbed his temples. “Ugh. I will eat this. But if I die, I will blame you.”

Shane laughed nervously. “Okay. Whatever.”

For a moment, the room was quiet except for Ilya's heavy breathing and the rustle of the pastry's wrapper as he took slow bites of it. He was still standing, back to Shane as he ate and drank, but Shane noticed how he had one hand gripping the desk at all times, as if he'd fall over without it.

Shane felt an odd mix of relief and curiosity. This was the first time he'd ever seen Ilya so... human. He was unguarded and messy, but still magnetic in a way that pulled Shane's attention no matter how hard he tried to look away. This was not the loud, fratty, chaotic roommate he'd come to know, just a hungover dude who needed a little care.

"I should shower, probably," Ilya muttered, gathering his caddy for the bathroom. He paused, finally looking at Shane. "Do you want to... come with me to get dinner later? Food that is not pastry would be nice."

Shane swallowed. "Yeah... yeah, I can do that."

Ilya smirked. "Good. You are not bound by spell to stay in this room, then?"

"Being in here is better than being in the bathroom throwing up all night."

Ilya scoffed. "Cheap." He left to shower.

And then Shane felt another shift. Not just in the room, but in the weird little dynamic between them. Maybe they wouldn't be best friends, but it would be nice to at least have a better relationship with his roommate that wasn't just daily one word greetings.

Ilya hadn't said anything about the night before, and Shane assumed it was because he didn't remember it. Shane tried not to think about it, about the warmth of Ilya's breath or the careful way his fingers had traced Shane's face. Whatever that had been, Shane told himself, it didn't mean anything. He buried the thought deep and forced himself to breathe.

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On Halloween, around ten pm, Hayden showed up at Shane's door dressed as a vampire with glitter smeared all over his cheekbones. "Okay," he declared, hands on his hips. "You've been in this room for three days straight. Put something on. We're going to Theta Rho's Halloween party."

Shane blinked at him. "I can't. I have a quiz Monday. And... Ilya's frat? Ilya will be there. No thanks." He looked over at Ilya's messy-as-usual side of the room. He had been gone all day, presumably in preparation for this huge Halloween party they were going to be throwing, and Shane hadn't seen him. He wondered what Ilya's Halloween costume was.

After they had gotten dinner together on the day of Ilya's blackout, their relationship seemed to be developing. Slowly. Shane found himself noticing the little things he hadn't before. The way Ilya's curly brown hair fell into his eyes when he laughed, the warm, grounding scent that clung to him, the scent that Shane thought he was getting used to. Musk and amber and cinnamon clouded his senses more than it ever had before. He started noticing Ilya's body more too, the broadness of his shoulders and solid lines of muscle Shane caught glimpses of when Ilya walked in shirtless from the shower.

They weren't friends yet, not by a long shot. There were still awkward silences, moments where Shane froze, unsure what to say or do. But for the first time, Shane felt the pull to cross that line, to stay close, to participate in Ilya's world instead of retreating into his own routines and homework.

Shane's not even sure if Ilya remembers what he said and did that night, but he's noticed a bit of a change in Ilya's demeanor. It was almost as if Shane's gesture was the green light for Ilya to act... sweeter. He lingered a little longer when Shane returned from the dining hall and asked about his day and classes more, he left snacks on Shane's desk, and he made more of an effort to tidy up his side of the room. And though Shane tried to remain aloof, he loved their developing friendship. He caught himself thinking about Ilya when he was alone, wondering if Ilya was thinking of him too.

Ilya was attractive. He wasn't stupid enough to deny that, and it didn't have to mean anything. But his mind kept betraying him. It was constantly replaying the careful way Ilya's fingers had traced his face in the dark, the softness in his voice when he'd murmured that Shane's freckles were cute. The casual invitation to get dinner together echoed too, like it had been more deliberate than it sounded. Shane told himself it was nothing. Just proximity. Just roommates. Still, the memories lingered, uncomfortably warm. It was enough to make Shane feel... something.

"Perfect!" Hayden said, voice cutting through his thoughts. "You literally know someone at the party. What are you going to do, stay here doing general chemistry all night? On Halloween?"

That didn't sound horrible. "Well—"

"No!" Hayden threw a black cape at Shane. Shane's not even sure where it came from. "You're going as my assistant vampire. Come on, we match. It's cute."

Shane groaned, but ten minutes later he was reluctantly following Hayden across campus, cape dragging a little behind him. Campus was alive and busy, and Shane took in all the different costumes around him. As expected, a lot of them were slutty. There was a lot of cleavage everywhere. It didn't make Shane feel anything.

Music thumped from Theta Rho as they approached, bass rattling the windows. The house's front yard was crowded. Fairy wings, football jerseys, and cat ears were everywhere. Shane knew it was hard for guys to get into the frats, but luckily (or maybe unluckily?), Ilya was at the door.

He looked stupidly good in a pirate costume. He had a white long-sleeve polo on, unbuttoned just a little too low, gold cross necklace that he always wore glinting against his collarbone. Shane could feel a low hum of *something* in his chest, a pull he didn't quite understand.

God, Shane was going to throw up.

Despite the long line, Ilya's eyes scanned the yard and found Shane at once, as if the pull between them worked both ways. "Hollander?" He called out in surprise, and Hayden took the opportunity to seize Shane's arm and drag him to the front door.

"Hi!"

Ilya froze, his gaze locked on Hayden's grip on Shane's arm. He almost looked angry. "Hi," he said flatly. "You are?"

"I'm Hayden! Nice to meet you."

Ilya stared at Hayden with a blank expression on his face. "Okay." He turned to Shane. "Hi, Hollander. You can come in. But not your friend."

Shane blushed. "Hi. Sorry. Please? Is it okay if Hayden comes in with me? I don't really know anyone else." He tried to put on his best puppy dog eyes.

"I guess," Ilya murmured, eyes lingering on Shane longer than necessary. Shane felt his chest tighten. He couldn't help but wonder about how stupid he looked with the glitter on his cheekbones and the fake blood on his chin that Hayden had forced him to put on.

Someone called Ilya back to the other side of the door, and he turned. "Have fun. I will see you in there."

As Hayden dragged him inside, Shane immediately regretted every decision he's made leading up to this moment. He was hot and overstimulated, and the music was so loud he could feel it in every joint of his body. "Your roommate is a dick!" Hayden yelled to be heard over the music.

"Yeah, I know," Shane replied weakly.

Hayden dragged him into the frat kitchen, where a concoction of a suspicious red punch sat on the table. Shane's not sure how much time passed, but he and Hayden made a game out of who could chug a cup of the punch the fastest. Shane was wary of drinking it at first, but he was also very competitive and Hayden had convinced him that the punch didn't have any strong alcohol in it, just a little bit of beer.

Hayden was wrong.

Four cups later Shane was even warmer than before. He couldn't stop giggling. He and Hayden were falling into each other, laughing like they'd each said the funniest jokes in the world. Their version of dancing was interpretative theater dancing, and they'd gotten a lot of weird looks, but he was surprised to find that he didn't actually care and that he was actually having fun. Hayden was nice to hang out with. Maybe he should go out more.

But then he spotted Ilya.

Ilya was leaning against the kitchen counter across the room, laughing with a girl dressed like a devil. The girl touched his arm and Ilya smirked at her. Shane's stomach knotted. The scent of Ilya - warm, familiar, amber and cinnamon - hit him. His chest tightened, his ears burned. He swore he could feel something twist deep in him, something primal, stirring.

Shane told himself it was the punch. Definitely the punch.

Someone else had grabbed Hayden's attention, some blonde girl dressed like a slutty version of some princess. They were talking and laughing, and Shane put his cup down and tried to slip away. But the kitchen was packed, and with the lights flashing red and purple, bodies pushing and moving in rhythm, he found himself getting swept onto the dance floor in what he assumed was the house's living room.

"Hollander," he heard a familiar voice call, and then he turned to Ilya standing right behind him. Ilya looked breathless and flushed, pirate bandana on his head askew. "Do my eyes lie? You are here? At party?"

"Hayden made me," Shane shouted over the music. "I mean- I wanted to! No, not wanted, but like- not didn't want-"

Ilya laughed, and it did something fuzzy to Shane's brain.

Before Shane could embarrass himself further, someone bumped into him and pushed him closer to Ilya. Ilya steadied him with two hands on his waist, warm and firm.

Oh.

"Are you okay?" Ilya asked, leaning in.

"Yep," Shane said, far too quickly. "Just... drunk, I think."

Ilya grinned. "Dance with me?"

Shane didn't even get a chance to answer. Ilya was already pulling him closer, swaying with the music. They fell into rhythm; Shane trying not to step on anyone, Ilya guiding him with gentle touches, hands firm on his hips. If Shane was sober, he probably would have sprinted out of there hours ago. But he was just tipsy enough that everything felt soft and unreal, like glowing edges around a dream.

Shane was a little paranoid of someone watching them and jumping to assumptions, but the room was so dark, the music was so loud, and everyone was so drunk. He could allow himself to relax.

The girl Ilya had been talking to passed by, gave him a playful pat on the shoulder, and disappeared into the crowd. Ilya didn't even look after her. He kept his eyes on Shane.

"You are so warm," Ilya murmured.

“You’re— very close,” Shane blurted.

Ilya’s smile widened. “You want me to back up?”

Shane shook his head before his brain could stop him.

They danced like that for a while. Heat, bass, and the smell of alcohol mixed with fake fog surrounding them. Shane kept catching himself staring at Ilya’s lips. Every time their hips brushed, sparks shot up his spine.

It was very possible he imagined that Ilya’s gaze was lingering on his lips too.

Eventually, though, the warmth in Shane’s stomach shifted into nausea. His head spun. His skin prickled.

“Oh,” Shane whispered. “I don’t... feel great.”

Ilya’s expression changed instantly. “Okay. Let’s go outside.”

He guided Shane through the crowd, arm wrapped securely around Shane’s waist, shouting, “Sorry, sorry, sorry,” until they finally reached the cool night air. Ilya had taken him somewhere private, not the crowded front yard they had been in before, but presumably the back yard, where it was completely empty.

Shane barely made it to the bushes before he was bending over, throwing up all the punch he just drank. It was awful. It left a bitter, acidic taste in his mouth. It was the most embarrassing moment of his life, probably.

Ilya held his cape back, one hand steady between Shane’s shoulder blades.

“Is okay,” Ilya murmured, voice gentle in a way Shane had never heard from him. “Just breathe. You are okay.”

When Shane finally stopped, he wiped his mouth on his sleeve, mortified. He felt like shit. His words were slurring and he could barely stand upright. “I’m... so sorry. I don’t go to parties. And I... don’t drink. And I’m... pretty lame.” Oh, God. Why was he rambling like a loser?

Ilya huffed a soft laugh. “I have seen way worse in this house.”

Shane straightened slowly, still wobbling. “You’re so cool, Ilya,” he whined, swaying as he tried to stand still. “You’re so cool and I’m not. You should have a cooler roommate.”

Ilya was quiet. Shane’s head wouldn’t stop swimming. He kept swaying, losing his balance and quickly catching himself so he wouldn’t fall onto the grass beneath them. “That is not true, Hollander,” Shane heard him say quietly. “You are boring sometimes, but it does not mean you are not cool.”

Shane glared at him. “Liar,” he muttered, nearly toppling over again. This time, Ilya caught him, hands closing around Shane’s biceps to steady him. He dipped his head, forcing Shane

to meet his eyes. Shane pressed his lips together, blinking hard. The vomiting had left his eyes watery, and he felt stupid and small. He didn't want Ilya close enough to smell his breath, didn't want to see revulsion flicker across his face.

"Not liar. You are clean and you have good routine. You have strong passions. You study both nerdy theater and yet also nerdy science. You are nice guy. That makes you a little cool."

Ilya stepped in, closer than necessary, and adjusted Shane's cape where it had started to slip.

The scent of him hit Shane all at once. Warm, overwhelming, too much. For a second Shane thought he might throw up again. Words abandoned him completely. Instead of answering, he shook Ilya off and took a step back, keeping his eyes fixed anywhere but Ilya's face.

Ilya caught the hesitation immediately. The sincerity on his face shuttered, replaced by his usual cool, controlled expression.

"Not bad for first party," Ilya said, steering the conversation somewhere safer. "Next time, though, maybe... one cup instead of four."

Shane snorted weakly. "Next time?"

Ilya hesitated. Then, with a softness Shane's never seen from him, Ilya leaned back in and pressed a light kiss to Shane's cheek.

Shane froze.

Ilya pulled back just enough to look at him. "*Da*," he said quietly. "Next time."

Shane swore his heart stopped. Or exploded. Or both. That was completely out of character. Was Ilya also drunk?

"Cool," Shane whispered, voice cracking. "Yeah. Um. Next time."

Ilya smile and slipped his arm around Shane's waist to guide him home. "I'll take you home. You smell like vomit."

Shane scoffed, but he didn't pull away. He let Ilya steer him, let himself be held in that steady, certain way. Normally, Shane hated feeling this exposed and vulnerable. He hated needing someone else to take care of him. But tonight, he found himself loosening his grip on control, just a little. They walked back to their dorm in easy, unhurried silence, and for once, Shane realized being taken care of was something he kind of liked.

He was absolutely never telling Hayden about this.

November

As school started to pick up even more, Shane found himself swallowed by readings, homework, scene studies, and the creeping fear of falling behind. His planner filled up so quickly he barely had time to breathe between classes, rehearsals, and late-night library sessions. And somewhere in all that rush, he and Ilya... stopped talking again.

Not in a dramatic, fight-ending way, but more like the quiet, awkward drifting of two people who accidentally became close for one night and didn't know how to handle it in daylight. They fell back into their old pattern of polite nods, quick "hey"s, and the occasional "do you want me to turn off the light?" before bed. Nothing more. Shane pretended it didn't bother him, but the truth was, it did, more and more each day. Because after that night - the dancing, the compliments, the care, the kiss - he finally knew that they *could* be something else. Something... closer. And he hated that they were acting like strangers again.

What made it worse was that Shane finally understood *why* Ilya had gotten under his skin in the first place.

It was how effortless he was. How cool without trying. Being around him lit something restless in Shane, something competitive, something sharp and alive. Shane liked trying to impress him. Liked the quiet challenge of it. Liked doing anything just to see if Ilya would notice.

Shane liked that Ilya was everything he wasn't: social where Shane was reserved, unbothered where Shane overthought, loud and certain in ways Shane only ever felt alone at night. Ilya moved through the world like he belonged in it, and Shane, who spent most of his time worrying about doing things *right*, found that intoxicating.

But more than that, Shane couldn't stop thinking about Halloween.

He couldn't forget the way Ilya had noticed immediately when something was wrong. The way he'd guided him without hesitation, hands steady and sure, voice low and calm, like it was the most natural thing in the world to take care of him. Shane had always hated needing help. Hated being seen when he was unsteady or sick or vulnerable. But with Ilya, it had felt... right. Safe. Like letting go of control didn't mean losing himself. That terrified him more than anything else.

He spent a lot of time with Hayden after that, enough that people had started giving them looks when they walked into class together. Hayden presented as an omega last year, and even with the scent blockers most students wear, Shane still caught faint traces of his scent now and then. Sweet, soft notes like cherry blossoms and vanilla drifted toward him when they sat close, warm enough to make Shane's chest flutter. Scent blockers couldn't hide everything, not when there was a genuine bond forming between him and Hayden.

Sometimes, when Shane was feeling especially hopeful, he wondered if he might present as an alpha and if maybe, *maybe*, he and Hayden could end up together. It made sense in his head. Hayden was kind, steady, and easy to be around. And he was totally boyfriend material. He walked Shane to class, grabbed dinner with him, texted him silly jokes, and was the one who dragged him to his first real college party where Shane tried alcohol for the first time (and immediately threw it all up). Hayden was safe. Hayden made sense. Hayden was not an off-putting frat boy from a distant country who didn't seem to care about his future. Shane told himself that's what he should want.

But the thought never settled quite right, no matter how sweet Hayden smelled.

On a random Saturday towards the end of November, Shane slept through his alarm until noon. He woke up feeling a little feverish.

Fuck. Perfect. Exactly what he *didn't* need with finals creeping up on him. His head was hot, his skin prickled, and his stomach twisted uncomfortably. Thankfully, Ilya wasn't in the room, so Shane forced down some Gatorade from their shared mini-fridge and crawled back under his blankets, hoping an extra hour of sleep might stop whatever sickness was trying to take him out.

Sometimes on weekends, Ilya didn't come back until night time. Maybe he was sleeping around. The thought usually bothered Shane, but for now he was too out of it to process that fully.

When he woke up again a few hours later, everything was worse. His body felt like it was burning from the inside out, sweat clinging to him. He stripped off his t-shirt, breathing hard. He tried to stand, thinking maybe washing his face would help, but the moment he was on his feet, a wave of dizziness crashed over him. The room spun. He stumbled forward and—

He fell face-first into Ilya's bed.

And the world stopped.

Oh.

Oh.

Oh.

For a dazed, stretched-out second, Shane just lay there, cheek pressed to Ilya's sheets. He should move. He knew he should move. But his body acted first. His nose dragged against the fabric, inhaling a deep, instinctive breath.

Heat flooded through him. Relief. Calm. Something warm and golden and safe poured through every nerve.

Amber. Cinnamon. Ilya.

Shane's knees nearly buckled. His fingers curled into the sheets and he nose-dived again, breathing greedily, like the scent was the only thing keeping him grounded. Before he could

think, he crawled fully onto Ilya's bed, burying his face in Ilya's pillow. He gasped against it, inhaling desperately. Jesus Christ. What the hell was happening to him?

He didn't feel like himself at all. His instincts - those quiet, repressed instincts he'd never given himself a chance to act on before- were suddenly loud enough to drown out every coherent thought.

He reached blindly for the clothes on Ilya's floor: a shirt, then another, then his pajama pants, even a worn pair of black jeans he's pretty sure were still dirty from Halloween. Shane dragged them all into the bed with him, clinging to them, pressing them to his face, breathing each one in like he was starving for scent.

A tiny voice of reason tried to break through. *Stop. Get up. You're losing it. You're in his bed. You're fucking insane.*

But the voice was distant, muffled, drowned beneath the overwhelming need crashing through his body.

He piled Ilya's clothes around him in a makeshift wall. Then he pulled the comforter from the foot of Ilya's bed, bunching it up protectively on the other side. He curled into the middle of it all, cocooned in warmth and scent and safety. The fire under his skin finally eased, soothed by amber and cinnamon, by Ilya, by *home*.

Shane exhaled, long, shuddering, relieved. And then, wrapped in a nest of someone else's scent, he passed out.

-

Ilya smelled it before he even got the door open.

He froze with one hand on the knob, nostrils flaring sharply. *Oh*. The scent on the other side of the door was so strong, so sweet, it nearly knocked the air out of his lungs. Rose, jasmine, something softer underneath - orange blossoms, maybe. Pure omega scent, rich and intoxicating. And it was coming from *his* room.

Did Hollander bring someone over? Impossible. Hollander would sooner die than break a dorm rule. If he *had* someone in there, there would be a sock on the handle, a politely written text, maybe even an apology paragraph. Also, the chances of Hollander ever bringing anyone over were practically zero. So what was this?

This smell was... different. Better. *Dangerously* good.

Ilya leaned forward until his forehead rested against the door, eyes fluttering shut as he took another breath. His knees went a little weak. He felt... floaty. Light-headed. Like the ground was tilting under him.

“Are you locked out?”

Ilya’s head snapped up. Their RA stood a few feet away, watching him with a mix of concern and confusion. She must not smell it. Not like he could.

He cleared his throat and forced a smile. “No. Is fine. Just... long day.”

Before she could ask anything else, he unlocked the door and stepped inside.

Big mistake.

The scent slammed into him like a truck. It was full force, unfiltered, and impossible to ignore. Ilya grabbed the doorframe for balance, swallowing hard. His vision swam for a moment, and he had to blink several times before the room comes into focus.

And then he saw it.

Hollander - sweet, anxious, rule-following Hollander was curled up in *Ilya’s* bed.

No. Not just that.

He made a nest.

Ilya’s breath catches. Clothes - *his* clothes - are piled around Hollander in a protective circle. His comforter bunched at one side, shirts and jeans forming a wall on the other. Hollander was asleep in the middle of it all, face buried in Ilya’s pillow, inhaling softly like he was drinking the scent down to survive.

Ilya’s chest tightened, heat rolling through him. It’s... God- it’s probably the sexiest thing he’s ever seen in his life.

And it hit him all at once: Hollander was presenting. Right here. In his bed. Wrapped up in Ilya’s scent like it was the only thing keeping him sane.

Ilya’s instincts flared - hard. Alpha instincts. He felt it simmering under his skin, rising fast. Yes! He knew it. But he clamped down the joy and excitement with effort.

Focus. Hollander needs help. Safety. Comfort.

He moved quietly, carefully pulling off his clothes until he was down to his underwear. He figured it could be seen as leveling the field, making himself vulnerable, softer, less threatening. Then he crawled onto the bed, slow enough not to spook Hollander, and reached out to brush his fingers through Hollander's hair.

The reaction was immediate. Hollander leaned into the touch, nose nuzzling deeper into the pillow.

And then his eyes flew open.

Panic flickered across his face; he tried to sit up, confused, disoriented.

Ilya expected that. He pushed the hand down on Hollander's head and swung a leg over him, pinning him lightly. Not trapping, just enough to keep him from hurting himself.

"Shhh, Hollander," Ilya murmured, voice low with his accent thickening. "Is all okay."

Hollander's breathing sped up; shallow, fast, overwhelmed. Ilya could feel the conflict radiating off him. Hollander's rational brain was screaming *move, get up, get away, pretend nothing happened*. But his omega instincts were pulling in the opposite direction. Ilya knew they were telling him: *stay, submit, stay, submit. Let him take care of you*.

Ilya leaned down, lips brushing gently over Hollander's shoulder. "Is this okay?" he whispered.

Hollander trembled beneath him. "Ilya... I'm sorry, I'm so sorry, I don't know what's happening—"

Ilya hushed him softly. "No, I said is okay. Just breathe for me, *da*?"

Hollander swallowed, voice thin. "What's happening to me?"

"You are presenting," Ilya said gently, brushing a thumb over Shane's cheek. "You are in heat. You are omega. And you are nesting in my bed."

He watched Shane's eyes widen, watched realization and fear flicker across his face.

"And I am going to take care of you," Ilya added quietly, voice low with certainty settling deep in his bones. "If you let me."

There was a pause. It was brief, but Ilya felt the shift anyway. He could smell the desire, thick and unmistakable, filling the air between them until it felt too heavy to breathe. Slick. It was coming out of Hollander in thick, heavy waves. Ilya closed his eyes briefly, steadying himself, committing the moment to memory.

"Just give in to your instincts," Ilya whispered, as his hand trails down Hollander's arm, brushing over his erection. He cupped Hollander over his pants, and the other boy shuddered at the contact, a whimper slipping free of him that went straight through Ilya's chest. It almost broke Ilya. "You are safe here. No one but us."

Hollander's resistance crumbled all at once. "Please- please- help me," he moaned.

That was all it took.

Ilya kissed him.

It was not a light kiss, as most first kisses should probably be. Heat surged where their mouths met, the kiss messy and desperate, like neither of them had the patience to go slow.

The only thought swimming through Ilya's head was *Shane Hollander, Shane Hollander, Shane Hollander*. He was drowning in him.

Shane clung to him, hands at his neck, and Ilya let himself give in. He let himself drown in how soft Shane felt, how easily he melted, how right it felt to have his lips on Shane's.

They both moaned into the kiss, Shane's hands flying up to Ilya's neck to steady himself. Ilya let his hand wander down, to the space under Shane's balls. God, it was so wet. There was slick piling up under him, making a mess on Ilya's bed. Ilya couldn't care less. He loved it. It smelled delicious.

He broke from the kiss, letting his forehead rest against Shane's. Shane tried to follow his lips, but Ilya stopped him. "Can I touch you?" He asked quietly.

Shane was so far gone. Ilya loved this look on him. He loved the way his eyes were blown wide and glassy, dark pupils swallowing almost all the warm brown. Usually so uptight and rigid, Shane was unraveling right there under his hands, coming apart. Ilya was obsessed with the fact that *he* was the one who'd done this, the one who'd pulled that soft, unguarded expression out of him, and his alpha instincts roared with a deep, satisfied pleasure. Ilya had to repeat himself a few more times before it finally registered, before Shane blinked hard and nodded frantically, like he was clinging to the sound of Ilya's voice to stay upright.

Ilya moved deliberately then, savoring every small reaction, every broken sound Shane made under his hands. Ilya pulled Shane's pants and boxers down, and then gripped Shane's hard cock with his hand.

Shane's back arched clean off the bed as he let out a load moan. "Fuck!" he shouted. "Please, please, please," he babbled.

Wow. Ilya watched him come apart with awe, like he'd been given something precious. The intensity of it stole Ilya's breath, sent something feral roaring through him. Possession, yes, but also devotion. Shane, undone by him. Shane, choosing to trust him.

Ilya let his hand drag up and down Shane's cock. Of course, it was just as pretty as the rest of him. Clean, smooth, and cut. He couldn't stop looking at Shane, who kept reaching out, kept begging without words, eyes glassy and desperate, body asking for more.

Ilya bent down and took Shane in his mouth.

Whining, Shane continued to thrash and lose it on the bed above him. Ilya reached up, palming his chest to try to get him to calm down. It was no use. Shane was barely holding himself together, moaning uncontrollably. Ilya let his head bob up and down for a moment, before bringing his hand up and thumbing Shane's hole.

"Oh fuck, Ilya," Shane moaned again, and that pushed Ilya over the edge. His alpha instincts roared with pleasure, and he slipped a finger into Shane.

Shane arched up with a wail, shuddering, and it took Ilya a few beats before he realized his mouth was full. Shane had come, just like that. It ignited something even further in Ilya. He felt delirious and feral, almost drunk on everything that was *Shane, Shane, Shane*. A perfect little omega, no, *his* perfect little omega, unraveling beneath him with just a few simple touches.

Ilya soothed him with a caress of his hip, steady and grounding, drawing him back. He took a moment to look up at Shane and take him in. Flushed, wrecked, beautiful. This little omega was completely his, if only just for now. If only before Shane came back to his senses.

Shane was clearly not yet satiated. He kept thrusting into Ilya's mouth, even after Ilya had swallowed around him. "More, more more," he begged, moaning. Ilya noticed Shane's eyes welling up with tears, and it was all the confirmation he needed to continue.

He thrust the finger still inside of Shane in and out. He let go of Shane's cock with a pop and pushed back up to crash their mouths together. He made out with Shane for a bit, then broke off, a nasty trail of spit connecting them. God, Shane was a *wreck*. His cheeks were flushed and his lips were glossy, his hair in complete disarray on Ilya's pillow under him. His eyes were begging for more, and Ilya wanted to give it to him so badly. But he had to take a beat and listen to the rational part of his brain begging him to check in. "Is this okay?" He asked gently.

Shane nodded frantically again. "Yes," he breathed. "Please. Please. Take care of me."

Ilya gripped his own cock with his other hand, never letting the other one out of Shane as he worked in two, then three fingers, finding a steady rhythm. Shane's pretty cock was already swelling again.

Ilya fumbled as he struggled to take his boxers off, his movements shaky with urgency and want. The air between them felt thick, heavy with their mingled scents. It was enough to make him dizzy. He was drunk on jasmine and orange blossom.

Ilya finally pulled his fingers out of Shane, who made a small, wounded sound. Ilya soothed it immediately, hands firm, grounding, drawing Shane closer. He pushed Shane's legs to his chest.

He positioned the tip of his cock with Shane's hole, another pretty part of him, and then finally, finally, pushed himself in. It felt like the whole world drew in a breath with him. Shane gasped beneath him like the sound had been pulled straight from his chest. He pushed further in until he bottomed out.

Everything narrowed after that. The room disappeared. Time lost its meaning. There was only warmth and closeness, and the deep relief of finally fitting together instead of orbiting each other for months. Ilya pressed his forehead to Shane's shoulder, breathing in his scent, grounding himself as the sensation crashed through him in dizzying waves.

He had never wanted anything like this so badly before. Never wanted *someone* like this.

The restraint he'd been clinging to frayed instantly. Desire surged sharp and feral, rattling through his bones, demanding more. He moved instantly, guided by rhythm rather than thought, as he thrust in and out, attempting to establish a steady rhythm. But there was no point. Shane felt impossibly tight around him, and Ilya could barely hold himself back. The clap of their thighs together was loud and filthy, as were Shane's moans and gasps. His hands clutched at the bed beneath him as if it were the only thing keeping him tethered.

Shane unraveled quickly, his body responding to Ilya so beautifully. He came almost instantly, spurting streaks of white come all over his stomach. Yet he was still impossibly hard.

"More, please, more..." Shane whined. The tears in his eyes finally spilled over, onto his beautiful freckles that Ilya loved so much. He leaned over and kissed them off his face, before crashing his mouth into Shane's and licking into it.

Something in Ilya snapped. He shifted them with purpose, flipping Shane over without taking his cock out and shoving him deep into the bed beneath them. He began thrusting deeper, harder, faster into Shane, jackhammering into him with all the strength he could muster.

"So pretty, Hollander, you're doing so good, taking me so well... My pretty omega," he mumbled, words pressed into Shane's skin between soft, grounding kisses to his back.

The possessiveness in his words surprised him. Ilya wasn't sure how much of what he was saying was conscious truth and how much of it was alpha instinct. Whatever it was, it burned, fierce and protective, wild with devotion.

When Shane tilted his head to the side, baring his neck without thinking, Ilya froze.

He knew that this was just instinct. Shane's omega was telling him to present, to let himself be claimed. Ilya lost it.

He pounded into Shane impossibly harder, the sound of his hips clapping against Shane's ass echoing throughout their tiny dorm room. He didn't care if anyone could hear from outside. Let them. Let them know that Shane belonged to Ilya. Let them know that he was an alpha and that Shane was his omega.

And then suddenly, before he knew it, he was leaning over and biting down onto Shane's neck. His mind was roaring, *claim, claim, claim*. Shane let out a moan, hands scrambling for purchase under him, baring his neck even more. Ilya knew that this was dangerous territory- if he bit down even just a little bit harder, he would break skin, and he would claim Shane. They would be mated.

Shane would probably kill him.

So begrudgingly, he let go, licking over the bite and soothing it with kisses.

Shane was full on sobbing into the bed now as he juttied his hips back to try to meet each one of Ilya's thrusts. Ilya couldn't stop himself from grinning. Even in such a vulnerable state, Shane was so eager to please, to impress, to make Ilya happy. He was so devastatingly earnest, and it made affection bloom fast and fierce in Ilya's chest.

God, Ilya really liked him. He liked him so much that it terrified him.

The realization hit harder than anything else had that night, and it scared him enough that he buried it immediately and instead focused on getting Shane to finish. He planted one foot up on the bed, changing the angle to try to hit Shane's prostate. He gripped Shane's hips tightly, fingers digging into skin, not caring if his fingers left bruises the next day. He definitely found it, judging by the way Shane wailed.

Ilya found his own release chasing after him, but he wanted Shane to come first. To have come three times before Ilya even came once made his alpha roar with pride. Satisfy his omega before himself.

He reached over and gripped Shane's cock from under him, giving it only one, two, three strokes before he felt Shane spill all over his hand and onto the bed sheets below them. He came with a broken sound, raw and helpless. It only took five more thrusts before Ilya was following suit. He barely managed to pull out, letting his own come spurt all over Shane's ass and back.

He had back dimples. Ilya watched in awe as his release dripped over into the dips, mind delirious with want. For a long moment afterward, neither of them moved.

It finally seemed like Shane was satiated, at least enough to come to his senses for now. Ilya stayed where he was, watching the rise and fall of Shane's back, the way tension slowly drained from his body as deep, shaky breaths took over.

Ilya took one of the dirty t-shirts from the foot of his bed and wiped the come off Shane's back, and then wiped his own cock too. He manhandled Shane to his back so he could wipe the come off his stomach too, and wipe Shane's dick as well.

Shane hissed softly at the sensitivity, eyes fluttering open just long enough to confirm that Ilya was still there. Ilya smiled softly.

Good. Awake enough.

He tossed the shirt off the bed without thinking.

Shane immediately started crying.

The sob came out sharp and panicked. "Woah, woah, woah," Ilya said, shocked, alpha instinct causing him to immediately pull Shane into his arms and soothe him with kisses all over his head. "You're okay, I have you, you're okay..."

Through uneven breaths, Shane clutched at him, voice cracking. “Bring it back, put it back, please, please...”

There were a few beats of confusion before Ilya realized he was talking about the shirt he had just thrown off the bed. “What? Why? Is gross.”

“Please, *alpha*, please, it’s mine.”

The word hit Ilya like a tidal wave. He *was* Shane’s alpha, and his pretty omega was recognizing that.

That got Ilya to immediately concede. Without letting go of Shane, he twisted his body to reach down to the floor and retrieve the shirt with great difficulty. Shane reached for it, but Ilya nipped at his shoulder to get Shane to relax. He put it down at their legs. He could allow the gross, come-soaked shirt on his bed, but he couldn’t let it be anywhere near their faces. That seemed to be enough.

He settled back down with Shane in his arms, who had immediately calmed down. He was clutching Ilya like he was his lifeline, breath evening out as if Ilya were the only thing anchoring him to the world.

“Thank you, *alpha*,” Shane mumbled into his chest, and Ilya could feel his eyelashes fluttering.

Ilya’s chest tightened.

He threaded his fingers through Shane’s sweaty hair, slow and careful, pressing a kiss to the crown of his head. Then another. Then one more.

“You did so good,” Ilya murmured. “You’re safe.”

Shane hummed quietly at that, body going loose and heavy against him, eyelashes fluttering as sleep finally claimed him.

Ilya stayed awake a while longer.

He watched Shane sleep. He memorized the weight of him. The trust. The way Shane fit so easily against his chest, like he belonged there.

The thought didn’t scare him this time.

He let his arm tighten just slightly around Shane, protective and certain, and allowed himself one quiet truth before sleep took him too.

He wanted to Shane to belong to him.

With that, Ilya closed his eyes, holding him through the night.

Morning crept in slowly, light slipping through the blinds and settling over the room like it was in no hurry to leave. It caught on the rumpled sheets, on the quiet mess of the night before, on the way Shane lay sprawled across Ilya's chest in sleep. Ilya was on his back, one arm wrapped securely around Shane's shoulders, the other resting warm and possessive at his waist. Shane's head was tucked beneath Ilya's chin.

Shane's breathing was even, his face slack with rest. Ilya couldn't take his eyes off him. He was so beautiful. It was the calmest Ilya had ever seen him.

It should have been peaceful.

Instead, Shane startled awake with a sharp, panicked inhale.

"Oh my god," he gasped, already scrambling. "My paper. I have a paper due."

Ilya blinked groggily, tightening his hold. "Is fine," he murmured, voice rough with sleep, mouth brushing against Shane's shoulder. "Just tell him you are presenting. Professors understand—"

"No, no, no, I can't do that. I can't use that as an excuse," Shane said, already trying to sit up, panic threading into every movement.

The shift hit Ilya immediately. It was sharp, stressed, too hot. Shane's scent spiked, tangled with frustration and self-reproach, and it made Ilya's chest tighten. The lingering heat clung to him still, restless and needy, tugging at Ilya's instincts in ways that made it hard to think clearly.

Shane pressed a hand to his forehead, breath uneven. "We can't even leave. I can't leave. You're still—" He gestured helplessly between them. "Taking care of me."

Ilya forced himself to take a deep breath, trying to control the parts of him that were starting to match Shane's distress. "Hollander," he said gently, grounding. "Relax. Is okay. I promise."

Shane's eyes light up. "Oh, I have heat suppressants. And blockers. Just in case something like this happened. I... can you grab them? They're in my bottom drawer."

Ilya frowned immediately. He didn't like the idea at all. "Those are not good for you," he said, instinct flaring. "You are supposed to let it ride out—"

"Ilya, please."

“I’m supposed to take care of you—“

“Ilya! Please!”

And how could he say no? Ilya’s alpha instincts surged. *Appease the omega, make him feel safe, do what he wants*, his body screamed out to him. He got out of bed and crossed the room to Shane’s desk. He opened the drawer, rummaging until he found the bottle. When he opened it, the little pastel gummies tumbled into his palm.

Gummies.

Suppressants... in gummy form.

He stared for a second, then let out a tiny, involuntary laugh. He slowly made his way back over to Shane.

“That’s... cute.”

Shane groaned, reaching over and snatching them from Ilya’s hand. “Shut up.”

“I am not teasing,” Ilya said softly, and he wasn’t.

Shane chewed them quickly, swallowing the blockers right after, like he was racing his own anxiety. Gradually, the edge of Shane’s heat dulled. His scent shifted, settling back into something familiar, something calmer, something sweeter.

He exhaled shakily and sank back into the mattress.

Ilya followed, curling in behind him without hesitation, arms wrapping around his waist like they belonged there. “See?” he murmured. “Is fine. You can email the professor later. Nobody will punish you for this.”

But Shane didn’t answer. He just clutched the sheets tighter, facing away, his shoulders trembling with something Ilya wasn’t sure he was supposed to notice.

Something in Ilya’s chest softened completely.

It wasn’t just the panic. It was what had caused it. The fact that even in the middle of a heat Shane’s first thought had been his paper. His need to do well, to be good, to not let anyone down.

There was something achingly sincere about that. Something that made Ilya want to reach into Shane’s world and take just a little of that weight off his shoulders.

God, he thought, almost helplessly. *I really really like you.*

The realization didn’t crash into him this time. It settled.

He pressed a kiss into Shane’s hair, slow and careful, and held him there.

Eventually, Shane's breathing evened out again. His grip loosened. Sleep reclaimed him.

Ilya stayed awake a while longer, listening, memorizing the feel of him, already knowing that this was more than instinct.

—

When Ilya woke again, the space beside him was cold.

His comforter was pulled up neatly, the room quiet in a way that made his heart drop instantly. Shane's scent was faint. It was distant, already fading like he'd tried to scrub it from the air before he left. No note. No footsteps. Just absence.

Ilya pushed himself upright, instinct tugging sharply at him the second he shifted. He knew he'd presented last night too - only lightly, only in response to Shane's heat, nothing like a full alpha rut. But it still counted. It still hit his system. And lying here now, he realized how deeply that had settled into his bones.

It felt... selfish, maybe, to even think it. Shane was the one who had gone into heat. Shane was the one overwhelmed. Shane was the one who needed help.

But Ilya had needed something too.

And Shane didn't even stay long enough to notice.

His gaze drifted downward, catching on the mess spread across the sheets. Ilya's clothes, blankets dragged from Shane's own bed and piled around them, pillows shoved into a soft ring around the bed. A nest.

Shane had made a nest on Ilya's bed.

An omega's instinctive, instinct-trusting nest.

Ilya settled his hand into it, fingers brushing one of the many shirts. His throat tightened.

Shane had built all of this around them. And then left Ilya alone in it.

Ilya lay there for a long moment, breathing in the space where Shane had been, the echo of last night settling heavy in his chest. The ache that bloomed there was sharp, instinctive, humiliatingly deep - an alpha's longing curling in on itself with no one to anchor to. He wished Shane knew that Ilya's body had answered his, that he'd been presenting too, even if only softly. That he needed to be taken care of afterward just as much.

He wished Shane had stayed.

He pressed a hand to the sheets, gripping them like he could somehow pull Shane back just by wanting hard enough.

But the bed stayed cold.

And Ilya stayed alone.

December

Back in October, after his frat initiation, after the blacking out, after waking up to a cold Gatorade and warm pastry he hadn't earned and definitely didn't deserve, Ilya had taken Hollander out to dinner.

It had been a last-minute decision, made on impulse. Somewhere in the hazy overlap between gratitude and guilt, he'd suggested they skip the dining hall and go off-campus instead. He'd picked a place that tried very hard to look respectable, like it wasn't surviving entirely on college students and mercy. Warm lighting. Laminated menus. A faint, permanent smell of garlic and fryer oil that clung to everything.

When they had slid into the booth across from each other, Ilya had instantly taken note of Hollander's demeanor. He had taken note of the straight back, the hands folded neatly in his lap, the eyes darting just a little too often.

"You look nervous."

"I'm not," Hollander had responded immediately.

Ilya had hummed. "You are *really* bad liar. I do not bite." And then just because he could, he had bared his teeth. Hollander had rolled his eyes.

"So what happened last night?" Hollander had asked. Ilya remembered that he actually sounded concerned. A little worried.

Ilya had shrugged. "Studied too hard. Textbooks everywhere."

Hollander had scoffed. "Come on, seriously! You said it was hazing. What happened?"

Ilya had tilted his head, completely ignoring the question. "Why did you get me that stuff this morning?"

Hollander had blinked, clearly thrown. "Because I knew you'd be hungover. I felt bad."

"Why feel bad?" Ilya had pressed. "You did nothing."

Hollander had hesitated, frowning slightly as if the answer should be obvious. “I don’t know. You seemed like you were in a lot of pain. I just... wanted to help.”

The honesty of it had caught Ilya off guard.

He wasn’t sure he would’ve done the same. Not because he was unkind, just because it wouldn’t have occurred to him. Besides, the odds of Hollander ever being hungover were laughably low.

“Why?” Ilya had asked again. “I thought we were not friends.”

Hollander had shrugged, cheeks coloring. “Yeah. But I still wanted to make sure you were okay.”

Before Ilya could respond, the waiter had appeared and stole the moment from them. They had ordered quickly. Hollander studied the menu like it might be graded. Ilya glanced once and pointed at something near the middle.

“You didn’t even look,” Hollander had said.

“I trust the universe,” Ilya had replied.

“That’s irresponsible.”

“You should try it. It has worked so far.”

“After last night, I don’t think that’s true.”

Ilya had smiled faintly.

Through dinner, with every word, Hollander had leaned in closer. Got flustered when Ilya teased him, then tried to recover with dignity and failed. He talked about his classes, about the gym, about how he liked structure because it made his brain quieter.

“School and discipline have just always been so important to me,” Hollander had said, almost apologetically. “And I feel better knowing that I’m working towards something bigger than me. Towards success.”

Ilya had watched him over the rim of his glass. “You are very serious for someone who is eighteen.”

“I’m nineteen.”

“Ancient,” Ilya had deadpanned.

Hollander had snorted, then immediately ducked his head like he’d revealed too much. Ilya found his gaze drifting back to Hollander’s freckles, scattered across the bridge of his nose like constellations he hadn’t memorized yet but wanted to.

He had noticed the way Hollander listened, *really* listened, like every word mattered. Even when Ilya offered little of himself in return. Even when he deflected questions about his past, about his life, and redirected them back at Hollander instead. It never seemed to discourage him. Hollander still held on to every word Ilya gave him, like it was something precious, like Ilya, somehow, was the most important thing in the room.

At some point, the teasing had softened. The conversation had slowed. They shared fries without thinking about it.

“This is not what I expected,” Hollander had admitted quietly.

Ilya had raised an eyebrow. “You are upset?”

“No,” Hollander had said quickly. “Just... surprised. You’re very easy to be around. You make things in my head feel quieter.”

It had been so earnest.

Ilya made Hollander’s head quieter, just like structure did. Ilya, who had always thought of himself as noise and chaos and impulse. Ilya, who had learned early on that he was something to endure, not something that soothed. And Hollander had looked at him like he was steady. Like he was safe.

Like he was *home*.

The realization had stolen the breath from his lungs.

Instead of saying what he wanted to say, Ilya forced a crooked smile. “Yes, well. Your life is boring and I make it fun.”

He had paid the bill and stood, tugging on his jacket. “Come on, Hollander. Let’s go back.”

Hollander had nodded. “Okay.”

And as they walked back, Ilya remembered that he had found himself thinking, not for the first time, that he wanted to continue getting to know Shane. Outside of their dorm. Outside of school. Outside of whatever this was supposed to be.

That realization scared him more than he cared to admit.

What scared Ilya most wasn't how much he'd enjoyed the dinner.

It was how much he had agreed with Shane. That it was easy to be around him too.

Shane was so unapologetically himself. He loved school and he loved all of his nerdy shit and he never tried to be something he wasn't. Unlike all of the frat boys Ilya was constantly around since getting to college, Shane never tried to be louder or smarter than anyone else in the room. He was just earnest. Eager to please. Attentive. And he always look at Ilya like he was worth listening to.

That was dangerous.

The first time Ilya had showed up at their dorm, he felt it deep in his body before it consciously registered. There was a low and instinctive pull that drew him to Shane. He'd known what Shane was the moment they locked eyes, long before Shane himself even knew. The omega scent sat just beneath the surface, restrained and disciplined, like everything else about him.

And Ilya. He'd always known what he was.

Alpha.

He carried the knowledge with him easily and comfortably. Back in Russia, when it had first become undeniable, it just made sense. He was happy about it. He was meant to be an alpha. It explained the pull people felt toward him, the way rooms shifted when he entered, the instinct to always be the biggest and the best in every room.

He was proud of it.

He wasn't proud of the way he had no control over his attraction to Shane.

Ilya didn't really care that much about college. Truthfully, he'd come to get out, to put distance between himself and the nightmare he left behind in Russia. He came here to let himself have fun and let loose, which is why he had immediately joined a frat. He knew all frats did was drink and party, and he wanted that. He deserved it after years of surviving his shitshow of a family.

He wanted to also build a future for himself here so he'd never have to return to Russia. His plan was to graduate with decent grades, work a decent-paying job, live here forever in a decent-looking house, and never have to talk to his dad or brother ever again.

He hadn't wanted a mate. He hadn't wanted attachment. He hadn't wanted anything that could ruin his focus or tether him to someone else's gravity.

Shane ruined *everything*.

He was just supposed to be a random roommate that Ilya ignored and never really talked to. But Shane was *so cute*. Ilya liked his freckles and his glasses and his henley shirts and his hair. He had invited him to their first date party because he thought it would end in a simple

hookup, a one-and-done, a fuck he could get out of his system to prove to himself that he was just horny. That's all it was.

But then Shane had taken care of him while he was hungover, and that kindness was unfamiliar. No one in his life had ever done something so thoughtful for him, not without expecting something back. Sitting across from Shane at dinner afterward, he felt it settle in his chest. The way they fit together without effort, the way their presence aligned. Their scents mingled softly between them, and it left Ilya feeling unsteady, almost drunk on the realization that someone actually cared about him.

And Halloween had made it worse.

Seeing Shane like that, unsteady, vulnerable, stripped of his usual control, had snapped something sharp and instinctive into place. The noise of the party, the chaos Ilya usually thrived in, had fallen away the second Shane faltered. His body had moved before his thoughts caught up. *Steady him. Get him home. Protect him.* It was why he'd leaned in without thinking, why his mouth had brushed Shane's cheek. There was nothing there but the unbearable need to be close. Truthfully, he'd wanted to kiss Shane for real, but he knew Shane would have found that gross, considering what he had just done moments before. Ilya probably still would have kissed him anyways.

That was when it scared him.

Before, it was nothing but a silly little attraction. Ilya had always been attracted to boys as well as girls, and Shane was cute and he had a nice body. There was nothing more to it. But after that, things felt more real.

He remembered how much it had hurt to hear Shane speak so lowly about himself. How fiercely Ilya had wanted to correct him, to make him see Shane the way Ilya saw Shane. The way Shane had leaned into him without thinking, trust written into every pliant line of his body, and how something in Ilya had answered so fully it left no room for doubt. All he wanted to do was kiss Shane senseless.

But more than that, he wanted to hang out with Shane. He wanted to text Shane. He wanted to take care of Shane when he was sick. He wanted to make Shane laugh and he wanted to comfort him when he was sad. He wanted to be Shane's best friend and he wanted to take him to date parties not just to hook up, but to just be in his presence.

He could never have that.

So Ilya did the only thing he knew how to do when something mattered too much.

He pulled back. He stopped initiating conversation with Shane. Stopped leaving snacks on his desk. He stayed later at the frat house and let frat obligations swallow his evenings and told himself it was practical, necessary, smart.

Then came the failed midterm.

Then came the meeting with his academic advisor about his dangerously low grades.

The quiet threat that everything he'd worked for, his peace, his future, his ability to finally get out of Russia once and for all, could slip through his fingers if he didn't focus. If he didn't get better at juggling his academics with his social life.

That decided it for him.

Ilya had always known how to survive pressure. You narrowed your focus. You didn't let yourself want things outside of necessities. You cut distractions.

And Shane, God help him, was the biggest distraction he'd ever met in his life.

But above all, one fear stuck out far beyond all the rest. That Shane didn't feel the same way. That Shane wasn't even into guys, didn't even find Ilya attractive, didn't even care about being Ilya's friend. That Shane thought he was nothing but a pathetic, stupid frat dude. That Ilya had misread the pull, the compatibility, the way their scents aligned. That Shane deserved someone steadier. Kinder. Someone who didn't live half his life in chaos. Someone who could give him the stability and warmth that Ilya couldn't.

So Ilya buried the pull. Told himself Shane was better off without whatever mess Ilya might bring into his life. Told himself it was kinder to keep distance.

Still, the want didn't go away.

It lingered in small, traitorous ways. Ilya couldn't stop noticing Shane's freckles, lightly scattered across his nose and cheeks, uneven and soft. Or his body, stronger than he expected, built for endurance rather than display. The tension in his shoulders when he studied too long. The quiet flex of his forearms as he wrote, hands steady, precise. He loved his glasses most of all. The way they softened his face, made his focus look even more intent. The way Shane's attention sharpened when something mattered, the quiet pride he took in doing things well, even when no one was watching.

Avoidance, he learned, wasn't the same as indifference.

-

Weeks passed. They never acknowledged that night Shane presented.

And by mid-December, Shane was almost never in the dorm. Ilya noticed immediately. Normally, Shane would be sprawled at his desk or on his bed, headphones in, studying - or at least present enough that Ilya could catch a glimpse of him. Now, the room felt emptier than it had in months. Shane came back even later, left even earlier, or didn't come back at all.

Ilya was busy too. He had frat responsibilities piling up and finals rapidly approaching, but still, he missed Shane constantly. He couldn't stop thinking about the night they had shared, about the warmth of him pressed against him, the way Shane's instincts had finally answered his alpha call. The firmness of his body beneath his fingers, the way he had so beautifully unraveled at Ilya's touch. The memory haunted his chest every time he was alone. And every time Shane avoided the room, Ilya felt it like a physical ache. He felt his alpha instincts roaring, frustrated, unsatisfied. Yearning.

The absence settled into Ilya slowly. Subtle at first, then impossible to ignore. He missed Shane in a way that surprised him with its persistence. Not just the physical presence, but the *order* Shane brought with him: the neat stacks of his textbooks, the steady rhythm of his routines, the way he moved through the world with purpose instead of impulse. Shane's discipline had always been a quiet marvel to him. It was intoxicating, the way Shane could want something and work toward it without burning himself out along the way.

Ilya admired it deeply. He envied it, even. His own life felt like a series of loud moments strung together by obligation and noise, the frat demanding spontaneity and excess, chaos dressed up as tradition. He loved it, truly, but sometimes, alone in their too-quiet room, if Shane was off at the library or practicing for some play, something deep in his bones ached for the opposite. For steadiness. For a sense of home that didn't feel temporary.

Shane had been that without trying, every time Ilya came back to the room and was greeted with a dazzling smile, like Shane was genuinely happy to see him. Calm. Grounding. A soft constant in a life that never slowed down. And realizing he might have lost that left Ilya hollowed out in a way he didn't have words for yet.

Ilya wanted to court him.

So he tried. Quietly, deliberately, carefully, so as to not scare Shane off.

He started by buying a gorgeous bouquet of roses, soft pinks and creams, something delicate but impossible to ignore.

He placed them on Shane's desk one evening before Shane returned from class, then settled in on his bed with his laptop to observe Shane's reaction. Strategically, he angled himself to face the door directly, not wanting to miss a single thing when Shane came back.

When Shane walked in, his eyes flicked to the desk, registering the flowers. And then he froze. For a moment, Ilya's heart leapt. Maybe this time, Shane would respond, would let the warmth back in. Maybe Shane would acknowledge the flowers, acknowledge their connection, acknowledge them.

Shane didn't touch them. He gave a tight, controlled smile. "Thanks," he said, not even looking at Ilya.

He went about his business, leaving the flowers where Ilya had set them.

Not willing to give up, Ilya tried again. This time, he bought a soft teddy bear, something that felt comforting and innocent. He wrapped it in three of his dirty t-shirts for a day before giving it to Shane, hoping his scent would rub off on it.

He placed it on Shane's bed, settling back into his bed again to watch, heart hammering.

A few hours later, when Shane returned, his eyes landed on the bear. He froze just like he had with the flowers, and Ilya thought- maybe- *maybe this is it, maybe now they'll be okay again*. Shane's gaze lingered, tight and conflicted, and for a second it felt like hope was alive in the room. Then Shane gave him a small, almost imperceptible smile and left it there, lying on the bed like a quiet truce.

Later, Ilya watched as Shane, before turning in for the night, carefully picked up the teddy bear and placed it on his desk, hyper-aware of Ilya's eyes on him. It wasn't warmth, exactly, but it was acknowledgment. A tiny concession. Ilya's chest ached with longing for something more. But... he could cling to that small act.

-

Finally, Ilya decided he had to be bold. As Shane was about to leave the room one evening, Ilya jumped up from his bed and placed himself between Shane and the door. Shane blanched, looking almost stressed.

"I am courting you," Ilya said, in the least smooth way possible. It was the first time he'd spoken to Shane in two weeks. "Or... I am trying to." He chose his words carefully and deliberately, his thick accent making him feel less articulate. "I mean... would you... like to come to dinner with me? Or. Can I take you out to dinner? Like in October." God, he was stammering like an idiot. He hadn't been this close to Shane in so long, and his scent, even dull and muted, was so prominent for Ilya's nose.

Shane stiffened, shoulders tightening, gaze dropping. He didn't answer immediately. Ilya's instincts were screaming: *claim him, hold him, don't let him go*. But Shane simply nodded once, tight and closed-off. "Maybe another time," he said finally. Ilya didn't stop him as he side-stepped him to leave the room.

Ilya watched him go, heart aching, alpha instincts roaring. Every inch of him wanted to chase, to hold, to make Shane his. But Shane's coldness, his careful distance, made every step forward feel like walking on thin ice. And yet, Ilya knew he couldn't stop. He *had* to court him. Somehow.

-

Finals ruined all of his plans.

Ilya had to put a halt to his efforts. He had to celebrate the end of the semester with his frat. He really liked the guys, so he was happy to spend evenings with them, drinking and partying. It was what he came here to do in the first place. But with the rapidness of how fast the weeks came and went, Ilya didn't even realize winter break had come so fast.

Ilya didn't even know Shane was leaving that day.

A random day during finals week, the morning was gray and quiet, the kind of winter light that seemed to press down on everything. Shane's bags were packed neatly by the door, his parents waiting downstairs. Ilya's flight wasn't for another two days, but Shane was leaving for break first.

Ilya sat on his desk chair backwards, his chin resting on the back of it to watch Shane. His own suitcase was half-packed, lying open and messy on the floor. He stared at the teddy bear on Shane's desk, which sat untouched since the day Ilya gave it to him. Ilya's chest ached, alpha instincts flaring even as he tried to keep himself composed. Shane was leaving him behind.

"I..." Ilya tried to start, but Shane cut him off abruptly.

"I'm sorry, Ilya," he said quietly. "My parents are here. I have to go."

It was cold. The message was clear.

"Okay." He cleared his throat. "Bye, Hollander," Ilya said softly, miserably. His voice cracked in a way he tried to hide. Every part of him was screaming for Shane to turn, to hold him, to tell him he wasn't going anywhere.

Shane paused at the doorway. For a heartbeat, Ilya thought maybe he would turn around. Maybe Shane would step back into the room, into the warmth, into the scent-filled space where he belonged. But Shane's expression was tight, careful, and distant.

"I will see you next semester," Ilya added.

Shane's voice was clipped, hollow, careful. "Bye, Ilya. See you."

The door clicked shut.

And with it, Ilya felt something break inside him. His alpha instincts screamed in frustration, his chest tightened painfully, and he moved to sink into his bed, fingers clutching the empty nest Shane had left behind.

The teddy bear, the flowers, the dinner invitation, all of it - ignored, left behind, unacknowledged. And still, Ilya's heart throbbed for him, pulling him forward even as Shane's absence burned a hollow ache through his chest.

He pressed a hand to the sheets, breathing in faint traces of Shane's scent, longing for a warmth that was gone. He couldn't stop the tears that escaped his eyes.

Every pulse, every breath, was a quiet, relentless prayer: *Come back. Please come back.*

Ilya stayed there for hours, unmoving even as the moon rose and bathed the room in cold winter light, leaving only the echo of Shane's absence, and the ache of wanting him more than anything.

End Notes

This was their first semester of college together! My plan was to continue this series and have each work be a new semester. But I guess that depends on if people want more of this story, writing takes so much out of me. Maybe I'll leave this alone, but I would like them to have a happy ending, which will definitely happen if I keep going.

Sorry if the shift from Shane to Ilya was abrupt. I realize now it got pretty heavy pretty fast. Next time we'll get to see more of Ilya's fun side, I promise.

EDIT: Thank you everyone for your love and support, I will write another part!!!

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!