

Like My Heart

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Like My Heart

by [oddcomet](#)

Summary

Shane Hollander, hockey prodigy and captain of the Montreal Metros, has a secret: he's an omega. No one knows, not even his frequent hookup partner, Ilya Rozanov. Shane's carefully-cultivated life threatens to unravel when he forgets his medication. Now he's stuck in the middle of nowhere, on the brink of a heat.

Enter Ilya, cocky and arrogant alpha, who is determined to help Shane through his heat... and keep his secret.

Neither of them can predict the effect they will have on each other, and how one week in a snowed-in cabin will change the course of their lives forever.

Notes

Hello Heated Rivalry fandom!

This takes place sometime after their night in Las Vegas. Obviously diverges from the timeline after that.

My first time publishing a fic woohoo! Enjoy some indulgent smutty omegaverse Hollanov. Already missing my boys, can't wait for season 2!! Until then let's all suffer together.

Also, this should be a given, but I wanted to make it a disclaimer regardless: no forms of AI were used in the writing of this fic. Art (even gratuitously smutty fanfiction) belongs to artists, not machines. This was written by a good ol' fashioned human who is very obsessed with two hockey players. (:

Also, apologies in advance for any typos. Wrote a lot of this on my phone, hopefully I caught all the worst mistakes.

Chapter 1: Mistakes

Chapter Summary

A break in Shane's routine causes a chain reaction of bad coincidences and stupid mistakes.

Shane Hollander didn't expect his entire world to upend today, but then, these things can't be predicted.

It starts normal enough. The sun is bright and Shane struggles not to squint. He looks directly into the camera with an earnest smile.

“And with your help, we can help the people of Lac-Cartier rebuild,” he says. He gestures at the surroundings for emphasis. He’s standing in what used to be the town square, but is now the ground zero for a disaster zone. “For the next two weeks, Rozanov and I will match all donations made.”

It’s the ninth time he’s said the line, and the words are beginning to get jumbled in his mouth. He pushes through. *For a good cause.*

Unfortunately, his scene partner isn’t as patient. “Why do we do this again?” Rozanov complains. “Is good enough first time. Is good every time.”

“Cut,” the director sighs.

Shane slumps, blowing hot air onto his numb hands. He’s tired. This whole endeavour has been tiring, and he tries not to let it show. Complaining about his own hardships while residents line up in the freezing cold for clean water is, ostensibly, not a good look.

For a good cause, he tells himself again. The northern Quebecois township of Lac-Cartier has been recently devastated by a spate of floods, and the League had the brilliant idea of teaming up with a local charity to raise awareness for the situation.

In theory, this is something that Shane can totally get behind. He’s no stranger to being in front of a camera, and it’s nice that it’s for charity, instead of the usual cologne ads or sneaker brand deals. In practice, however, the whole trip has been miserable. Travelling was the first issue; the nearest airstrip was a four-hour drive away, and the drive to Lac-Cartier was over pitted, unkind roads. Even worse, the director of this shoot is wildly picky, demanding they do take after take in pursuit of perfection. Those aren’t the real problems, though.

The real problem is who the League decided to send for this particular TV spot.

It makes sense, Shane has to admit. Both he and Rozanov are free; neither of their teams made it past the first round of playoffs, and so their schedules are wide open. More importantly, seeing Shane Hollander and Ilya Rozanov, arch-rivals on the ice, teaming up for the good cause—it sends the right kind of message. With their assistance, Lac-Cartier can finally begin to rebuild.

Unfortunately, it means spending all day in close proximity to Ilya Rozanov.

They haven't talked since Vegas. Not really. Not since Shane, feeling pathetic and sad, almost texted something unbearably stupid to Rozanov: *we didn't even kiss*. Even thinking of it now makes Shane shudder with embarrassment. Despite all he's done to prevent it, sometimes his omega instincts show up in the most unexpected ways.

Such as: being ridiculously needy with a hookup who doesn't owe him anything.

Needy. Clingy. All the hallmarks of being an omega—all the things that Shane has worked day in and day out to suppress.

Shane rolls his head back, trying to clear it. The cold is making him stiff and sore.

Rozanov cuts him a glance. "What is wrong, Hollander?"

Other than being stuck in the middle of nowhere with you? "Nothing," he murmurs. "Let's just—get through this, alright?"

"Let's go for another," the director calls from behind the camera. "More passion, Shane! More *passion*!"

Rozanov leans in. "Someone should tell this guy that he is no Spielberg," he mutters.

Shane laughs.

...

By the time they're done filming, it's nighttime. Snow falls in big, fluffy clumps. Shane eyes the sky uneasily. If the weather gets any worse, they might not be able to fly out. Hell, they might not even make it to the airstrip.

Someone nudges him. "Worried about a little snow, Hollander? Here I thought you are good Canadian boy." He grins crookedly. "Is too bad we fly home tonight. No time to... *catch up*."

It's the usual teasing, but something about Ilya calling him *good boy* makes Shane's whole body shudder. He throttles the motion, violently. *Stop it*, he tells himself. "It's not a *little* snow," he replies. "We might get stranded."

Rozanov snorts. "So dramatic."

Shane closes his eyes briefly. Tired. He's tired, and that's why he feels like shit. He's achy, hot and cold at the same time. His mouth is dry. "Excuse me," he mutters, pushing past Rozanov, needing the space.

The film crew's home base is a stone church, one of the few buildings in Lac-Cartier that hasn't been altered by the floods. The crew is busy packing up their gear, placing cameras and lights and lenses into pelican cases. It's clear they're in a hurry. Everyone is trying to beat the storm. Shane knows he should be in his rental car right now, driving down the pitted two-lane highway, but Jesus Christ, he needs a moment. He's feeling worse by the minute.

So he goes to the bathroom. There's no running water, of course, and that's a damn shame because Shane would love nothing more than to splash his face and snap out of it. Instead, he stares at himself in the mirror. Sweat lingers on his temples. His eyes are glassy and febrile. Shit, maybe he *is* coming down with something. A cold, or the flu. Just his luck. At least he's got Advil in his bag—

Advil. Medicine. A ping goes through Shane, half-revelation and half-panic. His pills. He took them last night, right? *Didn't he?*

He looks at himself again, and thinks: *no fucking way.*

Shane is a creature of habit, and this last-minute flight to Nowhere, Quebec is not part of his routine. He tries to think back, remember what he was doing at this time yesterday. Packing his travel bag, yes. But did he take his daily suppressants?

The answer comes to him. No. In the rush of it all, he forgot. Like an idiot, Shane Hollander forgot to take his medication.

No wonder he feels so weird. Without the pills suppressing the natural rhythms of his body, he's screwed. He's entering preheat.

"Shit," Shane says. "Shit, shit, shit."

This can be remedied. Surely he remembered to bring his little white pillbox. It's not advised, but if an omega forgets a dose, he can correct it by taking a double dose the next day. He'll feel a bit woozy and nauseous, but that's better than what's currently happening.

"Hollander?" Someone is knocking on the door. It's Rozanov, of course. "You in there?"

Shane groans and presses his forehead to the cool surface of the mirror. Rozanov's voice is *doing* things to him. His skin feels itchy and overly warm. It shouldn't be happening this fast, but maybe being near the presence of an alpha is, sort of, *accelerating* the process. Just his goddamn luck.

"Hollander?"

Shane doesn't reply, tries to spin up a lie. He can't tell Rozanov the truth; Rozanov doesn't know that Shane is an omega.

No one in the League knows. Sure, the NHL is theoretically progressive—the ban on omegas playing was repealed in the 90s—but he doesn't want to test it. There have been no 'out' omegas in the NHL, ever, and Shane doesn't want to be the first. He has no inclination to trailblaze. His credibility would be ruined first off; his team, his beloved Metros, a group of

brilliant and rowdy and incredibly *dominant* alphas, would never rally behind an omega as their captain. Instead, Shane masquerades as a beta, using a strict regimen of hormone suppressants, scent blockers, and every trick in the book to hide. It hasn't been easy, but it has worked.

He'd even fooled Rozanov.

Now, his own stupidity threatens to tear it all down. Everything he's built. Everything he's worked for.

"Go away!" Shane says.

There's a long pause. Shane hopes that Ilya has done exactly that. Then: "What is wrong, Hollander?"

Shane takes a deep breath. Looks at himself in the mirror, one last time. It's still early preheat, and he's wearing a lot of layers of clothing. There's a good chance his scent isn't strong enough to permeate. He treats the whole thing like an obstacle course; get past Rozanov, get to the car, find his pills. Easy. No problem. He puts on the hood of his parka for extra protection, then opens the door.

Rozanov says, "Hollander—!" But Shane is already walking by, which is harder than it should be, because his hormones do *not* want to leave the vicinity of this alpha.

Shane ignores everything and charges outside.

It's the kind of dry, icy cold that hurts on every inhale, and Shane ignores this too. The snow is getting worse, and visibility is poor. He beelines straight for his rental car, a grey Subaru on the edge of the makeshift lot. He's vaguely aware of Rozanov calling after him, equal parts indignant and bewildered—

"Hollander? What is your *problem*?"

—and instead goes straight for the trunk, where he keeps his duffel. Frantically he finds the medicine bag. Christ, his fingers are numb. It's unbearably cold, but he rifles as fast as he can. Advil, check. Benadryl, check. Miniature first aid kit, check. But where are his suppressants? Not here, evidently.

He looks again. He overturns the whole bag and dumps it all out. Shane is usually so fastidious, and it's a testament to his desperation that he doesn't care about the mess. He paws through the pile of clothing and toiletries. Misery is tangible, a lump in his throat, a pounding behind his eyes.

"No," he mutters. "No fucking way."

"What the fuck is wrong with you?"

Shane jumps.

Rozanov is standing right behind him, peering at the mess in the car. “Ah, did you forget your special disgusting protein bars or something? Do not worry, you will survive.”

“Fuck *off*,” Shane snaps, closing the trunk. Shit, shit, shit. Alarm bells are tolling in his head. He’s forgotten his suppressants. He’s forgotten them, and there’s a blizzard, and he’s very far from home, far from a doctor who can help—far from anyone who can help. This is the middle of nowhere, the edge of civilization. There are no helpful heat facilities nearby, stocked with the necessary toys and materials to assist a wayward omega. Staying in Lac-Cartier is out of the question; the town is reeling from a disaster and not a safe place to spend a heat.

So, then: Plan B.

Plan B is driving like a maniac to the airstrip, and praying for the weather to clear up. Preheat usually lasts a day, so if Shane is able to fly out tonight, then he should arrive in Montreal just in time. At least he’ll have options in the city.

An anxious part of Shane whispers, *What if the blizzard gets worse?*

Then it’s Plan C.

Plan C is to drive as far as he can, pull over somewhere safe-ish (gas station? Walmart parking lot? Fuck, the options aren’t great), and deal with his heat alone. In a rental car. In the middle of nowhere.

Jesus. Shane doesn’t know if he’ll survive Plan C, but it’s all he’s got.

“Hollander...?”

Rozanov is looking at him with something like concern, but that’s impossible. Concern isn’t part of the equation. They meet up, they fuck, and they hate each other in public. That’s how it goes.

“Storm’s getting worse,” says Shane. “You should go.”

“Yes, I should,” Rozanov replies, “but first I make sure you’re okay.”

“That I’m okay?” Incredulous. Shane wants to laugh. *Now Ilya Rozanov cares?*

Rozanov scoffs. “Because you are acting crazy.”

“I’m not crazy. Go away.” And just to prove his point, Shane once again walks away from the alpha. He gets into his car, slams the door shut, and starts the engine.

Click-click-click-click—

He turns the key again.

The car whines and sputters. It doesn’t turn on. He tries it again. And again. Each time, the engine makes a sad little clicking noise. The Subaru is dead.

No. Shane sort of feels like crying. He decides he must have done something truly, unforgivably atrocious in a past life, and this is the moment where he pays for it. It's the perfect storm, *literally*, a perfect series of awful mistakes and bad coincidences. This cannot be happening. This absolutely cannot be happening. No pills. No way home.

"Car trouble?" Rozanov calls, because *of course* he's still there, standing outside the driver's side and watching all this go down. "Is the cold. Kills battery."

"Yes, I know that," Shane snaps.

"What? Cannot hear you. Window closed."

Shane shuts his eyes and leans forward. Every passing minute, he's more aware of his own body, and how wrong it feels. He's wearing too much clothing, and it's all so scratchy against his oversensitive skin. The headache is getting worse.

Shane centres himself, taking a few deep breaths. Then he opens the door and steps into the cold once more. Subtly, he positions himself downwind.

"Do you have jumper cables?" he asks.

Rozanov shakes his head. "No. Rental does not have."

"Shit. Neither do I."

"Is no problem." Rozanov holds up his own keys. "I can drive. Get your things."

Shane stares at him, stares at the keys. The temperature is continuing to drop, and the wind—and the snow—are picking up, howling with a fervour exclusive to the vicious Canadian tundra. Accepting Rozanov's offer is dangerous, but this current situation is untenable. Shane has no choice.

"Fine."

He only hopes he can make it.

Chapter 2: Bad News

Chapter Summary

As his heat approaches, Shane struggles to keep his secret from Ilya.

Of course, the first thing Shane and Rozanov do is bicker, and this is kind of nice. It feels normal.

“But I’m warm!” Shane argues.

“Then take off your gigantic coat!” Rozanov replies. “Don’t be weird, Hollander, the window stays closed!”

Nighttime. The snow is coming down in flurries. Visibility is nil. Rozanov takes the roads slowly, fording the ice and potholes with a confident expertise. Shane burrows deeper into his parka, even though he’s dripping sweat from every goddamn pore. He *is* hot, that much is true, but the real reason he wants the window open is to help hide his scent. So far, Rozanov hasn’t noticed, but at this point it’s only a matter of time. Shane feels like a timebomb.

Shane tries again. “Maybe just a tiny bit open?”

“No,” Rozanov replies, a hint of alpha dominance entering his tone. This is typical. Alphas like throwing their weight around with other alphas—and even with betas to some extent. Especially in a setting like hockey, which is all about strength and competition and power. Shane is used to it. He has to be, as a team captain. He can’t be turning over and presenting every time an alpha snarls at him. Normally, he would roll his eyes and push back.

Not this time. On the precipice of a heat, Rozanov’s natural alpha dominance is having a completely different effect. Shane wants to shrink. Shane wants to incline his head and bare his throat. He wants to make this alpha happy, and keeping the window open will make him *unhappy*, and that simply won’t do.

It doesn’t help that Rozanov’s scent is everywhere. It’s a musky, heady thing, like sweat and cedar and pine needles. Shane loves it. Whenever they hook up, Shane keeps himself carefully in check, quelling any omega behaviours—nesting, nuzzling. But, sometimes, when Rozanov is in the shower, Shane can’t help himself. He finds a piece of clothing that belongs to the alpha and buries himself in it, allowing the scent to wash over him. Rozanov has never caught him, thank god. It would be a dead giveaway.

And now that scent is everywhere. Shane can’t help but respond, open up to it, his hormones reacting involuntarily. He releases a slow, shaky breath.

“So, Hollander, why have you been so weird today?” Rozanov asks.

“I’m not being weird,” Shane mutters, trying to keep his voice sounding normal.

The alpha shrugs. “Is not bad thing. Better than boring. Are you avoiding me?”

The question comes out of nowhere. Shane looks at him sharply. “What do you mean?”

“Driving with me, is not so terrible, yes?” Rozanov shrugs again. “Yet it seems like you’d rather be out there right now, walking.”

“It’s nothing,” Shane says.

“Is not nothing, Hollander. *Tell me.*”

Again, that razor in his voice, the dominance coming through. Shane shudders. He suspects that if Rozanov knew Shane’s true designation, he’d be *much* more careful. It isn’t fair to use that tone, not when millions of years of biology and evolution have primed an omega to respond to a demanding alpha with obedience. It’s part of the reason why there’s so many laws for omegas in place—it’s a vulnerable designation to be.

Shane knows this and can’t help himself, not when every bone in his body is screaming to submit. He gives Rozanov a piece of the truth. “I think I’m getting sick, okay? Coming down with—something.”

“Sick?” Rozanov repeats. And then he does something catastrophic. His hand darts out, and he presses his palm to Shane’s sweat-slicked forehead. “You are burning up!”

A few things happen at once.

The moment Rozanov makes contact with Shane, Shane gasps. It’s electric. It’s what he wants—what he needs. Yes, more. More of this. More touch. The gasp transforms into an almost-silent keen, something that comes from deep in his chest. *Please.*

At the same time, Rozanov retracts his hand. He’s gone very quiet.

“Sick,” he repeats.

Shane says, “Yes.”

With one hand still on the wheel, Rozanov lifts the other to his nose and inhales deeply. Inhales Shane’s scent. Shane goes completely still.

There’s a sharp intake of breath. Rozanov’s pupils dilate, visible even in the lowlight of the car. He does not look at Shane, he keeps his eyes on the road, and he speaks in a gravelly, strapped-down voice. “You have been keeping something from me, I think.”

There’s no point in denying. Shane, who has been feeling shitty all day, who is in need of comfort, who has never felt more alone as an omega in a world full of alphas, begins to speak. The floodgates are open and he can’t stop. “You weren’t supposed to know. *No one* is supposed to know. I’ve been so *careful*, but it’s my fault, I forgot to take my suppressants last

night, and I forgot my stupid pillbox, and this is completely my fault, and I'm sorry, I'm sorry. I'm in preheat. I'm sorry."

Shane braces for an explosion. Anger. Or maybe Rozanov will pull over and fuck him right then and there. Some alphas have better control than others. Shane isn't sure what outcome he wants, what outcome he fears.

Rozanov doesn't do anything drastic. He white-knuckles the steering wheel. "How long until your heat begins?" His voice is flat, businesslike.

Shane moves numbers around. Counts backwards from the first onset of symptoms. "Twelve hours, give or take."

"Enough time to get to airstrip. Get to Montreal. You go to—what is the word, place? Facility? How do you normally deal with heats?"

"Um," Shane bites his lip. "I don't... know? It's, uh, been a while, since I've had a..."

Rozanov makes a disapproving noise. "How long?"

Shane whispers, "Years."

"*Years*? Jesus Christ, Hollander, you know how dangerous that is?"

"Obviously," he spits out. He's been taking nonstop suppressants since before his rookie season, since before the world juniors. Normally, omegas on suppressants are supposed to have one heat per year, minimum. If Shane was smart—if Shane was *sane*—he would do exactly that, taper off his pills in the summer, spend a week at the cottage in aching seclusion. Except he hasn't. He takes his pills continuously. He hates this side of himself, he hates feeling so out of control—toys and synthetic pheromone spray can only do so much, and hiring a comfort alpha is out of the question. He can't risk his secret getting out. Besides, going into heat is a whole ordeal. It fucks up his routines. Shane's life is hockey, and being an omega is not conducive to that whatsoever.

"Probably why it came on so fast," Shane mumbles. "Because it's been so long. I'm sorry. I didn't mean to—"

"Stop. Apologizing."

Shane stops. He goes silent.

Rozanov groans. "Shit, no. That's not what I—I'm sorry, Hollander. If I had known that you are... it would have been different. Between us."

"That's the whole point," Shane argues. "I don't *want* to be treated differently. That's why I've kept it a secret."

Rozanov's eyes soften. "I would not tell anyone."

"Okay, great, but that's not—"

“I would be more—” Rozanov struggles. “More kind. Gentle. *Ach*, English is no good for this. There is old Russian saying about omegas, *kak moye serdtse*. Means to... protect, take care.”

“That’s not your—not your responsibility,” Shane says. He’s clinging to independence with a failing grasp. Part of him wants *so badly* to let Rozanov’s words sink in. *Protect. Take care.* But this is coming from a man who owes him nothing. He cannot ask this of Ilya Rozanov, as much as he desperately wants to. “I cannot belong to anyone. I can’t be an omega *and* captain of the Metros.”

A beat of silence passes between them. Then Rozanov says, “I will get you to airstrip, Hollander. I promise. You’ll reach Montreal in time.”

Just as he says this, fate once again overturns Shane’s plans in the form of a ringing phone.

“Not mine,” Rozanov says.

Shane pulls out his cell. It’s not a number he has saved, but the digits look vaguely familiar. He answers. “Hello?”

“*Hi, Shane, yes? This is Denis Lefevre.*” It’s a man’s voice, staticky and apologetic. He’s speaking French, so Shane switches effortlessly.

“*Lefevre...?*”

“*The pilot for your chartered flight to Montreal.*”

“*Oh! Ouais. Is everything alright?*” Shane asks anxiously.

“*Bad news. An awful storm front is coming in—worst blizzard we’ve had in over a decade. I can’t fly in these conditions, not anytime soon.*”

Shane closes his eyes, unable to process it. The world falls out of focus.

“*...Shane?*”

He’s missed something. “*Oui, désolé. What did you say?*”

“*Whereabouts are you? Still in Lac-Cartier?*”

“*Non. Left about thirty minutes ago.*”

“*I’d get off the roads, it’s only getting worse,*” Lefevre advises. “*Nearest town is Pointe-Lebel, it’s not much of a place, but there is a motel.*”

Not much of a place. Doubtful there would be anything approximating a heat facility nearby. “*Are there any... uh, bigger towns? Cities?*”

Lefevre chuckles. “*You may be a monster on the ice, but you can’t fight this storm. Welcome to northern Quebec. Get off the roads as soon as you can.*”

“D’accord,” Shane replies, sighing. *“Merci.”*

“Safe driving. And I mean it. Find somewhere safe to ride this thing out.”

The pilot hangs up.

Shane puts down the phone. He’s unbearably hot. He presses his forehead against the cold glass of the car window, watching the world pass by in a dark blur.

“Let me guess,” says Rozanov. “More bad news.”

Shane closes his eyes. “Yup.”

Chapter 3: Contingencies

Chapter Summary

Ilya is determined to make Shane's heat as comfortable as possible, and takes all precautions. Meanwhile, Shane's priorities are a little different.

Ilya is very close to losing his mind.

There are a lot of reasons for this. It's hard to organize the chaotic jumble of thoughts—all the things he wants, all the things he wants to say to Shane Hollander.

Even looking at him is painful. Driving is agony. Despite all the ridiculous layers he's wearing, Hollander's scent is permeating the car. It's intoxicating, like honey. Hollander smells needy. He smells ready.

That's not what's driving him mad, though. Ilya isn't an animal. He's capable of controlling himself.

What's insane is that Shane Hollander is an omega. What's insane is that Hollander has kept this secret for so long, even from Ilya. All for it to come undone over one silly little mistake.

Ilya wants to push the hair away from Hollander's face, wants to trace a finger over the curve of his jaw. Poor Hollander. The situation is so far from ideal it's almost comical. Hollander, forced to come out as omega before he was ready. Hollander, stuck between a series of bad choices.

Ilya follows the signs to Pointe-Lebel, taking the exit. He's Russian born and raised, but even these conditions are making him nervous. It's good they'll be off the roads soon. But then, the question of *what happens next* is palpable. What happens when they reach the motel?

Ilya doesn't know what to do. Already he feels incredibly guilty over ordering Hollander around. *Tell me. Stop apologizing.* If he had known, then he would have never used his dominance like that—it's a hockey player habit, something Ilya does with his team. But he would never do it with an omega. Ilya believes in choice. Ilya wants Hollander to know that he does have a choice in all of this.

There are lights ahead, breaking up the gloom. Pointe-Lebel approaches.

"Hollander," Ilya says quietly, breaking the silence. "May I say something?"

Hollander opens his eyes. "Alright," he says, cautiously.

He's so skittish. Ilya's heart hurts. He wishes that Hollander would trust him. No, that's not it—he wishes he'd given Hollander a *reason* to trust him. He thinks about Vegas. Watching Hollander touch himself had been so hot, bossing him around, turning him over and mounting him. But that was when Ilya had assumed Hollander was a beta. Had he known the truth—he never would have been so flippant, so commandeering. Not without explicit permissions, boundaries, and consent. Ilya wonders if there's any way to redeem himself, to prove that he's not the careless alpha that Hollander so clearly thinks he is.

Ilya takes his time with each sentence. "You do not belong to me," he enunciates. "I know that—I would never, ah, assume that." Hollander's scent changes, souring slightly. Is that—disappointment? Ilya pushes on. "But that doesn't mean I cannot... it means that I... *ach*, so hard to... I have helped omegas through their heats before, Hollander. Is what I'm trying to say."

Hollander looks at him with real interest. "Really? Who?"

"My coach's son, Sasha," Ilya replies. "Suppressants are—harder to find, in Russia. Omegas don't have as many rights. So we planned it. I did research. Made sure he was safe, looked after, cared for. This, I can do for you too."

Hollander's breath hitches. "Is... is that what you want? To help me?"

No, it's what I need, Ilya thinks. Sex is only part of it for him. Yes, heat sex is mind-blowing in the best way. He loved making Sasha feel good, loved turning *need* into *pleasure* into *bliss*. But, more than that, Ilya's protective instincts are going into overdrive. A scared, vulnerable omega is sitting next to him. An omega on the brink of a frightening ordeal. And Ilya can *help*. Ilya may be the only one who can help.

"Yes," Ilya rasps. "But it's your choice, Hollander. Always your choice. If you want to... we will talk, before the heat starts. Boundaries. Things you want, things you don't want. If you want to... I will take care of you. I *want* to take care of you. But it's your choice."

Hollander nods slowly. He's warming up to the idea, Ilya knows this because his scent has changed again, growing stronger and sweeter.

"This changes nothing between us," Hollander says finally. "No strings. Afterwards—it's business as usual."

Ilya keeps his eyes on the road. They're pulling into Point-Lebel now, a dimly-lit township on the edge of the St. Lawrence River. Ilya follows the main strip in hopes of spotting the motel. "Is that a yes, Hollander?"

"No mating bites," Hollander continues. His voice is trembling slightly. Ilya knows that telling an alpha what to do is contradicting all of his omega instincts.

Ilya is immensely proud. He nods. "No mating bites."

"And have you... um, have you been tested recently?"

Ilya nods again. He's always careful—he wraps it up with all of his partners. Even so, he gets tested every three months, and, as luck would have it, he went in four days ago. “Yes. All healthy.” Then the words sink into him. If Hollander is asking about his test results... “You don't want condom?”

Hollander rapidly shakes his head. “*No*, I'll need...” he licks his lips. “It's been too long since I've had a heat. It's going to be, um, intense. We can't... I'd rather we didn't use a condom. Please.”

Ilya tries to pretend like this isn't the best news he's heard all day. “This means you are okay with me knotting you, *da*?”

Shane sucks in air through clenched teeth. Ilya goes rigid. His scent is filling the car, and it's palpable. The *need*. Ilya can't help but say, softly, “Are you already slick for me, *moye serdtse*?”

“Yes,” Hollander whispers, almost a whine.

Ilya says, “Good.” Because it is good. It is *very* good. His mind is getting foggy. But the interrogation isn't over yet. It's important to get all the details squared away first, before Hollander is properly out of his mind. “And birth control?”

Hollander ducks his head. “I don't have anything. I'm sorry.”

“Not to worry. I go to store, pick up—how you say—”

“Plan O,” Hollander finishes.

“*Da*. You take it before?”

“Never needed to.”

“Is okay. Is not so bad. Sasha used it. He had, um...” he doesn't know the English word for cramps or nausea. “Sick, afterwards. Only for a day.”

Hollander digests this. “It doesn't affect the heat itself?”

“*Nyet*, only the postheat. You will feel... bad. But only a little. Don't worry, I will take care of you.”

Ilya is glad he has experience with this, because Hollander obviously does not. Plan O is a variation of Plan B, made specifically for omegas in heat. It's a pair of pills: one taken during preheat, and the other during postheat. It's not the most ideal option, given the side effects, but it's their best bet.

Hollander swallows. “Then let's... yeah. Let's go with that.”

“Good. Yes, good.” Ilya is trying to keep a clear head about all of this. It's difficult. Now that he knows Hollander is an omega, it's wild that he could have thought otherwise. It seems so

obvious, in retrospect. Ilya is beginning to feel excited. Heat sex, with Shane Hollander... this is a dream come true.

He shakes his head, trying to clear it. A dream, yes, but he refuses to take advantage of it in any way. "Hollander?"

"Yeah?"

"I will buy two rooms." Hollander begins to protest, but Ilya bulldozes over him. This is not up for debate. "If, at any time, you decide you want to stop—say it. Tell me stop, and I will leave, go to other room. *Da?*"

"I don't think that will be necessary," Hollander murmurs.

"Is necessary to me," Ilya says firmly. Necessary that the omega always has the option, the choice, to say no. Ilya does not want to erode Hollander's carefully cultivated independence. How hard he must work, day after day, taking a miserable cocktail of pills, repressing all his natural instincts. Hollander has worked twice as hard as any hockey player to get where he is. Ilya doesn't want Hollander to feel used, or coerced. This is imperative.

"Fine." Hollander sounds sort of cranky about it. Then he points, straightening out of his slouch. "I think I see a sign."

They're on the edge of town, right where the main street of Pointe-Lebel bumps up against the vast shore of the St Lawrence. A green neon sign approaches out of the blurry darkness.

"*Hôtel Terre-du-Nord*," Hollander says. "Northland Motel."

Thank god. Ilya doesn't know how much longer he can hold out. He guides the car into the empty lot and takes stock of the surroundings. "Hm."

Whatever he was picturing with the word *motel*, the Northland defies all expectations. Instead of the usual strip-mall setup, a dozen cute little log cabins dot the riverside property. It's actually rather charming.

And much more *private* than what he could have hoped for.

"It's nice," Hollander says, sounding equally surprised.

"Stay here, I get rooms." Ilya leans forward and presses his lips to Hollander's overheated forehead. Hollander leans into the contact. He tastes like *need* and *want* and *desperation*. He tastes sweet, like honey. Hollander sighs, as though the brief kiss means everything. Ilya is glad to give him this. Ilya wants to give him so much more. "Stay," he repeats softly, and gets out of the car.

...

Ilya goes a little overboard.

His plan to fly under the radar is immediately derailed when the woman at the front desk—who perks up, surprised to have a customer—recognises him.

“*Est-vous Ilya Rozanov?*” she says, startled.

She’s a beta. Ilya can smell it. His senses are dialled to eleven, probably because he’s been around Hollander so much. The scent of an omega in preheat sets off a hormone bomb in an alpha’s body, too—protectiveness, hypersensitivity, possessiveness. Sometimes, it can even trigger a rut, though that typically only happens with mates. Ilya is on edge, and he’s pissed off that his anonymity is blown.

So he does the next best thing. She doesn’t speak much English, and neither does he, but they make it work: an awkward dance which leaves her starry-eyed at the amount he’s offering. It’s way more than the going rate by at least double. Ilya buys all twelve cabins for the week.

He lays it on a little thick, using his alpha energy to his advantage. It’s not the same as ordering around an omega, but betas aren’t totally immune, especially since Ilya is so keyed up. He impresses the importance of privacy. No gossip, no telling anyone that he’s here. He invents a cover story—he implies there’s a companion with him, hoping that she’ll make the natural conclusion: Ilya Rozanov has unexpectedly entered a rut. It’s not unheard of. He is a hockey player after all, and everyone knows that nearly all professional athletes are alphas. The cover story is insurance; if his being here ever *did* get out, it wouldn’t exactly be news. Going into a rut would not ruin Ilya’s career, not in the same way that public knowledge of Hollander’s heat would.

Ilya promises even more cash if his stay at the Northland Motel is undisturbed.

By the end, the woman is tripping over herself trying to accommodate, insisting in broken English: “For you, *Monsieur Rozanov*, all private—only private. If anything you need—”

“I’ll be fine,” Ilya says. “Thank you.”

He leaves the woman a few thousand dollars richer than before, and in possession of all twelve cabin keys.

He returns to the car and experiences a full-blown panic attack when he realises that Hollander isn’t in the passenger seat. Oh, shit—where did—Ilya’s mind is suddenly filled with visions of Hollander lost in the snow, Hollander hurt somewhere, Hollander falling into the river, and most ludicrously, Hollander being kidnapped by some other greedy alpha, drawn to his irresistible scent. “Hollander? *Hollander!*”

“Here,” the omega calls, emerging from the blizzard. Ilya releases a breath. Hollander was barely a few metres away from the car, but visibility is so poor that he’d disappeared entirely. “Sorry. I needed some air.”

Ilya has to quell every instinct he’s ever had. It’s his job to keep his omega safe, and he almost lost him—*stop*, he tells himself. Hormones. Protectiveness. This is his body priming to the task, preparing for what’s about to happen. “I’m glad you’re alright.” He holds up the handful of keys. “Dealer’s choice, Hollander. I bought whole place. Here, you take.”

Hollander accepts all twelve keys, nonplussed.

Because he isn't getting it, Ilya pushes him gently. "You pick the cabin."

"What? You bought them," Hollander says, still confused. "You should pick."

How long has Hollander been repressing this side of him? How little does he know about himself? Ilya worries that he doesn't deserve—this. To guide Hollander through it, to show him the way. He feels unworthy, but he will try to prove himself otherwise. "*Nyet*, Hollander. Is your job. This is part of it. You're an omega—you make nest."

"*Ohh*," Hollander breathes, eyes widening. Now he gets it. "Of course. That, uh, makes sense."

"Whichever cabin feels best," Ilya presses. "Go. I follow with bags."

Hollander nods, staring at the keys with renewed interest. Ilya smiles. Sasha was the same before his heat, investigating Ilya's apartment, finding the ideal place to build a nest and filling it with scent and comfort. It's cute, watching Hollander wake up to these inclinations.

It's *less cute* to watch Hollander stride away, but this is something he needs to do, and besides—he's not a child. Ilya reminds himself of this as he goes to the trunk and takes both bags. Neither have packed much. He hopes there's enough clothes for Hollander to make a nest out of.

Bags in hand, Ilya follows the omega into the snow.

...

"Do you, um, like it?"

Hollander sounds needy. He *smells* needy, too. Having done a cursory loop around the property, he's decided on the cabin closest to the river. The interior is peaceful and quaint: rustic Canadian hospitality at its finest. There is a buffalo plaid quilt on the bed, which is made of a solid wooden frame. Sturdy. *Thank god*, Ilya thinks. The floor is warm, worn hardwood, and there's even a woodstove in the corner. It feels like an old hunting cabin, the kind of place eighteenth century fur traders would hole up in to wait out the storm. The only incongruous thing is the mini fridge in the corner, which Ilya is glad to see, because his next bullet point on the preheat to-do list is to fetch food.

"I like it," Ilya murmurs. He likes it because Hollander likes it, because his omega has picked this place for them. Outside, the wind howls, and snow piles up on the windowsills. "For you." He gives Hollander his duffel. "You build nest now."

Hollander accepts the bag reverently. Trancelike, he unzips it and pulls out the first piece of clothing; an old, faded Raiders t-shirt. He brings it to his nose, closes his eyes, and inhales deeply.

Ilya laughs.

Hollander breaks from the reverie, annoyed. “What?”

“Captain of Montreal Metros, using Raiders shirt like... that.”

Hollander scowls. “You’re such asshole.”

“Ah, you like it,” Ilya teases. This feels good. A brief return to normalcy in what is quickly becoming a surreal situation. “Go on, make nest, Hollander.”

Hollander is still clutching the shirt. He says, shyly, “Do you want to watch?”

Yes, he very much does want to watch. “*Da*, but only for a bit. Need to get supplies.”

Hollander sags. His mouth pulls into a frown. “You’re leaving?”

“Come here,” Ilya says. Hollander does as he’s told, and is folded into Ilya’s embrace. “You need Plan O. And food, and...”

Hollander nuzzles into Ilya’s chest. “No, I don’t care about any of that, I only want—”

“Shh, *moye serdtse*, is preheat talking. I know what you need.” Hollander requires a firmer hand now. His scent is growing stronger, more potent. The heat is approaching, and as it does, he’ll become less and less sensible. Especially—god help them—because it’s been *years* since he last had a heat. It’s going to be a lot. For everyone involved.

Ilya releases him. “Make nest. I watch, for little while.”

It’s adorable and arousing at the same time.

Hollander isn’t very good at this, not at first. Ilya lounges at the small table near the window, not interfering. It’s not his place to interfere. He has no nesting instincts of his own, but he knows that this is extremely important for omegas, especially if it’s an unfamiliar space. They need to feel safe and comfortable.

Hollander rifles through Ilya’s clothing, humming to himself, smelling certain garments and sorting them in ways that are incomprehensible to Ilya. Ilya smiles. Eventually, the sorting ends and the arranging begins: Hollander uses the quilt and the pillows and clothing, moving them in ways that seem to put him at ease. It’s good to see his omega like this, busy and content.

Unfortunately, being content and comfortable means that Hollander’s scent is only growing stronger. Even more so, now that’s finally out of that huge parka. It’s taking all of Ilya’s willpower not to stride over and claim him right here and now. He’ll wait. It’s not time. Hollander isn’t ready.

Ilya stands. “I should go.” It’s getting late, and he wants to get to the pharmacy before it closes. “I’ll be quick.”

Hollander abandons his nest-building, darting over to Ilya and pressing a kiss on his cheek. “Are you sure you have to go?” he asks, looking up with a dark, fringed gaze.

“Fuck, Hollander,” Ilya growls. “You make this hard.”

And Hollander says innocently, “I make *what* hard, exactly?”

Ilya growls again. His cock stiffens. God help him. Cheeky omega, trying to get what he wants. It almost works. Almost.

“Be good,” Ilya murmurs to him, drawing his nose across Hollander’s jaw, and down his neck. Hollander gasps, and Ilya grins. Two can play at this game.

“Rozanov—” Hollander whines.

“I’ll be quick,” Ilya repeats, and grabs his keys and coat before the last of his willpower crumbles.

...

Ilya flies like a madman through Rexall, throwing things at random into the cart. He gets the Plan O first, and this time he’s careful, keeping his hood up and head down when talking to the pharmacist. No recognition, thankfully. Then he goes shopping: nutrition bars, granola, beef jerky—high calorie, high protein is key. And sweets. Lots of chocolate and cookies and candy, because omegas are known for having a sweet tooth. He also gets way too much ginger ale. It probably won’t all fit in the mini fridge. It’s overkill, but Ilya can’t help it; Ilya is an alpha. It’s his job to take care of his omega, and his omega likes ginger ale.

Hollander won’t be interested in sitting down and eating a meal. In fact, Ilya will probably have to coax nutrition into him one bite at a time. Omegas in heat are only interested in one thing, and trying to make them do anything else—even eating and drinking—usually just pisses them off. Ilya is prepared. His bargaining skills are legendary, and he’s going to make sure his omega doesn’t starve.

He doesn’t forget about practical matters: kleenex, wet wipes, anti-nausea pills (for the side effects of Plan O), condoms and lube (he doubts these will be used, it’s more of a just-in-case measure), and scent-blocker patches. He *really* hopes the latter won’t be necessary, but he wants Hollander to have the option. They won’t work on an omega actively in heat, but they will work on Ilya, since his next rut isn’t due for a couple months. If something goes wrong, if something doesn’t go the way they planned, then at least he can appear as nonthreatening as possible to Hollander. It’s a last resort.

He also, after a moment of hesitation, buys something else.

This particular brand is called Astragel, but colloquially, everyone calls it the serum. It comes in a small, nondescript white tube, similar to toothpaste. It’s unreasonably expensive, worth more than everything else in his cart combined.

Standing in the aisle, Ilya pulls his hood tight around his face, and reads the description on the back.

Directions: 1. CLEAN affected area. 2. Apply generous amount of Astragel™ to affected area. 3. Mating mark will fade within 4-6 hours of application. If mark persists, apply more Astragel™ up to 3 times within 24-hour period. Most effective when used within 24 hours of mark occurrence.

WARNING: Astragel™ is guaranteed to eliminate physical effects of mark, but Astragel™ cannot guarantee total elimination of psychological effects. Astragel™ recommends consulting your doctor or healthcare professional.

Serum is new. Brand new, fresh-out-of-medical-trials new, and most of the alphas he knows scoff at its existence. Reversing a mating mark? Ridiculous. Impossible. At worst it's blasphemy. Nothing is more permanent than a mating mark. In truth, Ilya thinks that alphas fear the serum because it puts the power back in the hands of the omegas. Evens out the scales.

Long overdue, he thinks.

If scent blockers were his last resort, then the serum is an everything-has-to-gone-to-shit contingency. Because, when used correctly, the serum will *eradicate a mating bite*.

It's not recommended for an omega to use it more than once or twice in their life. Side effects of erasing a mark are serious. As the instructions clearly state, the *psychological* effects don't go away. But the serum has been a game changer; it helps omegas recover from unwanted marks, escape abusive relationships.

Ilya shudders. That's not him and Shane. It won't be.

It really is a *just in case*. Just in case everything goes to shit.

Shane isn't in danger. Ilya's next rut is months away. He's done this before, he's helped Sasha, he knows what he's doing. In fact, he won't even *tell* Shane that he's buying the serum. He'll stash it somewhere hidden. It feels rotten, buying it, even considering the option. But he wants to be prepared for all possible scenarios.

Thank god for self-checkouts. Ilya can't imagine meeting a cashier's eyes as he buys all this stuff. He feels obvious, anxious, like he's broadcasting to the world: *I'm about to have heat sex with Shane Hollander!*

As he loads the bags into the car, he can admit this to himself: he *is* anxious. About screwing it up. About making it good, making it right. This is all so sudden. Earlier today, he had no idea that Hollander was an omega... and now...

Ilya gives himself a moment in the driver's seat. He breathes it all in. Hollander's scent lingers here, and it's comforting, honey-sweet and heavy. It fills his nostrils, putting him at ease. *No strings*, Hollander had said. No strings, no mating bites. Ilya will obey, because he cares about Hollander in a way that's beginning to scare him. He will follow the rules. He won't protest.

But—in the privacy of the car, in the snow, in the nearly-empty parking lot, Ilya feels it all. It's unwise, but he can't help it: he imagines himself sheathed inside Hollander, fucking him into oblivion, and he imagines biting down, sinking his teeth into the nape of his neck. He imagines the noise Hollander makes as he's mated to Ilya, the pleasure it would bring them both. He wants it. Ilya releases a shaky breath. He's been telling himself he would do this for any omega teammate, no strings, only sex, only comfort. But with Hollander—fuck, with *Shane* he wants more. It's so, so selfish.

He thinks of the serum in the bottom of the grocery bag. Astragal. No, it won't come to that. He won't let it.

“Get a grip, Rozanov,” Ilya mutters to himself. He's aching, painfully hard, pressing against his jeans. He unrolls the window and gulps icy air. The cold is bracing. His head clears. He pulls out of the parking lot, feeling silly for that moment of weakness. It's foolish to want things he can't have.

...

When Ilya returns, Hollander is asleep. He's wearing boxers and an old, ratty, long-sleeved shirt of Ilya's, something that must have been sitting in the bottom of his duffel forever.

There's a fire burning in the woodstove. The nest is perfect. Hollander has scavenged every piece of clothing and put it to use, and the whole apparatus haloes his sleeping form. There's just enough room for two men to lie side-by-side.

“Hey,” Ilya murmurs. He wants to sit next to Hollander, but rules are rules. He stands next to the bed.

Hollander stirs. Being near him is like being drunk, and Ilya resigns himself to the fact that from now until the end of the heat, he will always be at least half-hard while around Shane Hollander. Especially since he smells so obscenely *good*. He must be on the brink, and he'll need all the rest he can get. It physically hurts Ilya to rouse him.

“Hollander. Wake up.”

Hollander smiles up at him. “Hey. What are you doing out of bed? Did you just get back?”

“*Da*,” says Ilya. “May I enter your nest?”

Hollander's smile fades. His brow furrows. “What?”

“May I. Enter. Your nest?” Ilya says clearly. Maybe his accent got in the way.

“Um...” Hollander sits up. “Is this, like... a thing?”

Ilya blinks. “You don't know? Hollander, is very important. Is tradition. Alpha needs permission before...” he gestures. “You must invite me.”

“Like you're a vampire or something?” He laughs. “Should I get some holy water?”

Ilya grits his teeth. Every moment away from Hollander is torture. But he won't beg. "Sure, yes like vampire."

Hollander laughs again. "My Russian vampire. This is crazy. Really? *Really?* This is a thing?"

Ilya thinks of a hundred snarky things to say, and discards all of them. In as neutral a tone as he can manage, he says, "I'm glad you're enjoying yourself."

Hollander sits cross-legged and puts his hands in his lap. He looks up at Ilya and clears his throat. "Rozanov, I hereby invite you into my terribly-made, shitty nest."

Ilya nearly collapses. Instead, he moves carefully, as though Hollander is made of glass. He eases himself into the bed, into the nest, and feels every moment of it. Hollander might not understand how important this is, but to Ilya it means everything. He releases a slow, shaky breath. "Thank you, Hollander. And don't call it shitty."

Hollander ducks his head, embarrassed. He flushes, a warm pink suffusing his already-heated skin. It drives Ilya crazy. He wants to kiss every freckle.

But first: business.

"You need to take your pill."

Hollander frowns. "Plan O?"

Ilya grabs a glass of water and a small white pill from the bedside table. "*Da*, as we discussed."

Hollander makes a pouty face. "I've changed my mind. I don't want it."

This probably isn't the case, but it's common for omegas to refuse birth control. Evolution at work. The biological purpose of a heat is to get knocked up, after all.

Ilya laughs. "I'm not getting you pregnant, Hollander. Is out of question."

But this is the wrong thing to say. Hollander's pupils dilate at the word *pregnant*. His mouth parts. "Rozanov," he says quietly. "What if that's what I want?"

He doesn't. Not really. Or, at the very least, he isn't in the right headspace to discuss it, but *fuck* does it send Ilya into a tailspin. Knocking up Shane Hollander sounds like the best and only course of possible action. He smells so fucking breedable. He looks like he would take everything Ilya can give him, and beg for more.

"Rozanov," Hollander breathes, realizing he has a foothold. He grabs onto the collar of Ilya's shirt. "Rozanov, knock me up. Put your baby in me *please*—"

Ilya shakes his head. One of them has to be sensible here. "I will make you deal," he announces. "Take first pill now. And after heat, if this is still what you want—we will

discuss. Maybe you won't take second pill." *Or maybe, once you have sense in your head again, you will.*

Hollander frowns. "That doesn't seem fair."

Now it's time for Ilya to set his own boundaries. This is part of being an alpha. "Hollander, if you do not take this pill, I will wear condom each time we fuck. *And* I won't knot you." Knotting comes with the risk of the condom slipping or breaking. It hurts him to say this, to place this particular barrier, but it must be done. Hollander doesn't *actually* want to get pregnant, not yet. He has years of good hockey left in him.

"Fine," Hollander grumbles, accepting the pill and begrudgingly swallowing. Something unwinds in Ilya's chest. He's relieved to have won this battle. "But I *won't* take the second one. I *won't*."

"I like your conviction," Ilya dryly. He sincerely doubts that Hollander will stand by it. This is just the hormones talkings. "Now—do you want to..." he runs his hand up and down Hollander's side. "Is there anything I can do for you? Can I help you?"

Hollander shudders, but he's shaking his head. "No—not yet, I'm—not ready, soon, but—I'm sorry."

"Shh, is okay," Ilya promises. "What can I do?"

"Just—be here. I'll try to sleep some more... you know, before it starts."

"I'm here."

They lie down together, and Shane nuzzles in like it's the most natural thing in the world. Ilya reaches over and turns off the bedside lamp. The room is plunged into darkness, save for the flickering of the warm-embered woodstove.

Ilya realizes how tired he is. It's been a long day filled with surprises. His eyelids droop. He wraps his arms and legs around Hollander, cocooning the omega's body with his own. He could live like this forever, frozen in this moment.

"Rozanov?"

"Hm?" He's barely awake.

"Do you really like my nest? Did I do it right?"

Rozanov kisses the top of Shane's head. Honey-and-sweat fills his nose and shoots straight into his brain. He bites back a growl. "*Da*, Hollander. Is perfect."

Chapter 4: Heat

Chapter Summary

Shane's heat begins.

Chapter Notes

Aaaand here it is! Shoutout to Ali Hazlewood's book *Mate*. Definitely lifted some inspiration there re: shower discussion/anxiety/heat foggiess and confusion. Excellent read.

yea yea, Shane is a lil bit anxious, what else is new?

Daylight. Shane stirs, opens his eyes, and thinks: *oh, shit*.

He feels terrible. He feels disgusting. Every inch of his body is covered in sweat. And the *slick*, holy fuck, he's never been this wet. Ever. It's leaking all over his legs. Suppressants all but eliminate this part of his biology, the natural lubrication, but now the ability has returned. With a vengeance.

Clothes. Why the hell is he wearing clothes? Whose awful idea was that?

Right, mine, Shane thinks dizzily, but he's already sitting up and pulling off the shirt. He needs—

Oh god, Rozanov. Ilya Rozanov's sleeping form is beside him on the bed. Shane wonders if he's going insane. He hurts. Every part of him hurts. There is a horrible cramping *emptiness* deep inside, a hollowness, and he knows without a shadow of a doubt that it can never be filled.

Wake him up, a part of him howls. *That's your alpha. He can help*.

Not like this. Not covered in sweat and slick like an animal, not when he feels so terrible and repulsive. He must be like this because he's been on suppressants for so long, and all the ghosts of heats' past have come back to haunt him. Surely Rozanov will reject him in this state. He can't imagine being appealing to *anybody*.

Shower. He needs to shower. If he can get cleaned up before Rozanov wakes, then maybe he'll get some of his dignity back. Maybe Rozanov will want to fuck him.

Leaving the bed feels wrong in a way Shane can't describe. It hurts. He's pretty sure the shower is going to feel even worse—each drop of water stinging like acid on his flushed skin. He sits on the edge of the bed and shudders as his bare feet touch the wooden floor.

Deep breaths. Outside, the blizzard rages on. The world has gone entirely white. He's glad that he texted his parents the night before, when Ilya was out grabbing supplies. Obviously he left out a few key details, but they know the gist: the weather is shit, and he's stuck in a motel in Quebec until it clears up.

Focus. Focus. *Get out of bed.* Leave before Rozanov wakes up—

There's movement on the mattress. A soft noise, inarticulate. Then:

“Hollander?”

There's a hand on his back. Shane melts.

“I'm sorry,” he manages.

“Hollander, what is wrong?”

Shane turns to face Rozanov. He's propped up on a forearm, the other hand still on Shane's back. The touch feels heavenly. Shane wonders how Rozanov can stand to be near him.

“I'm sorry,” he says again, gesturing at himself. “I didn't mean to—I need to shower. Go back to sleep. Please.”

The slumber clears from Rozanov's eyes and he sits up. “What? You are *leaving*? Why?”

He's angered his alpha, just the thing he was trying to avoid. “Because I'm... like this. Very fucking gross. I'm sorry. I didn't want you to see me like—”

Rozanov grabs Shane and pulls him back onto the bed. Shane lands on his back with a small *oof* and stares up at the alpha poised above him.

“Don't want to see you like what?” Rozanov says, his voice dangerously quiet. Shane tilts his head, baring his neck. It's not voluntary; he's responding to the deep, razorlike bass in Rozanov's voice. The alpha continues: “Fuckable? Breedable?”

Shane keens. Rozanov lowers himself until Shane can feel his breath, hot and panting, on the exposed column of his neck. He's so hard. They both are. Rozanov grinds against Shane. He's shirtless and wearing boxers, and Shane hates the fabric between them.

Shane moans, incoherent. “I thought—I thought I looked bad—”

A hand roams over his jaw, strong and possessive. “Look *bad*?” Rozanov mutters something in Russian. “Why the fuck do you think that?”

Shane is babbling. It's hard to think, to talk, around the emptiness. “I don't know, it's been so long since I've been in heat, and I woke up so sweaty and so *gross* and I just thought, maybe

something was wrong, I wanted to clean up before you—”

“Don’t shower,” Rozanov orders him. “You smell—” he lowers again, not to his neck, but to his chest, and delivers a long, wet stripe up Shane’s sternum. Shane’s whole body dissolves. “Fucking incredible, Hollander. I want it. I want all of it.”

Shane squirms. He wants to be pinned. He wants to be told what to do. He wants, more than anything, to be fucked. But first there’s something he needs to tell Rozanov. “Um. Rozanov?”

“Yes, Hollander?”

“I’ve, um, never, before. Not in heat. Not with an alpha.”

There’s a long silence. Shane is terrified that angered his alpha.

Then Rozanov chuckles. “This is supposed to be big secret? Yes, Hollander, this is your first heat sex. Is obvious.”

“Obvious?” Shane cries. “You asshole!”

Rozanov purrs. “Is that any way to speak to your alpha?”

Shane tests his limits against Rozanov’s pressing weight, and likes that he can barely move. In response, Rozanov grabs Shane’s wrists and draws them up over his head.

“Answer me,” Rozanov says.

“No, it’s not,” Shane says, barely more than a whisper.

“That’s what I thought.”

Then, because he feels like he needs more credibility, says: “I’ve used, um, toys before. Knotting dildos. So it’s not like I haven’t...”

“You think piece of plastic is *anything* like real thing?” Rozanov growls. “*Nyet*, Hollander. I will show you. I will fill you up and make you come, over and over, until you are begging me for mercy.”

Shane whines. It should be embarrassing, but he’s beyond that. He needs it. He needs Rozanov inside him. He might actually die without it.

“Please,” he gasps.

“Please, *what?*”

“Please, alpha,” Shane moans.

Rozanov says, “Turn over.”

Shane almost does, but then clarity spikes through his brain. “Wait.”

Rozanov goes completely still. There's concern in his eyes. This brings Shane no small measure of relief—that Rozanov isn't past reason, that he will still listen to Shane. Not all alphas are this kind to their omegas. "Yes?"

"I want to," Shane says, "But—" he thinks of Las Vegas, touching himself while Rozanov watched, and the feeling of emptiness in the elevator. The pathetic text he almost sent. "Kiss me first. Please."

Rozanov's gaze softens. For a moment Shane wonders if he will acquiesce. Alphas don't like being told what to do, especially by needy omegas.

Rozanov leans down and kisses Shane.

It's exactly what he needs. Rozanov forces his mouth open, his tongue tracing the perimeter of their lips. Shane's hands are in Rozanov's curls. He's in bliss. They've kissed before, but this is more raw somehow, more real, knowing that it's a prelude for what's about to happen.

The kiss deepens, Rozanov claiming Shane's mouth. It feels like a message, like something they're trying to transmit to each other without words. Rozanov's scent is everywhere, cedar and pine, and it's mixing with the smoky embers from the woodstove. Good. Safe. Shane's hindbrain is taking over, banishing complex thought. Rozanov takes a brief break to nibble Shane's earlobe and Shane actually mewls, oh god, like an omega from a *very obviously exaggerated* porno. The ones he likes to watch when he's alone, jerking off and using a dildo, filling himself up and wishing he could tell someone, anyone, the truth. Now Rozanov knows. And instead of rejecting him, here he is—

Shane reaches for Rozanov, seizes the waistband of his boxers. "Please," he says.

Rozanov's voice is low and rich. "You want to see it?"

Shane nods, breathless. Rozanov removes his boxers, and finally, fucking finally, he's naked. And so unfairly beautiful. Rozanov is all of a piece, his body in perfect proportion. The broadness across his shoulders, the sharp planes of his stomach, the *vee* of muscles that draws the eyes downward. To his cock. This is the centre of Shane's focus. He's seen it before, obviously, but it looks... different. Rozanov is completely hard, almost painfully so, and his cock larger than normal—longer, and thicker. His balls are swollen, so red they're almost purple. Shane knows what he's looking at: an alpha ready for his omega in heat. They've fucked before, but all of this feels brand new.

He wants to explore. He wants to nuzzle against the taut muscle of Rozanov's thighs. He wants to choke on it, suck Rozanov until he comes, shouting, loud enough for everyone in Pointe-Lebel to hear. But all of these pale in comparison to what he *needs*.

"Now," Shane gasps, unable to hold off any longer. There's more he could say—there's more he should say. But he can't think. He's nearly crying. Another wave of cramps has him writhing, and fresh slick spills from his hole. "Please, Rozanov, please, I need—"

"Shh, shh, I know what you need," Rozanov murmurs. "On your stomach, Hollander."

Shane flips over without hesitation. He braces on his forearms and knees. He's making another *noise*, this one is not voluntary, it's like a whine and moan mixed together.

And Rozanov is there, he's everywhere, the weight of his corded body bearing down on Shane. He tugs at Shane's hips and Shane realizes he's still wearing his boxers. This should be illegal. With a growl Rozanov pulls them off, and Shane instantly fucks backwards into him—or tries to, but Rozanov stops him.

"*Please*," Shane says.

"Yes, *moye serdtse*, I know," Rozanov murmurs. "I need to make sure you're ready."

Shane can't help but laugh. "Are you being serious right now? I've never been more ready."

Rozanov circles his entrance. His fingers pick up the slick. One finger enters. Shane gasps; good, yes, this is good, but it's not enough. Why is Rozanov doing this to him? He wants to cry. He wants to scream.

"Ready, *da*, but my knot is..." Rozanov trails off. "I do not want to hurt you, Hollander. I am bigger, because you are in heat. It will be... a lot, for first time."

Rozanov has never knotted him before. Knotting only happens between alphas and omegas, and before today, Shane was, for all intents and purposes, not an omega. His cocktail of hormones and suppressants disguised him as a beta, and they did their job well; Rozanov's body has always responded to Shane's like an alpha with a beta. No swelling, no extra girth, and certainly no knot.

"I can take it," Shane says. He can feel Rozanov's hesitation, the precipice on which they both stand. Rozanov adds another finger and Shane groans because it *isn't enough*.

He doesn't know what makes him say it, only that, in the moment, it feels right. "I am made for you, Rozanov."

That seems to do it. Rozanov's restraint snaps. He grabs Shane's hips and pulls him backwards, sliding perfectly onto his cock.

Shane throws his head back and moans. There's no ramp-up, no slow and questing thrusts. They find a rhythm instantly. It's desperate and hot. Rozanov grunts as he fucks into Shane, leaning over him, breathing onto his back, his neck. Finally. Finally. All that pain and cramping, all the emptiness—it's gone, eradicated like it never existed. It's so perfect.

Rozanov is larger than Shane was expecting, and he understands why all the slick was necessary. He rides the bright point of pleasure-pain, feeling every inch of him, loving how unbelievably full he is. He shudders with every thrust, chasing friction. He needs more. More of everything.

"So good," Shane slurs.

"Yes, Hollander," Rozanov says, slamming into him again, bottoming out. "*Da*, like that."

Heat begins to coalesce. *Already?* Shane thinks, surprised. They've barely started—his legs quiver—

“Rozanov, I'm—”

“Come for me,” Rozanov says, and on the next thrust, Shane does as his alpha commands. His vision whites out. Release hits hard and fast. Shane cries out as ropes of come shoot everywhere—on him, on all the blankets and pillows of his nest.

When it's over, Shane comes back to himself and realizes that Rozanov is still fucking him. Which is exactly what he needs, because *he's not satisfied*. He came, but it has barely taken the edge off.

“Shit, Rozy, I didn't—I need—” *more*, he wants to say, afraid of sounding greedy.

“*Again*,” Rozanov orders.

There's no way. There's no possible way, not so soon, not on the heels of his first—

Shane moans. He's coming again, his whole body sobs and shakes, and somehow it's even more than before, bigger and longer. Orgasm tears through him. He might actually be crying. He's not sure. He's not sure of anything. His soul briefly leaves his body. Rozanov fucks him through it, slowing into a less punishing pace.

Because *they're still fucking*. When his soul returns, Shane works his jaw, tries to remember how to speak. “Rozanov, I want—”

“Hush, *moye serdtse*,” Rozanov huffs. “I will fuck you until you are—”

“This time I want you to come too,” Shane says. “Knot me. Please, I need it.”

Rozanov has settled into a slow, rocking rhythm, each thrust perfectly hitting Shane's prostate. There's a leisurely moment where no one speaks, where Shane just basks in it all, the afterglow of orgasm, the bliss of being fucked by an alpha who wants to take care of him.

“You want my knot,” Rozanov says.

Shane wonders if he's crossed a line, somehow. “Yes—?”

Rozanov begins to speed up, his thrusts becoming deeper, harder. “Say it. Say it again, Hollander. Tell me how much you want it.”

“I *need* it,” Shane groans. Begging and writhing has never made him so incandescently happy before. Now, even the act of pleading is bringing him close to the edge. “Please, alpha, *please*, knot me. I want it, fuck, I want it.”

Rozanov slams into him. Shane cries out as his world becomes a series of fractured images; the woodstove, warm-embered and fitful; the blizzard raging outside; the trappings of his nest, the shirts and socks and blankets that he's gathered, his safe place. But mostly it's all Rozanov. His scent, pine and cedar, is everywhere, and it brings Shane an unreal happiness.

Rozanov's hand winds around Shane's chest, travels up to his throat, his jaw. Reaching, claiming. Faster, Rozanov drives into him faster. Harder. It's good, it's too good, and just when Shane wonders if he can't take any more—

"There," Rozanov grunts. "I'm coming, fuck, Shane, take my knot—"

Shane, he said *Shane*.

And Shane is coming too. "*Ilya*." Ilya, like it means everything.

Because it does. Because the world doesn't exist outside this snowy cabin. Because the only thing that matters is the wonderful, impossible feeling of *swelling* as Rozanov—no, fuck it, *Ilya*—knots Shane, as the base of his cock expands, as he fills up Shane with his come. It's exquisite. It's perfect.

Ilya groans, and collapses onto Shane, who is still braced against the bed. The pleasure fades, and for the first time since he woke up, Shane can think in full sentences.

He moves, tests the connection. He and Ilya are knotted together, tightly wedged, and holy fuck Ilya wasn't kidding about the size. It's... a lot. Almost too much. He's grateful that Ilya isn't in rut, because apparently an alpha's knot gets even *bigger* during a rut. Which is insane.

Gently, Ilya manoeuvres them—still connected—onto their sides, so that he is spooning Shane. Shane hums contentedly. He squirms, and Ilya makes a low rumbling sound in the back of his throat.

"So good," Ilya sighs. "So fucking good. You're so..."

Shane laughs. How the tables have turned. Ilya has been driven to incoherent lassitude, but Shane feels back to himself. "How long does this last?"

"Twenty minutes or so," Ilya mumbles into Shane's spine. His arms wrap around Shane's chest, pulling him closer. "Twenty minutes together. Perfect."

"Perfect," Shane agrees. "I had no idea that it could be this..."

"Good?" Ilya finished.

"Good. Yeah. Thank you. You really helped me, you know."

"Do not thank me yet," Ilya laughs. "It's not over."

Shane disagrees. "I can't imagine ever needing to get fucked like that again. You *ended* me, Rozanov. I'm done."

"Ilya," the alpha says quietly, after a beat. "Call me Ilya."

Shane pauses. "Call me Shane."

"Nice to meet you, Shane."

Shane smiles. “Nice to meet you, Ilya. I think I might be in heat.”

“Oh, really?”

They laugh, and their laughter does interesting and wonderful things to the way their bodies are connected.

...

The knot goes down after twenty minutes, and Ilya orders Shane to do annoying things that he does not want to do.

Such as eat. And drink. And use the bathroom.

Shane isn't so desperate anymore, but he whines and moans. Abandoning the nest is no good, very bad, *très mauvais*.

“You didn't want me to leave this morning,” he wheedles.

Ilya kisses his shoulder. In the wintry morning sunlight, he's so heartbreakingly beautiful. He's noble, his aquiline face like Russian royalty. “Because this morning, you needed to be fucked. Now you have time. Go, Shane. I get breakfast.”

Grumbling, Shane complies, but only because he doesn't want to upset his alpha. He's still cheesed that Ilya made him take that stupid birth control pill. It's not fair. None of this is fair. He doesn't *want* to brush his teeth; he doesn't *want* to drink ginger ale; he doesn't *want* to eat the protein bar that Ilya tries to feed him. All he wants is Ilya.

“It's your favourite flavour,” Ilya coaxes. “One more bite.”

They're back in the nest after a brief hiatus. Shane is petulant, like a child. Admittedly, he does feel better having looked after himself. He's thirsty and hungry; he's vaguely aware of these sensations, but they seem so damn unimportant. They're distractions.

“How do you know my favourite?” Shane mumbles. It's a white chocolate macadamia Cliff Bar.

“Because I notice things about you,” Ilya says, smiling. This is a very gentle side of him, one that Shane has never seen before. Usually, Ilya is all needling remarks. This is different. He's softer. “Please, Shane. Another bite. For me.”

And Shane agrees, but only because Ilya is asking.

As soon as he's eaten, the heat rises again, and Shane panics. He's not used to this, the cramping, the awful emptiness, the pain.

But Ilya is there, touching him, kissing him, reminding him that it's okay, it's normal and expected.

“Shh, Shane, it’s alright,” he murmurs. There’s no preamble this time. Shane turns over and Ilya and pushes deep inside. Shane never wants to let go. “I have you, *moye serdtse*, I have you.”

Ilya makes good on his promises. He fucks Shane through the pain, and somehow the heat is even worse this time, more intense than this morning, and he comes—absurdly—*five* times before Ilya agrees to knot him, and when he does Shane clamps around him and comes again. It’s so good, and it’s not enough.

...

The reprieves grow shorter.

This is normal, Ilya tells Shane. There’s a rise and fall to it. Tomorrow, or perhaps the next day, Shane will climax with unbearable need.

“It will be painful,” Ilya says. They’re lying side-by-side in bed, facing each other. “We will fuck *a lot*. Is why you need to eat now, keep your strength.”

“You’re saying it gets worse?”

“Worse, *da*, then better again.” Ilya traces a bell curve in the air.

“How long does a heat usually last?” Shane asks, embarrassed that he doesn’t know. He presented late, at sixteen, and he only had two heats before he got on suppressants—and those were preliminary, adolescent heats, not exactly great benchmarks. So, no, he’s not an expert. And, yes, he could Google it, but that would mean looking away from Ilya Rozanov. Gazing at Ilya Rozanov is currently one of his favourite activities, ever.

Ilya shrugs. “Depends. Sasha was... three, fourish days. Postheat was another two. But you might be longer.”

“Really?” Shane says. He can’t imagine feeling like this for *four whole days*. “What makes you say that?”

Ilya fixes him with an admonishing glare. “Because you went years without heat, Shane. Stupid thing. Your body is... is like, what is the word, payback.”

Shane groans. “Yeah, yeah, I said I was sorry, I won’t do it again. Next summer I’ll taper off my meds properly and go to a heat facility, like a good omega.”

Ilya’s eyes flare. He snarls something in Russian, then spits out: “*No*.”

Shane freezes. “Excuse me?”

Ilya turns away abruptly. He’s breathing hard, like he’s run a marathon. “Sorry,” he says. “Fuck. I am—*ach*, should have more control. Sorry, Shane.”

Shane reaches out. “It’s okay,” he says tentatively. So far, Ilya has been nothing but a gentleman, a gentle alpha, looking after his omega. A bit of alpha jealousy is forgivable.

“Let’s not think about the future, yeah? Let’s just get through the next couple of days.”

Ilya turns back around. “Sounds like good plan,” he says slowly. “But Hollander—”

“*Shane—*”

“Shane, if I... at any point if I become too...” Ilya swallows convulsively. “If you want me to leave—”

“I don’t!”

“Okay.” Ilya takes a deep breath. “I did buy... scent-blockers. Patches.”

Shane frowns. “Those won’t work on me, I’m in heat.”

“Not for you,” Ilya says.

The words take a minute to gel. “For... you?”

“My next rut is in two months, they will work on me,” Ilya says. “Is, ah, how you say, other plan, continuing plan...?”

“*Contingency* plan?”

“*Da*, that. Just in case. If I take blockers, I won’t smell... so much like alpha. You won’t want to... do what I say.”

Shane frowns and blurts out, “But I *want* to do what you say!” Along with admiring Ilya, obeying his every command is another one of life’s greatest joys.

“I know. I know.” Ilya smooths Shane’s hair back, which is already getting damp with sweat again. Another wave is coming. “Is just option, Shane. Just in case. Want you to feel safe.”

They’re gazing at each other. Shane says, honestly, “I do.”

Ilya smiles.

Making Ilya smile: that’s on the list, too.

...

There’s a lot that Shane learns about heat sex on the first day.

He learns that it’s not always like the pornos. Alphas aren’t always domineering and merciless. They can also be kind, patient, and gentle. And giving. Ilya gives him so much: trust and care and come, and his knot, over and over, uncomplaining, unfailing, no matter how much Shane begs for it.

He learns that heat sex is honest. He’s totally reduced to hindbrain, reduced to emotions and instinct. They’ve fucked before, but there was always a mask, a piece that Shane kept hidden. He told Ilya he was a beta and Ilya believed him. Now, that final barrier is stripped away.

Shane is open to Ilya, exposed and vulnerable. And Ilya, conversely, has risen to the occasion. He's so much more *alpha* than Shane could have hoped for. He wonders if Ilya, too, was keeping a part of himself in check.

He learns how wonderful it is to be fully, truly himself. It's vulnerable. It's intoxicating. Shane doesn't know how he can go back to his life after this. His half life, filled with lies and facades.

But that's not why they're here. For the next week, Shane resolves to be present, to discard worries about the future. He needs to get through his heat—and he will, with Ilya by his side.

Chapter 5: Discovery

Chapter Summary

Ilya makes a troubling discovery.

Shane drifts off to sleep, and Ilya stares at the raftered ceiling.

It's been a good day. A productive day. Shane has been needy and so wet for him, so splendid, and Ilya can't believe he's stumbled into this pocket reality of good fortune. Stuck in a cabin during a blizzard with the prettiest, most incredible omega he's ever laid eyes on. Shane Hollander. Hidden omega. The world doesn't know his secret, but Ilya does, and he feels remarkably privileged.

It should be perfect. Should be.

So what's wrong?

Ilya remembers earlier, when Shane mentioned visiting a heat facility.

Even thinking of it makes his temper rise again. He can't stand it, imagining Shane being serviced with toys and synthetic pheromone sprays and, if he requires it, a comfort alpha. A stand-in, trained and dedicated to providing relief for omegas in heat. Surely a comfort alpha would be better for this situation. Ilya is only doing this because it's convenient.

Yet even the *thought* of another alpha going near Shane Hollander makes his vision go red.

Ilya realizes that he's turned towards Shane, and is staring at the back of Shane's head. At his neck. The exact place where the mating bite would go.

He flinches away.

Control, Rozanov. Ilya prides himself on control. He prides himself on breaking the vicious cycle perpetrated by his father and brother, both of whom are alphas of the worst kind. Rude to betas, cruel to omegas. Walking around like the world owes them simply because of a quirk of biology. No, that's not Ilya. Never will be.

But with Shane, it's different. There were so many times today when Ilya felt close to spinning out of control.

I am made for you, Rozanov.

How could Shane Hollander possibly know the exact right thing to say Ilya, the exact thing to make him lose his mind?

It's heat talk. Nothing that Shane says can be held against him. And yet, and yet. How badly Ilya wants it to be true. This is already so perfect, but greedy, selfish Ilya imagines, in a burst of explicit fantasy, the world in which they are mates. Compatible in all ways. The world in which Shane wears the mating mark with pride, letting everyone know that he belongs to Ilya.

It's a nonsense fantasy. Shane is a hockey player, a team captain, and bearing a mating mark would tear down his reputation. Alphas would never follow an omega, especially one that belongs to another alpha.

No, it's not possible.

The serum is hidden behind the mini fridge. Where it will stay. Ilya is sure that if Shane knows of its existence, he will beg for the bite. He can already hear Shane's pleading: *It's okay, Ilya. We can reverse it, right? No one has to know.* An omega in heat is not a very sensible person. That's Ilya's job—to be sensible, to have common sense when his omega has none. Ilya regrets buying the serum—he almost wants to throw it out into the storm, lost to the blizzard forever, unrecoverable. He doesn't even want it as an *option*.

He refrains. Just in case.

Just in case.

...

The next morning, Shane wakes up with glassy eyes and parted lips and a scent that screams *fuck me, please, fuck me now*. He's mindless and barely coherent. He's approaching the peak of his heat; it's probably going to hit sometime late tonight or early tomorrow morning.

Ilya obliges his omega. He fucks into him hard, makes him come over and over, until Shane is quivering and boneless and humming with pleasure. Then he knots him, and Ilya tells him all the important things: *yes, for you, always for you*, but it's sort of a lie because it's for him, too. It's so good.

It was different with Sasha. Ilya wasn't as uncontrolled. Maybe because Sasha's heat was better planned, with limits and permissions mapped out far in advance. Or maybe it's because Shane's heat is really, really intense.

Because it is. There are times when Shane is in a bad way, and Ilya thinks that if he hadn't been here to help Shane through it, Shane might have suffered permanent damage. If an omega doesn't deal with his heat properly, it can lead to issues with future heats, or even fertility problems. *Thank god*, Ilya thinks. *Thank god I'm here*.

Or maybe he's just telling himself this, trying to justify how fucking *crazy* he feels. He's possessive and wild and wants Shane all to himself. Forever.

But it's not all knotting and intensity and fucking harder, faster, more and more until Shane is sobbing. There are points of calm and happiness and peace. Ilya makes a game out of trying to get Shane to eat.

“Another,” Ilya says, offering a section of a mandarin orange. The fruit is tart and refreshing. They both need the sugar.

“No,” Shane mumbles. He’s currently trying to nuzzle next to Ilya’s cock (with an end goal of what, exactly? Shane is *such* an omega) so Ilya grabs Shane’s chin and forces his head upwards.

“Trade you, one kiss for one piece of fruit,” Ilya says.

“I’m not hungry!”

“It will make me *so happy*.”

Shane eyes the fruit suspiciously, and eats it. Success.

...

Later that afternoon, Ilya uses the bathroom. He freshens up, splashing his face and brushing his teeth. He gives himself a cursory wipe-down with washcloths and wet wipes, because actually showering off Shane’s omega-slick scent is unbearable. This is the best he can do. Feeling renewed, Ilya opens the bathroom door—

Only to be attacked by a rogue omega, who pushes him against the wall and promptly sinks to his knees.

Ilya moans as Shane takes him into his mouth. Shane is good at this; Ilya’s taught him every trick in the book. He licks languidly from base to tip, then takes it all into his mouth. Ilya mumbles in Russian and grabs fistfuls of Shane’s hair. Soon he’s fucking Shane’s mouth, and Shane is so *good* because he takes it all, even though Ilya’s cock has changed, is larger and thicker than usual.

“Ah, fuck, good boy,” Ilya says. He’s getting close, pleasure spooling in his gut. Shane uses all of his mouth, his tongue hot and wet—

He makes a sound of warning. “Shane, I’m going to—”

Shane likes swallowing, but thankfully he has enough sense to back off, just in time. It would be a disaster if Ilya knots in Shane’s mouth; instead, Ilya comes all over Shane’s face and chest, absolutely ruins him, and his knot inflates in his hand. Shane watches, fascinated. He touches the knot, and Ilya’s vision whites out and he comes *again*, immediately, just from that simple touch. Shane loves it. Now he’s even more a mess, covered and dripping. So very pretty.

“Come here,” Ilya says roughly. “No, wait. Go to bed.”

There’s nothing he wants more than to knot Shane, but it’s too late for that now—twenty minutes until it deflates.

So Ilya spends twenty minutes going down on Shane, until the omega is practically screaming with desire. It’s indulgent, and Ilya finishes him with one perfect swallow, taking

all of Shane's come.

Afterwards, Shane's pupils are blown out, and he's staring at the ceiling like he's seen God.

"*Holy fuck*, Ilya," he wheezes. "That was—"

Ilya grins. "Want to make sure you know who the real expert is."

"Well. Yeah. I'm humbled. Fuck."

...

Sunset. The fire in the hearth crackles merrily.

Shane is slowing down. He insists it's over. Ilya knows better. *The calm before the storm*. He glances at the window, at the scuds of snow howling against the glass. An apt comparison.

It's not over; this is Shane's body giving him one last breather, a final shred of clarity, before the real insanity begins.

Tomorrow, Ilya thinks.

He's inside Shane. This time they fucked with Shane on his back, gazing into Ilya's eyes like a blind man seeing the sun. Now, Ilya has finally come, and he and Shane are knotted together.

Shane is dozing beneath him, full and happy and satiated. For now.

Ilya stares down at him, somewhat awkwardly braced on the bed. He's careful not to move much. Shane needs to rest. Up until now it's been a marathon, but tomorrow is going to be a sprint.

It's funny, how acutely he knows it. He's never spent a heat with Shane before, but it's like his body *knows* already—knows all of Shane's quirks, his cycles, his patterns. Ilya is primed and hypersensitive, aware of everything about his omega. Ilya wishes he could have convinced Shane to eat more today. There's so many things he could be doing better.

Shane. Ilya looks down at him again, rocking gently, allowing his body to take the lead. Shane snores lightly. His scent is sweet and heavy. It's everywhere. Ilya breathes it in. Honey and musk and desire.

And... there's something else.

Ilya leans over Shane, carefully, and breathes in the scent lingering on his neck—these are where his glands are. Where scent is the most potent.

Shane's scent has changed. Incrementally. Ilya inhales slowly, trying to parse it. Honey and sweetness... and an underlay. He smells... like smells like...

He smells like ownership. Like someone has claimed him. Ilya draws back in horror. Not because it's the claim of another alpha—if that were the case, Ilya would be rabid with anger. No. It's *relief* he's feeling, because Shane smells as though he's been claimed by Ilya.

Impossible. They're not mated. This is heat sex, and Ilya... isn't in rut. He's not due until June.

He closes his eyes. *Think, Ilya.* Did he miscount? No, he keeps careful track of his ruts.

Shane stirs, mumbles in his sleep. Ilya freezes. He doesn't want to wake up his omega.

His omega.

His.

It's an icy bucket of water, a douse of cold reality, like jumping into the St. Lawrence River at midnight.

He's been thinking of Shane as *his*.

The possessiveness. The rabid anger. How out-of-control he's been feeling. The changes to his cock. The anxiety—*anxiety* is a classic symptom of Ilya's pre-rut. It's all connected. The signs were all there. Ilya didn't see, he was too focused on Shane—

Shane's heat is triggering Ilya's rut.

Mated pairs sync automatically. That's typical. But Shane and Ilya are not a mated pair.

Unless...

It's rare, but spontaneous mating *does* happen. It's the sort of thing you read about in books and movies, an easy, impossible happily-ever-after. It only occurs when an alpha and omega are wholly made for each other—and not just physically. It's an everything connection, mind and body and soul all aligned. Ilya does not believe in the concept of soulmates, but if he did, that's the word he'd use. Ilya Rozanov and Shane Hollander, rivals on the ice. Soulmates.

Ilya is delighted. Ilya is horrified. Just *being around* Shane Hollander has triggered his rut. Just *being around* Shane Hollander has caused their scents to mingle. Shane smells like Ilya, and Ilya is certain that he smells like Shane.

His knot deflates, finally, and Ilya extracts himself from Shane's grasp. He needs to think. Away from Shane. Though the last thing he wants right now is being away from his omega—

Fuck, he's doing it again. Ilya panics. He's on the brink of a rut, a few hours away at most. It's going to time out just when Shane hits his peak. So, basically, the worst time possible. This cannot be happening. He goes to the bedside table and pulls out the box of scent-blocker patches. Maybe it's not too late. Right? *Right?!*

Please, god, let it not be too late.

Chapter 6: Please Don't Go

Chapter Summary

With the rut fast approaching, Ilya and Shane discuss next steps.

When Shane wakes up, there's pressure on his chest.

He's clearheaded. Surprisingly so. But Ilya, infuriatingly, is correct: Shane knows deep in his bones that it's far from over. This is the final reprieve. He can see the wave on the horizon, an incoming tide of hormones and instinct. He doesn't have long before the wave crashes into him and he becomes a being of pure need.

"Ilya," Shane murmurs, pawing at the bed.

His eyes fly open. Ilya isn't in bed.

It's fine, he tells himself. *Don't cry, you baby. He's probably in the bathroom.* He glances over. The bathroom door is open. The light is off. Ilya isn't there.

He isn't here, either.

"Ilya?" he says, voice rising in panic. "*Ilya?*"

As though calling for him will make the alpha materialize. The cabin is empty. The blizzard still rages outside. Shane cycles through explanations, and jumps straight to the worst possible scenario: Ilya has driven away and abandoned him.

No. Ilya wouldn't do that.

Shane whimpers. Where did his alpha go?

A blurry silhouette passes by the curtained window, startling him. It disappears, then returns, like there's someone pacing on the front porch. Shane's whole body relaxes.

Filthy habit. Ilya must be dying for a cigarette, and didn't want the smell to bother Shane.

Shane gets out of the nest—*yikes*, his hormones say—and gets dressed. Putting on clothes is somewhat excruciating, but common sense wins out. Going outside in nothing but boxers would be a very bad idea.

Zippering up his parka, Shane takes a deep breath. It's perfectly reasonable for Ilya to have a moment for himself, enjoy a cigarette and some fresh air. But all Shane wants to do is beg. *Be cool*, he orders himself.

He opens the door and steps onto the porch.

It's a different world out here, violent and white and freezing. Snow stings his face. Shane buries his hands into his pockets, and squints.

Ilya Rozanov stands at the farthest end of the porch, leaning against the wooden railing. He cradles a cigarette. There's an ashtray on a small table, and it's filled with butts. How long has Ilya been out here?

Shane tries to sound normal. "You can smoke inside, if you'd like." He has to raise his voice over the wind.

Ilya shakes his head. "You don't like the smell."

This is true, but Shane can put aside his reservations if it means bringing Ilya back to the nest, where he belongs. Where they both belong. "I don't mind!"

Ilya watches Shane warily. Shane steps closer, desperate to bridge the distance between them
—

"*Stop.*" Ilya holds up a hand.

Shane stops. He has no choice in the matter. This is pure, undiluted alpha command, and he must obey. "Ilya...?"

"Don't—do not come closer," Ilya says raggedly. He exhales smoke and puts the cigarette in the ashtray. "Is... is not safe."

"Not *safe*?" Shane says incredulously. "Ilya, come inside, you're being..."

Ilya barks out a laugh. "I'm being what? Am I scaring you? Good. Stay away."

Shane wants to whine. Shane wants to crawl all over Ilya and apologize for whatever he did to make him like this, cold and angry and bitter.

"Please," Shane says. "Tell me what's going on."

Ilya passes a hand over his face. "Here is what will happen, Hollander. I will go to the farthest cabin. I will *stay* in the farthest until your heat is over. Then I will get you a rental car, and we will drive home separately."

Rejection hurts. It's so unexpected, and Shane has not braced for it; Ilya's icy, furious words wash over him, burrow into his skin and set his bones on fire. Ilya is leaving him. Ilya is abandoning him. "What did I do?" he whispers.

Ilya gazes steadily at Shane. He seems to be silently deliberating.

"Tell me, please," Shane begs. "Whatever it is—whatever I did—I promise I'll make it up to you—"

“No,” Ilya interrupts. “No, is not you. Of *course* it’s not you, Hollander. You are perfect. Too perfect.” He laughs. The sound is bitter.

Shane is hurt, hearing *Hollander* come out of Ilya’s mouth. It feels impersonal. Which is probably the point.

It’s then that Shane notices something on Ilya’s neck, peeking over the collar of his jacket. A beige sticker.

“Is that a scent-blocker patch?” Shane says. He notices another, then another. He counts. There’s a ring of *six* patches on Ilya’s neck, one after the other, like a choker necklace.

The recommended dose is two.

Another sardonic laugh. “It’s not working. It was too late. I was too close...”

Shane takes this as an invitation, stepping closer. If Ilya won’t tell him what’s wrong, then maybe he can sniff it out. As he does, the breeze shifts, placing Shane perfectly downwind. He inhales.

And reacts. A flood of slick soaks his boxers, his pants. His whole body shudders. Ilya smells unreal. Like pine and cedar, like woodsmoke, like sweat and musk and *dominance*. He smells like sex.

He smells a little bit like Shane, too.

Shane comes closer still, because he can’t help it, because he is attached to a tether that leads him straight to Ilya Rozanov. Now there’s only a foot of distance between them, and Ilya’s scent is stronger. It’s like a drug. Shane is wet, wetter than he has ever been.

Shane says, “You are...”

“I am going into rut,” Ilya confirms.

The words fall like a cleaver.

“I don’t have long,” he continues. “It will begin as soon as your next wave comes.”

“But that’s... that’s not... you said you were due in two months!”

“I was wrong,” Ilya says. “You see. Is not safe for you. I won’t... I can’t control myself.”

It doesn’t make sense. Ilya seemed so sure. Not unless...

Shane’s eyes widen. “Spontaneous mating. I thought it was a myth.”

Ilya watches him carefully. His gaze is raptorial, like a predator watching its prey.

“I did this to you,” Shane realizes. “I triggered your rut, didn’t I? This is my fault.”

“Of course not,” Ilya says quickly. “Is an accident.”

“It’s not an accident,” Shane presses. “It means... this means...”

It means they’re compatible in every way. It means that, despite not receiving the bite, Shane and Ilya have begun the process of syncing up, because they are *just that perfect* for each other.

Shane takes Ilya’s hand, gently. “It’s okay,” he says. “I’m not afraid of you.”

“You should be,” Ilya huffs.

“I was right. What I said before. I am made for you, Ilya Rozanov. We can do this, together. You’ve helped me. I can help you.”

Ilya mumbles something in Russian. He closes his eyes briefly. “That is not the problem.”

“Then what is?”

“If I am in rut,” Ilya says slowly, savouring every word, “and you are in heat, I will not be able to stop myself. I *will* bite you. I will mark you.”

Shane knows this is a terrible idea. A visible mating mark would probably get him kicked off the team. Even if it didn’t, alphas wouldn’t play well with him anymore. It would be a scandal. No one would care about Shane Hollander, hockey prodigy—all they would know Shane as a secret omega, salaciously claimed. It would ruin him. It’s not fair, it’s not *right*. The world is a better place for omegas than it once was, but it hasn’t progressed enough for something like this. His career... his team... it would all be over.

Yet he wants it. He wants the bite *so badly*. He wants to be claimed by Rozanov. If only... if only there was a hide to it...

A lightbulb goes off in Shane’s mind. Eureka.

“Where are the car keys?” Shane says.

Ilya snaps his head up. “You... you want to leave? You are in no condition to drive, Hollander, if you want me to go...”

“No, that’s not—” Shane is growing excited. “You’ve heard of it, right? That new medical breakthrough drug, serum—I bet the local drugstore would have it—”

Ilya scoffs. “Won’t work.”

“What? Why not?”

“Astragal eliminates the mark on body,” Ilya says. “No one would know. But it does not eliminate the mark in here.” He taps his head. “You would still be... claimed. By me.”

Shane weighs his options. His hindbrain is screaming *yes yes yes*, and he forces himself to breathe in the wintry air. The cold clears his head. It would be a gamble. But his entire career has been a gamble. Shane has been balancing on a knife’s edge for so damn long. Denial is a

hell of a drug, and he hasn't been thinking about how *dangerous* it is to be a professional athlete while being an omega. Look at the current situation. It only took one missed dose for everything to come crashing down—and it was only through Ilya's kindness, his generosity, that Shane will make it through in one piece.

If Ilya bites him, all that will change.

Omegas claimed by good alphas live happier, more stable lives. This is a fact. Their heats sync with their partner's ruts, and the cycles become easier to control, easier to predict. If Shane is claimed, his hormones and instincts would level out. The pull of his teammates' alpha-ness wouldn't bother him as much. Yes, he would still need scent-blockers and suppressants, but he could reduce the dosages, and missing a dose would no longer send him into catastrophic heat.

Being claimed is a perfect ideal, but it's an option that Shane has never entertained. Because who could understand? What kind of alpha would be okay with all the terms and conditions of Shane's life?

Ilya gazes at him.

Through a series of mistakes and coincidences and maybe even fate, here he is. Here they are. Together.

And, if they use the serum, then *no one has to know*. Not until Shane feels ready.

It's almost too perfect.

"Ilya," Shane says. "I want it."

Ilya scowls. "Is heat talk, Shane. No, you don't."

"I know what heat talk is," Shane says. All his babbling about Plan O—that was heat talk. Shane knows, deep down, that he's not ready to be pregnant. But this decision is different. "This is me, clear. I know what I'm asking for. Ilya. It's okay."

Ilya looks desperate. He smells hard and sharp, like there's invisible claws raking over Shane's skin.

"I won't beg," Shane says. "I won't coerce. If *you* don't want to, that's alright. You'll have your cabin and I'll have mine." Even saying this is a struggle, it goes against all his instincts. Ilya's eyes widen, like he wasn't expecting this. "But if you agree... I'll go right now, I'll buy the serum—"

"Don't," Ilya says.

Shane's heart sinks. He tries to keep a straight face. "So that's a no, then."

"I already bought it."

It doesn't compute for a moment. "You... already..."

Ilya releases a shaky breath. “When I bought Plan O, I also bought Astragel. Just in case. I didn’t want to use it, but I thought... better to be prepared. Accidents happen.”

Shane is so relieved, his legs give out. Ilya lunges, but Shane catches himself on the railing. “Sorry. I’m okay.” He stands, embarrassed.

Ilya’s icy cold fingers grip Shane’s jaw, tilt his head upwards. “Shane. This is important. When next wave comes... neither us will be... we need to know, now. Are you *certain* you want?”

“I want it,” Shane answers. “I want *you*.”

“I want you too.”

There’s so much between them, scents and desire and so many things they haven’t said. The future is a hazy mess, but Shane knows, deep down, this is the right choice. The only choice.

“Go inside,” Ilya urges him. “Stay warm. I just need... I need another minute.”

“Yes. Of course.” Shane leans forwards and kisses Ilya’s cheek. He accepts the gesture. Despite the stinging snow, Ilya’s skin is hot, almost as hot as Shane’s. “But don’t take too long.”

“Of course not.” Ilya runs his hand over Shane’s brow. “My omega. So pretty.”

...

Shane quickly finds the Astragel, stuffed behind the mini fridge. He examines the tube and places it on the nightstand. Another omega might be pissed with Ilya’s presumptuousness, but Shane is purely grateful. *Accidents happen*. The fact that Ilya didn’t mention it before now means he had no intention of using it... no intention of forcing or ordering Shane to allow the bite. This is Shane’s choice.

Shane rearranges the nest, placing things here and there. His head is spinning. His heat has triggered Ilya’s rut. He’s excited; he’s guilty. This isn’t what Ilya signed up for. All of this is Shane’s fault.

There will be time for apologies later. Shane needs to prepare for what’s to come.

He can feel it. Pressure. The taste of rain in the air before a summer storm. Soon, he’s not going to be this lucid anymore.

Ilya is still outside. Shane needs his alpha, but he also knows that Ilya has his own preparations to make. Instead, Shane utilizes his clarity. He drinks a ginger ale and eats a Snickers bar. He freshens up in the bathroom.

He goes to the mini fridge again, rummaging for another snack. He’s not hungry, exactly, it’s more like an act of refuelling. He selects a Cliff Bar. Dense and high calorie, perfect. He eats at the small wooden table. He wonders what Ilya is doing. Smoking another cigarette, probably. Or some other mysterious alpha thing that Shane is not privy to.

He finishes the Cliff Bar and climbs back into the nest, curling up with all his favourite scents. Ilya scents. It's relaxing. He's safe and warm.

Without meaning to, Shane drifts off.

...

"*Wake up.*"

It's a snarl that drives right into his brainstem, an order that his body responds to unquestionably. Shane wakes up.

Ilya is above him. Ilya is everywhere, crowding Shane's vision, his curls, his eyes—his *eyes*, almost angry in their intensity.

His scent. Oh, his scent. Shane keens. He whines. He is utterly beyond words.

"Clothes off," Ilya says, already naked. "Clothes *off*, omega!"

There is a frantic interval of undressing; Ilya helps, sort of. Ripping occurs. Ilya is all over him, hands everywhere, grabbing and squeezing every part of Shane. He, too, can barely speak.

The rut has begun.

In another world, this would be frightening. But Shane needs it. The desperation. He is just as desperate for his alpha. Ilya needs to do something, anything, everything to him.

It's messy and clumsy, but soon Shane is undressed. His thoughts stutter. He can barely think at all. The pain is exquisite. He is so fucking empty. Ilya ruts against him, panting into his ear, breathing a slurry of Russian and English. Shane catches the word, *mine*.

Shane squirms. "Ilya, please, I need—"

"*Mine*," Ilya snarls again. He flips Shane over. He's so strong. So demanding. There is no margin of error for Shane, no options whatsoever. Shane is manhandled into a more pleasing position, and he loves it.

And then Ilya is pushing into Shane's body. No kind words, no reassurances. And Shane simply presses his head into the mattress and—takes it.

It's wonderful. How could it not be? It's so much *better* than before. Shane grinds and mews, needing all the friction. He clutches onto the headboard because Ilya is unrelenting. It's punishingly intense, but Shane meets him stroke for stroke, because somehow it's *not enough*. He's out of his mind. They both are.

Shane is babbling. "More," he says, begging. "Please, alpha—"

"*Mine*," Ilya says repeats. "Say it, omega."

“I’m yours,” Shane gasps. Ilya thrusts, and it hurts so good. Shane’s whole body is a live wire. It’s electric. It’s impossible.

“Good. Yes.” Ilya starts speaking in Russian again. The words are breathy, rasping. Shane’s vision whites out as Ilya begins a particularly hard rhythm.

He’s going to come. “Ilya, I’m—”

“No. Not yet. You come when I say so,” Ilya orders.

Somehow, though sheer words alone, Shane’s orgasm is stymied. “*Please*,” he begs, tears in his eyes.

“*Nyet*, not yet—I just—” another push inside, and Shane quivers and sobs. “So good for me, omega. I will breed you. I will bite you and get you pregnant, and your body will change for me. Everyone will know you are carrying my child.”

Yes, *yes*. Shanes wants it more than anything in the world. He wants to be filled with his alpha’s come, he wants to grow round with his children. “Do it,” Shane pleads. “Put your pups in me. Please, alpha.”

“Yes, Shane,” Ilya growls. The growl turns into a moan. “Come for me. Now.”

Shane comes. The orgasm is electric. Ilya is on top, pressing down, pressing *in*, and Shane can feel how full he’s becoming as he takes it all. But it’s not over. Ilya’s knot swells, and this time—

Oh, this time, Shane groans, comes again, just because the feeling of complete and utter *fullness* is so good. Now that Ilya has wholly entered his rut, the knot is so much larger than before, locking them together. It almost hurts, right on the edge where pleasure becomes incandescent. Shane must be glowing from happiness. It doesn’t hurt, not truly, because they are meant to fit.

Even though they are interlocked, Ilya is moving again—trying to move—rutting ineffectually against Shane, making low noises.

Shane reaches up. Ilya is covered in sweat. “I’m here, Ilya. Just for you. All yours.”

Ilya growls, tries to press in deeper. He’s speaking in Russian again, rough and rasping.

They stay that way until the knot deflates, sweaty and writhing and unable to get enough. Shane loves it.

He wants more.

He wants...

What he wants is very specific. His mind moves like syrup. Words are so hard right now.

“Ilya?”

“Mm?”

“Next time we fuck, you have to mark me. Please.”

Ilya is braced over Shane, and his breath washes over the omega’s back. Ilya kisses his spin, right below where Shane’s glands are. Right below the place where he needs to be bitten.

“Yes, omega. Next time. I promise.”

Chapter 7: Marked

Chapter Summary

With their cycles in sync, Ilya knows it's time to mark Shane once and for all.

Chapter Notes

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

It doesn't take long for the heat to build again.

This is it. Shane is why the world turns. Shane is so heartbreakingly pretty, he is soft and warm and pliant, and he is Ilya's.

He wishes he could savour it, take his time. But that is no longer an option.

Ruts are different from heats. Ilya could feel it creeping up on him, seizing his muscles, making him tense and angry and strong. It was why he went to the porch, smoking cigarettes like a chimney. He was trying to clear his head, and dutifully ignore how hard he was.

Shane wants it. Shane *wants his bite*.

As soon as his knot deflates, Ilya turns Shane over. His mind is a jumbled mess. His thoughts are hot and anxious. He needs Shane. He kisses every inch of him, and Shane makes encouraging, needy noises. Ilya is hard again. He drags against Shane, against his thighs, his stomach. He kisses Shane's nipple, which is swollen and sensitive because of the heat.

"Bite me," Shane begs.

Ilya's bites down on the nipple, hard.

Shane convulses. "Not there. You asshole. You know where."

"Don't call me that," Ilya snarls. He wants respect. He deserves respect. He is in control, and he will not abide a pushy, cheeky omega. "I am your *alpha*, Shane."

Shane's already so wet, but a hot spill of slick soaks the bedsheets. "I'm sorry," Shane says. He can barely get the words out. Pinned under Ilya, his eyes are all pupil, his mouth wet and parted. "I'm sorry, alpha."

Good. It should always be like this. Ilya wants to fuck him—but a part of him, a single shred in his brain warns: *not yet*.

Instead, he explores every inch of Shane's body. He kisses his mouth, his nose, his wonderful freckles. He nibbles Shane's ears. He grabs onto Shane's chest and lathes up and down Shane's stomach, imagining his pups growing there. He folds Shane in half, lifting up his legs for better access to that sweet, slick entrance.

Shane is so ready, and so is Ilya. But first: Ilya rims Shane, sweeps his tongue around Shane's hole. The slick tastes like Shane, but amplified. By the time he's finished, Shane is almost weeping.

"Yes, *moye serdtse*, now you're ready," Ilya murmurs. "Open up for me, Shane."

His cock pulses. He's so unbelievably hard. Shane does as he's told, spreading his legs for his alpha.

Ilya kisses Shane as he goes in reverently. It feels different. They're breathing the same air, and it's so hot and fuzzy. Ilya rocks slowly, keeping a possessive hand cupped around Shane's throat. Not squeezing—this is a show of ownership. The other hand roams greedily. Ilya wants to touch Shane's skin, all of it. Ilya wants to roll around in that sweet omega scent and live there forever.

He picks up the pace, his body seeking its own rhythms. "Eyes on me," Ilya orders.

Shane obeys. He looks at Ilya, his legs up around his ears, his hair a tangled, sweaty mat. Shane looks as though he can't speak. Ilya wants to fuck him until he can't walk. Ilya wants to hide him away from the rest of the world. Keep him in this cabin, fuck him every day.

It's so hot inside Shane, so tight, and Ilya recognizes that most omegas would not be able to fit someone this big. Shane is special. Shane is *his*.

Ilya thrusts again, bottoming out. He hits Shane's prostate and Shane just *wails*. Ilya groans, too.

"Mine," he says. "You're mine, Shane."

"Yes," says Shane. "Yes."

Ilya cannot do anything but feel Shane, feel his every twitch and movement. His omega is getting close. They both are. It's nearly time.

Ilya doesn't want to break eye contact, a persistent need is subsuming all else. In a low, confident voice, Ilya says, "Turn over."

Without separating, Shane obeys, lying on his belly. Ilya bears down, dragging, pulling, pushing in. The world narrows. His vision goes wavy. His. Shane is his.

Pleasure is becoming physical, a clenching in his muscles, a heaviness in his gut. His balls contract and his cock twitches.

"Please," Shane says.

Ilya knows what his omega is asking for. Right on the edge, Ilya leans down and draws his nose up Shane's spine... right to the base of his neck. His scent is strong here, and Ilya knows what must be done.

"Do it," Shane begs.

Ilya bites down.

They both come. Shane cries out, and Ilya's world fractures. He sinks his teeth into Shane's neck, tasting sweat and blood and salt. He fucks into Shane, filling his omega with come. His knot inflates, tying them together, but that's not what's important. All these things barely demand his attention.

Ilya is focused on Shane's precious gland, the spot where he is still biting, hanging on like a lifeline. Sensation is everywhere, and the nexus of it is right here. *Mine, mine, mine*. Shane is *his*, wholly and completely, forever.

The knot connects them. Shane is gasping, crying again, so Ilya murmurs, "You did so good for me."

"Yours," Shane mumbles. "I'm yours, Ilya."

"Yes, Shane, all mine."

Ilya rocks them slowly. Warm comfort suffuses his entire body. He is mated. He has an omega.

"So good," Shane hums. "Thank you."

"*Moye serdtse*," Ilya sighs. They stay like that, riding the waves into bliss.

...

There's only one moment of clarity, and Ilya is glad for it. After he marks Shane, after the glow fades, he remembers.

"The serum," he says, reaching for the tube.

Shane frowns. Ilya isn't happy about it, either. In a perfect world, they wouldn't have to do this. But he doesn't protest.

Astragel has the same consistency as Polysporin, but the liquid is transparent. Ilya makes Shane lie on his stomach.

"Something wrong?" Shane says, when Ilya pauses.

"No, I..." the mark is fresh, two crescent moons pressed into Shane's beautiful skin. Ilya did this. His mate. "I just wanted to look at it, for a minute."

Time is of the essence. The sooner the serum is applied, the better it will work. Ilya, clinging to the cliff of sanity—all while his alpha instincts scream in protest—does the right thing. He spreads the serum over Shane’s neck. Shane shivers.

“Are you alright?”

“Feels strange,” Shane replies. “Tingles.”

Ilya kisses Shane’s shoulder blade. “That means it’s working.”

...

The mark disappears, like it never existed.

Ilya stares in disbelief. He sort of hates it. A lot. “Like magic.”

Shane reaches around, experimentally prods the back of his neck. “Or really advanced science.”

“How do... how do you feel?” Ilya asks tentatively.

Shane gazes at him. His lashes are long and dark. “Like I belong to you. Alpha.”

Ilya makes a noise of relief. Thank god. The serum has worked as intended. Cosmetically, the mark is gone. But psychologically... Ilya doesn’t feel any different.

“We are still bonded,” he concludes.

“Still bonded,” Shane agrees. Then his scent changes. His eyes go glassy. It happens so fast, lucidity ebbing from his features. Ilya’s rut rises in response. They are so perfectly in sync now.

“Ilya, it’s starting again, I need—”

“On your stomach, omega. Now.”

And the conversation is effectively over.

...

It gets easier, after the mark.

Even though it’s gone, faded from the surface, Ilya knows that it’s still there, lurking under Shane’s skin. Ilya knows this because he doesn’t feel the need to bite him again. The promise is there, a secret only for the two of them.

Ilya’s rut lasts two days. He and Shane fumble together, napping in increments, eating and drinking only when they remember, which is rare. The next few days are one long, continuous act of fucking. Sometimes it’s slow and comforting. Other times it’s furious and vigorous, and Ilya shouts as he comes, and Shane takes it all. They barely communicate—not

with words. Their scents have aligned, and it's like a language only the two of them can speak.

Ilya doesn't think he's ever been happier.

...

On the third day, Shane's heat breaks.

He wakes up clearheaded, hungry and thirsty and exhausted. Ilya's rut diminishes in response. Common sense returns in waves. The alpha possessiveness fades, and he goes into aftercare mode. Postheat is an emotional time for omegas, especially one that is freshly mated.

Shane wants for nothing. Ilya feeds him beef jerky, Cliff Bars, and candy. He makes sure Shane drinks a gallon of water.

"You need it," Ilya promises.

"You should drink, too," Shane says sleepily.

"*Da*. But first, I want to watch you."

Shane closes his eyes as he drinks from the bottle Ilya has given him. Some water trickles down his chin. Ilya laps it up, indulgent.

"Shane, you remember... our deal from before."

Shane rests his head on his knees. "The birth control pills. Plan O."

"Do you want to take the second pill?"

If he doesn't, there's a more than likely chance he'll get pregnant. The mating bond increases fertility.

Shane glances at him. He flushes red. "Um. Yes, if that's okay with you. I know what I said before, but..."

Ilya grabs the pill from the nightstand and hands it to him. "Don't apologize. It's your choice."

"I, just, *really* like playing hockey."

"No need to explain."

Shane swallows the pill. Follows with a gulp of water. "But that doesn't mean... someday... that maybe we could, uh, revisit the topic."

Ilya's smile widens. "You would make excellent father, Shane Hollander."

"You would too, Ilya Rozanov."

Ilya opens his arms. “*Ach*, come here.”

Shane shuffles over, leaning into Ilya's embrace. Outside, the wind screams. The blizzard is supposed to break tomorrow morning. Just in time.

...

In postheat, Shane is shaky and emotional. So is Ilya, but it's different. They ride through it together, cuddling and holding each other.

Shane doesn't react well to the Plan O. Once, he bolts out of bed in the middle of the night, runs to the toilet, and retches. Ilya is right there with him, murmuring reassurances and smoothing his hair back.

"I'm sorry," Shane says, wiping his mouth. "You don't need to see me like this. It's just the side effects."

"I'm right here with you, Shane. Whatever you need."

...

The storm breaks.

Outside, the sky is a brilliant azure. The world is bleak and monochrome; the skeletons of deciduous trees are covered in snow, glittering in the morning sun. Parts of the St. Lawrence are frozen, and every so often a percussive *crack* indicates that a huge sheet of ice is rearranging in the slow-moving current.

Shane feels better. He keeps down food and water. Ilya restocks the fire and provides his omega with a steady drip of ginger ale.

"I'm sorry, you know," Shane says, sitting on the bed.

Ilya frowns. He's kneeling by the woodstove. "About throwing up? No need to be sorry."

"Not that..." Shane swallows. "I did this. I forgot my pills, went into heat, triggered your rut..."

Ilya abandons his task and joins Shane on the bed. He takes the omega's hands in his own. "No, Shane. Is not your fault. And besides, it doesn't matter. Even if things could be different... is not what I want."

Shane leans into him, soft and warm. Ilya loves holding Shane. He wants to protect Shane from anything that might hurt him.

"I don't regret it."

"Hm?" Ilya says.

"The mating mark. It sucks that we have to hide it, but... I like being mated. To you."

“I like it too,” Ilya purrs into his ear. “I will keep you safe. No more worrying about surprise heats. It will be easier for you, I think.”

“I wanted to ask you about that—maybe we could go to my cottage,” Shane says. “Just the two of us. We can time out our cycles for the off season, in the summer... it’s so private, no one will disturb us.”

Ilya kisses the top of Shane’s head. “Sounds perfect.” He pauses. “I will keep your secret, Shane. I promise.”

“One day, I hope it doesn’t have to be,” Shane murmurs into Ilya’s chest. “I want to wear your mark, Ilya. For the whole world to see. You can bite me again someday, and we won’t use that stupid serum. I don’t want to hide it.”

“And you won’t. We can work towards that future, together.”

Shane laughs. So does Ilya. It feels good to laugh.

“Together,” Shane sighs. He snuggles closer.

“Yes, *moye serdste*. Rest. I’m here. I have you.”

“You never told me what that meant,” Shane remarks. “That saying.”

“Ah—*kak moye serdste*. It means...” Ilya struggles. “There’s no direct translation. It means to treat omegas gently, like you would with something important and precious.” He kisses Shane’s head again. Once Shane gets back on blockers and suppressants, Ilya’s own claiming scent will fade from his skin. This is paramount—it’s necessary for Shane’s future as a hockey player. But for now, Ilya lets himself revel in it.

“What’s the direct translation?”

“*Kak moye serdste*,” Ilya says again. “Like my heart.”

Shane snuggles against him. “Ilya,” he sighs. “Is it weird this whole disaster has become the best week of my entire life?”

“Not weird at all,” Ilya assures him. “*Moye serdste*,” he says again quietly. “You, Shane. My heart.”

Ilya holds him tightly. Outside, the sun shines on a remade world. Today, he will live in this moment. He’s not worried about tomorrow. Whatever tomorrow brings, whatever the future holds, he and Shane will face it together.

Hope you enjoyed! :D

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