pretend it means nothing

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at https://archiveofourown.org/works/77589326.

Rating:	Mature
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	M/M
Fandom:	Heated Rivalry (TV)
Relationship:	Shane Hollander/Ilya Rozanov
Characters:	Shane Hollander, Ilya Rozanov, Svetlana Vetrova, Hayden Pike, Rose Landry, Yuna Hollander, David Hollander
Additional Tags:	Alpha/Beta/Omega Dynamics, abo for aces, Omega Shane Hollander, Alpha Ilya Rozanov, the abo isnt as much for sex here as it is to keep them from misunderstanding each other, but youll never believe they still manage it, Alternate Universe - Canon Divergence, goes through some canon plot points before diverging, Shane is a jock, Psychic Bond, Soul Bond
Language:	English
Series:	Part 1 of ilya_and_pasta completed hr fics
Stats:	Published: 2026-01-13 Words: 17,459 Chapters: 4/4

pretend it means nothing

by ilya_and_pasta

Summary

Ilya Rozanov spends thirty minutes after they've had sex and showered making sure every inch of Shane smells like him.
Rozanov says it's to ease the wolves in them, that it helps to give in every so often.
Shane doesn't argue but he knows it's not true.
He lets Rozanov do it, a goofy smile on Shane's face the entire time.
And they both pretend it means nothing.

aka

soft abo with fade to black sex, and all the slow burn vibes and comedy that comes with it

Notes

i have a work skin on that adjusts colors, if you have any issues or sensitivity to colors you can disable it at the top of the page with the "Hide Creator's Style" button!

Chapter 1: Rookies

★ 8 1 【☄】 8 1 ★

Shane has never considered himself a good secret keeper. The only times he successfully keeps things to himself is when he doesn't want to. It's usually when he most wants to express himself that people misunderstand him and his feelings go unshared.

He's also never been particularly good at avoiding scents before they cling to him. When he was a kid, his mom always told him it was dangerous to touch birds. *One* time he reached out to pet a bird that he'd dropped crumbs for and when he went back inside his mom smelled it on him immediately.

All this to say, Shane has no idea how he's supposed to drive back to Ottawa with his mom tomorrow morning after hooking up with Ilya Rozanov.

He takes a shower as soon as he gets back to his room at the hotel, thrilled that he has a private room assigned as part of his agreement to shooting the promo, otherwise he'd be found out already.

He scrubs himself down and then tugs on his pajamas and opens the door to the balcony and steps out, as if it's helping him air out or something. He stands there and finally lets himself process it all.

He'd stepped into Ilya Rozanov's hotel room and almost immediately dropped to his knees.

Fuck.

What the fuck was he thinking? Ilya Rozanov? The promo they fucking filmed was positioning them as fierce rivals. They should hate each other. Yet Rozanov said *he* suggested the joint ad. Because he wanted to see Shane? No, it's good press. They both want to be the best. That's all it is. It's just alpha posturing, and no one does that better than Ilya Rozanov.

The first time they crossed paths at the Prospect Cup, Shane hadn't presented yet. He was intrigued by Rozanov but not… tempted by him. He knew the man was an alpha, but it didn't affect him in the way it would later.

The draft was one month after he'd presented and it didn't affect anything about his potential. The league had been mixed for decades, they'd figured out all the rulings they needed to. But Shane stood next to Ilya Rozanov and realized certain things would be totally different after that point.

It's not like he hadn't been around an alpha since presenting, his mom is an alpha. Though he could acknowledge that's completely different. Most of his teammates for the Canadian Prospect team were alphas. It was different with them after presenting, but not like it was with Rozanov.

Rozanov's energy was fierce and smug after he'd gotten the number one draft spot and the power radiated off him like a physical thing. Shane was smothered by his scent in a way he wished, really wished, he hated.

It still clung to him in his bed later that night, even after the after party. He'd had to go to the gym to try and eradicate… whatever he was feeling about it only for fucking Ilya Rozanov himself to come in. That same energy radiating out of him. In a moment of weakness, Shane had to admit it was captivating. But then Rozanov increased the speed on his bike and Shane's competitive streak overpowered every other sensation in his body.

They'd sat on the floor and shared a water bottle and Shane knew he was absolutely fucked. The most attractive man he'd ever met was an alpha who would be playing for his rival team, the only person who'd ever beat Shane Hollander for a number one spot on a hockey rink. He wanted to suffocate him with his mouth.

That night, he'd resisted.

But tonight he stands on the balcony and thinks about Ilya Rozanov's dick in his mouth.

Shane thinks of himself as a fairly confident person. Maybe not… socially, but physically. He's usually good at that – moving rather than talking. Part of him assumed sex would be easier for him than a date ever was and he's relieved that Rozanov was willing to skip that step.

He just really hadn't expected to drop to his knees so fast. As soon as he was in that room, surrounded by that overwhelming scent – not just an alpha, but *Ilya Rozanov* – he was putty in Rozanov's hands.

Every light touch, Shane allowed himself to be moved. He whined at the smallest bits of praise. In retrospect, he has no idea why he expected sex with Rozanov to be on more even footing. Maybe because that's what it was like on the ice. He's been physical with Rozanov on the ice. It wasn't like this.

It surprised him and he could tell it surprised Rozanov more. It wasn't a secret that Shane was an omega, but if Rozanov had been with omegas before maybe they're not all this… desperate.

Taking another deep breath, Shane steps back into the room and closes the door to the balcony.

He needs to sleep.

He needs to sleep and stop thinking about Ilya Rozanov. And take, like, three more showers in the morning.

He gets in bed and finds his fingers tracing over his lips, thinking about how it felt to have Rozanov's there.

The strongest memory should be the orgasms. But Shane falls asleep thinking about a body pining him against a wall and lips, as desperate as his own, pressing not just attraction but kindness into his skin.

★ 8 1 【☄】 8 1 ★

The only thing stupider than hooking up with someone at the All-Stars game is hooking up with someone from the other team when you're all bound to run into each other in the hotel lobby the next morning as everyone heads out.

They've been practicing together for a couple days and it's enough to be roughly familiar with everyone's scent – especially since it helps on the ice. If you can recognize a teammate behind you, you don't need to turn around and can send off a blind pass.

Shane's sense of smell is sharpest on the ice. Most people feel the opposite, that things don't smell right in the cold. He can't relate.

But he's hoping that slight difference on the ice and off of it is enough to disguise the scent that will inevitably be clinging to him in the morning.

He remembers dashing into the hotel room, panicked about Scott Hunter next door.

Rozanov had pondered him. "It's hard to tell on the ice if you hate me or want me."

Shane had rolled his eyes. "You probably assume that of everyone."

"Mm, yes. Mostly." He conceded. "Is harder to tell with you, though. Your scent, when we're close enough during the face off. It smells like both."

Shane wasn't sure what small talk before a hook up usually looked like, but it was easy enough for it to be about hockey. "What if it's both?" He tried to say it cooly, he's not sure if it came off that way.

With a nod, Rozanov accepted that. "Hot."

And now he's scrubbing himself down in the shower again, just like last time. He should've asked Rozanov to do the same, or does he want to brag about the omega he was with?

Shane clears his throat, shaking that thought from his head. No way Rozanov is bragging about him in any way. But what if someone smells Shane on him? Would they write it off as happenstance? Would they assume something?

The NHL may have made strides with allowing secondary gender equality, allowing omegas to play, but they haven't even begun to talk about primary genders or queerness and certainly not relationships between players. Even beyond the NHL, the fans would hate it. They expect Hollander and Rozanov to be at each other's throats, out for blood.

And well, they're at each other's throats for sure and that's the main reason Shane is scrubbing at the scent glands on his neck for the fourteenth time tonight.

Nausea bubbles in his stomach and it's an unholy mix of terror and excitement.

They're riskier with each other than they need to be and as much as Shane tries to pretend he hates it, it's thrilling.

There is so much at stake but in the back of his mind is the omega desire to be recognized as chosen by such a well-respected alpha. What if someone *did* smell Rozanov on him? What if it wasn't someone who could ruin his career? Would they be impressed? Would Rozanov be proud?

The way he kissed up Shane's neck makes him think he would.

Fuck.

What the fuck are they doing?

★ 8 1 【☄】 8 1 ★

The Montreal vs Boston game gets snowed out and Shane fails terribly at pretending he doesn't care that his plans to be fucked for the first time get cancelled.

His hormones are out of whack for a week after to the point where his mom and his coach both notice, and some of teammates rib him about blue balls and how he needs to get laid.

Yeah. He knows.

★ 8 1 【☄】 8 1 ★

The excitement disappears for the first time.

Shane won rookie of the year, but he just came back inside from Ilya Rozanov pressing him against another wall, nosing at his neck.

Surely everyone can smell it. There's no shower he can jump in before returning to this room, and the bathroom is all the way across the crowded space. Even if they can't smell the alpha on him, they can probably smell the cigarette smoke. Can't they? Was Rozanov even smoking or is Shane spiraling? Shane smells the smoke and *Rozanov* clinging to him like gum on his shoe.

This room is filled with people who could end his career for this. He can just say they tussled. It's fine. It's out of character, but Rozanov was out of it anyway. He can just say they got into a scrap on the balcony because Rozanov is a sore loser.

As if in a nightmare, Shane hears a sniff over his shoulder. "You smoke now?" It's Scott Hunter.

The panic in Shane's heart redoubles. "Uh, I went to get some air and Rozanov was out there." He curses himself. There was no need to name Rozanov. It could've been anyone smoking on the balcony.

Scott's eyebrow raises. "Should I go out there and check he's still alive?"

Shane's laugh is a little forced but he tries to make it sincere though the nerves. "I need him alive so I can gloat. I'm the one you should be worried about tonight. He's pissed at me."

Despite the crowded scents in the room, Shane has no issue recognizing Yuna Hollander getting closer and his nightmare repeats as he hears a sniff over his shoulder. "Why do you smell like smoke?"

He repeats the same excuse to his mom that he gave to Scott and prays no one thinks about it any further. After all, the smoke seems to be strong enough to cover the true scent of *Ilya Rozanov*.

It's different on the ice and off, and for an alpha of his stature, it's subtle. Ilya Rozanov, now that Shane's had plenty of opportunity to enjoy it, smells like a sandy beach at night time. That crisp coolness, tinged with the memory of warmth. It's a gentle scent, masculine yet soft enough to be hidden–apparently–beneath a cigarette.

Not to Shane. He can smell them both independently. He knows his sense of smell is stronger than most but how is it possible they don't smell it on him? Is he truly hallucinating how strong it is? Has he memorized Rozanov's scent well enough to conjure it in his mind?

Rozanov walks back into the room from the patio and keeps his head ducked as he pushes through the crowd.

It's the exact opposite of the day at the draft, when Rozanov had shone like spun gold and his scent soothed the entire room.

Now he keeps everything close to his chest and does his best to move unnoticed to the exit, even his scent is subdued and beaten back to be small.

A part of Shane wants to try again – wants to follow Rozanov out and apologize, get the truth out of him about what's really wrong.

But he's just barely gotten away with an unexpected kiss. It would be stupid to risk anything else tonight just to assuage his guilt.

★ 8 1 【☄】 8 1 ★

The texting is sometimes harder to cope with than the hookups.

Rozanov is an asshole at every chance he gets, but Shane suspects Rozanov feels the same thing he does: these fake names almost allow for a kind of anonymity. It's silly, they both know who they're texting, but the secret of it makes it all feel so much safer in a way it truly shouldn't.

Yet Rozanov asks him questions Shane is positive he'd never voice aloud.

Lily: you resist more than most omegas, why

Jane: Is this a trap?

Lily: why would it be a trap

Jane: I don't resist that much

Lily: you do. before

Jane: Before what

Lily: before hookups

Jane: What do you mean 'before'? You mean like before we get to a room??

Lily: yes before the room

Jane: ??? Why would I give in in public?

Lily: because it's hot

Jane: You're fucking with me

Lily: usually i do this, yes. not now.

Lily: when i try to be subtle, to court, you ignore me

Jane: Of course I do? I don't want to get caught. And court???

Lily: is this not the right word?

Jane: No, it absolutely isn't

Lily: ah court is to marry, okay i mean flirt

Jane: You're not making any kind of logical point. I'm not going to flirt back in public

Lily: ah you are scared and uncreative, i see

Jane: What kind of flirting do you think you could even do without getting caught?

Lily: i scent you on the ice during a fight

Jane: Uh yeah, no.

Lily: come on! no one would know. we can say it's an accident

Jane: Still no

Lily: boo

Lily: i will think of something else

Jane: And I'll say no again

Lily: i'll think of something you can't say no to

Every so often, Rozanov puts together a sentence in perfect English that pierces through Shane's defences straight to the omega instincts he's usually so good at holding back. He rereads the text and has to pocket his phone and take some deep breaths.

★ 8 1 【☄】 8 1 ★

Everything's different after they finally have sex.

Mainly because Shane's entire apartment smells like Ilya Rozanov and he can't quite bring himself to do anything that would change that quite yet.

He even postponed his regular cleaning service.

It's pathetic but sue him. He's an omega who just got fucked by an alpha for the first time and he should be allowed to luxuriate in that, even if it *was* Ilya fucking Rozanov.

Shane's personality is often at odds with his secondary gender and he's found that this physical relationship with Rozanov is the first he's started to recognize true omega traits within himself. It's as comforting as it is terrifying.

People always assumed he would be an alpha and Shane understood why they thought that, from the outside, but quietly he assumed he'd be a beta. He always felt so… neutral compared to those around him. More level-headed, more focused, more subdued.

And that was all pointless anyway, personality has nothing to do with presentation. Still… he thought he was best suited to be a beta and still has to work to make peace with presenting as an omega sometimes. It doesn't matter. As long as none of it prevents him from playing hockey, it doesn't matter.

But with Ilya Rozanov it matters. He *likes* being an omega when it's with Ilya Rozanov. He likes giving in, letting Rozanov position him without a word. And he can tell Rozanov likes the control.

It's hot, if he's trying to not examine it too closely. But he's Shane Hollander so he does. It's hot but it's also fulfilling something in him he thought he could ignore.

He doesn't mind giving into it when they're alone. Somehow, he's always trusted Rozanov with that piece of him in a way he's *never* trusted anyone else.

But having sex feels like a turning point. Will he be weaker to it now? Will alphas have more power over him? Will Rozanov have more power over him? If Rozanov asks him to do something on the ice, will he submit to it?

Rozanov wouldn't. He knows they both prefer clean victories, but what if it was an accident?

He feels the familiar tightness in his lungs that preempts a panic attack and mentally brings himself back to the stairwell, clinging to Rozanov's jacket and pretending it meant nothing.

Shane doesn't necessarily have another hookup to compare Rozanov to, but he has a feeling there's not usually this much kissing. Kisses that seem to effortlessly assuage his bubbling anxiety. He knows that his anxiety can pulse out of him at times. His mom learned how to spot the way his scent changed eventually and know when he needed extra comfort. Somehow, Rozanov figured that out within a couple of nights.

He knew it was Shane's first time, knew what it meant even if they both are on the same page about this being casual and non-exclusive.

No one would ever believe him if Shane told people Ilya Rozanov is gentle. Any time that feeling swells in his chest, it twists his scent and Rozanov gets this look in his eye Shane still can't place, and leans in to kiss him until the feeling passes.

He'd felt like a child in the stairwell, asking Rozanov about Russia and the Olympics after… after that, but in spite of it all, Shane really likes having a hockey friend who understands him. Sure, they spend a lot of their time together naked, but Shane can *talk* with Rozanov in a way he struggles to talk with even his teammates.

Rozanov gets it. The pressure of being a rookie star player. The intensity of keeping up that momentum from season to season, nowhere to go but up. This thing between them, sometimes Shane thinks it's making them better players, better competitors.

Shane's definitely better at analyzing Rozanov on the ice now, can understand how he moves and what he's thinking more. Rozanov probably does the same for him. They have to study each other to beat each other and, well, they know each other's bodies pretty well by now.

He thinks about that lingering kiss before handing Rozanov his jacket back.

It's casual. That's what they agreed on.

Lily: you doing okay? no emotion drops?

Shane's stomach twists.

It's been a couple days and Rozanov is under no obligation to check on him, but Shane knows his instincts were intense the other night. It was his first time!

Jane: I didn't fuck up your pheromones, did I?

Lily: i can't ask if you're okay without imbalanced pheromones?

Jane: Unbalanced. And you don't usually.

Lily: we don't usually have sex for the first time

Jane: I'm fine

Lily: you washed your sheets?

No, Shane thinks to himself.

Jane: Of course I did, that's gross.

Lily: hm, you're a liar. you had a big reaction. it's okay if you can't. you need it to, what is it, whined down

Jane: Wind down. And I don't need it.

Lily: fine. you don't need it. but i'm saying it's okay if you do.

Lily: and you maybe did unbalance my pheromones. just a bit

Jane: Fuck. I'm sorry. I should've been more careful.

Lily: it's okay. i like it.

Shane collapses into his bed that still smells like Ilya Rozanov and pretends he feels remotely normal about that.

Jane: I'm washing them tomorrow

Lily: mm, my sweater still smells like you too

Lily: i'll leave you something next time

Lily: a boston jersey maybe

Jane: Next time?

Jane: Oh fuck you, no jerseys

Lily: after russia, not during

Jane: Yeah, I get it.

Lily: hm i like that you'll think of me while sleeping tonight

Lily: you'll tell me if you become not okay

Jane: I'll be fine

Lily: but you'll tell me if you are not

Jane: I'll tell you

Lily: good

In retrospect, Shane's not sure what he expected of himself when seeing Rozanov again after having sex with him.

They didn't even get to play against each other in the Olympics and now Rozanov is… distant. Well, he's been distant. He hasn't responded to anything since the Olympics started.

Shane thought it would be a relief for him to play on his home terf, he certainly feels that way about Canada.

They talked about this, kind of. That Rozanov didn't want them to see each other in Russia. But Shane can tell something is *wrong.* He's not sure why he knows that but it settles in his chest with certainty.

The figure skating routine ends, and Shane's eyes drift across the arena and somehow land on Ilya Rozanov.

He makes any excuse he can as instinct tugs him towards the man.

"Not here," Rozanov says immediately.

Shane's a little offended, but he tries to control at least some of this reaction he's having. "I know, that's not… are you okay?"

"I'm fine. Go sit down." Rozanov won't look at him. His eyes are focused on the ice.

Shane realizes this is one of the first times he's been in an arena with Rozanov without their full gear on.

This is Ilya Rozanov, unguarded, in the place where Shane's sense of smell is sharpened. The confidence of his words surprise even him, "No, you're not."

Rozanov is *off* in a way that Shane can barely comprehend. His scent is twisted. It's almost like that night when Shane won rookie of the year, but so much worse.

Shane didn't think it was possible for Rozanov to make himself small, yet every aspect of him is contained, repressed.

Rozanov's jaw twitches in reaction to Shane's statement.

No one's close enough to them, but they're close enough to each other.

Rozanov spares a glance at Shane. "You're too sensitive."

Shane bristles.

Rozanov blinks, touching his nose as he says, "When you smell."

"Oh." Awkwardly, Shane gestures at the ice. "It's stronger here."

“Hm.” Rozanov’s scent barely exists, but the absence of it speaks volumes to Shane. When did he learn the shape of Ilya Rozanov enough to know when pieces are missing? Rozanov tries to reassert himsef, “I’m fine.”

They both know it’s a lie.

Shane can’t stop himself from saying it. “But you’ll tell me if that changes?”

The emotions that tumble out of Rozanov are tidal waves. It starts as devastation and quickly swerves into rage.

“No, I do not need to tell you if I’m okay. Go away, Hollander.”

The words don’t match his aura at all.

Everything about Rozanov is begging Shane to stay, to comfort him, but they’re not kids. They know how to separate instinct from intent.

The words Rozanov chose to say were a rejection, no matter how much his body wants otherwise.

Shane wars with himself to ignore the way his instincts react to the alpha. The last time they were together they’d just had sex and traded gentle kisses in the stairwell. Now Rozanov is…

“Fine.” Shane makes himself okay with walking away. “Fuck.” The expletive is as much towards Rozanov as it is himself.

Something doesn’t feel right about leaving Rozanov on his own, but that’s not what they are to each other.

Shane’s just a romantic fool who feels the most in touch with his secondary gender as he pushes it down more harshly than he’s ever had to in his life.

★ 8 1 【☄】 8 1 ★

Rozanov wins the cup and Shane can tell through the TV that that golden aura is back. But even with the ecstasy shining out of his eyes, Shane has the feeling something is missing.

Something was taken from Ilya Rozanov on his last trip to Russia that he never fully got back.

But they don’t talk anymore and that’s none of his business.

★ 8 1 【☄】 8 1 ★

By the time they get to Vegas for the awards show, Shane has gotten over himself.

He’s not the simpering little omega crawling back to the first guy who would fuck him. He keeps his instincts in check as Rozanov sidles up to him in the wings.

They'll read the script. They'll walk away from each other.

But Rozanov is acting like they never stopped flirting. He touches Shane like it's normal, like he's *allowed to.*

And the worst part is Shane lets him, can't do much about it on stage anyway.

His resolve falters.

As soon as he's clear of the cameras he nearly sprints to the bathroom, leaning over the sink and trying not to cry.

Someone walks in.

Well, not someone. Shane would never mistake Rozanov's scent for anyone else.

They fight. Or, Rozanov flirts and Shane snaps.

He wants to make his point, he wants to set this boundary and walk away after being discarded for six months.

But his instincts betray him.

For a moment he wonders if Rozanov will pay him the same courtesy Shane gave him in Russia – trusting his words rather than his emotions.

Rozanov's hand is on his jaw and any fight in Shane leaves him.

He begs and it's easy to do it.

He wants to feel ashamed, he wants to feel pathetic, but Rozanov is as desperate as he is.

Despite all of this, something snaps together between them and it's like they're back in Montreal.

Rozanov invites him up to the penthouse and there's no world where Shane would say no.

Shane returns to his seat to finish watching the awards show, luckily he's next to Hayden and not some random player.

Hayden's nose twitches and he shoots a look at Shane before leaning in and sniffing again before getting close to his ear and whispering so no one else around them can hear, "Why the fuck does it smell like you've been scented?"

Shane thinks about Rozanov's wrists dragging across his neck in the bathroom.

He keeps his eyes on the stage and doesn't say a single word to Hayden.

Rozanov had just sent him some stupid hockey meme during the off season and it's so *normal* that it makes Shane's hackles raise as he slows from a run to a walk on the trail near his cottage.

Jane: What happened in Russia?

Lily: i lost to latvia. it's pathetic. we can forget

Jane: Something happened after that

Lily: it's like eight months ago. it doesn't matter

Jane: We can't just pick this back up when something in Russia made you want to stop talking to me.

Lily: if i pay my teammate to break your nose next game, you will become worse at sniffing around?

Jane: Maybe but it won't change what I already sensed from you then

Lily: my family is complicated. that's all

Jane: Does it help if I go first? I was so scared I'd be pathetic seeing you again after having sex. And I was. And you told me to fuck off

Lily: i was not thinking of that. what it was for you. i was somewhere else. i'm sorry

The apology helps more than Shane wants to admit.

Jane: You told me after that I should tell you if I ever became not okay, so I guess that's on me because I didn't. Until now, I guess

~~Jane: I just thought we~~

Jane: I know this is casual but I thought we were at least friends

Lily: friends? you and me?

Lily: you are not funny enough

Jane: Fuck you, I'm funny

Lily: what all not funny people say

Jane: Don't avoid the question

Lily: it's not a question

Jane: Whatever. Say something

Lily: what do you want me to say

Jane: Whatever you want to say

Lily: i wish you were sucking my dick right now

Jane: What happened in Russia

Lily: it's my fucking family!

Lily: it's not about you!

Lily: im sorry it was bad time for you or whatever, but it was bad time for me too. i hurt you, i said sorry. someone hurt me too. they dont say sorry so be grateful

Guilt consumes Shane. He shouldn't have pushed. But he… needed an answer and Rozanov kept trying to ignore the conversation with flirting and it's been working for months unfortunately.

Jane: I'm sorry that happened to you. You could've told me

Lily: sure, i will gossip to a metro. i do have other friends you know. friends who speak russian

Actually, Shane hadn't thought of it like that. He hadn't thought in a while about how much harder it is for Rozanov to express himself in a conversation with a secondhand language.

Jane: Right. Just, maybe next time you can warn me that you need some space instead of just disappearing

Lily: your omega is causing you problems?

Shane processes the message for a second. He remembers something about how some cultures in the world think of secondary genders almost as an entity that exists within you. He can see why, it certainly feels like that at times. He meets Rozanov where he is without trying to adapt the turn of phrase to something he's more used to.

Jane: Yeah, something like that

Lily: you need me that bad?

And Shane allows the conversation to shift this time. He pushed Rozanov too hard. They can overcorrect now.

Jane: What would you do, if you were here right now?

Lily: you are the one sexting now?

Jane: My omega is sexting

Shane regrets the text as soon as his thumb hits the send button. It's so cringe. But Rozanov doesn't miss a beat.

Lily: my alpha will find the softest bed and press you into it

Lily: my weight on you, scent around you

Lily: fuck you until you cry

Shane drops his phone and it narrowly avoids cracking over a rock.

He picks it up and sprints the rest of the way back to the cottage to bundle himself in his bed and imagine.

★ 8 1 【☄】 8 1 ★

Chapter 2: Off Season

★ 8 1 【☄】 8 1 ★

This season's schedule has the Montreal vs Boston game right before a long break for both of them.

Ilya Rozanov spends thirty minutes after they've had sex and showered making sure every inch of Shane smells like *him.*

Rozanov says it's to ease the wolves in them, that it helps to give in every so often.

Shane doesn't argue but he knows it's not true.

He lets Rozanov do it, a goofy smile on Shane's face the entire time.

And they both pretend it means nothing.

Shane conveniently forgot he still had to go back to his hotel room with Hayden that night, but the fear he usually feels about this is nowhere to be seen. He wants to be caught. There's no way anyone would know it's Ilya.

Hayden makes a show out of coughing and clearing the air when Shane walks in. "Visited Boston Lily, I take it?"

A nervous, smug grin pulls itself onto Shane's face. "Yeah."

Hayden wheezes again. "Guess you're serious about her."

Shane's heart constricts. "Uh, no. No, it's not like that."

Hayden raises an eyebrow at him and swats the air away from his own nose again.

Shane crawls under the covers and digs something out of his sweatpants pocket. It's a Boston Raiders t-shirt and he tucks it under his pillow, sticking out just enough near his nose, while he sleeps.

★ 8 1 【☄】 8 1 ★

The next game they play against each other is in Montreal and the league must think the rivalry is getting stale because they ask Shane and Ilya to do a pregame interview ahead of the match.

They both arrive at the arena early for the interview and stuff like this is effortless now.

They don’t slip up. They don’t say more than they need. They hype up the rivalry, toss some entertaining insults at each other, and head out.

Except Shane sees Ilya duck into the bathroom so he follows.

They both lean against opposite walls and watch each other.

“We are good at this,” Ilya finally says.

Shane shrugs. “I’m not good at much else.”

Ilya sucks his teeth. “Untrue.”

Shane digs for the compliment. “Oh yeah? What else am I good at?”

“Sucking my dick.”

Shane shrugs it off. “You always say that. Something new.”

The way Ilya looks at him makes Shane’s heartrate double.

“You are good at annoying me so much I tell you the truth.”

Shane laughs. “I don’t have to be that annoying to get it out of you.”

Ilya makes a face of disgust. “You are very annoying.”

“What else?”

“This is not enough? You need more praise?”

Shane’s chest puffs up. “Yeah. I do.” He loves when Ilya lets him pull him into a silly game, loves the bickering almost more than the sex.

Ilya licks his lips. “You usually do not like flirting before a game.”

“It’s just compliments, Rozanov,” Shane challenges him.

The staring contest reminds him of all those years ago, sitting across from each other on the floor of the gym.

“You are very pretty.”

Shane’s nose wrinkles.

Ilya notices. “You don’t like this?”

“I don’t mind it,” Shane lies.

Ilya unravels that from Shane’s reaction. He nods. “I can do better. You have these crazy freckles that I want to connect with kisses like a constellation.”

Shane's eyebrows shoot up. "Constellation?"

"I like stars, I know this word."

"Hm." Shane softens. Ilya's being sweet with him. This never happens. He's not quite sure what to do with it. "You'll map them later?"

"Maybe even with marker. Could be hot."

Shane imagines the felt tip of a marker dragging across his bare skin under Ilya's hand. "I should get to the locker room." He pushes off the wall.

"Hollander."

Shane stops.

Ilya crosses the room to him, presses his chest flush to Shane's back and buries his face in Shane's neck.

Shane should not allow Ilya to scent him before a game, but he leans into it.

Gently, Ilya pushes him away. "You will not win tonight."

Shane glances over his shoulder as he pushes out of the bathroom, "Will you even remember to shoot when you're looking at me?" Mischief sparkles from within him.

The door swings closed.

Ilya is so fucked.

Jane: One goal is unlike you

Lily: it is home field advantage, my defence have a cold. you got lucky

Jane: How far is your Uber?

Lily: 8 minutes

Hayden: Did you think no one would notice you somehow smell like Boston Lily in Montreal?

Shane's heart sinks into his stomach.

Shane: She's visiting.

Hayden: Like she was visiting during the awards show last season?

Hayden: Is it someone's sister or something? You better not say you're fucking a Raider's sister. I know your standards are higher than that, Shane

And just like that Hayden has handed him the perfect alibi. Gift wrapped even.

Shane: Fine, then I won't say

Hayden: This is devastating. I'm questioning my captain's loyalty

Shane: She loves to see her brother lose

Hayden: My faith in you is returning

Shane and Ilya lie in bed naked, staring at the ceiling catching their breaths.

Shane glances over at him. "One of my teammates thinks I'm fucking one of your teammate's sisters."

Ilya's eyebrows scrunch together. "That was not English."

Shane tries to phrase it in a way that makes more sense for him. "My teammate, Hayden." Ilya nods. "He, uh, smelled you."

Ilya puffs up a little but tries to pretend not to.

Shane continues. "He thinks I'm fucking someone's sister."

Ilya gestures at himself. "I have no sister."

Shane rolls his eyes. "No, not you specifically. Just a Raider. Someone on your team with a sister."

Ilya's not following. "Why does he think this? He thinks my smell is a woman's?"

Shane hesitates and then slowly makes himself say. "Yeah, well. He thinks I'm straight."

"Mm, yes. Okay, I see." Ilya considers that. "Is good alibi."

Shane laughs, relief falling out of him. "Yeah, I thought the same thing."

Ilya thinks about it more and laughs to himself. "Shane Hollander fucking a Raider's sister would be a scandal."

"Well, good thing there's no scandal with you fucking me."

Ilya's eyes lock with his, laughter suspended within both of them.

Ilya's body moves of its own volition to capture Shane's chin in his hand and pull his face close to kiss him.

He pulls away. “Is Hayden too stupid to remember my smell? He does not notice it’s me?”

Shane studies him. “Do you want him to know it’s you?”

“No,” Ilya pouts in a way he would never admit to. “That would be dangerous.”

“It’s different off the ice.”

Ilya doesn’t understand for a second. “Me? I smell different?”

“Everyone, but yeah. I guess you especially.”

“Especially?” Ilya asks for clarification and Shane doesn’t even realize he’s so used to adding context for Ilya that he understands the question of it within a single word.

“Like, more than other people.”

“To you? Or to everyone.”

“Uh, I don’t know.”

“What do I smell like on the ice to you?”

It’s an intimate question that Shane’s entirely too nervous to answer.

He tries. “You know that smell before it snows?”

“I’m Russian, yes. I know this.”

“On the ice, you smell like that.”

The gaze Ilya sets on Shane is unlike any he’s seen before, with a touch of judgement.

Shane swallows. “What.”

Ilya rolls onto his side, propping his head up in his hand. “Hollander, that is what the arena smells like. That is not me. Other people, they say I smell like lightning or rain or something.”

Shane’s shaking his head, looking almost offended. “No, they’re wrong. And it’s not the arena. I know what the fucking arena smells like. The arena doesn’t smell like snow.”

Still, that gaze stays on Shane. It’s invigorating and terrifying.

“My team, they say it’s impossible to track me on the ice. That it’s hard for them, and must be harder for the other team.”

Shane meets his gaze and confidently says. “Not for me.”

They hold there, absorbing each other.

Finally, Ilya says, “And off the ice?”

“Similar, but more… more like cold air at night than snow.”

Ilya’s expression shifts to pure fascination. “You are like, I don’t know the word, someone good with wine.”

Shane smirks. “A sommelier?”

Ilya gags. “And you pronounce it in French. You are a show off.”

They spend the rest of the night debating how to describe the scents of different players on different teams and how they’ve used the knowledge during games.

It’s nearly 4a.m. when Ilya has to tear himself away. “I need to get back to the hotel.”

After Ilya leaves, Shane is up for two more hours just staring at the ceiling vibrating with an emotion he can’t name.

★ 8 1 【☄】 8 1 ★

There’s another awards show and this time, there’s no question that Shane and Ilya will end up in the same bed tonight.

The part that’s different is after the sex.

Shane retreats to his room to sleep and picks up his phone to open his chat with Ilya before closing it and putting the phone down again.

He picks it up again.

Puts it down.

It buzzes and he snatches it.

Lily: come back

Shane couldn’t bring himself to be the one to say it.

He needed it to be Ilya.

He nearly sprints to the elevator.

Ilya is in the doorway when he gets there and opens the door and shuts it in the same motion that Shane’s lips crush against his.

“What did we do?” Ilya mumbles into Shane’s neck.

Shane feels drunk on him.

The instincts they’re usually so good at keeping in check are out of control.

“I dunno,” Shane speaks the words into Ilya’s chest as he kisses down the exposed skin there.

The sex tonight had featured a lot more growling and whimpering than usual.

Ilya was possessive of Shane in a way that activated every single omega impulse in Shane’s body.

Somewhere in the blur of their bodies twined together, Ilya’s teeth had grazed Shane’s neck and they both thought about how they should stop.

Ilya took a breath and pulled away but they both felt the moment where it could’ve happened and Shane would’ve let him.

They’d tried to end it like every other night, in separate beds.

But that didn’t feel possible.

Ilya guides Shane to walk backwards as they kiss until they fall back into the bed together.

When they’re settled under the sheets, they stare at each other.

Shane makes himself say, “We can’t.”

“I know.”

There’s wonder shining in both their eyes now that they’ve said it out loud. They’ve acknowledged what almost happened and that they both wanted it.

“We wouldn’t be able to hide it,” Shane insists.

“It would threaten our careers.” Ilya agrees.

They stare at each other, begging the other to give in.

It’s Ilya who caves. “Or maybe a small one for the off season. One way. It fades. No risk.”

Shane’s nodding before Ilya finishes speaking and then Ilya’s teeth are on Shane’s neck again and he bites.

★ 8 1 【☄】 8 1 ★

Shane’s not sure if he’ll ever get used to waking up at his cottage with the weighted blanket of his bond with Ilya covering him.

He knows Ilya is in Russia right now, but it feels like he’s right beside him.

Jane: Are you swimming?

Jane: Ugh if you’re swimming you don’t have your phone

Lily: i’m swimming, yes. with svetlana

Jane: Tell her I said hi

Lily: ha. she still thinks you are some american girl

Jane: Why American?

Lily: maybe because only an american is stupid enough to bond with me for the summer

Lily: she is mad i can't hook up with her

Jane: Does she know you like both

Lily: eh. kind of

Jane: How does she kind of know?

Lily: i slept with my coach's son, she thinks it was like troublemaker

Jane: And she's your best friend?

Lily: in the world, yes. she's very special. i told you, she knows everything about hockey

Jane: She definitely knows you like both

Lily: why do you say this

Jane: You said she's your best friend, is the most analytical person you know, and knows who you've been with. Except me. How would she not notice that about you if you're so important to each other?

Lily: you may be right

Lily: she asks me about you sometimes

Jane: ???????

Lily: like, she thinks you are hot and asks if i agree

Jane: And what do you say

Lily: i say no, you are boring

Jane: And she calls bullshit

Lily: ugh, yes. she calls bullshit

Lily: you would like her

Jane: I like her already

Lily: i think maybe if i told her, it would be okay

Jane: Do you want to?

Lily: my alpha wants it more than anything

Jane: Do YOU want to

Lily: it is scary

Jane: You don't have to

Jane: But you know, you can. If you want to.

Lily: are you sure?

Jane: She's your best friend

Lily: you trust her?

Jane: You trust her. That's enough for me

A couple minutes later, Shane's phone buzzes violently with a video call notification.

He feels sick with terror and excitement.

It's either going to be Ilya and Svetlana, or a very heartbroken Ilya but he knows already what the video will reveal to him.

It's his own video that he forgets about, so when he answers the call Svetlana and Ilya get an HD image of Shane's bedhead and bare torso with Ilya's bite on full display.

Svetlana says something in Russian that Shane does not need translated to know it's a curse word.

He laughs awkwardly. "Nice to meet you too."

She stares at Shane through the phone then at Ilya.

"This is a prank," she switches to English. "I know you think he is–" She switches to Russian again. *"You think he is hot, but this insane, Ilya. That's not real. You did not mark Shane Hollander."*

Shane catches his name, but definitely has not picked up enough Russian yet to understand the rest.

"It's real," Ilya translates with his response. "And yes, I think he's hot and he does make me insane. I did mark him." He gestures with his chin at the phone. "You see my mark, it looks good on him."

Shane feels his whole body flush red.

Shane can see the way she wants to be happy for Ilya, but is struggling to believe this. The full force of her gaze whips to the camera and it's piercing even from the other side of the globe. "If this is real, what does he smell like?"

Ilya rolls his eyes. "Shane's nose is like *a real wolf, a bloodhound. He can pick apart scents like it's nothing.*"

Shane blinks at the way Ilya flows back into Russian to say what he needs to to Svetlana. It makes jealousy rattle through him to see Ilya be able to slip into the more comfortable language than to struggle through English.

Svetlana ignores Ilya's praise. "Okay, so describe it."

Shane was embarrassed enough to say it in front of Ilya and this is definitely some kind of test from his best friend. "Um, it's like. Like cold air at night."

Distrust seals off her expression.

Shane caves. "At the beach. Like the beach at night, like it used to be warm."

The tension melts off of her and leaves behind a stunned silence. "Yes," she turns gently to Ilya. "Yes, like it used to be warm. I could never figure out how to describe it."

It's Ilya's turn to stare at Shane through the phone. "Last time you just said air at night. Not beach. Why do you say more now?"

"It was too much last time." Shane doesn't have a better excuse.

Before they can have a moment, Svetlana seems to shake off the initial shock and processes that she has a direct line to Shane Hollander and starts talking about hockey.

With a snort, Ilya hands her the phone and leans back in the jacuzzi they were relaxing in after swimming laps to just listen to them talk with each other.

She asks him about a play she thought was shortsighted in his last game and he puffs up a bit defending himself and the context of why it was the best option on the ice.

She makes a couple suggestions Ilya can tell Shane reluctantly admits are good critiques and after the initial clash they fall into a rapport about the state of the other teams and who they think will be tapped for the All-Star game next season.

"If you and Ilya play together, will you let him mark you again so you move on the ice together better?"

Both of them choke on air.

"Someone would find out," Ilya finally weighs in.

Svetlana looks unimpressed. "But you would win."

Shane lets out a weary sigh. “You’re just like my mother.”

Svetlana nearly wheezes. “Your mother has not fucked your boyfriend.”

Ilya lunges across the jacuzzi. “See you, Hollander.” He ends the call.

He looks at Svetlana like she just kicked a puppy. *“What the hell?”*

Her hands move as she speaks with emotion, *“What, I can’t joke about fucking you? He knows, yes?”*

“Yes, he knows.” Ilya’s face cycles through a million emotions. *“He is not, we are not. We don’t use that word.”*

Svetlana blinks at him and switches to English for a moment. “You marked him and he’s not your boyfriend?”

“It’s just sex. It’s simple.”

“Ilya.”

“We are not together like that.”

“You love him.”

“It’s not like that.”

“You are lying to yourself and to him.”

“We are bonded. There are no lies.”

“So how did he feel when I said boyfriend?”

Ilya jumps from the jacuzzi back into the larger pool and starts doing laps again.

★ 8 1 【☄】 8 1 ★

Ilya calls Shane back later.

“I am sorry about Svetlana.”

Shane snorts. “I can see why you like her.”

“What she said, I told her we are not… She assumes.”

Shane clears his throat. “Right. No, it’s fine. I get why… it’s fine.”

The connection between them buzzes like lightning. They ignore it.

Ilya does what he always does and shifts the conversation. “This is the longest since I have had sex in years.”

“Yeah?” Shane acts unimpressed. “And how is that my problem?”

“Take off your shirt.”

“Take off *your* shirt.”

They switch the call to video.

★ 8 1 【☄】 8 1 ★

Chapter 3: Bonded

★ 8 1 【☄】 8 1 ★

It wasn't a huge issue that the bond hadn't completely faded by the time the season started, but the Boston vs Montreal game is already here and now it's an issue.

Svetlana drives Ilya to the game in Boston tonight, determined to witness Shane and Ilya together now that she *knows.*

“I think this would be against the rules if the league was progressive enough to have rules about bonded pairs.”

“There is no rule and it's almost faded. It's barely there.”

“Then you'll play with no distractions. You won't go easy on him or get protective if one of your teammates checks him.”

Ilya's heart does a backflip at the mental image of that.

“I won't go easy on him.”

Svetlana sighs. *“It's like foreplay to you, isn't it? Playing your best against each other and then you fuck.”*

If it was anyone else, Ilya would deny it. He nods. *“Yes, it’s exactly like foreplay. And he will lose and I will fuck him.”*

She snorts. *“Does he fuck you if he wins?”*

Ilya wheezes. *“He wouldn’t want that as a reward.”*

Svetlana raises an eyebrow.

Ilya looks out the window. *“Maybe he doesn’t want you to know that about him.”*

“Too late now.”

It's a tense match. These teams have gone years trading victories and Stanley cups. Both of them want it the most tonight and every goal is met with an opposite one. The score remains tied into the third period.

The Raiders have roughed Shane up a bit and Ilya feels extremely normal about it. He's able to disguise his growls as grunts and most importantly, he hasn't made any mistakes.

But neither has Shane and part of him wondered what it would look like to be so important, so encompassing, that he could distract *Shane Hollander* from hockey.

It seems he won't experience that tonight.

Shane scores twice in two minutes and his euphoria echoes within Ilya's ribs. He borrows the energy to score two of his own.

After overtime, the game goes to shoot outs.

Ilya and Shane both make their shots.

One of the Raiders misses.

Ilya's disappointment is clouded by Shane's satisfaction.

They find each other's eyes across the ice.

The bond was fading. As of yesterday it was almost gone. Today, it feels stronger than the day Ilya bit him.

Hayden crashes into Shane, mumbling something to him, looking pleased about their victory.

He follows Shane's gaze to Ilya.

Ilya doesn't look away in time, but he sees in the corner of his vision the way Hayden sniffs at Shane and then settles his gaze on Ilya.

Ilya hasn't touched Shane. They brushed against each other during the game but nothing significant.

Ilya realizes he doesn't know what Shane smells like with the mark.

He must smell like Ilya’s.

Possessiveness pulses through him and he sees Shane's knees go weak as they line up to end the game.

Their gloves touch and there's so much Ilya wants to say but instead just says, “Hollander.”

“Rozanov.”

When his glove touches Hayden’s, Hayden leans in to sniff.

He’s skated by before Ilya can see his reaction.

Hayden's shooting weird looks at Shane as they all get their gear off and packed up in the locker room.

“We won,” Shane bumps Hayden with his shoulder. “What do you look so stressed about?”

The locker room is filtering out but it's just loud enough for a whisper to go unheard. “Are you bonded with someone right now?”

Shane's world starts crashing down.

His eyes scan the room frantically, making sure no one else is close to them. “I don't know what you mean.”

Hayden looks exasperated. “You’re lucky it’s subtle. I don’t know how I didn’t notice it before.”

“Can we–” Shane feels his lungs restricting. “–talk about this somewhere else?”

Hayden’s initial intensity softens. “Yeah. Sorry. I just… I was worried.”

Shane nods, but can’t bring himself to make eye contact with anyone.

They sit together on the team bus back to the hotel and Hayden ushers Shane into the window seat before sitting in the aisle.

It takes a second for Shane to clock the action as protective. Hayden is an alpha in the same way Shane is an omega – everyone expected them to present the opposite way based on their personalities, but every so often their instincts rear up.

It makes the anxiety melt within him to realize that he’s being cared for and that comes with an inherent forgiveness and openness. Hayden’s initial shock didn’t mean he was mad or disappointed. It’s like he said, he’s worried.

Shane’s thinking about how to get away from Hayden so he can make it to Ilya’s to meet Svetlana as soon as possible, but he needs to go to the hotel first anyway.

Hesitantly, he takes out his phone and hopes it doesn’t piss Hayden off if he hides his screen.

Jane: Hayden noticed the bond. I have to talk to him when we get back to the hotel

Lily: shit. are you okay? i can send svetlana to help if you need

Jane: I’m okay! It spooked me for a second but it’s okay. I think he just noticed that I’m bonded, not that it’s you.

Lily: hm. i dont know about that

Jane: What do you mean?

Lily: he was staring at me a lot during the game. sniffed me during handshakes

The anxiety that Shane had coaxed away comes roaring back.

Hayden must be able to tell because he tenses, glancing curiously at Shane's phone without meaning to.

Jane: Sniffed you??

Lily: i think so. i don't know. maybe my imagination. i did not mean to make you worry

Ilya must still be able to feel his emotions through the bond. Shane assumed it felt stronger today because they were close, but it seems like something else is at play.

Jane: You're not paranoid like me, you wouldn't imagine that

Lily: i am paranoid in my own ways, thank you

Shane can't help the fond grin that tugs at his lips. He lo–

He lets the fondness overtake the anxiety. It is what it is. He just has to talk to Hayden and figure out how to move forward from here. He's not usually this calm about things, but if the bond is reforged then he'll let himself borrow some of Ilya's peace of mind.

In a moment of genius, Shane follows Hayden to his room instead of inviting Hayden to his own for two reasons: one, he's not sure if his luggage smells like Ilya's shirt and two, it gives Shane agency to leave more easily.

The door closes and any calm thought in Shane's brain starts to vibrate.

Hayden turns to look at him. "How long has this been going on?"

Shane lets out a long breath through his nose. He doesn't know how to answer that. "It's just sex."

"That wasn't my question. Is this someone new or is it Lily?"

The questions are too specific and Shane doesn't want to lie. But if Hayden has figured something out about Ilya, is it a bad idea to confirm it's the same 'girl' Hayden thinks he knows about? Or does he think Lily is still Lily and Ilya is… new.

This could be catastrophic, but honesty always comes easiest to him. "It's Lily."

Hayden lets out a breath and drops onto the bed, sitting on the edge. "Okay. Wow."

Shane has intel from Ilya, but he doesn't want to show his hand first. "Why does that shock you?"

Hayden stares at Shane and Shane can't parse his expression, it's infuriating. He wishes he was better at stuff like this. "This Lily you always come back to the room smelling like… I guess it's a coincidence that she smells like someone else. But you're bonded now and it's like your scent is tangled with hers. I think hers is tangled with yours too."

He knows. He totally knows. “Why would–” Shane voice breaks, but he can’t bring himself to admit it. “Why would you think that about hers?”

Hayden treads carefully. “Shane, is Lily another player?”

Tears well in his eyes, betraying his calm demeanor. He can control his expression so well, but not his tear ducts. He’ll break if he speaks so he just nods, once. Sharply.

“Holy shit,” Hayden breathes out and then immediately keeps talking. “It’s okay. I mean, I won’t say– You’re still my friend. It doesn’t change anything that you’re… it’s just a lot of information. I’m still your guy, or uh…”

Despite the building terror of being found out, Shane feels a laugh huff out of him. “Yeah, you’re still my guy, Hayden.”

Hayden laughs too, stress tightening his shoulders. “Is it weird if I hug you?”

Shane tilts his head. “Maybe a little, but it’s okay.”

Hayden gets up and wraps his arms around Shane. Then backs away, throwing Shane a look. “It’s disgusting how well your scents blend together. I think the only reason I noticed is because of that time you came back, like, fully scented after that hook up.”

The emotions that go through him are hard to describe, but they’re loud enough that it seems to alert Ilya to him. He can feel a surprised kind of satisfaction from Ilya responding to the fierce possessiveness in Shane’s chest. His instincts *love* to hear that his scent compliments his… bonded pair. Or whatever Ilya is.

Hayden laughs. “You’re down bad.”

“It’s just sex,” the excuse is less believable the more he says it.

Hayden makes one more attempt to clear the air between them. “Can you tell me who it is or would you rather not? It’s a Boston player, right?”

Shane studies him. “You know, don’t you?”

Hayden hesitates. “I have a guess, but it… it’s insane.”

A laugh barks out of Shane. “Yeah. Then you know.”

Hayden’s eyes go blank. “No way.”

“Is it so surprising?” He means the question genuinely. Part of him thinks it makes sense, but from the outside… maybe it still seems impossible.

“You hate each other.”

“We have really similar obstacles with hockey. They pit us against each other all the time. Who would know what that feels like more than each other?” As the words come out of his

mouth, Shane realizes he's admitting to a deeper bond than 'just sex' but that lie was never going to hold up. Not even to himself.

Hayden just says it, "You're fucking Ilya Rozanov?"

Shane swallows. Hearing it out loud is invigorating and terrifying. He nods. "Yeah."

"You're… *bonded* with Ilya Rozanov?"

"Yeah."

"Is that against some kind of rule? God, I guess they'd have to be progressive enough to think same sex relationships could happen in the league before they created a rule like that."

Shane laughs. All their hockey friends think the same way. It's a relief.

Before Shane can respond, Hayden's talking again. "He's such a dick to you?" The statement gets turned into a question. "You complain about him all the time."

"The guys complain about him and I just agree. You're the ones saying I hate him the most, and I usually just say 'yeah' or something."

Hayden blinks. "Even if you weren't… I mean, if you're like *friends* with him on top of the… You could've told us to stop talking shit."

Shane laughs harder than he has in a *while*. "You think the captain of the Montreal Metros could convince his team to stop talking shit about the captain of the Boston Raiders? Because we're 'friends'?"

Sheepishly, Hayden relents. "Okay, fair."

"And it's mostly an act." Shane adds on nervously. "Rozanov. He's a dick on purpose. It's just… how he is."

Nodding, Hayden seems a little less shell shocked. "Yeah, I mean. You've been hooking up with Boston Lily for years now. You're not stupid enough to bond with someone who treated you badly so I have to assume he's… a good guy? God, this sucks. It's so much easier to hate him."

"I wouldn't know what that's like," Shane feels a goofy grin on his lips.

"Didn't you hate him before all this started? You started as rivals."

Shane shakes his head. "I met him at the Prospect Cup and we, uh, started hooking up before rookie season even started. We're competitive, but I never hated him." It's such a relief to talk about it. Shane wants to tell him everything, but he's also very aware of the time.

"BEFORE ROOKIE SEASON? You've been fucking him since before you and I even met?"

Shane shrugs and checks his watch as he laughs.

“Oh god, you’re going to see him right now, aren’t you?”

Blush colors Shane’s cheeks. “Uh, yeah. I’m actually meeting a friend of his for the first time so–” He gestures to the door. “I should change, make a good impression.”

Hayden goes into protective friend mode. “You’re meeting his friend. While you’re bonded to him. But it’s just sex.”

“Good night, Hayden.” Shane heads out.

★ 8 1 【☄】 8 1 ★

“It’s a shame no one but me knew you two were bonded tonight. It was like watching Romeo and Juliet play hockey.” Svetlana raises her glass of wine to the two of them. “Truly, thank you for a night of peak entertainment.”

Shane and Ilya glance at each other, deciding not to comment on the Romeo and Juliet of it all.

It’s strange to be alone together with someone else, to invite someone into this… whatever it is. This bubble where they can be themselves.

“The awareness you have of each other on the ice is like lightning. And you don't use it to cheat. It's clean strategy functioning at its highest capacity. You're both incredible, honest players.”

Ilya had taken food out for Shane, knowing he wouldn’t have made time to eat. And now they’re lounging on the couches with drinks, Shane and Ilya on opposite ends of the same couch and Svetlana tucked into the other one in the corner closest to Ilya.

“What's your opinion on the outcome?” Shane's in game analysis mode somehow. Ilya can't help but feel fond.

“My opinion on the outcome? So far I like you, Shane, but my loyalty to Boston runs deep.” Svetlana raises an eyebrow.

Shane tsks, “No, like, do you think we earned the win?”

Svetlana takes a moment to glance at Ilya who gestures at her in a ‘go ahead’ motion. “It was a close game. It's hard to say which team earned it but that's what shoot outs are for. The team that takes the win is the most consistent and makes the least mistakes.”

“Hm.” Shane doesn't seem to have gotten the answer he wanted.

Svetlana continues. “If you mean how well did you play, I've never seen either of you play better games. It's just unfortunate that it was against each other on the same night. You cancelled each other out. Neither of you got the overwhelming victory you would've gotten over any other team.”

That just makes Shane think harder.

Ilya groans, “Okay, okay, I let you talk about hockey for like 5 hours. Please, anything else.”

Shane throws Ilya a judgemental glare. “I don't know what else I can talk about.”

“Weather,” Ilya suggests, “Dogs, food, sex.”

Shane’s face drops into an unimpressed expression. “What great ideas.”

“That's a good point actually,” Svetlana jumps in. “Obviously with the mark, you're not sleeping with other people but is that true for after it fades?”

Shane’s eyes find Ilya's like magnets.

Ilya takes any chance to be annoying, “Yes, Shane? Will you sleep with anyone else? He is known to be such a playboy.”

Shane kicks Ilya's leg across the couch. “That's a question for you to answer.”

Surprise colors Svetlana’s reaction. “You don't see anyone else?”

Ducking his head, Shane shrugs. “Who else would I see?”

With a sort of shocked laughter, Svetlana asks, “Don’t you have girls begging to spend the night with you everywhere you go? I know Ilya does and you’re much more conventionally attractive than him.”

“What the fuck, Svetlana?” Ilya throws a pillow at her, careful not to hit her wine glass.

Blushing at the compliment, Shane diverts it. “I think you might be biased from practically growing up with him.”

She raises that sharp eyebrow again. “You think he’s more attractive than you?”

Shane can’t look either of them in the eye and his face is red. “Definitely.”

Ilya locks eyes with Svetlana for a moment and then swivels his gaze to Shane. Hesitantly, he gets from from the opposite side of the couch to sit on the edge beside Shane.

He places his fingers on Shane’s chin. “Okay?” He whispers.

Shane’s eyes find his, nodding slightly.

Ilya kisses him. It’s a gentle kiss, but there’s power behind it. Intention.

They break apart and Ilya’s not quite conscious of the smile on his face while he brushes his fingers through Shane’s hair.

Svetlana is though. She switches to Russian, “*You’re in love with him.”*

Ilya’s eyes cut to her, anger filling them immediately. “*Why the hell would you say that? He’s calling me hot and I can’t kiss him?”*

She folds her arms across her chest. *"I've* never *seen you look at anyone like that, Ilya."*

Defiantly, Ilya makes himself comfortable at Shane's side, throwing an arm around his shoulders.

Shane looks lost. "Anything I should know about?"

Ilya tsks, "She is jealous."

Svetlana rolls her eyes. "You wish."

Ilya amends, "She is jealous of me, that I get to kiss you."

"That's slightly truer," Svetlana concedes.

Shane laughs nervously, eyes flitting between them. "Okay."

Ilya laughs and Shane feels the rumble of it where their sides touch. "Is okay, I will not let her. You are all mine, hm?"

Covering his face, Shane feels himself start to blush again. "This is hell."

There's a weird sort of prodding in Shane's chest that he recognizes as Ilya trying to communicate with him in a language only *they* know.

There are no words but somehow Shane understands.

Ilya's checking in on him, making sure all of this isn't too much. He's teasing, but he doesn't want to freak Shane out.

Shane, of course, has to admit he likes it as much as it is terrifying him.

Ilya leans in to press his lips to Shane's temple, then makes his way to his ear.

"Svetlana," Ilya looks to her, mouth on Shane. "Perhaps it is time for you to go."

"I had a feeling you'd kick me out soon." She switches to Russian, *"Maybe one day you'll invite me to stay with you both."*

Ilya's face is serious as he says, *"I don't think he likes women like that."*

She shrugs. *"Shame, but fair."* Tugging her shoes on, she looks at Shane. "Don't get up on my account. I know how to lock the door behind me here. It was nice to meet you."

Shane starts to reply, "It was really nice to meet y–"

Ilya fully straddles him, pining Shane down onto the couch and pushing his hands under Shane's shirt. "Bye, Svetlana."

After that, Shane isn't conscious of a single thing outside of every point where Ilya's body is touching his.

When Shane wakes up the next morning, he realizes he really shouldn't be here.

One, he's never stayed the night with Ilya.

Two, his suitcase is still at the hotel and he needs to be on the bus in an hour.

He grabs his phone, panicking and sees texts from Hayden.

Hayden: Did you really not come back last night????

Hayden: I can bring your bag to the bus, loverboy. But you better wake up soon. They WILL take off without you and then you have to get to New York on your own

Ilya's tugging Shane back into his chest. "What? Why are you… freaking out? Come back."

"My team's on the road, Ilya. We push off in an hour." Shane swats his hands away.

Ilya's eyes open at that.

Right. That had sort of slipped out last night.

First names.

Stupidly, Ilya forgets about the bond until Shane turns around to look at him. The deep affection in Ilya's chest is being broadcast loud and clear. "You are late, *Shane.* It's very unlike you. Such a bad boy."

Shane barely processes the words, just focuses on his name in Ilya's voice. His eyes are practically sparkling as he leans down to kiss Ilya.

They should probably talk about this.

"I will drive you." Ilya decides.

Absolute disbelief colors Shane's expression. "People will notice."

Ilya shrugs. "You sit in the back, they won't look at the driver. I'll wear hat."

"A metros hat," Shane dares.

"Mm, I don't have one. Too bad."

Shane starts tugging his clothes back on and Ilya watches before sighing and doing the same.

Shane keeps checking in-between getting himself together, "You're really going to drive me?"

"Yes, Shane." Ilya says sarcastically, his heart pounding in his chest and betraying him. "I will drive you."

Crossing the room, Shane puts his hands on Ilya's bare chest. "You like saying my name."

Ilya whispers directly into Shane's mouth. "You like hearing it."

They get distracted kissing again until Shane pulls away. "I'm really gonna miss the bus. Fuck." He focuses and gets all his clothes on.

"Then I drive you to New York." Ilya says casually.

"Really?" Shane looks at him in wonder.

"No," Ilya says with a smug smirk. "I have a flight to Minnesota tonight."

"You're such an asshole," but it comes out breathy and fond.

Ilya grabs Shane's hand and drags him out of the bedroom. "You drink coffee?"

"Yeah."

"I have, um, cold brew. It's fast."

Shane should be freaking out. He should be running out the door, but he finds himself leaning against the kitchen counter watching Ilya pour two glasses of cold brew into to-go cups. "Is this a typical morning after with Ilya Rozanov?"

With an awkward laugh, he says, "Eh, no. I do not share cold brew with anyone."

"Svetlana?"

"Mm," he hands Shane a cup. "Different. She made it."

Shane laughs too hard. "That makes sense."

"You ready?" Ilya glances around the condo.

"I didn't exactly plan to stay so yeah, all I have is my wallet and phone."

"Okay."

They stare at each other. Everything about this is too familiar.

The only reason they're getting through this is because every insecurity and moment of doubt is met with quiet fondness through the bond.

They would've run into some kind of miscommunication by now without it, but they've got a cheat code. At least temporarily.

With a nod, Ilya leads them out to his car. He sits and has Shane type the hotel address into his GPS from the passenger seat, subterfuge be damned. With a soft growl, he says, "I would give you something of mine, but…"

“Yeah, it’s too obvious. It’s okay. I’ll be okay.”

“Hm.” Ilya doubts that somehow. He has a bad feeling about the bond reestablishing itself with proximity and Shane immediately going away.

“Ilya, I’ll be okay.” Shane responds to the grumbling uncertainty in Ilya’s chest.

“I don’t like it,” he says softly. “Something is not normal.” They very intentionally did *not* let their instincts convince them to let Shane bite Ilya and seal the mark. Ilya didn’t even bite Shane again to reestablish it formally.

They *intended* for it to be gone by now.

“I think maybe,” Shane says softly as they drive, “we’re choosing to keep it.”

“No,” Ilya says immediately. “I think it’s a bad idea.”

“Sure,” Shane says gently, watching and feeling Ilya’s reaction, “but it helps, doesn’t it?”

He spares a glance at Shane before looking back at the road. “I know what you mean,” he says tensely. “And maybe… yeah, maybe we are doing it without meaning to.” He makes a face. “My alpha does not like… if something *is* wrong and you are far away…”

“It scares you. That you wouldn’t be able to be there to help.”

Ilya doesn’t answer out loud, but Shane can feel his affirmation loud and clear. “I did not want this during the season.”

“Me neither,” Shane emphasizes, making sure Ilya believes him.

Shane realizes he should respond to Hayden.

Shane: I’m almost there

Hayden: Wow you got an uber during peak time, impressive

Shane: Something like that

Hayden: He’s not… He’s not driving you is he

Shane: Is anyone from the team in the parking lot

Hayden: YES of course they are. We’re BOARDING THE BUS.

“Shit,” Shane mumbles.

“What.” Ilya checks in softly.

“Hayden says the whole team is practically in the parking lot.”

Ilya’s eyebrows raise. “Shit.”

“I told you this was a stupid idea.” Shane slumps in his seat.

“You would not make it otherwise. And I wanted to.” The bond turns the word wanted into *needed.*

Shane stares at him, really stares. “This is messing you up. The bond.”

Ilya’s jaw tenses. “I am not used to it.”

Shane wants him to specify. “Used to what.”

Ilya sighs, giving in. “Worrying.” He laughs bitterly. “Well, worrying, um, about good…” He struggles to get his words in order.

Shane understands though. Ilya’s worries are usually forced upon him – his family, the pressure they put him under. He hasn’t specified what they’re like, but Shane has felt the shape of it through the bond.

He’s used to worrying about bad things getting worse. He’s not used to hoping a good thing stays good.

Shane reaches out and twines his fingers through Ilya’s.

It helps.

Ilya spots the parking lot up ahead. “Shit, it’s crawling with Metros.” He sneers. “10 points for each one I hit?”

“Just park in the back, Ilya.” A smile tugs onto his lips in spite of himself.

The bus is in the far corner of the lot and luckily, there’s a spot in the back here where the building blocks them from it.

Shane is relieved by their luck. They sit for a second and stare at each other.

Ilya raises his eyebrows. “I thought you were late, Shane.”

“I’m worried about you, too.” The words stumble out of his mouth.

Ilya sighs, squeezing Shane’s hand. “I know.” It’s the gentlest thing Ilya’s ever said.

Shane’s eyes glance out the window to check no one’s around, then he leans in to kiss Ilya as hard as he can.

It’s stupid. Even if no one sees them, there’s no way they won’t smell something on him at this point. He can’t bring himself to care.

Ilya pushes him away, “Okay, go play good but not better than me.”

“Whatever, the cup is ours this year.”

“I will hold you when you cry over it, promise.”

“Bye, Ilya.” He scoots out of the door.

Ilya leans over to meet his eye one last time. “Bye, Shane.”

Shane tugs his gaze away in time to see Hayden peaking around the corner with two suitcases.

Shane sprints from the car and grabs it from him, pushing Hayden out of sight.

Ilya smacks his head against the seat rest and covers his face, letting out a deep breath.

“You’re a fucking idiot,” he says to himself in Russian before pulling away so no one else can spot him at the Metros’ hotel.

“You reek,” Hayden says scoldingly.

“I know,” Shane acknowledges.

“The team will know you’re bonded as soon as you step on that bus.”

“I know, Hayden.”

“I’m not judging you for, you know, but this is… stupid.”

“I know!” Shane nudges him away. “Jesus, Hayden. I didn’t really do it on purpose. It just… I know it’s stupid.”

Hayden looks over his shoulder, but doesn’t see Rozanov’s car. “The way he looks at you…”

“Why the fuck were you spying on us?”

“Excuse you, I was keeping watch to make sure no one *else* was spying on you.”

“Fine,” Shane relents. “Thank you. Sorry. I don’t mean to take out my stress on you.”

Hayden loads his bag under the bus and Shane does the same. The others are on board already. “He’s down bad. You are too.”

Shane rolls his eyes, but he’s pleased to hear that.

Hayden holds Shane back from getting on board one more moment. “Ready to tell the entire team about your personal life?”

“Absolutely not.” Shane self consciously brushes at his hair. Fuck, he didn’t even look in the mirror. His eyes go wide. “I don’t have any like…” He gestures at his neck.

“No hickeys, Captain. Thank you so much for making me acknowledge that about you know who.”

Shane nods. “Okay,” he tries to feel okay with it. He doesn’t. “Okay.” He steps onto the bus.

He’s met immediately by a bunch of cat calls and whistles.

“WE MISSED YOU AT BREAKFAST, CAPTAIN!”

“SOMEONE IN BOSTON KNOWS HOW YOU LIKE YOUR EGGS IN THE MORNING, HUH?”

“IT’S THAT GIRL YOU’RE ALWAYS SEXTING, ISN’T IT?”

Shane makes awkward eye contact with his coach. “We could talk about that or we could talk about why the fuck the game went into shoot outs last night. We can’t cut it that close if we’re getting the cup this year.”

His coach nods, relieved.

The team grumbles at the lack of gossip, but lets it go.

Shane sits down and Hayden sits beside him looking impressed. “Damn. You settled that fast.”

Shane shrugs. “It helps that I’m legitimately pissed about that, so.”

“You’re an enigma. You had an insane hookup last night and you’re already analyzing the game.”

Shane glances around but decides it’s vague enough if anyone hears. “We analyzed the game last night a bit.”

Hayden rolls his eyes. “Of course you did. You’re as bad as each other.”

Shane can’t help smiling about that. Yeah. They really are.

★ 8 1 【☄】 8 1 ★

Ilya sits on the bench at the arena in Minnesota and waits impatiently to get back on. When he’s on the ice, it’s easier to use the tangled feelings in his chest as fuel. It’s when he’s sitting still that his mind starts to wander to Shane’s feelings. He’s well aware that focusing on it could be bad, disastrous. He can’t be zoning out into Shane’s mind in the middle of the game but it’s hard to think of much else when he’s still.

He thinks Shane is playing right now too. Maybe just a practice, but it’s killing him to feel how Shane feels on the ice while he’s on the bench. He hasn’t even been off the ice for that long, he’s just being petulant.

The coach calls him up and Ilya vaults the wall impatiently, letting himself come back into his body and his focus sharpen on the puck.

They win 5-2.

★ 8 1 【☄】 8 1 ★

Ilya's roommate said he was going to explore the hotel amenities, so alone in his room he impulsively hits call.

"Hey?" Shane answers almost immediately.

"You won." As if Ilya is only calling about hockey.

There's a huff of laughter on the phone. "Yeah, you did too."

Ilya hears Hayden's voice in the background and doesn't know how to feel about Shane answering the call around someone else.

"Deep breath, man." Shane whispers and only then does Ilya realize how possessive he feels about it.

"Sorry," Ilya says under his breath.

Shane takes the phone away from his mouth and says something to Hayden about taking a walk but Hayden saves him the trouble and goes out himself.

"You were really distracting earlier. You like… I dunno, you were more present than usual from far away." Shane doesn't know what to call it.

There are no secrets anymore. They've been stupid to pretend there could be. "I was jealous you were on the ice while I was on the bench."

Shane laughs fondly. "That's pretty cute."

Ilya pretends to retch. "I am not cute. Cute is for freckled omegas who whimper as soon as I touch their cheek."

"You know, you were all worried about me but I think actually I need to be worried about you. You're so out of it, I think you're actually being honest through the bond *and* out loud at the same time."

Ilya latches onto the part of that that he's been focused on. "You're okay? Not freaking out."

"Ilya, you can tell I'm fine. And I can tell you're not."

The sentence jars Ilya like gears jamming in his mind. He can't comprehend this problem being on his side. He wants so badly to blame this on someone else, but…

Shane's right. Ilya is the one being negatively impacted by the distance right now. He should've asked for something of Shane's.

"You're alone in your room?" He says instead.

"Yeah," Shane sighs. "Will phone sex really help you?"

Ilya makes an offended sound, "Phone sex always helps me."

"Fine. Do you want to switch to video?"

"Obviously."

★ 8 1 【☄】 8 1 ★

Chapter 4: All-Stars

★ 8 1 【☄】 8 1 ★

It goes on like that for a while before buzz starts about this season's All-Star Game and how it's shaping up for Shane and Ilya to be on the same team.

Neither of them knows quite how to feel about it.

There's also the addition of Svetlana texting Shane now.

Svetlana: you know hes right about your backhand

Shane: I'm not allowed to have a single weakness? I'm good at everything else

Svetlana: cocky

Shane: It's just true. I work on all the pieces. My backhand just… idk it doesn't come as naturally to me

Svetlana: work harder on it, he'll take advantage next time you play

Shane: The other teams do too, it's not just him.

Svetlana: yeah but he goes harder on you than everyone else. he knows you can take it

Shane: Yeah and I can, no big deal. Why are you thinking about it

Svetlana: because if you two really do play on the same team, it could be the most beautiful match of hockey ever played and if your backhand improves by then, it would be flawless

Shane: Tell him to stop doing showy tricks, then

Svetlana: but he pulls them off and they work

Shane: They're unreliable

Svetlana: you're much blunter via text than real life but i guess it's different when you're not curled into a certain someone's chest

Shane: Sorry if I come off as ungrateful. I actually really appreciate and enjoy talking about how I can improve my game. It means a lot

Svetlana: does he know you'd welcome criticism from him?

Shane: Feels weirdly like insider trading if we really talk about it. The insults work well enough. What do you tell him to improve on when you critique him?

Svetlana: i tell him his tricks are unreliable

Shane laughs at his phone. He likes Svetlana more and more.

Hayden side eyes him in the Montreal gym. “Is that…”

“No,” Shane says honestly for once. “Just a friend.”

Hayden can put together the pieces. “But you’re talking about…”

Shane glances at him and relents. “Yeah.”

“You get the same look on your face every time you think about… her.”

Reluctantly, Shane agrees. “I know.”

“Do you?” Hayden perks up. “This is a new development. You acknowledge your feelings for her?”

It would be insane if Shane didn’t at this point. They’ve switched to first names, they’ve kind of met each other’s friends.

And Shane researched the bond. He has a feeling Ilya has too.

They hadn’t done anything wrong with the mark when they’d done it. It should’ve worked exactly as they planned and faded at the end of the Summer. It should’ve faded before the end of the Summer. But both of them adapted it as a crutch, too scared to let it go and be alone again.

Maybe if they can admit how they feel for each other, they can let go of the bond. But Svetlana has made very good points about having the bond during the All-Star Game.

“No offense, man,” Shane says, “but I’m really glad you won’t be at the All-Star Game.”

Hayden’s jaw drops. “Rude.”

“I don’t think I could… keep it together if someone knew.”

Hayden rolls his eyes. “Fair, but still rude.” He pauses. “Are you still…?” He taps his neck.

Shane nods.

“Will that cause problems at the All-Star Game?”

Shane shoots him a look, “It should help, right?”

Hayden doesn’t look convinced. “Won’t people notice? Everyone’s going to be watching the two of you. It’s the most compelling game in years with you two as teammates for the first time. I think at least a few people would be able to tell if you’re communicating through the bond in the middle of that game.”

It's way too specific and Shane glances in the mirrors and around the room to see if anyone is close enough or listening. "I have an idea how to end it. If it… you're right, it could be a problem."

"What's the idea?"

"Some things are private." Shane is not ready to say out loud that the bond may prove unnecessary if he tells Ilya he's in love with him.

★ 8 1 【☄】 8 1 ★

Shane gets a text from his friend JJ about the cast of his favorite franchise throwing a party in Montreal.

It's stupid to go, especially in the middle of the season. But if anything, this thing with Ilya convinces him to take more risks and have more fun.

He has no idea how he ends up eating fries with Rose Landry.

They hit it off so quickly, Shane doesn't even realize she's flirting with him until he feels a torrential amount of jealousy hit him from Ilya.

He checks his phone.

Lily: where are you

Lily: it's late. are you at a bar or something? mr goody two shoes out at 1am?

Lily: are you flirting with someone

Lily: [Missed Call]

Lily: [Missed Call]

Shane sucks in a breath. "Fuck."

Rose leans over. "Something wrong?"

Shane angles his phone away from her. "Uh." He looks her in the eye. Which alone is out of character for him, but he trusts her. It's only been a couple hours. He gestures away from the poker table and she follows him to a balcony. Everyone else is inside drinking, away from the cold so it's just them.

Shane looks at her and sees a parallel universe where he flirts back, she comes to his game, wears his jersey. They become a power couple and his mom plans publicity and brand deals around them.

It would be so easy. It would be so easy to be in love with Rose Landry.

But he's not. He can't.

Shane spits out the question, “I’m not sure if you can tell that I’m, um, I mean, you… I’m sorry if I’m reading it wrong, but have you been flirting?”

She laughs awkwardly, looking away. “Wow. Uh, yeah I’ve been flirting. I guess that’s a no.”

“No, I mean. Yeah.” Shane is so bad at this. “Look, I really like you. I know it’s been, like, one night. But, does it have to be flirting?”

The wind blows by just right and Rose’s eyes go wide. She looks mortified. “Oh my god, you’re bonded. I’m so sorry.”

Shane tries to placate her. “No, really. It’s okay. I’ve heard it’s not very obvious.”

His phone rings again and he cringes now that it’s quiet out and the vibration is loud in his pocket.

“Is that her?”

“Probably, but I mean it. I don’t usually… I’m not the best at making friends.” He finally says it.

Something in Rose softens and she looks, really looks, at him. “I know what you mean. In this industry, when we’re seen as so untouchable, so many people want something from us. Making friends doesn’t happen as much as people would think.” Her resolve hardens. “Yeah, fuck it. Absolutely. Give me your phone. I’m giving you my number and we’re gonna be best fucking friends, Shane Hollander.”

Shane relaxes and hands her his phone, a soft smile on his lips. “Yeah. Awesome.”

As she’s typing in her number, Lily calls again.

Rose looks up, eyebrows raised. “You got a thing for girls named after flowers?”

Shane snorts. “I guess so.” She hands the phone back to him and he holds it up. “I should take this, I’ll meet you back inside?”

She nods and heads in.

Shane answers the call, “I’m not flirting with anyone.”

“Okay, but you’re drunk and someone is flirting with you. I know it.”

Shane can’t help the way his lips curve into a grin. “How the fuck do you know that?”

Ilya hesitates. “I don’t know. I just… you’re never out this late. Who are you out with?”

Shane glances inside and watches Rose join the dance floor. “You’ll never believe me.”

“What does that mean? Is it like a fucking Ottawa Centaur or something?”

“What? No, it’s… It’s Rose Landry. The actor. The cast of my favorite movie is filming a sequel in Montreal, it’s crazy. They’re all here.”

Rage flares across the bond. “You are flirting with a fucking movie star? Is she an alpha?”

“Yeah, she’s an alpha. She was flirting with me, but I just talked to her and she finally noticed the bond and freaked out and apologized.”

The line goes silent for a bit, but Shane can feel Ilya processing his emotions.

“Ilya…”

“I think I know why it is easier for you, the bond.”

“What do you mean?”

“I really do not like that other alphas cannot smell me on you easily. I have this… my alpha would say claim on you, but other alphas, they do not see it. How can my bond protect you if no one knows it’s there?”

This is a really important conversation that they need to have with each other. Unfortunately it’s 2am and Shane is drunk.

Luckily, that seems to come across to Ilya through the bond. “Sorry,” Shane apologies. “Can we, uh, can we talk about this tomorrow? Like really, can we… I want to talk tomorrow.”

He keeps rambling, unable to stop himself. “I have this idea, I told Hayden. And I think it’s a good idea, like before the All-Star. Because it’s risky, right? People will see.”

Amid the flames of jealousy, Shane starts to feel a cool thread of affection. “You talk a lot when you’re drunk.”

“Maybe you should share your vodka more.”

“I told you, only as a reward.”

“I’m good. Reward me.”

Ilya moans. “You are phone sexing me in public from a party with movie stars?”

“Yeah,” Shane laughs. “Fuck, I guess I am.”

“Go inside, you’re cold. Have fun. I’ll talk to you tomorrow.”

“Night, Ilyaaa.”

A pulse of affection, neither of them can tell where it starts. “Good night, Shane.”

★ 8 1 【☄】 8 1 ★

Shane wakes up with the worst hangover he’s ever had.

To be fair, he hasn't had many but this one is extremely unpleasant.

He winces at the light through his curtains and masochistically reaches for his phone only to find the brightness too bright.

Squinting, he turns the brightness down and takes the phone under the covers with him to avoid the sun. There's a text waiting for him.

Lily: call me after you have coffee and eat something

After Shane does as he's told he calls Ilya.

"Good morning, Shane." There's amusement dancing in Ilya's voice.

"I'm sorry, Ilya." Shane knows he didn't actually do anything wrong, but he's still sorry for worrying him.

"It pissed me off at first, but it turned out very cute that you sent away famous movie star to have phone sex with me."

The memory of that sharpens in Shane's head and he blushes. "Jesus. Thank you for hanging up when you did."

"You're welcome." Ilya is so immensely fond of him right now that Shane doesn't know what to do with it. Luckily, Ilya keeps talking. "What was your idea?"

"What?" It's not fair to reference a conversation that Ilya was sober for.

Ilya tries to remind him. "You said you have an idea to get rid of the bond before the All-Star Game. That you told Hayden."

Embarrassment floods him again. "Oh."

Ilya perks up. "Good, I like when ideas embarrass you. Must be a good one."

"I didn't actually tell Hayden. I just told him I have an idea. I didn't tell him what it was."

"So, even more embarrassing."

Shane sighs and grabs a second cup of coffee as he moves to the couch to sit down. "It's not a phone call kind of idea."

"So it's a sex idea."

"No."

"What else could it be?"

"Isn't it nice sometimes to talk in person about important things?"

Ilya hums, “Like you talked in person to Rose Landry and told her you are taken by a big strong alpha.”

Shane tries to sound mad, but he’s smiling at the energized possessiveness Ilya’s feeling. “You’re not gonna let me live that down.”

“Never.”

Shane redirects. “Are you also getting to Miami a day early?”

“Of course, practice is early the next day.”

“Can we talk then?”

Ilya sighs. “Shane, that is three weeks away.” It’s the closest he’s ever heard Ilya to whining.

“So? Usually we see each other like every six months, max.”

It’s quiet a moment and then Ilya mumbles, “It is harder to wait that long lately.”

“Yeah,” Shane eagerly agrees. “Yeah, it’s harder lately.”

With a sigh, Ilya relents. “You will bring me something of yours to keep?”

Shane blushes. “Oh. You… want something?”

“You can be an asshole like I was with the Raiders T-shirt.”

Shane says absolutely nothing because he’s wearing that shirt right now.

Something about the color of his silence through the bond must signal Ilya. “You are embarrassed again. Do you wear it?”

“I, uh…” Shane can’t think of an excuse fast enough.

“Video. Video, Shane.” Ilya hits the request to switch to video and Shane reluctantly accepts it.

He pulls the camera away so Ilya can see the shirt.

Ilya gets horny immediately. “You will wear that next time I suck your dick. Only that. And your socks you’re sensitive about.”

He says it like nothing but it sort of startles Shane. “Sensitive about?” He knows it’s a sensory thing for him, but he didn’t know Ilya knew that.

“Yes, you don’t like not having them. It feels bad.”

Shane’s still struggling to understand. “How do you know that?”

Ilya shrugs, looking confused as well. “Eh, I don’t know. For the shower. When you take them off. You hesitate, but it’s not like… self conscious about feet or something.”

Shane stares at him. “You know so much more about me than I think you do.”

Ilya laughs, a flash of pained acceptance on his face. “Yes, well. Imagine how I feel. I say even less than you and I think you know more.”

I love you.

Shane wants to say it so badly. It crashes out of him like a wave cresting on the shore.

Ilya looks at him, voice going gentle. “What is that?”

“My plan,” Shane teases, “For the All-Star Game.”

And Shane regrets saying it because he can see that Ilya figures it out. His entire face softens. “I see.” His eyes flick over Shane’s face on the screen. “Interesting. I think we have similar plans then.”

A cloud of pure affection floats to Shane through the bond.

“Three weeks,” Shane says, jaw tense.

“Three weeks,” Ilya agrees.

★ 8 1 【☄】 8 1 ★

Rose: so who’s the girl and why isn’t she at your games?

Shane: It’s complicated

Rose: if it were me, i’d be at your games, jersey ON, bragging

Shane: Actually, I think she would too if she could.

Rose: is she international?

Shane: Ha. Incredible guess.

Rose: i will sleuth this out, shane hollander.

Shane: If anyone could, it’s you

★ 8 1 【☄】 8 1 ★

Svetlana: have you told him you love him

Ilya: i think there’s a plan for that

Svetlana: ????

Ilya: we've been talking around it. he wants to have a conversation when we get to miami

Svetlana: you make it sound like he's proposing

Ilya: i mean, practically. if that's what it is.

Svetlana: you're considering marrying a metro?

Ilya: you like him too

Svetlana: okay you were supposed to deny it. what the fuck ilya. are you really thinking about marrying him

Ilya: im not thinking about it but im not rejecting it

Ilya: marriage is stupid but maybe something like it

Svetlana: hes like a golden retriever. he will want to settle down

Ilya: mmm i wouldnt be so sure. he is not as traditional as he appears to be

Svetlana: so threesome is still on the table

Ilya: highly doubt it

Svetlana: hes so HOT

Ilya: oh i know. and he has only ever been for me

Svetlana: i hate that for me but i love that for you. fuck thats hot. whats it like to fall for the first person you take seriously

Ilya: honestly? …it's easy

Svetlana: who ARE you

★ 8 1 【☄】 8 1 ★

As soon as Shane sits down for breakfast, Yuna's eyes are on him. "You're seeing someone?"

With a heavy exhale, Shane nods. He knew this was coming. "Yeah."

"Who? Why haven't we met her?"

And that's exactly why they haven't met him.

Shane doesn't mean to get mad, but he knows there's anger in his eyes when he looks at her. "Can we not talk about it here?"

There's shock in Yuna's eyes when she sees Shane's anger, but she can acknowledge that their regular brunch place is not the best location to talk that out. She glances at David who

looks as out of his depth as she feels.

They do their best to recover and talk about brand deals and travel plans and the upcoming All-Star Game.

Shane never quite relaxes. Even with Ilya's comforting energy pulsing through to him.

It's the first time Yuna's ever really felt cut off from her son.

When they get home, Yuna and David debrief but shockingly it's David that brings it up first. "Did you notice when he got mad?"

Yuna nods, "Of course, I asked about his love life."

"No," David shakes his head. "Did you notice *exactly* when he got mad?"

She tries to think back but can't place it. As an alpha, she clocked the bond immediately, but maybe as an omega David was more sensitive to the actual emotions of the conversation. "No," Yuna admits. "I don't think I noticed."

Hesitantly, David says. "His head snapped up when you said… her."

Yuna's hand goes to her mouth. "Oh, fuck."

"It's okay, you didn't mean to–" David tries to console her.

"That's so fucking stupid," Yuna admonishes herself. "Why did I say that? I could've just said them. Why did I assume…"

"We should talk to him," David says calmly. "Not about who he's seeing. Just about him."

Yuna nods immediately. "Yes. They play Ottawa after the All-Star Game. We can have him over for dinner."

Silence hangs between them.

Yuna and David trade conspiratory glances. They should not speculate but it's so hard not to. "It has to be another player, right?" Yuna's sure.

David nods. "It would make sense. He loves hockey so much, of course he would fall for someone who loves it as much as he does."

"Teammate?" Yuna suggests.

"I don't think so. He'd have slipped up by now."

"Opponent?" Yuna's eyebrows raise. Her eyes slide to the TV in their living room, thinking back to plays, interviews, chirps. "Which team?"

David snorts, “Which city does he play the worst in?”

“Mm,” Yuna shakes her head. “No, which city does he play the *best* in?”

They both think for a second and then have the same thought at the same time.

“Boston?!”

★ 8 1 【☄】 8 1 ★

The Miami sun is bright as Shane spots Ilya across the hotel bar and old habits dictate he avert his eyes and walk the other direction.

But they’re teammates now.

Confidence surges in him and Ilya’s head whips up as the wind blows Shane’s scent toward him.

They talk about clothes but that's not what matters here. They're together. In public. They can talk to each other at a bar and it's not a scandal.

Ilya's never seen Shane flirt more confidently. Even when another teammate, JJ, comes over it seems to just energize him more.

This whole city smells like the beach so just like on the ice, it seems Ilya’s scent is harder to distinguish. Besides, JJ’s sense of smell is as bad as Shane's is good.

They'd both been looking forward to a private conversation but the lure of being together in the sunlight is too tempting so instead of talking they head to the pool.

Watching Ilya play with the kids, being so silly and himself, is the most dopamine Shane's ever had in this body.

He's so in love and the feeling is reverberating back and forth between them.

They should be hiding but it's impossible not to enjoy this while they can.

The sun sets as it must and they look at each other, falling back into old patterns as they learn to walk far enough away from each other to the same hotel room.

As soon as the door is closed, their lips press together and Shane is whimpering.

They press together as if they're trying to fit into the same space and become a single entity.

This isn't how Shane wanted this moment to go, hiding in a dark hotel room, but it's better than over the phone and it’s better now than years down the line.

Ilya pulls them onto the bed, lying down on his back and is pleased at the way Shane crawls on top of him.

They stay there, thinking of the past three weeks as they waited for this moment of privacy.

Ilya's eyes tear up, *“I love you.”* He mumbles the Russian into Shane's neck as he flips them over. He's fully crying now. “I love you.”

Shane's eyes tear up in sync with their shared emotions. “I love you too.” They hold each other, faces in each other's necks. “Fuck, I love you so much.”

Somehow, Shane's plan works.

They both feel the bond resolve and fade, the emotions they shared become their own again.

It feels like the opposite should've happened, but they're both certain of the other now. They don't need the crutch anymore.

Shane whimpers, “Does it fucking kill you too?”

Ilya shakes his head fiercely. “Not anymore.”

★ 8 1 【☄】 8 1 ★

After all the trouble they went through getting rid of the bond, there's still speculation that they were bonded during the game because of how synchronized they were on the ice together.

They don't care.

Ilya assists Shane's goal and it's euphoric. He kisses his helmet right there on the ice in front of everyone and he can feel Shane's arms embrace him on instinct.

★ 8 1 【☄】 8 1 ★

They fall asleep in each other's arms that night, certain some people have figured them out but they can't bring themselves to care yet.

“I think I know why we got away with it for so long,” Ilya whispers onto the top of Shane's head.

“Yeah?” Shane hums curiously.

Ilya kisses his temple. “You never asked me what your scent smells like to me.”

Shane sits up a little and they look into each other's eyes.

Ilya Rozanov might smell like moonlight and sand, but Shane Hollander smells like the ocean.

THE END

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BONUS

Rose: ……so i watched the all star game and it occurs to me that lily is remarkably similar to ilya

Shane: Huh, you think?

Rose: SHANE. THERE ARE HASHTAGS ABOUT THIS.

Yuna and David invite Shane over when he's in Ottawa.

He asks if he can bring a guest.

Ilya wears his Boston shirt and a Metros hat.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

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