

Familiar

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Additional Tags:	Alpha/Beta/Omega Dynamics , Alpha Ilya Rozanov , Omega Shane Hollander , Touch-Starved , Omega Verse , omega drop , Fluff and Angst , Canon Typical mentions of Suicide (Irina) , Shane Hollander Needs a Hug , Ilya Rozanov Needs A Hug , referenced domestic abuse , Grigori is his own warning , Honestly this is much fluffier than these tags make it seem , No Smut , accidental omega drop , Alternate Universe - College/University , Ilya does not get enough credit for learning English , baby boy is TRYING , Ilya has a few issues but he cares a lot ok? , Cuddling , Scenting
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Familiar

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Summary

Familiar:

(Adj.) Of established friendship; intimate.

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Hollander will react poorly, he expects. Maybe even file a formal complaint. That will suck, but Ilya won't fight it because he, unfortunately, is just enough of a dick to have done this without good reason. Still, there is a chance he can avoid the paperwork if he is forgiven, so he prepares a nice Canadian apology on his tongue before Hollander has turned around.

What he doesn't expect is Hollander to fucking *drop*.

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OR Ilya Rozanov accidentally causes his classmate Shane Hollander to drop in the middle of campus.

Notes

Wow. So I really wanted to play in this sand box and I figured this old fic of mine has been through two other fandoms, what's one more?? It was incredibly interesting to revisit a fic I wrote five years ago and morph it into fitting the hollanov boys, who are so different from any characters I've ever attempted to write before! I imagine there are quite a few moments this will feel a bit OOC, but I did my best! Most of Ilya's rough edges on his dialogue stem from how many of my ESL friends speak. I tried my best to make it feel genuine without being too obtuse. At college age he would be fairly new to Canada and still getting a hang of it and I really wanted that to be apparent. English is hard, friends!

(Also I did most of this on my phone - no beta - so mistakes aplenty I am sure)

There is the mildest of dubcon touching due to the nature of Ilya accidentally sending Shane into an 'omega drop' - it doesn't lead anywhere naughty but Shane's upset when he comes to.

Blink and you miss - A mention of Shane having little to no appetite.

This would be set roughly around 2010. The lightly alluded to technology is the biggest indicator of this.

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

“Fuck.” Ilya leans back to stretch out his spine from a slump.

The lecture hall buzzes. Students slide their belongings into their bags and chat with neighbours. So friendly, these Canadians, they talk to strangers like puppies sniffing out new friends. Ilya watches without desire to participate, amused but groggy after a grueling two hour lecture.

“Think he noticed I passed out for a solid hour?” A girl asks across a few empty seats, silky long curls shifting as she packs up. Her text book closes with a solid thud that sends a waft of her scent his way. Most likely it is an accident, not on purpose. Pleasantly floral, if mild. A pretty beta.

Ilya shakes his head, lowering his hands from his stretch and using one to cover his yawn. “All class is napping.”

This professor is the most boring person on the entire planet, and the warm sun streaming through the windows does not help. This class was the easiest part of this semester's course load, a dull morning lecture on material he barely needs to listen to for a passing grade. An easy way to tick off a few more points for his degree. What the hell he was going to do with the final degree remained a concern he would leave for the future.

“We could certainly use the beauty sleep.” The girl finishes with her bag and considers him. The eye contact is brazen, and Ilya matches it with mirrored attention. “Well, maybe you don’t, you’re gorgeous enough already.” The girl winks as she stands and tosses her bag over her shoulder. The flip of her silky curls leaves traces of jasmine.

It is nice. Typically he would say so, especially to someone so clearly interested. Yet Ilya’s teeth cut into his cheek to keep from commenting. This is not a bar or dance floor. She is pleasant to look at and her scent is unoffensive, sure, but he has a full semester of sitting in this class room to get through. He does not need the distraction, nor the annoyance, of blurring lines between his studies and leisure activities. Besides, talking about scent was not done. That would be creepy.

Don’t be creepy, Ilya.

Ilya clears his head with a deep breath of dull, stuffy classroom air. He is one of the last souls in the purgatory that is a college amphitheatre. With little grace, Ilya dumps everything from his desk into his bag with one broad arm swipe, shouldering it with a huff at the depressing weight. At the edge of the class room doorway he habitually scans the empty room behind him. That’s when he sees it.

A forgotten text book on the desk completely opposite from his seat.

Ilya squints through the open door, the radiant sun dancing through tree leaves that canopy the campus. The beta has given him the idea of a nap, and he can see the perfect patch waiting for him on the grassy hill.

He looks over his shoulder to eye the book.

Fuck, his mama taught him too well. If she were around he might have complained to her about the manners she taught him, but he can not truly dislike any part of her that lives on in him, the good or the bad.

Ilya rounds the rows of benches to snatch the book. Worn hardcover in hand, he marches through the door. Once he's returned it he can get nearly an hour of sleep in the sun before an evening shift at his boring job.

He flips the cover open. The name scrawled in neat pencil on the first page is vaguely familiar. A few students loiter around the building steps, none of them right.

"Hollander!" The call is met with no response, hardly anyone looking up as they keep chatting with friends or walk to and from classes. Annoying. He could be sleeping by now.

Ilya chooses a direction and marches. He scans the crowds for broad shoulders and dark hair. Finally he lands eyes on him, the oblivious idiot walking further away.

"Hollander!" Ilya growls louder. He has half a mind to throw the text book at his clueless head. It is just heavy enough that Ilya can not truly risk it. He does not need reason for school to kick him back to Russia.

Hollander is about to cross the road, looking up from his phone and stopped fully to look both ways, like a child. Ilya huffs when he sees the earbuds jammed into Hollander's ears. He steps up his pace to a jog and catches up just as Hollander steps off the curb. Frustrated and tired and impatient, Ilya reaches out - the exact way he has been told a thousand times not to.

His mama when he was a kid, his teachers in grade-school, the information packets he had to sign for every job, they all told him: Do not touch random omegas. No shoulder pats, no hi-fives, no hugs, no hand on the back. Not unless you were related or familiar, at least.

Ilya's had a total of three classes with Shane Hollander, both sitting on the opposite ends of the lecture amphitheatre. He is definitely not *familiar*. He knows he's fucked up the second his hand comes down on Hollander's shoulder to keep him from stepping out of reach, especially when it's close to his neck, an unfortunate accident.

Hollander will react poorly, he expects. Maybe even file a formal complaint. That will suck, but Ilya won't fight it because he, unfortunately, is just enough of a dick to have done this without good reason. Still, there is a chance he can avoid the paperwork if he is forgiven, so he prepares a nice Canadian apology on his tongue before Hollander has turned around.

What he doesn't expect is Hollander to fucking *drop*.

Ilya is an Alpha, yes? He knows what an omega in drop is like, knows what to expect and what they need and how to make that happen, knows as the initiating Alpha that Hollander's well-being is now entirely his responsibility.

He definitely knows he is fucking far from being able to handle the situation in broad daylight in the very middle of campus.

“Чёрт(*fuck*),” Ilya spits in surprise. His heart is a rocket in his veins as the full reality of what is happening settles.

Hollander is not exactly limp, but the daze has affected him enough for the phone in his fingers to be slipping. Ilya’s ill-placed grab has managed to pull them face to face, and with a full look at Hollander’s eyes he can see the swirl of anxiety beneath the clouded sheen of drop.

“I am sorry.” The apology is stupid words, too little to excuse his actions and the situation he has caused. Even if true, they do not help. “You are ok.” Better words, the best he can do right now. His hands ache to curl into fists, panic leaving bitter taste of defensive aggression curling under his skin. This is the inheritance from his father. It is useless. Ilya removes his grip to shake out his hands, releasing the tension. Without thought he snatches Hollander’s phone before it slips out of his weak hold.

Ilya swings his bag off his shoulder and fights to fit the text book that deserves to be stomped into a puddle at this point, but fuck, it is worth a over a hundred dollars and Hollander will be mad if he leaves it here, even when every second the omega spends standing— alone and dropped, *fuck* —is a tenfold longer to Hollander in his state.

Finally Ilya gets the stupid zipper on his bag to close and he stands up with a roll of his shoulders. He taps at the screen of Hollander’s phone. The emergency contact can be used without unlocking.

“Alpha?” Hollander’s usual timbre is a weak whisper as he curls into himself, looking lost and afraid. Ilya freezes. Every nerve in his body sings with discomfort. It is not Hollander’s confusion that unsettles him, it is the fear.

Ilya did that.

He looks at his fingers hovering over the screen. One phone call, it will be short, possibly a minute or two. Then how long until that person gets here? Are they on campus? Are they even in this province? He doesn’t know where Hollander is from. This country is nearly as big as Russia, his closest Familiar could be hours away by car or plane.

Ilya did this. To fix it he can dial the phone, or-

Or...

Ilya squeezes his palm around the phone. Hasn’t he done enough? Hollander could press fucking legal charges against him. Ilya should really leave this to Hollander’s Familiar. Anything else is taking advantage, no?

An Alpha that couldn’t control themselves. An Alpha that seized the opportunity. Cases like this happen everyday. Ilya’s stomach twists so quickly he tastes bile at the thought of Alexei.

Ilya will not be like him. He has always been careful, he always asks permission, he has never made assumptions no matter how good an omega smells.

But Ilya does not even know how Hollander smells right now, he's too caught up in the way Hollander is swaying on his feet like a dandelion in the wind.

"Alpha?" The second shaky whimper cuts Ilya deep. He is taking too long. He is *hurting* this omega.

Using the emergency contact would be cruel.

Hollander's face is creased in anxiety. He is most likely feeding off of Ilya's own turmoil and fuck, what is he doing? He can not leave Hollander like this a second longer when the boy's chest is starting to jerk like he is not breath or, fuck, he is fucking *crying*.

"I am sorry, Hollander." Those useless words again. They can not say the depth of his remorse when he tugs the cuff of Hollander's sleeve and closes the space between them.

Hollander takes a gasp of air the second his face finds Ilya's collar. Ilya threads a hand through Hollander's hair, not blind to the people starting to notice them. Of course they look. Ilya is scenting an omega in the middle of the fucking campus. He pulls away as soon as he feels the slack in Hollander's muscles.

"We must go. You are safe, солнышко. Walk for me, yes, good. I am sorry, fuck, Hollander," the english is clumsy in his mouth with his focus so strained by the situation. Ilya loops an arm around Hollander's waist and encourages the boy forward, Hollander's face still tucked into his neck to scent him, small noises of complaint dripping from his mouth. He is probably looking for the scent of a familiar, or even just the soothing comfort of an Alpha in fucking control.

Ilya does not want to know what his scent is doing. Likely sour with stress. He has tried to be an Alpha that exudes calm in a crisis, but this has rendered him fully incapable of it. If they get stopped by campus security for indecency or fucking god forbid, a challenging Alpha, his last string of control is going to fucking *snap*.

One hurried step after another, Ilya drags Shane along. He has lost his mind. Only an Alpha out of his fucking mind would be walking *towards* the Omega Residence building with a dropped stranger. But Hollander can't go into a building full of Alphas like Ilya's dorms. However Hollander's going to feel when he comes out of it, everything will be a lot better if the boy is in his own den and surrounded by the comfort of his own scent.

Luck shines down on them. No one is attending the entrance desk of the omega dorms. There is no way Ilya could have explained himself, not even his own mind understands what he's doing. Hollander's name is scrawled on the directory, *S. Hollander: 24*.

He just has to find door 24. Second floor, most likely. By the time he gets them up the stairs he is sweating through his t-shirt from carrying half of Hollander's weight across campus.

The door is not so far down the hallway. Success is at his fingertips, but in the stillness of the corridor comes a burst of clarity. The hallway is empty right now, but any second someone could step out of a door and see them; Ilya, sweaty and panting, a stampede for a heartbeat. And Hollander.

Hollander, who's warm and loose-limbed as he presses closer into Ilya's side, small huffs of breath raising goose flesh on the back of Ilya's neck.

Key. Ilya has to get the key. Hollander is still wearing his bag. Ilya uses the arm he has around Hollander's shoulders to start blindly patting around the canvas, looking for the zipper. He's got a good grip on Hollander's arm tossed over his own shoulder to keep the boy standing, but the search has Ilya angling into him and the omega takes it as a fucking invitation to completely plaster himself against Ilya's front. Ilya stumbles backwards into the wall at the force of Hollander nuzzling into him.

Ilya's mind blue-screens.

Shit. Oh Jesus fucking Christ.

Ilya casts his eyes skyward to the universe and all the deities his mother believed in, asking for strength. Because the shift in position has made him undeniably aware of two facts: Hollander's shoe size must be above average to match his cock, and his key isn't in the backpack.

It's in the front pocket of Hollander's jeans, the one currently shoved against Ilya's thigh.

Ilya breathes deeply in an attempt to steady himself. It backfires immediately. His lungs fill with the omega scenting him. Hollander's short hair brushes his cheek as he hums and nuzzles close, the motion leaving the tempting skin of his neck obscenely bare and inches away from Ilya's face.

Ilya curls his hands into fists. Everything in him is screaming to scent the omega back.
Comfort and claim.

He has done it once already, but that's only because Shane was seconds from full blown panic. Ilya won't do it again. He can't. Not even with his head spinning and instincts itching. Because Hollander does not *know*. He has no idea what he's doing right now, and Ilya might be sweating under the pressure of the moment, but the thought of how violating it is to have dropped a random omega absolutely chills him to the bone.

The only reason Ilya is touching Hollander at all is to keep the boy from returning to the shuddering mess so nearly avoided on the street. Once he is safe and grounded, Ilya will make one hell of a hasty retreat.

Ilya squeezes his eyes shut and gropes Shane's hip with one cautious hand. As delicately as he can, he feels around with his fingertips, holding his breath in fear of actually feeling anything this close to Hollander's crotch, until he's dug the ring of keys out of Hollander's pocket.

The moment they pull free, Ilya's lungs collapse in a sigh of relief.

“Okay, here Hollander. Inside, yes?”

Hollander has been docile since they started walking, sweetly compliant with his nose stuck in the crook by Ilya's ear. He remains so as Ilya fumbles with the lock and rushes them through the door like a four-legged creature. With force he knocks it shut, dumping Hollander's book bag to the three inches of floor space available in the narrow dorm. Gently, as gentle and light as he can be, Ilya gets Hollander to make space between them.

“Hollander, you are home. You are safe now. I am sorry, fuck, you will fucking kill me, I am sorry.” Hands on Hollander's hips manage to get the pouting boy to step back, another little push of pressure and Hollander's knees give out to land him on the edge of the rumped bed like Ilya hoped.

Hollander's hands, however, still reach out to snag on Ilya's jumper. As gently as he can Ilya peels the fingers from the fabric, having to do so several times because as he works on one hand the other he just freed finds a new place to attach to.

“Hollander, please, okay, you must— must stop.” Finally Ilya gets a grip on both of Hollander's octopus arms and settles their joint hands in Hollander's lap. He looks him in the eyes in an attempt to get through the haze of the drop.

“I swear you are going to murder me, and I may let you, but you must get your pretty head clear for me, okay? Yes? You are safe, in your bed, in your ne— your nest.” Ilya stumbles over the word, cringing at the intimacy of such things in the company of someone he hardly knows.

They hold eyes, nothing but the sound of their breathing and the thrum of Ilya's hummingbird heart as he waits and watches the brown brown brown of Hollander's iris'.

There's a flicker. A pinch to Hollander's brow.

“Rozanov?”

His name is odd in Hollander's pink pouting mouth. They have never spoken to each other directly, only in group class room discussions. What a fucking fantastic first impression.

“Yes, it is me.” Ilya nods. Hollander is so close to pulling himself out of it. They are so close to getting through this.

Hollander blinks, slowly at first, then faster as he surfaces. He grows restless under Ilya's loose hold, their hands still joined in his lap. Hollander's gaze flicks around the room, searching until they return to Ilya, confusion growing deeper the longer he stares.

“I don't— What are you doing?”

Ilya cringes in preparation. Like a plaster, he must say it as fast as he can, fast and simple, fast and simple, fa— “You dropped.”

Hollander freezes. The full stillness of his fingers draws attention to the fact that Ilya has absolutely no business still touching the boy. He yanks his hands away like they're scalded and stumbles backwards into the edge of a desk.

"So you came into my room unsupervised?" Hollander's eyebrows are severely angled, has he always been capable of looking so angry? Because Ilya is definitely a little scared. "What were you planning—"

"What was I to do? Leave you alone?" Ilya bursts, backing up as far as the shoebox of a dorm allows him. If he reached out his foot would still kick Hollander's shin, it's really not that far.

A glare from Hollander pins him there. Hollander puts his hands flat on bed either side of himself, morphing from the timid omega in search of cuddles into an agitated young man filled with righteous fury.

"So what? You think because you're an Alpha you can just touch whoever you like?"

"Who drops from hand on shoulder?!" Ilya gesticulates as he speaks, heavily emphasising his words because come *on*. "Yes, bad manners on me, but that is not normal."

He has had omega best friend for entire life, and Svetlana wasn't capable of dropping without a half hour of talking down first. And that was at home in her nest with only a familiar person around, not in a busy street midday. Has Ilya mentioned Hollander dropped in *the middle of the street*? No one prepared him for anything like that.

"Fuck off." Hollander stands with a snarl.

Ilya trips over himself as he moves sideways towards the door. Right now maybe is not the time to get frustrated, he still feels at least a little justified in his own freak out.

He tries to reel it in. "I am sorry, Hollander, I had no idea—"

"I said get the fuck out."

The air is crisp with Hollander's anger, but not enough for Ilya to miss the tremble in his lip or the shake of his shoulders. Very suddenly it is clear that the anger is a veil over Hollander's horrible vulnerability, because Ilya has made Hollander scared. Like a brute. He has forced his way into a place he does not belong, and every passing second he lingers is an offense. He is a piece of shit, just like his brother.

Ilya stumbles backwards over the threshold into the hall. After one last glimpse of Hollander's furious face, Ilya's hand snags the door on his way out to shut it solidly in front of him. He should leave now, before anyone sees him.

He has to leave. He will. But there are hooks in his heels keeping him tethered in place. He eyes the wooden door. He doesn't know what he's waiting for until he hears the snick of the lock turn.

Locked. Safe. Hollander is safe.

Ilya slumps in something like relief at the sound. Finally he's able to move his feet and get his ass out of the building. Hopefully he moves fast enough that people don't recognize him as an Alpha in a place he most definitely should not be.

Well. So much for the morning class being relaxing.

Two days later Ilya squints, trying to make sense of the foreign alphabet on screen. Shifting in this uncomfortable chair or angling his head can't bring a single thing from the teacher's slides into focus. For two nights his mind has raced with how fucked up yesterday was. He should have let someone like campus security or one of Hollander's friends or *someone* other than himself deal with the situation, because clearly he'd had no fucking concept of the right way to handle it. He has lied awake expecting his door to be beaten down by an official pressing charges of assault, and fuck, how did Ilya become someone who had to worry about that?

His stomach twists, sour bile pooling on his tongue.

Class is close to being over and he has not looked in Hollander's direction once. The omega is here. It's unmistakable. As much as Ilya has been avoiding Hollander, the angry tension humming in the two-hundred seat hall is nearly visible with how strong it is.

He just needs to avoid Hollander for the rest of term. They do not have the same major because this is the only course they share. It can't be that hard to ignore someone when the closest they ever get is different ends of a hundred metre hall for two hours twice a week.

The professor sighs and takes off his glasses as his lecture comes to an end like a sad shuddering train. With weary exhaustion he drones on with such lack of enthusiasm Ilya winces. The more he saw of old age the less he blamed his mother for avoiding it.

"As we discussed last class, your midterms will be conducted through a partnered presentation of your collective statement. Please ensure you thoroughly communicate with your partner to handle equal division of the workload."

A vice appears around Ilya's lungs. He sits up straighter as the professor continues to discuss the project in detail, trepidation choking him the longer the professor goes over formatting citations. There are over a hundred and fifty students in this course. He did not take statistics, so he does not know the chances of them being partnered, but it surely can not be that fucking high.

The professor taps to the next slide containing the paired names.

In bold font is Ilya's doom:

HOLLANDER/ROZANOV

Ilya twists in his seat in search of Hollander. With students shuffling next to their partners it's a sea of backpacks and ruled notepads that blocks the way. Surely Hollander will say

something to the professor. It will be humiliating, but maybe now is when it'll all come out. The school counselor will schedule regular sessions with Ilya for Alpha Aggression therapy and his father is going to be absolutely livid if he finds out. Ilya sinks in his seat at the mere thought.

When everyone has settled and Ilya's sight across the amphitheater is finally clear, Hollander's chair is empty.

The back of Ilya's neck tingles.

Nearly everyone has hunkered into their new seats. Hollander has to be *somewhere*. The professor stands at the front with his back to the class and nose in his mobile, so Hollander is not talking to him, unless he's left. He could have just... left. Like a silent protest in refusal to work with a monster.

A thump on the desk makes Ilya jump.

A neat book of notes and textbook rests on the desk beside him. Sitting in the chair is Hollander. He glares at Ilya. His hair is a wild mess. The urge to run a hand through them has Ilya's palms itching.

"There are rules." Hollander's stern voice is lowered so those around can't overhear, but it's commanding enough to pull Ilya out of his thoughts.

He freezes in his chair and tries to silence the pound of his pulse through willpower alone, ready to be hung and quartered by every word that could come from Hollander's mouth.

Shane hisses with rage in his eyes. "Don't fucking touch me again."

"Never." Ilya nods eagerly with a ragged breath of relief. That is an easy one he is more than willing to follow.

"If you absolutely must contact me you can send an email, and if I see you anywhere close to my building I'm reporting it."

"Hollander." Ilya licks his lips as he flounders, mortar sticking to his bones like quicksand he hadn't noticed consuming him until he was neck deep. He looks precariously over his shoulders at the room around them, glad to see everyone is heads down in their phones or talking about their projects, the professor sequestered to the front desk probably flipping through online dating profiles. Ilya sits a little taller but doesn't lean in like he would like to in order to keep his own voice down. He speaks as low as he can with sincerity. "I am sorry. I panicked."

Hollander narrows his eyes with a sneer, looking a bit like an angry puppy, but that doesn't stop Ilya from taking him seriously. "Alphas don't panic, they manipulate."

Ilya's stomach clenches like a sucker punch. He retreats into himself, tugs his sleeves over his hands as he sinks into his chair. He wants to press, insisting the apology is genuine, that he's telling the truth, but... well, so is Hollander. Alphas don't commonly panic. They're leaders

and plan makers, people who get shit done and take control of the situation instead of letting the situation control them. Ilya might not play into that stereotype all the time, but he can't even be certain he isn't trying to manipulate Hollander. Isn't *'I would never do that'* exactly what someone who did that would say?

Whatever Ilya might want to say about it, one look tells him Hollander's in no mood to hear it. Ilya will take the loss over making things worse.

Ilya ducks his head to stare at the blank white page on his laptop and the blinking cursor. Slowly he double taps the top and begins to type the header. Hollander's eyes are heavy on his profile as the boy watches him, but Ilya doesn't break focus until the title is complete. He glances up once it is, the thesis of their essay in bold at the top of the page.

"I prefer laptop. I am not so good in your alphabet with pencil." Ilya fights to keep his voice level as he speaks, the admission a peace offering to move on.

Hollander's shoulders lower like he'd been prepared for more of a fight. Without the anger burning in his eyes he looks softer, younger than he had before. With precision he uncaps his pen and copies the words into his notebook in black ink, the final letter pressing so hard into the paper it threatens to tear.

Ilya purses his lips. Hollander's shoulders may be lowered, but the walls around him remain as high as ever.

Slowly but surely Ilya forms a hatred for the school email system more than anything he has encountered in life. There's no app, meaning he has to load a webpage not meant for mobile on his four inch screen and zoom in and out continuously to navigate and decipher it, and it also means it never keeps him logged in, so he constantly has to retype his login information, sometimes twice if he's made a mistake on the first rushed attempt.

Several times he nearly throws his mobile to the ground in a fit of impatience, only a deep steadying breath and the threat of his own stupidity costing him several hundred dollars for a new phone keeping him from doing so.

The email system is annoying, but worse than that it's fucking awkward. The delayed response and lag on the network means to form any sort of conversation is a test of patience in the extreme. It doesn't take any longer than the first class after they've been assigned as partners for Ilya to insist they work something else out.

"I'm not giving you my phone number," Hollander declares in the seat next to him.

Ilya grips the side of his desk. "Ok, do not give, but we can meet at library? Waiting for emails is making crazy. We both work, then I see you already do the same as me."

Hollander grinds his jaw. He is frustrated too, even if not admitting it. He does not look as stern and angry as he thinks he does, not when the flush brings out his freckles and his lips

are so close to pouting. Not that Ilya has been looking, but Hollander does sit directly across from him. He would have to be a blind man not see how pretty Hollander can be.

“Fine.”

The tension has hiked Hollander’s shoulders again. He looks more wound up than Ilya has seen him before, which... well he has barely seen him in passing before, so it is not like Ilya has much to compare it to, but surely Hollander can't always keep his body so tightly coiled.

Ilya freezes when he notices himself shifting in his chair. He has been leaning, half his ass on the edge like he could get closer to Hollander without either of them noticing if he didn’t move the chair. He did not notice before now, but maybe Hollander has, and that’s why he is all clammed up.

Ilya clears his throat and shuffles around, hoping to hide the way he settles back into the centre of his chair without drawing attention to just how far off it he’d been.

“Did you read the link I sent you?” Hollander asks while getting his notepad sorted to the right page. Ilya relaxes an inch. Hollander probably didn’t notice if he’s been distracted getting his highlighters and shit out.

“The co-authored journal?”

Hollander huffs, his pad slapping down on the table once he’s found the page. “No, the hockey scores.”

“Good game, actually,” Ilya mutters as he clicks through older emails on his laptop.

“Rozanov.” Ilya jumps at the sound of his name. He turns wide-eyed to Hollander, who’s raised an unimpressed eyebrow. “I mean the journal.”

“Da, yes, I know.”

When he does not say more, Hollander rolls his eyes and goes into a pointed explanation of the article Ilya did, in fact, read. He just needs a moment to get over the jolt of his heart at the sound of his name from Hollander’s mouth. Needs to shake off the vivid memory of the first time he heard it when Hollander was docile and clingy in his hands.

The exact opposite of the agitated fireball sitting beside him.

Ilya narrows his eyes at Hollander as the boy keeps talking, on a tangent now and huffing over how much he didn’t actually agree with the point the article had made and what he had to back up his own opinion, then backtracking to say he still thinks they should cite the inkling of truth this article held.

The brown in his eyes is quite deep. They flicker between the screen and Ilya's and the papers in front of them, but something is off about them. It takes some scrutiny to realize it’s the contrast of lilac bruises on the soft skin beneath Hollander’s lashes. He must not be sleeping very well, or at all given just how deep the colour has bloomed. That’s not the only thing though. The closer Ilya looks the more he sees there’s a lethargy to Hollander’s gestures. The

nervous tapping and shifting of his supplies as he talks about his opinion are now mild gestures that look like they're made underwater, limbs weighed down by invisible pressure or... exhaustion.

Hollander's run off his train of thought more than once, Ilya too distracted to notice until the moment Hollander's licking his lips with a lost look in his eye. It's a flash, but it's enough to light Ilya on fire because for a second, a mere blink, Hollander looked ready to drop.

"Hollander." Ilya's voice is cautious when he wants it to be stern, but not too stern because mother-of-fuck he's not going to go around *commanding* people.

Hollander's eyes clear with a burst of blinking, shoulders rising and muscles tensing so instantly it radiates from him.

"What?" Hollander snaps, as though he doesn't know.

Fuck, Hollander has to know. There's no way he's been hovering this close to drop and not felt it coming. He's got to be an absolute idiot for remaining in public like this. Maybe it is not fair that omegas have to deal with it, but it's the same as any Alpha knowing they should isolate when their rut starts coming on. Taking care of yourself and your personal needs is everyone's personal responsibility, Hollander's just being stupid not to listen to his instincts like this, and plain inconsiderate for those who'll have to deal with him when he finds himself in a sticky situation.

People like Ilya. It's maddeningly dangerous when Hollander could fall prey to any sort of animal out there. Even those with good intentions, like oh, *Ilya*.

They stare at each other with mounting frustration.

Ilya does not know how to say '*You are being fucking idiot, go home,*' without actually saying that, or even worse, saying '*You need an alpha to put you down and if you do not leave in the next ten minutes it will be me.*'

"You okay?" He asks stupidly instead. Stupid, because they both know Hollander is not okay, and pretending otherwise is crazy.

But of course Hollander is nodding, chin tucking as he turns to focus on his bag by his feet. "Yeah, fine. Gotta head home though. Email me when you've actually read the material instead of wasting my time."

Ilya sits, relieved and yet stupefied as Hollander shoves everything into his bag. From just a glimpse, Ilya can see a full lunch still untouched. His own stomach clenches at the thought of Hollander not eating all day.

Without another word or look back, Hollander leaves, the seat cooling by the second as he walks away.

Every muscle in Ilya's body screams to follow Hollander through the door and make sure he gets home safe. Anything could happen to him on the short walk. Someone could bump into

him too hard, and then what if he tripped and someone helped him get up, only for him to drop at the touch? What if he almost walked into traffic and someone grabbed his shoulder?

Ilya gets everything in his bag and slung over his shoulder, brimming with pent up worry before he stops himself at the door, fist tight around the handle.

What if Hollander is perfectly okay, and he finds out Ilya is following him all the way home?

Ilya's forehead knocks into the glass with a low thud. He takes a deep breath of the muddled air of the library in an attempt to calm himself. He's being an asshole, thinking Hollander can't look after himself because he's an omega, that he doesn't know his own limitations, that Ilya knows what's best for him over his own self judgement.

Ilya has never wanted to be that sort of Alpha, and he's sworn never to let his instincts get the best of him. Not again.

"Hey knothed, you're in the way."

Yes. Sounds about right.

Ilya pushes through the door so the student behind him can storm out. Ilya shoves his hands into his pockets and looks in every direction before he can stop himself. Probably for the best that he doesn't catch sight of a single freckle.

Hollander is still on his mind when Ilya gets back to his own dorm. He makes himself a gourmet dinner of packaged noodles. He chews without tasting as the television plays sport highlights. It is not enough. He grabs his phone and launches the email website with rote muscle memory. He gets his email correct on the first attempt and types out a message before he can think better of it.

ROZANOV_ilya@mcgill.ca

Subject: ???

Did you make it home?

He stares at the screen until it goes black. Twice.

Fuck, it is the stupid program. A reply isn't going to come for at least ten minutes until the server refreshes. With a growl of frustration Ilya chugs down the rest of his noodles and flicks through channels before giving up and pacing.

Hollander has to have friends. There's a vague shadow of figures Ilya can recall sitting round Hollander's area of the amphitheatre, maybe one or two of them the same people he's seen at the lunch table with him that one time in the first week, or walking through the halls on his way to another class. But Ilya had been grumpy with hunger when he saw Hollander in the cafeteria, and only running by in the halls, so he'd barely even registered Hollander's

presence past there being a cute kid nearby, but Ilya definitely didn't get a good look at those around him.

Maybe that blond one, Pike. Yeah, maybe Ilya can get ahold of him somehow and ask him to text Hollander, or even stop by his place just to make sure he got in okay and ate something. Make sure he isn't huddled in a corner, spending the night cold on the floor because he's down too deep.

Pain sings through Ilya at the mental image. He nearly tears through his door to track Hollander down, threat to his criminal record or no. A little ping sound and a symbol on his phone screen stops him:

Inbox (1)

Ilya can't work his finger fast enough to tap open the message.

HOLLANDER_shane@mcgill.ca

RE: ???

fuck off

The phone clatters on the table when Ilya tosses it.

This is so stupid! Ilya had to sit through the most awkward hour and a half of his life at eleven years old, watching slide after slide about sexual and biological health, going into truly uncomfortable detail about the way bodies work. Even in Canada they must do this, he is sure. So Ilya knows that Hollander *has to know* what's happening. He's in touch deprivation, and the simplest way to fix it is to find a familiar and cuddle. Put something stupid on the television and get some snacks, call it a day. It is this simple.

Is Hollander doing this? Fucking no, obviously, if he is dangerously close to dropping in the middle of an overcrowded library.

Ilya is blind with anger over it. He can't understand why Hollander is not looking after himself, why he's putting himself in such a position, why he's putting *Ilya* in such a position.

Like a boulder of frustration, Ilya drops onto the couch and plants his fisted hands on his thighs with a groan. He bounces up again to pace with a swarm of bees angrily buzzing beneath his skin.

Maybe it is crossing the line, but Ilya can't just sit here and do nothing. Because there's that chance, the slimmest of impossibilities, that Hollander doesn't have anyone to cuddle. Ilya can not fathom it, but he also can hardly believe the reality of what he has witnessed twice now. The possibility of Hollander dropping again without someone to look out for him is too fucking high to do nothing about. Even if Hollander doesn't want his help, as a good Alpha Ilya has to do *something*. Even if it means going to the counselor to discuss possibly having a professional approach Hollander with the concern this situation called for.

But before he takes it that far and completely villainises himself to the boy, Ilya has to Alpha the fuck up and speak to him first. It is only the right thing to do.

He breathes deep through his nose and rolls his shoulders back. He straightens the crucifix around his neck. He breathes out. He picks up his phone.

ROZANOV_ilya@mcgill.ca

RE: ???

We need to talk. Why are you always close to drop? Is no good.

Ten of the longest minutes of Ilya's life are spent pacing the room and tearing at his hair. He shoves all his dishes into the sink, walks a loop around the living room, returns to the kitchen and gets elbows deep in dishwater before the responding message comes through. The ping makes him drop a plate and soak his shirt, but Ilya hardly notices as he struggles to make his soapy hands work on the touch screen.

HOLLANDER_shane@mcgill.ca

RE: ???

Fuck. Off. Asshole

Ilya growls and throws his jacket on, stomping into his shoes and pausing in the doorway to reply.

ROZANOV_ilya@mcgill.ca

RE: ???

I tell someone if you do not

Hollander might hate him forever for this, but Ilya's mama would be disappointed if something happened to a stranger and she knew Ilya had known something was wrong while there was still time to help. With guilt twisting in his stomach Ilya tries to explain himself in a quick follow up.

ROZANOV_ilya@mcgill.ca

RE: ???

is too dangerous. not only for you

He's down the stairs and halfway to the head offices when another message comes through, right as he's about to open the doors to the building. It's a phone number.

Ilya doesn't waste a second before dialling. He hovers on the cusp of the building entrance stairs and waits.

It rings several times. Hollander has responded to every email quickly, which means he has to have known Ilya was about to call. Which means the phone is probably in the omega's hand as it rings.

The ringing goes on for so long it begins to seem unlikely there is a machine at the end, just an endless dial tone he is not going to waste all night listening to when he can see the school counsellours through their office windows, packing up their belongings to head home for the day.

Ilya pulls the phone away from his ear just as the line connects. He places it back on his ear, but there's nothing.

"Hello?" Ilya says.

Another moment passes. He will not hang up. He can wait as long as Hollander needs.

"Hey." Hollander's rough voice sings through the mic directly into Ilya's ear.

Ilya's tongue is tied. After all his grand posturing about wanting to talk and being a responsible Alpha, now he can hardly get his lungs and heart to work in tandem.

He swallows thickly. The white noise of the phone rubs against his nerves. He closes his eyes, wishing stupidly that he'd gone to the omega dorms instead of here. He doesn't know how to do this without seeing Hollander's face.

"I..." Hollander starts, voice thin with hesitation and shaky like it's about to break. Ilya waits. There is something about this boy that makes him filled with an ocean of patience. He would wait for Hollander to finish this sentence until he rolled into the grave.

"I need help."

Ilya forgets to look over his shoulder as he enters the omega dorms. Luckily no one is at the front desk to call him out as an intruding Alpha and he makes it to Hollander's door without issue. This is good. His hands are in fists, and he is no longer against using them if someone gets in his way.

He knocks. The lock clicks as it slides open. The sound is a stroke of reassurance and a twist to wind him up with anticipation.

Hollander has been crying. It is obvious in his swollen red eyes and gaunt features. Hunched into himself with arms crossed, Hollander steps back to let Ilya into the cramped space of his room, a single bed against one wall and a desk against the other with just enough room to stand between.

Ilya hovers awkwardly by the door once it is shut. He should not intrude more than he has, but his body yearns to wrap Hollander in comfort. He knows better though, and he keeps his hands fisted tightly behind his back, clutching his own shirt.

Hollander fidgets in the space, like he wants to sit on the edge of the bed but won't put himself in that lower position with Ilya, with an *Alpha*, around, but he doesn't quite know what to do so instead.

The deep sense of patience is back in Ilya. He's anxious, thrumming with the electric tension in this tiny room, but he will withstand it for however long Hollander needs him to. He can be a good Alpha. Anyone would surely do the same.

Hollander finally settles with thumbs looped in his pockets, looking somewhere at the desk beside Ilya. Likely Hollander will not break the silence. It is ok, but unfortunately Ilya has the tact of a hammer.

"You have touch deprivation."

Hollander sucks in a breath. With lips curled in a grimace he nods, eyes still adamantly focussed away from him.

It is good he does not deny it. Ilya continues to prompt, keeping his voice low as he finds he can not fully manage being soft. "Why?"

Hollander shrugs. Blinks a few times, looks at him and away again. With a big sigh he finally answers. "I travelled with friends before term. Our plans changed a lot, I didn't have a chance to go home before I had to be here for classes."

Ilya's brow creases. The facts do not quite add up. "How long was the trip?"

Hollander rubs the back of his neck like he can mask the excuse it is to hide his face. "Six weeks."

Term has been going on for four. That means Hollander has been away from a familiar person for...

"Ten weeks?" The words burst out in pure shock. He feels like he's stepped in quick sand, the gravity of the full situation starting to feel overwhelming.

Hollander shakes his ducked head.

"There were two weeks between, but I couldn't get the flight so, uh," Hollander winces, both arms tightly crossing now as he meets his eyes. "More like twelve?"

Ilya's back hits the door with a thud. His knees are going to give out.

Omegas could go one month, *maybe*, without an Alpha or familiar person to give them a decent full day cuddle to make up for the lack of daily touches. Two was supposed to be impossible, focus completely shot and irritability at a max. *Three months*? Ilya has no clue how this is possible. No one has ever spoken about it.

Hollander's face is pale. There is a tremor in his hands. A nervous twitch in his eyes. He keeps re-crossing his arms over himself like— like he's trying to give himself a hug.

“What were you thinking?” Ilya blurts, mentally berating himself for the harshness of his tone, but he’s still trying to comprehend how it’s even possible for Hollander to be functioning.

“I don’t know,” Hollander admits weakly and shrugs again, curling into himself. “I thought maybe I could make it to midterms and take a long weekend.”

“That is three weeks away!”

“I know that!” Hollander snaps with a glare, but there’s a wetness in his eyes and a shudder to his breath.

Fuck, of course he knows. It’s just such a shock for Ilya to hear about this now, but Hollander must be stressing over it everyday, counting the minutes before he can make it home. Ilya is just some asshole that’s yelling at him.

Ilya retreats the step he took with his outburst. He clears his throat and finds a more civil, friendly, *Canadian* tone as he tries to understand.

“Why not tell somebody?”

“I didn’t know who to tell. I don’t want some assigned stranger around touching my things and touching *me*, and it just—” Hollander takes a deep breath like it is going to save him. He closes his eyes and speaks with a false calm like his words actually make sense. “I just want to make it home.”

“Take sick leave,” Ilya says like it’s obvious. It *is* obvious. Hollander is sick and he needs to rest before he can get better, it’s not uncommon, just like it’s not uncommon for Alphas to take leave when they see their mates for a day here and there.

“I can’t!” Hollander cried, his breath quickening as he is worked up. “This is my first term, I have to nail these midterms or I’m screwed for the finals and then I’m screwed for scholarships next term and I get sent back home and— and—”

“Am I stranger?” Ilya cuts in, a balloon swelling in him inch by inch with every word Hollander spewed out.

Hollander deflated as his panic morphs into confusion. “What?”

“You say you don’t want stranger. I could...” Ilya falters in his own offer. Is this stupid? Probably. He sighs and rubs the tip of his nose in awkwardness before getting the balls to continue. “If you tell me to leave, I go, but I go to the counselors to make you go home to get better.”

“You can’t do that!”

“It is not safe!” If Hollander is yelling it is too hard not to do the same. “What if you dropped in street and cause accident? What about walking home at night when no one see? Or in middle of class?”

The half-rhetorical questions linger in the air as Hollander pulls back, refusing to look him in the eye again. Ilya wishes he could regret being so harsh, but the situation isn't one he can take lightly when the consequences could be so severe.

Still, he softens his tone at the sullen look on Hollander's face, ducking his own head in an attempt to coax Hollander to meet his eyes. "You're strong to have made it this far, but you can not last three more days, definitely not three *weeks*."

Hollander wavers, mouth open like he wants to fight the truth. He holds it back with an audible click in his throat.

Ilya watches. Waits.

He sighs when Hollander remains silent. The bubble feels like it's been burst, all the energy in the room drained and swept under the crack in the door.

With a sigh he offers, "I help you book fligh—"

"Drop me."

The world tilts. He stumbles in a whiplash of Hollander's fierce gaze striking him.

"You are sure?"

Hollander rolls his eyes, arms hitching a little tighter around himself. "Don't be an asshole, you just said it. I can't make it until midterms, but I can't ruin my grades with an ill-timed suaray."

He does not know this word, but he thinks he understands. Now it is Ilya's turn to choose something in the room to focus on, avoiding Hollander's eyes. He makes the mistake of looking on the side of the room with the bed, where the sheets are still a mess because Hollander slept there last night, a dent on his pillow from his head and thin cotton that's been curled around his body like Ilya would be if they—

"We talk first." Ilya turns to look at the wall beside him. Yes. Good. Dirty white paint with marks from years of students coming and going. Absolutely nothing to do with Hollander and what he may or may not wear to bed. "New rules."

"New rules." Hollander nods. "Clothes stay on."

Ilya shakes his head, despite his thoughts a second ago they were just that, thoughts. Actions would be entirely different. "I would never—"

"I get handsy," Hollander cuts in, a light blush on his cheeks that does not match his serious tone. "You just- make sure it doesn't go far. I settle down after a bit, but I can be- I'm not always shy."

Ilya nods, remembering the way Hollander had clung to him.

Awkward silence slowly creeps between them. Ilya rubs his nose. They should do it soon if they're going to do it, and Ilya sort of regrets wearing the same jeans he's worn all week instead of fresh ones from the wash. His thumb scrapes at the stitching at his waist.

"Clothes on. Hands above waist." Ilya tries to shake the awkwardness by being direct as he lists a rule that should be said instead of implied. "We cuddle, I am ok to be bored and you probably fall asleep."

"No." Hollander takes a deep breath,

Ilya bites the inside of his cheek.

Hollander's body has been running on high-alert for long time, once he's dropped and cuddling it could be a big task to keep him alert enough to stay awake when his body might be desperate to sleep. It is understandable though. Sleeping in a drop was an added risk of waking rushing the come-back. If an omega startled awake without coming up from their drop properly, they could be ripped out of it in a terrifying hysteria. Ilya has only seen it once. He never wants to witness something like it again, let alone let it happen to someone in his care.

"Okay, no sleep," Ilya agrees, fortifying himself for how much effort it might take to ensure that promise.

For a flicker he is certain Hollander is going to double back and ask him to leave.

"Okay," Hollander says, gaze connecting with Ilya's as he holds his hand out.

"Okay," Ilya agrees slowly, still drawing it out just a few seconds longer incase Hollander has a last minute change of heart.

Hollander's hand doesn't shake when it takes his wrist and pulls him a step closer. Ilya goes easily and watches with as Hollander lifts his hand by the wrist and places it on the back of his neck.

Warm skin brushes Ilya's palm for less than a second before it happens.

Hollander drops.

The glaze in his eyes is instant. He's unsteady on his feet, lips parted with a a shocked little gasp that sets off every single instinct of Ilya's. With a gentle tug on his new hold on the back of Hollander's neck, he has Hollander fall into him. He catches him in an easy embrace, chests pressed so tight he feels Hollander's heartbeat through his ribcage. Hollander is insistent, nose buried into Ilya's hairline as he breathes in large lungfuls of scent, so deep and violent he's practically sobbing. Ilya keeps a hand wrapped tight around the back of Hollander's neck, overwhelmed with the ease of giving into the natural inclination to reassure Hollander in every way he possibly can.

"I have you, солнышко(sunshine), you are safe," Ilya murmurs with his mouth pressed to Hollander's soft hair. He rocks them gently as he slowly angles them towards the bed, one

slow step at a time with every rocking motion.

Hollander clings through it all, his desperate whining constant no matter how physically close they get, his arms locked around Ilya's torso.

There's no good way to do it. Hollander has become an instant koala, unwilling to part a second's worth of time for Ilya to get them on the bed.

"Hollander, I bend a rule, sorry," he whispers to deaf ears as his hands move lower.

This isn't what he meant by touching below the waist anyway. It's practical for Ilya to take hold of Hollander's thighs and tug, getting his way faster than expected with how quick Hollander is to catch the memo and wrap his legs around Ilya's waist. The full weight of the boy in his arms carries him backwards and he doesn't stop the momentum, falling to the mattress heavily with Hollander in his lap.

Like this it's harder for Hollander to duck down and find his neck while keeping their bodies pressed together, a fact he takes an obvious dislike to with urgent whispers. "No, no, please no."

A tear in Ilya's chest. In this moment, he will do anything for Hollander, this strong boy who's suffered needlessly for so long.

He eases them sideways, a slow tip that gets them flat on their sides. Hollander squeezes away every molecule of space between them until his breath is hot on Ilya's neck.

"More, please, I need- I need more, please," Hollander begs.

A larger tear rips close to his heart. Hollander rocks shamelessly against him, his hands trying to fit themselves under Ilya's shirt. Ilya closes his eyes.

He can't. And he won't let Hollander, no matter how much he begs, because deep down Hollander trusts him not to, and Ilya would snap his own neck in a rope if he did anything to break that promise.

So he catches Hollander's hands no matter how he squirms and presses them with no short amount of strength. Ilya holds their clasped hands to his chest over his shirt and keeps himself still as Hollander rocks against him with louder and louder whines. Hollander is *not* in heat, he reminds himself. He's just confused and desperate and in need of someone he can depend on to be there for him. He's just human, and he's hurting.

Ilya closes his eyes to blink out the tears of secondhand embarrassment and his own frustration at his inability to do something to make Hollander's pain stop faster.

True to his sober word, Hollander does settle after what feels like hours of struggling to keep him still. Ilya resorted to rolling on top to use his own weight as a cage to keep Hollander from acting out, his own face tucked into the crook of Hollander's neck as the boy struggled, then calmed. It probably took less than a quarter of an hour, but it feels like half the night has

gone by by the time Hollander's hands stop fighting against his and his hips cease their lewd roll.

With caution Ilya pulls back to see a more familiar look on Hollander's face, the docile tranquility of an omega settled into their drop. Hollander's eyes are half mast like he's sleepy, his blinking drowsy and body slow to react as Ilya shifts, his gaze taking it's time to meet Ilya's.

Ilya brushes a hand through Hollander's hair to clear them from his face. He's got quite a pretty face, Hollander. Ilya wonders how many times he's been told that.

"We are good now, yes?"

Hollander looks at him like he's deciphering a code before he nods. It's not normal for an omega to be quite so lethargic, but the deep bruises under Hollander's eyes are enough to remind him this isn't quite like any time he's seen before.

Everything's just a little *more*. Hollander himself is *more*.

Ilya gets them back on their sides and tucks Hollander into the curl of his body. Their joined hands rest over Hollander's chest. Ilya keeps watch, making sure there's absolutely nothing more Hollander might need, shifting positions every time Hollander's eyes start closing. In the moments between the shifting, Ilya takes the time to sow the torn bits of his heart back together by selfishly mesmerizing the warmth of the sweet omega in his arms. Every time Ilya scents him, he can't help but think of summer days in berry fields.

Hollander comes out of it slow. Ilya is aware he might be verging on creeper territory with the way he keeps staring at the details of him, like the pad of Hollander's pinky is calloused and the slant of his nose is perfect and the soft part of his lips is—

So he's trying not to do that, but it's hard when Hollander is so immediately in front of him and they've gone so quickly from strangers to... well, still strangers-ish. Hollander is just so new to him. There are photos on Hollander's walls that Ilya can't recognize anyone in but that laughing blond boy they share class with. There is also a couple with the same smile and eyes as Hollander. His parents, likely.

Hollander looks happy in the photos. Mischievous in some, relaxed in others, but overall a glowing ball of contentment. Ilya scans every photo to make sure he doesn't miss a single smile.

It's hard to reconcile that such a colourful personality lives within the boy in his arms. Crazy to think Ilya can't even be sure what Hollander's major is, despite spending a decent bit of time trying to pin it down, looking for clues from the room around him but finding none which meant his focus caught on the hair that is softer than a baby bunny. And fuck. He's being a creep again.

Hollander comes up slowly. It starts with a press backwards that holds the air of change, too much purpose behind it. Ilya presses forward to meet him with similar soft force, his nose

tucking into Hoplander's neck to breathe him in and keep Hollander from falling into any sort of shock as he returns to reality.

Hollander simply grumbles and blinks, squeezing his eyes shut a few times before refusing to open them. Ilya tenses, unsure of how Hollander might react as he comes up, but he tries to forcefully relax before Hollander can catch on and be affected.

The smile on Hollander's face is a small and playful thing when Ilya nudges him a few times. Propped on his elbow, he watches as Hollander shuffles onto his back but keeps an arm tossed over his eyes in playful refusal. He huffs a laugh at the ridiculous boy. He manages to get his way by weaving fingers with Hollander's and gently peeling his arm from his face. When it's revealed, Ilya can't resist raising a finger to bop Hollander on the delicate tip of his nose. It sparks a blush that makes Ilya's mouth go dry.

"Time to come up, солнышко(sunshine)."

Hollander sighs a great big lungful with a pout to top.

"None of that," Ilya chides.

He squeezes Hollander against him one last time, for Hollander, because who knows how he'll fair over the next three weeks given the way he was before he dropped. They didn't speak about how long Hollander should be down, which they really should have. They really should have talked about a lot of things actually, but thinking back on it now things seemed to happen so fast, and it's something Ilya can't change with Hollander still down.

Three hours have passed since Ilya came over here, so the history on his mobile says. Surely this has been enough time. If there's a tug in his gut wanting to keep Hollander exactly where he is and feed him supper and maybe watch a few episodes of something stupid before going to sleep, that's because Ilya's being an overbearing Alpha and also being incredibly selfish. He's helping Hollander out, that's it.

Ilya shifts to sit, getting his limbs to awkwardly move him over Hollander and extract himself from the clingy hands, easier now that Hollander has calmed.

"You are safe, Hollander," Ilya says as sits on the edge of the bed. He squeezes the hand still in his before letting go. "Come back now."

"Yeah, okay," Hollander sighs. "Okay," Hollander says again, a bit quieter, a bit less warm and more serious as his brow starts to crease, features drawing down.

Ilya stands and watches as Hollander makes to sit up. Ilya's startled by the way his hand moves with him. He hadn't realized he'd wrapped his fingers around Hollander's ankle. He snatches it back.

Hollander sits on the edge of the bed, rumpled but clear-eyed as Ilya hovers by the desk. Hollander looks at Ilya in a quick flash of brown before looking away again.

"Thank you," he mumbles.

Ilya hums a bit awkwardly, not pretentious enough to say something like 'you're welcome'.

"Is not a problem." He takes a deep breath. "If something I can do, this again or- or finding someone else, or getting you home..."

"Shit," Hollander shakes his head, scowl coming over his face and making Ilya grimace in return at how absolutely unrecognisable this version of Hollander is compared to the smiling boy he was moments before. "You're not magically my Alpha now. You get that, right?"

Ilya doubles down on the offer, stubbornness rearing to make his point known. "Not because I am Alpha, because I am *human*." Ilya rubs his eyes and mutters to himself. "И они говорят, что я засранец." (*And they say I am the asshole.*)

He holds out an offering hand. "Is simple, if I can help, I want to. You tell me to fuck off if you don't want, okay?"

Hollander's scowl lessens as he thinks it over, hopefully hearing the sincerity in his voice. Hollander's hands curl in the sheets on the edge of the mattress.

"Okay. I don't want."

Ilya nods. Ok. Yes, ok, easy, simple. His insides feel like the fuzzy static of a broken television as he lets himself out.

There's a wild fluctuation in how Ilya expects seeing each other in class to go. Maybe Hollander will smile and sit next to him throughout the lecture. Maybe he'll glare across the room and storm off before the class even ends. There is no way to know. His leg bounces under the desk as he waits for Hollander to arrive.

It's quite anti-climatic when nothing happens. Hollander enters with his loud friend and sits across from Ilya on the other end of the hall like he always does, barely a glance in his direction. The professor lectures them to death as the sun warms the space like every class before, and by the time it comes to an end Ilya's too sleepy to still be nervous about anything.

He shuffles out of there with a polite smile to the brunette beside him and doesn't even think about Hollander as he finds a soft spot of grass for a short nap on the hillside like he'd been envisioning last week. As he lays in the grass he shuffles around in an attempt to get comfy, and the sun's caress might be nice, but he longs for the true warmth of a body next to him. He buries his face into the crook of his elbow and blocks the thought out as soon as it enters. Within the next few breaths he's asleep, but his fingers have twirled long strands of grass like they could ever compare to short silky hair.

When the sun hangs golden amber on the horizon, Ilya's brushing leaves from his curls as he scurries towards the cafe because he accidentally snoozed the alarm meant to alert him to his oncoming shift. An evening spent making more and more of the stupid pumpkin-everything

has him sneezing at the cinnamon and longing for the whirl of the blender that accompanies summer-time drinks.

By the next day he's not as anxious as he thought he might be when he sits in the library with Hollander at his side. The due date isn't getting any further and the amount of work they have to do on this thing is notable, even when split between two of them.

For the most part things go back to the beginning. Hollander keeps himself pulled back and distant, face a serious scowl every minute he's in Ilya's presence. Ilya keeps his head down and tries not to get too bothered about how he saw Hollander smiling in the hallway with friends not five minutes ago.

It's fine, not everyone has to like him. In fact, Ilya knows for certain he can put quite a few people off, but this rejection hurts more than the canteen ladies that never smile back at him. Maybe because he cares about Hollander's well being, maybe because he's just getting a bit too lonely with all his friends busy with midterm studying or being back in Russia. Ilya can't even remember the last time he and Marlow hung out.

Svetlana is the only one he has told about the Hollander situation. The sound of her voice was a comfort, and her advice to try and forget about it was hard to hear but probably right, but that was three days ago and it's been longer since he actually hung out with someone. He shoots Marlow a stack of books emoji next to a skull. He gets a quick response.

Marly:

Big mood.

"And another one of Shane's ideas, let's put the next figure in here." Hollander points at the computer screen in front of them, leaning precariously on two legs of his chair to reach across to the far corner.

The chair legs click as they meet the ground, Ilya's arm having stretched across the back of the chair to ease it down as he gives a hum of agreement to whatever suggestion is being said about the formatting. Hollander continues talking, none the wiser.

An hour later they're slumped in their seats, Ilya's fingers sore from typing and eyes bleary. He groans as he rocks onto the hind legs of his own chair to stretch out his back, arms overhead to stretch his shoulders as his face screws up. A gentle weight pulls his chair down.

Hollander's foot had been on the bottom rung of Ilya's chair. Ilya only gets a glimpse of it as Hollander pulls it away and keeps talking like doesn't realize what he's just done.

Ilya narrows his eyes in consideration. With measured movements he takes his water bottle and the one next to it to the water fountain and fills them both. They clank down on the desk with enough sound to jostle Hollander from a stupor. It's the jolt that catches Ilya's attention, a niggling thought in his brain that Hollander should go home before he passes out and Ilya has to carry him.

“Hollander, is late, I’m tired,” Ilya says, faking another stretch with his arms above his head where he stands.

He’s not tired. There was a sale on energy drinks and he has been trying one of each flavour every day, one of which he’d drank between classes while staring out at the miserable grey sky that had come out of nowhere after such a lovely day yesterday. So while he’s quite bored of skimming text and discussion using words he doesn’t know, he’s not actually sleepy.

Still, he starts packing his stuff into his backpack.

Hollander hums beside him, slowly following his lead and gathering his things. Cautious victory curls Ilya's lips. With the clumsy fumbles and lack of grumpiness, Hollander resembles the soft omega Ilya was starting to think he’d made up.

Ilya deliberately takes his time idly shuffling his belongings around his bag when something moves startlingly fast towards him. Ilya flinches, only to realize it’s his water bottle. Hollander is holding it up for him.

Ilya takes it slowly, a cautious fondness blooming. His fingers wrap around the lid and squeeze.

Hollander shrugs on his backpack once it’s zipped and finds his own feet. Hollander starts to leave the computer desk and Ilya shakes his head behind him, not moving an inch.

“Hollander.”

Hollander stops to look over his shoulder. Ilya snatches the toque from the desk and tugs it over Hollander’s fringe. Hollander blinks once, looking concerned more than anything. Ilya's hands hastily retreat to the straps on his shoulders, twisting them tight so he doesn’t reach out and do something even more stupid like tuck the lock of hair fallen in the middle of Hollander’s face. No words come from Hollander’s parted mouth before he turns away and heads for the door.

The earlier spark of victory flares into a fire within Ilya. As he steps through the door behind Hollander he has the restraint not to offer to walk him back to the dorms, but he does keep his head turned with an eye on the slope of Hollander’s shoulders until he’s out of sight.

A loud laugh turns his head. Ilya's in the grass a few days later, his newfound favourite spot to study, eat, and catch up on sleep. On the pathway close by, in the sprinkle of sunlight filtering through overhead leaves, is Hollander. He’s with a group of people, a couple giggling girls and a few loud guys Ilya doesn’t recognize. Hollander’s smile is wide, hands animated as he joins in on the conversation. He’s not just with the loud boys, he’s one of them.

Maybe even the loudest of them as the group draws closer down the path and Ilya hears him say, “That’s not true, I’ve failed a few tests.”

“I don’t believe that for a second.”

Hollander smiles and insists. “I promise, all of my drug tests have been negative.”

“Hollzy,” the girl groans in complaint.

A few of the others laugh and continue to talk about tests and studying and the infuriating way Hollander doesn’t need to worry about it because *‘he’s such a smartass.’*

There’s something... something there. Ilya squints after them from his spot on the grass, trying to make sense of whatever it is his subconscious has caught onto.

None of them are Alphas.

It shouldn’t be that odd, but it sticks in Ilya’s mind as he watches them walk away. He’s seen Hollander a few times around campus now. Yet not once can he think of him ever being in the presence of an Alpha that wasn’t their professor. He doesn’t know what to make of it. Just as he’s about to go back to his books the light catches on sunglasses. The ones propped in Hollander’s hair, pushing it out of the way so when he turns to look over his shoulder their eyes meet with nothing to hide behind.

Hollander’s smile shifts. It’s not as big or bold, but it feels private, this smaller, gentler smile he gives just for Ilya.

He doesn’t know how to take that either.

Two days later Ilya sits in class and sees the dark hue beneath Hollander’s eyes from across the hall. Ilya shifts in his seat, elbows coming into his desk as he leans over to get a better look.

Something is wrong.

Hollander’s slumped and unfocused, leaning heavily on the desk in front of him. Ilya doesn’t spare a glance to the professor once the lecture starts. He can hardly look away as the blond next to Hollander continuously nudges him awake, but the subtly is ruined by the jolt Hollander has every time he startles.

A throat clearing next to him makes Ilya jump. The brunette girl, uh... Rose, maybe. She pointedly looks between Ilya and Hollander, and Ilya forces himself to sit back in his desk, face heating as he realizes he’s been far from subtle.

For the rest of class Ilya tries not to look. Tries not to care. He’s an Alpha, but he doesn’t need to be an asshole. Hollander said he’d say something if he wanted help and he hasn’t. So *obviously* Hollander doesn’t want Ilya’s help.

He repeats this to himself like a mantra all class long, his leg jostling and arms folding over themselves a dozen times as he shifts around with anxious energy. Nothing soothes the itch urging him to catapult over rows of students and take Hollander into his arms.

When class ends Ilya's out his seat in a blink. He needs to get a handle on himself, and the only way he can do that is by putting as much space between them as possible. He packs up as quickly as he can and practically jogs out of there with his head down, jaw clenched with the strength of his fraying willpower. Stepping barefoot through a field of nails would have been easier than walking away from Hollander right then.

Ilya makes it around the corner of the building and takes a steadying breath, hand on the brick as he takes a moment to recoup. He's never regretted being an Alpha, but he's never felt instincts pull at him so strongly. Although, Sveta is usually around. Maybe that's all this is. Maybe without her to coddle he's projecting, looking for some sort of omega replacement.

The thought makes his stomach queasy and he scrunches his face in mild disgust at himself. Sveta may adore his attention, but that doesn't mean every omega will find him pleasant. In fact, Hollander seems to be a prime example of that.

Ilya stands and straightens his backpack on his shoulders. Okay. No more creepy-Alpha vibes. He can do that, he just has to avoid all things Hollander until his instincts get over the confusion.

Vibration in his pocket alerts him to a new text. Ilya slips out his mobile, half-hoping it's Marlow so he can distract himself. His stomach drops when he sees the name.

Hollander

Library @7?

Ilya knocks his head back and groans. Stupid fucking professors and their shitty group projects.

He jams his phone back into his pocket and stomps forward. It's fine. Ilya's fine. He just has to... not be a creep.

Ilya's iron-forged determination shatters the minute he sees Hollander in the library. Curled into a chair, the boy has eyes half-mast as he writes slowly in the notebook in his lap. The closer Ilya gets he can see Hollander's not even writing, he's just swirling his pen around in doodles. Before Ilya can say a word Hollander looks up.

His eyes spear Ilya through the chest.

"You're late." Hollander might be trying to glare at him, but it lacks heat and looks more like a pout. It tugs on Ilya's heartstrings.

Ilya nods, throat clogged with the realization that he can't just ignore this feeling taking hold in him, no matter what he might have told himself before. That was when Hollander wasn't living and breathing right next to him in all the captivating aura that comes with his existence.

They fall into their work without much speaking besides referencing each other's notes, but the screen of cyrillic text when he opens his laptop may as well be in Latin. From the corner of his eye he peaks at Hollander.

Hollander, who's propped himself on an elbow, his hand holding his forehead in a way that covers his eyes so Ilya can't even see if they're open.

"Is..." Ilya clears his throat when his voice comes out rough from disuse. Hollander's hand drops as he looks up and narrows eyes at him, daring him to continue. Ilya licks his lips, faltering. He dips his head and asks, "You are ok?"

"Peachy," Hollander mutters. He kicks his bag between their feet as he shuffles around in his chair, still curled into himself but now leaning on his other side, the one that puts him further from Ilya.

Ilya swallows and tries to breathe evenly through his nose. His hands twist in the length of his sweatshirt, his heart hammering like he's balancing on a high wire above a circus ring, one false step and-

"Do you need-"

"I don't need your fucking pity for the weak little omega," Hollander snarls. His eyes are enlivened now, burning a hole through Ilya in accusation. "Alphas can't fix everything waltzing around waving their dicks everywhere."

Shit. Ilya's fists curl tighter in his jumper sleeves. Shit shit shit. This is exactly why he should have kept his stupid mouth shut. He knew Hollander did not want his help.

Ilya keeps his head down and shuffles his computer around his lap, tapping a finger pointlessly on the mousepad as he tries to think through the mental jenga happening inside his head. Is he being intrusive or is Hollander being mean? Maybe there's something else making Hollander lash out, but he could still be a bit nicer about it.

Or maybe Ilya was being a dick and he should just mind his own business. The computer is slow to load the citation website he's opening just for something to do, and it gives Ilya too many seconds of idleness. He doesn't realize he's glanced at Hollander until he meets his eyes, Hollander staring straight back at him.

Ilya's eyes widen and completely give himself away like a fucking idiot before he can tear his gaze back to the laptop screen. The delete key clicks under his finger, but no matter how many times he presses it he can't erase this entire day.

Ilya rubs his nose in a nervous tick, scrambling to move on and get this study session over so they can get the project done and go back to being strangers that shared one pleasant evening and a handful of unfortunate encounters together that they'll both hopefully forget by next term.

He flips to the open tab of the shared document and points at a random sentence.

“This, we should move it to the end. Do you think is adding proof or distraction?”

The silence that follows is maddening. Ilya tenses, waiting as long as possible before giving in and looking up.

Hollander’s looking at him like he just spoke Russian. Ilya thinks back on what he remembers of speaking just now, nearly certain the words he meant to say came out and not an admission of liking silk panties or some other Freudian slip.

No. He definitely didn’t say that. But now that he’s thought it, he has to bite his tongue just to be extra sure the next thing he says has absolutely nothing to do with lace.

“Sure,” Hollander says. He sighs, one great big deflating breath. “That was uncalled for, what I said before. Today’s been shit, and you’ve been kind while I take it out on you.”

“Is fine.” Ilya shrugs. It’s not big, Hollander didn’t even properly apologize, but it soothes him still to know Hollander doesn’t think Ilya, specifically, is terrible.

They work with stilted one word conversation between reading an article that really they could do on their own time at home but they’re both here now and they decided to skim it together just to get through it. When Ilya finishes his reading he looks over to find Hollander’s face soft with sleep, chin tilted down in a doze.

An errant strand has dropped into his face. It’s as silky as he remembers between his fingers as he brushes it aside. Hollander is truly really pretty. Freckled cheeks and teasing lips. A solid jaw Ilya enjoys running his nose along until he’s tucked into the crease of Hollander’s neck.

“Shane,” he murmurs, the name new but right in his mouth.

Shane hums in response, blinking his eyes open in a way that’s familiar...

Familiar.

Ilya jolts backwards, flailing as he unbalances his chair. Holy fuck. He just invaded Shane’s space like only a familiar should.

Shane’s frowning as Ilya gains his balance. Ilya’s hands twist in his sleeves and he can’t get it to cover his knuckles enough or twist tight enough when he doesn’t have a clue what to do with his fucking *hands* or where to put them other than hold them close to his chest so they don’t lash out and molest Shane further.

“Sorry— I’m sorry—“ Ilya stutters as he scrambles to his feet.

“Ilya, can we t—“

“нет.” (*No*) Ilya swears. He struggles getting his bag on his shoulder and tripping backwards. “We email, ok? And I do not go to class next week, and project is done—“

And then his shoulder meets the library door and he shoves himself out, the fresh slap of autumn air the clarification he needs to encourage desperately need oxygen back into his lungs. It does nothing to rid him of the memory of Shane's scent.

He has done so well not thinking about it, not even *once*, since he'd scented Shane during the drop. It was something so intimate that he hadn't earned the privilege to know, only been given by default of the situation. An omegas scent is something shared with in, not meant to be taken by force.

Ilya rushes through crowded campus streets, elbowing and swerving through people to get back to his dorm. No matter how quick his footsteps get, he can't outrun the memories of the first time he'd seen something like this happen.

When he was twelve and coming into his new designation, he'd heard his parents fighting. It was a common sound. Nothing new, but always made him want to hide. He had come home from school early, hockey practice cut short by an accident at the rink.

He came into the house to the sound of his father yelling and the low sounds of his tearful mother. They had not heard him, so he crawled into a closet he was almost too big to fit in and tried to wait it out like he had for years.

But this time he did not just hear them. He did not just see them, his mother bursting into the room with his father stalking after her, grabbing a hand of her hair to keep her in place as he berated her for something. He had heard it and seen it before.

But he had never smelled it.

Newly presented as Alpha and still adjusting to the world of scents and hormones, the stench of his mothers fear was a splattered paint that soaked the entire room. Ilya's body vibrated with instincts he did not understand as he saw his father crowd into his mothers space and molest her neck, bared to him by the wrenched fistful of hair he had in a meaty hold. He was an absolute monster to her, taking only what he wanted for his own pleasure. His father had stripped her shirt off before he froze, scenting the air. His mother watched him turn and look straight at the closet Ilya hid in with a snarl.

His mother had pleaded and cried and tried with nails and teeth to keep his attention on her.

It had not worked. Grigory had smelled the small scent of a rival Alpha in the house, and he had ripped open the closet to show him who was in charge.

If someone had seen Ilya with Shane, scenting him in the middle of campus, would they have seen something similar? An alpha turned into a monster?

Ilya's hands shake so violently his books drop. He leans over before he understands, his body a step ahead of him as he purges an acidic rush of half digested lunch. As the heaving ends, a pit of despair swallows him whole as he looks at the disgusting puddle at his feet.

He disgusts himself beyond words.

The thing about doing everything through the email system is that it's horrible. But it's necessary, because Ilya never ever plans to be within a fifty metre radius of Shane, or any omega for that matter if he can help it. So Ilya sucks it up and waits in painful ten minute increments as he trudges through the project, his coursework for other classes going pointedly ignored.

On Sunday night he gets three emails over the span of a half hour.

Hollander:

Fuck

Hollander:

This

Hollander:

Shit

When the last one comes in, Ilya groans and leans back in his chair. He can do this. Even if Shane hates him, he can get through this. Ilya rubs his eyes until they make the satisfying-but-slightly-disturbing squeaky sound and then gets back to it.

Class on Monday is torture. He sits in his chair and stares at the ceiling as the professor drones on through slide after slide, the light of the screen tinting the ceiling panels until the buzz of people standing around him is enough to knock Ilya from his daze. He didn't even open his bag, so there's nothing for him to pack as he stands, but a stack of papers thrust toward him makes him pause.

"You're friends with Shane, yeah?" Rose waves the papers a little closer to him.

Ilya angles his head in consideration, wincing as he starts to deny, but she doesn't give him the chance. The papers drop to the desk in front of him.

"Can you give these back to him? He's a lifesaver, even if his handwriting is horrible." She smiles and waves, hair fanning out as she spins before Ilya can get a word out.

Ilya glares at the papers with half a mind to leave them where they are. They're the ones Shane is always scribbling away throughout class when he actually has the energy to focus and participate. Because of course Shane's the type of person people borrow notes from. Because he's fucking perfect enough to not miss a word, and kind enough not to mind, and he probably says '*Anytime,*' when you hand them back and *means* it.

They wrinkle in Ilya's hand when he snatches them determinedly. He'll just leave them at the desk for the omega dorm, he won't have to see, or talk, or—

He's been so aware of Shane like a burning star in his orbit, yet in his angry huff he's completely taken off-guard by the shove, hands knocking into him like asteroids.

"What's your problem?" Shane demands, immediately tangible in front of Ilya.

Ilya wants to crawl out of his skin at the injustice of someone being capable of such devastating beauty with anger on their face. Especially when pointed at him.

"Just one?"

"*Ilya*," Shane growls, sending a zing through Ilya's spine even as he looks like he's ready to through a punch. "I can't do this project over email. You were right, it fucking sucks."

Ilya tucks his head and shrugs, increasingly aware that the lecture hall is closer to empty with every second. He steps backwards, his bag clutched to his stomach like a protective barrier between them.

"I do not think is good idea," Ilya admits. He holds out the notes.

Shane takes them without a glance, just a tilt of his head as he asks, "What?"

"Us around each other, me around you." Ilya sighs, taking another step back so he's on the edge of the aisle. "But you are right, the emails suck, so is good thing we won't have to anymore."

"You can't be serious." Shane's eyes widen, his speech quickening as he takes a step forward. "It's way too late to switch partners now, is it even possible? Is this because of what I said? Look, I—"

Ilya shakes his head as Shane speaks, interrupting him. "My half is done. If more you need," he shrugs and turns to start down the stairs, calling over his shoulder as he leaves. "Email me!"

Every step down the stairs he half expects Shane to call out, say something, maybe run after him even. But Ilya's footsteps echo in the empty amphitheatre, unaccompanied the entire way to the top until the doors open.

That should be the end of it. Ilya's more than ready to skip out on the last class of term so they don't have to see each other again. The sooner the scent of Shane fades the better, and it will. Fade. Just like he can't recall the exact shade of his mother's eyes anymore. And maybe he doesn't want to forget it, but it's not really about what Ilya wants, is it?

Ilya's been zoning out on his computer for the better part of a day before he busies himself looking for his midterm schedule and comes across a notification.

Inbox (1)

Stupidly his heart starts pounding before he even knows if it's spam from the bookstore or something. One click and he sees the full thing.

An email asking him to join the school bake sale.

He deletes it without opening.

Ilya groans as he slumps in his chair. This is ridiculous. He needs to get out. Socialize, maybe go for a run. Remember how to be a fucking person without control issues. Ilya grabs his phone to call Marlow and remind him that friends are actually meant to see each other every now and then.

Instead his screen lights up.

Missed Call (7)

HOLLANDER

Urgency builds like a boulder rolling down a hill, growing heavier and faster with every rotation. He jumps to his feet as his thumb swipes to return the calls. The line connects on the first ring.

"Ilya?" Shane's voice comes through small and uncertain, at odds with the confident, if angry, boy Ilya has grown used to.

"Yes," Ilya bites his tongue to keep in the twenty questions concerning the sea of messages in decreasing increments of time. The last were only seconds apart.

"How fast can you be here?"

Ice cracks through Ilya's bones and threatens to swell and burst his veins as his heart turns frozen. There is nothing in Shane's voice but pure panic.

"Fast."

Ilya races through campus and builds himself into a sweat before he even leaves his room. Every nerve ending in his body screams at him to move faster, that flying, no fuck that, *teleporting*, would be too fucking slow to get to Shane.

Shane hadn't explained anything on the phone, just left with his cryptic little plea about needing help at his dorm and adamant about Ilya coming as quickly as possible.

Ilya yanks the door to the omega dorms open, carelessly walking in only to be yanked by the back of his shirt.

"What the hell do you think you're doing here?" It's the blond kid he's seen sitting beside Shane in class, usually quite jovial but now looking serious with a stern edge to his voice. "This is the Omega hall, you're rather out of place here."

Ilya tries to step around him. "I must—"

“Are you mated to someone living here?” The guy, Pike, is quick to put his body between Ilya and the hall like a goal tender in net.

Ilya tries to dodge around the other way. “No, I—”

“Then you’re shit out of luck, bud.” Pike crosses his arms as he easily maintains his defence.

Ilya bounces on his toes, unable to decide the best next move but engulfed with the need to get past this roadblock. “But he is—”

“It’s the fucking rules, Rozanov. What if an omega went into heat in the hallway with an A around?”

And he’s right, Ilya knows he’s right, but his instincts are crawling up the fucking walls of his skull with the want to simply tear Pike’s throat out for standing in his way to Shane. Ilya shudders at the visceral inclination for violence he’s so rare to experience, even when most angered. He curls his fingers into his palms to keep from reaching out.

He gazes desperately down the hall to the stairs he needs to take to reach his— to reach Shane.

But Shane’s not his omega, not his mate, barely really even his friend. Ilya’s gaze returns to Pike’s stern face. A face Ilya’s seen smiling in photos on Shane’s wall. Pike is Shane’s friend, Ilya’s such an idiot for forgetting.

“Something is wrong with Shane.” Ilya’s eyes might actually jump out of his skull as he tries to imbue just how serious he’s being, and when he gets no immediate response he slaps a hand on the other man’s chest then motions up the stairs. “Someone needs to *go* to him!”

Pike’s face contorts with confusion. “Since when do you talk to Shane?”

“We are partners for stupid project—” Ilya flails in frustration, patience at an all time low to talk about details. “It does not matter! Go check on him!”

Pike eyes him warily for a moment, Ilya at a loss of what more he could do to convince him of the truth and possibly reconsidering the tearing-his-throat out tactic just as Pike nods and steps back.

“All right.” He heads for the hallway. “Stay here.” Pike points a warning finger before finally turning up the stairs.

Death would be better than the following minutes that drag by. Finally Ilya can’t take it any longer and he calls Shane’s phone, but it goes straight to voicemail. He debates a thousand different courses of action, like going outside to see if he can find Shane’s window, or just charging his way in to see if he’s okay, or maybe it’s something really terrible and Ilya should be calling an ambulance right now instead of wasting his time humming and hawing over it. Just as he’s convinced himself the worst has happened and Shane’s laying out cold on the floor of his dorm with Pike weeping over him, he sees the blond man himself return from the stairs.

Ilya turns to him. "And?"

Pike's mouth is a tight grimace as he comes closer, considering his words infuriatingly slowly before his blunt answer. "He's in heat."

"What?" Ilya's voice goes high, coming out strangled.

Pike shrugs, looking uncomfortable as he checks the empty entrance around them before leaning over to speak quietly. "I think, I mean this is kind of his business, but I think this is a lot sooner than it was supposed to hit."

Ilya's heart aches with the thought of it, of Shane taken by surprise by something that could so quickly make him vulnerable in the wrong place and time. Shane's earlier spaciness makes sense now, and Ilya feels like an idiot for not putting it together. Shane wouldn't have gone into heat while he was in touch deprivation, which meant the moment he came out of it from their cuddles his body barely had a moment to balance out before whirling into heat.

"He is okay now? Has food? Water? Someone with him?" Fuck, Shane. Did he even have food in his dorm?

"Dude," Pike wavers with uncertainty of sharing more details. He is protecting Shane's privacy, he is good friend. Ilya only wants to kill him a little.

Ilya curses and shakes his head, pulling back. "No, I understand, fuck. He was bad over phone."

Pike gives him a sympathetic look. "It's just heat, Rozanov. He's going to be fine."

Ilya wants to rage about Shane deserving to be better than *fine*. He needs to be taken care of through every second he's incapable of doing so himself, that Shane's the strongest person Ilya knows, but right now he needs someone else to be strong for him. But he can't say that, because that would insinuate Ilya has any damn right to be that person, and he doesn't.

Even if Shane called him, it could have only been because Ilya was the last person in his call history. Who knows. *He* won't until after Shane works through this and they can talk again. *If* they ever talk again.

Ilya takes his head into his hands and groans, whirling away without another word to the befuddled man behind him. He slams through the door only to halt. He can't leave. There's a tether hooked into the fleshy softness of his tender belly and it aches with every step he takes away. God. He can't just *leave*.

He plops down on the step of the residence building and doesn't move until the sun is down and the night's chill has thoroughly sunken into his bones. Rationally he knows he can't stay here overnight, it's a miracle campus security hasn't already been called, and he has a feeling the only reason for that is Pike. And fuck. Is Ilya really this guy? The one sitting outside the omega dorm like he's desperate for a few pheromones to jack off to?

Anger takes over Ilya in a tsunami wave, a righteous fury at society for being filled with obnoxious pricks, and himself for basically being one of them. He stands to leave.

His shoes are made of stone the entire walk home. The hook in him has nothing to do with his cock or the way Shane might be right now. In fact, Ilya hasn't thought once about what Shane might look like or sound like or feel like, really, other than the obvious and all encompassing *'he's in heat'* that implies he's currently very hot and willing.

But that's just it. Shane always has his guard up. He's pointed about his opinions and selective with his attention, to think of him in a position as someone that needs to be cared for is in contrast to his personality Ilya's only gotten hints at. But biology would have stripped a lot of that away. Even if Shane is never the weak one, right now it wouldn't matter how much of a fight he put up if the wrong Alpha latched onto his scent. Ilya doesn't want to *be* that Alpha, he wants to *stop* them.

He arrives early the next morning after a night of staring at his walls and counting the minutes until society deemed it not-too-completely-stalkery-and-weird for him to wait outside of the omega dorms. It takes half the day, nearly a full twenty four hours since Shane's phone call yesterday, until Ilya's phone goes off in his pocket.

HOLLANDER

Sorry for calling. Hayden says you're outside, be down in a bit if you're still around.

Something nudges Ilya in the ribs, startling him so bad he fumbles his phone. Ilya turns to see Pike behind him on the building stairs, poking at him with the toe of his shoes.

"He's lucid. Told him you'd been here all night like a fucking stalker but he said he'd still grant you face time." Pike sighs like he's disappointed to even say it. "He'll be down after a shower."

After Pike returns to his position at the desk, Ilya paces furtive little figure eights and debates leaving no less than nine times between the text and the next time the door opens to reveal Shane.

A ratty old high school hockey t-shirt and sweats cover his trim frame, loose and undeniably soft. His hair is slicked back from his face, still wet from his shower and leaving dark spots around his collar.

Standing pigeon toed on the stairs with thumbs in his pockets, he looks normal and yet not. He is oddly shy. It is hard not to find cute.

"I'm a bit embarrassed, to be honest." Shane admits without looking Ilya in the eye.

"I did not mean to be creep, I promise— I do not—" Ilya struggles, caught in the urge to explain himself and yet at a loss for how to say he's not here because he's been fantasizing about Shane in heat like some pervert. "I am worried. About you." He finishes lamely.

Shane's eyes widen as he finally looks at him. "Really?"

“Yes!” Ilya huffs, pursing his lips as he works through how to speak. “You have gift for attracting trouble and I do not stop thinking about something bad happening— leaving was hard, I had to last night, but I come back.” Ilya jams his fists into his jacket pocket and curses himself for being an idiot, eyes rolling skyward. “Sorry, is weird, I know. Is only I need to know you are okay.”

God, who the fuck lets him speak English? In his next reincarnation he hopes he never has to speak more than one language.

Shane’s trying to hold back a smile when Ilya braves a glance at his reaction. No fucking doubt he’s ready to laugh in Ilya’s face. But this does not look mocking or cruel. Shane is all soft edges and kind amusement. It does not help Ilya’s desire to get closer to him.

Slowly Shane’s expression sobers. “I’ve never wanted an Alpha. Ever.”

Ilya freezes. His heart hammers in his chest, so hard and fast it’s on the brink of combustion. Shane doesn’t want an Alpha. And he will never. And Ilya should leave before he does something as terrible as cry, but Shane keeps talking.

“My mom and dad are betas. They’re insanely happy without the stress of cycles and scenting and all the bullshit. So I always told myself I didn’t need it, either,” Shane says and ok, Ilya, he needs to go like now if he wants to keep the water in his eyes from spilling over. “But when I was scared out of my mind by the surprise heat, I knew you’d know how to handle the situation, that you’d keep me from spiraling and calm me down.”

Ilya blinks, trying to put the words into meaning. He looks to see Shane’s cheeks blooming pink, but his gaze unwavering as it holds Ilya.

“I want you safe,” Ilya says in small denial, like it’s not some great big deal that Shane’s making it out to be.

“I know.” Shane agrees with a nod. “But I- I’ve never wanted to be protected by anyone, especially some conceited Alpha. But then Hayden told me you were out here and I wasn’t angry because it wasn’t just anyone waiting around trying to get lucky, I knew- I *know* you care. About me.”

Ah, he is not the only one struggling to find the words. It is hard, Ilya thinks. It is one thing to feel something, another to really think about it, and absolutely terrifying to be saying like this. The movies make it look easy, but here there are still students walking in and out of the building behind them and the blaring sun leaving nowhere for their naked words to hide.

They are just two boys on the stairs, trying. Shane’s trying to say something, and Ilya strains to not hear only the words, but the truth that Shane’s scared of showing.

“It made it better. Easier. Knowing you were close.” Shane continues. “And it had nothing to do with you being an Alpha and everything to do with it being you.”

Breath knocks from Ilya’s lungs. “Oh.”

That's a lot of truth.

"Yeah," Shane flushes deeper. "Oh."

Ilya hovers awkwardly, on the tip of his toes as he waits to take a step forward, but not before he has permission to do so. If only he could get the words out.

"I can scent you?" Ilya chokes, awkward and voice close to breaking. The tears are a lost cause, they started falling awhile ago.

Shane sucks in a deep breath, his own eyes wet as he nods. "Please."

Shane collapses into him the moment Ilya's hand touches his skin. Ilya braces to support their combined weight and keep them standing, arms painfully tight around Shane in a way that presses their every curve and muscle against another, the few layers of clothing seemingly thin and negligible.

An instant wave of comfort settles Ilya's soul. He is complete with Shane in his arms, a loose thread that's been tugging at him finally pulled tight to make him whole.

Ilya's nose gently trails the edge of Shane's jaw, and this time he dives deep into the experience of it, unafraid to take a deep inhale. Strawberries. Ilya's world is soaked in the sweet delicate smell of Shane, a scent that brings to mind strawberries warmed by the sun.

Shane makes the deciding move to angle closer, until the gap between their lips closes with a kiss that is sloppy and doesn't quite line up but radiates perfection.

They get it right on the second try. And the third.

End Notes

Yay! Who doesn't love some classic kiss endings?

I have a few more fics I might "translate" into this pairing. Let me know what you think about that!

Please let me know if you liked reading this by leaving kudos/comments - I always love to hear your favourite part of the story! - xoxo

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