fresh bruises we learned patterns to

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fresh bruises we learned patterns to

by downtheroadandupthehill

Summary

The first time they'd done this, in Ilya's bed, Shane had been mystified at Rozanov's insistence that he not enter the nest without Shane's permission. Now, Shane feels something akin to smugness flexing its claws in his chest. A primal satisfaction at the rightness that he is the one with the power - at present, if not for much longer - alpha just outside the nest and at his mercy.

Like Shane will only yield for someone who has earned it. He can draw out Ilya's suffering just a little longer, make him earn it.

Shane rakes his gaze over the delicious chest and bicep muscles bunching above the edge of the nest. "Waiting for something, Rozanov?"

"Are you going to let me into your nest, omega?" His pronunciation of the endearment is more Russian than English, accent thickening around the syllables.

"Depends. You gonna give me your knot?"

"Hm, does not sound like begging yet to me."

Some months after Shane recovers from rejection sickness in Ilya's bed, they share their heat/rut together at the cottage, both clinging to the delusion it's still casual.

Notes

Still in disbelief from all the positive feedback to the extremely self-indulgent rejection sickness fic!!! I truly had no idea so many people would demand a sequel but the validation totally fed me and y'all really made me want to deliver so I hope this doesn't disappoint.

FWIW I wanted this to be a one-shot but I have no self-control. I kinda feel like the Lucille Bluth "how could a banana cost, $10?" meme, but "how long how can a heat/rut fic at the cottage possibly be, like, 10k words at the maximum??" Hope part one isn't too pedantic with all of the exposition - we're getting there. <3

Relationship development-wise this won't make sense if you haven't read the first one in the series btw!

Chapter 1

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Lily

I think you will give in first

Shane

????

Lily

When your heat comes, you will beg before I do

Shane's breath stutters, face going hot, on the verge of slamming his phone down or maybe just dropping it before he remembers he's alone. While it's certainly not the most obscene text he's ever been on the receiving end of from Ilya Rozanov, it's the first time the alpha's referenced the upcoming ten days they have planned as an obvious tease, intended to rile.

They've seen each other in person a grand total of once since dealing with Shane's rejection sickness, a hasty post-game hotel hookup which had almost been more stressful than it was worth, on top of pressure to advance in the playoffs. Otherwise, they've kept in touch via texting - though with more frequency than they used to - as well as semi-regular weekly phone calls and even occasional video chats, when Ilya pesters him about needing a proper visual to jerk off to.

Shane had been annoyed by the introduction of that last one - albeit reluctantly turned on anyway - until he remembered that he and Ilya had somehow agreed to an exclusivity arrangement to placate Ilya's alpha instinct. Which meant that Ilya was pestering him to jerk off in lieu of going out and finding a sexy, exciting stranger to bring back to his hotel room. And, well, when that occurred to Shane, he found himself a little more eager to comply, even though it was embarrassing, taking his clothes off and trying to hold his phone in front of his body so it looks appealing enough for Ilya to get off.

But all in all, Shane is mildly surprised it's taken Ilya this long to bring up the topic as sexting fodder, though his type-A personality appreciates that they prioritized the planning and logistics before getting around to *this* part of it. The waiting game, a slow build of anticipation with each passing day as they drag themselves through their off-season obligations a hemisphere away from one another. Plane tickets purchased, suppressant dosage tapering schedules aligned, half-truths and fictions given to anyone else who might need to know the least bit about how they're handling their cycles during the ten days they'll have at Shane's cottage.

Every day the eventuality grows just a little bit more real around the edges, now one month away. Now they're letting themselves fantasize about it. He won't tell Rozanov that it makes his belly flutter.

Shane

As if your rut won't be making you just as desperate

Lily

Of course desperate for pretty omega hole to fuck

But first desperate to hear what you sound like begging in heat

Shane has to close his eyes for the next several seconds, remove Ilya's text from his immediate vision so he can process the words without imploding from the sudden jolt of want.

…At least he's already in bed for the night. Lying on his back, his legs unconsciously spreading a tad wider.

As he tries to collect himself enough to craft an appealing response, his phone vibrates a few more times in his hand. With a deep breath in, Shane peeks at his phone screen glowing in the dark.

Lily

Don't worry, you will only have to beg for a little bit before I take care of you

Just so I can know how it sounds

After that I keep you full and satisfied

The tent growing in Shane's sweatpants sure likes that idea. He's not touching himself yet, not really, hand only skimming his own neck and the skin of his collarbone beneath his t-shirt - still half-feigning casually for an audience of no one like he doesn't know exactly what he's building up to, as long as Ilya keeps texting him. That said, Shane knows he needs to at least *attempt* his own contribution, too.

(And, God, it is *so much* easier for him to default to playing the stubborn brat in these exchanges rather than tying himself in anxious knots to try and achieve the sexting equivalent of baring his neck. Luckily, at least Rozanov doesn't seem to mind.)

Shane

My knotting dildo will be there if you need backup

Lily

Finallyyyyyyy the color, I will know the color

I won't take bait about my stamina

Too long i think about you with this fucking dildo and i can't picture it properly

I promise you won't remember what dildo even looks like when i'm done with you (but finally i will lol)

Shane bites his lower lip, rucks his shirt up around his torso as his thumb hovers over the keyboard. He types out *What else will you give me if I beg* in all of its entirety, then hits the backspace key as quickly as he can before he can send the alpha what might risk being perceived as an oddly specific or leading sort of question.

Shane

Idk….my heats are pretty intense, might be a bit much for you to handle

It's something about which he's already cautioned Ilya, when they first began discussing the logistics of how this would all go. Most omegas don't suppress their heats for an entire year, and so they'll typically last two to five days, depending on an individual's cycle. Shane's heats, however, end up about a week long - drawn-out, miserable, painful, *endless*, nothing but his toy to ease the cramps and frustrated, lonely tears.

Ruts are slightly shorter, on the average, though Ilya saves his for once a year during the off-season like most other alphas in the league, similar to Shane's heat. It makes their cycles rather complementary, based on what Shane has read online, in fact, assuming Ilya's rut lasts for four or five days like it usually does. Something to do with alphas needing to protect the den and secure provisions for their vulnerable mate, with the purpose of rut being to sustain them through the most intense of said mate's sexual needs. Weird, evolutionary nonsense that may or may not be half-bullshit to begin with, and certainly doesn't apply to real life nowadays.

Shane has done a *lot* of research over the past few months, from both legitimate medical websites as well as the usual sorts of forums and subreddits, combing through other people's experiences. After he'd been the one to suggest this whole thing to begin with, when he was too knot-dumb to resist the impulse, Shane considers it his responsibility to make sure they do it right, do it smart. And he obviously wants to be considerate of Ilya's needs, too, as it's not just Shane's cycle, after all. The last thing Shane wants is to be a hassle, make Ilya regret not having spent his rut somewhere else with someone else, someone less of a burden, someone who is just plain more *fun*. Whatever kind of partner Ilya usually prefers to rut with.

Not that he's gotten into that much detail about his insecurities with Ilya. But they exchanged general information about their cycles, and Shane warned Ilya then of the length and intensity of his heats, sans provocative innuendo. It was a phone call, so he wasn't able to *see* Ilya's reaction - not that he'd actually expected the alpha to balk - but he heard him let out a low, intrigued noise.

"*Mmm*, Hollander, maybe finally an omega who can keep up with me."

“Fuck off - this isn’t like a *brag*. I’m just giving you a head’s up so we’re both on the same page -”

“Fuck off why? Is alpha now not allowed to be excited for seven days of fucking omega in heat, in rut? Instead I am supposed to shake and cry ‘*oh no, my poor dick, it’s going to fall off from too much glorious fucking*’?”

“Oh my god, that is not what I’m trying to say either, asshole.”

“Then let me be happy, yes? You act like prison guard and your heat is death by firing squad for me, instead of lots of good sex with world’s prettiest omega. Maybe bit of mess afterwards, maybe tired, but will be good, *da*? You keep talking like this, I will think maybe you do really plan to kill me in Canadian forest murder shack.”

Grateful Ilya couldn’t see how the *world’s prettiest omega* comment made him blush and resolutely ignoring the swoop in his belly, Shane laughed aloud despite himself. Then he sighed and set down the pen he’d been holding atop the calendar on his desk, flipped a few months ahead to July. “Da. Yeah. Sorry. Just nerves, I guess. Not your fault.” Then he added, almost petulantly, “I’m really not trying to talk you out of coming, promise.”

“Good, okay.” In the brief pause, Shane closed his eyes and imagined Ilya smiling into his phone just like he was. “And if my dick *does* fall off in the process, then you know I am happy to give noble sacrifice to very sexy cause.”

“...Damn it, Rozanov.” Shane had laughed again and was more relaxed in his chair as they continued discussing plans.

So…while they haven’t gotten *that* far into talking about it, Shane isn’t so obtuse that he doesn’t *get* that the challenge of his heat is part of the appeal of Ilya, and that doesn’t have to be a bad thing. It’s just one more biological compatibility on a preexisting laundry list, and this one a happenstance in large part just due to the cycles they both maintain for pro hockey. One more thing that works so well between their bodies - or *might* work, anyway, they won’t know for sure until it happens, after all.

Which Shane is suddenly looking forward to, lying in bed with one hand tucked in his waistband and the other clutching his phone in the dark, attempting to tease the very first alpha who’s ever going to *have* him in that way.

Shane

Idk….my heats are pretty intense, might be a bit much for you to handle

No shame for either of us if big bad rutting alpha needs help to satisfy me, right? ;)

Lily

Greedy

Eyes bigger than your stomach but for knot in your womb

“Holy fucking christ,” Shane mutters aloud, finally giving in to the temptation to slide his entire hand into his shorts and thumb the wet slit of his cock. The extent to which the word ‘womb’ turns him on, apparently, is a little alarming, but he’s choosing not to examine that any further - a minute quirk of Ilya’s use of English is *hot*, sue him.

He’s struggling to both touch himself and think of something sexy enough to type back at the same time when another text comes in.

Lily

Are you touching yourself?

Shane throws an arm over his face as if that’ll stop Ilya from somehow seeing right through him, via text, a continent away. The phone vibrates right up against his ear.

Lily

Call? I have 5 minutes

Shane

Yeah

He answers the call halfway through its first ring.

“Greedy,” Ilya hisses before Shane even has a chance to say *hello*. He doesn’t need video chat to picture the smirk in the alpha’s voice. “You are in bed? Hand on your cock or your hole?”

“Yeah. My - *ah* - cock. What are you doing?” Shane’s face is hot. He gives himself a stroke and lets his hips buck up slightly into his grip.

“Listening to you, *moy kotenok*, all hot and bothered for me. Put me on speaker so you can play with your tits.”

“Oh *fuck* you.” Not that he hesitates to comply, setting his phone down next to his pillow on speaker, sinking a little deeper under the covers. With a slight uptick in pace, he keeps stroking his cock, using his free hand to grope his own chest. Palms drag against pebbled nipples as he squeezes his pecs, first one and then the other. It’s thoughtless habit to furtively stifle whatever sounds his own touch is capable of producing - but he can’t forget his audience. He closes his eyes and tries to imagine Ilya’s hands on him instead, making him moan loud enough for the other man to pick up through the phone. Through the self-conscious embarrassment and heavy breathing, he forces himself to ask: “Are you hard?”

“*Da*, yes, thinking about you spread out in heat, dripping and begging for my knot.”

“I mean I might not - *ah* - *beg* for it. But I do…I do want it. Want *you*.”

“Is your hole slick?”

"*Nn*, uh-uh." Although he knows it's true without having to check, he reaches lower to rub his fingertips around his dry rim, the sensation making him gasp. The vast majority of the time, his suppressants keep his body from self-lubricating, even when he's doing something as objectively horny as masturbating. It would probably be easier to lie - they're on the phone, after all, and someone less awkward than Shane would have something to say to maintain the fantasy. "Just - *ah* - give me a sec…"

"Mm, but you'd be slick already if I was there, yes? Perfect for me to fuck right into, one big thrust."

"*Yeah*, yeah, I would."

Then, biting his bottom lip hard enough to hurt, Shane finally gives in to the temptation tucked beneath his pillow, a dirty t-shirt - *Ilya*'s dirty t-shirt. White, basic, made from thin and soft cotton. Ilya had been wearing it just before the last time he and Shane fucked, after Shane had taken it off of Ilya and then taken it home with him, later. He'd taken a few other things, too, thanks to Ilya's stubborn insistence, but this is the only one left to which any of the alpha's scent still (barely) clings.

He drops the t-shirt right on his face and draws in a deep breath through his mouth and nose.

Mostly it smells like Shane's soap, his sweat, but underlying his own subtle omega sweetness remain scant traces of Ilya's smoky forest pine and alpha musk.

Enough to make his mouth water and the warm need low in his belly surge - Shane feels the beginnings of warm wetness in his insides a few moments before he can feel it on the outside, too, slick where his fingertips are just touching his entrance.

"*Ilya*," he moans, not necessarily having intended to on purpose for Ilya's benefit. The t-shirt still over his face should be thin enough not to muffle his voice enough to be noticed through the call, he has the fleeting thought, and leaves it there. Marginally more composed, he adds, "I'm…a little slick now, kinda."

As the tip of his index finger nudges past his rim, he almost idly swipes a drool-wet tongue against the t-shirt, the cotton growing damp above his lips.

"*Good boy*," Ilya purrs. "Is good, is okay, no matter what. We work you open, slutty hole, until you take it easy like you're meant to, *da*?"

"Yeah, fuck. I'm close, I'm gonna be close, soon. Are you - ?"

"Can you come like that, just from your fingers and my voice?"

"*I - mmhm*, I think…"

On the rare occasions when he used to masturbate entirely on his own, watching porn or trying to let off steam, before this - whatever this is - with Rozanov became more and more frequent, he almost always just focused on his cock. Seemed easier, since he could hardly produce slick anyway, to ignore the pleasurable potential to this part of his body unless he

was in heat and otherwise forced to. But the sound of Ilya's voice deepened with desire makes Shane feel so fucking *empty*, like the only way his body will know true pleasure ever again is to be stretched open, filled up.

His heels dig into the mattress, knees raised under the sheet and back curving as he works a finger into himself, whimpering. Then he's opening his jaw, sucking the shirt into his mouth and moaning freely just like that, saliva soaking into the fabric. The hand not awkwardly thrust between his legs won't settle anywhere in particular, restless, tugging his hair, palming his chest, dragging blunt fingernails across his abs. An itch under his skin he's desperate to scratch as the pressure builds in his lower belly.

"Go on, baby, just like that. Whatever feels good, okay? Just want to hear it when you come. How many fingers?"

"Two-*ish*," Shane whines, starting on the second now. He pretends he can taste Rozanov on the shirt as his hips rock down against his hand. "I'm - *I* - " He distantly manages to hope the alpha is as close to the edge as he is, just from listening to Shane get himself off in the dark -

"*Shane*," Ilya growls.

Just then, Shane's hand falls above his collarbone, thumb pressing in hard to one part of his neck - his cock spurts in his underwear, ass clenching down around the fingers he has shoved up there and writhing.

"*Aghhhh*, fuck, Ilya. *Ilya*. Ah, want - *ah*, *ah* -" He cuts himself from any further words by clamping the shirt between his teeth with a loud groan.

Ilya's saying something, Shane thinks, but for at least a few seconds he can't make out whatever it is over the noise coming out of him - Ilya's fault, considering he'd essentially cranked Shane's 'volume knob' all the way up to porn star levels.

" - boy, good boy, such pretty sounds, just what I wanted. Shane, *moy kotenok* - "

His thumb is still digging into his own neck, Shane realizes, rubbing tiny and insistent circles almost hard enough to bruise - right on his fucking *mating gland*. Fucking - shit. He yanks his hand away like it's on fire and flings the t-shirt - now with a damp drool spot in the middle - from his face.

"Ilya." Shane clears his throat, wincing a little as he gingerly removes the fingers from his hole and wipes them on his messy underwear. He'll need another shower before he can go to sleep, after this. "Are you - " Still panting. "Did you - "

Ilya grunts, and Shane is scarcely able to interpret it as being in the negative. "Bad timing, going to save it for later. But I promise you make my cock very hard. So hard it hurts a lot, and very difficult not to come in my pants like teenage boy, okay?"

"You - what?" Shane's kneejerk response is annoyance. Surely he isn't being ridiculous for assuming that phone sex should naturally be reciprocal, go both ways? "But *you* called *me*."

"*Da,* and?"

"What do you mean *bad timing*?"

"Bad time for me to take dick out. Good time for you. You give me plenty of material for later though. *Shane Hollander spank bank* for when I close my eyes."

Shane can't help his irritated huff, bothered despite realizing he probably has no logical reason to be. But there's an irrational embarrassment creeping beneath his skin, a sense troublesome to shake that he's taking something without giving anything back and making a fool of himself somehow, like showing up empty-handed to a birthday party.

"Okay," is all he says, stilted, suddenly unable to think of anything he can say to Ilya right now that he won't feel very stupid about or later regret. Shane blames the orgasm. He picks up his phone, avoiding the brightness of his screen, and takes it off speaker. "I…am guessing we are past five minutes at this point, huh?"

He wishes he could feel as well as hear Ilya's low chuckle, the warm breath of it in his ear. "A little bit, is no problem. "

"It's ass o'clock in the morning there, yeah?" As if by narrowly turning the statement of fact into a question, Shane can pretend the precise time difference isn't etched into his brain. He'd assumed Ilya was at home in his Moscow apartment, maybe in bed, like him, but sleep-rumpled and procrastinating getting out of bed instead of putting off sleep. "No way you're up this early to hit the gym."

"I'm at my father's house." Shane thinks he might hear Ilya sigh, or maybe blow out a stream of cigarette smoke. "He's dead."

"*What*? Ilya." Shane's cum is going to start going dry and gross in his underwear at any moment, and Ilya *just told him his dad died*. "Your dad - are *you* - "

"Yesterday, in the morning. I am…it is fine. He was sick. Long time coming." A noise like a scoff. "And big asshole before he got sick, worse after. I have been busy, here, with the, um, arranging plans. Annoying family."

"I'm so sorry." The words feel less than useless in his mouth. Not being able to reach through the phone to wrap his arms around the alpha and rub their scent glands together is an almost tangible ache. "*Ilya*." It's all he has, name weighted with sympathy.

"You see why I call you now, yes? I need distraction. Pretty moaning in ears is best distraction."

Still somewhat in disbelief, Shane shakes his head. "I'm here if you need to actually *talk*, too, y'know?"

Another pause, another long exhalation of air on the other end. "I know, Hollander."

"...But I can help distract you, too. Since I get an orgasm out of it." Look, Shane *gets* it - he isn't entirely in denial about the fact that things between them have progressed a little beyond

‘just sex.’ But why make it even more complicated by talking too much about anything beyond what’s bringing their bodies together? “Whatever you need,” he adds, softer.

“I text you later this week. I will be busy, but…thinking of you. When I finally have chance to stroke my cock, later.”

Maybe it doesn’t amuse him as much as it should, but Shane forces himself to go along with Ilya’s banter anyway, mustering the shadow of a laugh. “Do they not have porn in Russia?”

“Not like Shane Hollander spank bank, unless you plan big career change.”

“Okay, fuck all the way off.”

“Yes, I should probably go,” Ilya says, resigned. Then, in a gentler tone: “You are good?”

Since Shane’s rejection sickness after Vegas, of course, Ilya never forgets to ask Shane how he’s feeling whenever they’re done talking or seeing one another. Right now, it makes Shane feel particularly absurd and coddled, considering he isn’t the one whose dad just fucking died. But he’s also *genuinely okay* - it was just a bit of phone sex, for fuck’s sake - and if the only thing he can do for Ilya to lighten his burden in this moment is reassure him of that fact, then Shane can do that.

“Yeah, I’m good.” For once it seems cruel to turn the question around on Ilya like he usually would, try to get him to confirm he’s good, too.

Miss you, Shane almost says, instead. *I wish I was there*. Then he’s biting his tongue and contorting the words into a more comfortable shape, however empty: “I’m here if you need anything else.” Whatever that’s worth - *nothing*, Shane thinks.

“Good night, *moy kotenok*.”

“Night.”

After that, Shane has to climb out of bed, tossing his underwear in the hamper and stumbling to the en-suite for a quick rinse in the shower. Under the hot spray of water between his shoulder blades, he closes his eyes and does his yoga breathing exercises, like he can release through each long, slow exhalation of breath another problem he can’t control or fix, washing it down the drain so he can actually get some sleep instead of worrying.

Once, using his hands to help sluice water through his hair, Shane lets them fall a few inches lower and pretends it isn’t entirely deliberate as he drags his knuckles over the mating gland in his neck. The sensation makes him shudder, though it doesn’t feel nearly as good as it had when he’d done it without realizing, part of what’d gotten him off so spectacularly while listening to Ilya’s voice.

Something else to worry about, he supposes, draw deep into his lungs and exhale out again, where it will still be waiting for him in the morning.

…..

Ilya's done a decent job of lying to himself over the past month in Moscow, pretending like the thought of getting to see Shane Hollander's freckles in the flesh again, and soon, isn't what gets him through the worst of those days. The reality of which becomes much harder to deny once finally faced with the man himself, as Ilya slides into his passenger seat at the airport.

Shane doesn't turn his head to look at him as he pulls out of the parking lot, and his expression is atypically inscrutable behind sunglasses - freckles still visible around the dark rims. He smells even better than Ilya remembers, honey floral musk escaping the scent blocking patches on the sides of his neck, a siren song for alpha senses, with just the hint of something sharper.

Ilya has to quell the urge to snap his teeth at the thought of any other alphas getting a whiff of Shane like this. His body isn't begging to be fucked just yet, but the ripening of his scent is a sign that he will be, soon. If the omega went milling about in public, outside the confines of his car, the tinge of his oncoming heat would definitely attract leers and catcalls.

The stupid alpha jealousy in Ilya's chest is smothered with stupid alpha smugness by reminding himself no one will be getting to smell Shane Hollander like this but him.

No one else ever has, probably, except when Shane was a teen and still had to deal with his heats under his parents' roof. It's a fact Ilya has long been well-aware of, that Shane has spent every one of his heats alone.

Until now. Asking Ilya to partner him - for whatever godfor-fucking-saken reason.

(It's easier playing dumb, rather than thinking about *all* the reasons. For this. For them. A thought can't hurt you if you don't acknowledge its existence, goes the logic.)

The air-conditioner is on full blast, but traces of sweat glimmer on Shane's forehead and in the hollow of his throat, the peek of chest where his top few buttons are undone. Ilya's mouth waters with the knowledge that, soon enough, there will be nothing stopping him from chasing that sweat with his tongue.

"Smell like you're looking for trouble, Hollander." He takes a deliberately deep breath in through his nose for emphasis.

Shane's cheeks redden all the way to the tips of his ears. "Fuck off," he snorts. "What about you? Smells like trouble found me."

"Hm, I am thinking of a phrase…I think it is called *telling on yourself*?" Ilya smirks and chuckles. "Rut comes fast, not like heat. This is my normal scent. Is your preheat making me smell extra yummy to you already, *moy kotenok*?"

Some of the awkward tension of the initial few minutes of their reunion dissipating, Ilya gives in to the temptation to finally exchange scents like he's been dying to since opening the car door. Based on the unending irregular rhythm of Shane's fingers *tap-tap-tapping* the steering wheel, Ilya figures it might help ease his nerves, too. Because Shane is driving, Ilya

telegraphs his reach, only intending to rest his palm on the back of the omega's neck for a few moments, maybe let his wrist brush the edge of the scent blocker -

Inches from Shane's neck, practically out of nowhere, Shane *swats* Ilya's hand away.

Ilya yelps - entirely due to outright surprise, rather than any actual force from the swat. Sure, he could've asked permission before reaching out, he supposes, bemused. But given everything else they've got going on at this point, it hadn't occurred to him to question such a relatively minor intimacy.

Donning an overly-aggrieved scowl, Ilya clutches his hand to his chest and whines. "*Shane*."

And, to Shane's credit, his immediate grimace is apologetic. "Shit, sorry." He reaches out, hesitating not once but twice before finally giving Ilya's knee a single, tentative pat. The first time they've touched each other in months, fucking *finally*, the briefest flashes of Shane's palm on the back of Ilya's hand, his knee. Like touching a hot stove.

"I'm seriously sorry about, um, that," Shane apologizes again, then launches into a ramble. "This. Obviously this is the first time I've got an alpha in my space when I'm…*y'know* - and I think I might really not like to be touched right now. At least during this part of my preheat. Which probably really sucks for you, and I'm not super thrilled about it either, honestly, but…" He pushes his hand through the sweat-dampened strands of hair falling across his forehead and sighs. "Sorry."

Ilya shrugs, then puts his hands up and waves them. "No, no, no, is okay, Hollander. You say no touch, we don't touch. I wait." He slaps his own thigh to stop himself from automatically reaching for Shane again. "It's just preheat. You will change your mind."

"No shit."

The initial onset of hormones at the start of their breeding cycle can make omegas sensitive. Some more than others. Some crave coddling during preheat, the soothing blanket of an alpha's touch in the gradual build-up to a hormone-fueled fuckfest. Others get agitated and territorial, everything a little *too much,* with an alpha's presence particularly grating against over-expanded senses before the haze of needing to get fucked finally settles in.

Figures Hollander would be the latter, more challenging type. Ilya grins. It might grate against *his* senses, for now, not being able to touch or scent Shane, but Ilya has a predator's patience. He's a wolf in the winter chill, waiting for the moment when he'll get to warm himself with the hot blood of the prey he's been tracking. Only unlike a wolf, Ilya has to wait for his prey to come to him. He can do that.

The inevitability crackles like static in the air.

"*Ugh*, this is so fucking weird," Shane says, face scrunching in that half-embarrassed, half-annoyed way he does so often that Ilya can't help but find adorable. He rolls the car windows halfway down without adjusting the air-conditioner from high, and then Ilya just has to laugh.

But he feels a little guilty, too, sitting there playing passenger princess when Shane is clearly uncomfortable. “I offered to rent a car and drive myself,” he reminds Shane. He knows better than to offer to take over driving now, and tiptoes with his English around saying anything to make Shane bristle. “You could be nesting.” *Could* is the right word to use there, he knows, not *should*.

“Not worth trying to come up with a story for my parents if they saw a strange car out front. They’ll give me all the privacy I want, as long as I let them know I’m alive once or twice a day, but they live too close to probably not drive by at some point.”

Ilya grunts in acknowledgment - not that he didn’t know this already, anyway. They’d talked about it over the phone, along with just about everything else, planning out the mutual sharing of Shane’s heat, his rut. Shane asked a few questions about Ilya’s past experiences, too, about being in rut with omegas, the heats he’d partnered omegas through.

Ilya could tell when Shane was speaking with his guard up, on the phone, each word a carefully placed brick in a wall to defend himself from Ilya’s bullying. After every few bricks, Ilya could decide what to do with them - kick them down, knock them off balance, do nothing but let Shane build his silly wall a couple bricks higher, so that when Ilya *did* decide to kick it down, it would feel all the more like victory.

This was one of those times, Shane doing his wall-building. His questions were curious but deliberately neutral and non-intrusive. *Boring*. As Ilya responded, honest but without going into any specifics, he imagined Shane reading them from a written-out list, and it bothered Ilya as he realized he didn’t know what Shane’s handwriting looked like.

In this context, boring questions were fine with Ilya. He didn’t want Shane to have any thoughts in his head about Ilya with other people. Who knew what trouble those kinds of thoughts could cause up there, in that anxious brain of his? He’d make unkind and ridiculous comparisons to himself, twist Ilya’s words into inventing a standard that Shane would fail to live up to in his mind alone.

So Ilya kept his answers simple. He’d helped Svetlana through several heats, and she’d helped him through a few ruts, and they’d never synced up because it was less convenient that way, when both partners were out of their minds, and also because so much of their friendship was built on grounding one another that it just felt wrong to cross that particular line together. Not that Ilya explained that last part to Shane. The other omegas he’d been with, either during their heats or his ruts, Ilya had mostly been with to make sure the sex part was as fun as possible - because most people didn’t choose to spend their cycles lonely and miserable - with little to none of the before and after parts. Casual one-offs of mutual pleasure and convenience.

He’d used the words *fun* and *casual* and *convenient* in there for sure, when explaining all of this to Shane.

“So sort of like what we’re doing, only since it’s the off-season, it’s more convenient for us to cycle at the same time,” Shane commented.

Ilya chuckled, husky and teasing. “*Mm*, you are opposite of convenient, Hollander, for me.”

Sue him - He'd been flirting! But after a few seconds of silence on the other end, Shane sputtered, then launched into a hasty apology which Ilya had to hurriedly interrupt so he could explain he wasn't trying to complain about the inconvenience of coming to Canada for ten days.

"...But wouldn't Svetlana or someone else in Moscow be more convenient?"

Convinced he could hear Shane's puppy dog eyes through the phone, Ilya silently cursed himself. What was he supposed to say to that? *Fuck convenience, your heat is mine even if you lived in Antarctica and I had to walk all the way there to have you*.

"Fun we will have together will be more than worth it for me," Ilya said aloud. "You know this. Sex-wise, we are very compatible."

Compatible. It's become one of Ilya's favorite English words, from the first time he looked it up and mouthed it silently, the shape of the consonants on his lips.

He could've said more, at the time, talk all about just how *compatible* they were and the fun they'd have, in explicit detail, employing all the filthy thoughts in his head. But he'd behaved himself without devolving into phone sex so they could continue to talk productively. At least that'd been the last time Shane had asked if Ilya was sure that all of this was worth the trouble, that *he* was worth it - which pleased Ilya, since he hoped it meant Shane was questioning his own value a little less.

The fresh air from the open car windows offers marginal relief from the distraction of Shane's alluring scent. Ilya looks out his window and pretends he'd rather be looking at trees than at Shane - it's easier not to accidentally reach out and touch him, that way.

"Do you want to see my test results?" Ilya asks. Something else they'd discussed over the phone some months ago. "I brought the paper."

Condom usage. Or rather, the lack thereof. Shane's idea, to Ilya's shock, citing 'the internet' as a source on why it would be more practical to go without, as long as they were both disease-free and contraception was otherwise handled (*no issues there, I would* not *have suggested this otherwise, trust me*, Shane told him).

Shane shakes his head and shrugs. "You sent me a picture already. I don't really need more proof than that. Why, you want to see my paper results?"

"Is cute you think you needed test done too." Ilya cocks his head to watch Shane's face redden out of the corner of his eye.

"It was only responsible and fair for us *both* to get tested," Shane grumbles. "And it's not like I've been with absolutely *no one* else other than you, so."

Sure, whatever betas he'd dry humped before Ilya showed him what he was missing out on. And Mexico alpha.

But even the most indirect reminder of Shane's Mexico alpha experience has Ilya barely managing to quash a growl and resist the urge to lean over the console and rub his scent possessively all over the omega.

Rolling the window on his side the rest of the way down, Ilya briefly debates the wisdom of sticking his whole head out of it like a dog, beast that he is, only deciding against it to avoid being demanded to explain his ridiculous behavior.

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Although Shane is still very much trying not to crawl out of his skin, both from preheat on its own and the impact of Ilya's presence, there's an unexpected relief in taking the alpha over the cottage's threshold, a sort of unclenching of a fist in his chest Shane never noticed until suddenly it was gone.

Unfortunately it's not enough to fix the rest of what's wrong with him, the itching in his blood, flustered and over-warm. His extremities are tingling worse and worse by the hour, like he's taken too much preworkout but the only cardio that work the feeling off is *fucking* - but the thought of anyone touching him now gets his jaw clenching and muscles tense. Even the thought of touching himself has zero appeal, despite how odd and itchy and *empty* he feels.

He doesn't know how Ilya can smell *so fucking good* to his senses - pine and snow and a blanket of familiar alpha *want* which Shane's been missing - while his body is simultaneously telling him to stay the hell away. The itchy, unpleasant tingling just worsens with proximity, a nonsensical alarm in his nervous system. More stupid omega bullshit, Shane supposes. Something his hormones are doing, while his body readies itself for the days ahead of it, keeping him untouched and unfucked until he's ripest for breeding.

At least Rozanov isn't giving him shit for it, a mercy Shane didn't expect - at the very least, he'd been braced to deal with more whining.

It's dark out, by the time they arrive. Shane flicks a switch connected to soft lamplight and offers Ilya a quick tour. Living room with television and game console. His home gym. In the kitchen, Shane pulls open the refrigerator door, grabs a can of Coke for Ilya and a ginger ale for himself. He also shows Ilya the rest of groceries he bought - mostly fruits and veggies in the fridge, for him, and bags of pizza bagels and chicken nuggets and other junk Shane's never tried locating in the freezer aisle until now, all stuff from Ilya's supply list. The pantry is similarly stocked: granola, instant oatmeal, two loaves of bread that are more seeds and nuts than flour, alongside an assortment of sugary cereals with mascots on the colorful boxes and three boxes of Pop-Tarts.

"There's a mini fridge and protein shakes and a lot of snacks downstairs, too. Jerky and stuff like that," Shane explains. "We shouldn't need to come up here very much. Either way we definitely won't starve." He ignores how hot his face is from acknowledging aloud the necessary preparation for the days ahead of them, when they'll need to take occasional breaks from fucking for the sustenance to resume.

Naturally, Ilya, eyes alight with amusement as he cracks open the soda, picks up on his plight. “Good omega, keeping me fed so I keep you fucked, hm? So I don’t run out of energy to satisfy you.” On the opposite side of the kitchen island from Shane, Ilya leans forward, elbows on the marble and wearing a smirk which shows his teeth.

And Shane knows it’s not smart to turn his back to a predator, but he does it anyway. It’s easier not to look at him when all Shane wants to do is chase that obnoxious fucking smirk away with a kiss but his stupid body won’t allow it.

“Whatever. Fuck off,” he mutters, busying himself with grabbing a frozen pizza and turning the oven on. Neither of them have had dinner yet and for once Shane is too consumed by everything else happening to his insides to worry overmuch about some excess sodium and empty carbs.

As he turns back around, Shane presses the unopened can of ginger ale to his neck, letting out a pleased little hum of relief at the feel of the ice cold metal against his over-warm skin.

”*Shit*.” The can almost slips out of Shane’s hand as his pupils dilate and knees shake.

All thanks to the sudden spike of *alpha* in the air, a burst of smoke and spice.

On the other side of the kitchen island, Ilya has gone utterly still, gaze fixed on the soda can now gathering condensation on Shane’s throat.

For a few moments, staring at Ilya and breathing the scent of him in, Shane nearly panics, thinking he might be tipping over into heat early, or maybe Ilya’s rut is on more of a hair-trigger than either of them realized. But - *fuck*, that annoying buzz under Shane’s skin hasn’t gone anywhere. Meanwhile, Ilya doesn’t lunge or growl, just blinks, slowly, as if centering himself without the benefit of a deep lungful of air.

“Rein your shit in, Rozanov!” Shane yanks the collar of his shirt up over his mouth and nose as he stomps past Ilya while keeping as much distance between them as possible.

“I can’t help it!” Back to crinkling in amusement, the corners of Ilya’s eyes bely his whiny tone. “Is not my fault you are so sexy.”

Shane flops onto the farthest end of the sectional with a frustrated groan and scrubs his hands over his eyes. “I can’t believe I’m saying this, but I’m actually looking forward for my heat to start, because it will definitely be an improvement on how I feel right now.” And here he’d originally been hoping that an alpha’s presence would alleviate his preheat symptoms instead of making them worse.

“Impossible not to look forward to spending heat with alpha as virile as me.”

“You know, I hate that that’s in your vocabulary.” Regardless of whether or not Shane feels himself smiling.

“Is there anything I can do to help, Hollander? For real, totally not sex-related. It’s one of the reasons why there is no real pre-rut, for alpha to care for omega during miserable preheat.”

Is that why he has to let himself be cared for? As dictated by biology? Shane wrinkles his nose but chooses another point to question aloud. "*This* miserable, with other omegas?"

Ilya shrugs. "Other omegas don't like touch sometimes, probably, I don't know. I'm sure you are not that special. Svetlana likes backrubs and reality TV with the rich ladies who yell at each other, and sometimes she puts on a rom-com instead that makes her cry. You're not that bad, I don't think. It's hard not to touch you, but I can be patient now and make up for it later. But anyway." He stretches his arms up over his head, and Shane has to avert his gaze from the strip of chiseled abs and trail of hair temporarily on display. "Can I help with anything?"

"Um, can you get me a plate of some of the chopped-up fruits and vegetables in the fridge, I guess? I meant to grab some before sitting down to snack on while we wait for the pizza to be done."

Ilya practically bounces to comply as Shane looks on, half in disbelief. He stews on another idea, working up the courage to suggest it when Ilya returns with a plate, looking ridiculously pleased with himself as he stretches his arm out to hand it to Shane from a distance.

It's…an array of fruits and veggies, all right, arranged in the vague outline of a cock and balls. Like what a twelve-year-old boy would attempt carving on his school desk, spread out on the plate in fruit form.

Ilya is waiting for a reaction, clearly, either for Shane to laugh or maybe to scold him - knowing Ilya, he'd prefer the latter - which makes Shane reflexively determined not to react and give him the satisfaction. But then, looking at Ilya, the unguarded, boyish *glee* all over his face over something *so fucking stupid* - Shane finds himself grinning back at the other man, chest shaking with laughter.

"You're - " *Adorable*. "An idiot."

"Anything else? How about I kick your ass at video game from safe distance?" Ilya pats the opposite end of the soda.

"Yeah, good idea. But before you sit down, do you want to…would it help if you wore something with my scent already on it?"

Ilya's eyebrows lift a fraction. Then he nods.

Shane's burning up enough that he wouldn't mind unbuttoning his current shirt, honestly, and tossing it at Ilya's chest. However, he knows better than to do anything to intentionally provoke Ilya's instinct any further, right now, and he's self-aware enough to realize that probably includes revealing more skin.

"Down the hall, my bedroom door is open. There's a laundry hamper right there." He knows his face is once more turning red, thinks it would just be easier for everyone if it stayed this shade permanently. "Grab a shirt or something. Just - don't be a weirdo about it."

"Weirdo how? I'm going to be inside your asshole for the next week, and you're worried about me sniffing your underwear? You think I will snoop? Who wants to snoop through

things of world's most boring man? It's not time to sleep yet."

He easily locates Shane's room, doesn't bother to flick the light on as he evidently takes whatever is right there on top, or maybe finds what he's looking for through scent alone.

When Ilya comes back to the living room, he's wearing the faded blue Voyageurs' t-shirt Shane woke up in this morning. It's all but molded to Ilya's torso thanks to their size difference, and he has his nose buried in the shoulder and armpit as he sits down on the opposite end of the sofa with the slightest rumble of a purr.

"Gross," Shane comments, fond, something warm and possessive and *new* fluttering in his chest. Reluctantly, he permits himself to enjoy the feeling, along with a bit of self-congratulations for having thought of something that so evidently pleased the alpha.

Ilya tosses Shane one of the video game controllers, picks up the other, and uses it to boot up the console. They end up playing last year's league-licensed hockey game, the one with Rozanov's face on the cover. After Ilya baits Shane into an argument before they've even made it past the start screen, they play intently, chirping like they're against each other on the ice. So they can both graze before dinner, Shane puts the plate in the middle of the coffee table. As they play and snack and bicker, Shane becomes conscious at some point that Ilya is careful never to reach for something at the same time as Shane, respecting his need for space.

For a while - after the oven timer goes off, too, and Ilya fetches them both some pizza - they just get to *hang out*. The video game gives Shane something to focus on outside of his body and how damn weird he feels, helps him unwind a little as he laughs and volleys insults with Ilya just a few feet away. He hadn't given too much thought to what these stretches of time where and he and Ilya *wouldn't* be having marathon sex would be like, but it's…nice. Not only nice, it's *fun*, loads more fun than Shane ever has by himself in the single-digit number of hours he spends playing video games during his typical solo staycations. He supposes it's not all that different from real hockey - Shane always has more fun on the ice, too, when Rozanov is there to push himself against.

Eventually, they call it a night, and Ilya gets to doing the dishes before Shane can even think about doing them himself, so he ends up lingering awkwardly, watching from the other side of the kitchen. All of Ilya's upper body muscles bulge ridiculously in Shane's shirt, and it occurs to Shane that he's less than a day or so away from having all that coiled-up strength unleashed on him.

Ilya shoots Shane a glare over his shoulder, nostrils flaring. "Now who is the one who needs to rein their shit in, Hollander? Unless that is the smell of your heat starting?"

"Well, it's not, so fuck off. I did think there was a chance I might, y'know, start early, with you here." Shane shrugs. "But I haven't, so probably tomorrow."

"You are going to show me where heat room is, yes?"

Ugh. Yes. Shane had *intended* to show him the windowless bedroom in the basement where he always nested and spent the duration of his heat. A completely private place built and furnished expressly for that purpose and nothing else, for Shane to hide away in all the

comfort he could muster as he was reduced to his basest self. His mother's idea, another way for Shane to treat himself when they had the cottage built.

"I was *going* to," Shane says. "It's in the basement, down the stairs over there." He points at a door. "Where the bed with the nest is gonna be and everything else, and where we'll…yeah. But." Cringing again at his own flummoxing behavior, he hesitates, biting his lower lip and ducking his head bashfully. "I - my omega - doesn't really want to right now, I don't think."

Ilya's brow furrows for a moment in confusion, but he's back to grinning once the meaning clicks - at least thus sparing Shane the necessity of further explanation. "Aww, your omega is very shy, hm? Is okay, is *cute*. You're like bunny who knows better than to bring bear back to den."

"And here I thought I was a kitten."

"*Da*. I said *like* bunny, for sake of comparison only. Bunny has den in woods. Kitten is kept."

The words don't seem to be loaded with any particular weight, not that Shane can hear, anyway. But he still has to bite his tongue to stop himself from asking: *Is that what you're doing, keeping me?* A stupid retort to a metaphor spun out of nonsense to tease him.

Instead, Shane waves at the dishwasher. "Thanks for doing that, by the way." He swallows, hands at his sides, fingers curling and uncurling. "And for being here. Thank you for being here."

The amusement in Ilya's gaze softens. "Shane." He steps back to lean against the counter. "It's nothing. If only I could kiss you to show you happy I am, really, that you're letting me be here. Would you believe it then?"

"I believe it now. Still just…I'm allowed to say thanks, alright?"

"Polite Canadian boy." Braced on the edge of the counter behind him, Ilya's knuckles are white, the rest of his body swaying ever so slightly toward Shane. "So Mister Architect, does your fancy place have extra bedroom for me to sleep in tonight?"

Shane sighs, partially in relief that Ilya has spared him having to be the one to bring it up. "Yeah. Also not what I originally planned on, by the way, but you know…" He gestures exasperatedly at himself. "Sorry. I'm aware this is the lamest thing ever."

"It's no surprise. You are very lame, Hollander."

Ilya winks, and Shane rolls his eyes, smiling begrudgingly.

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Before Shane can get them, Ilya snatches up his bags and takes them to the guest room pointed out to him. Following separate showers and an awkward wave good night from across the hall, they both try in earnest to get some sleep, knowing they'll need to be well-rested for the days ahead.

It's easier said than done, at least for Ilya, surrounded by the omega's scent and tormented by both the closeness and the distance between them.

While Shane was showering, Ilya thieved from the hamper the pale blue button-down Shane had been wearing all day. When Ilya closes his eyes and presses his face into the wrinkled linen, still slightly damp with Shane's sweet and salty sweat, he imagines he's able to hear the omega's heartbeat from more than a room away.

What Ilya *really* wants to do is jerk off.

He thinks about clamping Shane's shirt between his teeth, fisting the fabric around his cock and stroking until it's soaked with his cum, a poor and temporary substitute for the real thing. Just enough to take the edge off, for now, help him work off some of his pent-up desire so he can fall asleep more easily. The only reason he resists is his presumption that Shane, with his preheat-heightened hypersensitivity to alpha pheromones, will know immediately. Probably be pissed off by it, too, whether he wants to be or not, and then be embarrassed and more pissed off at himself than Ilya.

Usually, pissing Hollander off is *more* of a reason to do something. But for as restless and horny as Ilya feels, he knows the omega has it worse than he does, and now is not the time for Ilya to go out of his way to further agitate him.

Some of the tension has leeched out of Ilya's chest since he doesn't have to look at Shane anymore, be in the same room as him and smell him *not* smelling like Ilya. The urge to scent-mark him with a deliberate brushing of pulse points, to make Shane smell the tiniest bit like *his*, felt as necessary and impossible as the gratification of any touch at all.

He'd noticed it earlier, a subtler sharpness faintly underlying the rest of the delectable preheat scent that had slapped Ilya in the face. Like a honey-drenched garden menaced by a swarm of bees you don't notice until you've already stepped too far into their flowers. In this case, the bees are whatever the hell Shane's hormones are doing.

But Ilya's used to sleeping in strange rooms, under more stressful circumstances, so he falls asleep eventually. And he must find something soothing in Shane's scent and not *only* riling, because Ilya sleeps deeper than he has in as long as he can remember. He wakes up feeling surprisingly refreshed just after the sun has gone up, drooling on the stolen shirt beneath his head.

He runs his hands through his curls for a few minutes trying to neaten them before poking his head into the hall. Shane's bedroom door is still closed and he doesn't seem to have gone anywhere - Ilya doesn't want to risk interrupting if he's still asleep. But the restless energy from last night thrums with renewed intensity under Ilya's skin. He needs to work at least a little of it out, find space for the patience he promised.

He types out a text to Shane but deletes it before sending, in case the other man's phone isn't on silent, writes a quick note to push beneath his bedroom door instead.

Going out for jog. Be back in 1 hour or less. Call/text if you need me sooner, I will come running xoxoxo

To be cheeky, he signs it *Lily*, draws a heart for the dot in the *i*.

Then Ilya goes for a jog. The cool morning air hits oddly like a cigarette, outside of the muted haze of pheromones beginning to permeate the cottage, a pleasant jolt to his system he enjoys in deep, luxurious inhales. Ilya considers himself a city boy - it's nice that nature is out there, for other people, but it's never had much appeal for him. But as he runs among the trees and along the lake, imagining he can hear the beat of shorter, faster strides alongside his, sometimes ahead of him and sometimes behind - Ilya can't help but think maybe this *could* have some appeal, after all.

Blood pumping, his legs find their rhythm. He feels more alert, a tad twitchier than usual, not that there's anything out here to be twitchy about, considering Ilya doesn't even spy so much as a squirrel.

But there's something primal and very *stupid* in Ilya's instinct which exalts at pretending he's doing some nonsensical alpha bullshit like *scouting the perimeter* or *surveying his potential mate's territory* to ensure their safety for the days ahead.

…Maybe he can empathize, if only a little bit, with how flustered Shane gets over his own frustratingly illogical instincts. At least Ilya gets to keep this piece of nonsensical alpha bullshit his own private embarrassment.

It's not just due to Shane's proximity, but part of the earliest signs of Ilya's oncoming rut. If he were on the ice right now, he'd be even more of a monster than usual, senses heightened, a touch faster and stronger. And that's without factoring in any additional aggression toward other alphas. No one's allowed to play in rut, of course, but that doesn't stop some guys in the league from trying to get themselves into a pre-rut state before a critical game, for example. The benefits are tangible, as are the liabilities. Ilya's never bothered with it himself, however - he'll leave that sort of thing to players who, unlike him, aren't just damn good enough on their own.

Ilya's pulse beats faster and louder in his ears against the sound of his shoes on the dirt path. Something about it makes him think about fucking - probably because everything makes Ilya think about fucking, right now. He thinks about his heart pounding in time with rhythmic thrusts between sweat-drenched bodies. The slap of flesh instead of rubber soles.

He licks his teeth, panting.

Ilya is used to maintaining some thread of lucidity, during rut, particularly when it comes to keeping his strength controlled. The conventional knowledge goes that alphas aren't reduced to such mindless beasts in rut as to unknowingly risk doing harm to a partner. Heat, however, tends to be different, in terms of how it affects omegas. The most basic biological explanation is that, since omegas are supposed to be smaller and weaker, they aren't at risk of genuinely hurting their partner - regardless of whether or not that's true in reality. An alpha in rut, meanwhile, simply has more instinctual imperative to ensure they keep an omega thoroughly fucked without damaging them.

Omegas in heat are uniquely vulnerable. Even the worst sort of knothead alphas, for the most part, are above using rut as an excuse to neglect their responsibility to care for and protect an

omega in heat - on top of the whole *breeding* aspect, of course.

Ilya won't risk taking any longer than he'd promised Shane in his note by wandering too far, so after about half an hour, he turns around and jogs back to the cottage approximately the same way he came. He's gotten what he needed, fresh air and the chance to soothe the beast in his chest by stretching his legs.

Shane hasn't called or texted him in the meantime. Maybe Ilya's a *little* disappointed he didn't have an excuse to come sprinting back and bursting heroically through the front door, but he'll continue to be patient. He takes one last big deep breath in to regather his self-restraint before entering -

Where the scent of an omega teetering on the precipice of heat hits Ilya like a rib-shattering slam into the boards, except the boards are also on fire. *Ilya* feels on fire, all of sudden, surrounded by the thick scent of sweet honey-vanilla and ginger spice.

The door to the basement is open, though Ilya forces himself to bypass it initially, suspecting that he won't be coming up from those stairs for quite a long time once he follows them downward. Shane's bedroom door is open, too, room empty and bed unmade, reeking of arousal which Ilya doesn't pause to bask in.

When he does pause, just inside the door to the guest room, his brow furrows at the sight of the large suitcase he brought lying open, the majority of his things strewn about in a mess around it. It takes him less than a second to realize what precisely is missing and why.

Ilya just can't help the ridiculous grin that splits his face after that.

In his suitcase, there was a bag specifically packed with some of his softest sweats and shirts that hadn't been washed after he wore them each once to sleep in - what he'd hoped Shane would find decadent fodder for his heat nest.

…He just hadn't expected the omega to literally go into Ilya's suitcase and *find* the clothes himself. Later, he'll have to try to remember to feign some outrage about it, see if he can get Shane flushed and stammering in self-defense.

After the world's shortest shower, he approaches the threshold to the basement stairs. The moment he crosses it might be the first time Ilya admits in a silent flicker of acknowledgement that he's been *lying* to himself about expecting to still be the same person, once this is all over.

Just like he's been lying to himself about not being changed by every kiss, every fuck, every goddamn *glance*, since the first time Ilya laid eyes on those gorgeous, stupid freckles.

Pretending like *this,* in particular, won't change him in some fundamental, irrevocable way he might come to regret, if it ruins him for good.

He takes the stairs two at a time on the way down.

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Shane needs to make sure the nest is *perfect*. He's never been quite so consumed by it before. His heat nests have never been built for anything but his own comfort, in the past. Even the nest in Ilya's bed when he was sick was made primarily with himself in mind, since he'd been too wrung out to worry overmuch about the alpha's preferences.

Now, however, especially with the bounty of perfect nesting materials drenched in Ilya's pheromones at his disposal, Shane is torn between two urges. The first is to *hurry*, get the nest done before Ilya gets back - like that'll somehow get him fucked faster, and he's been wet ever since he woke himself up moaning loudly in his sleep, dreaming about -

No, no, the *nest*. Shane needs to focus on ensuring the nest is perfect - he can worry about the rest when Ilya gets back.

That's the other urge, the one winning out, though every move he makes is frantic - to *fuss*.

He has a dresserful of his usual things to choose from - soft blankets and some of his own old clothes, stashed away here just for his heats, as well as nearly a dozen pillows in all kinds of shapes, colors, and textures. They were a ridiculous online retail therapy purchase he'd made when he was feeling especially sorry for himself during preheat two years ago, and now he's suddenly embarrassed that Rozanov will be seeing them.

But he still includes them as he pieces the nest together, settling each item with care, tucking corners of blankets under the oversized mattress, weaving Ilya's scent carefully throughout his own clean things. It's difficult for Shane not to second-guess every decision he makes, wondering if he ought to move a pair of sweatpants somewhere else or fold a blanket differently, thinking he can make the nest more appealing somehow through infinite tweaks.

And *that's* what it comes down to, what Shane is consumed by - not just wanting, but *needing* Ilya to find his stupid nest appealing.

This was a *thing* Shane had encountered In more than a few of the dozens of the heat-themed porn videos he skimmed through for research purposes. Near the beginning, the omega performer acted either all sexy and aroused or wide-eyed and sweet as they asked for the alpha's opinion on their nest. He'd assumed it was a weird alpha fetish thing, not something omegas actually felt compelled to do in real life.

Fuck.

He's aware that his heart is beating a little faster than usual, and the pumping of his jugular to keep up is a tangible drumbeat against his throat. While he's felt uncomfortably warm for days, the slow simmering of his blood has felt cranked up to a boil since this morning. Oddly, however, he's all of sudden barely breaking a sweat. Despite feeling like a sweaty and disgusting mess as he tossed and turned, struggling to get to sleep last night, right now Shane is only damp between his legs - just starting to soak through his boxer briefs, too, the only thing he's still wearing.

Ilya's voice comes from beyond the door to the stairway.

“Hollander! Shane? I am here! I am coming down the stairs now, okay? I am allowed? If I am not, tell me and I will stop, okay?”

For several seconds, Shane loses the capacity for rational thought as the sound and the scent of Ilya in the flesh hit him like an aphrodisiac. He feels himself grow more slick as his lower belly and hole both clench with raw need as he listens to bounding footsteps, and then a knock at the door.

Shane sits on the edge of the bed and tries to do his yoga breathing as his underwear grow steadily more wet. The haze of need which will reduce him his basest instinct hasn’t set in yet, which means he’s still capable of rational thought and the anxiety accompanying it.

Another knock. “Shane? Are you okay?”

Finally realizing he has to respond, Shane clears his throat nervously. “Uh - yeah! C-come in.”

As he opens one of the drawers beside the nest, he notices and tries to ignore how his hands are shaking as he grabs what he’s looking for, relieved he isn’t too far gone to have forgotten about it.

With one more deep breath to compose himself, Shane rises to his feet to meet Ilya in the middle of the room - in large part due to his eagerness for the other man’s touch, Shane resists the temptation to hide in the nest, instead.

Ilya greets him with pupils blown and nostrils flaring. “*Shane.*” He leaves his mouth open around the name as if to keep tasting the air around them. After a few steps into the room, he pauses, hesitating. He’s wearing gym shorts and nothing else, not even underwear, judging by the half-hard bulge Shane can see. The ends of his curls are wet; condensation glistens on sculpted shoulders and bulging pecs, his familiar necklace in its place between them. An expanse of bare skin stretched over powerful muscles, all Shane’s to *finally* fucking get to enjoy.

“*Ilya*,” Shane breathes, drawn to him like a moth to flame. He all but flings himself upon the alpha with no thought other than needing to get all that bare skin against his. As their chests collide, Ilya doesn’t stagger or flinch - just catches Shane around the waist to keep him there, bodies pressed together.

Ilya’s already purring, Shane realizes. Inaudible, but he feels the indistinct rumble in Ilya’s chest as Shane insistently exchanges their scents, rubbing the sides of their necks together. He himself, meanwhile - and only just now noticing - is humming happily in the back of his throat.

“And here I was going to behave, ask if I am yet allowed to touch you.” Ilya reaches between them to capture Shane’s chin between thumb and forefinger, looking intently into his eyes for a half-dozen heartbeats or so. Then his lips are on Shane’s, a warm press of mouths turned wet as Ilya slides his tongue between Shane’s teeth.

“It was so fucking annoying, not being able to,” Shane grumbles into Ilya’s mouth, breaking the kiss so he can nuzzle Ilya’s pulse instead. “Not wanting this is stupid as hell.” As he rubs the underside of his jaw into Ilya’s shoulder, he feels the alpha’s low chuckle vibrate through to the base of his own spine, making him squirm.

“For once we agree on something, Hollander. You are very stupid and annoying.”

The tenderness with which Ilya pets the soft insides of Shane’s forearms gives him goosebumps. The urge to bare his neck is almost overwhelming - and it reminds him.

“Though, um, there is this…I probably should’ve said sooner, but - “

“*Mmm*, what’s in your hand, sweetheart?” Ilya asks, distracted. He has already laced one set of their hands together and is encouragingly unfurling Shane’s other hand.

When he sees what’s in it, he freezes, and the hand holding Shane’s goes somewhat loose.

“It’s a heat collar,” Shane forces himself to say. Too nervous to look Ilya in the face, he stares down at the thick strip of black leather he’s holding, what he’d been so concerned about remembering while he’s still lucid enough to care. “To make sure you can’t…yeah.”

It’s too hard to speak the rest aloud. The collar is far from delicate - it’s sturdy, solid, and has a series of pea-sized buckles hanging from small straps at each end, intentionally annoying and finicky and difficult for fingers of any size, though particularly larger ones, to deal with. For someone in the throes of heat or rut, undoing the collar would be nearly impossible once it was in place.

That is, quite obviously, the point. A physical barrier which can only be removed by someone right enough in the head not to do or *ask for* something colossally, irrevocably stupid.

To make sure you can’t give me a mating bite.

Some aspect of Ilya’s scent which was building to a blazing bonfire instead begins to char.

“I…” Ilya trails off and takes a breath. Forces a hollow laugh. “Hollander, if you are so worried that I could - that I would *ever* - we talked about this, *da*? No bond bite, we agree.” His tone is stony.

And…*fuck*. Shane *knew* he was going to fuck this up, that there was no graceful way for him to introduce his intention to wear a heat collar that would be accepted with any degree of nonchalance. He knows collars worn by omegas expressly to keep an alpha from bonding them aren’t widely used nowadays outside of risky situations like heat sex with strangers.

Biting an omega in heat against their will, scarring their scent gland with a mate bond without their enthusiastic consent, is a taboo which only the *worst* kinds of alphas violate. Even rut isn’t considered an excuse, though some alphas may opt to wear a muzzle, if it’s something they’re *that* worried about - Shane’s research indicated this was rare, but somewhat common than heat collars. But, considering this was *his* issue, not Ilya’s, Shane would genuinely rather die than ever ask such a thing of the alpha.

A collar seemed like the easiest solution to his worries; he'd known the hardest part would be actually telling Ilya that, which is why Shane had kept putting it off. Of course, waiting until the very last moment to spring it on Ilya was just Shane fucking it up beyond the bare minimum. Maybe it would've been easier, if he'd been able to put the collar on himself when he was struggling to do so twenty minutes ago. But his hands were too sweaty for the clasps and staring at them for more than two minutes made his vision blur. That hadn't been a problem when he tried it on a week ago, after it arrived at his door in discreet packaging, though it had taken several painstaking minutes of squinting at the collar in the mirror as he fastened them.

Now the collar's weight is lead-heavy in Shane's hand. He still hasn't looked at Ilya, doesn't know if his gaze upon it is part of what's giving the collar its new weight.

"Ilya." Shane swallows and squeezes the alpha's hand. "This isn't…it's not that I don't trust you, but - "

"Is okay. Is your choice, I know. I should not…" Ilya lets out a frustrated exhale through his nose, grappling with the English.

His hand is only still in Shane's because Shane is hanging onto it. That's what Shane is staring at, their joined hands. He feels small - not the kind of small he's come to enjoy feeling, sometimes, in Ilya's arms. Pathetic small. Coward small. When he at long last forces himself to look up at Ilya, the alpha's expression is guarded and jaw tense as he stares down into Shane's face. Meeting his gaze makes the backs of Shane's eyes burn, and he has to avert them to stop himself from crying.

"I know you wouldn't," Shane says. "*Of course* you wouldn't. But we'll *both* be so out of it, and - and I'm just really worried about what could happen if - "

"Stop explaining. Is no problem. Better safe than sorry, yes? Would have brought muzzle if I knew."

"Shut up." Taking a step back, Shane drops Ilya's hand and puts his forearm over his face. He can't - it's so fucking hard to say what he *knows* he has to, the truth, so that Ilya stops wondering about what it is he must have done for Shane not to trust him with such an essential, vulnerable thing, despite being the one to ask him to share his heat. It's the last thing in the world Shane wants to admit to, but more than anything else he is compelled to repair the hard-won trust between them.

"I might…beg for it," he musters through gritted teeth, unable to hazard even a glance at Ilya as he waits in for the other man's uncertain reply.

"Yes, of course, is heat. And I have promised, is nothing to be - "

"Not that. I mean, also *that*, I am sure I will be begging for all of it, in the general sense, very soon but…" He sighs and runs a hand through his hair, where sweat is just starting to bead around his hairline, the nape of his neck. From his other hand, the collar dangles limply. "The *biting*. I…I'm afraid that - when I can't control myself - I'll *beg you* to bond-bite me."

In the lingering silence, Shane can't avoid looking at him anymore - at Ilya's expression, uncharacteristically strained.

Brow furrowed, the alpha huffs and curses in a spit of Russian. "I am…confused. By English. You are afraid of - wanting bite? That's…"

Shane is on the verge of whining, and he can feel his hamstrings starting to quake. He misses the warmth of Ilya's skin against his to a visceral degree. And he knows what he's saying sounds like nonsense without any further explanation. But honesty comes a little easier every second his oncoming heat loosens his tongue, flush rising in his cheeks. He licks his lips and stares at the wall behind Ilya's head, pitiful in tearing the words out of himself.

"I can't stop thinking about it when I touch myself and pretend it's you. I - fuck, Ilya - even when I try not to, I've been having dreams about it." Shane blinks back the tears prickling behind his eyes. "And it definitely means I'm gonna want you to do it to me while I'm in heat, I'm not going to be able to help it. And I *know* you won't want to, you'd *never* do it on purpose, but you'll be in rut, and - and if I'm *begging* for it, then…it's too much, it's too big of a risk."

They both know what would happen to Shane if he's ever given a mating bite by an alpha, on accident or otherwise. First and foremost, he'd be outed as omega. Not only would the mark itself be a giveaway to anyone who saw it, but the way his scent would change to scream *claimed* would be impossible to hide completely. Bite scars could be surgically removed, but dissipating a mate bond took many months of pharmaceutical intervention.

The topic was not one which ought to require significant pre-negotiation. They weren't doing this to *mate*, so they wouldn't. Their bodies would be too preoccupied trying to breed to be too concerned about doing anything else, so all Ilya really had to do was keep in the back of his mind that he could sink his teeth into any part of Shane except one. That Ilya wouldn't bite Shane's mating gland was simply a given.

Or it should've been. If not for Shane's recent *fixation*.

"I should've said something sooner," he says, wiping his eyes with the back of a hand and wrapping his arms around himself. "Maybe called the whole thing off. I feel like such a fucking freak. I don't even need to be in heat for the thought of your teeth in my neck to drive me *so fucking crazy*, and -"

Ilya cuts him off in fervent-sounding Russian, looking wild-eyed as he reaches out for Shane. Then he cuts himself off. "Can I touch you, please?" His voice nearly cracks around the question, accent thicker than usual.

Shane manages a tiny nod, and in less than an instant he's back in Ilya's arms, going just a little boneless against the breadth of the alpha's chest. He tucks his head into the crook of Ilya's neck, cheeks wet and wishing it wasn't too late to hide them.

He feels a nose and mouth against the top of his head, hears Ilya murmuring in more Russian. The acrid tinge of smothered smoke has faded from the alpha's scent.

Then Ilya's head dips to bestow a kiss upon Shane's mating gland, the tenderest brush of lips.

Shane's breath hitches. His cock, which had gone half-soft, perks up again, and he feels his hole gush with slick. He shudders, leans a little further into Ilya's body, letting his head fall back halfway.

At some point he realizes he can hear himself whimpering.

Then Ilya kisses his forehead. As he moves on for a kiss to Shane's mouth, he places his hand on the back of Shane's neck, squeezes so gently that the shift in pressure is almost imperceptible. Holding him just like that, Ilya tips their foreheads together, and Shane knows without being told that the alpha wants eye contact.

Slowly, Shane drags his gaze up from the crucifix on Ilya's chest, vision blurring as he forces himself to meet Ilya's eyes an inch away. Fingers comb through his hair. Ilya picks up his wrist, presses a kiss to its inside, and carefully removes the collar from Shane's grasp.

The collar. Shane had already briefly forgotten.

"If this is what you really think you need, then…thank you for telling me, *moy lyubimyy*. Never want you to be afraid to lose hockey because of me."

"Because of *me*." Shane isn't so far gone that he won't insist on that being the truth of it.

For a moment Ilya looks like he might argue, but he takes a deep breath in as he tests the leather's softness against the palm of his hand. "You need my help putting it on, *da*?"

Help me keep us both safe from how fiercely I want to keep you, be claimed by you, Shane thinks. Though all he says is: "Please."

Ilya kisses Shane's mating gland one last time, lingering a little longer to draw out how it makes Shane moan and tremble against him. Then he drapes the collar around Shane's neck, and Shane tells himself it feels like safety.

"Anything, for you."

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter will start off with Ilya's POV (trust me, making sure he is happy and cared for too is SO important to me). I hope the worldbuilding isn't TOO obviously contrived for silly angst reasons lol.

Thank you again for the many wonderful responses to the first installment and appreciate every single one. (I hope no one is offended I don't reply to comments, btw, it's because otherwise I'll never get any writing done but I really do treasure all of you who took the time.) Y'all really got me wanting to write this sequel immediately, and

being able to go back and reread your responses and excitement helped me get through all of the negative voices in my head that plague me most when writing. I hope this will live up to people's expectations!

Hit me up on twitter, I'm shy but always looking for fellow HR friends to yap with.

As usual, please let me know if there are any particular scenes or lines that you liked!! Thank you for reading! <3

Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

> Sorry for the extension into a chapter 3, but it had to be done for my own sanity because it turns out I do not have the mental stamina as a fic writer to crank out 20k+ words without posting to make sure what I'm writing is actually coherent to people? Idk I've never written a fic this long before and each chapter gets longer than the previous, though maybe more redundant too idk!! I appreciate everyone's patience and apologies for any mistakes (the more I write, the more there are going to be lol). <3

See the end of the chapter for more notes

As he kisses farewell to Shane's mating gland before wrapping the collar around his neck, Ilya tests the feel of the leather against his palm. Immediately, he wishes it were softer, though there's no point in dwelling now on all the things Ilya wants to fix for Shane but can't, all the ways he'd go back in time and pamper the omega properly, if he could. But he has *now*, the days ahead, walls without windows, a fully-stocked mini fridge, this collar which ought to be velvet-lined but isn't, and the two of them.

He turns Shane around, so the omega's back is to Ilya's front, still close together but with Ilya keeping a modicum of distance between their lower bodies. He needs to be capable of focusing, actually, on the annoying little buckles in the series of slim, criss-crossing straps which make up the collar's fastenings. It's difficult enough already with Shane smelling like caramelized sugar on a metallic spoon - almost like pure desire, with just enough of an underlying edge of anxiety to keep Ilya attentive to its existence. Shane bows his head without Ilya needing to ask, exposing the back of his neck so Ilya's hands have more room to work.

"Do you want to go to your nest?" Ilya asks him, keeping his voice low and gentle. "You can lay down while I finish this." He kisses a freckle on the back of Shane's neck that just happens to sit below the single buckle he's fastened thus far.

Without raising his head, Shane shakes it. "No, 'm good. I don't mind standing. Want to get this done with - " He gestures at his throat. "Before we get to the whole nest thing."

"*Mm*. Nest *thing*?" Another buckle down. Ilya finds the closest freckle to kiss.

"Yeah, you know - it's a whole thing." Shane shrugs, shooting Ilya a sheepish glance over his shoulder. "Making sure you like the nest."

Ilya's lips were already quirked upward in mild amusement; now his eyebrows raise in surprise to match. "I do not know of this thing. But I will like nest very much anyway, I am sure. Though…" Ilya kisses the next freckle, lingering this time to suck hard for a few

seconds upon the skin, letting Shane feel the brush of his teeth. "*Malen'kiy vor*, I think we have been robbed."

The gears turning in Shane's head are practically audible to Ilya's ears. Understanding, when it dawns, startles a laugh out of him, the sound of which has Ilya's smile going a little wider. He tucks that away to resume teasing Shane about, shortly, but first, Ilya is determined to discuss the collar just a little more. After all the agitation the thing has caused the both of them, he wants more than anything to reassure Shane - and himself - that this is a minor hurdle to be taken now in stride. Diminish its weight between them into nothingness.

He's just over halfway through the buckles, now, not forgetting to put his mouth on a freckle after each one done.

"How did you shop for this?" Ilya asks, keeping his tone light. In the delicacy of their current context and the omega's physiological state, he's pretty sure it would be a bad idea to attempt to extract any further explanation from Shane regarding the precise meaning of what he'd confessed to mere minutes ago. "Pet store?"

"Shut up." Shane's scoff carries with it the cadence of a reluctantly amused eyeroll. His elbow bumps Ilya's abs and stays there, unwilling to sacrifice even an inch of conquered skin-on-skin contact. "Sex store, actually. Online."

Talking about the collar doesn't seem to dampen Shane's mood, as long as Ilya isn't demonstrating any further upset, behavior-wise or in his scent. He prods ahead to continue indulging his curiosity.

"Were there many to pick from? Why this one?" Ilya refrains from expressing aloud that *he* would've personally selected something softer.

"Had good reviews, I guess. Seemed…durable. Isn't a stupid color or super weird looking. Or any weirder looking than it is by default, anyway." He leans his head back on Ilya's shoulder and kisses the bare neck in his immediate vicinity, seeming to temporarily forget about keeping his head bent.

"Only one more left, I just have to *see* it. Head down for another minute, *malysh*." Ilya nips his ear, and when Shane is quick to obey, he gives his waist an appreciative squeeze.

Once all the buckles are fastened - and yeah, Ilya's definitely not going to have the patience to undo a single goddamn one of those when he's in rut - he turns Shane around to face him. Before even looking at the collar around his neck, Ilya grips his jaw and kisses him, this time using his entire hand to cradle Shane's face. Ilya feels hands in his hair as Shane melts into him, humming into his mouth as he returns the kiss with double Ilya's urgency.

When their lips part, Shane tilts his head down to one side, breathing heavy and averting his gaze from Ilya's as Ilya finally really *looks* at him with the collar head-on, black leather unremarkable against his skin.

It helps that, in overall visual impact, it does look rather different than the collars Ilya is more accustomed to seeing. 'Conventional' omega collars, worn by mated omegas in public and

outside of heat, had grown steadily more unpopular across most of North America over the last several decades, mostly due to progress when it came to omega rights. They're still a much more common sight in Russia, however, a custom for which Ilya barely bothered to conceal his distaste. Such collars are by design somewhat slimmer than a heat collar, intended to accentuate a mating gland, sitting above or below it - and the scar left by an alpha - rather than to purposefully shield it. Symbol over function. Leather like this would often be used, though fine bands or chains made of silver or gold are frequently worn by bonded omegas among Ilya's family's social class. His mother had a delicate gold chain fastened around her neck the morning after her wedding to Ilya's father and died in it, was buried in it. The crucifix necklace of hers he inherited had never quite matched her collar regarding the makes of the chains and shades of gold, and Ilya always suspected she preferred the subtle clash, though she never remarked upon it aloud.

Ilya watches as Shane reaches up to give the collar an experimental tug with two fingers, the leather remaining snug. There's just the tiniest sliver of give permitted between the collar and Shane's neck to ensure it isn't too constricting without allowing fangs or fingertips to slide underneath. Shane seems satisfied with how it fits, anyway, though his gaze flits nervously back up at Ilya.

"Sorry, again, for springing this on you so last minute," Shane says, self-consciousness not having completely vanished just yet. "In case I wasn't making this weird and annoying enough already, now you have to deal with this." He waves at his neck but shows no other sign of embarrassment or retreat, flush high in his cheeks for the same reason his pupils are blown and he keeps leaning against Ilya and smelling sweeter by the second.

"Not weird to protect yourself." Ilya pats Shane's cheek and strokes his freckles with the pad of a thumb. "A little annoying you didn't tell me sooner, maybe." Then Ilya adds, as if the rest of Shane's confession accompanying the collar hadn't caused the very earth to shift under his feet: "Is no big deal. How bad you want me, very flattering, okay? It makes collar very sexy."

Although his stomach had dropped, when he first saw the collar Shane's hand. He felt, at first, a curdling rush of disappointment and shame at what he thought must either be the fracture of some fragile trust between them or the realization that he'd only fooled himself into believing such trust existed in the first place. He blamed Shane for it, a little, but mostly he blamed himself for being an idiot, and it was a fight to hang on tightly in restraint against the initial flush of anger which he could not and would not give way to in such a sensitive time and place.

Underlying Ilya's tension, too, was the unreasonable fear that Shane had somehow seen into his darkest, most illicit fantasies. Tantalizing flashes of fangs in flesh, blood in his mouth, and a bond forged deeper than any knot could go - thoughts which Ilya always banished without daring to indulge further, both out of guilt and to protect what little remained of his own damn sanity, where Shane was concerned.

But he trusted his self-control, when it came to something so vital. A muzzle had never even entered into consideration, let alone a heat collar, which were often viewed as borderline

barbaric. At Shane's behest, of course, he'd never *not* go along with it, albeit pretending the whole time like it wasn't wounding in some inescapable way.

That's what Ilya was steeling himself for when the rest of it tumbled out from behind Shane's lips, already kiss-red and glossy with spit. The teary confession had dangled Ilya in some extra seconds of suspense as he struggled to figure out what exactly Shane was saying about the *begging* and the *biting*. Once he processed the words, however, they were like lightning, with the belated thunder of meaning crashing louder and closer to home than anticipated.

Ilya couldn't take it any more, after that, chest full enough to burst. Once Shane was back in his arms and before taking the collar from his grasp, Ilya murmured a confession of his own into the omega's hair, in Russian, just to get something of the sentiment out for his own sake before it burned him up from the inside:

"*You can't just say you want my fangs in your neck so badly that it even haunts your sleep and expect me to keep pretending like I'm not in love with you. I love you, and it fucking terrifies me, but even if you never wear my mark, yours is in my heart already, forever.*"

Reminding himself of what the collar does mean and what it does not, Ilya finds the sight of it around Shane's neck now significantly easier to stomach. The beast in his chest is a greedier being to satiate, however, and looks at the collar buckled by his own hands around the omega's neck and only wants to growl *mine*. But in their current situation, it's probably for the best that his instinct doesn't recoil from it and is inclined to enjoy the tangible sign of *possession* instead.

He wants to pretend otherwise, play-act a better man than he is, as he trails his fingertips from Shane's chin and down the front of his throat, over the width of the collar to reach bare skin again and end at the hollow between his collarbones.

"Even though I say you're kitten to me sometimes, you're not a pet or a thing to me, Shane, *da*?" He worries the distinction he's attempting to draw is about as clear as mud. Maybe it would just be easier to say *I love you*, *I'm yours*, and in English this time, but he doesn't.

Shane laughs, a warm huff. "I know." Freely given, without a thought. His fingers toy with the curls on the nape of Ilya's neck. "Do you want to see the nest? I can show you now, if you want."

The room isn't that big. Ilya sees the nest over Shane's shoulder, in the far corner, mattress even larger than a typical king-size, set upon a sturdy, basic bedframe without a headboard, sitting up against the walls and about a foot above the floor.

"*Mm,* yes. Show me your nest, sweetheart, please."

The expression on Shane's face as he shuffles backwards until the backs of his knees hit the end of the bed, he and Ilya still clinging to one another, is a combination of eagerness and trepidation. Ilya relates, and for once he's probably doing a piss-poor job of hiding it, based on the dopey and nervous smile he can feel himself reflecting in return. It's difficult to think about anything other than putting his mouth back on Shane - somewhere, anywhere - taste more of the honeyed heat scent leaking out of his pores.

Not the only place he's leaking something *honey*-like from. Ilya has a hand on Shane's ass, still clad in underwear, can feel the wetness for himself through the fabric. He wants a taste of that, too.

Since the bed is bigger than Ilya's, so is the nest Shane has built in it, and considerably more lavish. There are multiple layers of blankets of different sizes and textures draped in imperfect alignment across the bed and the pillows lining it. Ilya can see the colorful rows of seams poking out on one side. He can't make out any of the pillows beneath the blankets, other than that they seem to be of various sizes, too, contributing to an overall sense of artful disarray which almost startles Ilya with how viscerally it pulls to him in invitation. The nest already smells as much like Ilya as it does like Shane, and as much as it pleases him to spy his own dirty clothes folded among the blankets and a few of Shane's older things, Ilya suppresses his smirk and pretends not to see them.

"Nest is beautiful, *moy kotenok*. Perfect, looks very cozy. Soft and good for cuddling. Fucking, too."

"Really?" The way Shane's face lights up with surprised delight in response to his stupid praise makes Ilya's heart feel like a warm bowl of soup.

"Would only be better if I still had present for you. I brought present for you, yes? Only I go to get it for you from my things, to give you for your nest, and - *poof* - gone. Only messy suitcase, no more present for my princess - "

Laughing, Shane finally cuts him off. "Alright, alright, shut up, I admit it."

"Admit what? Fancy cottage not so private after all, since thief broke in?"

"When I woke up this morning, all I wanted was more of your scent." Shane bumps his forehead against Ilya's. "I went by your room, and it was like - once my omega could smell what was in your bag, I just couldn't help myself." Fingertips curl into Ilya's back muscles and Shane kisses the corner of his mouth. "And I knew you brought them for me."

"Okay, I admit it, too. I bring nesting material for wholesome Canadian boy who turns out to be filthy criminal. Maybe I'll take back."

When Ilya pinches the meat of his ass, Shane yelps and lets out a giggle that turns into a moan as his groin presses up against Ilya's. He's as unguarded and unsparing in his sweetness as Ilya has ever had the privilege of seeing him. There are shades of Vegas in his drunken smile and how his half-lidded gaze keeps straying back to Ilya's mouth, though Ilya thinks back to his own alpha posturing in that shitty bathroom and - to his relief - can scarcely recognize himself.

"You weren't joking about the nest though, right?" Shane asks. "About it being…good, and stuff?"

"Shane Hollander is in heat, and instead of begging for me to fuck you, what, you are so greedy for trophy you want one for best nest of all time? I forgot to bring trophy, but you win." None of the other omegas Ilya has been with, in heat or otherwise, ever sought his

approval on their nests. Which is perfectly alright with Ilya - the nest is for the omega's comfort, not for him in any specific sense, and he's never been given a reason to want to complain regardless.

But earnestness with which Shane is looking at him makes Ilya's belly swoop, compels him to reiterate. "No joking, what I said before. Nest is perfect, comfy, cozy. Many pillows for bending you over, smells like both of us together already. You do wonderful job building nest, *malen'kiy vor*." *Little thief.* Ilya slips his other arm around Shane's waist to knead his ass with both hands as he noses behind his ear. "Maybe we get in now, *da*?"

…..

Shane is gold on the verge of going molten in Ilya's arms. It's amazing just what the alpha's presence is *doing* for Shane, right now, pheromones getting him warm and fuzzy all over in a way that somehow makes the fire pumping through his veins easier to bear than he'd imagined possible. A warmth to bask in that won't burn him.

By this point, in Shane's solo heats, the cramping would usually start, his body's last-ditch effort at begging him to find an alpha to fill him up and *soon*. He'd curl up beneath the many layers of his nest, smelling of nothing but his own neediness, alone, forcing steady, even breaths as he smothered his instinct's irrational panic.

There's not even the slightest trace of any of that now. Thanks to the onrush of heat hormones, even the unpleasant collar reveal and his fraught confession feel distant and immaterial, now that the thing is secure around his neck and Ilya is no longer displeased.

Ilya.

As tempting as it is to drag the alpha bodily into the nest, place him like a pillow right where Shane wants him and take what his hole is already wet and ready for, Shane isn't quite that desperate. *Yet*. Despite the eager moan he buries in Ilya's neck, licking his pulse, at the broad hands on his ass helping him grind his dick against the alpha's much larger one through their underwear.

To Ilya's suggestion, instead of replying, Shane peels himself off of the other man and drops onto the bed on all fours. From there, he crawls further into the nest, hazarding a shy glance over his shoulder because he wants to get a glimpse of Ilya watching him. Ilya's eyes are dark, hooded, fixed on Shane's ass, where Shane feels the slick-damp boxer briefs clinging to his crease.

"*Fuck*," Ilya mutters, quietly enough Shane nearly misses it.

He turns around and lets his legs fall open as he lounges back against the biggest pile of pillows at the head of the bed. At the other end stands Ilya, leaning forward, fists sinking into the blankets with knuckles white.

Waiting for a go-ahead from Shane, clearly. The first time they'd done this, in Ilya's bed, Shane had been mystified at Rozanov's insistence that he not enter the nest without Shane's permission. Now, Shane feels something akin to smugness flexing its claws in his chest. A

primal satisfaction at the *rightness* that he is the one with the power - at present, if not for much longer - alpha just outside the nest and at his mercy.

Like Shane will only yield for someone who has earned it. He can draw out Ilya's suffering just a little longer, make him earn it.

Shane rakes his gaze over the delicious chest and bicep muscles bunching above the edge of the nest. "Waiting for something, Rozanov?"

"Are you going to let me into your nest, *omega*?" His pronunciation of the endearment is more Russian than English, accent thickening around the syllables.

"Depends. You gonna give me your knot?"

"Hm, does not sound like begging yet to me."

Shane pulls off his boxer briefs and wads them into a ball, launches them at Ilya. Ilya catches them out of the air between his teeth, looking like a horny golden retriever as he grins widely at Shane through the underwear dangling out of his mouth. Without breaking Shane's gaze, he brings the underwear up to his nose with an exaggeratedly pleased inhale.

"Gross," Shane says, too breathless to sound like he means it. He relaxes further into the pillows, spreads his legs a little wider and watches as Ilya's eyes zero in on his flushing cock before dropping to his hole, the slick gleaming on the insides of his thighs.

"You're too cruel, and why? Smell so good, I just want to taste."

Self-imposed it might be, but the loss of Ilya's touch is already prickling Shane's skin. He squeezes his own pec and resists squirming needily.

"Fuck off. I know how fucking easy I'll be, soon…"

"Always, you are *always* so fucking easy for me. *Blyat,* look at you. What, you want I should beg first? Okay - I beg." The coiling tension of self-restraint reveals itself in popping forearm veins. Ilya licks his lips. "Please, Shane Hollander, let me into your nest. Let me taste you, and when you can't fucking stand it anymore I will fuck you and knot you so good, I will make sure you are ruined for anyone else."

"*Fuck*." It comes out of him in a breathy laugh. He's too aroused to care about what he says now. "As if I'm not already."

"*Hollander*," Ilya says through gritted teeth, voice low with warning.

Shane is just *so* fucking gone for him. Always easy is right.

"Get in the nest, Ilya. Need you so fucking bad."

The alpha pounces. Firm hands wrap around Shane's calves, tugging him halfway down the bed to meet Ilya where he's landed in the middle of the nest. Then Ilya's head dives down, capturing the head of Shane's cock in his mouth and sucking it aggressively clean.

Shane gasps, hands flying up to fist in Ilya's hair and hips jerking beneath the sudden burst of concentrated pleasure. "Holy fucking shit, *fuck*."

Ilya doesn't linger there for long, looking up at Shane as he trails wet, sloppy kisses lower, over his shaft and balls. Hands on the backs of Shane's legs, Ilya raises them to drape them over his shoulders as he bullies his face between Shane's thighs. From there, a slobbery tongue laps at the slick all around Shane's crease, pausing twice to bite hard into each asscheek. One of Ilya's arms holds Shane's pelvis in place, the other reaching up to grope blindly at his pecs. The heels of Shane's feet - and *shit*, he never took his goddamn socks off - are digging into Ilya's back.

"*Ilya* - shit, *fuck*. You, your mouth, it's…"

Loud. Ilya hums decadently as his tongue nudges closer and closer to Shane's hole, not missing a drop of the wetness oozing out of him. Shane's breath catches as his hips are hiked higher, hears himself whining at the overwhelming sensation of a hot and slippery mouth against his rim.

"*Vkusnyy, mmmm* - delicious, sweetheart, the best thing I have ever tasted."

Shane feels hands on his cheeks, spreading him open, Ilya's thumbs right on top of the imprints of his teeth. Then, open mouth and tongue right up against Shane's hole, the alpha begins *purring*. With a yelp, Shane's whole body shudders; he inadvertently kicks at the small of Ilya's back, and the purring only grows louder in response.

Every muscle trembles with vibration through his insides, lower belly growing taut. He feels so good he can't speak, can barely fucking breathe, hands still hanging on to Ilya's curls as if for dear life. But although the stimulation is already *so much*, it's not enough, not anywhere nearly enough. He's empty, so empty, even though his toes are curling and his own whiny panting is ringing in his ears, cock wet again all over his belly.

Yet when Shane feels the tip of a finger at his entrance alongside the tongue, evidently for Ilya to pry him open with so he can make his way easily inside Shane with both at once, he yanks on Ilya's hair and stops bucking against his mouth.

"Waitwait*wait*!"

Ilya pauses, kisses where Shane's leg meets his hip and raises his head. The entire bottom half of his face shines with slick, and between his brows is a concerned little furrow.

"I - I'm…" Shane starts, chest heaving while he recalls the ability to form words. He closes his eyes and lets head fall back against the pillows. "Don't want anything stretching me open before your dick."

He hears a sharp intake of breath from between his legs. *Feels* it, too, a hairsbreadth from his soaking rim. In case its cause is hesitation, Shane pats the side of Ilya's face and continues, desperation cracking his voice:

"I'm in heat. Fuck, I'm *made* for this, let me take it, *please*."

“Fucking - christ, Hollander, *Shane*, *blyat*, talk like that going to kill me before I even - are you begging yet?” He bites the inside of Shane’s thigh.

Shane doesn’t have room in his head anymore for their sexy game of foreplay one-upmanship, now that the heat haze has settled in, all inhibitions fled. All he knows is emptiness and *want*. Again he pulls on Ilya’s hair.

“Want you - get - fuck, *kiss me*, *please* -”

With a growl, Ilya surges up to oblige him, licking into Shane’s mouth and dragging their cocks together in the process. Ilya’s lips are more slippery against his than usual, kiss thick with the taste of Shane’s own sweetness.

“Need you,” he whispers into Ilya’s mouth.

“Tell me, *moy lyubimyy*.”

Shane’s body feels like it’s on fire, burning hotter everywhere the other man’s skin meets his, and all he wants to do is throw himself into the sun. “Need - need you to fuck me, alpha, fill me up - *please*, I *can’t* - “ He starts to roll over so he can get onto all fours, keep begging in a proper omega presentation pose, but instead finds himself pinned on his back with a heavy hand on his chest.

“*Nyet*.” Ilya kisses his cheek. Hands skate up the backs of Shane’s thighs to hitch them a little higher up over his shoulders and secure them there. “Later, I promise to take you like bitch. But for first knot, face to face, okay?”

Shane is *so* far beyond caring how he gets fucked or what position he ends up knotted in - Ilya could do just about *anything* to him right now and he’d take it happily and beg for more as long as it got him filled up with alpha dick. But Shane is still empty and Ilya is nodding at him, close enough for their noses to brush as Shane nods back, uncomprehending but desperate to agree with anything.

Then Ilya’s notched at his entrance, and Shane can’t exactly see it from this angle without craning his neck and losing eye contact with Ilya, but the alpha feels bigger than he ever has like this, tip pressing into Shane’s unstretched opening. Shane keens, pulse rabbiting in his throat as his head falls back against the pillows. Slow but unyielding, Ilya pushes into him with a wet-sounding thrust. Shane’s insides are a vice which gradually give way to the intrusion, welcoming it, until Ilya is finally buried to the hilt in him right where they both belong.

Shane blinks away the blur in his vision to see Ilya staring down at him, panting hard through gritted teeth. He’s speaking Russian again, interspersed with familiar English like *fuck* and *Shane* and *tight*.

The first time Shane took Rozanov inside of him like this, it had unravelled and unmade him in some stupid way, poetic and fuckdumb, though he’d never regretted it for a moment. But now, consumed by the frenzied need of his heat, it’s *worse* because it’s better, like Ilya is making him whole again, or on the very verge of it - not even a latex barrier separating them.

Ilya's cheeks are pink as he pauses for several seconds, after that, still looking into Shane's face, and breathing heavy and just about as deep inside him as he can possibly go. But all Shane can think about is *more*. He reaches up to clutch at Ilya's chest and shoulders as if to somehow merge their bodies into one, jerking his hips in a wordless plea.

"*Fuuuuuck*," Ilya groans, gaze falling between them. Then he starts thrusting. Slow, at first, arms around Shane's legs, setting a carefully controlled pace.

Every purposeful drag of thick cock punches a new noise out of him. There's only so much Shane can do in this position other than lie there and *take* however Ilya wants to give it to him. Shane ends up with his forearms wound around his own thighs and ankles almost beside his ears of his own volition, anyway, desperately contorting himself into nothing more than a vessel to be fucked into the bed and filled.

"*Ah, agh - unnff -* "

Ilya's weight does the rest of the work in keeping Shane folded in half as the alpha's thrusts begin to quicken; he lowers his head to capture some of the sounds Shane is making, mouths moving together in a filthy kiss. Shane could already feel the rhythmic smacking of hips against his ass - now he can hear it, too, along with how much *wetter* he sounds than usual, *fuck*, which he's well beyond too far gone to be grossed out by.

"Ilya*aa*," Shane mewls into the other man's mouth. "Alpha, *please*."

Ilya's grip on his thighs is hard enough to leave bruises behind as he fucks into Shane faster.

"Will you come soon, sweetheart? Do your trick for me, *da*?"

Shane shakes his head. Though Ilya is skillfully building him to a crest they're well-acquainted with and Shane's lower belly draws tighter and tighter with pleasure, he won't -

"*Can't,* alpha. Need you to breed me, can't come without a knot in me, *please*."

"Fuck, *Shane*."

Ilya kisses him again, hard enough for Shane to feel his teeth. For about a half-dozen more slapping thrusts, Ilya fucks him as punishingly as he ever has, folding Shane in half against the bed, growling into his mouth, squeezing his chest. When Shane feels the swell of a knot at his rim, his whole body shudders, and a fresh wave of slick squelches out of him with Ilya's final thrust.

"*Mmm - ah* - nnn*hmm*."

Shane's jaw works open and closed around a wordless, drawn-out cry as he clamps down on Ilya's rapidly expanding knot. The spurt of his cock between them as he comes is almost incidental, in comparison to the burning stretch of his insides. The overwhelming, inescapable pleasure of finally being *full*. Not just the knot, but the vaguely liquid warmth filling him to the brim, body spasming with every fresh burst of alpha cum and desperate to keep all of it.

Still moaning and with eyes rolling back, Shane wraps his arms around Ilya's neck and tries kissing anywhere he can - aimless, messy presses of his spit-wet mouth to Ilya's chin, his nose, his neck, the gorgeous little dip in the center of his upper lip. Ilya's moaning, too, and carefully shifting Shane's legs from his shoulders to the crooks of his elbows and then lower. And even though he can barely feel them, once Shane's legs are free, they go immediately around Ilya's waist, like it's even possible to draw their bodies any closer together, like Shane would crawl under the other man's skin, if he could.

"Ilya, *Ilya*," he mumbles, and against his lips he can feel the pounding of the pulse in the alpha's neck. In a sudden rush, the following words need to be out of him as desperately as he'd needed Ilya to be *in* him, just moments ago, and the dam holding them back splinters.

"I love you, I love you. Ilya, I love you so fucking much. I can't - I *need* - I have to *say* it, Ilya, I just - *I love you*."

He pauses, breathing ragged, eyes fluttering shut as his body milks the knot keeping him plugged up and occasionally sending another pump of heat shooting through the base of his pelvis.

Ilya's forehead comes to rest against his, both warm and damp with sweat. Without opening his eyes, Shane blindly seeks the alpha's mouth with his once more, only to find the pads of two fingertips pressed over his own lips. Without thinking, he draws the fingers partway into his mouth and hums, blinking dazedly up at Ilya through his eyelashes.

Shane's entire nervous system is afloat in the best soup of endorphins and other happy chemicals his brain has ever cooked up - but somewhere along the way, something in Ilya's expression has cracked open, making him look younger than usual, and so achingly vulnerable. In Shane's current state, when he's never felt so wonderfully *right* in his life, he can't comprehend why Ilya seems so stricken.

Around the fingers in his mouth, he makes a confused, questioning noise.

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Most of the blood in Ilya's body feels like it's in his dick; even though he isn't in rut yet, it's pretty difficult to think clearly when there's so much hot, delicious pressure locked tight around his knot and wringing every drop of pleasure out of him. It's so damn *wet* without a condom - warm and *wet* and squeezing him so damn *tight*.

It'd be easier if his rut would hurry up and start already, actually, relieve him of the burden of coherent *thought* at a time like this, let his instinct take responsibility and deal with the fallout later. He'd felt stirrings of it in his fangs and groin during the build-up to his climax, though they'd receded temporarily thanks to the preemptive satisfaction he is currently enjoying. Or was.

I love you, I love you. Ilya.

Maybe he's a fucking idiot for not being better prepared for this.

Ilya's heart is being yanked painfully in too many disparate directions. He just…he wants to have as much of *this* as he can get - Shane in his arms, heatdrunk and soft - without completely fucking it up. Because *of course* Ilya loves him, too, has said so in every way he can but one: plain English, words burning like shitty vodka in the back of his throat.

But it's also an inevitability that, in his heat haze, Shane's submission took deeper root than usual. Ilya watched it overtake the omega, after putting the collar on him, in the splayed out lines of his body, every syllable uttered with crackling neediness. His heat just makes him so *vulnerable*, and regardless of the physical strain Shane's body can and will take so beautifully throughout its duration - his headspace is *fragile*. And Ilya wants to protect him. Protect him both from Ilya's selfishness and his own heat-loosened tongue, because…

Hell, it isn't even that Ilya fears Shane might not mean it - he *knows* he means it, heat or no heat, can feel the undeniable truth of what pulses between them with sharp ends hooked in each of their hearts. And for all that Ilya feels unworthy of Shane's love, that doesn't make it any less true.

But for all that Shane is the last person to blurt out that kind of thing in the midst of his heat unless he meant it…he still might regret having said it out loud, later. Not that Ilya *wants* him to regret it, but he thinks maybe Shane deserves the *space* to regret it, if that's how Shane feels when his heat is over.

Ilya knows their situation is *complicated*, to put it mildly. He's aware, too, of all the ways in which it's worse for Shane than for him, thanks to the hockey of it all - everything they'd worked and bled for, their careers - and because of how the sport treated their differing designations.

None of it is fair to Shane, and Ilya isn't sure what he can do to fix any of it. So if Shane wants to take back admitting to loving him, later, that's something Ilya will swallow willingly if it will make the life of the man he loves a little more bearable.

So when it comes down to it, Ilya feels *selfish*, somehow, telling Shane that he loves him, too. More of a burden to him, in the long run. It will be easier for Shane to let go of him - the *smart, reasonable* thing for Shane to do - if Ilya keeps his fucking mouth shut.

The words burn worse than ever in the back of his throat, and Ilya only hesitates because he thinks Shane deserves better than to hear them from him now. He only put his fingers over Shane's mouth to stop the beautiful overflow of words, and the omega is so far under that all he's done is suck the digits between his swollen lips and moan, glassy brown eyes looking up at Ilya like he's some kind of god.

"You should not - maybe *I* - baby, your *heat*," Ilya says, a raw edge to his voice too jagged to be from sex alone. He can't find the words to tell Shane that all he's trying to do is protect him from giving in to what they both want for *Shane's* sake.

(Which is *stupid as hell* anyway, because why would Ilya even be here in the first place if he's so committed to 'protecting' Shane from the consequences of *them*?

It's beyond irrational and has nothing to do with his alpha instinct, the bone-deep way in which telling Shane that Ilya loves him, too, feels equivalent to pushing the other man off the precipice of a cliff.)

The humming around Ilya's fingers takes a grumbling turn, and Shane butts his forehead against the side of Ilya's, nuzzling his cheek. With some reluctance, Ilya lets his fingers slide out of Shane's mouth.

"What's wrong?" Shane asks, all softness and soothing, aside from the occasional hitch of breath which accompanied another squeeze of his hole around Ilya's knot. So Ilya's all the more surprised by the strength of the heatdrunk grip turning his chin so they're face to face again. He hadn't even realized he was avoiding Shane's gaze until confronted with the sight of it, glistening with unshed tears and pupils dark.

"It's just…fuck - " It's too difficult to find the English, so he shifts to Russian in a futile rush: "*If only you knew how precious your heart is, you would do better than to let me within arm's length.*" He dips his head to kiss the palm of the hand cradling his jaw before switching back to English. "How do you feel?"

"An*noyed*." Shane's head falls back to the pillow with a huff, though his limbs around Ilya don't loosen in the slightest. "Everything is soo*ooo* fucking good, but I can tell you're not. Because I said I love you?"

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There's a flash of something akin to panic in the widening of Ilya's eyes when Shane says it again, simply in the context of a question.

I love you.

"You are…is not that - *Shane.*"

Shane hates hearing how *afraid* his alpha sounds.

Forcing all of his worry and doubt to recede, it's the deluge of happy heat hormones unlocked in him by Ilya's knot that have given Shane more clarity than he's had in months, the capacity to be honest not only with Ilya, but with himself. Thanks to those same hormones, it doesn't even occur to Shane to be devastated that Ilya isn't saying the same thing back or fear his feelings are not reciprocated. Shane is a little more at home in his body whenever he's with Ilya, and at this particular moment, he's never been more at home with his instinct, too.

And Shane's instinct just thinks his alpha is an annoying idiot who he still very much loves. He's still holding on to Ilya's jaw, their noses touching.

"What - because I'm a stupid, soft omega and I'm in heat, it means I'm too fucking *dickmatized* to know what I'm talking about? I…it'd be easier if I hated you, but I don't, I *love* you, asshole." Swallowing the lump in the back of his throat, Shane kisses the bow of Ilya's upper lip and continues against his mouth. "And I'm not gonna take it back. You can't make me."

He punctuates the statement by tightening his legs around Ilya's waist, inadvertently jostling the knot inside him and making them both groan.

"Shane, *moy lyubimyy*, you win, you always win." Ilya's breathing shakes, but the corners of lips have lifted - almost like laughing. "*Ya tebya lyublyu* - I love you, in Russian. *Ya tebya lyublyu*, have told you so already." He turns his head to kiss Shane's fingers.

"I think I felt it, anyway, or my omega did, at some point. I don't know." The backs of his eyes are suddenly burning.

"Mm. Have not tried hard to hide it lately."

Big hands squeeze Shane's thighs, and then Ilya's mouth drops to his again, and after a few moments, the purring in his chest kicks up. Shane realizes then how careful Ilya's been above him, braced on knees and elbows to keep his full weight from bearing down on Shane, especially his filled-up and sensitive lower belly.

Fuck, Shane loves him, loves him so much. He grinds his pelvis upward just to really *feel* Ilya in him, including the extra pressure below his ab muscles. Then, with effort, he shifts the angle of his upper body upon the pillows behind him to better accommodate Ilya atop him, and gestures with his elbow at a thick cushion on one side of the nest.

"Grab that, and - *nhh* - put it under my low back like - *mhm* - good, yeah." Shane nods as he scritches the curls at the nape of Ilya's neck, ensuring they're re-situated so that Ilya can relax most of the tension in his muscles without worrying about Shane's discomfort. "Are you good?" And because he's heatdrunk and can't help himself, before Ilya can even answer: "I love you, I *do*." He kisses Ilya's forehead.

"*Mm*. I love you, too. More than I know what to do with, most of the time." Ilya kisses his nose, catches each one of Shane's ankles to finally strip off his stupid socks and toss them to the side. Draped over Shane like he is now, he's a burly and sweat-damp weighted blanket, tears in the corners of his eyes.

He holds Ilya as closely as he can, after that, and the purr vibrating through him and the scent of his alpha's cinnamon and campfire contentment give Shane the rest of the assurance he's looking for.

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The sticky mess of their combined fluids leaks out copiously around Ilya's softened cock from where it's remained inside of Shane. By the time his knot has gone down enough for him to carefully disengage the interlocking of their bodies, Shane dozes, long and dark lashes fanned out beneath his shuttered eyes, breathing even. Each of them will need their rest whenever they can get it, so Ilya keeps his movements slow and cautious to avoid disturbing the other man's light sleep.

Watching the almost-closing of the omega's reddened rim as he withdraws his cock, however, and the gush of cum and slick which follows, Ilya can't contain the soft rumble of a possessive growl.

Mine.

He can't fathom not dedicating the rest of his life to keeping *this*.

Then he leans down to lick the exposed skin above Shane's covered mating gland, taste their combined sweat and mingling scents, alpha musk and omega sweetness.

Without opening his eyes, Shane only tilts his head a little further to the side, the hint of an encouraging sound in the back of his throat.

The encroaching pull of Ilya's rut pulses in his balls - useless, for now, having been so recently emptied. But it won't be much longer.

Peeling himself away from Shane and out of the nest is a tangible ache in Ilya's chest, one which grows stronger with every inch of distance between them. He grits his jaw and rummages through the mini fridge and the cupboard next to it as quickly as he can. After loading up with an armful of assorted items and a bag of jerky between his teeth, he hurries back to the nest and sets his haul down right beside it, in easy reach. The ache in his chest dissipates as he climbs back into the nest behind Shane, burying his nose in the side of the omega's neck and wrapping his arms around the ridiculously sexy curve of his waist to pull his back in close to Ilya's front.

Shane hums happily and wiggles his ass against Ilya's dick with a sleepy smile over his shoulder. "G'nna knot me again, alpha?"

The question startles a low laugh out of him. "Already? *Nyet*, I don't think so, *kotenok*." Luckily there's no fresh spike of lust in the air to tell him the omega really needs it - yet. Ilya hauls them both upright against the pillows, ignores the mess still leaking out of Shane's hole, sticky and growing tackier by the second between their tangled lower bodies. "We sleep or eat, when we are not fucking, don't forget. Drink, too. Here." He cracks the lid on a blue Gatorade, plastic refreshingly cold against his fingers, and holds the bottle up to Shane's mouth.

Shane tips his head back and takes several long gulps, throat bobbing underneath the collar.

"You want ginger ale, too?"

"Nah, thanks, I'm good," Shane says. Some drops of Gatorade get lost along the way, end up in pale blue rivulets down his chin. Before he can wipe his face with the back of a hand, Ilya beats him to it with a warm downward swipe of his mouth from the underside of Shane's bottom lip to the hollow between his collarbones, accustoming his tongue to the taste of leather in his trajectory.

Nudging the bottle against Shane's lips again, Ilya gets him to take another couple of swallows, then finally drinks from it himself. The omega's spit left on the plastic rim isn't nearly as sweet as direct from the source, but it reminds Ilya of sharing his water bottle on the floor of that hotel gym, both of them sweat-drenched, soles of their shoes almost-not-quite touching and eyes full of one another.

Reminds him of that initial prickling of primal satisfaction behind his ribcage as, after telling Hollander to drink from his water bottle, he'd watched him obey. *More*, he'd encouraged, and again Shane obeyed without question. He hadn't known Shane was an omega yet, and it honestly didn't matter. It wasn't the obedience alone which did it, either, though that was part of it, of course - it was that Shane *needed* the water, since he hadn't remembered to bring his own, and Ilya preened inside at being the one to fulfill even so simple a need.

Next Ilya unwraps a chocolate peanut butter protein bar and breaks it into pieces, feeding it to Shane bite by indolent bite. He's able to get Shane to eat half of a second one, too, though Ilya finishes the rest of it off as Shane's eyes slide shut and he rests his head on Ilya's chest, nuzzling between his pecs. Ilya feels his own heart beat a little faster when Shane very carefully straightens the gold chain askew beside his cheek.

"So when are you gonna fuck me again?" he mumbles, looking up at Ilya and drawing lazy circles on his bicep. (And maybe Ilya flexes it a little extra, hopes the omega appreciates the swell of muscle under his fingertips.)

"Greedy. Do you want it now, really?" Ilya brushes two fingers between Shane's cheeks, against his sloppy hole.

"Mmmm, it's not really want-*want* yet, but more like I wouldn't mind it, keeping you in me forever. Feels go*ood*."

Ilya resists the urge to push his fingers into him. They have days of this ahead of them and have to pace themselves accordingly. Instead, he pats Shane's flank, tries not to let himself dwell on what the temptation of an actual *forever* looks like.

"I fuck you again when you're almost begging for it, baby. Not to be mean. It's to be nice to your pretty hole. Do not want to ruin it before your heat is over, *da?*"

Shane lets out a scandalized giggle with a strong note of offense, retaliates by tugging at one of Ilya's nipples with his teeth. "Fuck you."

"Okay, we try that, too, if you insist."

"*Ugh*, no."

"Aww, but maybe it's my favorite when I'm rutting, I am very modern alpha, you know?"

Shane's pretty pink mouth twists into a pout, the shape of which is definitely in Ilya's top five favorites his mouth can make. It means Ilya just *has* to kiss him one more time before they drift off together for a brief nap, murmuring *ya tebya lyublyu* and then - more bravely - *I love you* - right up against that gorgeous pout.

In return, Shane sighs, "*Fuck*, I really love you, too," into Ilya's mouth.

Every fresh taste of the words on his tongue hooks Ilya more and more, headier than the deepest pulls of nicotine into his lungs.

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Shane wakes to a furnace of flesh molded along his spine, draped in a heavy embrace with his feet tucked between a pair of brawny, hair-covered calves. A hot puff of breath ghosts behind the shell of his ear every several heartbeats in an easy and familiar rhythm.

There, feeling smaller than usual and also probably the safest - the most *protected* - he ever has in his life, Shane doesn't have a single thought in his head for anything outside the bounds of the nest, not even their own existence beyond their physical bodies and skin contact and the perfect blanket of their scents.

(Later, when he's capable of remembering their names again, he'll reflect on the precious, minor intimacy that is knowing Ilya can purr when he's half-asleep but not when he's fully asleep, having listened to his rumbling peter off into a series of low snores before reaching this quieter state of slumber.

The precious, minor heartache of not being able to bottle up the sounds to lull himself to sleep with always.)

But right now, more than anything else, Shane's hindbrain is acutely aware of the length of a thick, hard cock slippery between his asscheeks. He *wants* it, immediately, more than anything, fantasizing about exactly how it'll sit in his guts at this angle, how deep into his belly it'll reach based on where the tip of it currently rests on his lower back. As he falls into a state between drowsing and daydream, he fantasizes, too, about being taken from behind just like this while truly asleep, either eased or slammed into waking by sheer fullness alone.

With his eyes still closed, Shane wiggles his ass against the body behind him. When it remains unmoving, other than the continued slow rising and falling of the chest against Shane's back, he huffs and tries again, more insistently, needy little circles of his hips he's pretending aren't with any specific goal in mind despite their shameless backward tilt.

It's *impractical* to get the damn thing inside of him, like this, regardless of how wet and open and ready he is, but he's too heatdrunk not to try, and there's not a trace of a twitch in any of the muscles plastered to his.

The only warning Shane gets is the hitch in an exhalation against his ear.

In one forceful and elegant movement, he's rolled onto his belly and held there by the full weight of the alpha at his back.

Shane yelps.

Big hands encircle his forearms on either side of his head, pinning them to the nest. Shane's first instinct, naturally, is to fight the grip; it's less than two seconds before he realizes his strength is useless against the other's, at least in this position, and for some reason the knowledge makes him go boneless.

Ilya's usual smell of pine and woodsmoke is almost undetectable beneath the veritable fog of musk, amber and earthy, by far the strongest any pure alpha scent has ever been in Shane's nostrils. Different enough to be nearly unrecognizable, though Shane doesn't think a world

exists in which his body doesn't clock Ilya's scent in an instant, no matter how changed due to hormones or circumstance.

"*Omega*," Ilya snarls, teeth sharp in Shane's shoulder blade.

Shuddering, Shane tilts his head with a whimper. "Alpha…?"

Every wet smack of Ilya's lips up the back of Shane's neck is accompanied by a nip of his teeth. Without meaning to, Shane bucks his hips against the mattress, enjoying the friction against his cock too much to help himself. When they rock back up, he can still feel what he *really* wants pressed up against his backside, and he whimpers a little more hopefully.

"Fuck, *Shane*. *Ty malen'kiy, provornyy koyot.* It is - um, *shit*…you are like horny little beast dog, I don't know - so slutty and desperate and sexy. It's okay, omega, going to take care of you, *da*?"

He releases Shane's forearms, slowly dragging broad, calloused hands over Shane's upper arms, shoulders, the tapering of his back from wide to narrow. They come to land on Shane's hips, framing his ass, and begin to tug him upward.

"Hands and knees, come on, *present*, pretty thing. Show your alpha what he's getting." A flat palm lands with a thud on one of Shane's asscheeks, firmer than a tap but not a slap with any real force behind it, either, just gravity and the familiar surface area of Ilya's hand.

With a moan, Shane complies on shaky limbs. Thumbs fit themselves almost proprietarily in the dimples at the small of his back, and the pair of knees between his own nudges Shane's legs open a little wider.

Then - on a slow inhale, because he's done too much yoga for cow pose not to be embedded in his cardiovascular memory - Shane arches his back, deeply as he can. Due to his heat, he's too far gone to have an ounce of inhibition about it like he otherwise would, not only putting himself in a submissive position meant for omegas to show off for whoever is about to breed them, but putting unabashed *effort* into it, too.

As his neck relaxes, Shane finally steals a look at Ilya over his shoulder. The other man is on his knees, a picture of barely restrained control, with bicep veins popping and ridges of upper body muscle which more than ever look like Shane could scale with his teeth. All that pent-up strength is being stored for later, somewhere - Shane knows he's only getting a hint of it, when Ilya squeezes his hips, once, hard enough to bruise.

In response, his own hole clenches down around nothing, and a fresh gush of slick begins to drip out of him onto the bed.

Ilya's eyes, pupils big with a thin ring of hazel, travel from the arch of Shane's back to the wet place between his asscheeks. Without a word, he slides two fingers into him, and Shane's head drops entirely as he shivers around them.

"*Nnhh*."

The shivering only intensifies a few seconds later, after Ilya has pulled the fingers out of him, utterly frictionless, leaving Shane emptier and more exposed-feeling than before.

From the sound of it, Ilya - *fuck* - he's got to be sucking or licking his fingers clean, noisy and lewd about it.

"Fucking - *hell*." Shane drops to his elbows, only dipping his back more, pushing his ass further into Ilya. Then his hole is on the receiving end of an open-mouthed, tongue-filled kiss, more slippery stimulation making all his muscles quiver.

"Nnn*gaahh*."

Ilya hums, and, with one more squeeze of Shane's hips, pulls back.

Another not-quite-hit leaves Shane's other asscheek not-quite-stinging.

"Not fair you taste so good when all I want is - fuck…" Ilya's low-pitched rambling switches to a stream of Russian, the only distinct word of which Shane registers, distantly - thanks to the effort he put in to commit about a half-dozen sex-related Russian vocabulary words to memory - is *razmnozhat'sya*.

Breed.

The tip of Ilya's cock is at his entrance. Shane braces himself, bites his bottom lip.

"…Need to be inside you, sweetheart. You need it too, *da*? Show me. What you try before."

"What?" The most thought he's put into a syllable since waking, Shane's voice cracks around it in confusion. He glances over his shoulder again, and Ilya is still just…kneeling there, except now he's got his dick in one hand, holding it between Shane's cheeks.

Transfixed as Ilya is by the place their bodies are on the verge of joining, he catches Shane looking at him, anyway, and gives him a smirk that bares his teeth.

"This is what you were trying to take, yes?" He slaps the head of his cock on Shane's hole and Shane feels his whole lower body twitch. "Take it."

With a whiny exhale, Shane drops his head into the mattress, nodding, and turns his head to one side. The hand still on his hip doesn't offer any encouragement or resistance, just holding him, a point of contact, other making Shane do all the work as he starts easing his hips backwards.

It's an easy stretch for his hole now. Probably the least effort it's ever been, though no less satisfying, wet and fucked open and knotted raw once already. It'll only get easier from here on out, too. The knowledge gets his thighs quaking a little harder. Gasping, he fists his hands in the bedding, completes the process of spearing himself on Ilya's cock from behind on knees and elbows.

Slick trickles down his inner thighs.

Ilya's panting is even louder than Shane's own in his ears, as he bottoms out.

"*Khoroshiy mal'chik.* Good boy."

An admiring hand runs down the middle of Shane's back, and he arches into it, breathing shallow and desperate, incapable of deciding whether it would be better to move or stay impaled on all fours like this forever.

"*Hh..nnghh* - alpha*aa*." Shane shifts on his knees until the hand still on his hip squeezes hard again to keep him still.

Then Ilya is leaning over his back again, a warm and manageable weight, shifting the sparks of pleasure in Shane's insides. He kisses the nape of Shane's neck and behind his ear. "The best, most perfect hole, taking my dick so pretty. Going to fuck you now, omega. Ready?"

Swallowing, Shane nods into the bed.

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Ilya nibbles Shane's earlobe. Then he heaves his own upper body back up, grinding his pelvis forward into the incredible wet heat of the other man's insides clenching around his cock.

Even with a condom on, the very first time he'd been inside Shane was a goddamn revelation. But nothing prepared Ilya for how new and hot and *right* it felt to be able to take him now without. Skin on skin, flesh to flesh, freedom thoughtless and primal. He was glad Shane hadn't wanted him to last long, earlier.

But now Ilya's rut is settling in, and the beast usually trapped behind his ribcage, loose, intends to do better. Fuck the squirming prey he's caught on his cock into proper submission, breed him until he can't move, until he's so full he's crying with it.

This is where you belong, Ilya thought, smug, watching - *feeling* - Shane work his ass back onto his cock without an ounce of hesitation, the greedy suction of his body made for Ilya's.

Never has his rut felt so intense and all-encompassing before. Shane's pheromones invade his senses, spark more than desperation for a hole to knot. A desire to consume, *possess.* He doesn't know if it's Shane specifically or because Ilya's never rutted with an omega in heat until now, some combination of the two.

(And, it occurs to him later, maybe it doesn't matter either way, especially if - like he really wants - he never spends his rut with anyone other than Shane Hollander ever again.

Ilya only dreams he can be so fucking lucky.)

He snaps his hips forward with a groan. Though he's anything but gentle about it, Shane's limbs melt into the mattress, a soft and decadent moan punched out of him.

Ilya pauses to stuff a few pillows under Shane's pelvis. Then - another snap of his hips.

"Mn*ngh!*"

“Good boy. Just like this, *da*? Stay there and take me.”

The pace he sets is ruthless, after that, with Shane bent over the pillows on his knees, face and shoulders pitched forward into the nest. Every thrust of Ilya’s hips fucks a new noise out of the man beneath him, and the harder Ilya fucks him, the louder Shane gets. One of his hands on Shane’s hip moves, sliding up the smooth skin of his back, every divot in his spine, pushing him deeper into the bed.

“Mm - *hhmm* - *fuck*, Ilya - “

It’s instinctual, the trust Ilya has in himself, his own strength, the omega body under his to communicate what it needs and any strain beyond what’s pleasurable. He can tell from the desperate dip in his back and how he’s starting to practically *yowl* that Shane doesn’t want him to let up. Ilya can hear his own low grunting, too, molars grinding, growl rumbling in the base of his throat.

“*Ngh* - nnghh - *good omega*, going to ruin you -”

The hammering of his hips quickens against Shane’s plush ass.

“I need - I *need* - “ Head turned to one side, Shane’s mouth is a red slash, open and whining, his eyes rolling back:

“You won’t get my knot until I’m finished with you, *malysh*,” Ilya tells him, breathing heavy; at the same time Shane finds words again:

“*Mate* me, alpha, give me your bite, *please*.”

Ilya, of course, was aware of this potential. The collar itself, too, served as an ever-present reminder, albeit one which had faded to the back of his mind, after it was on and Shane’s heat began in earnest.

But for the beast now wearing Ilya’s skin, the plea shifts the world on its axis. Permission granted for something he was pretending his fangs hadn’t ached for all along. The beautiful, begging creature tightening helplessly around him is *his*, belongs to *him*. A claim deeper than skin and sex, but which would through both be wrought permanent.

Never before has Ilya’s instinct so craved the coppery taste of blood in his mouth.

…..

And Shane - he just *can’t fucking help it*. Though he was at one point extremely cognizant of all the reasons *not* to do this, how can he stop himself? When he has the sexiest and strongest alpha in the world fucking him into the stratosphere, who Shane is so full of *love* for he thinks he might burst with it - *is* bursting with it, seams ripped and impossible pleas spilling out. Nothing else could possibly matter more than keeping this.

“Want you to bite me, alpha - bite me, *mate* me, *please*,” he begs. “Fuck - I need it, your mate-bite, alpha, please, *need* it!”

…..

Leather splits his palm in half, where Ilya's hand moves up to the back of Shane's neck. Without a stutter in the forceful rhythm of his hips, he grits his teeth, musters all the deliberate caution he can into that hand so as not to scruff or choke him, and presses his thumb into Shane's mating gland, right through the collar on one side of his neck.

Shane keens, head listing further to the side, and his insides clamp down hard enough to finally slow Ilya momentarily. The mating gland is more sensitive to his touch now even through the leather than any of the previous handful of times he teased at it directly. Ilya experiments with rhythm and pressure as he keeps massaging the gland with his thumb, feeling every tiny corresponding spasm of Shane's hole he gets in response, a magic button connected to the omega's pleasure.

For about a minute, breathing harder through his nose and teeth, Ilya is able to keep fucking Shane like that, a little slower, more uneven - without any more begging. At least until Shane seems to realize that's all he's being given, and the noises coming out of him take on a forlorn edge. It must be the desperation which helps him find words again.

"Alpha, *Ilya*, come on! Gimme your fucking *teeth*."

Shane preempts Ilya's next thrust by shoving his ass back onto his cock in a fit of frustration. Without thinking - *provoked* - Ilya's hand flexes, squeezing the back of the omega's neck hard enough to, briefly, make his gorgeous body turn to mush onto the pillows, hole flooding with another wave of slick.

(Thankfully, scruffing was something else they'd discussed in advance, and there had been zero hesitation, only flustered laughter in Shane's tone when he granted Ilya blanket permission to do as he wished.

"I know you won't do it to me in a way that I won't really, really like. Honestly, Ilya, I trust *you - there's probably nothing you could do or would ever do that I won't be totally crazy about."*

"Yes, because you will be in heat."

"…Yeah.")

Ilya releases the hold on his neck entirely and leans over close enough that his necklace, glimmering gold, bounces on Shane's back. Mouth to his ear, Ilya growls, "You get only." He slowly withdraws his cock until the tip is barely inside the other man. "What I give you." Punctuated by another brutal thrust into Shane's pliant body.

Now that his pretty face is back in kissing range, of course, Ilya has to indulge himself, first pressing his lips to a flushed cheek, the corner of an open mouth. There's a thready, unending whine in the back of his throat, neediness and pleasure combined. Ilya can smell how much Shane is enjoying this, fleeting scruff included, and otherwise tries to force himself to ignore the sour tinge of desperation beginning to creep into his heady heat scent.

Shane's mouth is still slack; Ilya takes his chin in one hand, sucks for a few moments on his lolling tongue to taste the sounds he's making. Pushes three fingers into his mouth until they're wet enough along with the precum dripping onto the pillows for Ilya to jerk Shane's cock with, ignored up to this point.

Ilya can tell from the pressure building at the base of his own cock that he won't last much longer, instinct eager for the first knot of his rut, to breed a hot and willing hole, claim the other man from the inside out. Wants, too, to overwhelm the omega with enough pleasure to drive the hint of sour from his scent, make him forget about the stupid shit he's begging for, forget how words work completely. Ilya will give Shane everything he can of the world and of himself - fuck him, knot him, *love* him, purr while feeding him from hand - within the realm of what counts as possible.

Sweat gleams on the nape of Shane's neck, and Ilya's tongue, fangs pricking at its rear, catches the edge of the collar as he tastes it.

His accent thickens, but he makes the effort in English, words for Shane as much as for himself. "*Nngh* - give you what you need, omega. Fill you up with my cum, breed you full of our pups - *mine*."

In response, Shane's voice is half-slurred and half-muffled into the bed, barely audible, a fraying plea.

"*Alpha*...promise I'll be good - *mm* - please just, *your bite*. Wanna be *yours*."

And - *fuck*, Ilya's self-restraint has already been hacked to the roots, but this, finally, slices him clean through. The idea that Shane, in his heat haze, is promising to be *good*, like - *shit*, like Ilya's bite, like *Ilya*, is something Shane's hindbrain has convinced him he can have if only he earns it.

Of course Ilya has to prove him otherwise.

All else in Ilya's head is crowded out by the desperate *need* to give the omega what he wants - what they *both* want, and to *show* Shane just how fucking *badly* he's wanted, how perfect he is, how much he is loved and the fierce desire with which Ilya wants to keep him. Last tether to reality gone, Ilya's instinct wonders why the hell he hasn't staked his claim already.

With a low grunt, hips grinding forward, he finally gives in and tries.

Instead of sinking into flesh, however - as intended, his fangs meet the collar. Snarling, he struggles to uselessly tug at the leather as it grows soaked with his drool, teeth scraping the skin around it.

Shane shuts his eyes but doesn't flinch. The dramatic curve of his neck suggests he'd bare it even further to Ilya if he physically could. "*Mmmm*, alpha, *fuck*, please…"

Ilya's jaw snaps in tandem with his hips. The Russian and English muddle more and more as his knot begins to swell and Shane tightens around him.

“Shane, *yebat - moy omega* - mine, *mine*.”

Mine.

Mate.

Bite.

One last thrust, and Ilya’s knot bursts at the same time he buries his fangs in Shane’s neck, an inch above where they both want them.

Shane is coming, too, with a frantic shout, back arching and body growing taut beneath Ilya’s, every fresh pulse of cum making him shudder.

Floating on the mutual current of pleasure made up of sweat-slick skin and heaving breaths and Shane’s hole squeezing him dry, time passes in a fog of pleasant pheromones. Ilya swipes his tongue over where his teeth pierced skin, purring through the blood in his mouth, until the realization of what he’s just done - as well as *failed* at doing - settles like broken glass in the pit of his belly.

…..

Shane’s hands beside his head are limp, after spending so much time clutched in the blankets. Every beat of his heart sends a thrum of syrupy pleasure through him as its racing rhythm begins to slow. The pain in his neck, while sharp, is as minor of a discomfort as the puddle of drool under his cheek.

Though something doesn’t seem right, Shane can’t pinpoint exactly what or why, other than the vague sense of both disappointment and relief for the collar which sits atop his mating gland - rubbed a little raw and sore, but unbitten - just below the throbbing wound on his neck.

“Ilya,” he mumbles, when he notices at some point that the purring against his back has stopped.

He hears a heavy, almost mournful sound of acknowledgment, and Ilya starts to gingerly maneuver them out of the awkward position into a slightly more comfortable one on their sides.

The alpha’s scent is changing, Shane realizes, albeit somewhat dazedly. And it’s far harsher than the anxiety which had lurked at its edges when Shane declared his love after knot number one. More akin to when he’d first shown Ilya the collar, but even worse, like an acrid pile of ashes.

”Ilya?”

Ilya spoons up behind him by virtue of how they’re stuck together, but he’s not cuddling him like he usually does, none of the shameless clinging or effortless melding of limbs. He’s not *not* cuddling Shane - it’s pretty much impossible not to, considering how intimately they’re connected, and Ilya’s arms are encircling him, their bodies pressed together. The pieces are

right, but they aren't clicking together how they ought to be, Ilya holding himself stiffly, like he's inserting imaginary space between every inch of skin on skin he should be basking in instead.

Shane hates suddenly that he's trapped like this with his back to Ilya, can't turn around and cradle the other man's face in his hands, pepper it with kisses.

"Ilya…can you tell me what's wrong?" he asks, forcing his wobbly mouth to work properly, though he can't yet summon the urgency into his tone he'd like.

It gets him a squeeze from Ilya, at least, and Shane encouragingly rubs the forearms around his waist. Then he hears a choked-off, hiccup-like noise in the back of Ilya's throat. It takes a few seconds for Shane's brain to catch up and register it for what it is - a *sob*.

Ilya is *crying*. Or otherwise struggling very hard not to, from the sound of it. And it would align with the abrupt downturn in his scent, too, only it takes Shane just a little while longer to puzzle out its most likely cause, the literal pain in his neck.

"*Ilya*, I - it's *okay*. It's not a *real* bite, no big deal." He rubs his wrists against Ilya's in an attempt to communicate reassurance through the scent glands there.

"Your neck, *blyat*, it's - *Shane* - " On his name, Ilya's voice cracks, and Shane *knows* he's crying now, the alpha defeated by the sobs rising in his chest, which Shane feels beginning to tremble up against his back. A fingertip very cautiously circles the bite mark on Shane's neck, bleeding sluggish. "I *hurt* you. Bite like animal." He pauses, letting out another sob. "Because my alpha couldn't give mate bite instead."

Never before has Shane so regretted not being able to see Ilya's face. Hearing him cry is enough to make the backs of Shane's eyes burn hot, too, though a chill settles upon the rest of him, and there is suddenly nothing more important in the world than Shane reassuring his alpha that he's *fine* - better than fine, really. Getting a useless bite on his neck might not be ideal, but so what? They'd both been caught up in the heat of the moment, obviously, pun not intended. Throw on some first-aid cream and a bandage and forget about it. The fact that it was alpha saliva should help the healing process along, too, so Shane had even less cause for concern.

"*Ilya*," Shane says again, repeating the other man's name like a lifeline to keep throwing though it's already proven too short to reach. He tries to focus on how good the rest of him is feeling and on projecting calm through his scent, rubbing his wrists more insistently against Ilya's and kissing the back of one of his quivering hands. "It's okay, *I'm* okay. You didn't hurt me, promise."

He can't tell if Ilya hears him, based on the lack of response he gets. The longer he listens to Ilya cry, the more Shane's heart aches for him, acutely. Regardless of if *he's* okay, Ilya obviously isn't, and Shane feels useless to comfort him like this.

There was an instinct Shane had long ago sealed behind his rib cage with concrete and - in all honesty - otherwise *forgotten* about. But - maybe it's not being able to wipe away Ilya's tears that Shane can feel dripping onto the skin between his shoulder blades which shifts

something in him, creating new cracks and allowing something more than dust to rise to the surface.

The lack of inhibition thanks to all the heat hormones probably also helps. There's no conscious decision about it as Shane winds his fingers with Ilya's and manages, for the first time in his life, a soft omega croon.

Crooning - a sound unique to omegas, the closest parallel of which is an alpha purr. Most commonly used to soothe their mates and children, though younger, unbonded omegas often croon among close relatives and other loved ones to offer reassurance, too.

The kinds of croons that people wax poetic about are smooth and musical. Shane's is… decidedly *not*. It's hoarse and stuttering, utterly unused. It was one of the things Shane was always on guard about, after first presenting - so even by accident, he's never actually done this before now. He's lucid enough for his face to burn with embarrassment when he realizes what he's doing, the croon creaking through his windpipe. He's on the verge of cutting himself off when he notices Ilya curl a little further around him, the shuddering in the alpha's chest begin to ebb.

At least it seems to be helping. Ilya nuzzles the bite mark, licks it, and tucks his head over Shane's shoulder with a doleful sigh. Shane kisses the back of Ilya's other hand and keeps up the awkward croon.

Ilya's knot doesn't last as long as it usually does, for which Shane decides to be grateful. As soon as it's deflated enough for Shane to gently disengage their bodies without any discomfort beyond the mess, that's what he does, though not without immediately turning around and gathering Ilya in his arms, pressing his forehead to Ilya's and rubbing the uninjured side of his neck against his. His crooning fades as he tries deploying words again.

"Hey," he starts, as gently as he can, with an unhurried kiss to Ilya's mouth. "I'm *okay*. It's no big deal, at least to me, really. Are you okay? Can you talk to me about it?"

Ilya's eyes are red and damp, but not full of any fresh tears. His mouth - a flat, miserable line - is red, too, from use as well as a smudge of blood that Shane brushes away with his thumb.

"I - I should not have bitten you, baby. I'm sorry. I *hurt* you." Sniffling, he indicates Shane's neck without daring to touch it again.

"Barely. And only because I was asking for it. *Begging*. Like I…kind of figured I would, I warned you. Which is what the collar is for."

"*Nyet*, no, does not matter. I shouldn't - it's still wrong of me to *try*." As he appears to commit to loathing himself, Ilya's jaw acquires a mutinous set.

Maybe they need a soft reset. The last thing he wants to do is risk arguing with Ilya about his own feelings, but Shane just hates to see how much he's hurting due to a bite mark that Shane - perhaps shamefully - *likes*.

Shane rolls out of the nest and onto his feet, groaning with effort and encouraging Ilya up to join him.

“We should take this chance to clean up a bit, yeah? Before we fall asleep or need to fuck again. Come on.”

As anticipated, walking proves a bit of a strain on his legs and lower back, but he appreciates the opportunity to stretch. Without detaching himself from Ilya’s side, he grabs a can each of ginger ale and Coke from the mini-fridge before shepherding them both to the basement’s bathroom, essentially an en-suite for the heat room.

It’s smaller than any of the upstairs bathrooms, a little less expensively built, more white tile than fancy marble. In addition to a toilet and sink, there’s a shower stall in one corner. Opposite, slightly over-large and with gleaming brass taps that don’t match the rest of the room’s brushed nickel finishings, is an old clawfoot bathtub.

“This thing was just *here* when I got back a few summers ago. My mom’s idea,” Shane explains, muttering sheepishly and waving at the tub, aware how incongruous it looks among pretty much every other furnishing he owns and babbling to fill the silence. “She said it counted since I didn’t want to bother with doing anything custom down here, and it’ll be hard as shit to ever get rid of it, anyway. And it is nice to soak in, sometimes, so.”

He fiddles with the drain to double-check the plug is in place, twists the hot water on. When he glances up again, Ilya’s gaze on him has, somehow, impossibly softened further.

“She does good job, your mom,” Ilya replies, voice hoarse. “Knows the ways you’re worst at caring for yourself, trying to make sure you do anyway.”

Shane cracks open the Coke and pushes through the beat of anxiety that nearly threatens to avert his eyes from Ilya’s, holding the can out to him and offering, shyly, “Something she’ll like about you, too, probably.”

Ilya huffs. Shaking his head, he lifts Shane onto the bathroom counter, and - ignoring how unsanitary it feels to be sitting there, bare-assed and hole leaking - Shane spreads his knees wide enough to accommodate Ilya’s hips between them, hooking his calves around the alpha’s thighs to keep him there. He presses the soda into Ilya’s hand. As he takes it, Ilya’s attention slips down to his neck, the bite.

“Does it hurt?”

”Only a little,” Shane says, because he doesn’t want to risk telling even a white lie at the moment. “Not enough to bother me. More like how the rest of me will probably hurt in a few more days, once we fuck a million more times and the hormones start to wear off.” *My favorite kind of hurt, reminding me of you*. “How are you feeling?”

“Mm, a bit better than before. Finished crying, I promise. *Izvini*. Sorry.” He wipes his eyes with the back of his hand, after which Shane captures and kisses it, a poor, belated attempt at catching Ilya’s tears.

“Shut up, no more apologizing - especially not for *crying*, Ilya, it’s okay for you to cry - but this is basically *harmless* to me, okay? We’ll take care of it right now.” Shane keeps his voice low and soothing as he grabs from the mostly empty medicine cabinet a years-old, unopened first aid kit that Ilya immediately plucks out of his grasp to tear into himself, starting with a packet of antibiotic cream.

Shane doesn’t bother to remind him that alpha saliva probably makes this process unnecessary, relieved to give Ilya something to do to feel useful at the moment. He cocks his head to the side, zero flinching to accompany it as Ilya very lightly dabs a few dots of the cream where his fangs had been. Perhaps unintentionally, Shane takes the opportunity to admire up close Ilya’s tender concentrated expression, his primal instinct basking in being its subject.

“How are you feeling?” he asks again, infusing his tone with as much care as he can. A tone that hopefully communicates to Ilya *you can keep crying if you need to as long as you don’t apologize after.*

“Fine.” Ilya lets out a warm breath. “Okay. You helped, earlier. With, um, the English for this I forget - “

“Crooning.” Shane feels his face burn as hot as it did while he was actually *doing* it, at having to acknowledge it aloud, but the language difference is surely hard enough for Ilya already without Shane’s hang-ups manufacturing further obstacles.

“Yes. Crooning. That.” He sets the packet of cream down and thumbs through the limited selection of bandage options offered by the first-aid kit. “Was nice.”

Shane considers brushing it off, a gentle *fuck off* and a redirect in conversation. But how little of himself does Shane have yet to reveal to Ilya, after all this - so what’s one more thing? “That’s actually the first time I’ve ever done it,” he admits. “I just…you were upset, and I didn’t know how else to help.”

The information appears to startle Ilya, in turn surprising Shane - considering all of the other firsts of his which Ilya has been, this one shouldn’t particularly matter. But then Ilya’s face goes all soft again, some of the tension melts away from the corners of his eyes, flickering up at Shane.

“It is two things, opposite each other. But that make me and my alpha…” He gestures to his chest. “Sad. In different ways.”

Shane’s fingers twitch. He settles for rubbing one of his heels up and down Ilya’s calf. “Mmhm.”

“For myself, I am sad to hurt you, of course. And for being worst kind of knothead, too. To try to bite you, no self-control, even with -”

“Which I was *begging* for.”

“It’s no excuse.” Ilya peels a bandage from its wrapper.

"*Fuck off*. Like my words don't matter?"

"You're *in heat*."

"You're in rut! They should cancel each other out."

Instead of answering, Ilya places the bandage over the bite mark on the side of Shane's neck, smoothing it at the edges particularly where the gauze risks overlapping with the collar to minimize the risk of any chafing.

"I'm sorry," Shane says, even though his logic clearly wins. He puts a hand on Ilya's chest, waits for him to meet his eyes again before continuing. "You're allowed to feel how you want to feel about it. That's fair. I don't want to negate that or whatever. But I do need you to know that - while you probably shouldn't do it *again* - you really shouldn't be mad at yourself on my behalf, because I *liked it*. In the moment…it was, honestly, really, really hot."

The pained furrow between Ilya's brows has eased but not yet vanished. "In the moment, yes, but now - "

"Now it's, it's like physical proof that *you* want this as much as *I* do. Or part of you does, anyway. And even though we *can't*, for *real*, right *now*, obviously, I…I already said I love you, so I probably do want it for real." As he says it aloud, he knows it's true with hardly a second thought, no *probably* about it. "One day. If you do. We can figure it out."

Ilya blinks. One hand comes up to loosely encircle Shane's wrist, keeping his hand there just over his heart. "Then I will admit. My alpha was sad because…" Ilya swallows, voice dropping. "Because I felt like *failure.* By giving you fake bite, instead of real one. After I… my alpha thought, in the moment, and was…happy. But then…it's not just shame for hurting you, *moy lyubimyy.* Not being able to give you mate bite…my alpha felt like we were losing something."

"*Ilya*, fuck…" Shane feels his eyes stinging, and he squeezes them shut because even though all of the emotion building in his chest is threatening to escape via his tear ducts, crying is the last thing he wants to do right now. He pulls Ilya in closer, grabbing his hair and kissing him just to let out a little of the feeling that may otherwise overwhelm him.

"*Da*, Shane. I want, too, one day. More than anything," Ilya tells him, between both kisses and shaky, eager exhalations breathed warmly into Shane's mouth. "This. Us."

"Yeah?" He pretends not to hear the giddy crack in his own voice, lips curving into what feels like the world's dopiest grin. Ilya's eyes have never seemed to sparkle more, and Shane's heart is seized by the desire to spend the rest of his life making Ilya look this awestruck, as if taken aback by his own happiness.

In response, Ilya just kisses him again, a clumsy bumping of smiling lips, and both of them might be crying a little bit again, too, and neither of them minds, tears mingling on each other's cheeks.

The bath is finally filled. Shane turns the water off, confirms the presence of towels and soap nearby, climbs over the side of the tub with an unnecessary hand from Ilya for balance. From muscle memory, he drew the water at his preferred temperature - hot to the point of almost scalding - and he hisses as lowers himself beneath its steaming surface. Then, leaning back against the edge and spreading his legs, he motions for Ilya to join him.

The position seems slightly counterintuitive, as Ilya is the larger of the pair of them, but he doesn't argue; rather, a delighted grin flashes across his face, though it quickly turns agonized as he steps into the tub and feels the water for himself. He lets out a string of Russian curses while he nonetheless sinks down into it, settling between Shane's legs, his back to Shane's chest. Shane is pleased that Ilya can't fixate on his bandaged neck from this position, though he tries not to wince at the water splashing out onto the floor - he'd filled it about as high as he always did, which meant the water level only accounted for displacement by one body, rather than two.

"Sorry, I should've asked if you'd mind getting boiled alive," he says, picking up a washcloth and slinging an arm around Ilya's shoulder to wipe lazily at the mess that had accumulated on his lower belly.

Ilya tries to grab the washcloth from him, but Shane doesn't let him, yanking it away.

"*Mm*, Hollander, let me. I should be the one who - "

Shane scoffs. "I'm an *omega*. Isn't taking care of my alpha what I'm wired for?" He doesn't give Ilya a chance to respond to *that* revealing of a sentiment, forging ahead. "Just shut up and let me do this for a bit, okay?"

Ilya's cheeks flush - Shane doesn't know whether it's thanks to him or heat from the bath - and he stops arguing, relaxing a little further and letting his head fall back on Shane's shoulder. His eyes go half-lidded, and Shane kisses the top of his head when he feels the low rumble of a purr kick back up. He resumes cleaning around Ilya's belly, thighs, and deflated knot, runs wet fingers through curls mussed due to sleep and sex, blames the hormones for his mind wandering to silly shit like his heart being a nest he wants to build just for Ilya, his safe place.

"Um, I'm gonna leave the collar on, obviously," he says after a while, breaking the comfortable almost-silence of purrs and sloshing water. "At least until the first one of us finishes cycling and has a semi-functional brain again."

"Collar was smart," Ilya admits, though he sounds begrudging about it as he tips his head back to look at Shane.

"No shit. I told you - I knew I was gonna beg for it. Though I guess I just…wasn't admitting to myself why."

"Because we love each other, yes?"

"Yeah." *So fucking much*. "You don't need to look so smug about it, asshole. But - maybe the uncontrollable begging will be less of a problem. Now that we've kind of…talked about shit?

And…" As much as he'd rather keep some inner thoughts just that, he wanted to assure Ilya - the best that he could, at any rate - that the alpha wouldn't spend the next few days tormented, instinct triggered over and over again by Shane's mindless pleas, the opposite of a fun and sexy good time together. He takes a deep breath before admitting the last part out loud. "And when I feel where you've already bitten me." The faintly throbbing ache on one side of his neck. "It will let me pretend I don't have anything left to beg for."

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As if Ilya wouldn't give Shane the whole fucking world if only he could.

"*Da*, sweetheart. Either way, is okay if you can't help it," he says softly, before adding: "Only thing I ever make you beg for is my dick, okay?"

"Fuck you," Shane laughs.

When he feels a playful tug at his hair, Ilya's purr only grows louder.

After another minute or two, he hears Shane clear his throat. "I'm…I just want to make sure that - when you were crying, earlier…" The reminder makes Ilya's jaw twitch. "It's okay to be upset, and sad, and I don't want to take that away from you. But I want to make sure it doesn't outweigh…everything else. The parts of this making you sad, versus the rest of it. That you don't…regret this."

"No, no! No regret. Not this, not you, not ever. Promise." He picks up Shane's closest hand to his and winds their fingers together. "Earlier, when I was - it was not - "

"I know - it wasn't anything I did. And it's *okay* that you…I'm not gonna say I'm *happy* you cried or something, because it's not that, but I'm…I like that you felt safe enough with me to do it. But I also just wanted to - I don't know - make sure how fucking happy you make me and that I love you isn't somehow at your expense."

It's difficult to follow the precise *point* of Shane's rambling, but *how fucking happy you make me and that I love you* sound like the important bits, in Ilya's opinion.

Because he can, he replies: "I love you, too," and kisses the back of Shane's hand. "I regret this only, even if you don't." He turns his head, reaches up to brush a featherlight fingertip over the bandage on Shane's neck. "The rest, being here? Never."

"Good, because you owe me at least ten more knots."

Ilya sputters with surprised laughter. "Only ten? Why that many?"

"Fuck off, I said *at least*. Twenty? How about a hundred?"

"Greedy omega, going to make me think you love me for my knot and stamina only."

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Although it's something they'd discussed over the phone weeks ago - in light of recent realizations and confessions, everything they've said to each other with and without really meaning it - Shane thinks it rather prudent at this point to reaffirm, just in case, before proceeding.

"I do, um, just want to clarify." After everything they've said and done so far, he kind of can't believe he's *still* so prone to blushing. "The dirty talk about…breeding, and pups, stuff like that. That is all just dirty talk, for me. I'm in heat, so. It's just really sexy, you know? I don't mean it, in the way I mean…everything else. Like loving you. Wanting to be your mate. Not that I wouldn't - one day, a long, long time from now, maybe. I don't know." His nose wrinkles. Pups - *babies* - aren't the sort of thing he's ever given serious consideration to, or wants to, really, at least for the foreseeable future.

But for right now, just the thought of one day being mated to Ilya feels like it would be enough to fill Shane's cup forever. Anything else can come later.

"*Da*, of course. Me too, I promise. Hockey is too important. Would be no fun at all to play without you." Ilya blows a raspberry on Shane's bicep. "But for heat talk, rut talk, whatever, still good, yes?"

"*Yes*," Shane agrees. Perhaps too emphatically, based on how Ilya smirks up at him as he presses a kiss to his jawline.

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They dry each other off, getting handsy with one another in turns inadvertently and then growing more and more intentional about it - because they just can't *help* themselves. Stamina recovers along with hormones, and from there it's just a horny feedback loop.

Towels abandoned and breathing just a bit heavier, Shane's thighs bracket Ilya's waist once he's scooped up, and he grinds his cock against the other man's rippling abs as he's carried back into the heat room. Before Ilya can toss him into the nest, undoubtedly lunging after him, Shane squirms out of his arms and uses his palms on Ilya's chest to shove the alpha onto the bed first. Rather than protesting or putting up a fight, Ilya leans back on his elbows, tilts his head and looks up at Shane with a toothy grin.

Shane's instinct preens with something akin to triumph, warm in his chest, drinking in the sight of the alpha returned to *his* nest, and to be the one who put him there.

"What do you need, *moy lyubimyy*?"

"You, alpha." Shane follows him onto the bed, straddling his lap, poised on his knees above Ilya's hard dick. "I need you."

One of Ilya's hands lands on the small of Shane's back, urging him closer, and the other on his nape. "You have me. *Ya tvoy*. Means - 'I'm yours.'" He punctuates the statement with a kiss.

Yours.

“Mine.” Shane latches onto Ilya’s neck with his teeth, biting just hard enough to leave two curving imprints behind without breaking the skin. At the same time, he slowly relaxes his thighs, sinking onto Ilya’s cock in an effortless glide, both of them in thrall to each other and the flames yet to be quenched in their own bellies. And because he suspects he’ll soon be past the capacity for words again soon, he takes the chance to get to repeat these ones now. “I love you.”

“*Fuck*, Shane. *Ya tebya lyublyu.*”

They don’t need a mate bite to spend the days left ahead of them proving it to each other.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you everyone as always for all of the supportive comments, they all really mean a lot and keep me going when the writing gets tough. And whew boy, this chapter was tough!! I actually re-did a lot of my outline for this fic compared to the original plan; it turns out it’s a lot harder to turn a boatload of feelings and sex into a semi-coherent (?) narrative (?) than I thought.

Anyway I hope this chapter not being the last one isn’t too much of a disappointment, and please continue to be patient with me on chapter 3 because it will probably be pretty slow going also. <3

I used Google translate + browsing subreddits for the Russian, so my apologies as usual for all my fuck-ups!! (I will actually be grateful if any native speakers want to give me corrections in that regard as long as y’all don’t mind my preference for transliteration.)

I love all comments even though I don’t reply to them (pls forgive me I love you all), but especially if you let me know something specific or any particular lines you liked, that’s the shit that inspires me the most.

Feel free to say hi on twitter, I’m shy but always looking for fellow HR friends to yap with.

Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

> Um, hi. I'm sorry this took so long. There was never a day I wasn't working on it, some days less than others and other times obsessively tweaking sentences, but overall writing this was just a LOT harder than any previous chapters in this series, and I'm pretty anxious about posting this (there is so much redundant and self-indulgent shit in here!!!) but also so relieved to finally be done. Please feel free to kindly point out if there are any egregious errors I missed in the following giant mass of text and I will fix them when I can.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"Good boy," Ilya coos, and the praise is sweeter than the juice bursting onto Shane's tongue as he bites down on another strawberry fed to him from Ilya's fingertips.

Fingertips Shane nips or kisses with every new offering pressed between his lips, having decided that if Ilya is going to be ridiculous by insisting on feeding him like this through his entire heat, then Shane can be ridiculous, too. Every nip or kiss is a tiny release for the intensity of the feeling which threatens to burst out of him with each morsel Ilya gives him, the alpha's gaze more syrupy with affection than Shane's ever seen it.

The pleasurably fuzz-edged contours of reality don't blind him. Between rounds of sex driven by the demands of their bodies they wouldn't be able to deny themselves even if they wanted to, Shane is conscious of being *doted on*. To an absurd degree, in his personal opinion. And it's not that Ilya's particular brand of alpha doting is *completely* brand new to Shane, but what he'd experienced of it prior to Ilya's rut starting was merely a fraction of the full force upon him now. Shane can't reach for something to eat or drink with his own two perfectly capable hands without Ilya intercepting it to feed to Shane himself.

"Is just - this is what my alpha needs, okay? So let me," Ilya told him, perhaps a little gruffly, and it was enough for Shane to stop attempting otherwise, even to stop him from any further feeble, futile protests.

(He drew a line, however, at being encouraged to eat something while still on Ilya's knot, jerking his head back, mouth pressed flat.

"No Ilya, that's *gross*. Food and sex stay separate.")

When Shane tried to reciprocate the gesture - not at the intrinsic urging of his instinct, but because he felt he ought to - Ilya rebuffed him, opting instead to shovel food into his face with alacrity between the much more leisurely mouthfuls bestowed upon Shane.

And when he wants something specific within reach, he doesn't even have to ask; Ilya notices his attention straying to an open bag of jerky or condensation-coated can of ginger ale even before Shane does, and Shane finds whatever it is being brought to his lips faster than he can formulate the request. On top of his heightened senses, something about Ilya's rut has him hyper-attuned to Shane in particular, in a way which maybe should feel overwhelming to Shane but doesn't. Probably in large part due to his heat making him a pliant, happy receptacle for all of the attention the alpha wants to give him.

Anything Shane might want outside of the nest? Ilya fetches for him, naturally, albeit with the air of a golden retriever only reluctantly leaving his master's side because he's too dutiful not to when the ball is thrown. Except this dog has the ass of a Greek god carved from marble for Shane to admire, striding naked around the room.

It becomes clear before the end of their first full day cycling with each other that Ilya prefers Shane not leave the nest at all, especially without him. During the occasional instance Shane *has to*, and *can you just leave me alone to piss for a few minutes in peace, Ilya, jesus fucking christ* - he reenters the room to find the alpha pacing in circles, growl caught in his throat. White-knuckled fists unclench and muscles flex as Ilya lifts Shane by the backs of his thighs hitched around his waist, an effortless display of strength that leaves Shane breathless regardless of how many times he's subjected to it. Sometimes, on occasions where his legs aren't too wobbly, Shane makes a game of running and jumping into the other man's arms with varying degrees of momentum, trying to catch him off-balance and in every instance failing.

Always, Ilya carries him back to the nest.

(It's more than a little ridiculous, actually, considering Shane's own decent size and obvious strength, just how Ilya manhandles him like it's nothing. There's a reason Shane passes so easily as a beta, as a top athlete in a full-contact sport, nonetheless - maybe later he can blame his heat for just how much it turns him on to be treated like the delicate flower of an omega he definitely isn't.)

And he doesn't think he's imagining it that Ilya's muscles even *look* slightly bigger than usual, veins standing out against the skin. Another effect from his rut, giving Shane an intimate understanding of the distinct advantages to be gained by the alpha hockey players who recklessly risk playing games while on the edge of a similar state. Not that Ilya's ever done that, because he'd never have to. Which gets Shane weirdly smug and horny to think about, hindbrain gushing *yes, mine, I won him, my alpha is the best, the strongest, no one can compare, need him to breed me full of pups, he's more than strong enough to keep us safe*.

…So Ilya probably isn't alone in having his behavior altered thanks to the potent mixture of their pheromones, maybe too the mutual confession of feelings. Shane's instinct has always had an endless hunger for skin contact with Ilya, *no one* other than Ilya, but his heat makes Shane feel like he's dying a little bit inside every moment they aren't wrapped around each other. Like the rejection sickness but different, in the way that fire is like ice and being burned alive is like freezing to death. Only Ilya can manage the wildfire that is Shane's heat.

Ilya's cycle sharpens his senses; Shane's are heightened, too, but in a useless way, distracted by sensation to the point where sometimes all he can do is rub his entire body against Ilya's

because it feels too good *not* to, reveling in the complete amalgamation of their scents.

On the rare occasion Ilya has to steal away from the nest for more than a few moments - a handful of minutes, maybe, for some practicality or other - Shane finds his heartbeat racing, an utterly irrational lump of panic in the back of his throat he has to fight to remind himself to breathe through. These interludes end up useful, however, routine opportunities to check his phone, text his parents to reassure them he's alive and fine and so there's no risk of them stopping by.

Ilya ran upstairs not long ago, coming back down with a plateful of microwaved pizza rolls and a restock for the mini-fridge's supply of fruit. He made sure the pizza rolls were sufficiently cooled in the middle before bringing any of them up to Shane's mouth. After Shane ate a generous portion and only complained once about them being 'processed garbage,' he's being fed fruit for dessert. Strawberries, blueberries, chunks of banana and pineapple. Especially delicious whenever Shane is able to snatch a real taste of Ilya's fingertips.

Yeah, Shane has an idea of what he'd still like to get a *real* taste of.

He's sprawled sideways across Ilya's lap, leaning somewhat into the bulk of his chest, their heads and shoulders propped up on the same big mound of pillows, sharing space and breathing in one another's exhales. Shane gets more brazen with his mouth, sucking on Ilya's fingertips and making an unnecessary show of licking them clean, watching Ilya's eyes darken.

Over the next few bits of fruit, Ilya escalates Shane's little game, playfully yanking his hand away after depositing each bite in Shane's mouth, baiting him into chasing after Ilya's fingers with his teeth. Only to catch Shane's lips with his and kiss him with far more tenderness than the silly moment otherwise warranted. For several seconds all Shane can do is sigh happily around Ilya's tongue in his mouth, heart fluttering more than he knows what to do with. But through the pleasurable haze, the specific shape of Shane's desire begins to solidify.

And so in its pursuit, Shane slides down the bed, kissing Ilya's pecs, his abs, the happy trail between the sculptured cut of his hips, running appreciative palms up and down hairy, muscular thighs. What he's angling for couldn't be more obvious; Shane licks his lips as he wraps one hand around the base of Ilya's cock, ready to -

Until a hand lands on his shoulder, squeezes in interruptive cadence that makes Shane want to scowl - it's not the first time in the last few days Ilya's stopped him from getting his mouth around him properly, but he's not deterred just yet.

God, he misses the weight of Ilya's cock in his mouth, heavy and uncut, now smelling and probably *tasting* as much like Shane himself as the heavy musk of Ilya in rut. Ilya's fingers on his tongue aren't cutting it anymore.

"*Shane*," Ilya says. At least he sounds a little pained about it

"*Ilyaaa*, come on. Want to suck you, *please*. You go on and on about how good I taste - let me have a turn."

The enormous quadriceps under Shane's palms tense, and Ilya's gaze burns down at him, jaw clenched. "Yes, fine, a little bit, but not too much, sweetheart, okay?" He gives his cock a single stroke, then uses that same hand to pat Shane's cheek. "I love your mouth, but I can't waste myself and leave your other hole empty, understand? Would make me very bad alpha if I don't save everything for your heat."

And *oh*, Shane's heart is an absolute puddle. He really did score the world's most ridiculously dutiful alpha in rut ever, even if that's a little less than ideal for Shane at the moment, considering just how desperate he is to get Ilya to cum in his mouth. Sure, it's not like he *doesn't* want another knot, craving it deep like he's made to. But the craving comes in ebbs and flows, and he's been fucked full enough times to permit his priorities to wander.

Getting to suck Ilya's cock *a little bit* won't cut it either - not only does he really want to be able to *worship* Ilya with his mouth, but Shane's instinct fixates on the *claim* of it, too, getting the back of his throat wrecked for his alpha's pleasure, swallowing his cum. Another way to put his body to use, let Ilya mark him from the inside, in his guts, Shane needs it every way he can get it.

"There's something in the drawer we can use."

"What?"

Shane lifts his head a few inches to rest his chin on Ilya's knee, and points at the nightstand beside the nest. "In there. You can open it. You were, um, probably going to be nosy about it anyway. So…"

Attention still mostly on Shane, Ilya leans to the side, opens the drawer. When he glances down and gets a look at what's inside, Ilya's eyes widen and his mouth falls open to an almost comic degree, and from there Shane watches as his expression resolves into some combination of reverent and gleeful.

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"Are you going to let me knot you, Hollander? You think it won't be too much, your first time taking alpha dick, big knot for your pretty virgin hole?"

"Oh my god, shut up. It's not like I, I haven't…my thing - my dildo - *it's a knotting dildo, okay?*

"A what?"

"It's just …just a fucking dildo, *okay? You know what a dildo is. And it…has a pump attached, on the outside. For…pumping up the knot part."*

"Holy shit, Hollander. You really are a knotslut."

"And you're a fucking knothead. I need it for my heats, asshole."

"What. Color?"

"…Do you want to keep interrogating me about my dildo, Rozanov, or are you gonna fuck me?"

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"Purple!" Ilya crows, grinning as he grabs the 'thing' out of the drawer.

Shane's very first mention of the toy had unlocked a new range of filthy fantasies for Ilya to indulge in, vivid images of Shane Hollander on all fours or with his legs spread, struggling to fuck himself properly on plastic. Learning that it had a *knot* for the omega to squirm on just made it that much fucking hotter for Ilya to stew upon later, dick in his hand and seeing if he could bait Hollander into sexting him back.

The images in Ilya's head are complete, now that he knows Shane's knotting dildo is that sex-toy-specific shade of vibrant purple silicone, with a short length of cord and black pump attached to the base.

"There, happy?" Tracing ticklish circles with an index finger on the inside of Ilya's thigh, cheeks reddening, Shane averts his eyes from the toy.

He's not just referring to the dildo's color, it dawns on Ilya, tracking the peek of Shane's pink tongue wetting his bottom lip, doe-eyed gaze flitting to Ilya's cock. Which hardens just a little more, thanks first to the attention, and then further as Ilya realizes just what Shane is angling at, however vaguely.

Or, at the very least, what Ilya *suspects* he is angling at.

Though Ilya should probably make the little pervert say what he wants out loud. Ilya wouldn't want to *assume*, after all. He's just considerate like that.

He pats Shane on the head, musters what's left of his self-restraint to leave it at that instead of grabbing him by his hair and shove his cock straight down the other man's throat like he's so clearly hungry for.

"Thank you for showing me your toy, *kotenok*. And since I am here, I'll just put it away now, *da*?"

The sound of displeasure Shane makes is part-huff, part-whine, and Ilya suppresses a smirk as he feigns returning the dildo to the still-open drawer. "Aw, is there something else you wanted?" he prods, teasing. Notices, in the process of doing so, the only other thing still left in the drawer, an expensive-looking crystal bottle. It has a shimmery cap in metallic gold, is bottle-size-wise somewhere between perfume and vodka of excellent Russian quality.

Fancy lube or oil? Ilya picks it up, lets himself be nosy. "What's this?"

Shane wrinkles his nose, groaning miserably. "*Ugh* - don't open that, please. I always mean to get around to throwing it out and then I forget it's in there." He must see that it doesn't resolve the question on Ilya's face, because he continues, explaining: "Synthetic alpha pheromones. Some kind of fake formulation - highly recommended to help soothe…you

know, omegas in heat without a partner." Precious kitten - face still scrunched, and Ilya wonders without testing if those unhappy wrinkles might be simply kissed away. "Super overpriced, but the reviews seemed promising. So I tried it a few years ago but all I got was a fucking *migraine* for the first three days of my heat. *Horrible*." He shakes his head and affects a shudder at the memory, one corner of his kiss-swollen bottom lip twisting downward.

And - *shit*, what the thought of that does to Ilya's *heart*. To his cock, too, maybe, more than it ought to. The beast in his chest is a greedy, selfish thing, has never been more so than where Shane Hollander is concerned, for better or worse. He tries not to linger on how cruelly *grateful* his instinct is that Shane has suffered alone, the needs of his body unassuaged by anything other than Ilya, what Ilya gives him.

At least he's not so stupid with rut at the moment to smash the bottle in his primal sense of triumph, instead putting it back in the drawer. The dildo he leaves out, sets aside.

He had *intended* to drag this out a little longer - grand plans he'd concocted practically upon the spot when he first realized just what Shane was showing him, giving him permission to use. Once he got Shane to spell out *exactly* how he wanted to incorporate the toy into their play, Ilya thought maybe he'd coax the omega into putting on a show with it for him, say something like *show me what you'd do if I wasn't here, how pathetic you are without* my *alpha dick in you.*

And, after watching right up until he couldn't bear to anymore, Ilya would stifle Shane's lovely pleading with a cock down his throat, just like he was asking for.

But aside from the underlying frisson of smugness, Ilya is mostly overcome by *sympathy*. Thinking of his precious Shane, whose suffering without him was only exacerbated by some shitty approximation at comfort, derails Ilya's own salacious plotting in a blink.

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What Shane doesn't - maybe, *never* - confesses, is that he only even bought and tried the damn fake pheromones for his heat scheduled for just after the draft, because in the few he'd had up until that point it had never occurred to him before he might *crave* any sort of alpha scent in his nest. He'd been utterly shame-faced as he ordered them online, telling himself over and over again it had *nothing nothing nothing* to do with what he smelled of Ilya Rozanov's sweat, damp fingers sliding against his over the sharing of a water bottle.

…..

"My *babyyy*. My poor Shane. Come, come here." Cradling Shane's jaw in one hand and the other gripping his shoulder, Ilya tugs him upwards and into his lap again, this time with Shane's knees bracketing his hips. The grinding of their cocks together is incidental, their mouths slotting less so - Ilya thinks it must be seared into his muscle memory by now, something about Shane's lips calling his like a beacon whenever they're in sufficient range, the wet insides of his mouth made to be plundered by Ilya's tongue. Ilya palms one of his pecs, too, thumbs a stiff brown nipple.

“I should have been here, I should have always been here,” Ilya says, nosing the uninjured side of Shane’s neck. His brain in its current state is incapable of computing all of the perfectly good and logical reasons why in summers’ past this never would’ve been feasible between them anyway. “I make it up to you now - I give anything you want, *moya shlyushka, da*? Just let me make you say it - my baby needs to tell me what he wants so I know to give, okay?”

Shane’s gaze is hazier than it was five minutes ago, pupils darker; still managing to look thoughtful, he sucks Ilya’s thumb between his lips for a few seconds before replying. “I just - let me blow you, please? I haven’t yet, since you’ve been here, and I really, *really* want you to…” He hesitates, ducking his head, not so far under again as to have lost his capacity for embarrassment entirely yet.

“Tell me.”

“Fuck you - want you to come in my mouth, okay? Just let me suck you off and swallow it, is what I want. Without you worrying about saving yourself or whatever for…the rest of me.”

God, Ilya wouldn’t need to be in rut to be stirred by *that*, to let everything Shane is saying to him drive him *up the goddamn wall*. Between their bellies, his cock jerks. While his hormones might be to blame for tamping down on his usual (exceedingly high) level of enthusiasm for getting his dick sucked, Shane’s own fervent earnestness - in conjunction with the dildo in arm’s reach - are more than enough to overcome Ilya’s initial reluctance, instinct-deep, to waste his cum on anything other than filling the omega’s womb.

Saliva accumulating in a pool below his tongue, he picks up the dildo. It’s probably about average, size-wise - so smaller than he is, Ilya notes with satisfaction; the inflatable knot part is a bit more mysterious, but it doesn’t give him the impression of being anything particularly extreme.

Ilya *boops* Shane on the nose with it. Then, looking directly in soft baby deer eyes, Ilya *spits* on that same end of the dildo and pops it between Shane’s lips.

Who thereupon sucks another inch of the toy immediately into his mouth, dark lashes fluttering.

“*Blyat* - “ Ilya pulls the dildo out, slides it along Shane’s cheek to leave behind on the smooth skin a shining trail of spit. “You are a *crazy* fucking pervert, *lyubimyy*. You’ll take toy knot in place of real one, all for my cum in your belly? Not enough in there already, need from both ends?” He pinches the soft layer of skin and fat between Shane’s hipbones.

Shane nods, agreeing in a dreamy sigh. “*Yeah*.” Past the pretense of any heatdrunk attempts at flustered banter, his head turns slow as if through honey to belatedly try and follow the toy with his tongue.

A mouth too inviting for Ilya not to catch for himself instead. Their first kiss, their millionth - the way Shane always fucking *melts* into it never fails to make Ilya’s heart seize.

They're on the verge of forgetting themselves. Would be easier than breathing for Ilya to rut up into him, used and dripping. But more than anything, at least for the moment, his instinct's first priority is to cater to his *mate*. So ignoring his own cock for the time being, he reaches behind Shane with the dildo, drags it through the slick between his cheeks. Shane's breath stutters when it catches on his rim, the tip of it slipping right into him without intentional effort from either of them.

"Fuck, Hollander, feel that? How loose I've made you. Fake dick has never been so easy before, *da*?"

Without any further preamble, Ilya pushes the rest of the silicone length into him in one smooth, wet-sounding glide. Pushes a shuddery exhale out of Shane's lungs in the process, too, gorgeous thigh muscles contracting then relaxing again. Their foreheads tip together and Shane kisses his cheekbone.

He finds the hand of Ilya's still holding the pump attached to the dildo - squeezes it. Once. Twice. A slight hitch of breath on each, jaw clenching, and - *holy fucking shit*, just the *sight* has Ilya closer to coming untouched than he's been since he was a teenager.

Then, leaving the pump where it is in Ilya's hand, Shane's fingers come up to curl into Ilya's chest.

"Just…how about you give me the rest - five pumps, maybe - at the same time I make you come with my mouth - okay?"

Ilya swallows, nods. Shane either doesn't notice or doesn't mind his brain short-circuiting.

"Thank you*,* alpha*aa*," he practically lilts, playful, altogether too sweet-sounding to be so obsessed with sucking dick. He even punctuates the words with a brazen wiggle of his ass.

Fucking hell. Even in heat and behaving like utter sin, Shane Hollander is still the *cutest* fucking thing. So cute it hurts, sometimes, almost like looking into the sun.

Ilya shades his face with a forearm, briefly, just in case.

…..

"*Yesssss*," Shane is too far gone not to hiss aloud, re-situating himself between Ilya's legs in the nest. Without any finesse or performance, he buries his nose where the dark hair crawling down Ilya's torso grows thickest, inhales deeply, luxuriating in the concentrated combination of raw alpha musk and his own slick. The dildo is more of an afterthought, unyielding plastic the absolute least fulfilling in his insides it's ever been, a band-aid on a wound he already knows the cure for outright.

Except Shane is going to put the cure in his mouth, so. Might be an 'off-label use,' in a manner of speaking, but…oh well, that's what the band-aid in his ass is for.

Either way, it's not really on his mind as his tongue follows his nose through coarse curls, beginning his worship at the base of Ilya's cock. From there, sloppy and open-mouthed, he

gradually kisses his way up its flushing underside, paying extra attention to the sensitive skin where the knot forms. Only conceding to using a hand once he reaches the very tip, so he can get a better angle for licking into Ilya's foreskin.

Shifting his hips, Ilya groans. Shane soaks the head of his cock with loose spit from his tongue before finally - *fucking finally* - drawing it into his mouth. Fingers that have been carding loosely through Shane's hair up until this point scrape his scalp.

The searing shape of Ilya's length is familiar against the roof his mouth, and - *fuck*. Shane *missed* this. Hasn't done this nearly enough to memorize it properly. Won't have by the time his heat is over, either, but he isn't dwelling upon that now. It's all he can do to summon what little capacity for thought he has to make this *good* for Ilya in spite of his own impatient enthusiasm. Savors the precum on the back of his tongue.

Head down, mouth full. Halfway between all fours and on his belly, Shane settles where he is. As always leaking like a fucking faucet, his cock presses against the inside of Ilya's knee. Shane chases the friction initially without intending to, in shy little rocks of his hips.

"*Fuck*, your perfect fucking mouth. Of course you needed this, I should've known. Born to take my cock - born to suck it, too, *da*? *Shlyushka moya* - slut, baby, I'm calling you a slut, *takoy razvratnyy moya.*"

"*Mmmm*," Shane hums in agreement, feeling how the vibration makes Ilya's cock twitch. He doesn't gag as the tip slides into his throat, even taking it a bit deeper beyond that. Must've closed his eyes in concentration somewhere along the way, he notices, and opens them - missing the sight of Ilya already.

Who looks down at Shane like he's hanging the damn moon instead of sucking him off. Who's maybe looked at Shane a little bit like this from the first time he got his inexperienced lips curled awkwardly around Ilya's stupid big alpha dick.

Maybe a little bit too why Shane has always liked doing this so much - nothing exists beyond the hot length in his mouth and dark gaze devouring him.

His nose meets Ilya's body without gagging, and he'd let out a groan of satisfaction if he could. Thus far, the hands in his hair have provided nothing more than gentle encouragement.

"*Nnngh 'lng gnu. Unh nhe.*"

I love you. Use me.

There's no way Ilya can understand what he's saying. And although he's probably heard from Shane some variation of all these things already, there's nothing Shane has left of himself to reveal to Ilya - isn't that still *freeing*, somehow? Exhilarating?

Drawing the motion out, slowly, Shane lifts his head, eyes still locked with Ilya's. The alpha wets his lower lip, tilts his head back. Sweat gleams upon the strong column of his neck. Perhaps Shane is just imagining the hint of challenge he thinks he detects in his expression -

there's a decent chance Ilya's face just Does That, resting-arrogant-asshole-face or something, but -

Shane frames the first inch of cock between his lips with the prettiest pout he can manage ("*born to suck it*" Ilya told him), drags his tongue through the slit. Then he abruptly allows his head to sink back down, swallowing Ilya back down to the root, gratified by the wordless snarl it earns him, hands on his head tightening.

"*Angh hne houhrs enghyere engver*."

Make me yours everywhere forever.

He bobs his head again in a similar rhythm.

"*Anghngh ohlh ugh ouh oush."*

Another hole for you to use.

He's liberal both with the spit and with the noises in his throat, even when his brain is too fuzzy and body too eager to remember concepts of words. When the dildo's deficiency begins to gnaw at his insides, Shane makes up for it in the unsteady rolling of his hips upon Ilya's leg.

Eventually he must spend enough time slobbering and moaning with his jaw wide and throat full, blinking up at Ilya as entreatingly as he can, for him to *finally* take the hint and give in to thrusting between Shane's lips. In restrained jerks of his hips, at first. Shane feels long fingers weaving together on the back of his head to hold him in place, and lets his eyes shutter again.

"*Unngh eeyahh*."

Fuck yeah.

Next he lets his neck and shoulders go lax with a blissful sigh. Sure, he loves to *work* for Ilya's pleasure, to put in genuine effort, take detailed little notes in his mind of how he's elicited a particularly strong response. But *fuck*, doesn't matter if it's his ass or his mouth, what Shane really revels in is just being *used*.

Just *being*.

A pliant and perfect body for the alpha he's dying to belong to.

"*Khoroshiy mal'chik*, good boy, the - *hnnh* - fucking *best*. Is this what you crave, *omega*?" Terms for designations are shared among swathes of languages - Ilya's always lingering on the inflection of his mother tongue whenever he refers to either of them directly, and it's just another entry on the endless list of things he does that Shane finds ridiculously sexy.

Again and again, heavy balls hit his drool-soaked chin.

"Just look at how fucking *happy* you are, *da*? Pretty bitch, the mess you're making, *blyat*. "

The flat of a palm taps his cheek, not quite a slap. Ilya goes faster and deeper in increments, grunts increasing in volume. Shane gags only on an occasional thrust at first, and then with more frequency.

Every part of him that isn't his head or his throat or his dripping cock or the unsatisfying not-fullness in his ass feels to have floated away. To return *never*, maybe. Nothing but *this* in perpetuity: two holes and the worthless pulsing between his legs. Shane could probably die happy like this.

All Ilya's. Down to the snatches of oxygen keeping his blood pumping caught in irregular little huffs through his nose.

…..

"*Glngh - nlgh - nlgh!*" Wet noises. Choked off, cock-stifled.

Hair velvet-soft in Ilya's hands, sweat damp at the roots. The tension building in his pelvis ratchets through his fangs and soles of his feet. The rest of his teeth grind against the battle not to go any harder beyond his current pace.

A fire burning in his belly, hotter and higher with every new thrust. And Shane's mouth - a plush and sopping home made for his cock. Ilya could draw this out for longer if he were inclined to, stave off his approaching orgasm and just fucking *ruin* Shane's throat until snot streams down his chin - and *fuck*, Shane would love that, would *thank* him for it after in a rasp, probably.

But what Ilya really wants right now, more than anything, is to find out what noises Shane will produce with each subsequent pump to the fake knot in his guts. Which means they're earning Ilya's climax first this time, thanks to the kinky game his cock-hungry little knotslut has set them up to play.

Shane's eyes are squeezed shut. Tears bead like little stars along his lashline. There's nothing Ilya won't give to him, won't do for him, and all his *ideal'naya shlyushka* can think to beg for is alpha cock and cum to swallow. Ilya would be a bad alpha *not* to give in to him.

In time with his heartbeat, the slight swell of his knot throbs under the skin. Shane's jaw is slack, neck loose, an obedient vessel of flesh and bone cradled between Ilya's hands, deliberate especially in roughness.

"*Fuck,* Hollander. *Omega.* I'm going to - want to taste me? Swallow like a good boy?"

On the knife's edge of coming is where Ilya means to pull out. *Always* pulls out, either all the way or almost so - he lets whoever he's with decide whether or how much of him they want a taste of, because Ilya is nothing if not a gentleman. Since his current (*forever*) partner has declared more than once exactly what he wants in this specific instance, Ilya anticipates with relish watching his cum spurt across Shane's pretty pink tongue.

A low growl rumbles in his chest. His balls contract, a looping band of pleasure drawing tighter and more taut between his knot and the load he's about to blow. Ilya braces himself

for the reverberations of the snap to come, inevitable and glorious.

"*Shaane*," Ilya groans. "*Malysh*, your mouth, *blyat* - here, you have to- I'm, *nnnghh* -"

…..

Based on the past head he's given Ilya alongside a smattering of fairly vanilla porn, Shane is distantly aware that this is the part where he's supposed to let the cock slide partway out of his mouth, focus on licking and sucking the tip while Ilya comes. If Shane isn't too fucked out to remember he can use his hands during a blowjob, he might use his fingertips to milk the expanding knot and feel each gush before it leaves Ilya's body.

In one memorable aftermath, Ilya indulged his curious exploration - Shane spent several minutes sprawled between his legs, tracing the knot's shape in a slow, repetitive motion with his tongue as it deflated, grounded by the hands in his hair.

Now his tongue flattens against that familiar bulge on the *inside* of his mouth, and *fuck* - what is Shane but a pair of holes to be filled by his alpha? When has Shane ever settled for only being *good* when he can be the fucking *best*? And isn't the best what his alpha deserves?

He opens his mouth until his jaw aches, inhales through his nose.

…..

No longer so malleable to his touch, struggling to make Shane lift his beautiful, moronic head is a battle Ilya's already lost. By the time it hits him what's happening - what Shane is *doing* - it's too late to undo the kickstart of his body's response.

"Baby, *moya shlyushka*, *lyubov,* I'm - holy *fucking* shit - "

He's never knotted anyone's mouth before. Never for even a moment has it occurred to him to ask any of his previous partners for the act. And if any had ever offered (though none had), he'd have brushed it off with a dry laugh about preferring his dick right where it is and without any teeth in it. Although it's not like he doesn't see the appeal - up until right now it's been only theoretical.

As his knot inflates to its full size, maybe that's why it feels to Ilya like his soul is being shot from a gun straight through his dick and into Shane's belly, with Shane somehow the one to pull the trigger while Ilya tastes the metallic of a phantom barrel in his empty mouth.

His already racing heart spikes. Realizing in the throes of his orgasm the extent to which the continued existence of his cock depends on Shane's heatdrunk confidence - and not only that, but his *mercy* - the unexpected danger is an adrenaline-loaded, delectable thrill. Pleasure with a sharper edge than he's used to lately shatters through him.

And as he gasps among the jagged pieces, warm hands knead his pecs almost soothingly.

Fucking *hell*.

Reddened eyes brimming with worship flicker open. Ilya feels like a god.

Shane is just so damn *beatific*, and also somehow absolutely the sluttiest sight Ilya's ever been graced with in his life.

Drool pours from corners of lips stretched wide and thin. Tears stream down his cheeks. Several labored swallows.

Ilya's never seen anything more stunning than Shane Hollander pushing his own limits, pushing Ilya's at the same time without even intending to. And this gorgeous, sexy, fucking knot-addicted cumslut *idiot* has Ilya's knot lodged just shy of his teeth.

Faintly, Ilya thinks he feels Shane's blood pumping through the tender clutch of his wide-open mouth.

His hands slip from Shane's hair to cup his face in both hands, massaging all the tiny straining muscles on either side of his jaw, inadvertently massaging his own *knot* through those stretched cheeks and dribbling more cum straight down his throat.

"*Fuck*." Ilya fights for breath and to keep his hips still. "You are - holy *shit* - *sooo* fucking crazy." Panting between words. "Your breathing, sweetheart - is okay? No choking, promise me."

"*Llnngg*." Shane pats the middle of Ilya's chest.

"Very sexy, very stupid, very crazy. And *blyat*, just look at you." Ilya thumbs the saliva running down Shane's chin, lets his fingers caress the flex of his throat from the outside. "Too greedy for cock to think what you're doing, hm?"

Another groan. The scrape of a fingernail across Ilya's nipple.

Ilya resists the childish impulse to flick him in his ridiculously beautiful forehead, pushing aside the damp fringe of hair sticking to it instead. Shane's gone lax from the neck down since Ilya's knot formed, aside from the hard cock Ilya can still feel pressed up against the inside of his leg, resting in a pool of precum.

As he fumbles for where the pump for the dildo had fallen aside, Ilya takes the time to admire the curve of Shane's ass from this angle, mourning only that the dimples atop it aren't within range for him to kiss.

. ….

There's a large, warm hand on one side of Shane's head, and he lets himself lean into it to relieve some of the tension creeping into his floating headspace through his neck. His mouth feels as wide and as full as it's ever been in his life and all he can taste is skin and sweat and the cum he's not able to completely swallow. Tears mix with the drool running down his chin and neck.

The sense of having accomplished something impressive - and blowing Ilya's brains out in the process - is itself nearly sufficient to satiate him, despite his needy hole's twitching. He's

a limp and useless thing, purpose served and practically ceasing to exist. The only bit of him left that matters encompassed in the hinges of his jaw.

Then a knee nudges his cock, reminds him of what sensation is out there beyond his skullbones.

Ilya holds up the pump to the dildo still buried in Shane's ass. Waves it. "You still want?"

Shane makes a noise of assent, tips his head against Ilya's hip.

"Tsk. Of course you do. I don't know why I bothered asking." Another hot gush at the back of his throat. "I should've known, *moya krasivaya shlyushka* - you are probably the biggest knotslut I've ever met."

Shane's mouth is too full to retort, which - says it all, really, doesn't it? All he can do is moan dumbly and sound like he agrees.

"You can come this way only if you're very, very careful, okay? Precious cargo in here." He pats Shane gently on the cheek.

Yeah, Shane wants to agree, thinking less about the cock in his mouth - though he really, *really* likes that, too - and more about the precious man to whom it's attached. The precariousness of their current positions from *Ilya's* perspective genuinely hadn't dawned on him until less than a minute ago. He feels like a bit of an idiot for not having realized sooner, but takes his responsibility for Ilya's cock (for his love, for his heart, for all that is *Ilya*) with only the utmost seriousness. He wiggles the flat of his tongue against its underside as if to prove it.

Rubbing Shane's ear between his thumb and forefinger, Ilya murmurs something in Russian. With his other hand, gaze intent upon Shane, he gives the pump a squeeze.

The fake knot swells inside him. Maybe it's not real-alpha-good, not *Ilya*-level good, but at a certain point a knot is a knot, and Ilya's right - Shane's just too much of a knotslut not to be greedy for it. He groans. More drool soaks into the dark hair surrounding Ilya's groin.

Two more squeezes, quicker and back to back, seize Shane's breathing for a few moments. He's never able to get used to the toy's unnatural-feeling growth, incremental and stuttering. Not like how *alpha's* knot fills him up, which is always fucking *perfect*.

This time, Ilya gathers some of Shane's spit on his fingertips before using them to tap his cheek. Shane hears and feels their muted *splat*. Then Ilya moves his leg, and *shit* - Shane can't help the shift in his hips, chasing the friction. Opens his eyes upon another wet pat to his cheek, to the pump returned to his line of vision.

"Is enough, baby? Or two more?"

"*Lnheagh*."

"*Mmmm*, your throat fucking *milking* me when you - do it again. Answer me: are you going to come like this, stuffed on both ends and humping me like bitch?"

“*Lllnhheaaghhh*.” Shane moans as sluttily as he can. As sluttily as he feels, with half his face in a puddle of his own spit.

“Good boy.”

Shane gets them then, while Ilya pets his hair, the final two artificial bursts of expansion to the plastic in his guts. He can’t keep his eyes open through the strain and the tears. Pressure builds at the base of his spine, and his hips rock faster. Maybe the toy isn’t so bad when he has Ilya there consuming his senses.

“Maybe next time we see how good you suck me with the full knot in your ass from the start, *da*? Or I put dildo and tongue in you at same time, since you’re always begging to be fucked when I would rather take my time tasting you.”

He clings to Ilya’s thigh with both hands, holding his upper body mostly still and using the leverage to work his cock with increasing urgency against Ilya’s calf. The coarseness of his body hair is easily mitigated by the copious amount of precum leaking from Shane’s cockslit.

Reduced to humping him like a bitch, just like Ilya said.

“Or - you like mouth to be filled so much - we see if you can hold toy in your mouth, just like this.” Another boop to Shane’s nose. “While bouncing on my dick.”

“*Hhnnngh*.”

Fuck - *yeah*. Shane wants it, he wants all of it, wants Ilya to play with his body however the fuck it pleases him to, sticking anything knot-shaped into his holes just to force new sounds out of him.

And the filthy pictures Ilya paints for him don’t completely crowd out the unspoken fantasy cooked up in Shane’s own soupy, heat-addled brain - he’s *mortified* to recall when he’s back to his normal level of inhibition, later:

Instead of the substitute dildo in his ass, Shane’s mind wanders to getting filled up on both ends by two identical alpha knots. To be speared between two impossible Ilyas, utterly at their mercy.

But Ilya’s voice wraps him up with lascivious promises, too, silk-spun for Shane to bask in.

The damp grind of his pelvis on a muscle-thick leg. Wet-sounding moans of pleasure trapped in his throat. Driving himself toward the precipice, his body is a machine tuned toward the singular purpose of wringing the utmost from a knot in his ass in the hopes that it *takes* -

There’s no seed to milk from the dildo when Shane comes with a muffled sob. Not that his slutty hole recognizes the difference, clamping down around the toy so hard it makes his insides ache. All he can do is quiver uselessly in place, suckling at Ilya as if to soothe himself, whining at the lack of liquid warmth his womb craves.

…..

Ilya is the first to notice his knot has deflated enough to be released from its luxurious prison. He's acutely aware that Shane is more out of it than he is, breathing hard through his nose, eyes closed and knotdrunk and mouthing incessantly at Ilya's length. Ilya, in the meantime, alternates between petting Shane's hair and carefully massaging his jaw, hissing every so often from oversensitivity.

"*Solnyshko*," he murmurs fondly, squeezing the hinges of Shane's face as he finally withdraws his cock from its clutches, watching the drool spill in its wake.

Shane coughs, shoulders shaking with a series of unpleasant hoarse noises that have Ilya wincing in sympathy. He grabs the closest thing to drink nearby - a half-empty tumbler of water - and Shane covers Ilya's hand with his own as they bring it together to his swollen and reddened lips.

Ilya watches the bob of his throat beneath the collar, licks at the points of his own teeth.

After several hasty gulps, Shane blinks up at him with bleary eyes, catching his breath.

"*Hmmm*." A pleased little rasp, then, purr-adjacent, and he's crawling ever-so-gingerly up Ilya's body, reminding Ilya of the knot still in him, undoubtedly shifting as he moves.

An irrational flash of jealousy seizes him, thinking about the lucky fucking dildo. *Stupid thing*, his hindbrain snarls - he ought to throw it in trash, later. What needs could his omega possibly have that Ilya isn't *alpha* enough to satisfy?

Shane tangles their limbs together, plastered to Ilya's side. The entire bottom half of his face is covered in saliva and some smaller streaks of cum. With heatdrunk affection, he rubs it against Ilya's cheek, trying and failing to mush their lips together at a sideways angle. Ilya slings an arm around him and squeezes the nape of his neck, inhales the honeyed scent of satisfaction along his jawline.

"You have to *warn* me if you're going to do that, sweetheart," Ilya tells him, sucking a mark under Shane's earlobe. It's what he's allowing himself, to pacify the possessive beast living in his skin. Nothing overkill, nothing that won't heal within a few days, no more teeth breaking flesh. The gauze bandage that sits above the collar on the side of Shane's neck is an ever-present reminder of *that*.

"'*M* sorry, Ilya." He sounds sorrier than he looks, thanks to the obvious hoarse quality to his voice, while the corners of his abused mouth float upwards in a dreamy grin. The goddamn cat that got the cream. "Wasn't really thinking through the logistics of it, from your point of view."

Ilya kisses his temple. "*Da*, *kotenok*. Is as I said - you're just a cock-hungry slut." He's gentle as he takes Shane's chin in hand, turns their faces together properly, noses brushing. Then he licks past slack lips, between teeth - finds what remains of his own bitter aftertaste, steeping toward sweetness underneath Shane's tongue.

"Hmm….yaht voy, though. Yah tevoy…your slut, kitten…whatever, fuck you too."

Ilya can still feel him smiling.

I'm yours.

Sighs of words pressed like gifts to his mouth. Something like sustenance.

Still holding Shane's chin, Ilya begins to lick the mess from his face…clean-not-clean, swapping Shane's slobber for a thin layer of his own saliva.

He said in Russian, earlier, Shane's mouth still full of him:

"*You are too good to me, angel. What have I done to deserve you?*"

He keeps his mouth busy now to stop himself from repeating the sentiment aloud, over and over again, ringing in his head every time he's clear-minded enough to look at Shane looking at him with the world's softest doe eyes to remember not to take for granted that they belong to each other now, even if it isn't permanent yet.

But - sooner than that. He has vague designs upon flipping Shane onto his belly. Prying the deflated toy from his hole with fingers and tongue before replacing it with his cock.

It's these parts, though - all the little in-betweens smattered amidst days of the most mindblowing sex he's ever had - that Ilya tries the hardest to commit to memory. Odd-shaped scraps of precious metal to pocket and trace the contours of for comfort, later, when they're all he has to hold onto in the meantime. *Ya tvoy,* in a bad Canadian accent. An invisible ring on a gold chain.

…..

Other than the occasional, unavoidable need to use his phone, Shane's lost all tether to the outside world. Thanks to being in the basement, the heat room's lack of windows, a day turns into a night turns into another day, or maybe it doesn't - spans of hours abbreviated by nothing but fucking, no sun and sky by which to tune his body to any concrete sense of time. On his own, he's used to counting down every torturous hour, waiting for agony to end. But with Ilya here, Shane is content to let time pass as told by the tides of their desire, rising and falling, waves lapping at the salt-crusted beach of their bodies woven together. Who needs the sun or the moon or the night sky when they have each other?

But there's only so much *crust* on his body Shane can take, at a certain point, even if the hormones make him way less finicky than usual. So about once a day they wind up in the shower or tub together, scrubbing each other filth-free - for however short a time *that* might last - and afterwards, Shane likes to spend a few minutes rearranging the nest. He has a pretty decent system worked out, moving the dirtiest blankets to either the nest's far edges or bottommost layer, and rotating the cleanest-ish ones to the top. Their scented clothing items stay mostly tucked among the pillows all around. His only regret is not having prepared an even larger stash of blankets, considering the rate he and Ilya have proven capable of dirtying them at.

Case in point: his current nest refresh is taking longer, is more frustrating than the last. Shane *fusses*, pulling up blankets and trying to decide which ones are covered in marginally less dried sweat and cum than others, folding them in particular ways to maximize the clean (or even just least-gross) surface area.

Ilya, meanwhile, hovers nearby - inconveniently close, really, other than the fact that he isn't only one who doesn't want to be out of arm's reach. The fond smirk he wears sends a flush up the back of Shane's neck. When Shane tries to summon a glare in response, Ilya's smirk only widens to show his fangs.

"Stop that."

Ilya's face melts immediately into a pout. "Stop what?"

"Stop looking at me like - it would be one thing if you're staring like you're about to pin me down and fuck me, but you're staring like, I don't know - "

"You're just so cute!" Ilya bursts out. He's on his way to pinching Shane's cheek until Shane catches him with a shoulder to the chest, and so then in turn Ilya's mouth just latches onto his shoulder. From there, hazel eyes blink up at him adoringly. "Is crime for me to want to eat my boyfriend now? Especially when he's making such an eatable face?" He pokes the furrow between Shane's brows, growling playfully. Snaps his teeth in the direction of his chin before seeming to settle for a fat pinch of bicep to chew on instead.

(And after all they've said and done together, the word *boyfriend* gets Shane's belly swooping?)

Shane huffs, shakes out the blanket he's holding for an excuse to elbow Ilya in the side of the head. "Cannibalism is a crime, actually." He settles on an optimal fold, brings the corners together. Then, to deflect from his own grating self-consciousness as he tries to fix the nest just right, carries on in a frustrated tone. "I already doubled the number of blankets I usually nest with, by the way. Since you're here, obviously. For…trying to keep everything soft, and nice, and even mostly *clean*, but it turns out that just because there's *two* of us doesn't mean we don't more than double the *mess*, so…"

"Because I make you come and drool and sweat and *cry* more than Mr. Purple - "

"Shut *up*, l know, we both already *know* - and it's not like you're much better, especially with the cum. I mean, Jesus - "

"My body is desperate to pup you, *malysh*, is only natural - "

"Oh my god - *shut up*." Shane very nearly hides behind the blanket before instead carefully spreading it out on top of the nest as he originally intended. "*Anyway*," he pushes ahead. "Now I know, I can get even more blankets for next year. And if you have any preferences on fabric or whatever, or anything specific you have that you want to bring, I can probably…" He's fluffing a few pillows as he speaks, not thinking too much about what he's saying until a couple beats after the words leave his mouth. Warmth rises in his cheeks, then, second-

guessing his own presumption, and he can't help but trail off bashfully. He glances again in Ilya's direction and:

The absolute asshole stares at him with his…stupid *cannibalism* face again.

"Of course *moy pechen'ye*. Next year, every year after that, too." He verbalizes a "*mwah*" sound atop an unnecessarily loud lip smack, giving Shane another kiss. When he makes to pull back, Shane stills him with a firm hand in his curls, keeping their foreheads together as he hangs on to the courage to formulate words adequate for the sentiment bubbling up in him.

"And - it doesn't just have to be when we're cycling, right?" A tentative offering before he launches into a ramble. "I mean, I know we both have a *lot* going on, and I never get to spend as much time here at the cottage as I would like, but…consider it an open invitation. Hell, I'll get a copy of the key made for you. This is my safe place, and…I want it to be yours, too."

Ilya is uncharacteristically quiet for a moment. Then he nods, nose brushing Shane's as he kisses him again, this time with far more intensity and none of the demonstrative noise. "Only preference I have for nest is you in it," he murmurs, and from there his voice turns teasing. "But how about nicer sheets for guest bedroom? Something with higher thread count maybe?"

"Okay, asshole. You know that was only because of my preheat and you'll obviously be in the master bedroom with me."

"Hm, but I'm very polite, of course. Would never want to do something like *assume*, Hollander. It's rude. Do you not know this?"

"...You can sleep in the guest room, actually. With the worst sheets I can find."

…..

They're between waking and sleeping and dozing and dreaming, some time later in the nest together, a jumbled mass of eight limbs - an octopus, practically. Shane is shamelessly indulging his own clingy instincts, leg slung across Ilya's hips and arm over his chest. Eyes closed, he has his head tucked under Ilya's chin and mouth glued to the dip of his collarbone, lapping idly at the skin and savoring the rut-warm notes of smoke and amber. Ilya's hand smooths over the divots in his spine, up and down, heavy palm lingering every time it reaches his ass and the nape of his neck.

Their quiet idyll is interrupted by the shrill tune of a cell phone ring. An unfamiliar one, to Shane's ears. The sudden loudness makes them both jump, and Ilya groans unhappily and curses in Russian under his breath.

Shane frowns. Both of them put their phones on 'do not disturb' for all but whomever qualified as emergency contacts - any of whom was supposed to know better than to bother either of them unless it was an *emergency*. So despite his initial frisson of annoyance at the interruption, Shane is mostly just *worried* as he lifts his head and chews on his bottom lip, watching Ilya fumble blindly for his phone with one arm out to the side in the ringtone's general direction. When he finds it, instead of immediately answering, he squints at the

screen for a few seconds - eyes darting in Shane's direction - before hitting the red button Shane infers is Cyrillic for some version of 'ignore.'

Shane hesitates but can't hold back. "Who was that? It's definitely okay if you have to -"

"No, no - is nothing. Just - is Sveta, calling, and she knows I'm very…occupied."

Shane's chest constricts. He's conscious of his lips curling up, baring his teeth in an involuntary snarl his face feels unaccustomed to. He very nearly chokes in the course of suppressing a hiss in the back of his throat. Ilya gives him an odd look and Shane pretends not to notice, adopting the most casual tone he can.

"Her call wouldn't have come through if she wasn't important." Well, he doesn't know quite why his phrasing came out like *that.* "What if it's an emergency?"

"Is definitely not an emergency, Hollander. I know this. If something is important, Sveta will text like normal person." Ilya puts his phone down, eyebrows raised and one corner of his mouth upturned in evident amusement. "Is something wrong, sweetheart? Why are you making that face?"

"What face?" Shane asks, pretending as if he isn't aware.

Ilya reaches up, then, and -

"This one." *Tap tap* with a fingernail, right where Shane's top and bottom front teeth meet. And Shane can't stop him, because apparently Shane can't stop showing his own teeth at the moment, no matter how chagrined he is about it.

So he *snaps* at the tip of Ilya's finger instead, who withdraws it just in time, catching Shane's jaw in his other hand.

"You're *jealous*," he coos.

Shane blanches, unable to meet his eyes.

"I'm not jeal*ous*." More and more *pretending* - this time not to hear the crack on the last syllable. *Ugh*. "I'm *not*," he insists. But he can smell the lie souring his own scent, knows Ilya smells it, too, and finally has to amend: "At least, I don't *want* to be. It's - I mean, I shouldn't be, right? I know it's just…you're *friends*. And my heat is making me….I don't know - I can't help it." He re-buries his face in Ilya's neck, now vibrating with husky laughter. "Fuck you," he mumbles, and before he can put any conscious thought into what he's doing, begins worrying at the skin there with his teeth.

"I should've guessed how fierce you'd be." Ilya's head falls back. "Go on, mark your territory."

"That's not what I'm doing." The flesh Shane has to release from his mouth to respond, meanwhile, is already reddening.

"No?"

One hand comes up to try to hold Shane's where it rests on Ilya's chest, and Shane realizes his own fingernails are digging hard into a pec's upper curve, digits flexing. As he forces his grip to loosen, hand slipping into Ilya's, Shane catches himself unwittingly admiring the five little imprints he's left behind. Ilya kisses the tendons in the back of his hand.

The…whatever it is - *jealousy*, if Ilya's going to call it that - is worse than bile in the back of Shane's throat. Acidic, strange, and *happening* to rise whenever he thinks about Ilya and Svetlana, threatening to consume him from the inside out. Or Ilya and *anyone* he's been intimate with before, really, but Shane's biology gets its hackles up *especially* over the thought of another omega, an implicit competitor for *his* alpha's affection, his alpha's knot, his alpha's mark, his alpha's *pup* -

Shit, this is ridiculous. *He's* ridiculous. They're *boyfriends* now, and the part of Shane's brain still thinking rationally is relatively secure in the knowledge that it was *Ilya's* idea they become sexually exclusive to begin with, despite Ilya being the only one who actually had other partners he'd have to give up. And considering all the comments Ilya's dropped over the past few months about what he's had to deal with from his family in Russia, Shane has also learned enough about his friendship with Svetlana to more than appreciate her presence in Ilya's life.

No matter what his hormones are currently telling him what to think.

Jealousy swallowed. A minor indignity.

"I know what you have with her is special."

"Yes, Sveta is very important to me. Old friends, best friends. And sure, we've also had a lot of pretty great sex, but -"

Abruptly, Ilya stops speaking. His eyes on Shane go alight with glee, and it's only then Shane hears it himself.

"*Rrssghh*."

A growly little hissing noise. Coming from *him*.

Then Ilya resumes laughing, louder and more delighted-sounding than a few minutes earlier.

"You are such *a fucking asshole*," Shane forces through the gravel in his chest.

He rolls atop Ilya to straddle his thighs, stifling both the laughter and his own stupid growling by shoving their mouths together so hard he hears their teeth click.

From a biological perspective, only omegas have scent glands in their neck capable of receiving a genuine mating bite: something to do with the combination of heat hormones, an alpha's saliva, and a punctured omega neck gland full of blood being necessary to instigate the chemical realignment between partners, creating what constituted a mate bond. At least in mating terms, the scent glands in an alpha's neck are functionally useless.

But Shane doesn't let that stop him from targeting Ilya's anyway. While they kiss, in his fit of madness, he roughly grinds his knuckles into the spots on either side of Ilya's neck.

"*Mmm*, such a needy baby. Reminding me who I belong to?" Ilya pushes his neck up into Shane's knuckles and his own hands come down to grab Shane by the hips, rock their groins together.

"Fuck off. I remember that territorial display in front of your house over Hayden's pocket square, and you weren't cycling, so what's your excuse? Should I give him a call and see if you can help whatever *your* face does?"

"You want Pike to hear you scream for me? How good I satisfy you?" Ilya flings one arm out to the side table, clearly seeking Shane's phone. "Okay, let's call."

Shane tries to grab it before he does, but Ilya's half-second head start gives him the victory. He's on his way to opening up the contact list when Shane bites down on his bottom lip, snarling. Then he takes Ilya's cock in his fist, lines it up with his dripping hole, and - at the same time he sinks down on it, punching twin moans out of them and into each other's mouths - knocks the phone from Ilya's hand so it lands with a *thunk* across the room.

Ilya's hands return to Shane's hips as if magnetized. Fingers fit perfectly into bruises they've already made without aching. Gazes magnetized, too, turned from the momentary battle over the phone and back to one another, a coming-together as natural as the rest of them.

Then, thighs working, Shane starts to ride him.

At this point there's no position they *haven't* fucked in, at least that Shane can think of, and he's more determined than ever to get *fan-fucking-tastic* at every one. He's well-aware of the breadth of Ilya's experience, and with partners who have more experience than Shane does, too. Being reminded that they still exist out there, especially an omega with whom Ilya has been intimate in so many ways, just fans the fire blazing under his skin.

A fire Shane thinks he wouldn't mind spreading to Ilya, too, setting him alight, consuming the both of them together as long as it means no one else ever gets to touch Ilya again but him.

"Thinking of anyone else near you right now - " Ilya grunts, gripping his hips harder, fucking up into him. "Other alphas, especially, seeing you, smelling you, how fucking sweet, ripe and ready… *chtoby ya v tebya shchenochka vtrakhal.*"

Not for the first time, Shane's brain clocks a snatch of the Russian sex vocabulary he'd tried to memorize he knows, this time something to do with *pupping* him, and - *fuck*. More slick soaks the base of Ilya's cock and Shane quickens the rhythm of his hips.

Ilya's ribcage rumbles with a growl.

"Anyone else - I will tear out their fucking throats, *malysh*. You're *mine*."

Muscle bounces. Smacks of thighs, shallow breaths fill the air. Shane's knees are digging into the nest. Friction and fullness, the push and the pull. He drags his nails down the meat of Ilya's chest, relishes the burn in his hamstrings alongside the red marks he leaves behind.

It's more than pleasure his body chases, from a more deeply rooted ache.

"*Il-ya. Al-pha*." Each syllable a pant.

Ilya starts to play with Shane's chest as he rides him, groping his pecs and smushing them together with almost slap-like force. Then he pinches his nipples, holding onto them tightly to put Shane in control of the tension, dual stinging through his nerve endings and down his spine. The more pain Shane puts himself in, the more he can hear himself whine, feel his hole clenching irregularly, sabotaging his own effort to take Ilya's cock harder and faster with how fucking *good* it feels.

Fuck, Shane fucking *loves* this, somewhere between riding his alpha like his life depends on it and being bounced like a slutty ragdoll with nipples meant to be pulled on.

"No one else, Ilya. Fuck, *please*, no one else, want you to *keep* me - "

"I keep you, keep you and the most perfect tits I've ever seen, small and pretty and so *sensitive*, baby, *blyat*." Ilya leans up and bites at one, and Shane winds a hand in his hair to hold him there.

Then - while he's still capable of grasping for one of the phrases he'd learned, none of which he's yet managed to deploy - he blurts out in clumsy Russian: "Pozhaluysta, alpha, sdelay menya beremennym."

Please alpha, breed me.

Ilya freezes, growling around Shane's nipple. The cock in him *jumps*. Then Ilya's mouth pulls away, head tipping back to stare up at Shane with eyes like dark pits attempting to swallow him whole.

And *that* dam broken, Shane can't stop more from spilling out of him, albeit in easy English which flows familiar as water from his tongue.

"*Shit*, Ilya, I don't care - *hmmnn* - you can *breed* me. Want you to *pup* me, *please.*"

In an impressive athletic maneuver he's displayed more than once in their past few days together, Ilya keeps his cock buried right where it is as he rolls Shane beneath him, only to immediately start fucking into him harder.

"'Mm g'ing to knock you up, *omega* - you want a pup, *da*? Lay there and - *nnghh* - fucking *take it* while I give you one."

…..

He pushes Shane onto his side, pressing the omega's knee into the nest at an angle along his waist to improve his leverage and deepen his thrusts into Shane's guts.

Shane tosses his head back, and - *hell.* The bandage on his neck, the collar, too - still hurt Ilya to look at if he lets his brain acknowledge their existence. So instead he focuses on every moan and gasp he's earning from the man beneath him, lovelier than music, brow furrowed and freckles scrunching in concentrated pleasure. There's a specific way Shane loses himself in being fucked like he's trying to memorize how it feels, and the beautiful sight of it never fails to take Ilya's breath away, commit him more than ever to giving the man he loves absolutely the *best* memories.

"Such a good hole for me. No matter how much I knot you, still so fucking *tight*." Ilya's face is hot; sweat beads down his nose. He's distantly aware of the pounding of his heart, the particular tempo it creates with his hips.

Shane opens his eyes, reaches up to grip Ilya's chin in one hand. Ilya sucks his thumb into his mouth as a liquid gaze locks onto his.

"Fuck a pup into me, alpha - no one else's, *yours*."

The hand in the roots of Ilya's hair tugs hard enough to send tiny shockwaves of delicious hurt pulsing through him, increasing his urgency. For over a minute, he intensifies the pace, rut-driven, nursing the thumb pressed against his tongue until it slips from his mouth as Shane flings his arm back into the pillow.

"Mine, *solnyshko.* You - only you. Have to - *nnhh* - make sure it *takes*. My claim - our *pup*, in your - *rrngh* - fucking womb. So everyone sees - everyone *knows* -"

Ilya's always admired the stretch marks framing Shane's perfect ass. With an appreciative *thwap*, a harsh squeeze to a palmful of patterned hip, he shifts into fuckdrunk Russian to give them their proper due. "*Do you know how obsessed I am with these, your pretty stretch marks*? *Going to give you more of them, all over your pregnant belly and leaking tits.*"

He dips his chin, kisses the sweat-slick, smooth bit of flesh where pec and armpit join.

"Your tits, *bozhe moy*, your fucking tits. Will be full of milk for our pup once I make you into a mommy, *da*?"

And *fuck* - Shane *wails*, his whole body seizes, shudders, and Ilya feels the hole around him go so vice-tight his thrusts are made to stutter to a halt.

Without something knot-shaped convincing their body to be satisfied, it ranges from difficult to impossible for an omega in heat to come. Even Shane, who is usually so deliciously *easy* for Ilya to draw exactly what he wants out of him, has been able to come without a knot in him only once this heat, on about day two or so - and even *that* took three thick fingers spearing him open while Ilya simultaneously employed every trick he'd ever learned from past partners when it came to sucking *amazing* dick.

All of which is to say - it is an unexpected goddamn *rapture* for the both of them for Ilya to fuck a climax out of him just like *this*, nothing but words and cock. *Shane's* cock, meanwhile, spurts between his legs untouched. And his hole keeps convulsing, letting out fresh little gushes of slick whose liquid warmth Ilya feels dripping down his balls.

He kisses a perky brown nipple, suckles it between his lips the same as he had Shane's thumb, worshipping it with the flat of his tongue.

Shane lies beneath him in something akin to a daze, mouth hanging half-open. A softer moan, drawn-out and ragged, leaks from his lungs along with any of the tension leftover from his orgasm. The hands in Ilya's hair finally loosen.

And now that Ilya can thrust his cock again, it's *agony* for him to keep his lower body still rather than immediately resume. But even in rut, the initial impulse of his hindbrain is to resist proceeding if it could lead to his mate's discomfort. If Shane's hole is too overstimulated to continue, Ilya can fuck and knot between his thighs or in his own fist if he has to.

So he waits. Finally, looking at Ilya from under pleasure-hooded eyes, Shane starts to squirm.

"Come *onn*, Il*yyaa*. How are we gonna make a pup if you don't - *nngh* - *knot* me again?" he bursts out in a breathless whine, torching what little remains of Ilya's self-restraint. "I can't be a mommy without your cum in me."

And then Ilya is *gone*, hips pumping with savage intent, cock driving into a hot and soaking velvet heaven made for him. If he was a beast before, red-faced and grunting, then he must be a monster now. Something out of a fairy tale or a nightmare that's been doused in gasoline and trapped in an inferno, a gaping maw of blistering desire. Before he turns to ash, he'll carve a place for himself in Shane's entrails, mark him, claim him from the inside, ruin him for anyone else. If he can't keep his omega with a bite, then he'll keep him with a knot and a pup, *full* of pups, just a soft body in Ilya's bed for him to fuck and breed and kiss awake every morning for the rest of their lives.

…..

The loose-limbed sated feeling and ability to form words are rapidly fucked out of Shane's nervous system. Every thrust is an audible *smack* of their bodies, an increasingly wet *squelch*. He arches into his favorite cage, Ilya's muscles bracketing his own and the bone-deep certainty that even if he *wanted* to get away now - alpha won't let him, it's too late.

Alpha. *Ilya.* Staring down at Shane, vein in his temple pulsing. His hair is a sweat-damp disaster, the world's worst excuse for a halo, thanks to Shane's fingers tangled up in it. He's back to yanking at it now, trying to pull that beautiful face closer to his, capture the avalanche of growls from lips in need of kissing. Shane can't see the shape of Ilya's mouth and *not* think about kissing it, wondering when was the last time they kissed, when they'll get to kiss again, why aren't they kissing *right now*?

Hot and heavy puffs of breath collide in the scant inches between them before their mouths do. After an irregular beat, panting in one another's proximity, Ilya's pace quickens; Shane feels the base of the knot at his entrance convulse, and he hears himself let out a needy, *bleating* sound at the incremental stretch's delectable promise.

He's a hole to be filled, a womb to be bred. He's being utterly flayed open in some inexplicable way, the thrill and vulnerability of exposed viscera he didn't know he possessed

- and shielded from the rest of the world, right here where he belongs, in the arms of the only man he'll ever love.

"*Rrgshhh - sha - Sh*ane."

With a palm on his throat, resting flesh to bone, Shane feels as well as hears how guttural Ilya's voice has gone. A pulse rabbits under his thumb. The tip of his middle finger maps perfectly to the mole in the middle of Ilya's cheek. He's being further drenched in alpha sweat with every passing moment.

They kiss again - fucking *finally* - mouths smearing together in a messy lack of coordination and unparsable slurring noise. Then Ilya's knot swells, and he ducks his head, burying his face in the pillow just above Shane's shoulder as he comes with a muffled roar. His whole body shakes - Shane's along with it, too, insides stuffed to the brim in the very particular way he aches to accommodate and sends sparks through his spine.

Into the pillow and next to Shane's ear, Ilya continues to let out a low, bestial groan, an occasional spasm to his hips. As they both catch their breath, Shane kisses the scent gland in his neck, petting his hair.

Until Ilya raises his head - teeth bared and wild-eyed, chest still heaving. A hot mouth slides from Shane's chin to his jawline. Ilya grinds his pelvis purposefully forward, knot deeper, as rooted in Shane's guts as he can possibly get.

All Shane can do is lie there and take it. A hole for cum to be wrung into. His cock is hard again, leaking, still untouched.

Then Ilya puts a hand on Shane's lower belly and *presses*, massaging in firm, tiny circles so that they can both feel the slight distension of his knot beneath Shane's ab muscles.

"Right *here*. *Moya lyubimyy* - can you feel that?" Ilya rumbles into Shane's ear. "*Nngh* - that's where the baby's going to be, *da*?"

And it's enough to drive Shane over the edge once more, as - with a wordless scream - he comes again, this time so hard it causes him to black out.

…..

(Hormone-fueled fantasies. Impossible ones, thanks to Shane's birth control. For which they're both extremely grateful, really, due to…just about every possible practical consideration.

It's not something they talk about when they're lucid again.)

…..

Ilya shoves his nose into Shane's armpit, rubs his face between the omega's pecs, mouths at his nipples with significantly more gentleness than earlier. The feedback loop of pleasure shuddering between the joining of their bodies lessens in intensity, becomes more manageable as the minutes pass. He wishes he could find some way to stay like this for the

rest of his life, just another one of Shane Hollander's organs, nestled in his insides. He may or may not mutter aloud in Russian something to the effect, too.

Tears on Shane's cheeks, half-smudged. Ilya licks them away. When Shane's eyes eventually flutter open, they're too lost in looking at one another for a few moments to do anything else. Ilya kisses him twice more, then - one each for his upper and lower lip, spit-shiny and swollen so pretty.

"I have to confess something."

"...Mmm?" Rumpled and soft, and *his*.

"Promise you won't be mad at me."

Suddenly concerned, Shane's nose twitches. "What?...*Ilya*. What did you do?"

"Noooo, Shane, *pleeease*. You have to promise not to be mad."

Shane's lips purse, very clearly trying not to give Ilya the satisfaction of smiling at his whiny antics even while his eyes crinkle in uncomplicated and knotdrunk delight. "Okay, baby, I promise."

The rare endearment all but pierces Ilya through the chest with unexpected warmth, a bolt of sunshine straight to the heart. It takes him a second to remember what he was even going to say. Then:

"I bit through your pillow."

Shane blinks. He turns his head to the side, where Ilya's face had been when his knot popped. Ilya sees the flicker of genuine consternation in his expression as the sight registers of a fraying tear in satin fabric, the spilling forth of a handful's worth of cotton fluff.

"Oh - *shit.* You really did." A pause. His gaze rebounds coyly back to Ilya. "...I guess it's kinda hot?"

"Not as hot as *you* are, sweetheart - *blyat*." Ilya nips his shoulder. "When did you learn Russian? Do you know anything else besides begging for alpha to breed you?"

Shane's cheeks go adorably pink beneath his freckles. "I may have tried to learn a few phrases I thought you might like, once we really committed to doing this together. Mostly just generic - 'breed me,' 'give me your knot' - that sort of thing. But it's pretty hard for me to remember them in the moment, when we're actually…and, *ugh*, I don't want to try repeating any of them now because my pronunciation is seriously *embarrassing* and - "

Ilya cuts off his rambling murmur with another kiss. "Is okay. I will teach you to pronounce many sexy things for me, *moy lyubov*, I promise."

After a moment and without any prompting, Shane tries to repeat, "....Moy leeyoubov."

And how is Ilya *not* supposed to fall a little bit more in love with him, after that? Gets the chance to tell Shane so, too, when he asks for the translation.

…..

Some time later, Ilya's phone pings. Without taking his eyes off Shane, he reaches for it with greatly exaggerated caution, his other arm up as if to ward off an attack.

Shane rolls his eyes. "Just check it. Answer back. It's fine!"

He means it, even if the hormones buzzing under his skin are unusually wasplike in their disagreement.

Ilya opens his texts. Instead of trying to read them from the corner of his eye, Shane minds his own business - not like he can read the language anyway even if he was nosy enough to make the attempt.

"I have couple of days to reply before she comes looking for my body," Ilya tells him as he reads, snorting fondly. "But otherwise she assumes I'm having too much fun to answer her call, and I am just the perfect alpha gentleman for *my precious Jane.*" He emphasizes the last three words in an over-the-top, syrupy tone, pinching Shane's cheek. Shane bats his hand away.

"You don't think she feels like - I don't know - I'm stealing you from her? Even just as a heat partner?"

Ilya scoffs and shrugs one shoulder. "It's nothing, trust me. She has any alpha she wants at a snap of her fingers. Sveta and I - " Shane is very careful this time not to even allow his jaw to clench at the sound of her name. "All we really want is to see each other happy."

But any other alpha is definitely a downgrade! Shane barely manages to keep that one an inside thought. But he decides to take Ilya at his word anyway, ignore his own stupid hindbrain. Allows the idea to settle that maybe he's somehow the only one Ilya Rozanov has truly ruined for anyone else, and let that mean something.

"Anyway," Ilya continues, carding his fingers through Shane's hair. "Not only is Sveta big fan of you as hockey player - she is very big cat person. Has two of them, likes to feed the strays. You are just a big kitty, Hollander, and so Sveta will not be put off by all your hissing and spitting."

Shane has to bite back the urge to snark back and be accused by Ilya of proving his point exactly. "...Whatever," he feigns grumbling instead, and butts their foreheads together.

…..

As soon as he'd seen Sveta's incoming phone call, Ilya had a feeling he knew its true purpose, recalling an earlier conversation.

They'd been walking back to her flat together, probably about a week after his father's funeral. Both of them were a little drunk, holding hands, arms swinging playfully across the

distance between them. He wasn't spending every night on her couch because he still had too much shit at home to do, but he needed the breaks where he could get them from Alexei and the sight of the walls where he'd had to watch each of his parents waste away.

And - since he wasn't sleeping around Moscow anymore after convincing Shane they should be sexually exclusive despite not defining themselves as in a relationship or even admitting to feelings for one another - it was easier if anyone prying into his personal life just assumed he and Sveta were still fucking. Even if he wasn't necessarily behaving like the playboy everyone was used to seeing, at least he wasn't celibate - now that would've raised too many awkward questions.

"I'm going to call you, when you're with your Jane in a few weeks," Sveta announced.

Ilya glanced up from his phone. Naturally, that was exactly who he was in the middle of texting, the ping in his pocket having distracted him from the cigarette he'd been previously fumbling to light. "What? Why? I'll be busy."

"Why not? Are we not very dear friends and I want to make sure you haven't been abandoned by your omega on some Canadian mountaintop? If you're so busy, then don't answer," she said airily, knocking Ilya's elbow with hers before continuing in a mischievous lilt, "Or if you want to see how she reacts, see how much she likes you, make her jealous…"

Ilya sniffed. "I don't think she's the jealous type."

"That you know of. Let's just test it when you're there in her heat nest and see. Maybe text instead of call?"

"I texted others - " *Shane* "- in your nest before. You told me you didn't give a fuck."

She gave him a sidelong look. "I didn't. And maybe Jane won't either, just like maybe you aren't lying when you pretend whatever you're doing with her is all very casual and just-for-fun. Who knows? I'm curious, Ilyusha. And you deserve to find out if Jane has any idea how lucky she is." With that, she plucked the cigarette from behind his ear and lit it for herself, offering Ilya a drag or two as he typed away on his phone, their other hands still joined as she walked a step ahead of him.

I didn't answer because he said he loved me even before *you jealousy-baited him, Sveta*, Ilya will brag later. It seems like the sort of thing she will approve of.

…..

Shane's alpha in slumber is a sight to treasure, and one he's scarcely gotten a glimpse of this week. Whenever Shane stirs into bleary consciousness, Ilya seems to nearly always have already beaten him there by several minutes or more, clear-voiced and attentive. Per Shane's prior research, it's not atypical for alphas to function on much less rest than omegas do to get through their cycles. Some latent instinct to 'protect the den' - or the usual sort of irrational alpha bullshit with no basis in reality.

(Not that the way Shane's belly flutters whenever he thinks about Ilya protecting *their den* is overly concerned with nonsense like *reality*.)

But - even if Shane is half-braced to be pounced on at any moment - he's managed to catch Ilya asleep this time, study the predator in repose. A resplendent sprawl of muscle, laying on his front with his head turned toward Shane, cheek mushed against the pillow. Utterly free from any tension or care, his features have an aspect of boyishness despite the coarse layer of brown scruff grown in, framing jaw and lips Shane knows the shape of better than his own by now. He's seen Ilya's playoff beard just plenty in photos and videos, has fantasized about it more than once but never had the chance to feel it for himself.

And okay, maybe it turns out Shane doesn't *love* the beard burn - it *itches*, especially between his thighs - but he's greedy for every new kind of friction Ilya can awaken skin to skin, refuses to take anything for granted.

Fuck, Shane can't even look at the bit of drool gleaming in the corner of Ilya's mouth without being hopelessly enamoured by it.

Chin in hand, he gingerly levers his elbow without disturbing the arm slung across his waist, sweeps his gaze down Ilya's back, its steady rise and fall. The heat fog in his brain makes it too easy to forget they won't be tucked away in the cottage's basement forever, now feeling like a proper den for the first time. When the cloud lifts temporarily, he wants to preserve in his memory for later the most minor of details.

Like trails of pink left from his fingernails, the dotting of purple bruises. He is a possessive flame, crackling and smug. But the smattering of moles across Ilya's back is even more beautiful, just because they're *Ilya's*, and when Shane's marks fade, they get to remain.

He draws strings with his eyes between Ilya's moles, seeking constellations across the vast sky of his back. Maybe the precise location of each one will be easier to map out in his memory if he can find patterns in them, the impressions of shapes. But Shane's always thought that *real* constellations are too abstract to actually look like what they're supposed to be anyway, and it's a similar struggle for his brain to catch upon anything of legible enough shape to put name to now. There are six moles that he decides look vaguely like a hockey stick, after which he gives up, gives in to the temptation to let his touch wander along with his eyes. From mole to mole he drags a fingertip, playing connect-the-dots between them in a useless attempt to spell out the letters of his own name, however crooked and overlapping.

He's halfway through the *o* in his last name when Ilya's purr kicks up, and Shane knows he isn't asleep anymore. (And as far as little alpha 'tells' go, Shane is pretty obsessed with it.)

"What are you doing back there, Hollander?" Ilya mumbles the question half into the pillow, squinting up at Shane. His upper body squirms in a way that is just undeniably fucking cute. "S'ticklish."

"...You have a lot of moles back here." Shane drums his fingers across the divot in Ilya's back.

A quiet huff of bemused laughter. "*Da*, you think I don't know this?"

“I noticed them before, but I’ve never gotten a good chance to really *look*, you know?”

Ilya shifts slightly, and Shane drinks in the intentional flex of his trap and lat muscles. “You want me to send you sexy back photos? Mmm - back *shots*?”

The wordplay gets a giggle out of Shane despite himself. “You know we can’t in case our shit gets hacked. And besides - the point is making sure I take the time to remember.”

“What, like you won’t get to see them again?”

“Pretty sure that’s the opposite of what we decided.” Shane leans over, kissing first a mole on Ilya’s shoulder blade and then nuzzling his cheek. “It’ll be a lot of sneaking around for awhile, still. My parents, the league…the plan has always been to go public with my designation one day, and that obviously needs to happen first.”

It was something he’d actively tried to avoid thinking about for most of last season - he’d won Montreal a cup, and his mother’s hints about the increasingly progressive social climate were getting less and less subtle in their implication. It’s nothing Shane wants to have to deal with, especially where hockey is concerned, but of course he’s never allowed just to be an athlete. He’s a name and a brand. And not only that - he’s *the best.* It’s afforded him far more luxuries than it’s ever cost him, but the whole ‘coming out as the first omega in hockey’ thing has always been a can of unnecessary complications he’d rather keep kicking down the road for as long as he’s possibly able.

But - he’s found a reason for that to no longer be the case, hasn’t he? Over two-hundred-and-twenty pounds of it, right here in his nest. If he’s going to be mated to Ilya someday, the rest of the world needs to know he’s an omega before then, because Shane wants to do this the *right* way. Or at least in a way that the league and the public are capable of digesting. Whatever the hell that looks like.

Because that is a problem for *future* Shane to deal with. *Present* Shane is still in heat, and even in the moments when his mind is mostly clear, Ilya’s presence and the combination of their pheromones render him incapable of much worry or ruminating.

And so Shane sticks his tongue in Ilya’s ear, giggling again when it makes Ilya jerk and yelp. Then Ilya growls and playfully snaps his jaw, and Shane goes pliant giddily as he’s wrestled beneath the other man.

“My rut is over, *kotenok*. Maybe this comes off now?” He hovers above Shane on knees and elbows, reaching between them to brush his fingers across Shane’s neck.

The collar - Shane forgot it was there, after wearing it for so long.

Distracted, he blinks up at Ilya and hopes he doesn’t come off as too disappointed when he asks, “Oh, your rut’s over? How are you feeling?” Now that Ilya mentions it, Shane supposes he should’ve been able to tell himself, by the shift in his scent. The heavy amber and musk have dissipated, leaving his usual pine and smoke behind - Shane’s mouth waters for it regardless.

“Perfect.” Ilya palms his ass.

“And like I knew would happen, I’m, uh, still in heat - “

Ilya buries his nose in the hollow of Shane’s throat and inhales. “I *know*,” he groans. “Still smell so fucking sweet.”

“I can use the dildo if you’re tired, it’s really okay.”

“*Nooo*, I’m not too tired, baby, promise. Alpha is going to take care of you. But…” Ilya tugs the leather between his forefingers and thumb. “Will be more comfortable for you without this? Up to you, but I will not bite.”

His skin beneath the collar feels somewhat raw, admittedly, though he’s gotten used to it. “Okay.” He pats Ilya’s cheek. “Since your rut is over. I know I’m in good hands.”

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Ilya’s heart could burst out of his chest like a cartoon character at the unerring trust Shane has in him. *Fuck* - it just never fails to take his breath away. Brown doe eyes shine at him brighter than stars, darting between his eyes and his lips, and Ilya gives in again to kissing him, slipping a tongue into his mouth.

If Ilya *is* tired, and *if* his hips and his dick are in actuality pretty sore now that his body is allowing the strain of the past several days to settle in, he’s not about to let any of that stop him from being inside Shane himself again. When it comes down to it, if Shane’s heat stretches on for too much longer, Ilya will do whatever it takes to keep him full and happy, including taking turns with a toy. Based on his scent, however - the most aggressive notes of burnt sugar and ginger beginning to ebb - Ilya suspects they’re nearing the final wave, and he’s not about to risk *not* being the last knot of Shane’s heat.

He swats Shane’s flank. “Roll over.” When Shane complies with an eager little shimmy, Ilya scolds, “Don’t get so excited, sweetheart - collar is coming off before I fuck you. Be patient for me, okay? You’re not so desperate yet.”

Either on purpose or just because he’s a natural whore, Shane’s legs are spread. Using his own knees and more roughness than necessary, Ilya shoves them together, comes to straddle the backs of Shane’s thighs, soft cock resting in the cleft between plush asscheeks. He squeezes them appreciatively before he can help himself, giving Shane a soft smack when he arches back into his touch…which does the opposite of discouraging him, of course. Leaning forward, Ilya nips the nape of his neck, preparing for the interminable hassle of the collar’s series of tiny buckles by refamiliarizing himself with them up close.

Shane crosses his arms and pillows his forehead on them, facedown. Ilya gives the hair on the back of his head a fond scratch before starting to undo the first buckle.

“Maybe I don’t go back to Russia next summer. After this I go back, too much shit to do. But.” He swallows, peering closely at his work. “It will be last time, maybe.”

A soft, surprised exhale. “What? Really?”

”Yes. Stay here - North America - permanently. Try to get citizenship. I don’t know.” Rights for omegas are not so good in Russia.” As succinctly as he can, he explains in broad strokes how ‘traditional roles and values’ for omegas are legally enforced, employment restrictions, what a convoluted nightmare it’s known to be to try and can get ahold of things like heat suppressants and birth control on the black market. Not exactly a *light* topic of conversation, but judging by the slight cock of his head, Shane isn’t uninterested, and it keeps them both from being overly distracted by each other’s nearness, lets Ilya focus on the buckles while he talks.

“Even worse than it used to be,” he adds. “Old rules, alpha mate had final say. Not so bad, maybe, for omega with good alpha.”

Shane responds to *that* with a derisive noise in the back of his throat. Ilya hums to show his agreement.

“But now laws sometimes even punish alpha, if omega mate has too much freedom. Bad example for others.”

“*Jesus*, Ilya. That’s bullshit.”

“*Da.* So, I always plan to leave Russia one day for good. My niece - I want to have home for her in US or Canada, in case she presents as omega in a few years.”

“Canada.” Barely a murmur.

Ilya feels the corner of his mouth tug upwards. “What was that?”

“*Canada*,” Shane says, louder this time. Briefly, he cranes his neck to meet Ilya’s gaze. “Would be better.”

All fake-casual, Ilya shrugs and nods like he’s seriously considering his options. “I am free agent next season, so maybe…Probably, since I will have very boring Canadian mate to make happy.”

Shane’s cheeks turn pink, and he’s too late in returning his face to his forearms to prevent Ilya from seeing the crooked line of his smile, embarrassed and pleased.

After several minutes of effort, the collar loosens, and Shane turns his head from side. When Ilya gets through unfastening the last little buckle and carefully pulls the collar away, he can’t help but grimace at the irritated band of red it’s leaving behind. Shane’s moan of relief sounds *mostly* free of imminent lust as, flipping on his back, he reaches up to rub at his newly freed scent glands.

“Don’t give me that look,” Shane says to him, eyes narrowing.

“What look?”

“The sad puppy-dog eye look!”

Ilya scoffs in abject disbelief. “I have sad eyes, really? You’re one to talk, Shane Bambi-eyes Hollander. Yes, the cartoon deer.”

Shane kicks at his thigh; Ilya catches his ankle. Grinning lazily, Shane tilts his chin up, baring his neck once more, and Ilya forces himself to look at the inflamed ring of red surrounded by hickeys shaped like his own mouth.

“Collar was good idea,” Ilya assures him. Meaning it, too, even if he can’t bring himself to return Shane’s grin. Better than any alternative. Without it, maybe he would’ve tried harder for a little longer to resist his alpha’s urge and Shane’s pleading to be bitten. In the darkest, most shameful part of his heart, however, he knows he’d have given in eventually anyway. If not for the solid leather barrier, Shane would be wearing a wound on his mating gland instead of some chafed skin and a bandage hiding a futile, worthless bite.

And that would be worse, Ilya has to remind himself. That would be worse.

Batting his eyelashes, Shane taps the scent gland in his neck opposite from the bandage and gives Ilya an imploring look.

“Tell me with words,” Ilya says.

“Scent me, alpha, please?”

“So polite.” Ilya’s voice is a rumble as he blankets Shane, first tucking his wrist against Shane’s neck and then immediately replacing it with his nose followed by his mouth, so instead of giving Shane the scenting he’d asked for, Ilya’s lapping at the gland with his tongue, then sucking the spot into his mouth as tenderly as he can. It doesn’t matter, Ilya thinks, because they’re already as drenched in one another as it’s possible to be. Shane tastes like smoke and honey, sweetness charring on a flame surrounded by tall pine trees.

One leg hitches up Ilya’s hip. Hands find their home in his hair. Shane’s back arches, pressing his hard cock against Ilya’s, who’s barely started to chub.

“Sure I haven’t worn you out, Rozanov?”

Ilya growls and tweaks his nipple. “If you can chirp you aren’t desperate enough yet. I’m not in rut anymore. Means my dick is no longer unlimited resource.”

”Maybe this is why you’re only second-best in the league.”

Ilya resists the urge to nip his scent gland in retaliation. Instead he bites Shane’s chin and otherwise refuses to be baited. Then he sits upright on his knees, hikes Shane’s leg on his hip a few inches higher. Squeezes roughly at a muscle-thick calf, pushes it into the air, pinning Shane’s other thigh to the bed to put him in an almost-splits position. His grip is possessive, testing - like he hasn’t tested Shane’s flexibility *plenty* - and, breath quickening, Shane just lets himself go loose and heavy beneath him. Ilya pushes his calf all the way back to his shoulder, surveying him from head to toe but mostly leering between his legs, blatant enough to make sure Shane sees.

Shane licks his lips, pupils beginning to lose focus.

After settling that leg back onto the bed, Ilya does the same thing to the other, and then both at once, continuing to move both limbs with almost doll-like ease until Shane's ankles are above his head. Throughout, he watches Shane's cock leak and throb, more and more slick dribble steadily out of his hole.

"What are you doing?" Shane finally bursts out, fingers digging into the nest at his sides.

"Deciding how I'm going fuck you, for last knot of your heat." Ilya slaps the back of one thigh. "Hold."

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"Last?" Shane asks dazedly. At the same time, without any hesitation he obeys, hooking his elbows around his thighs, quads flexing like he's in plow pose. Combined with the familiar ache creeping in his lower belly, Ilya's casual manhandling has him turned on to a dizzying degree. "S'usually not so early…"

Ilya adjusts Shane's forearms, making him bring his legs in even closer. Far enough back that his hamstrings burn, loose and bendy as he is. "First time you have alpha here. Maybe my greedy omega is almost satisfied?"

A new gush of slick. Shane feels his wet hole twitching around nothing, exposed to the air, putting himself on display at Ilya's bidding to be devoured by that predator's gaze. It's only when the predator in question eventually glances at Shane's face again and raises an expectant eyebrow that Shane realizes he's expecting a reply.

Shit…Shane can't even remember what he'd been asked.

Ilya spits on his hole.

"*Fuck*," Shane gasps, sudden tension shooting through him, weight sent rocking backwards on the curve of his spine.

He hears Ilya spit again, feels warm saliva land in approximately the same location. Shane almost kicks him in the head entirely on accident, and he hears himself letting out an unintelligible whine.

"How many times have I fucked you and you're still so sensitive?" Ilya asks. He pushes the unruly leg back where he put it, folded to Shane's chest.

With a wet squelch, two fingers plunge into him to the knuckle, easy as anything. Legs trembling, Shane tightens his biceps to hold them in place. His breath comes in shorter, harsher pants as he struggles against the urge to buck and squirm. Inside him, Ilya's fingers twist and scissor in a ruthless, wordless show of just how *open* he is.

A pitchy, dissatisfied noise slips from him at the same time Ilya's fingers do - only for Shane to find those same fingers pressed between his lips, making him taste his own tangy-salty sweetness.

“I knew you could be a good boy,” Ilya croons, stroking Shane’s tongue. “Maybe you are the best at hockey, too - doesn’t matter when all you need is big alpha knot to fill you.” He withdraws his fingers, and as Shane tries and fails to follow them without a second thought, he’s intercepted by Ilya’s face looming over his.

Wet fingers brush his cheek. Shane’s eyes close, and he blindly tips his head back for a kiss.

Ilya spits into his half-open mouth.

Shane moans, slowly blinking up at Ilya. His jaw hangs open until Ilya closes it for him with a thumb on his chin. Then - Shane doesn’t know why, but -

“Thank you, alpha,” he says, voice watery and dumb.

“*Fuck*.” A reverential curse and shift toward awestruck in Ilya’s features. Shane is too far gone to comprehend the reason for either as he finally gets Ilya’s mouth on his, however brief. “Turn over for me now, baby. Knees and elbows.”

Shane’s brain is slow to process the request - he can’t understand why Ilya isn’t deciding to fuck him in this one since he can hold it so well - but Ilya’s already got big hands on his waist, helping him into position. Shoulders in pillows, head turned to one side, hips in the air.

“*Mm*, ass up. Higher. *Da.*”

His hips sway with how badly he wants it. Ilya’s hands settle on his asscheeks, and as Shane prepares instinctively for a familiar breach of thick cockhead, he’s surprised instead to feel lips at the very small of his back. Rolling bleary eyes over a shoulder, he sees Ilya’s head bent, kissing one of the dimples above his ass. Then a bob of blond curls in the subsequent kiss of its twin. And since he was expecting to get fucked but isn’t, Shane distantly wishes he could muster a glare, but all he can do is melt a little further into the nest and the grip on his ass.

Ilya catches his eye again.

“Just relax while I enjoy, okay?”

He *winks*, the absolute asshole - and then his *mouth* is on *Shane’s* asshole, lips latching around his soaking rim with a loud, slick sound, the effortless slide of tongue inside him. Toes curling, Shane keens and buries his face between his elbows.

Everything is hot and wet and sensation too slippery to cling to, and it’s *good*, so fucking good, but no matter how good it is it’ll *never* be enough. There’s a chasm at the base of his tailbone, empty and aching, too deep for any kiss to reach. And soon every muscle in Shane’s body is quivering all over from little shockwaves of imperfect pleasure, knuckles white, tears gathering under his eyelids - all while Ilya continues to moan happily and make out with Shane’s hole in gratuitously sloppy fashion.

At some point Shane realizes he’s started babbling.

“Ilya - *Ilya*, alpha, *fuck* - nnhh…I need - *hah* - *pleeeease,* I *can’t*, you have to, pl*eassse* -“

“Please what?”

Shane shudders at the gravel-laced taunt, has to scrape for the words to respond, to *beg*. “*Pleeease* alpha, n*eed* you inside -“

And all of a sudden, he’s being *slammed* into deep, cock driving air and spit and a shout from his lungs in a single, punishing smack of flesh. Ilya is in him, on him, crucifix dragging at the nape of Shane’s neck. At the same time he’s slowly withdrawing his cock, Ilya growls:

“Now thank me, *moya lyubov*.”

In a thrust as powerful as the first, Ilya shoves his cock back where it belongs. Shane’s compliance is instant.

“*Nngh* - thank you!”

Once more, an almost-emptying, torturous and slow - and another brutal filling.

“Thank you!”

Another.

“Thank you*uu* - !”

Thrust.

“Th*aank youu* -“

Deliberate. Hard. Deep. Ilya’s body wielded as the blunt instrument of Shane’s undoing.

“Thank you - *nngh* - thank you - *nnff* - *thank you* alpha, th*aaanghyou*, *mmgh*.”

Punctuated by the slap of pelvis and ass, his cries of gratitude slur into sobs he muffles into the pillow, dampening with drool and tears. The only reason he isn’t being driven headfirst into the wall with the force of every thrust is Ilya’s iron grip on his already-bruised hips. He is an animal scrambling for purchase in the dirt, mounted and being shown his place.

“*Blyat* - last knot face to face, like first, *da*? Let me see you, *malysh*.”

The world upends, then, and Shane’s - *Ilya* - comes into view, glimmering in a sheen of sweat. Shane is on his back now, his alpha slotting perfectly between his thighs. One set of their hands entwines in the nest next to Shane’s head, as Ilya presses *gently* back into Shane’s sore insides and tips their foreheads together.

Shane whimpers, melts. And despite being a loose and fucked-out mess, he manages to get his aching legs around Ilya’s waist and hold the alpha as closely as he can.

“*Yesss*,” he coos against Ilya’s open mouth. “S’*you*, alpha. Taking such good care of me. I love you - *hnngh, fuck* - I love you so fucking much.”

"*Ya tebya lyublyu* - I love you, too, Shane - *mine*." Ilya's hips rock in a careful, tender cadence. "My mate, I am fucking made for you."

And *holy fucking hell*, now that the collar is gone and he can feel the initial swell of Ilya's knot his entrance, Shane wants to *beg* for it, beg for Ilya's bite like he's never begged for anything in his goddamn life. Bare his neck and say *fuck you* to the fallout because *he deserves this, he was* made *for this,* fuck. He needs fangs in his neck as deep as the knot in his ass and nothing else will ever fucking do.

"Ilya*aa*…alpha, can you - please, I *neeeed* - "

Ilya kisses him in an uncoordinated meeting of tongues. Shane moans when he feels the prickle of fangs on the inside of his bottom lip.

"I take care of you, baby - *nngh* - give you what you need!" As his knot pops, Ilya's snarl seems to vibrate all the way down Shane's throat. At this point Shane scarcely feels any stretch in being filled, but his hole spasms anyway, clamps down, milking the last warm load of his heat.

Tossing his head back as he comes, Shane's reduced once more to a single, mindless plea:

"Ple*eease*, alpha, want your *bite* - !"

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Ilya's orgasm gives him as much pain as it does pleasure, wringing him past dry, knot and balls pulsating with overuse. Most of the satisfaction thrumming through him comes from his instinct's pride at having fulfilled his mate once more, with so little of his own body's lust now consuming him, in comparison to days and days of rut.

Then - for the first time since Ilya had bitten him hard enough to break skin just along the edge of the collar, days ago - he's hearing Shane beg for a mate bite. Ilya's eyes widen as a dagger of *wantpanicneed* jams itself into his ribcage from behind. Saliva pools behind his bottom teeth. His fangs itch at the roots.

He's a fucking *idiot* for suggesting Shane should take the collar off. A brainless dog who needs to be put down. But he's - he's still *him*, and Ilya knows somewhere deeper than instinct there is one thing he *cannot* do right now, he cannot do to ruin the life of the man who's given him his trust and his heart.

When his fangs pierce flesh this time, it's Ilya's own blood spilling into his mouth, jaw locked around his forearm. The jolt of pain sent wrenching through him is a greater relief than any climax of his life, and a jagged howl dies in the back of his throat. With his head down, he feels but can't watch Shane shuddering apart beneath him as they cling to each other. Blunt teeth dig possessively into the side of his neck without shedding any blood at all.

Moments pass, and Shane finally slumps. "*Ilya*," he says, maybe the softest he ever has.

Ilya takes a deep breath through his nose, soothed somewhat when he can't sniff out any distress in Shane's scent, and gingerly releases his own forearm. He looks at Shane looking up at him with glassy, reddened eyes, knotdumb and cumdrunk and exhausted, heat fizzled into the smoky vestiges of an extinguished forest fire. Beautiful lips upturn at one corner in hazy, belated response a second or two after their gazes meet.

"Alpha…you can…" Shane's head teeters to one side, pulse thudding in his neck. "I want it. We'll figure it out. B'okay."

"*Nyet*." Ilya can't listen to any more of this; he shakes his head and pushes three fingers into Shane's mouth.

It would be so easy, it occurs to him, exhaling harshly through his bloody teeth. Even if Shane got mad at him for it later, Ilya could shrug and say *I was only doing what you asked me to.* He knows how easily Shane shoulders responsibility for anything and everything, unreasonably so. Ilya could use that, manipulate Shane into blaming himself, ultimately, for sending so many mixed signals - even if it had been Ilya who'd suggested it was safe to take the collar off. *So many other things you said I could believe even though you were in heat, like loving me and wanting to be mine forever - was I wrong for believing those things, too, like I was 'wrong' for believing when you beg for bite?* He can justify taking what it is they both want anyway, with none of the guilt and relatively minor personal consequence.

But Shane isn't putting up any resistance, isn't arguing, isn't being a brat and *insisting* he knows what he wants despite the heat hormones. Instead, he's gone docile with Ilya's fingers in his mouth, blinking slow and watery.

Ilya's fangs throb, along with the wound in his arm, his drained knot. Of fucking *course* he isn't going to mate bite Shane now, he'd *never*, but it does something thorny and complicated in his gut to imagine making a different choice.

"Not now, *solnyshko*. Will be better to wait, we agreed, *da*? One day, okay? One day?"

Shane mumbles something incoherent around his fingers which Ilya chooses to interpret as acquiescence rather than anything that risks breaking his resolve. Leaving his fingers where they are, he pats Shane's cheek with his free hand and kisses between his brows.

"Good boy."

Not long after, still suckling on Ilya's fingers, Shane drifts off. Ilya listens to his breathing even out, watches the steady rise and fall of his chest. Allows himself a few extra minutes like this before dislodging himself from the embrace of Shane's insides.

His instinct is quiet in his chest as he pulls himself out of the nest, taking stock of the damage he's left in Shane's flesh when he returns with a clean towel. Hickeys and scrapes, bright red patches of beard burn, bruises in all kinds of shapes and places that don't make any sense, imprints in skin outside of any memory, but…*fuck*. Ilya never had a rut like this before, knew *nothing* of what raw alpha possessiveness could be until sinking his metaphorical teeth and then his real ones into Shane Hollander, and it might just be that his selfish hindbrain makes him incapable of regretting any of the marks marring the pretty skin of his one-day mate.

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“The fuck did I do to your arm?” Shane asks later, when he’s awake and sufficiently cognizant to notice it. Two rows of pink teeth marks, relatively fresh-looking but clean and not oozing any blood. The first logical conclusion to jump to is he’s the one who somehow left them.

But Ilya just gives him a sidelong look and a little flash of fang.

“*Oh*, shit. You - because of me. I kind of lost my mind again, earlier, when…Ugh, *sorry*.” He sits up, scrubbing the heel of his hand over his face.

”Is nothing, no big deal. Same thing you say when I bite you, right? No blame, and healing will be easy.” Ilya’s hand is warm and unyielding in the middle of Shane’s back, and any of the tension beginning to creep back into his shoulders dissipates.

“*Ugh*, fine, okay, but you’re at least gonna let me bandage it for you. There’s more first-aid shit upstairs.”

Shane knows his heat is really over because he genuinely can’t stand to be in their so-called *den* anymore no matter how romantic it ought to feel, cuddled here with his alpha and secluded from the world. His heat scent - obviously still *everywhere* in the room - has turned sickeningly sweet and cloying to his own senses, and that’s on top of the days-old sex smell and stale rut musk thick in the air.

When Shane suggests (not without a muted note of regret in his voice) that it’s probably about time they go back upstairs for good, Ilya sweeps him into his arms bridal style.

“Are we *still* doing this?” Shane scoffs, pretending he isn’t tired and aching everywhere. The *best* kind of tired and aching though, like after a winning playoff run. The heady rush of pressing on a tender bruise. The thrilling use and abuse of his body in pursuit of victory and pleasure and stupid biological imperative.

He’s never felt so satisfied in his entire life - even if he logically realizes that’s in some part due to the post-cycle hormones from being cared for by an alpha in heat for the first time ever. For the first time ever, he isn’t ending his heat dehydrated and underfed, oversensitive and empty-feeling and outright miserable. Now he’s sated more deeply than he ever knew the emptiness to reach.

Ilya shrugs. “*Da*. Even more important now for my alpha to pamper you. Omega needs rest to improve chance for pup to take.”

Shane feels himself flush. “There is *zero* chance any pup will take!”

Another shrug. “*I* know that, but my inner alpha is very stupid, does not understand birth control.” He kisses Shane’s cheek. “What…is such big hardship to let me take care of you for two more days?”

“I guess not,” Shane mumbles, hiding his face in Ilya’s neck.

“And your nest? You leave this big mess?” Ilya nods at the layers of blankets, clothes, and pillows, all well beyond soiled. “Should I clean it later?” he asks on their way up the stairs.

“No - Ilya, and I will be pissed if you try to. I usually let myself have a couple of lazy days before I tackle the heat room anyway. Yoga, video games. Lake if the weather is nice. See my parents, too, though I’ll put that off a bit longer than usual, obviously. But I really don’t mind cleaning it on my own - it’s a soothing part of my routine, and…the *last* thing I want is you to waste time doing it when we should be hanging out together.”

“Okay, okay, *fuck*, Hollander. I know better than to touch nest without permission. Can’t afford to lose a hand to feral omega.”

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Ilya doesn’t mention the duffel bag’s worth of clothes he brought still tucked into Shane’s nest. They belong to Shane now, as far as he’s concerned, just like the rest of him does.

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They stumble into the marble expanse of the shower together. “I can’t believe I didn’t fuck you here,” Ilya groans when he sees the size of it, eyes roving appreciatively over the glass wall.

“Put it on the to-do list for your next visit.” Shane grins and fiddles with the taps, nudges them both under the hot spray.

His soap and shampoo are *supposed* to be scent-neutralizing, the same products he uses during the season. As Ilya bundles him into a towel like an oversized toddler, he leans in, inhaling deeply at the side of his neck.

“You still smell like me. Seeping from your skin,” he purrs and presses a suggestive hand against Shane’s lower belly. “My scent is in you very deep. Maybe take days to wear off.”

Shane wrinkles his nose. “Seriously? That’s gross,” he says, lying. Like he won’t go back to smelling like nothing but the faintest trace of artificially clean beta mint once he’s back on his suppressants anyway. He’s unused enough to his own natural scent that he can hardly tell where Ilya’s ends and his begins, anyway, and knowing it won’t last, he’s going to revel in it while he can.

“You’re seeing your parents next week, right?” Ilya asks. “Will be hard to hide all of this.” His thumb ghosts across the imprint of his own teeth in Shane’s neck, the red marks leftover from the collar.

“Yeah…I’ve been thinking of shit to tell them, to put that off without making them worry. But I don’t know.” He lets out a long exhale, lets his gaze settle in a corner.. “Maybe I could just…let them have a little bit of the truth. I’m an adult, and I’m allowed to spend my heat with someone - to have *needs*.” He’s painfully conscious, as the words leave him, of the extent to which it sounds he’s trying to convince himself to believe them. “And with my career and everything else, they should understand why I’m being so…private about it. I

wouldn't tell them about *you*, specifically - " An apologetic look at Ilya. "But I could at least maybe…soft launch the idea with them. That I'm seeing someone."

And - *shit*, his career isn't the only reason he's ultimately convinced himself it's a relief Ilya didn't mate-bite him this summer. Shane is pretty sure his parents couldn't envision a more unlikely and horrifying scenario than him showing up with a mate-bite from *Ilya Rozanov* after he was presumably intending to spend his heat alone, as he always had, as he'd certainly never *lie to them* about…

Shane wants his parents to *know* Ilya. He wants them to *like* Ilya. He needs to figure out a plan for introducing them to Ilya, at some point, and for better or worse that point is in the future, ideally well before they mate each other. Maybe his first tiny step in that direction can be honesty about having a partner for his heat this year, even if it means his parents express some measure of shock and disappointment due to having kept it from them. He'll cope with that.

"Will they be angry? Risking your career?"

"Not angry, just…worried, probably." He sits on the edge of his bed, eyes drawn inadvertently to the towel slung around Ilya's hips and sharp cut of his pelvis, and Shane is reminded of how he looked in the locker room after the CCM shoot. In arm's reach but utterly untouchable, at least by *Shane*, and yet all Shane could do was think about touching him.

Now he can. He's *his*. At least here, where they don't have to pretend not to belong to each other.

"See something you like?" Ilya catches Shane staring and leers right back.

"Yeah I do." He hooks two fingers under the edge of the towel to pull Ilya closer, plants a kiss to his happy trail right where towel meets skin, starts nuzzling the spot until Ilya clucks his tongue and takes a step back. Shane looks up to see him wincing, face red.

"Sorry, *kotenok*. My dick hurts if even on accident it thinks about getting hard."

Shane snorts and grimaces. "*Same*. Maybe not a hundred percent same, but - close enough. Don't worry, I was *not* offering to blow you."

Though it's an important step in feeling less like an animal and more like a person again when Shane's heats are over, it's always strange to go back to wearing clothes again. For a few days in the aftermath, the fabric of even his most comfortable sweats itches against his skin. Putting on Ilya's clothes, however - clean ones, from his suitcase, ones which he probably actually packed for himself but has handed over to Shane anyway without having been asked - that doesn't seem to be a problem for Shane this year.

Rather, the strangeness comes from seeing *Ilya* wearing clothes again, after having gotten so used to the (*glorious*) sight of him without.

Fuck, even Shane's *eyes* were absolutely spoiled this heat.

Ilya is snuggling into the shorts and t-shirt Shane offered him. Although they're a tad too small on him, he looks slighter with his most impressive muscles partially hidden - more a man, less the naked, ferocious beast Shane's so recently grown accustomed to. The fresh shave helps, too.

("I never keep it longer than I have to. Too scratchy," Ilya explained, wetting his razor underneath the bathroom faucet. "Unless you really want…" While he trailed off, Shane kissed the scruff goodbye.)

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Shane would *never* sit on his kitchen island, but because Ilya put him there he's perched upon it right now anyway. In the oven is a sheet pan crammed full of chicken nuggets, and Shane crunches leisurely on celery and carrot sticks while he waits for them to cook. Ilya, in the meantime, has devoured two foil packs of Pop-Tarts and is scraping the bottom of a box of Frosted Flakes - the eating of which at no point involved either a bowl or spoon.

"No judging! I warned you - I get bad munchies after my rut, and this year maybe worse than ever." Ilya gestures at him with the cereal box and puts on an aggrieved tone. "I blame you, Hollander. You *almost* wear me out."

One corner of Shane's mouth uplifts. "In a fun way though, right?"

"*Da*. The funnest." Leaning back with his elbows on the kitchen counter opposite Shane, Ilya winks and makes cutesy kissing noises in his direction. "No other alpha could keep up. You're very lucky to pick me for this."

Knowing the rest of his face gives him away, Shane feigns a neutral hum, as if *lucky* isn't exactly how he feels, looking at Ilya.

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They eat right there in the kitchen. Afterwards, yawning, they crawl into Shane's bed together, Ilya's front curling around Shane's back without any hesitation. Shane's heart warms. He kisses Ilya's bandaged forearm, stretched out on the pillow by his head.

"I would invite you to stay longer," he says quietly. "One or two days, a week. Whatever." *Forever*. "But we both already know you can't this time, and I don't want to make this another thing you have to be the one strong enough to say no to." He feels Ilya's lips on the back of his neck. "Just…want to make sure you don't think it's not because I wouldn't keep you here, if I could."

Ilya's arms around him go a little tighter. Shane hears him swallow. "Next summer you keep me, okay?" His voice is low, hoarse. "*Ya tvoy*."

"'M yours, too."

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Shane won't cry about it now. He won't even cry on the way to the airport, though his emotions will be much on shakier ground by the time they're saying goodbye on some airport parking lot curb. The drive back to the cottage alone will be miserable, and maybe he'll have to pull over at least once when his vision gets blurry enough to be dangerous, but after that he will wipe his eyes on the sleeves of Ilya's sweatshirt, force himself through sheer willpower to get home without being a highway hazard or having to stop again. The sadness he's currently keeping buried deep down in the middle of his chest will be fully exhumed through heaving sobs by the time he unlocks the front door, by which point Ilya will probably be boarding his flight back to Moscow. Still wearing his sweatshirt, Shane will ball up on the couch with the hood up and eat an entire pint of s'mores-flavored ice cream that's at this very moment hidden in the back of the freezer. Since he was a teenager, he's always bought one to keep as a treat for himself following his heats, and cried himself out while eating the whole thing. One of the rare times he indulges his sweet tooth (which he'll otherwise deny exists) without any guilt, thanks to the hormonal crash he always has right after his heats end.

No hormonal crash this year, of course. The opposite, really, and Ilya leaving won't change that. For both of them - from a biological standpoint, they're happy, sated, not a tinge of distress in parting to be found.

But he'll eat the ice cream and cry later anyway, pressing his knuckles into the abrasions on his neck and wishing one was in a slightly different place - and permanent. Not that he'll regret it in the long run, using the collar for this heat, denying his instinct, *waiting* - but losing the precious what-could've-been of *now* is worth mourning, too.

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Half-watching an action movie on the couch together, they get to bask in both the sunshine and the air-conditioning in the middle of the day. All that's leftover from the pancakes Ilya made are two syrup-sticky plates and forks on the coffee table, and Shane's legs are draped across his lap.

"Since the first time we met, I may have had baby crush, I admit," Ilya says.

"Really?" It's not that Shane doesn't believe him, but… "You didn't have a clue about my designation until later though."

"*Da*, not until I smell you go slick for me in the shower."

"Only because *you* got hard first."

"Mm, maybe. Because I knew you were looking, pervert. Anyway. Didn't matter. Pretty beta boy with pretty freckles - " He puts a hand over his heart. "*Boom*, crush." Then he shrugs. "You could even be alpha, probably. Wouldn't matter to me, as long as you have these."

His fingertip brushes along Shane's cheekbone, down the bridge of his nose.

A few months ago or maybe as recently as last week, this might be the kind of musing to draw Shane down a less-than-pleasant train of thought about his designation. Since presenting at fifteen, being an omega has been at best an inconvenience, at worst a threat to

his lifelong dream, his career - to letting him have hockey, his one (first?) great love. Otherwise, he thought about his secondary gender as little as he could get away with, beyond suppressing it to the greatest extent possible. But even hearing that he could've - apparently, in theory - snagged his hot alpha boyfriend without any of the omega baggage doesn't do anything to shake how settled in his instinct Shane feels in a way he never allowed himself to before Ilya showed him he could.

With a rueful hint of bashfulness, he chuckles softly and looks up at Ilya from beneath his eyelashes. "But being an omega makes it easier for me to take your knot, so…"

Then Shane catches Ilya's thumb between his teeth, and in return, Ilya captures his chin in hand, bringing him a few inches closer to kiss each freckled cheekbone.

"Sooo stunning," he murmurs, with enough sincerity that Shane thinks he might actually implode due to the butterflies in his belly.

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"We could make a fire? Might be nice to sit beside." The sun is almost finished setting when Shane makes the suggestion.

"Boring." Ilya bumps his chin against Shane's shoulder and blows a wet raspberry in the curve of his neck. He still can't stand to watch the omega lift a finger and has zero interest in figuring out how to build one himself.

Unfortunately, Ilya also can't come up with any better ideas for something to do instead, as they've both accepted there won't be any repeat sexual performances for either of them.

There is saying in English, Ilya told him in the lake that morning, Shane's legs wrapped around his waist. *I think it is: heart is willing but flesh is weak. My flesh is very weak now, baby, tired. I will not be able to fuck you again before I leave no matter how much my heart wants, okay?*

At that, Shane bonked their foreheads together a bit harder than was strictly necessary and laughed, saying, *Oh my god I cannot think of anything that sounds worse than that right now*.

But, surprise surprise, Ilya is no match for Shane's doe eyes when he *does* want something.

"Well, if cuddling in front of a fire is boring…" Shane trails off, chewing on his bottom lip like he's trying to think of some alternative activity instead of menacing Ilya personally.

Ilya stands up, about to go stomping off into the forest to collect sticks to rub together like an idiot, when Shane points out a plastic crate next to the cottage's front steps.

"Dry wood and stuff in there. It'll take, like, ten minutes tops."

It takes fifteen minutes instead, probably because Ilya has to keep batting away Shane's attempts to help stack the wood in some sort of optimal fashion. He bullies Shane into sitting beside the fire pit until it's hot and crackling.

A wolf howl. Ilya jumps halfway out of his skin. *A loon*. Shane almost falls over laughing as he explains and Ilya curses at him.

“Thought I had a big bad protector in my nest,” Shane teases. “Turns out all it takes to spook my alpha is a bird.”

Ilya’s grin is beautiful in the firelight. “First time you have called me *your* alpha.”

“...No it’s not.”

“Outside of heat and sex, yes.” He drops into Shane’s lap and pinches his cheek. “Good thing I have fiercest omega in the world to protect me…*Awww*, you’re blushing brighter than the fire, solnyshko.”

Shane snorts and tucks his face under Ilya’s chin. They stay like that until the relative silence is broken by another loon call, upon which Ilya makes a dramatic show of shrieking and swooning with his full weight against Shane. And despite the temptation to let him risk falling into the dirt, Shane catches him, and they resettle with Ilya laying on his side, facing the fire, head in Shane’s lap. Fingers come to rest in his curls, gradually combing through them, scritching his scalp here and there. A muscle in Ilya’s jaw twitches from the tickling sensation as Shane’s knuckle traces the shell of his ear.

Relaxed, their breathing falls into sync with one another. Then, fighting off any awkwardness from entering his posture, Shane clears his throat.

“I know I’m a little late saying this, but…when I couldn’t touch you, after picking you up from the airport, it would’ve felt fucked up. And then - we were busy, and I was worried about ruining the mood, I guess.” He pauses, lets out a breath. Ilya looks up at him in a mixture of confusion and concern as Shane presses forward. “I know this doesn’t really mean anything and you’ll just say he was an asshole anyway, but - I’m really sorry about your dad, Ilya.”

Ilya blinks. Exhales a dry and humorless laugh. His expression quickly morphs from surprised to sullen to stoic, but then his eyes catch Shane’s again and he immediately softens.

“It was easier to hate him before he got sick,” he finally says. “Hating him was easier than feeling sorry for him, but I felt sorry for him even though I didn’t want to. Even though I don’t think he ever once in my life felt sorry for me. And that was even before I presented.” Another unhappy huff of laughter.

It’s not an uncommon stereotype: when an alpha’s child presents as an alpha themselves, it’s a coin flip whether or not they’ll fall into place as a natural subordinate (*correct*, traditionalists would argue) or threaten the alpha parent’s authority (the opposite of natural is unnatural). Based on everything else Ilya mentioned about his father, Shane already hadn’t liked the man. What Ilya’s saying now just cements his opinion.

Then Ilya tells Shane about his mother’s death. Finding her, the pills, his father’s cruel response. “She was never good at being what he wanted from an omega, so he was harder on her than he had to be.” He toys with the crucifix around his neck, looking into the fire.

“She was an ice dancer before she married him,” Ilya says. “She wasn’t allowed to skate with alpha partner after that - could not skate with anyone. Father was jealous of the ice itself because it made her happier than he did, so he took her skates away, too.”

(Because he could, because he didn’t want to let her have anything that allowed her to feel like a person outside of his existence, though maybe she hoped their sons would always be at least a little bit hers.)

”Was different when Alexei and I were old enough to learn. Papa let her take us to the rink in the mornings when no one else was there, and sometimes she would just skate circles around us. She was so *fast*.”

(The snick *of blades in ice, tinkling laughter, a golden banner of hair.)*

Funny and beautiful and sad, Ilya tells him. *She would’ve loved you like I do.*

Shane holds him closer as Ilya starts crying. Pets his hair and and his face, tries to keep his mind solely on the man in his arms instead of loathing himself for having begged for a mate-bite that final time. Wondering what it took from Ilya to find it in himself to resist and say no, for Shane’s sake.

”She’d be proud of the alpha you are,” Shane says. He presses his lips to the top of Ilya’s head resting on his chest. “The *person* you are. *Shit* - Ilya, I’m sorry about your mom, too. You’re so strong, and I love you so much.” Brow slightly furrowing, he pauses to clear his throat, and then begins to eke out the second omega croon of his life.

Its first occurrence had been practically involuntarily, springing out of him thanks to the heat hormones having melted away even his most deeply rooted hang-ups. Now, Shane has to dig for it intentionally, the shape of a noise he scarcely recognizes buried somewhere behind his breastbone.

But it’s about as pretty as it was last time which means it’s not pretty at all. A low-pitched rattling of sound and air in the back of his throat, rasping and mostly tuneless. But it must be helpful anyway, because it’s not long before whatever tension Ilya’s still carrying drops out of his neck and shoulders. As Shane feels the alpha go slack, his arms around him automatically go tighter, and he keeps up the croon while Ilya cries himself out with his face buried in Shane’s chest.

The fresh tears ebb, eventually. With eyes red-rimmed and shining and glowing amber in the firelight, Ilya tilts his chin up to look at Shane like he’s some kind of miracle. Unable to bear the intensity of that gaze for long, Shane’s croon stutters to an end, and Ilya smiles at him with all the warmth in the world.

”Maybe I find excuse to cry every day now, hear you croon so pretty for me.”

“Fuck off.” Shane briefly envisions dumping the other man out of his lap and settles for tugging at his hair. “Don’t *lie*. I know it’s *bad* sounding, objectively. I’m still figuring out how to do it right.”

Ilya gives him the crooked grin that usually means he's got something sharp and clever at the tip of his tongue; the rest of his face is all tenderness, especially his eyes still fixed on Shane. "Good thing I'll give you plenty of chances to practice then."

Shane ducks his head to kiss him, then, at the same time using the sleeve of his hoodie to wipe at any lingering tears he spies gleaming on Ilya's cheeks. Their foreheads are still touching when Shane grins back at him and says, "Now I know I'll have to do it for you after every time I kick your ass on the ice, Rozanov."

"Okay, so long as it's not the only thing you promise to do for me after," Ilya flirts back before pretending to sink his teeth into Shane's pec through his shirt.

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Their voices didn't need to have anything remotely in common for Ilya to think Shane's is the prettiest croon he's heard since his mother's, though he spares both Shane and him the embarrassment of admitting that out loud.

But maybe something about the direction of his thinking is revealed in his expression, or Shane intuits it otherwise, somehow, because after a few more minutes of cuddling in comfortable silence, the ragged crooning tentatively resumes.

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It's the third night they're sleeping in Shane's actual bed together, and this time Shane refuses to let himself fall asleep without tattooing the sight of Ilya here to the inside of his eyelids - the shadow of his body against Shane's sheets and vague impression of his handsome features in the dark. Ilya has been a *heavy* sleeper since the end of his rut, soaking up ten hours of rest each night with the ease of someone who's *earned* every bit of it.

Which is a *good* sign for post-rut alphas, according to Shane's internet search. Since a 'successful' rut means the alpha *ought* to exhaust themselves providing and protecting and pupping their partner, their bodies should thus naturally need the restorative rest.

Maybe Shane likes to feel a bit like the protective one for once, keeping watch over his sleeping mate. *Mate*. Even if it's not factually accurate, the word fits a lot better than *boyfriend* in his head most of the time, when it comes to Ilya.

Outside of their nest and the four walls of their little fuck den, the shape of everything between them is solidifying - maybe not into concrete or diamond or something unbreakable, but into something that's still *real.* Something solid, at least, easier to hold onto than water slipping through cupped fingers. The realization settles into Shane's bones, and maybe it should scare him - and it probably will, eventually, Shane has never been great at dealing with the uncertainty of future - but right now, it's reassurance that this is exactly what he wants. He's more determined than ever to keep it.

Ilya's mentioned more than once his willingness to move to Canada. Shane's already thought over the teams and rosters, various proximities to Montreal. Ottawa could work.

In all honesty, Shane is *dying* to shake Ilya awake to discuss his ideas for the future - not just a team, but a reason for them to be *friendly* in the public eye, in a mostly professional sense. A charity, maybe, but Shane doesn't want to let his mind go too far down that road before he talks to Ilya about it.

He can be patient until tomorrow morning. Ilya deserves all the sleep he can get, especially with his flight tomorrow, and Shane won't be surprised if Ilya insists on being the one to drive them to the airport, either for weird alpha reasons or because he knows Shane will be driving back alone or some combination of both.

Either way, they can talk on the way there.

And - *fuck,* Shane needs to stop thinking about how little he looks forward to any future nights in this bed without Ilya in it. He'll be tempted to build a nest with Ilya's clothes here once he's gone, settle for a clothing item under his pillow instead after deciding no nest will feel right anymore without Ilya there.

Mate. One day.

What they're doing in the meantime might not be easy, but - filling his lungs with warm pine and melting snow as he curls around Ilya's bulk in the dark - with or without a mark on his neck, Shane knows where his heart lives.

Chapter End Notes

Shoutout to the couple of oomfies who read snippets of this and gave me the praise I needed to keep going, I am SO AWKWARD about asking people to read my stuff lmao. <3333 Also the couple of oomfies who helped fix my Google translate Russian dirty talk. <3333

Idk if anyone else here is a Lucy Dacus fan, but her song "Forever is a Feeling" really captures the emotional vibe of a lot of the parts of chapters 2 and 3 FOR ME when it comes to thinking about the permanence/potential impermanence of falling super deeply in love with someone. Like…before "forever" with someone is a wedding ring or a mating mark, it's a feeling. So if you hate me for not letting them mate here, idk, maybe that'll help? (btw if you know of any Hollanov edits set to a Lucy Dacus song PLEASE SEND ME THE LINK.)

Also idk the anatomical realism of oral knotting without breaking your jaw or choking to death when it comes to a gigantic alpha dick like Ilya's but Shane was just born for it maybe. He's the best for a reason.

Feel free to hit me up on twitter; I'm really trying to be less shy!! Sometimes I post a/b/o hollanov ideas but I haven't really committed to what I want to write next.

Thank youuuuuu for the support everyone!! Comments good!! Especially if you have favorite lines/quotes or if any of the smut was hot. Tbh that is the shit that validates me to continue when writing is haaaard and you're all my best friends in my head even though accepting compliments gives me awkward recovering Catholic guilt. <333

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!