

heated island

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Relationships:	Shane Hollander/Ilya Rozanov , Shane Hollander/Hayden Pike , Hayden Pike/Jackie Pike , Rose Landry/Svetlana Vetrova , Ilya Rozanov/Sasha Ilya Rozanov's Coach's Son , Kip Grady/Scott Hunter , Troy Barrett/Harris Drover , Jean-Jacques Boiziau J. J. Dagenais/Cliff Marlow Cliff Marleau , Shane Hollander/Scott Hunter
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heated island

by [tenderbleubells](#)

Summary

“I have a surprise for you all, if you’ve been good boys and girls.” Ariana gestured across the lawn, where pink X-shaped crosses now dotted the landscape. Handcuffs dangled from the top of each.

“Two, if we’re being technical. Islanders, please welcome our new bombshells! They will be giving you a very warm welcome. If you’re chosen, that is. Have fun...”

Shane's wrists pulled against his restraints, heart thudding. A finger ran over his lips, shushing him. Then two hands appeared, tracing his body, warm and firm over his exposed skin. Shane panted, dizzy and delirious. Through the haze, he started smiling. He was straight. He was actually straight. Irrefutably hard as hell for some sexy new bombshell.

A hand traced Shane’s jaw, almost tender, and their hips pressed together again for just a moment. Shane’s mind stuttered, his own hardness meeting...something else.

Warm breath wafted into his ear. “I will give you some time to ah, calm down, yes?”

Shane jerked back, hitting his head against the cross with a loud curse.

The voice was Russian. Vaguely familiar. And unmistakably male.

~shane goes on love island. ilya enters as a bombshell. gay chaos ensues. ~

Notes

adding some love island terminology here that may be helpful if you don't watch the show!

- open: being open to connections other than your current couple
- closed off: not seeing anyone else in the Villa, including any future bombshells that may come in
- exclusive: usually means you're closed off AND plan to be exclusive after leaving the Villa too (bigger commitment)
- turning heads: if you can be tempted by anyone outside your couple or if your head can't be turned anymore (usually a precursor to being closed off)
- testing connections: hooking up with other people to see if you still want your couple the most. this is a love island thing where you basically HAVE to hook up with other people to "prove" your couple is strong enough to be with other people and still return to the original couple. often couples aren't taken seriously if they don't test connections and people are even voted out for playing it safe/not testing. and often yes, people test connections and realize they want a new couple haha

love island structure

- recoupling occurs about every week give or take, with new contestants introduced as bombshells every few days
- halfway through the season, Casa Amor happens where couples are split to test their connections with a batch of new contestants, and they can come back recoupled with the new people or stick with their original couple
- towards the finale, family and friends are brought on in person or virtually
- the audience votes throughout the show leading to a final couple winning, which comes with prize money
- the majority of the challenges don't mean anything for the winners/losers which i think is silly but that's how the show works take it up with them
- unspoken rules are that you don't want to be too monogamous (you are expected to explore) but that longer standing couples are more favored than newer couples (ex: couples who pair in the first week and make it to the end tend to have a higher chance of winning the audience vote). you are not supposed to pair in a friendship couple on an ongoing basis and should always be looking for a new connection if you are single and vulnerable
- no one is supposed to hit on the host but sometimes people try lmao
- islanders get texts at random to announce important events (bombshell entrance, a recoupling, sudden elimination vote etc)
- people do have sex on the show despite the cameras and lack of privacy, but the Hideaway is a room you can earn that gives you complete privacy (from other people at least) for sexy times so often people try to wait for that
- love island uk is the original and the BEST for fantastic slang (to this american) but i am stealing ideas from the more recent seasons of love island usa which i credit in end notes when it comes up :)

i'm sure i'm forgetting things but hopefully that helps give a framework for the context of this AU!

Chapter 1

Chapter Summary

~meet the islanders~

Chapter Notes

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

Shane Hollander stood gripping his suitcase, in denial that he was really in Fiji. This was possibly the stupidest thing he had ever agreed to. Yes, he had bruised his ribs in a way that may benefit from more rest than he usually got during the off-season. Yes, he wanted to distract from the nonstop gay rumors that had been swirling online, no matter what his agent did to try to smother the flames. Yes, there was a small part of him that even thought *what if - what if he did find love on Love Island?*

But standing in Fiji, the reality sunk in. He was not going to find love on a dumb reality TV show that his mother watched to “numb her brain.” He was going to be miserable, and his absence would traumatize his sweet cat Pork Belly, and Chexy and the team were going to give him absolute shit when it was all over. They had already promised they wouldn't miss a single episode - which was more of a threat really.

Already, Shane was damp and sweaty. He couldn't tell if it was from the high humidity or the stress finally hitting with full force. His mom would never massage Pork the way he needed for his sphynx skin, and his dad would give him too many treats. Shane didn't want to bodyshame Pork, but the vet *had* said he needed to lose some pounds to live a long, happy life. And Shane needed Pork to live a long, happy life.

And then there was his hockey. It had been a disappointing end to the season. He'd love to pretend the online chatter hadn't impacted his game, but it had gotten into his head like smoke, slow and suffocating. With every blink of his eyes, there was another tweet he couldn't stop himself from looking at or interview questions irritating reporters wouldn't stop asking, playing in his head on repeat.

dude has only stepped out with one girl the whole time he's been famous? and it turned out it was just his cousin visiting?! lmao gay for SURE

And, What do you say to the rumors online, care to confirm or deny? Fans are desperate to know!

Yes. Yes, Shane did care.

He wasn't ready. Wasn't ready for any of it. True, he hadn't had many girlfriends. None, technically, if he was going off strict definitions. And Shane definitely didn't like hooking up

the way his teammates seemed to. But that didn't necessarily mean anything. Shane wasn't like his teammates in other ways either. He had more pressure on his shoulders than they did, the perfect diversity ambassador, bland, nonoffensive, striking the right balance of belonging everywhere and nowhere. He was more dedicated to the game, watching tapes back obsessively while everyone else seemed able to call it a night. He was ridiculously picky about the fabric of his undershirts and needed certain brands of socks so his skin wouldn't crawl for god's sake - of course he was going to be picky about whose tongue was in his mouth.

It was true that Shane had considered...experimenting...recently. It wasn't like he could talk about it with anyone. Couldn't ask Chexy, *hey, do you ever stare at guys and think they're kinda...beautiful?* Or, *what is the appropriate amount of time you can look at another dude in the gym before it crosses from admiration to...gay?*

So he had thought about it. Driving somewhere far, far away. Finding some dark bar. Locating some guy, any guy, and just...seeing.

But of course, he was Shane Hollander. If the internet was on fire because of his years-long lack of a girlfriend, he could only imagine what would happen if some random hookup decided to blab.

So here he was. His mom said the show was "fun." That it would be good for his sometimes too-good boy image, roughen him up a bit. Show his humanity. He had winced when she said that, though he tried not to show it. He knew what she meant. He always knew what people meant, when they told him to loosen up, or just relax. As if it was that easy. As if he didn't also hate feeling like a robot that was constantly one beat off script. He tried to make it easier for others, for himself. Played the part. Being gay, possibly being gay, was not part of the part.

His mom had asked. After a particularly bad call with the agent, where Shane got a bit too heated and raised his voice, asked if she wouldn't mind *not* sending him each text that implied he sucked cock? His mom had just asked. Simple, eyes open, watching him. *Are you, Shane?* He hadn't been able to look at her. Maybe if it was his dad who had asked - their relationship slightly less nuanced. Simpler. But it was Yuna Hollander. His role model. Her model son. So he said nothing. He stared at the carpet until she cleared her throat and said his agent had sent over an interesting opportunity he could consider, if he wanted. And that she would stop forwarding the tweets for comment.

If Shane was lucky, his ribs would recover while at least one woman kissed him on camera, the show broadcasting into endless households, and everyone would leave him the fuck alone. It was six weeks of filming, at most, if he didn't get eliminated immediately.

How bad could it be?

Ariana swept into the hotel lobby, Shane stumbling to his feet as she approached.

"Shane! It's so lovely to meet you! I wanted to swing by in person to say hello. We're so excited to do a celebrity edition of Love Island. I think it's gonna be great."

Shane gave her a tight smile, nodding.

“Anyway, I know you have your intro to record so I’ll leave you to the crew. You’re in good hands.” She squeezed his shoulder once. “Car’s ready out front.”

Her head tilted and her voice dropped a bit, softening.

“And Shane? I think you’re going to have a good time. Really. It means a lot to have you here.”

Shane’s smile widened by a millimeter. “Thanks. I hope so.”

Then her show smile was back and she was striding away from him with a wave, leaving Shane to the cameras.

The intro video could have been worse. Shane was so media-trained, he could’ve done half of this in his sleep. The background section was a breeze, him sitting wide-legged on a stool in some freakishly neon room, acting like the lights weren’t burning his eyes out. He didn’t bother interrogating why he was in his swim trunks, topless, and swinging hockey skates over his shoulder that weren’t even his correct size. He simply hit his beats:

Hi. I’m Shane Hollander. If you know hockey, you know me. If you don’t...well...get ready to. Cut to him putting on a lopsided grin, not too cocky, but confident enough. Relaxed. A normal guy.

The motivation part got a bit trickier, but was manageable:

I’m here to find love, like everyone else, I hope. There’s been a lot of rumors going around, and it is true... an attempt at a cheeky smile...I don’t have a lot of free time to date! Hockey will always be my number one love, but I hope to find someone to share that love with.

Then lots of clips of him being ‘hot,’ which would’ve been unbearable if his past campaigns hadn’t already trained the embarrassment out of him. He knew how to flex by this point, how to angle his chest to catch the light. How to relax his jaw and raise his eyebrows just slightly, so he looked both bored and intrigued. He knew how to stretch his arms over his head and look off into the distance, lips parting. He knew to laugh with a wide smile that showed off his white teeth when they dumped Gatorade over his head, shaking his hair out in what would be edited into slow-motion when the episode aired, camera zooming in on beads of liquid dripping down his abs. Shane knew how to package himself.

What he couldn’t nail, no matter how many takes, was what he was looking for.

Yeah, I’d love to meet um, just...a nice girl...really.

My last relationship? Oh, that, yeah, it was a while ago. Or, not a while while, just. Do you factcheck this? Because I don’t know the exact year, if that’s important.

Ah, physically? I like...sure, yeah, I mean. I guess I go for what’s...inside a woman? No, sorry, don’t use that, give me a moment.

Eventually, they got the briefest of clips of Shane saying he'd love to meet someone who knew a bit about hockey and who had a big heart. Vomit-inducing.

He could barely sleep that night, his eyes memorizing the ceiling of his hotel room. He had placed his last calls out to family and friends earlier that morning before his phone was confiscated. There would be no more check-ins from his mom, grounding him through his rough media performance in her logical and reassuring way. No more warm, short sentences from his dad, saying he missed him, saying he was proud. No updates from Chexy about the latest hockey news or inappropriate Russian words he'd try to trick Shane into saying. And absolutely no adorable pictures of Pork in cute sweaters to get Shane through the six-week separation. He exhaled, closing his eyes and honing in on the tightness in his chest.

I do not know the future. He exhaled. *The future can be what I make it.* Inhale. *I am manifesting positive things for me.* Exhale. *I am kissing a beautiful woman.* *Women even.*

Shane sat up, chest seizing tighter. This was going to be a disaster.

Ariana stood in front of the camera, the glam team having done a fantastic job. Her hair swayed down one shoulder, mermaid-like, her silver dress sparkling in the afternoon sun. Shane shifted off-camera, trying his hardest not to eye up his fellow contestants more than he already had. He hadn't recognized anyone. Why was he always out of the loop when it came to celebrities, general human knowledge, the common chitchat everyone else seemed to get memos about?

"Welcome to this season of Love Island!" Ariana beamed, arms spread wide. "And this year, we're changing things up a bit." She winked at the camera.

"We'll have our usual selection of delectable contestants, but for the first time ever, we're also having...*celebrities!* That's right, you will be recognizing more than a few of these faces. And since we didn't want anyone getting starstuck, our contestants are meeting for the very first time...right...now."

The camera panned over to the five contestants standing in a line. Shane tried to imagine how they would edit this. He had binged as many seasons as he could squeeze in between agreeing to appear and landing in Fiji, but he still felt underprepared. He wanted to know every season, every reference, every angle of how to play. Because he was still playing, even though this wasn't a rink. It was still a sport. There were still winners. And there were definitely losers.

"Now, to keep this fair, I'm going to have our handsome men draw straws to see who gets to choose first. No celebrity advantage, I promise!"

Shane reached forward, his hand skimming the guy next to him. It was another Asian dude, dressed in a very tiny, very leopard print speedo. His face had drawn-on whiskers for some reason. What the fuck had Shane gotten into.

Thankfully, the other men seemed more like typical guys, though all of their swim trunks seemed to be cropped rather short. Shane had packed his usual baggy pair that he'd worn for

years now, given how rarely he went swimming, not realizing that tight and tiny seemed to be more in fashion now. His eyes skimmed the circle of muscular thighs and he swallowed, forcing his eyes down to the artificial turf lawn.

Ariana cued the men to open their hands and clapped happily.

“Well, look at that! Javi, our humble personal trainer, you will have the first pick. Come stand here. Followed by...Zac, I *loved* your latest comedy special, you’ll be next. Follow Javi over there. Connie you’re next, currently a waiter but hey- maybe this will be your big break! Leo, you wild Youtuber, follow Connie please, and sweet Shane, hockey icon, you are last but not least!”

Shane nodded, trailing to the end of the line. His stomach was clenching. He hated coming in last, even when it was a matter of luck.

“Now let’s bring out the ladies!” Ariana grinned again. Shane figured this was when some pop music would start blasting post-production, but right now, it was awkwardly silent as five women filed out to line up next to Ariana.

Shane straightened. Rose Landry was in line. *Rose Landry*. His lips twitched up and he looked down at his sandals before she could notice, trying to keep his cool despite the smile spreading on his face. Maybe this hadn’t been such a terrible idea.

The first couplings went by in a blur. Javi chose Lexi I., who had apparently been on *The Bachelor*. Zac chose Hannah, who worked as a nurse. Connie picked Shawna, who did medical sales. Then Leo tried to steal Lexi I., but she chose to stay with Javi. Leo didn’t seem bothered in the least, despite Shane flushing with secondhand embarrassment on his behalf.

Ariana tsked. “Sorry about that, Leo. We still have two *celebrities* up here - Cici is a huge beauty influencer and Rose Landry has been on a movie-making streak lately. I’m shocked by you boys - too intimidated? I hope we’re not too insecure to handle a successful woman.” She cocked an eyebrow as the women let out some cheers. “Okay, Shane, your turn.”

Shane nodded, stepping forward. “Um, I would be honored to choose Rose Landry.”

Ariana smiled at him and Shane dipped his head, feeling he had done right.

“And why Rose, Shane?”

“Well, I love her movies. She’s incredibly talented.”

He looked up. Ariana’s eyebrows were slightly raised.

“And, yes, also gorgeous. Of course.” He choked out a laugh. Ariana smiled, nodding her head.

“Wise man, Hollander. Rose, you are free to join your new man!”

Rose walked to his side with an endearingly goofy smile. She intertwined her arm with Shane’s, squeezing his hand once.

“Thanks for choosing me.”

Shane grinned. “Easiest choice ever.”

“Now, Cici. These boys are clearly blind, but don’t worry, you won’t be single for long. Leo is still available. Or...you can steal *any* of the men here before you.”

Ariana gestured along the line of couples. Shane’s grip tightened on Rose, willing Cici not to pick him. Rose looked at him, putting on an exaggerated panicked face that almost made Shane laugh out loud.

Cici threw her long hair over her shoulders, placing her hands on her hips.

“You know, while I’m *offended* Leo didn’t choose me first, I have to admit, I think his Land Leopard videos are fucking hilarious. So Leo, let’s see if you can make me purr.”

Leo laughed as he bent forward, clapping, and then waved her over. She flounced to his side and he let out a growl before dipping her alarmingly close to Shane’s personal space, their lips meeting in an audible wet smack.

“All right, we’re not wasting any time at all!” Ariana laughed, her face slightly shocked as she turned back to the camera. “Let’s celebrate our new couples, shall we!”

Rose smiled up at Shane, giving him another squeeze, and he tore his face away from Leo and Cici, hoping his face didn’t look too judgemental.

She leaned in closer, whispering. “*Way* too much tongue. Maybe that’s why they call him the Land Leopard. He’s practically grooming her whole face.”

Shane snorted, trying to hide his smile with cameras so close. “Hope he doesn’t get a hairball.”

Then the couple cam arrived in front of them, and they cut their conversation short. Rose slipped her arm around his waist, drawing in her stomach a bit. Shane squared his shoulders, plastering a wide smile to his face. He could already see what they would look like when the episode premiered: sun making them golden, Rose nestled beneath Shane’s broad shoulders, happily matching by accident in Rose’s baby blue bikini and Shane’s blue trunks, *Rose and Shane* scripting cutely in the lower corner of the screen. They’d look happy, and beautiful, and good.

The camera moved away. Shane let his face relax, smile falling. He cleared his throat, turning to Rose.

“Shall I...pull you for a chat?”

Rose blinked at him. “Um, sure?”

Shane tilted his head. “Rose Landry. Have you watched this show?”

She grimaced, hiding her face into his chest for a moment.

“Shh! Okay, so I’ve only seen a few episodes? And I was texting through half of them. But being on here is such good exposure for my movie coming out, my agent said I should just say yes!” She made another face. “Am I messing up already?”

Shane smiled, shaking his head. “No. I’ll teach you everything I know.”

They walked side-by-side into the villa, her kind eyes watching him as he said things about firepits and recoupling and something called Soul Ties. Their hands swung together as they walked. Rose Landry, in person. With him. Shane blinked, trying not to fixate on the circular cameras spinning from every corner of the villa, then found himself smiling a bit wider. If he had to be under a microscope, it couldn’t get much better than with Rose Landry at his side. Let them all talk about *that*.

Voiceover:

*TOMORROW NIGHT...There’s already trouble in paradise. Get ready...for two...new...
BOMBSHELLS!!! They’re Russian...they’re bisexual...and they’re going to step on
evvverybody’s toes!*

(sound of a whip cracking; fade to black.)

Chapter End Notes

love island is one of my obsessions but big credit to @_vividblossom on twitter/vividblossom (dirtymudblood) on ao3 for the tweet that finally got my butt to sit down and write!

pork belly hollander, my entire heart, credit to @narivaaaal on twitter/thathastu on ao3 (writer of dust bowl yall!!!) for his holy creation

chexy, ALSO my heart, credit to the writer of tongues a-wagging for this sweet boy

i’ve always been obsessed with reality tv - i feel like there is so much to unpack with performativity and scripting and human interaction ESPECIALLY when you add an autistic lens. and i have so so soooo much drama planned if i can get myself to stick with this :) there will be some tears, there will be some shouting, and there will absolutely be hot hook-ups. keep tuning innnn

Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

russian bisexual bombshells do BDSM challenge! shane is not okay!!

Shane gripped his champagne glass, toasting with everyone else around the outdoor table. He had survived the boys' chat, where he made it clear he was *very* happy in his couple, especially since Zac and Javi seemed less than content with their matches. He hoped Rose had said the same to the girls.

He made eye contact with her across the table, her smile curving as she took a deep sip. She looked fantastic. Her dress was some kind of slinky material that clung to her body. Shane had made sure to compliment her when she walked down the stairs earlier. Meanwhile, he had copied what the other boys were wearing, his suit not seeming out of place for once, though most of them weren't wearing shirts under their jackets which was bizarre to him.

Shane took another sip of the cheap champagne, trying to force himself into the moment. He scratched at the mic around his neck, unsuccessfully attempting to block out the fact that people were listening to his every breath.

"I've got a text!"

Cici hopped up and down. Shane averted his eyes from what seemed like a wardrobe malfunction waiting to happen. Cici peered at her phone, Leo leaning in to read over her shoulder.

"Islanders. Get to know each other in a spicy game of truth or dare!"

The Islanders let out whoops and giggles as Shane took another sip of champagne, hoping it would kick in soon. As they moved to the firepit, Rose rejoined him, wrapping her hand around his upper arm with a reassuring squeeze.

The first few rounds were survivable. Shane chose truth his first turn and had to list three Islanders he was attracted to. He said Rose immediately, earning him a kiss on the cheek, and then named Cici and Shawna, who happened to be sitting right next to her.

Unfortunately, the truths quickly ran out. Shane looked on in what he hoped came across as a relaxed, cool-guy manner as the dares started. Hannah demonstrated her favorite sex position on Zac. Shane applauded with the rest. Connie gave a lap dance to Rose while Shane crossed his arms, looking away as Connie bobbed up and down between her legs. Then Javi, Shawna, and Lexi I. had a three-way kiss which Shane could not understand the appeal of, all of their mouths meeting like weird wet fish.

And then Rose was dared to kiss her favorite boy Islander and favorite girl Islander. She chose Shane easily, heat still rising to his cheeks when he heard his name. They stood up in front of the firepit, her lips approaching tentatively at first, then closing the distance. Shane bent down slightly, his hands holding firm on her waist. He tried not to focus on what this would look like on television later, if it would put a dent in any of the rumors. He didn't stop the kiss until Rose pulled back first, laughing as she wiped her lip.

"Let's go, Hollander!" Zac clapped, hooting.

"I'm impressed." Leo made a purring gesture. "Breaking my records, boy!"

Shane flushed, looking shyly back at Rose as he returned to his seat. Rose stayed standing, surveying her options while tapping her lips. "As for my favorite girl...I'm going to choose...Lexi!"

"It's Lexi *I*." She hopped up with a flounce after the correction, meeting Rose in front of the Islanders. Rose didn't hesitate. She leaned down, one hand angling Lexi's jaw up slightly, the other wrapping around her lower back to pull her in closer. Their lips met softly at first, and then Rose went *in*, tongue slipping into her mouth, hand gripping Lexi's hair and pulling back with slight tension as Lexi moaned.

Shane's mouth fell open. Stayed open. The boys were on their feet, hollering and slapping each other on the back, fists covering their mouths in shock. The girls clapped, smiling. Shane stayed frozen as Rose released, Lexi's face now bright red. Rose guided her back to her seat, her fingers only then slipping from her back, and rejoined Shane.

Leo leaned over, looking at Shane. "Good luck taming *that* wildcat!"

Rose nudged Shane's shoulder. He forced his eyes to meet hers, throwing her a tiny smile even as his heart twisted. Her eyebrows lowered and she looked away again, both of them pretending to immerse themselves in the next dare.

Shane was ready for bed before Rose that night. He slid into the bed marked with their names, wondering how he was ever going to get a solid night's sleep with four other couples sleeping in the same room.

"Good night, Islanders!"

"Sweet dreams!"

"Love y'all!"

As soon as the bright overhead lights went off, Shane felt Rose turn on her side. Wet kissing noises immediately started from where Leo and Cici slept.

Shane inched closer to her back, feeling the distance. He cleared his throat, whispering. "Hear that? *Grosssss*."

Rose turned, her nose almost skimming Shane's in the narrow bed. He could make out her eyes in the dimness, blinking once.

Cici let out a low moan and Rose snorted. Shane smiled, his shoulders relaxing.

"You okay?" Shane whispered.

Rose shrugged. "Are you?"

"What do you mean?"

"The challenge...with Lexi?"

"Oh." Shane drew the sheets higher around his shoulder. "Just...ah, jealous, I guess?"

Rose didn't answer for a moment. "It's not a problem?"

"You liking Lexi?"

"Not Lexi. Liking women. It's not, like, part of the game to me. I'm bi."

"Oh." Shane swallowed. "No, that's...fine."

"Fine?" Rose scoffed, turning away.

"Hey, no." Shane squeezed her shoulder, trying to find the words. "I'm sorry. I was surprised."

He let out an exhale, thinking of the way people had clapped, even if part of it was from gross horniness and other bullshit. Still. There had been some claps.

"I think it's great. Brave." Shane's voice cracked slightly. "And Lexi clearly thought it was great too."

Rose studied his face in the darkness, a small smile on her lips. She paused.

"I guess I thought...you might understand?"

Shane stiffened, staring at the ceiling. He shook his head. "No. But I support you."

"Okay." She inched closer to him, her nose skimming his arm. "Thank you." They breathed in and out for a moment. "We're okay?"

Shane stretched his arm out, circling around her back. "We're okay."

He felt Rose exhale against him, scooting closer so that she was curling into his chest. Shane blinked at the ceiling. Usually touch made him freeze, or overthink. He still hadn't figured out how long he was supposed to hold a hug or how to horseplay with the guys on the team in the right way. But Rose felt...nice. His body didn't feel on alert. It was the opposite, actually. He could feel her breath steady against his pajama shirt, her bodyweight grounding in his

arms. They breathed in and out together and Shane closed his eyes, letting himself go into sleep, *really* trying to block out Leo's high-pitched moans from two beds down.

Wake-up was brutal. The lights flared into existence without warning, searing Shane's eyes. He shifted groggily, trying to remember where he was, if he was late for practice. He turned, taking in the mess of dark hair next to him, and shot up in his bed.

Right.

Love Island.

Shane made himself take a deep breath in and out, heart skyrocketed. Javi gave him a nod as he headed for the bathroom, his boxers clinging to his thighs. Shane looked away. His heart was not slowing down.

Zac groaned and sat up, tugging off his eyemask and throwing a pillow at Cici and Leo's bed. "You motherfuckers kept me up all night."

Cici squealed, hiding from the attack behind Leo. Connie laughed from the bed next to Shane.

"Hey, I heard some pillowtalk from Hollander on my other side too. Shawna and I might need to change beds."

Rose yawned next to Shane, stretching out. He leaned down, kissing her forehead.

"Morning."

"Morning, Shane."

He smiled. "Breakfast order?"

While the girls got ready, Shane joined the guys in the kitchen. He wanted to go big for his first breakfast. He knew everyone usually did avocado toast, or smoothies, but he wanted to give Rose something special. Shane searched around the kitchen, eyes lighting on some of the artificial flowers lining the dining area. He plucked a red tropical flower and added it to his plate, the closest thing to a rose he could find.

"Falling hard already, Hollander?" Javi leaned against the counter, biting into an apple.

"Yeah, uh, sure. Sure am." Shane pushed up a smile. His eyes trailed down Javi's bare chest. The dude had more abs than seemed humanly possible. Javi raised his eyebrows. Shane froze.

"Jealous?" He laughed. "I'm sure you're more impressive than me on the ice, at least. Wanna hit the gym after dropping off breakfast? Can give you a free training session. Maybe recommend me to your rich hockey friends once you're home."

Shane nodded furiously, smiling. “Yes, please. It feels weird not to have practice or a game or anything.”

“Cool.” Javi grabbed a banana out of the fruit bowl. “Let me just run this up to Lexi.”

Shane looked down at his plate. He had arranged two pieces of avocado toast on one side as well as some scrambled eggs, his flower nestling along some fruit. Maybe he was falling hard. He lifted the plate and grabbed Rose’s coffee, following Javi up the stairs.

Rose sat in front of her mirror, applying mascara. Cici had already recapped her adventures from the night before (heavy making out, second base, and touching over bottoms). Apparently, the Land Leopard was packing some serious heat.

The attention had just turned to Rose when Javi and Shane entered, slipping their breakfasts in front of their respective girls. Rose flushed, kissing Shane’s cheek.

“Thanks babe!”

“You’re welcome...babe.” Shane gave her a tiny smile and disappeared behind Javi. The girls sat in silence for a moment, waiting for the footsteps to go silent, then burst into squeals.

“Oh my god, Rose, he is so *cute*!” Shawna lowered her lip gloss, pouting.

“Seriously, I don’t know if I want to adopt him or marry him.” Hannah tugged on a sheer cover-up in front of the mirror, glancing over her shoulder at Rose.

Lexi I. looked down at her banana. “Look at this shit that Javi did. You got the best one, Rose, damn.”

Rose waved her hand. “Stop, stop.” She bit her lip. “The kiss during the challenge *was* really good.”

Cici leaned over her makeup. “Girl, spill! Did you kiss in bed too?”

Rose shook her head. “No, we just talked. It was sweet.” She paused, exhaling for a moment. “I told him how I’m bi and he was fine with it and just reassured me and stuff.”

“Oh my god, girl, me too, girls are so cute!” Cici laughed, tossing her hair up into a ponytail. “Honestly, if Javi keeps being a dumbass, you should take Shane *and* Lexi.”

“It’s Lexi I.” Lexi slammed her blush down.

“But you’re the only Lexi here...?” Hannah tilted her head.

Rose took a bite of her toast with a smile, the crunch echoing in the room.

“*Anyway.*” Cici turned back to Rose. “I’m happy for you. He seems like a solid dude.”

Shawna blinked her false lashes into place, staring at herself in her mirror. “Yeah, I’m so surprised, I had totally bought into those gay rumors. My brother’s a huge hockey fan and

said it would like, rock the league or something if true, so I guess I should've known it was bullshit if he's still playing."

Rose took a sip of her coffee, toast lodging in her throat. "Yeah, it's hard when people make up rumors when you're even vaguely famous. Gets out of control so fast."

"Funny that you're actually the gay one." Lexi took a bite of her banana, making a face as she swallowed.

"Bisexual, Lexi." Rose corrected.

"Lexi-"

"I..!" the girls said in unison, laughing.

Lexi laughed a little too, looking down at her lap. "Sorry. Hard habit to break." She took another bite of her banana. "Ugh, Rose, I'm choosing Shane next recoupling. Give me some of your toast."

After his morning workout, Shane spent most of the day lounging with Rose on the daybeds. He had taken a cold shower after his workout, because he hadn't accounted for the humidity in Fiji when working out, and noticing the constant motorized turns of the cameras had made him perspire even more. Javi had given him a sweaty one-armed hug when they finished, saying he put in good work. Shane did not think about that while showering. Or how Javi had corrected his form, his fingers tracing lines over certain muscle groups that still held heat from his touch, even after the very cold, very long shower.

Luckily, the producers would have more than enough footage to use of Shane with Rose. They cuddled, something Shane had never imagined himself doing, and even drifted off into a mini-nap together thanks to Cici and Leo's antics the night before. In between, they talked about hockey and her latest movie and about how much Shane missed Pork Belly and how Rose wished she could have a dog but she traveled too much, and, and, and...

Everything was calm. Everything was good.

"I got a textttttt!" Leo's shout rang out across the villa. Shane and Rose exchanged a look, both grimacing. They stood to join the other Islanders gathering around Leo. Shane reached out for her hand, grabbing it firmly. It felt almost natural.

Leo jumped on top of the kitchen bar, clearing his throat to project. "ISLANDERS! Prepare to get *whipped* into shape. Your outfits are waiting upstairs."

He lowered his phone. The Islanders looked at each other and then ran for the stairs. In their dressing rooms stood two racks of the tiniest pleather outfits Shane had ever seen. Shane elbowed Zac out of the way, trying to grab one of the only hangers that seemed to have pants, but was short by a millimeter, his ribs aching slightly as he stretched for it.

The rack cleared, leaving Shane with the only remaining outfit: a pair of miniscule black pleather shorts and a mesh crop top. Shane stifled a scream as he touched the material. It was incredibly scratchy. Clearly cheaply made. A nightmare.

The other boys struggled into their outfits, all variations on dark leather and mesh. Shane changed quickly, horrified. The shorts were even smaller on, the material creeping up his ass and clinging to his inner thighs. The top was no better, barely skirting over his pecs.

Thankfully, the other boys looked just as ridiculous. Only Leo seemed fully at ease, having grabbed, of course, the only speedo cut available. He adjusted a thick collar around his neck, smiling.

“Damn, Hollander, look at that cake!” Zac slapped his ass, laughing. “You barely fit in that thing!”

Shane shoved his shoulder, flushing. “Yeah, ’cause you got the only pants.”

“These are assless chaps, my friend.” Zac did a slow turn, and sure enough, his ass was essentially on full display.

“Boys! You ready for us?”

Cici didn’t wait for an answer, leading the girls into their changing room. The girls were all outfitted in knee-high boots and some wore bodysuits, others miniskirts or microshorts. Rose had gotten a bodysuit with a deep plunge in front that left little to the imagination. She lifted Shane’s arm, spinning him in a circle with her mouth open.

“Okay, you need to keep this on *all* night.”

Shane flushed even deeper. “That’s enough.”

“Islanderssss! Come out to play!”

Their heads snapped up. Shawna cupped her ear. “Is that Ariana?!”

Downstairs, Ariana waited in a bright-red dress with generous cut-outs, her heels strappy and soaring. A red robe drifted around her shoulders, a whip in one hand. The Islanders whistled, whooping as they poured down the stairs.

Ariana grinned, then cracked her whip for attention.

“I have a surprise for you all, if you’ve been good boys and girls.” She gestured across the lawn, where pink X-shaped crosses now dotted the landscape. Handcuffs dangled from the top of each.

Ariana sauntered closer to one of the crosses.

“Ladies. Please join me.” She cracked her whip again, waiting for them all to get cuffed in. Rose winked at Shane from her cross.

“Now the boys.” Ariana spun the cross with Cici, revealing matching cuffs on the other side.

“What kind of challenge is this if we’re all cuffed?” Javi shook his head as he walked towards Lexi.

Shane shrugged, heading to Rose, hoping the cameras weren’t zooming in on his ass. A crew member helped cuff him in place before melting back into the scenery off-camera. Shane shifted his weight, a sudden jolt flooding his body. He pulled slightly against the restraints. They held, fastened snugly enough to hold his weight. He swallowed, wishing his shorts were less tight. But surely they wouldn’t show hard-ons on national television. He didn’t think...

Once everyone was strapped in, Ariana took her time weaving around the circle.

“I have one final surprise.” She grinned, eyes narrowing. “Blindfolds.”

“Oh my.” Shane heard Rose giggle from the back of his cross. He was glad someone was finding his fun. He stiffened as Ariana approached, the thick fabric sliding down over his hair and blocking his eyes. The loss of vision heightened the feeling of the cuffs against his wrist, the breeze against his waistline. Shane swallowed, willing himself to go numb from the waist down.

“Oops. I lied.” Shane could hear Ariana’s voice from a distance. “That wasn’t the final surprise. I actually have one more. *Two*, if we’re being technical. Islanders, please welcome our new bombshells!”

Shane heard the other Islanders whispering. Someone cursed. A few of the boys whistled, which was sure to get them in trouble with their couple later.

“They will be giving you a *very* warm welcome. If you’re chosen, that is. Have fun...” Ariana’s heels echoed as she moved farther away. Shane froze, tensing as he waited.

“I hope their breath isn’t rank.” Rose whispered.

Shane snorted, relaxing slightly. “That’s assuming you’re chosen to kiss.”

“Hey! Of course I’ll be chosen!”

Shane smiled, starting to say something back, but stopped when two sets of footsteps echoed across the pavement, softening once they reached the lawn. Shane strained his ears. He heard slight intakes of breath. Cici’s voice calling someone a fucking tease. And then someone was behind him.

He could hear Rose startle, the metal of the cuffs jostling against the cross. There was the wet sound of lips meeting. A...moan? Shane turned his head, frowning. Then he nearly jumped, a low *tsk* sounding in front of him.

Shane’s wrists pushed against his restraints, his heart thudding. A finger ran over his lips, shushing him. Then two hands appeared, tracing his body, warm and firm over his exposed skin. Shane felt his hips arch slightly. The air smelled like flowers and musk. A thumb traced

his jaw, trailing down his neck, resting for a minute against his jumping pulse. And then soft lips unleashed against the tender skin there, hot and wanting.

Shane clamped his lips together, suffocating the noise that threatened to escape. The kisses continued, coating his throat. Shane's fingers grasped at air. Twin hands slid upwards and intertwined with his, pressing his palms open, flattening him back to the cross.

Shane licked his lips, blinking into his blindfold, his neck straining towards the person in front of him. He heard a low laugh, then a leg firm between his, edging his stance even farther apart as the person slid forward. Shane felt bare skin brush against his thighs, followed by a quiet squeaking noise as their bodies pressed together. They must have put her in pleather too.

One hand dropped to Shane's leg, slowly tracing up from his thigh before reaching back to gently skim fingertips over his ass. Shane whimpered instinctively, hips jerking back into the touch, then immediately went lax, feeling the flush spreading over his face and down his chest.

There was that infuriating low chuckle again. A thumb found his bottom lip and Shane parted, more than ready. It seemed like both bombshells were teases.

Supple lips skimmed Shane's, barely making contact. There was a hint of tentativeness. Shane let out a soft whine, leaning forward as much as he could with restraints, and suddenly he was enveloped, the lips swallowing him whole, a hand anchoring around his jaw.

Shane forgot where he was, forgot about the cameras, forgot about anything that was not those lips. Those *lips*. Shane moaned into the bombshell's mouth, abandoned, wishing he could use his hands. He wanted to touch everywhere. One of his legs wrapped behind the person's thigh, desperate, pulling them even closer to his body. Shane was rewarded with a soft moan that made him twitch inside his pleather shorts. A tongue poured into his mouth and Shane met it, slipping over one another, licking hungrily. A hand disappeared under his mesh top, cupping his pec before tweaking his nipple, hard, and Shane pressed his hips forward with a cry, feeling himself straining uncomfortably against the cheap fabric.

At last, their lips broke apart, foreheads resting against each other. Shane panted, dizzy and delirious. Gentle kisses blossomed over his freckles, first on one cheek and then the other. Shane tried to follow each touch with his lips, wanting more, only to hear that chuckle again.

Through his haze, Shane started smiling. He was straight. He was actually straight. Irrefutably hard as hell for some sexy new bombshell.

A hand traced Shane's jaw, almost tender, and their hips pressed together again for just a moment. Shane's mind stuttered, his own hardness meeting...something else.

Warm breath wafted into his ear. "I will give you some time to ah, calm down, yes?"

Shane jerked back, hitting his head against the cross with a loud curse.

The voice was Russian. Vaguely familiar. And unmistakably male.

NEXT TIME ON...HEATED ISLAND

Yuna and David watch Shane's premiere on Heated Island. Chexy is excited that there are not one, but two Russian bombshells. The internet loses its mind over what becomes known as the Bisexual BDSM Blindfold Challenge. And we see what happens once those blindfolds come off...

Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

and now we'll hear from our viewers at home

Chapter Notes

FYI chexy is completely fan created from anon's fic tongues-a-waggin! the actual in universe characters on shane's team may be occupied as future contestants sooo i threw chexy in there as a teammate instead

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

“Hurry, hurry, it’s starting.” Yuna shifted on the couch, motioning David from the kitchen.

“Here, Chexy.” David handed him a large bowl of popcorn before sitting down next to Yuna.

“Thank you, Mr. Hollander.”

Yuna tsked. “Please. Yuna and David.” She clapped a bit as the recap from the last episode started, Shane posing in the hockey outfit from his intro video. “Oh, he looks so good.”

The screen cut to another scene and she turned to Chexy.

“You know, you’re more than welcome to stay here if you ever want. I worry about you alone in your hotel all summer.”

Chexy smiled. “Thank you, Mrs.- ah, Yuna. I will get some vacation soon, when my sister visits.”

“If you’re sure, honey.” Yuna scooped up a handful of popcorn, sighing as the camera panned over the current couples, Lexi I. and Javi flashing briefly on the screen.

“I don’t like any of these girls for Shane. He better stick with Rose.”

David gave her a look. He took a sip of his beer. “Javi seems nice.”

“More built than me.” Chexy laughed.

They watched in contented silence for a bit, Yuna getting agitated anytime the camera cut away from Shane. The Truth or Dare Challenge started and she covered David’s eyes,

laughing at his blush.

“This is what they do on this show?” He peered over her palm at the three-way kiss. “I can’t believe Shane agreed to go on.”

Yuna scoffed. “It’s not all bad. *Aww*, see, look at that kiss with Rose!” She leaned back against the couch, nodding fiercely. “Talk about chemistry.”

The trio fell silent as Rose kissed Lexi, the kiss stretching on and on.

Chexy bit back a laugh. “Rose has lots of chemistry.” Yuna hit his arm. She motioned to the popcorn bowl and his drink.

“Refills, Chexy? David?” She swept into the kitchen as the episode played on, chattering over the show. “I think Shane’s doing great. He’s coming across really well. Don’t you think?”

David and Chexy nodded in unison. Chexy’s phone lit up and he grunted with a smile. “Yeah, the boys are going crazy in the group chat. Furious he gets to kiss Rose Landry.”

Yuna came back into the living room, sliding down a fresh beer for Chexy and more popcorn.

“See, that’s what teasing should be. Good-natured.” She took a sip of her wine. “Not like those cruel rumors.” David squeezed her knee with a small smile.

The nighttime cameras flicked on, zooming in on Cici and Zac underneath moving covers. Yuna made a gagging sound. She stilled when the camera changed to Rose and Shane, nose-to-nose, the night vision bright enough to see every detail in grayscale.

Her hand found David’s. They both stopped breathing when Rose spoke. *I thought you’d understand...?*

There were twin exhales. Chexy glanced over, catching traces of what almost seemed like disappointment on their faces. David cleared his throat.

“Well, Shane is a good ally.”

“Yes, very supportive.”

Chexy nodded, feeling like he was supposed to add something too. “Bisexual is, ah, more common than people think, I think.”

Shane barely appeared in footage of the next day, the camera focusing more on Cici and Zac making out in the photobooth and the awkward silences between Connie and Shawna, her eyes tracking Javi wherever he went. Yuna murmured to herself as she texted Shane’s agent, David letting out an exasperated sigh.

Yuna jerked up suddenly, squealing. “Bombshells already!?”

“What is this bombshell?” Chexy looked at David, who shrugged back.

“Oh, they bring in new players every few episodes to shake things up. Didn’t expect any so soon.” Yuna’s eyebrows shot up. “Wow, that woman is *gorgeous*.”

Svetlana loomed large on the screen, her cat-like eyes staring down the audience. The intro room flashed in the background, neon lights illuminating her name. She smiled coyly into the lens.

“I am Svetlana Vetrova. You may know me from my modeling campaigns, and I am appearing in my first television series this fall. I came here for love...but I am not opposed to some fun in the meantime.”

She smiled then, showing off her bright white teeth. The camera cut to her twirling in a short dress, showing off her long legs, then pouting over one shoulder, before cutting back to her speaking.

“I don’t discriminate. I have a wide palette. And I’m not afraid to step on toes to get what I want.” She gave the camera a wink, pop music blaring.

“I’m getting the bombshell thing now.”

“David!” Yuna swatted his arm, laughing.

Chexy whooped. “Russians! We are gorgeous!”

The screen changed to a man, his gaze burning through the lens. *“My name is Ilya Rozanov, if I need an introduction.”*

David squinted. “Is that...?”

“I am, ah, supermodel. Big deal.” He cocked an eyebrow. *“You know this. I know this. I am sure many Islanders will leave couples just for a chance with me. I can be lazy, probably.”*

His intro video cut to shots of him posing, a damp white tee plastered over his pecs as he flexed and lifted the shirt higher. The camera zoomed in as his thumb ran over his ample lips, dripping with water.

Chexy scoffed. “Ego. But Russian, so...still gorgeous.”

On screen, Ilya leaned closer to the camera. *“As bisexual bombshell, I could consider everyone. But...I am a man who knows what he wants.”*

His lips finally quirked into a mischievous smile as the camera zoomed in even tighter around his face.

“And I want...”

His lips filled the screen, parting, his voice falling to a rough whisper.

“Shane Hollander.”

“Oh!” Yuna’s hand jerked, wine sloshing near the rim. “That’s...not going to help things.”

David was still staring. “His face...he did that Rolex campaign with Shane, right? Isn’t that how those rumors...”

Chexy looked down, avoiding anyone’s gaze. He could feel his phone buzzing again in his pocket. He didn’t want to see what the Metros were saying.

Yuna placed her glass down with a thunk, shaking her head. “How inconsiderate. Knowing that Shane has been dealing with that, just to...fan the flames.”

“I apologize on behalf of Russia.” Chexy gave Yuna a small smile.

Yuna exhaled, shaking her head. “It’s fine. It’s *fine*. Let me go feed Pork. Might have to message these producers too. They *promised* me Shane would be in good hands...”

“Honey...” David started. He sighed. “Maybe wait until tomorrow to message?”

She disappeared into the kitchen, David calling after her.

“And make sure you give Pork one of those duck liver treats I got him! Those were expensive!”

Chexy was glad Yuna was out of the room as the next part of the episode started. It was awkward enough to sit on the same couch with David, both staring somewhere slightly off-screen as Shane tugged on an incredibly tiny pair of black shorts, his ass spilling out the bottom.

“Okay, what did I miss?” Yuna plopped down between them, Pork letting out a miffed meow from her arms. She adjusted his sweater, leaning forward.

“This is pretty racy, Yuna.” David gestured to the crosses, Islanders shifting in their blindfolds.

“Well, it’s too late now, David. He’s on the show.” Pork snuck out of her arms, curling up in David’s lap.

A slowed-down version of a top forty song began blasting from the TV, the melody somewhat familiar to Chexy, one of those songs that was constantly on the radio. On the screen, Ilya and Svetlana moved in slow motion. They were both dressed in red. Svetlana wore a bustier that cupped her sizable assets, the slow motion not helping Chexy feel like a gentleman. Ilya wore a leather harness, straps crossing diagonally over his shoulders and meeting the horizontal straps looped around his muscular torso like a shiny external ribcage.

Svetlana’s hair swayed to the beat as she walked, tight dark curls skimming the top of her shoulders. The camera panned over to Ilya, his chin raised, face determined. Pork hissed. Yuna patted him approvingly.

Svetlana and Ilya’s eyes slid towards each other, both letting out a slow smile, and the camera zoomed out to take in the villa’s lawn. Ariana silently waved hello to the bombshells and then

pressed a finger to her lips, motioning to the Islanders.

Svetlana approached Javi first, running fingernails down his torso before leaning in to kiss, tilting her head up to meet his lips. Ilya circled Cici, breathing gently on her neck. He hovered for a moment, giving her a long lick on the cheek, then nothing further. Meanwhile, Svetlana had moved onto Connie, placing a sweet kiss on the lips as Ilya approached Leo, his hands appraising his body before moving on without anything more. Then Svetlana was on Cici, their lips tangling for longer than she had with Javi.

David cleared his throat. "I thought this was the celebrity version, not uh..."

"It's not a gay version, David." Yuna snapped, taking another sip of wine. "The producers would have told me that."

David smiled at her irritation, making eye contact with Chexy, who pushed down a laugh. Yuna sat up straighter.

"Oh no, she's going for Rose! Hands off! That's my son's girl!"

Svetlana had crossed over to Rose, her lips tender and intentional, Rose offering no resistance. Svetlana's lips curved up in a smile as they kissed, her fingertips light over Rose's body, their lips moving in unison.

Then Ilya approached the other side of the cross.

"Do not even *think* about it!" Yuna stood up, popcorn falling to the ground. Pork hissed again, jumping to the floor.

David grabbed her arm, moving her back down. "Honey, he's just looking..."

It was true. Ilya stood in front of Shane, his eyes raking over the man's body, taking in the dark mesh top and miniscule black shorts as his hands hovered at his side. Shane's head arched to the side, straining towards Rose, but then Ilya must have said something, because he snapped forward, wrists jolting in his cuffs. Ilya stepped forward slowly, his hands cradling Shane, hovering at his neck before lowering.

Yuna, David, and Chexy sat in silence, watching Shane come alive. He bucked against his restraints, lips open and panting, neck bobbing wherever Ilya moved like a desperate magnet.

Yuna made a small sound. "It's...well...he doesn't know it's *Ilya*."

David and Chexy said nothing. The camera zoomed out, showing both sides of the cross at once, Rose and Shane looking equally hopeless as the bisexual Russian models staked their claims.

"Okay!" Yuna cleared her throat with a clap, looking away as Ilya and Shane's lips finally met. Shane's moans were very audible, even with the sexy pop song playing loudly in the background.

“More drinks? I’m going to get us more drinks.”

Yuna hastened into the kitchen, luckily missing Shane’s reaction to his nipple getting tweaked. Chexy reached into his pocket, turning off his phone to stop the incessant buzzing. He glanced at David, whose face was blank but bright red.

“Just looking for the beer...can’t find it...don’t pause the show on my behalf!” Yuna shouted from the kitchen.

David leaned forward slightly, his voice almost a whisper.

“That’s...sweet.”

Chexy brought his eyes back to the screen. Ilya was kissing what seemed like each and every freckle on Shane’s face, his expression soft, torn open, rapturous. Shane’s head tilted side to side, trying to track where Ilya was like a helpless bat.

Ilya looked down at Shane with disarming tenderness, a crease growing between his eyebrows. Ilya swallowed thickly, pulse visible in his neck, curling his hands back against his body. Chexy found himself flushing for the first time that night, something more intimate in Ilya’s gaze than Shane’s obvious hard-on fighting against the poor pleather construction of his shorts.

Pork let out a low growl before flopping onto his back, stretching out his many folds.

The cheery voiceover for the next night’s episode started, followed by a reminder to vote for your favorite boy and girl.

Yuna hustled back into the room, her wine glass very full.

“Oh, hurry, everyone make sure to vote for Shane!”

David paused, looking at her. “Uh, should we? What if...he might want to come home after...” He gestured at the TV.

Yuna shook her head. “Shane can self-eliminate at any time, David. He’s in a strong couple with Rose. And it’s not like he *knew* who he was kissing.”

“Yuna.” David looked at her in a way that made Chexy feel like he should leave.

She stared him back down.

“Until *he* says he is, I’m not making assumptions. It happens on his time.”

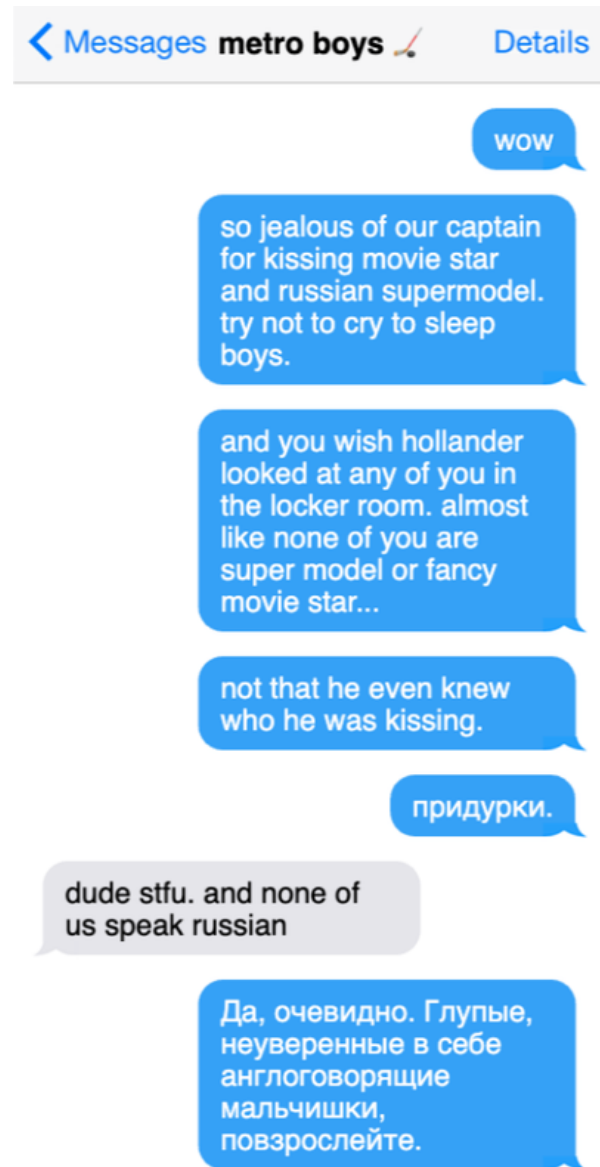
David sighed, nodding. “You’re right.” He scratched his neck. “Rose is very nice. As are some of the boys.”

“Any of them would be lucky to have him.” Yuna straightened. “But so help me god, if that Russian boy tries to do anything Shane is uncomfortable with...”

“I will find his family and kill them all.” Chexy smiled, showing off his missing teeth.

“Attaboy.” Yuna clapped him on the shoulder. “Now, *vote!*”

Chexy powered his phone back on, navigating to the Love Island voting app to click on Shane’s picture. The group chat was still going off, unsurprisingly. Chexy angled the screen away from Shane’s parents. He only skimmed a few lines before he felt his face go hot, fingers typing before his brain could catch up.





ari bb
@miss_eleganza

...

umm these might be the hottest bombshells in
[#loveisland](#) history 🤔🤔🤔

9:11 PM · Jul 6, 2026



ari bb
@pixi_eleganza

...

holy fUCK not them getting the dude who kicked off the
gay rumors...!! yuna works hard but LI producers work
HARDER



9:13 PM · Jul 6, 2026



anya 💜💜💜
@ethereal_echo

...

wow so this russian supermodel is a full on bisexual
terminator hunting down a dude who maybe ISN'T
EVEN GAY?? and i can't get a text back smhhhhh

9:16 PM · Jul 6, 2026



Twink4Twink
@pixel_pump1n9



wait but im so stressed for the hockey boy on love
island my secondhand embarrassment is SO BAD
someone save him honey the closet is GLASSSS



9:41 PM · Jul 6, 2026



jane <333
@chillwave_chirp



what in the bisexual BDSM is happening...i am NOT
complaining...

9:43 PM · Jul 6, 2026



holliehollander
@analog_aesthet1K



why is [#loveisland](#) calling me single ugh the way the bombshell is looking at shane??? I CAME HERE FOR LOVEEEE



9:48 PM · Jul 6, 2026



chexy's mix
@l33t_ledger



everyone vote for [#ShaneHollander](#) on [#LoveIsland](#)!!
tbh the [@MontrealMetros](#) should be supporting their captain instead of being quiet as fuck over there,
where's your team spirit fucking wimpsss

9:57 PM · Jul 6, 2026

NEXT TIME ON...HEATED ISLAND

The blindfolds come off. Some secrets are kept while some are revealed. The bombshells choose three Islanders to take on dates. And Soul Ties...well, Soul Ties is *crazy*.

Chapter End Notes

Translations from Chexy's text message:

- Assholes
- Yes, obviously. Idiotic, insecure English-speaking boys, grow up.

I wanted to get back to the episode this chapter but got lost in the side-tangent of viewers at home!! Next chapter we get back to Ilya and Shane :)

Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

in which shane sprints away from ilya in a nonstop panic attack of lust

Chapter Notes

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

Shane waited impatiently for a crew member to uncuff him, jerking his hands down once they were free and immediately clasping them in front of his shorts, where the reminder of what Ilya had done was still hovering.

Ariana's voice rang out.

"Islanders, remove your blindfolds and welcome our newest bombshells to the Villa!"

Shane had already torn his blindfold off, his eyes scanning wildly in every direction. None of the contestants seemed to be staring at him. That was good. His scan continued, eyes meeting someone who was. Shane quickly diverted his gaze away, refocusing on Ariana as his breath sped up.

"Welcome Svetlana," Ariana did a gameshow gesture, showing off the beautiful woman to her left, "and Ilya! Our newest bombshells may look familiar because their faces are absolutely everywhere. Both supermodels, both Russian, and both ready to shake things up."

Shane thought he might faint. It *was* him. Ilya Rozanov was standing next to Ariana Madix. His golden skin was caged in red leather, his shorts almost as miniscule as Shane's. He seemed composed, cocky, as he always did. His lips did look a bit swollen, like his natural pout had been enhanced with plumper since the last time Shane saw him. He swallowed. That was from Shane. Ilya's lips were swollen from *him*.

Shane half-collapsed back against his cross, trying to steady his breathing. In for four. Out for four. It wasn't helping. Ariana was saying more things, but his ears were static. Beside him, Rose reached out to squeeze his hand, her face concerned. He threw her a smile, snaking his clammy hand out of her grasp. He could not draw attention to this. Would not.

In front of him, Ilya's eyes tracked Rose's hand in his, lips curling upwards as Shane pulled away. Slowly, Ilya dropped his gaze to the outline of Shane's slightly softening cock, half-covered by his hands, then drew his eyes back up to Shane's gaze. Shane could feel himself flush deeper, shoulders tensing. Ilya smirked, then *winked*, fucking *winked* at him. On camera. On national television.

Shane tore his eyes to Ariana, his ears desperately trying to make sense of the sounds coming out of her mouth.

“Now, while some of you Islanders may need an introduction, some of you certainly do not.”

Ariana scanned the group, tapping against her lower lip.

“So...which of you have been good? And which of you have been naughty? Lucky for you, these bombshells don’t kiss and tell.”

Shane felt a slight gasp of oxygen leak through to his lungs.

“But I for one *hate* keeping secrets. So...” Ariana threaded her whip through her hands. “Anyone brave enough to spill?”

Cici raised her hand in the air immediately. “I would like to say, fuck you, sexy Russian dude, for teasing me like that and giving absolutely *nothing*. Rude as hell.”

Ilya grinned. “Is called edging, I think.”

Ariana fanned herself. “That accent? I think I’m on the edge already!” She laughed. “Okay, Cici, anyone else?”

“Oh, I’m not done.” Cici fluttered her eyelashes at Svetlana. “I’m glad at least one of you has manners.”

Rose shifted next to Shane. He glanced over at her, her face empty of her usual playfulness. He reached back out to her, lacing their fingers together and kissing the back of her hand. She looked up, giving him a small smile.

Leo raised his hand. “Yeah, I got some of that edging action too, and I would’ve rather the second course, if you know what I’m saying.”

He made a scratching motion with his hands, growling. Ariana looked like she was trying to suppress a smile, or the upchuck of her last meal.

“And, listen, I assumed it was the chick, but if the dude teased Cici, that must be his thing. So props to you, uh, Illy...? Sorry, forgot your name. But uh, yeah,”

Leo rubbed his hands down his abs, throwing his head back to show off his collar.

“Don’t be afraid of this wildcat and finish the job next time, huh?”

The Islanders burst into laughter. Shane gripped Rose’s hand without realizing, his knuckles whitening. It’s not like he had wanted Ilya to kiss him in the first place. But Leo? Really? Clearly Ilya had some fucked-up Asian fetish since there was nothing else he and Shane had in common. Leo acted like an actual animal for god’s sake. That’s what Ilya found attractive? Shane shook his head, snorting.

Ariana was trying her best to keep her smile contained. “Can I just say, I love how open we all are this season! Now, would anyone else like to share?”

There was a moment of tense silence. Rose and Shane stared at the ground.

Ilya cleared his throat.

Shane’s heart started pounding, his vision beginning to blur again.

“I am a gentleman, so I will not reveal secrets. But I will say there are very pretty faces here. One in particular. This face I would like to kiss again and again. Maybe without blindfold. Handcuffs could still be fun.”

Shane’s face was on fire. He wished the synthetic grass would open into the ocean, that he could sink to the depths and never be discovered.

“And you Svetlana? Any words for the Islanders?”

Svetlana smiled slowly. “Ilya and I have many things in common. I am also excited to kiss some of these pretty faces.” Her eyes drifted towards Shane and Rose. “And if those kisses make some people upset, well.” She shrugged, smile deepening. “I came here for love, not to be liked.”

Shane looked at Rose. She was staring down at the lawn, *grinning*. With all two million of her movie star teeth. She wasn’t even trying to be subtle. He jerked at her arm slightly and she blinked at him, as if she was remembering where she was, and pressed her lips together.

Ariana nodded. “Well, you two will both be going on three dates tomorrow to get to know some of these pretty faces better. Until then, mix, mingle, and at least try to behave. Or don’t...”

She winked at the camera before striding off.

Once she was gone, the Islanders surged around the new arrivals, hugging and shaking hands. Ilya’s gaze was trained on Shane, continuing to push towards him even as people tried to get his attention.

Shane swallowed. “Hey, let’s go chat.”

Rose glanced at Svetlana. “But shouldn’t we...”

“We can say hi after, c’mon.” Shane practically dragged her off the lawn, Ilya coming to a stop a few feet away before getting mobbed again by the other Islanders.

“Shane! Slow down! Where are we going?”

Shane panted, coming to a stop after the two flights of stairs and opening the balcony doors.

“C’mon, let’s chat here. Away from everyone.”

Rose exhaled with a slight frown, folding her arms. “Fine.”

“Fine.” Shane collapsed onto the padded bench, Rose sitting on a cushion away from him.

“Well?”

“Um, how was the challenge? For you?”

She squinted, tilting her head. “Is that why you’re acting so weird? You’re jealous?”

Shane licked his lips, choosing his words carefully. “I thought we should talk about what happened.”

Rose exhaled, leaning back into the cushions more. “One of the bombshells kissed me. You?”

“Yes. One bombshell kissed me too.”

“Okay.”

“Okay.”

Rose and Shane stared into the distance for a minute. Rose shifted in her seat. Shane grabbed a pillow, absently fluffing it up. Over the balcony, he could glimpse the rest of the Islanders down below. Hannah was talking to Ilya, her hand on his biceps. His stomach flipped. Rose looked up at the night sky.

“Shane. I know which bombshell kissed me.”

“How?” Shane scoffed. “You were blindfolded, you couldn’t touch...”

“I felt her hair against my neck. When she kissed me.” Rose’s voice was quiet. “I like you Shane. Really. And it’s also early days, and we need to explore all connections, right?”

“Right.”

“And it felt...different. With her.” Rose glanced down. “Tender, almost? I don’t know. I don’t even know her, obviously, it’s stupid. I guess...I want to? Get to know her?”

Shane nodded, not sure why his eyes were starting to tear up.

“Hey.” She scooted closer, squeezing his hands. “It doesn’t mean I’m going anywhere. We’re still a couple, okay?”

“Okay.”

“And I will be honest about how I’m feeling. I won’t blindside you.”

Shane nodded, blinking hard. “Thanks.”

She swallowed, thumbs tracing lightly over the back of Shane’s hands.

“I would really love if you could be honest with me too?”

“Sure, of course.”

“Shane...”

“Rose.”

She groaned, covering her face for a moment. “Shane, I could hear someone kissing you.”

“Yes, I already told you that. I’m not lying-”

“While I was kissing Svetlana.” She raised her eyebrows. “Which means...”

“I don’t...” Shane swallowed, shaking his head. “I smelled...flowers...and...”

“Okay.” Rose exhaled. “It’s okay. I only wondered...I know you did that Rolex campaign together. And then those rumors...”

“Were rumors.” Shane shot up to standing, taking a step back. “Insane rumors. Based on what, a two-second clip of me *looking* at someone? But setting it to some romance music and doing edits and spreading it online is suddenly, what, clear evidence that I’m gay?”

“Shane.” Rose’s voice was strained but calm. “I am sorry. They will hear you down there if you don’t lower your voice.”

Shane collapsed back into his seat, crossing his arms. The tears were coming now. He was glad it was darker up here.

“Ridiculous. If Rolex hadn’t released their stupid behind-the-scenes outtakes, if...”

If I hadn’t looked at him, hadn’t let myself, for just one fucking second, look at him the way I wanted...

“Shane. Be here with me. Focus on my face. You’re okay. Just breathe.”

Shane leaned his face into Rose’s shoulder. “This is so embarrassing.”

“There is nothing embarrassing about this.”

Shane pulled back, smiling slightly as he rubbed away some snot.

“Really? Because I’m crying on a movie star’s shoulder in too-tiny BDSM gear.”

“Sounds like my idea of a great time.” Rose grinned, making him laugh. She rubbed his back softly through his mesh crop top, considering. “So. You didn’t actually say how the kiss was.”

Shane sniffed, the tears building again. “Great. Really great. More than great.”

“Oh, honey.”

Rose kissed his forehead, rocking him a bit where they sat. Something loosened in Shane's chest, the phantom of Ilya's hands washing over him. It took a few minutes and then Shane froze, remembering the cameras nestled in every corner. Rose stopped, her hands hovering as Shane stilled.

"What is it?"

Shane swallowed, then leaned closer to her ear. He whispered something, gesturing, Rose's brows pulled together in concentration. Then she grinned, clearing her throat.

"Hey, babe, don't worry! You don't need to apologize for exploring bisexuality. It makes sense, after so many *rude-ass people* on the internet started gay rumors about you, that you might want to see what they're all talking about!"

Shane rolled his eyes at her, leaning closer to whisper in her ear again.

"I thought you were supposed to be a good actress? Now say the next part."

She tweaked his ear, making Shane wince.

"Remember, I'm bisexual too!" Rose fluttered her eyelashes. "I'm *so* glad we can support each other. In fact, it makes me feel closer to you than ever. Our couple has never been stronger!"

She leaned in, hands cradling Shane's face. He met her lips, their first kiss out of a challenge. The kiss was nothing like Ilya's, nothing like the hot heat that had made him moan on national fucking television. It was soft, comfortable. Safe.

And then Rose smacked the side of his ass, making him draw back with a gasp. She grinned, eyes narrowed.

"Thanks, babe. That was hot!"

Shane gritted his teeth and forced a smile back. "Mm, yes, thank you Rose."

He yanked her into an embrace, bringing her ear close to his lips. "If you don't get it together, I take back offering to help with Svetlana."

Rose straightened up, face serious. Shane laughed, standing, and offered his hand. "Shall we join the masses?"

"Mm, if we must."

Rose swung their hands between them as she looked down over the balcony. Svetlana and Ilya were holding court in the middle of the Islanders, champagne flowing. Svetlana glanced upward, her elbow nudging Ilya. Shane fought the impulse to duck down below the balcony's railing and hide from sight.

Svetlana called up to them. "Why are you depriving us of such a beautiful sight, hmm? Come join us!" She raised her champagne glass in the air.

Rose gave a soft wave back, her face flushed. "Be right down."

Ilya took a slow sip of his champagne, his eyes not leaving Shane's face. "Hurry."

As soon as Shane and Rose descended the stairs, she slipped her hand out of his and practically skipped to Svetlana's side. Shane didn't even have time to be mad before Svetlana was whisking her off for a chat across the lawn, their pleather boots clicking together into the distance.

Shane spotted Ilya's broad shoulders moving towards him in the crowd and immediately turned to the closest person who was...fucking Leo.

"Leo! Hey, man! How's...how's it going?"

"Shane! My guy." Leo grabbed his shoulder, shaking him like a ragdoll. "Bombshells are wild, huh? Can't believe you knew one of them already. Unfair advantage, Hollander!"

Shane's mouth went dry. "What do you mean?"

"Rozanov. I thought he looked familiar. But in all the clips I've seen, they just zoom in on your face with like, heart eye effects and stuff, so I didn't realize he was the one."

Shane stepped closer to Leo, practically chest-to-chest. Leo lowered his champagne glass, a smile spreading on his face as he started to make a purring sound.

"Stop that immediately, Leo."

Leo pouted.

"What exactly did Ilya say about me?"

Leo looked over his shoulder. Ilya was hovering ominously between Hannah and Shawna, his attention clearly trained on them.

"Chill out, man. He said you had both been Rolex ambassadors and met when Rolex did a collab campaign. I already knew those online rumors cause that's my job as a Youtuber, I gotta stay informed and,"

"How is that even a job, Leo?" Shane shook his head, disgusted.

Leo stepped back, his face falling. His voice lost its playfulness, turning almost childlike.

"I know it may not be impressive to someone like you, Hollander, but people like it. I make them laugh. I do my silly skits. I talk about gossip. It gets people through the day. It gets me through the day." Leo shook his head, turning away. "And just so you know, on my channel, I said people shouldn't believe rumors until proven true. I didn't like when the whole eighth grade iced me out for similar shit, okay?"

He scoffed, shaking his head again. "Not that you bothered asking. I should mingle."

He walked away. Shane exhaled, feeling like a giant asshole. He glanced up as Ilya started heading towards him again and quickly turned, pivoting to Connie.

“Connie, um, hi! How are you!”

“Oh, Shane. Hello.” The waiter gave him a small smile. “You’re so sociable tonight.”

“Yeah, yeah, I love...socializing.” Shane tugged down the bottom of his shorts, wishing they were allowed to change already. “So...thoughts on the new bombshells?”

Connie glanced over to where Svetlana and Rose were sitting across the lawn, their heads close together, Svetlana’s hand on Rose’s knee.

“Oh, Svetlana’s gorgeous. Doubt I have a chance though. But my current couple, it’s not going too well. Especially now that I have that for competition...”

Connie and Shane glanced at Ilya. Shawna was now running her fingers along his harness, cooing. Shane ignored the line of fire that burned up his chest, looking away before Ilya noticed.

“Yeah, well, he seems like an ass.”

“Ilya?” Connie’s eyebrows rose. “He’s been really nice so far. He’s been trying to talk to you actually.”

“Me? Why me?”

Connie tilted his head. “Nothing bad, I don’t think. He said you two know each other a little bit. That it would be nice to know someone here besides Svetlana. I guess they already know each other from the modeling world. Why do you think he’s an asshole?”

“No...no reason. Just didn’t know what he was telling people. Don’t really trust him.” Shane cleared his throat, hating that his face felt hot.

“Okay...Well, I’m gonna...” Connie gestured vaguely into space and then peeled away.

Shane scanned the crowd, increasingly panicked, striding farther from Ilya and grabbing Lexi’s arm.

“Lexi I! How are you!”

Lexi looked him up and down. “Fine...? Um. You haven’t talked to me like, once, this whole time.”

“Exactly.” Shane gripped both her arms, trying to stop his eyes from darting towards Ilya, who was now outright smirking at him. “We should go for a chat!”

“Uh...” Lexi looked him up and down again. Shane felt sweat beading along his hairline.

“Yeah...maybe tomorrow? Javi and I haven’t debriefed yet so...” She gave him another look as she headed off with Javi, who threw a bemused look over his shoulder at Shane.

“Hollander.”

“*Fuck.*” Shane clasped his hand to his mouth, furious he had spoken out loud.

“Mm, fuck later. Chat first.” Ilya stood before him, smile playing around his lips. “Unless you are still too scared?”

“I’m not *scared.*”

“Really? You run every time I look at you.”

“I’m busy, I’m-”

“Ah, Mr. Social. Mr. Flirt. Apologies. I leave you alone. Find me when you are ready.”

Ilya turned and started walking across the lawn, Shane’s brain short-circuiting. He jogged after him, grabbing Ilya by the biceps.

“Hey! You stare me down all night and then just...just...” Shane realized he was still gripping Ilya’s arms and dropped his hands immediately.

“Just...?” Ilya raised his eyebrows, hands windmilling. “I thought it was my English that was bad. What are you saying, Hollander?”

Shane crossed his arms, lips pressing together.

Ilya sighed, looking up at the sky. “I would like to chat, as they say here. But, I do not force people. You do not seem to want to chat, so we do not chat. Yes?”

“That’s not...” Shane exhaled slowly. “I didn’t say that.”

“Oh, really? So what do you say?”

“Fine, yes. Let’s...talk. Get this over with.” Shane headed inside, motioning for Ilya, who did not move. Ilya wagged his finger.

“No, no. The Islanders have told me. You must say it right. It’s not talk.”

Shane groaned, gritting his teeth. “Can I...can I pull you for a chat?”

Ilya beamed. “Yes, I like this. You may pull me, Hollander.”

Shane shook his head. “I’ll...give you a tour of the villa. We’re not going anywhere.”

“Afraid to sit in a dark corner with me?”

“*No.* I am being a nice person. Showing you where shit is.”

“Okay, okay. Relax, Mr. Panic Attack. It is fine.”

They walked in silence for a moment, Shane gesturing at times to tell Ilya where the photobooth was, pointing out the private speakeasy on the first floor, the stairs upstairs that led to the bedrooms. Shane stopped at the foot of the stairs, skidding to a stop.

Ilya tilted his head. "One floor tour? That is all?"

Shane huffed. "The rest is obvious. It's a self-explanatory layout."

Ilya stepped closer, clasping his hands behind his back. "You do not wish to show me where I will sleep?"

Cici and Leo walked by, or rather, stumbled by in full embrace. They slammed the door to the speakeasy behind them, Ilya and Shane springing apart until they passed.

Ilya's voice dropped, more serious. "I am glad to see you. Familiar face. I like familiar faces. Especially pretty ones."

"I'm not..." Shane tore off the rest of the words, pressing his palms to his eyes. "What have you told people?"

Ilya cocked his head. "What is there to tell? We work on Rolex together. I shake your hand at the ambassador campaign. You shake back. Great ad, does well, we're even more rich. Yay." He shrugged. "And...few months later, turns out you are obsessed with my ass, now the whole internet knows."

"I am *not*-"

"Shh." Ilya stepped closer, a thumb sliding down Shane's jaw, somehow stilling him even as his heart accelerated. Ilya dropped his hand, moving to lean on the wall next to Shane, both of them looking forward with their shoulders barely skimming.

"I do tell contestants, yes, I thought maybe Hollander will be my friend. I add on Instagram, you add me back. I send you fire emojis on your sexy hockey stories. You do nothing. I DM you hilarious messages. You say nothing." Ilya shrugged. "So, it was nice for my ego to see edited videos of Shane Hollander looking in the direction of my ass."

Shane blinked down at the floor. "It was two seconds. And it's not like..." He sighed, suddenly exhausted.

"Yes, two seconds should not be such a big deal." Ilya studied him carefully. "Not nice, all these videos and rumors. For you."

Ilya shrugged, starting to smile again. "For me..."

"Shut up." Shane bumped his shoulder, giving a small smile back.

Ilya gave him another look. "How are you and Rose?"

Shane adjusted the mic around his neck, swallowing. "Great. Strong. Still open, of course. It's early days. But."

“Mm. So good for you two.” Ilya sighed pitifully. “I am all alone.”

Shane rolled his eyes. “Yeah, you looked real alone.”

Ilya lit up, releasing a full smile. “Ah. Hollander watches me for three seconds now?” Shane looked away, lips twitching.

Ilya pressed off the wall, hovering in front of Shane.

“At least I had a great kiss tonight. Kind of kiss that makes me feel less lonely. Will keep me warm all night.”

“Oh really?” Shane could feel the blush starting up his chest, spreading up his neck and across his cheeks.

“It was an incredible kiss, Hollander.” Ilya’s voice lost some of its teasing for a moment. Rough, almost desperate.

“Never thought I could have a kiss like this.” He leaned closer. “So filthy. So *wanting*. I can only imagine if hands hadn’t been cuffed...”

He pinned Shane’s body between his arms, his shaky exhale tickling Shane’s cheek.

“If there had not been blindfolds...if we could look at each other...”

Shane’s heart thudded in his chest. His hands felt glued against the wall, Ilya’s thighs braced on either side of him, his muscular torso looming above him. Shane felt his head tilt back as if against his will, lips parting as he looked up at Ilya.

Ilya was undone. His eyes searched over Shane’s face, not hiding any of the open desire there, looking almost in pain. Ilya’s breath quickened, red harness rising and falling rapidly, his fingers tensing against the wall on either side of Shane’s face. His nose edged forward by a millimeter, tracing the air between them, hesitating helplessly above Shane’s lips.

Shane’s hands twitched at his sides. He reached out, his fingertips skimming Ilya’s abs, tracing the straps of his harness as if testing that Ilya was real. Ilya sucked his breath in, pulse jumping. He leaned his forehead against the wall close to Shane, his lips next to his ear in a plea.

“Hollander...”

Cici’s high squeal bled through the thin walls, calling out Leo’s name in a high, breathy staccato.

Shane inhaled, dropping his hands and ducking beneath one of Ilya’s arms, practically sprinting up the stairs away from him.

“Um, gotta go. Talk later!”

“*Hollander.*”

Shane ignored Ilya, his brain screaming only to get away, away, away.

He heard Ilya shouting out from below, voice stabilized somewhat. “Good view at least! Wear this to bed later!”

Shane’s hands fluttered to his pleather-coated ass, trying to keep some dignity as he ran up and away from the magnetic pull of the man below.

Shane was ready for bed early, showered and in his two-piece pajama set while the rest of the Islanders were only starting to wind down. He laid in bed, arms thrown over his head, telling himself he was grateful he wouldn’t risk running into Ilya in the showers or the dressing room.

Gradually, the communal bedroom filled with the sound of Islanders, some of the boys flicking Shane’s feet as they passed with teasing remarks, the girls coming by to give him brief hugs goodnight with something that looked like pity.

Shane straightened, pushing himself up and glancing around. Ilya wasn’t in the room yet. But maybe someone had seen...had said something...

Rose and Svetlana entered, laughing at something that had been said in the corridor. Shane’s shoulders lowered. So that’s what it was.

Rose was glowing. Shane hoped he didn’t look like that. It was obvious, her eyes practically sparkling with mini-Svetlana figurines. Svetlana was harder to read, her cat-like gaze sliding over Rose like water and around the room, but they walked in lockstep with each other until reaching Rose’s bed.

“Goodnight...” Rose said breathily, waving as Svetlana walked to one of the single beds that had been brought in since the night before.

“Be cool.” Shane hissed. “For both of us.”

Rose glared at him, flushing, then slipped beneath the covers. Shane slipped down too, lifting the top sheet over their heads.

“Well?”

Rose’s face broke into a huge smile. “I *like* her, Shane. We talked for so long, and she was kind of touchy, so I don’t know, I think she might like me? I know it’s early and-”

“She’d be an idiot not to like you.” Shane smiled, cutting off Rose’s nervous stream of consciousness.

Rose sighed, squishing her face in a silent scream. “Oh, I’m gonna murder someone if I don’t get chosen for a date tomorrow.” She opened her eyes, exhaling. “How about you? How was your night?”

Shane’s smile faded. “Okay. Not bad.” He gnawed his lip. “Complicated.”

Rose sighed, scooting closer to him. “I don’t think it’s that complicated for him, Shane. Apparently, in his intro video, he said you’re the one person he wants to get to know.”

Shane flushed, shaking his head. “That’s...that’s crazy.”

Rose shrugged. “That’s what Svetlana told me. And he’s been telling the other Islanders you’re his top choice, so...”

Shane bit back a smile. Rose gasped, grinning.

“See, you do like him! You want to *kiss* him, you want to-”

Shane grabbed her, flipping on top of her and covering her mouth with his hand, laughing. “Shut up, Rose!”

“Oi!” A pillow hit them from somewhere to the right, Javi’s voice ringing out. “No funny business till the lights go out!”

A hand yanked back their sheets with a squeal. “Oh my god, you two are *bad*.” Cici giggled, Shane exposed on top of Rose.

Ilya was standing in front of his bed, which of course was against the wall closest to Shane and Rose. He raised an eyebrow, taking in Shane’s hand over Rose’s mouth.

“Mm. Kinky.”

Shane flushed, rolling over and releasing Rose immediately. He threw the pillow back in Javi’s direction, trying not to linger on Ilya in his periphery. Ilya was shirtless for bed, wearing only a golden crucifix around his neck, the rest of his torso even more incredible without leather in the way. On bottom he wore low-hung joggers, oddly conservative compared to the boxers most of the boys wore to bed, not that Shane cared. His curls were damp from the shower, and Shane had the insane urge lick the water droplets falling onto his neck before he banished the thought from his mind.

“Good night, Islanders!” Lexi called out in a sing-song.

“Good night to our new bombshells, especially!” Shawna giggled.

Goodnights rang out across the room, and Shane finally gave in, letting himself glance at Ilya at the bottom of his bed. The man was laughably large for the twin mattress, lounging like a Greek god above the covers. His lips curved when he caught Shane’s eye, his low voice mimicking Lexi’s singsong.

“Good*night* Shane Hollander...”

Shane did not sleep well. At all. He had closed his eyes for hours, sure, but he felt certain no actual sleep had happened. His thoughts had been filled with his agent’s voice a few years back, gently telling him they had gotten feedback he was a bit too stiff in his ad campaigns.

Recommending models to look up, to learn from. And Shane was a good student. He was good at learning to be the best.

So of course, he had looked at her list of recommendations and ran with it. He studied one supermodel from Sweden, her limbs supple and elongated in every shoot. He memorized the beat of a breakout American on the runway, her long legs always in rhythm, and tried to encompass that on his commercial sets. He had, as a good student, looked into Ilya Rozanov as suggested as well. Had studied the rising star as he was told to. Had learned how to square his shoulders, angle his jaw, find the light, just as Rozanov did.

And even after his agent told Shane he had done well, that the latest feedback was great, that more campaigns were pouring in now that he looked less like a cardboard cut-out...well... Shane told himself he was keeping his skills sharp. He would never be a model, not really, but he could make his agent proud. His mom proud. All the little Asian hockey players proud, which no one ever let him forget.

It was for work purposes, really, how often Shane would look up Rozanov's name. Track his latest bookings. Study the way his skin glowed off the page, out of his phone, off giant billboards that stalked Shane like something taunting. How those piercing eyes seemed to follow him everywhere.

That's all that stupid clip had been, when it came down to it. Shane finally meeting someone who had helped him in his career, even if Ilya was completely unaware of his assistance. It was no different than admiring an athlete on the ice, or a great work of art. Ilya's body was art. Athletic in its own way. How he could contort and shapeshift, and yeah, maybe Shane's thoughts wandered sometimes, late at night. But Shane did nothing but shake hands when they met. Made himself shut down any attempt at conversation the day of the shoot. Never responded to his DMs on social media. Never engaged with any of his reactions. Shane was disciplined. Always. Not that the internet cared in the end.

That's what kept him up the most as Rose snored quietly next to him. Knowing he had been disciplined his entire life. Knowing how strict he had been. Only for it not to matter at all in the end.

But it would be ridiculous to give in now, on incredibly intrusive television. That countless Canadians, team members, hell, his *family* would be watching unfold. Shane had clamped his eyes shut, forcing his body to still. He had tried his best not to think about Ilya breathing the same air, his bed so close to his own, and how his lips had felt when Shane had been helpless to stop it. How it might feel to do that again, and again, and again.

"Man, you look like shit." Rose laughed into his shoulder, rubbing the sleep out of her eyes.

"Wow, good morning to you too. You're supposed to support me, you know." Shane snorted, moving a loose wave of hair out of her face. He sensed slight movement from Ilya's bed and hesitated, then leaned down, his lips hovering above Rose's in a question.

She grinned, reaching up and pulling Shane to her in a loud kiss, releasing as soon as Svetlana walked by.

“Okay, I’m gonna go get ready!”

Rose hopped out of bed, abandoning Shane immediately. When Shane looked over at Ilya, he was not looking back. He rubbed his lips with the back of his hand, something twisting in his stomach.

Mercifully, Shane did not run into Ilya in the kitchen as he made Rose breakfast. His brain was as scrambled as the eggs he was making, equal parts terrified of any further interaction and desperately needing more. It seemed the producers had scooped Svetlana and Ilya up for a bombshell debrief. If Shane craned his neck, he thought he could spot them on the upper deck, leaning off the balcony above the villa.

“So. Shall I spill first?” Svetlana cupped her mug of tea, smiling as she took a sip.

“Please. Do not keep me waiting.” Ilya turned away from Shane’s tiny figure down below, leaning his back against the railing as he stretched out his arms.

“Okay.” Svetlana dropped down onto the cushioned bench, getting comfortable. “So. Connie - very cute. Almost too sweet. I want to pinch his cheeks. Javi, very hot. Definitely curious about him.”

“And?” Ilya cocked an eyebrow.

Svetlana covered her face with one hand, peering out between her fingers.

“Fine. Last but not least. Rose.”

“She is like a puppy dog around you.”

“You think?” Svetlana crinkled her nose with a smile.

“Sveta. It is obvious.”

She laughed, throwing back her head. “Is it bad I want it even more obvious?”

“Of course you do.” Ilya scoffed, chuckling. “Never enough with you.”

“Well, don’t be shy.” Svetlana lowered her tea, nudging Ilya’s foot. “Your top three choices for dates?”

Ilya looked down at the ground.

She sighed. “Let me guess...Shane, Shane, and Shane?”

Ilya glared at her. She took another sip, humming. “What were you saying about being obvious?”

He sighed. “I should not put all my eggs in one nest.”

“Eggs in one basket, Ilyusha.” Svetlana smiled. “Have my English lessons been for nothing?”

“You got me the model jobs, the English, now help me with this boy.” Ilya slid down to join her on the bench. “He is...frustrating.”

Svetlana ran her hand through his curls. “Oh, you’ll be fine. He turns bright red every time he sees you.”

“Red can be from anger.”

“Yeah...I don’t think that’s what it is.” Svetlana pulled back, glancing at Ilya’s face. “Cheer up. See how the date goes. If he’s truly not feeling it, onto the next.”

“No next. Just Shane.” Ilya mumbled into her tank top.

“Okay, we have to fix that attitude before we get down there. C’mon, let’s pick out a date outfit for you. You’ll look devastating. You’ll seduce Shane and anyone else you want. Because you do know you have to choose two other people, right?”

Ilya frowned, snuggling closer to Svetlana.

“No. We get to choose three dates. Didn’t say it has to be three different people.”

Svetlana laughed. “Ilyusha! That is not how the game works!”

“What, should I choose your Rose?”

She swatted him. “She’s not *my* Rose.”

She straightened up.

“Actually...yes. *Yes.* ” She grabbed Ilya by the shoulders. “Take her on a date and get some info for me! Please! I know she likes to have fun with girls. But would she really, you know, be interested?”

Ilya narrowed his eyes, then nodded.

“Fine. But then you have to choose Shane for one of yours. Same purpose. And no flirting with his cute freckle face. It will be very hard to resist.”

She rolled her eyes. “Fine.”

She held out her hand. Ilya shook it, a smile growing on his face.

“We are Russian spies now, Sveta. Top secret.”

Svetlana lowered her voice, thickening her accent as she wiggled her brows.

“Come back with the intel I demand. Or do not come home at all.”

They burst into laughter, leaning on one another before running inside to get ready for their dates, Ilya’s spirits high again as he elbowed Svetlana out of the way. In a matter of hours, he would look devastating, and Shane Hollander would be on a date with him.

Chapter End Notes

okay i keep writing too much and not getting to what is promised! but NEXT installment will have the dates and maybe even some soul ties wildness ;)

Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

the bombshells go on three dates. shane takes ilya to the docks. soul ties is ALWAYS crazy.

Chapter Notes

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

Rose adjusted her bikini higher on her hips, wiggling back on the lounge chair.

Shane looked over at her behind his sunglasses. “You probably need to reapply your sunscreen.”

“Shane, the whole point is to get a tan.” She shifted. “Have you seen them?”

Shane shook his head, not needing to know who ‘they’ were.

Rose huffed, sighing. “I’m in my cutest bikini too.”

“Oh. Yeah, looks great.”

Rose scoffed. “Thanks, Shane.”

A phone buzzed. From the beanbags, Hannah screamed, scrambling to her feet. “I got a *textttt!*”

The Islanders, scattered around the villa, popped up like meerkats before gathering closer, Cici’s lipstick smeared around Leo’s mouth from where they had been lounging on the daybeds.

Hannah shouted out her text. “Islanders! Our new bombshells will now begin their three dates.”

Rose’s phone buzzed from her lounge chair. She squeezed Shane’s hand, pressing her face into his chest as she muffled a squeal. He rubbed her back, projecting his voice.

“Don’t worry, Rose. We’re a strong couple. We’ll be okay.”

Rose ran over and opened her phone, clearing her throat.

“Rose. Svetlana would love to take you on a beachside picnic. Please go upstairs and get ready for your date. Ilya will now reveal his choice.”

She lowered her phone, cheeks flushed. Shane felt his phone buzz in his pocket. Everyone turned towards the sound. Shane didn't move. Rose nudged him.

"Right." Shane swallowed, sliding his phone out. "I am also going on a beachside picnic."

"Try to be less excited about it, damn." Shawna rolled her eyes. "What a waste of a pick."

Shane watched himself in the mirror as he buttoned up his shirt, the third one he had tried on in the past five minutes. He was following the rules of the show. He was doing what production said. Everything with Ilya so far had been done *to* him - the kiss, now this date. People couldn't possibly say Shane was the one initiating.

And it would be silly to be nervous for his first date with a man. With Ilya. It was for TV. It's not like it was *real*. The producers would probably make them repeat conversations or pause while they fixed things on camera first like they always did.

Shane repeated these facts like a mantra while styling his hair. It was also true that he was still a product. Still on screen even if not on the rink. It was his responsibility to look good. Not for himself, or for Ilya, of course. For the audience.

Shane and Rose walked down the stairs together, Ilya and Svetlana waiting for them at the bottom. The other Islanders gathered around as instructed, cheering. Ilya was in a crisp white shirt, unbuttoned, his chest on full display, golden necklace winking in the sun beneath his mic. Shane pried his eyes away from the happy trail that dipped down into matching white shorts, riding dangerously low on Ilya's hips.

Rose reached Svetlana first, slipping their hands together as they peeled off to exit the Villa. Shane came to a stop in front of Ilya, his arms stiff at his side.

Ilya cocked his head, a smile fluttering around his lips.

"You look very nice. Very formal." His finger trailed down Shane's row of buttons. Shane tugged at his long sleeves, suddenly hot.

"Thanks. You look nice too."

"Yes." Ilya nodded, a broad hand reaching up and pushing gently against the small of Shane's back. "Let's not miss our ride, hmm?"

Production didn't let them talk on the brief ride to the beach. Rose bit her lip to keep from giggling, Svetlana cursing in Russian every time she started to say something and got cut off by production.

"Save it for the beach, ladies!"

Ilya reclined against his seat, seatbelt hanging off one-shoulder. He looked out the window instead of at Shane the whole ride. It should have been a relief.

The beach had been prepared for them. Twin set-ups faced away from each other: large, colorful blankets scattered with pillows, foliage that would look better on screen, and plates of food they weren't supposed to actually eat.

Ilya sat down and immediately popped a few grapes into his mouth. Shane made a face, lowering his voice.

"Um, we're not supposed to eat that. No one ever eats on these dates. It's only for show."

Ilya raised his eyebrows, cheeks puffing out as he chewed. "Not my fault if no one eats. I am hungry." He sighed. "No one made me breakfast this morning."

Shane exhaled through his nose. Rose and Svetlana were facing away from them, their heads close on the blanket. Rose let out a laugh, loud enough that Shane could hear.

Shane picked at a pillow, trying to think of conversation.

"So if you haven't watched *Love Island* before, what made you want to come on the show?"

Ilya looked at Shane, considering, then dropped his gaze. "What, you were a big fan?"

"Well, no, but my mom thought it would be—" Shane cut himself off. "It's not important."

Ilya popped another grape in his mouth, silence stretching.

"So. Tell me your life story."

"What?"

"We're on a date. Tell me about your life." Ilya shrugged.

"Have you been on a date before?" Shane tugged at his button up. "You're doing this all wrong."

"And you have been on so many dates?" Ilya tilted his head, tone teasing but curious.

Shane's eyes darted to the wine bottle nestled in ice near Ilya.

"No. Not really. Hockey keeps me pretty busy."

Ilya tracked Shane's eyes, propping himself up and pouring out two glasses. He handed one to Shane.

"And so you do not have time for dates? Especially with men? I am the first?"

Shane choked on his wine, then drained the whole glass, swishing it in his mouth to buy some time.

"Obviously. I, uh, date women."

Ilya slowly nodded, studying Shane. “This red here. It is not anger, I don’t think. Svetlana was right.” He traced a finger across Shane’s cheek, outlining his freckles. “You have so many types of red. I am trying to learn them.”

Shane swallowed, reaching for the wine bottle. Ilya held it back, tsking.

“I am not trying to get you drunk, Hollander. You do not need to overindulge.” Ilya’s face was tight, something shifting beneath the surface. Shane felt his stomach clench slightly. He exhaled.

“Sorry if I’m bad at this. Dating.”

Ilya blinked up at him, something relaxing slightly. He reclined back on the pillows, pulling Shane closer to him. Shane leaned stiffly against Ilya’s shoulder, holding himself tight.

“So. You have not talked about our kiss. You liked it?”

Shane stared into the sky. The sound of the ocean waves did nothing to relax him.

“It was fine.”

Ilya snorted, hand drifting off Shane’s shoulder. “Fine. I will not do it again if it is only fine.” He turned his gaze towards Shane, blue-green eyes sliding down his face, asking something.

Shane’s heart thudded, trapped.

“I’m with Rose...”

“Yes. You have said this.”

Ilya drained his glass, then passed Shane the bottle. “Help yourself.”

Shane walked back into the villa with Rose. She had practically levitated on the ride back, her lips and cheeks flushed with more than sunlight. Meanwhile, Ilya had felt like ice. Shane’s brain felt caught, trying to pinpoint what had shifted while telling himself he shouldn’t care.

The Islanders swarmed them, the girls starting to pull Rose to get the scoop on how her date had gone. Then her phone buzzed.

She gasped, her eyes darting to Shane. Her tone was almost apologetic. “I got another text! I’m, um, heading back to the beach. For Ilya.”

Javi shifted off his daybed, holding his phone in the air, Lexi sliding unhappily off his lap. “I got a text too! Svetlana chose me as date number two!”

They left far too quickly, leaving Shane alone at the mercy of the Islanders.

“Well?” Cici raised her eyebrows. “Spill, Shane, how was it?”

“Fine.” Shane shrugged. “Kind of...awkward? I guess we don’t have a lot in common, maybe. I’m not sure.”

Shawna rolled her eyes. “Called it.”

“What did you do? Don’t leave any details out. I want to know what Javi is doing.” Lexi narrowed her eyes intensely.

“It wasn’t much. We got to the beach and there was a picnic waiting. We talked for a bit about our dating histories and then, uh, enjoyed the wine and food.”

Hannah wrinkled her nose. “Ew, you ate the date food? That’s just for show.”

“I *know*.” Shane shook his head, a small smile turning up his lips. “That’s what I told Ilya, but he...anyway.” He swallowed. “I’m sure you don’t have anything to worry about, Lexi.”

“Sure, a hot Russian supermodel is on a date with my couple, but sure, Shane.”

Shawna smirked. “At least your couple hasn’t gone on dates with *two* Russian supermodels.”

Shane glared at her. “Thanks, Shawna.”

Rose narrowed her eyes at Ilya, sitting as far away as she could on their picnic blanket.

“What are you playing at?”

Ilya spread out his hands, eyes widening innocently. “What do you mean? I know you may think I am out of your league, but,”

“Oh, shut *up*.” Rose rolled her eyes. “What did you do to Shane? He looked like a kicked puppy.”

“He did?” Ilya straightened, face slightly more serious before he glanced away. “Maybe he is sad his couple was putting her tongue down her date’s throat instead of his.”

Rose forced herself not to look over her shoulder where Svetlana was sitting agonizingly close, stupid Javi where she had just been. Rose huffed, fingernails tapping nervously near her mic. She spoke carefully.

“Shane and I have a strong connection. However, we have both said we are still exploring.”

“So Svetlana is an exploration to you? Some fun?” Ilya’s tone was suddenly icy.

“What? No, I like-” Rose cut herself off. “I’m not talking about her. I’m talking about Shane.”

Ilya eyed her warily.

“Like I said, Shane and I are strong. *And...*”

Rose's eyes darted to the cameras nearby, looking meaningfully back at Ilya afterwards.

"*Super* into each other. But that doesn't mean we don't feel things for other people. So if you're playing some mindgame with him, cut it out. It's not fair to act so into him and then ignore him or switch up or whatever you did."

"I did not ignore him." Ilya's face darkened, voice rising slightly. "I kiss him. I ask him on date. In fact, I come on this whole show only to see him again. And he is not so sure. He likes me sometimes, most of time, probably not. He turns red all the time for all different reasons I do not understand. He will not say *yes* so clearly. I need *yes*. I will not guess with this, with him."

Ilya exhaled, glaring at her, pulse jumping. Rose blinked back. There was a pause, and then she threw her arms around him, wrapping Ilya in a tight hug. Ilya froze, then reached his hands up, patting her gently on the back. Rose leaned into his ear, trying to be as quiet as possible.

"Don't give up yet. Trust me. It's a yes."

Ilya's heart surged. Rose released the hug, sitting back down. Ilya glanced away, mind racing. He looked back at Rose, trying to pick the right words out of his brain.

"If Svetlana feels like more than an exploration...you should continue. If you know it is only fun, you should stop. She has other people to have fun with, if that is all you want."

He raised his chin, gesturing to Javi's back.

"She looks at you like it is more than fun. Be careful with her." He stretched his lips in a smile, teeth glinting. "Or else I will not be so careful with you."

Rose looked at him, completely unintimidated, her big eyes blinking. She reached out, squeezing his hand once. "Thank you, Ilya."

Ilya laughed, surprising himself. "I...like this date. You are a good date."

Rose flipped her hair over her shoulder. "That's what they tell me." She glanced behind her briefly, then back at Ilya. "Should we laugh really hard, to make her jealous?"

Ilya laughed again despite himself. "You are so...stupid. Silly puppy and sad puppy. Good couple."

"At least I have one." Rose smirked, and Ilya gasped like he had been mortally wounded.

At the villa, Shane threw down his weights, massaging his ribs slightly. He was sweating profusely, the good kind of sweat that came from a heavy workout. He missed hockey, missed practice, missed his body doing what it was meant to do. He had forgotten how loud his mind got off the ice.

“I got a text!” Connie shouted from the kitchen, his cheeks flushed. “I’m - oh.” His shoulders drooped. “It’s a date with Ilya.”

Shane's stomach twisted. And then his phone vibrated from the weight bench, spinning in a half-circle.

“*Seriously?*” Cici shrieked. “Leo and I are like, the most bi people *here* but no, don’t choose us for *any* dates.” She pouted, melting into Leo’s arms. “It should’ve been us.”

Shane headed upstairs without comment, showering quickly and throwing on fresh clothes from the top of his suitcase, not caring if they matched. His hair was still wet as he and Connie were driven over, Shane’s eyebrows lowered in thought.

Shane stepped onto the beach for the second time that day, hesitating when he saw Ilya. He looked more relaxed than in the morning, his face turned towards the sea. Shane’s eyes dragged down the cut of his jaw, the easy roll of his shoulders. Ilya turned, eyes widening slightly as he saw Shane staring, and then that infuriatingly slow smile crept along his face.

Shane was smiling back before he could help himself. Whatever ice there had been seemed to have melted. Ilya was back to being Ilya and - Shane’s smile fell as Connie blocked his view, striding over to sit on the blanket with him.

Shane made himself turn the opposite way, walking over to Svetlana. She stood, opening her arms, her curves wrapped in a deep blue minidress that Shane was sure Rose had appreciated. She squeezed him in a hug, laughing quietly.

“You could try not to look so disappointed.”

Shane flushed. “Oh, sorry.”

“Shush.” She grinned, sitting down and running a hand through her coils. “Tell me about you and Rose.”

“Um...we’re in a couple?”

“Yes, Shane, I know that.” She rolled her eyes, then hesitated. “Is she...open?”

“Oh.” Shane smiled a bit. Svetlana was looking down at the ground. “You like her, huh?”

Svetlana squinted up at him, not answering, her lips twitching in a smile.

Shane nodded. “Yes. She’s very open.”

Svetlana exhaled, eyes fluttering shut for a moment. “Fantastic.” She opened, brown eyes taking in Shane. “Are you?”

“Oh, sure. I mean...” Shane pushed the words out. “I think it would probably be awkward to date the same person. Not that you’re not,”

Svetlana bit her lip, laughing. “No, I am not interested. I am curious if you are open, generally. Like Rose is.”

Shane flushed. “Oh. Yes. I’m open.”

She nodded, gazing at him as if waiting for him to say more. And the odd thing was, Shane wanted to. Her eyes were steady and warm. It felt like he could say anything and she wouldn’t be surprised. Wouldn’t judge him.

“I can see why Rose likes you.” His voice came out quiet. He hadn’t meant to say that. He fiddled with his mic instinctively.

Svetlana’s face shifted, something tender breaking beneath the surface. “I like her too. Maybe too much.” She forced a smile.

Shane shook his head, grinning. “I don’t think it’s possible for you to like Rose too much. She’s fantastic.”

“Yes.” Svetlana sighed, exhaling loudly as if to shake things out. “So. Who might you be open to exploring?”

“Um. Everyone’s nice.” His eyes dragged up behind Svetlana’s shoulder. He could see the back of Connie’s head, blonde curls catching the light, Ilya’s face a sliver to the side, a faint smile visible.

Shane furrowed his eyebrows. “Is Connie even...?” He flushed again.

Svetlana turned to follow his gaze, looking over her shoulder without an ounce of subtlety. “Hm. Not sure. I don’t think it matters, though. Everyone seems to fall for Ilya.”

She looked back at Shane, face turning to amusement as he glared into this distance. “Huh. I didn’t take you for the jealous type.”

“What? I’m not jealous.” Shane shook his head furiously.

Svetlana shrugged. “Then stop leading him on. He has more than enough options if you’re not interested.” Her voice was cool, detached, the brown of her eyes shifting into stone.

“Leading him on...?” Shane’s brain short-circuited.

She sighed. “Shane, Ilya came on this show for *you* after those rumors started. He had almost moved on too, если бы только. He would not shut up after that Rolex shoot. We had to watch so many boring hockey games together, so many of your boring interviews.”

Shane felt feverish, his body building heat as Svetlana continued.

“I would put the phone on *mute* because of how much he babbled over what message to send you, rewording it a million times, asking if three fire emojis was better than one whenever you’d post something new, when the true answer was absolutely neither, because you didn’t respond to a single message, Shane. Ever. Which is fine. I don’t know you. I don’t know if

you're into Ilya, or if you're even into men, and if you don't know either, that is okay. Really. But tell him that, so he can find someone else."

She glanced over her shoulder, taking in Ilya's date with a small sigh. "I mean, maybe someone like Connie would be good for him. He's so sweet. An innocent little waiter." She shook her head. "Ilya would change his entire life."

"No." Shane's voice was low, strong, almost a growl.

Svetlana's head snapped back. Shane exhaled shakily, not sure where the word had shot out from. He looked at the back of Connie's stupid head, violent fantasies flashing through his mind, and shook his head no again.

"Ilya shouldn't find someone else."

Svetlana's eyebrows were raised, lips curving into a suppressed smile.

"So you're open. Noted."

It was early evening by the time they returned. On the car ride back, Shane's sandal had skimmed Ilya's, Svetlana's eyes communicating something to him without words. They had immediately been mobbed by Islanders asking for gossip on how the dates had gone, but Ilya and Svetlana were quickly swept away by producers for their bombshell debrief.

Rose and Shane had one of their own as Rose paced by the pool.

"Shane, it felt like you were gone forever. Now tell me everything."

"Yeah, the date was good!"

"Good?" Rose raised her eyebrows.

"Not like that, but yes, good." Shane laughed. "How was yours?"

"Good too." She grinned. Shane narrowed his eyes. "No, but really." She pulled him onto a lounge chair, scooting closer. "He likes you, Shane. For real. But you need to be clear."

"I know." Shane sighed. "That's what I wanted to talk to you about. If I wanted to do something...to show I'm open to him...would you be okay with that?"

Rose screamed. Birds flapped away in the distance. Ilya and Svetlana looked over from their daybed.

"Rose!"

"Sorry, sorry, sorry! Yes, you can do something!" She squeezed his arms, lips coming out into a pout. Her eyes actually looked teary. "I am so proud of you, Shane."

"Okay, enough." He swatted her away, his ears burning.

“So...” Rose swallowed. “Your date with Svetlana?”

“Oh, right.” Shane grinned. “She said something about you. Hmm. What was it?”

“Shane, I swear to god. I don’t care if you’re a great hockey player, I will break your legs right now.”

“Okay, okay!” He laughed, looking at her with a smile. “She likes you Rose. Really likes you.”

“She did not say that.”

“She did too.”

“But like, in a friend way, or?”

“Noo, it was definitely in a super gay way.” Shane grinned.

Rose keeled over on the loungebed, comatose. He peered at her, her face pressing into the cushion as she kicked her feet.

“Hey Rose? I’m pretty sure that’s where Leo was sitting earlier. And his Speedo does *not* contain-”

“Okay, ew.” Rose shot back up, hands pressed against her cheeks. “Are you really sure? You’re not misinterpreting?”

Shane gently pulled her hands down. “She told me she likes you. I told her you were open. Pretty clear cut.”

She exhaled, chewing on her lip. “Fuck. If *you’re* going to make a move, I guess I should too...”

They looked at each other, grimacing, then fell into each other’s arms with muffled screams.

Svetlana snorted from the daybed, shaking her head. She turned to Ilya.

“Well? Are you going to go get your boy?”

“If you get your girl.” Ilya smirked at her. “My sweet Sveta, getting so shy.”

“Shut *up*, I’m not shy! I’m...nervous.” Her face burned.

“I think it has to be us.” Ilya tsked. “I don’t think we can count on the puppies to get it together.” They watched Rose and Shane roll around on the lounge chairs for a minute more, laughing.

Svetlana exhaled, sitting up, but then Rose and Shane separated. Shane pushed Rose forward, sending her skipping slightly towards Svetlana before turning away.

Rose stumbled closer. “Um, hi, sorry to interrupt.”

Her cheeks were flushed, hair mused. Svetlana wanted to consume her.

“Svetlana, could I pull you for a chat?”

“But of course.” Svetlana stood gracefully, letting Rose grasp her hand and lead her away. She winked over her shoulder at Ilya. He watched for a moment, smiling, then grabbed his water bottle and sauntered over to Shane.

Shane had moved to the edge of the pool, his ankles dipping into the water. He was doing the breathing exercises he did before big games, his eyes closed, manifesting his gameplay like always. He would approach Ilya. Ask to go somewhere private. Maybe the docks. Too romantic? And shit, then what would he say, exactly?

“Hello.”

Shane’s head shot up, Ilya blocking out the falling sun with his broad shoulders, the straw of his water bottle hanging lazily out of his mouth. He hooked a thumb into his shorts, the weight pulling them down another millimeter. Shane leaned forward, swaying slightly, eyes tracing the bare skin there, and suddenly he was no longer on solid ground.

“Fuck, Hollander!” Ilya jumped in the pool after Shane, but Shane was already sputtering to the surface, his eyes wide. Ilya hoisted him back to the lawn, pulling himself up after and doubling over with laughter.

“Shut *up*! I lost my grip!” Shane shivered, hair wet against his forehead, clothes damp and disgusting against his skin.

Ilya did not shut up. He stretched out on the lawn, heaving with laughter, the white of his outfit almost completely sheer from the water. Shane swallowed, soaking in how the fabric clung to Ilya’s pecs, shorts skin-tight around his thighs, outlining his...

Ilya stopped laughing. His lips parted, eyes snagging on Shane’s. Shane did not think, did not process. He bent in one smooth motion, tongue lapping the beads of water dripping down Ilya’s neck. Ilya let out a strangled noise, his pec twitching. Shane raised up slightly, looking into Ilya’s eyes, and then leaned down into a deep kiss.

Ilya met him immediately, his hands coming up to cradle the back of Shane’s head, hips rising off the turf. Shane let out a soft moan and Ilya pressed up harder, thumbs pressing against Shane’s jawbone, his skin hot beneath the wet clothes.

Shane pulled back with an inhale, breaking the kiss, Ilya dazed beneath him. Shane bit his lower lip, trying to stop his growing smile.

“Um, Ilya. I’d like to pull you for a chat.” He looked down at his clothes. “After I get changed.”

Ilya blinked up at him, his accent thick and raw. “Yes. Okay. Yes.”

Shane waited in the communal bedroom, nervously sipping from his water bottle like a hamster. Ilya had come up to change after him and finally emerged, his hair still damp but eyes slightly more grounded. Shane stopped cupping his water bottle, standing up immediately.

“Ready for our chat?”

“Yes, of course.” Ilya smirked. “Should we go to the Soul Ties?” He jerked his head down the corridor.

“Soul Ties? No.” Shane shook his head rapidly. “You really haven’t seen this show before? Ever?”

“Why would I watch this? I have a life. No.”

“Ilya, you shouldn’t say that.” Shane glanced at the cameras, muttering. He cleared his throat. “Soul Ties is...crazy. Literally. Like...it’s where...” Shane’s face started to burn. “Things happen there. It’s not proper.”

“Ah.” Ilya looked him up and down, a wave of heat slamming over Shane. “You want me to be proper?”

Shane swallowed, trying to stay focused. “I do, a little bit. I don’t think I was the best date today. I’d like to try again.”

Ilya softened. “Okay. Where are you taking me then?”

Shane chewed his lip. If Ilya really never watched the show...

“We can go to the docks. It’s a bit private.”

They walked in silence, between themselves that is. The other Islanders let out whoops as they passed.

“I saw you boys wrestling by the pool earlier! All wet and sexy!” Leo purred at them, Cici shushing him with a palm over his mouth.

“Y’all are *cute*! Get it!” Her voice faded. “You can always get it with us too though!”

Ilya and Shane kept their heads down, smiling, hands skimming as they walked.

“Here it is. It’s, uh, not much.” Shane gestured.

The docks at the edge of the water, white railings encompassing two small padded benches. Twinkle lights were strung above, pulsing warmly in the dying light. The docks looked out onto the ocean, the sunset a deep orange-red in the distance.

Ilya’s mouth opened. He spun around slowly.

“Ah. You are trying to romance me. So very proper.”

Shane flushed, shoving his shoulder. "Sit."

They sat on opposite benches, staring at each other. Shane absently bit into his straw, pressing it against his lower lip as he tried to figure out what to say. Ilya's eyes raked over the image and Shane cleared his throat, putting the water bottle down and away from his mouth.

"Okay. So. I haven't been on a date before. With a guy."

"I see."

"I'm still figuring things out." Shane felt a moment of panic, the mic tight around his neck. "It's hard to do that...here." He gestured at the hidden cameras.

"Yes. It is very brave." Ilya said it plainly, and it was something about that, as if it was a fact, that made Shane start to tear up. Ilya's eyes widened in alarm and he scooted closer, sliding an arm around Shane's waist.

"Sorry."

"No apology. It is hard. You are brave. We can cry."

Shane snorted. "I don't really want to cry on a first date."

"Ah, I see." Ilya swept away Shane's tears with his thumb, face concentrated. Shane watched him, eyelashes fluttering, Ilya's breath catching when he saw Shane staring.

"I think you are doing good for a first date."

Shane looked down, slowly tangling one of his hands in Ilya's.

"Have you been on dates before? With men?"

"Yes."

Shane stared at Ilya's fingers, tracing the smooth nails. "You've had boyfriends?"

"Ah, no, actually." Ilya shifted, smiling ruefully. "Nothing proper."

Shane glanced up, not able to hide his grin. Something they were equal in. Ilya let out a laugh.

"So you are competitive off the ice too?"

Shane grinned, leaning into Ilya a little. "Yes. Always."

"Mm." Ilya swept his hand through Shane's hair, resting his chin on top of Shane's head. They were quiet for a moment.

"Does it feel bad, to kiss me?"

Shane straightened, pulling away from Ilya. "What?"

Ilya shrugged. “Some men...it feels bad after. Inside them. I was wondering if, for you...”

Shane shook his head. “No, I mean. It’s complicated. I’m trying not to think about it, to be honest. Can’t think about it too much. But no. Kissing you...feels the opposite of bad.”

Ilya grinned. “Finally, you admit you liked my kiss?”

“I think that was pretty obvious.” Shane looked down at his lap, shame tightening in his chest.

Ilya pulled Shane’s chin up, eyes blazing.

“It was obvious for me too, no?” He bent closer to Shane’s ear, his breath setting off goosebumps. “You heard my groans when you kissed me? Tasted my tongue, so desperate for you? Felt how hard you made me, squirming against me like that?”

Shane swallowed, his palm pushing Ilya back slightly, breath ragged.

Ilya continued on, nonchalant. “I like when you kiss me too. When your hands are not so tied. When your eyes can look at me with that little begging expression and-”

“Ilya!” Shane flushed.

Ilya chuckled. “See, Sveta says red on you does not mean anger. But I think sometimes it does. But maybe mixed with other things?”

He reached for Shane’s hand, cradling it and then bringing it to his lips, kissing Shane’s fingertips. His lips slid slowly down Shane’s first two fingers, his lips curving around the digits. Shane may have whimpered before snatching his hand back.

“*Ilya*. We cannot do this here!”

Ilya shrugged, eyes wide. “I asked about the Soul Ties.”

“You’re impossible.”

“Mm, no. More that you are finally possible.” Ilya gazed at him, eyes soft and hungry. “It makes it hard for me to behave.”

“Well, we...” Shane couldn’t think of words, couldn’t think of reasons not to. Couldn’t explain that it was all happening too fast and not fast enough. That at some point he would have to explain this to his mom, his team, *fuck*, his team...

“Hey, hey.” Ilya rubbed Shane’s back. “It is hard but I can do it. No more. We can watch the sunset like good boys.”

Shane snorted, snuggling a bit into Ilya’s broad shoulders.

Ilya’s voice was low when he spoke again. “But tonight...tonight I think I will sleep in Soul Ties. More private than the group bedroom. I will be very lonely, of course. All alone. Unless

someone comes to keep me company.”

Shane couldn't sleep. Ilya had made a show of taking his bedding off his bed and heading to Soul Ties, everyone sending Shane knowing looks. Even Rose had grumbled that he should go already so she could get the bed to herself.

But he hadn't moved. He had laid there like a corpse until snores and kissing sounds and soft whispers filled the air. He had laid there with his dick throbbing, hands clenched at his sides. It was bad enough that he had kissed Ilya, on national television, with no doubt about who had initiated. As skilled as Yuna was, there was no way she'd be able to spin that. Shane's agent would be disappointed; she'd lose income if he got booked less for campaigns and ads. His team was probably disgusted with him, if years of their locker room talk was anything to go by. Hell, there would be little kids crying over what a failed role model Shane turned out to be.

And that was what broke him. Because Shane couldn't remember, even as a kid, doing what he wanted. Control had been there from the moment he was conscious. The safe, chosen control of having his routines and his favored foods and the right kind of fabric against his skin. And then the forced control, like having to smile even when people said insulting things to him, to his *mother*, because to react would be to make it worse. All of the ways that he contorted, shifted, cut off limbs, to fit in some box that would never be the right size, no matter how hard he tried.

Shane felt the dampness on his face before he was aware he was crying. He palmed his skin roughly, exhaling shakily. He had been doing this so long, numbing everything but hockey, all his desire challenging into the only appropriate avenue and even then it wasn't right. Too much. Too intense. Everything else bland. Shane had forgotten what it was to allow himself to want.

Shakily, Shane threw back the covers. He slipped outside, the night air chilling his skin. He racked his brain for a moment, trying to remember if the night vision was as sharp on the outdoor cameras as the indoor ones before shutting his frontal cortex off completely.

Ilya was reclining under the neon light, SOUL TIES illuminating his profile. He was staring into the distance, face vaguely troubled, arms hugged to his torso as one hand played with his necklace. Shane stopped walking, soaking him in. His body relaxed by degree, something deep within settling. He moved closer and Ilya turned, inhaling slightly.

“You came.”

“You're still up.”

Shane stepped gingerly down into the conversation pit, pushing aside some pillows to sit next to Ilya. Something about the night made Ilya softer, more fragile. Shane touched his toes against Ilya's foot, nudging him.

“Is it okay that I'm here?”

Ilya nodded, his eyes locking into Shane.

Shane stretched out on his side, scooting closer to Ilya. His fingertips hovered, then traced the line of Ilya's jaw, dipping gradually down his throat to his collarbone. Their breathing quickened, together, loud in the silence of the night.

Shane pressed his forehead against Ilya's, their noses skimming. His voice was low and clear.

"I want you, Ilya."

Ilya inhaled sharply. "Fuck."

Then Shane was in motion, flying beneath Ilya as he moved on top, Ilya's biceps flexing above him. Ilya buried himself into Shane's neck, lips wet and hot, Shane arching up with a high-pitched sigh. He ran over Ilya's muscles, his hands squeezing, gripping the strength of him. His hands moved everywhere, mapping what he had missed from their first kiss.

Ilya parted Shane's legs, thigh anchoring in between, and lowered again. Shane gasped, the length of Ilya's hardness apparent. He shivered, flushing, eyes darkening as he caught Ilya's gaze.

"Do you feel what you do to me?" Ilya ground his hips against Shane, making a low noise in the back of his throat as Shane let out another whimper. Shane pressed up, eager and needy, dampness already spreading on his pajama bottoms. Ilya felt it, his eyes widening as he lowered to Shane with increased intensity. He swallowed thickly, eyes roaming over Shane's freckles.

"Are you *trying* to kill me?"

Shane let out a breathy laugh, words no longer easily accessible. Ilya yanked at his shirt, sliding it off Shane's head as Shane bounced back like a ragdoll against the pillows. Ilya sat back for a second, running his hands over Shane's bare torso. Shane tilted his head up, lips wet and parted, pouting slightly at the lack of heat.

"Patience." Ilya smirked, lowering his lips to Shane's pec. "I remember you liking this?"

His tongue swirled around Shane's nipple and Shane inhaled sharply, moan tangling in his throat. Encouraged, Ilya doubled his efforts, tongue darting back and over and around in worship until Shane felt his nipples stiffen, every atom of him arching towards Ilya.

"Please..." Shane's legs wrapped around Ilya, his strong thighs pulling him tighter, cock aching.

"So polite. So proper." Ilya's hands framed Shane's face, anchoring him, his tongue slipping into his mouth like he owned him. Then he released, hands sliding down to Shane's hips, his fingers around Shane's waistband.

Shane froze. Ilya stopped, hands releasing.

“Sorry. Um.” Shane’s brain let out a strenuous spark of activity, his neurons barely firing. “Clothes...on. For tonight?” He flushed, feeling absolutely virginal. Ilya stared at him, something twitching in his jaw.

“Absolutely.” Ilya said something in Russian against Shane’s neck. Shane couldn’t understand, but there was something about Ilya’s tone, soft and completely undone as he murmured into the tender skin of Shane’s collarbone. Shane whimpered again, his hips rocking, and Ilya cursed, nipping his throat. His hands scooped under Shane’s hip and flipped him, Shane suddenly straddling Ilya, who collapsed beneath him.

Shane inhaled, taking in Ilya’s curls scattered across the pillow, his muscular form sprawled below him. Ilya pushed his hips up slightly, reminding Shane of their shared hardness. He cocked an eyebrow, bringing a hand to the back of Shane’s neck.

Shane dove forward, lips finding Ilya’s again as his hips started rocking and forth. He could feel his precum dripping and he groaned as Ilya shifted, wedging his thigh between Shane’s legs and pushing him down harder. Shane anchored his hands behind Ilya’s neck, his body no longer in his conscious control, hips hitching in desperate little motions. His lips became messy, landing half on Ilya’s lips, then his throat, then the side of his jaw, wanting wanting wanting.

A haze spread over Shane, body loose and flushed, the heat rising up his chest. He leaned into Ilya’s palm against his cheek, pressing sloppy kisses there. Then he found Ilya’s fingers, remembering earlier. His tongue reached for them hungrily, two sliding into his mouth as Shane moaned with satisfaction. Ilya began to speak in low, fast Russian, his hips jerking beneath Shane’s as Shane ground down, his tongue swirling around Ilya’s fingers, wanting his cock, wanting to be filled in every way possible. Shane gasped, pulling up.

“*Fuck*, Ilya, I’m close, I’m-”

Ilya grunted, tightening his hand around the back of Shane’s neck, the pressure delicious on Shane’s throat as Ilya drove his fingers back into Shane’s mouth, Shane sucking them up eagerly. Ilya’s hips moved faster, snapping as he ground into Shane’s thigh and Shane felt another wave release, pleasure somehow extending, heightening, as Ilya shuddered beneath him, warmth pooling through Shane’s bottoms as he slowly came back to himself.

Ilya dragged his fingers free, a trail of wetness streaking along Shane’s cheek. Shane shifted slightly, moving his weight to the side, breathing still coming fast. Ilya’s eyes closed as small tremors continued to rack his body.

“You...are not proper, Hollander.”

Shane smiled into Ilya’s shoulder, murmuring happily.

“I did not realize.” Ilya exhaled shakily.

“Too late.” Shane nuzzled into Ilya’s armpit, moving his arm around him. “Our souls are tied now.”

“I understand now. Soul Ties is crazy.” Ilya gripped Shane, Russian phrases slipping into his dark hair. “We sleep here every night now. Is official.”

NEXT TIME...ON HEATED ISLAND...

America’s vote is in, sending someone packing. The rest of the Islanders scramble to seduce, because it is time...for the first recoupling!

[a black-and-white video of Shane and Rose bursts into flames]

And whoever isn’t chosen will be left single...and vulnerable...

[theme music blares]

Chapter End Notes

this one felt a bit clunky cause there was a lot i wanted to get through sigh BUT cutesy stuff ahead next episode followed by of course more drama and guest stars in a bit (hint: bombshell hayden...ilya is gonna be SO NORMAL about it)

translations: если бы только --> if only

shout outs!

to Game of Roses for being the experts on reality tv as sport and fun trivia like not eating date food

to Kay Kay from Season 5 for coining "soul ties is craaazy" (and personal shout out to Nicolandria for doing hot things in soul ties and keeping my personal crazy going) and BIGGEST shout out to yall reading!! so appreciate you being here and leaving comments! <333

Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

Shane feels more comfortable in his sexuality. Ilya feels more comfortable in being An Idiot. We have our first recoupling ceremony and, gasp, Shane and Ilya officially couple up <333

Chapter Notes

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

The bright white lights flared on in the communal bedroom, without warning as usual. Shane jolted awake with a gasp, wondering for a brief moment if it had all been a dream.

Ilya had plunged into sleep almost immediately afterwards. Shane's brain had gradually come back to earth, becoming increasingly fixated on the drying fluids clinging to his thighs. He had gently pried himself out of Ilya's arms and showered quickly, grabbing a fresh pair of bottoms from the dressing room and slipping in beside Rose as if he had never been gone. Now that Shane was awake, he could feel the lack of sleep in the puffiness around his eyes, a dull headache threatening.

Rose groaned, turning over. She squinted at him, rubbing her eyes awake as she registered him.

"Oh, Shane." She sighed. "Next time a sexy Russian model wants to have a sleepover, you should really say yes."

"I'll keep that in mind." Shane ducked his face as he got out of bed, hiding his smile from her.

Rose's eyes flickered over him, taking in his bare torso and athletic shorts instead of his pajama set. She shot up.

"Shane..."

Shane tossed a pillow at her, grinning, speeding out of the room before she could pry him for details. He slowed as he went outside and passed Soul Ties, craning his neck slightly as he turned the corner. The area was deserted. No sign of Ilya, or of the night before. Shane's stomach dropped slightly but he continued downstairs. There was breakfast to prepare.

He had almost finished Rose's scrambled eggs, Leo making Cici bacon next to him, when Ilya appeared in the kitchen. Shane sensed him first, a change in the air, before his head jerked up in greeting. Ilya's hair was wet from the shower. He had put on a plain black tee

over joggers, nothing extraordinary about the outfit that would justify why Shane's heart was vibrating like that.

Ilya meandered closer, hands in his pockets.

"Ah, no. I like my eggs over easy."

Shane's lips twitched. "These are for Rose. We're supposed to make breakfast for our couples?"

"Or who we're courting!" Connie flushed behind Ilya. "Do you happen to know what Svetlana likes for breakfast?"

Svetlana strolled down the stairs, still in her nightset that left little to the imagination.

"You are so sweet, Connie. Make me anything." She leaned on the counter, taking in Shane at the stove with a sigh.

"You're too fast, Hollander. At least let me bring Rose her coffee?"

Shane laughed, nodding. Ilya sniffed, heading back to the stairs with chin raised high.

"Over easy, Shane. I shall be with the girls. Being courted!"

The boys whooped in the kitchen and Shane shook his head, face red and split into a wide smile. He scraped Rose's eggs onto a plate, hesitating for only a second before heading back to the fridge for more. Svetlana squeezed his shoulder with a grin, Connie interrupting to start up some nervous chatter in front of the coffee machine.

Shane headed up the stairs slowly, both hands balancing precarious plates of food. He paused outside the girls' dressing room, laughter echoing within, as his eyes dragged over his bed. His pajama shirt rested on the edge, folded neatly with care. Shane blinked a few times, holding back a grin before pushing the door open with his hip. He was met with a silence that could only mean they were just talking about him.

Inside, the girls sat at their vanities in various states of getting ready, mirrors in front of each, makeup scattered across the long faux marble table. Ilya was sitting on Svetlana's stool with his knees pressed against his chest, absurdly large in the space. His curls were pushed off his forehead by a soft purple headband, a big bow in the middle, while Shawna applied light blush to his cheeks, giggling happily.

"Shh, ladies, we have an intruder." Ilya fluttered his eyelashes at Shane, who snorted despite the happy warmth spreading across his chest.

"This is for you, Rose." Shane placed one plate in front of her, Ilya sitting right next to her. "And um, for you too."

Ilya inspected the plate closely, pouting slightly.

“Rose said she got a flower for her first breakfast. Very cute. Very courting.” Ilya poked one of his eggs with a fork. “Where is my flower hiding?”

The girls tittered as Shane shook his head and looked at Rose. “Traitor. Svetlana wanted to make your coffee. She should be up soon.”

“Ah, do not change the subject!” Ilya gestured with his fork in exaggerated outrage. “Do not become distracted by my sister wife!”

“Sister wife?!” Shane looked around the room. “Who’s teaching him this stuff?”

“They are helping with my English education.” Ilya sniffed. “And you can only have two sister wives at most, is new rule, very important to follow.”

“Is that so?”

Shane’s eyes snagged on Ilya’s, really looking at him for the first time that morning. He was somehow more beautiful in the morning light, his laugh lines faint and visible, irises a swirl of ocean colors. Shane’s eyes softened, muscles relaxing even as he felt a faint throb below the belt, Ilya gazing back at him.

“*All right.*” Cici leaned forward, lip gloss in hand. “Spill. What happened last night, hmm?”

Shane’s voice dropped. “You didn’t tell them?”

Ilya shook his head slightly, then raised his jaw. “A lady does not kiss and tell.”

“I tell! I’ve told everything!” Cici smacked her lips together, spreading the gloss.

“That’s all been against our will,” Lexi deadpanned, studying her eyes as she swept up her mascara.

“And how is it even possible you were riding cowgirl *under* the comforter? That’s like...hot as hell.” Shawna shook her head, disgusted.

“Oh my god, I *know*.” Cici giggled.

“No, literally. How did you breathe? That’s a suffocation hazard.”

“Ugh, I wish.” Cici bit her lip.

Rose and Shane exchanged a glance, Rose moving her hand up to mask her laughter.

“Thank you for the breakfast, Shane.” She leaned forward, kissing his cheek.

“Yes, thank you, husband.” Ilya leaned forward, kissing his other cheek. “I will find others soon, so you can have brother-husbands. Be less lonely.”

He pinched Shane’s side, Shane slapping him away with a half-smile, half-glare.

“And that’s why you didn’t get a flower.”

The producers pulled Shane for his confessional not long after that, their eyes glinting. Shane had been close-lipped the last few interviews, too boring for really any of it to make it to air. They had clipped him saying he was glad to be paired with Rose, that their couple was strong, that the new bombshell was “interesting...,” but then Shane’s lips had sealed tight against any more words.

But this? Today? This was different.

Shane shifted in front of the cheesy backdrop, palm tree looking out over a beach behind his shoulder. He pushed one of the pillows to the side, wrapping his arm around the other one for stability. He was wearing his favorite tee, a soft gray thing that soothed his skin, wrapping him in comfort. He was also sweating profusely.

Shane swallowed, looking into the camera lens, the small room empty. The producers would poke their heads in sometimes to prod, but they tried to stay out if they could help it. Tried to make it feel like you were talking to your own reflection instead of a national audience, a trick to make you let your guard down.

Shane knew exactly who he was talking to.

He exhaled intentionally, breath expanding his chest and centering him as it poured out his lips. He raised his gaze to the camera.

“Well.” He smiled. “I suppose I have some updates.”

Shane re-entered the villa, eyes blinking against the sunlight. He wanted Ilya. Before he had a chance, Zac dropped his weights in the outdoor gym, holding up his phone.

“Got a text!” The Islanders gathered, Zac squinting at the screen.

“Islanders. America has been voting.” There was a collective groan.

“Tonight, the Islander who received the least votes will be sent packing.” Zac swallowed. “Then it is time for our first recoupling. Bombshells will choose first. Everyone else is at risk. Chat accordingly.”

He lowered his phone. Everyone glanced at each other like they were at a funeral. Rose caught Shane’s eye at the edge of the crowd, moving to him automatically.

“Okay, show expert, what does this mean?”

Shane slipped his hand in hers automatically, wandering to the beanbags with his brows furrowed.

“It’s a bit unusual. Not knowing who goes home throws things off. But since Ilya and Svetlana are safe, if they pick us...”

“We’re safe.”

“Unless we’re voted off first.” Shane’s stomach clenched. For all he knew, rabid hockey fans were leading campaigns to get him voted off, disgusted with him and Ilya. Rose squeezed his hand.

“We’re not going home. And if we don’t get picked by them,” She shook her head a bit, as if refusing the thought. “Then we pick each other. Easy. There’s no way either of us is voted the least popular.”

“If you say so.”

Shane glanced up. The villa was in chaos. Ilya and Svetlana were already being swarmed by those not interested in their existing couples, Shawna and Hannah crowding around Ilya while Connie hovered hopefully at Svetlana’s elbow.

Lexi cleared her throat, her knee leaning into a bean bag next to them.

“What’s the deal with you two? Are you locked in with the bombshells?”

Shane and Rose looked at each other. Lexi sighed in irritation, fingers tapping against the *Lexi I*. looped on her water bottle in pink cursive.

“Hello, I need to know if you’re with each other or with the bombshells.” She glanced over her shoulder where Javi was napping on one of the daybeds, oblivious to the chaos.

“Javi is some random personal trainer, okay. Us celebrities will get the votes easy, but Javi could be voted off before recoupling and I am *not* ready to go home. So if there’s a chance...”

Rose pushed down a smile. “So true, you’re way more popular. Ilya would be *so* lucky to have a girl like you.”

Shane scoffed. “Or Svetlana. Since you’re...” He motioned between Lexi and Rose.

Lexi flushed. “I’m not anything, pervert.” She stomped off, beelining for Ilya.

“I think she might like you.”

Rose laughed, hitting Shane’s chest. “Shut up.”

“And thanks a lot.” Shane took in the line forming around Ilya. “I really wanted to talk to him sometime in the next twelve hours.”

“Yeah, you’re gonna be waiting a minute.” Rose grinned evilly as she walked away, Svetlana’s eyes looking for an escape from Connie and gesturing to the swings near Rose.

“Dirty play, Landry!” Shane laughed, reclining on his beanbag for a moment.

It was rare for him to feel this settled. He hadn’t even worked out yet. Still, his muscles felt loose, warmth steady through his fingertips. A smile flitted over his face as he soaked in Ilya,

the girls hovering around him like butterflies, only Shane knowing what he sounded like when he reached that brink of pleasure.

Shane stretched leisurely, wandering over to where Javi was napping. He nudged his foot.

“Hey, man. Not stressed about tonight?”

Javi cracked an eyelid, yawning. “Whatever happens, happens.”

“So zen.” Shane laughed. “Up for another training session later?”

“Anything for you, Hollander.” Javi grinned, one side of his mouth twitching up around his water bottle.

Shane felt his body shiver for a moment, his eyes finally allowing himself to take in Javi. Dark hair. Plush lips. Body a tool of muscle and strength. Shane smiled for a moment.

It was new, this want. It shimmered around everything. He had made himself eggs after feeding Ilya and Rose that morning, the yolks bursting into his mouth. He had taken one of the ginger ales out of the fridge as he left his confessional, savoring the bubbles dancing over his tongue. And now this. A beautiful man before him. A man Shane could admit was beautiful like he could admit the ocean was beautiful.

That he liked it.

That maybe, in another timeline, he would take it - drawing Javi to him like he had Ilya the night before.

Because that...that had cracked open his want. Had rearranged the atoms of the world around him. The way Ilya had touched him, had made him feel like he not only could want, but *should*, before offering himself up for the taking. The way Shane woke up feeling like everything was suddenly in reach, glowing and pulsing and maybe something he deserved.

“What are you looking so goofy about?” Javi cocked his head, still grinning. “Let me guess...something to do with your soul getting tied?”

Shane let out a laugh, full-throated, his eyes closing against the warm sunlight as he tilted his head back. He rubbed his face, chuckling.

“I really wasn’t subtle, huh?”

“Not even a bit, mate.” Javi playfully hit his arm with his water bottle. “Just glad you boys took it outside. Every time I close my eyes, I still hear Cici screaming Leo’s name. Or vice versa.” He shuddered exaggeratedly, making Shane laugh again. “For real though, happy for you two, yeah? Good looking lads.”

“Oh, shut up.” Shane blushed, digging his fingers into the cushions.

“What do you wanna work today, then? Want to impress him with some biceps?” Javi sat up, squeezing Shane’s arm.

“Abs?” He tickled his sides, Shane squealing and twitched away. Javi’s hand came down on his ass in a playful slap.

“Yeah, glutes it is, fuckin’ knew it.”

Shane laughed again, slamming his shoulder into Javi as they stumbled towards the gym, looping away from Ilya outside the kitchen, still surrounded by admirers.

“Shut *up*, he’ll hear you.”

“Hey, as long as I don’t hear you two after recoupling tonight.”

Shane tweaked Javi’s nipple, hard, the man gasping in surprise before grabbing Shane in a headlock, spinning him to the ground. Shane struggled for a brief moment before flipping Javi over, righting himself, and slapping Javi’s cheek lightly.

“Good try, Javi. I should be training you.”

“Beginner’s luck!”

Shane dismounted, his grin threatening to burst his cheeks. Javi thought Ilya would pick Shane at the recoupling. Said it like a fact. An inevitability. Shane rubbed his chest slightly, smile stuck on his face. It was odd to feel the joy he usually only felt on the ice, here, in the summer sun. For something that wasn’t about winning, or being the best, or training the hardest.

Just Ilya. Wanting him. And letting himself be wanted.

“Ah, I’ve lost him again.” Javi slapped the back of Shane’s head. “Tackled you too hard, eh? Your brain is probably mush from hockey anyway.”

Shane just smiled, tilting his face higher towards the sunlight.

Ilya’s brows lowered as he leaned back against the kitchen counter, Shawna chattering about something as her fingertips grazed his arm. It’s not like Ilya had been in a rush to talk with Shane about last night. All there was for the Islanders to do was talk. Maybe lift weights or jump in the pool for a bit, but mostly talking. They couldn’t have their personal phones, couldn’t bring books, couldn’t do anything but interact with one another. So Ilya knew there would be time.

It’s just that...he hadn’t expected Shane wouldn’t be in a rush either. He seemed so at ease. So different from the nervous bunny he had been the day before, darting away if Ilya even breathed near him. Ilya had woken up expecting to see Shane still there, hovering, needing to dissect and process every moment of the night before. It’s not like Ilya needed to talk through anything. He’s been with men before. Lots of them.

Ilya’s eyes flickered to the swinging bench across the villa. Rose had found Svetlana immediately after the announcement. Even from here, he could see how into each other they were, their hands tracing one another, shoulders leaning in. He bet if he could see Svetlana

closer, her eyes would have that glimmer she usually only got when looking at her next luxury car purchase.

But Shane, Shane hadn't come to find him. Shane had let Ilya get mobbed by women - oh lovely, here was Lexi heading over too - without a care in the world. As if he knew Ilya would choose him for the recoupling.

He would, of course.

But wasn't Shane even slightly worried? Didn't he want to put even a bit of effort in to make that a guarantee?

Ilya forced a smile, nodding as Hannah said something, her hands gesturing wildly as Shawna pouted behind her.

Ilya thought he had been coming off confident. Sexy, almost, coming in so strong. So focused. Breaking through whatever fortress Shane had put up in his head to deny the spark between them. Ilya had felt it, the second they met on the Rolex shoot, their hands meeting in a shake that wanted to linger.

But maybe it was...a bit much. Pathetic, even? To be so clearly into only one person on a dating show centered around exploring with as many people as possible? He shouldn't have told Rose he had come on the show just for Shane. Thinking about it now, that sounded deranged. Like some kind of stalker, betting his dignity on a two-second viral clip. Ilya shifted, letting Lexi lean in a bit closer, her eyes lowering as she trailed a finger over his torso.

Ilya had been men's first experience before. It was sort of his pastime, to be honest. Svetlana would make a game out of it, pointing out someone in the club whenever the night started to drag. And nearly always, Ilya would be successful. Some man shocked that yes, another man could be attractive to him. His lips could like the feel of another's, nevermind the stubble. His dick could twitch as Ilya moved closer, bodies hidden in the press of the dance floor.

It never bothered Ilya what the outcome was. Sometimes they called, desperate for more. Sometimes they disappeared completely, slinking off into the night with questions Ilya couldn't answer for them. Sometimes Ilya would see them again a month or two later, arms twined around another man, face loose and happy.

Maybe that's what he was for Shane. A portal. A doorway he moved through on the way to finding himself.

Ilya stiffened, Lexi's fingers withdrawing as she followed his gaze to the daybeds. Shane was sprawled next to Javi, thighs falling open in loose comfort, faces far too close. He couldn't see Shane, but he could see Javi's smug little face, the grin dancing there like something he had earned.

Lexi inhaled slightly, following his gaze. "Oh. When Rose said I should talk to you, I thought she was mostly messing around. But maybe..."

She sighed, blonde hair tickling Ilya's chin. Her tone was so light.

"You shouldn't worry about it, though. I'm pretty sure Javi doesn't go that way. He's like, obsessed with me." She trailed her fingers down Ilya's arms. "Even if I'm not so obsessed with him..."

Ilya's jaw was clenching almost as quickly as his heartrate, his fingers gripping the kitchen countertop as if he planned to shatter it. Rose, pushing this girl towards him on purpose? Shane, rising from the daybeds, now blushing? Shane and Javi's hands tangled as they playfought, Ilya watching in what felt like slow motion as Javi slapped Shane's ass. Absolutely not.

Ilya released the counter, about to stride over and throw Javi halfway across the villa like useless debris, when he realized Shane wasn't stopping him. He wasn't upset. He wasn't unwilling. Shane was still laughing, pulling Javi to his feet, his face flushing just like it had the night before.

Fine. Ilya had miscalculated. His eyes tracked Shane and Javi winding their way to the gym, noticing they took the long way to avoid passing in front of him. Cowards. Lexi blattered on about something as Ilya watched the two boys peel off their shirts, Javi moving to spot Shane on the bench. He forced himself to nod, coming back to the present in degrees, Lexi taking center stage while Hannah and Shawna hovered at the wings, irritated.

Ilya's face broke into a smile he did not feel.

"Ladies. My apologies. You are all so beautiful. How could I be expected to choose?" He tapped his chin, pondering. "Ah. I know. We will have a kissing contest."

He pointed to the firepit, a stone's throw from the outdoor gym.

"I will sit there. You do whatever you like to me. Whatever girl wins, I pull for a chat."

The three women exchanged a look, smiles growing on their faces.

"I call first." Hannah grinned.

"Game on." Shawna flipped her hair over her shoulders.

"Get ready to lose." Lexi added sweetly.

Ilya strode over to the firepit, eyes trained forward, chin raised. He thought he felt Shane's gaze flicker over him, but it may have been wishful thinking. He couldn't trust himself with anything at this point.

Ilya settled himself in the center of the curved bench, spreading his arms wide as he reclined, king-like.

"I am ready, ladies!"

Rose squinted over, Svetlana trailing her lips away from Rose's ear to glance behind her. Hannah pushed off the kitchen counter, striding over to Ilya. She wore heels with her bikini, trying to boost her short frame, and her curves were on full display as she strutted over. She reached Ilya and straddled him without hesitation, his hands rising to cup the swell of her hips, his thumbs treading under the white bikini ties popping against her dark skin.

Rose blinked. "What...is he doing?"

Svetlana's eyes flickered, lingering on Hannah's ass. "Let's keep watching and find out."

"Ugh!" Rose slapped Svetlana's shoulder lightly, scooting into her lap. "You close your eyes. I'll keep you posted."

Svetlana giggled, burying her face into Rose's collarbone.

Hannah leaned down, her lips teasing Ilya for a moment before making contact, hand coming up to cradle his face. Zac looked over from his pingpong game with Connie, his racket lowering. After a long few beats, Hannah released Ilya with a smack, her hands fluttering by her face as she dismounted.

"Whew, you are a *good* kisser."

She strode away, hips swinging, passing Shawna on the way. Ilya sat smugly, eyes trained on the next woman walking towards him. His head snapped at the sound of weights dropping onto the ground. Shane slipped off the bench, practically running as he crossed the villa and mounted the stairs two at a time, Javi hovering helplessly behind him.

"Shit." Rose dismounted, kissing Svetlana's cheek briefly before hurrying after Shane. She strode across the villa, glaring in Ilya's direction with a shout.

"Are you *actually* that stupid? *Actually*?"

Ilya sat frozen, face blank. The rest of the villa graciously looked away, Zac having some loud words with Hannah in the kitchen. Svetlana approached him, sighing as she stood above him.

"Hello, my sweet idiot."

Ilya replied in Russian, bending over as his stomach cramped. "*I don't know what I'm doing.*"

"*Mmm, I don't know either. Odd mating ritual, kissing everyone but the boy you like.*"

"*He...I saw him with Javi...*" Ilya blinked. "*I thought maybe he didn't want...*"

Svetlana exhaled slowly, opened her arms and pulling Ilya in. She rocked him slightly before pulling back, slapping his cheeks lightly like a drum.

"*My idiot boy. Try using those lips to talk first, hm?*" She ran a thumb over his lips, erasing Hannah's gloss, and jerked her head upstairs. "*Now go fix your mess so I can get back to*

*using **my** lips for other things."*

Ilya snorted, groaning as he leaned back, fists over his eyes. He knew he would still pick Shane in the recoupling. Would always pick Shane. But what if Shane didn't want to recouple with him?

Upstairs, Rose practically growled, her arms thrown around Shane as they sat on their bed, Ilya looming in the doorway.

"Rose. It's okay." Shane's voice was a flat monotone. Ilya's stomach twisted again, the nausea kicking up.

"Please. May I talk to him?" Ilya clasped his hands in front of him, shoulders bowed, feeling like a scolded schoolboy.

Rose huffed, standing up and coming closer in what he assumed was an attempt at intimidation, nevermind the fact that she barely cleared his chest.

"If Shane does not leave here grinning, and happy, with, with, his feet massaged, and carried in your arms for the rest of the night, while you kiss his little forehead, I swear to god Ilya, I will throw you off the balcony myself."

"Yes. Understood." Ilya bowed, nodding immediately. She glared at him for another minute and then stalked out of the room, giving Shane a final glance over her shoulder.

Ilya sunk onto the bed, feeling the mattress shift, sliding Shane a hair closer to him. Ilya cleared his throat. Talking. He could talk.

"Ah. We did not speak about last night?"

Shane's face did not move, his eyes fixed on a point at the floor.

"I thought...maybe you were not joking about souls being tied. But today, Rose told Lexi to pull me. And you went to pull Javi. I...reacted badly."

"Ilya..." Shane's voice was low, his eyes drifting to closed. "Javi and I--"

"Is okay." Ilya nodded, pushing down the lump in his throat. "It is early days, as they say here, yes? We are not even in a couple. We are all open, all exploring. I know this. I forgot this. It was wrong of me."

He scratched a line on his thigh, forcing himself onward.

"It is a lot for you, all this figuring out on camera. It is selfish for me to be jealous. You should explore. If I am the only one you have been with, you should...see what else you like."

Shane blinked at the floor. "That's what you want?"

Ilya leaned a bit closer, bumping their shoulders.

“Testing the connection, yes? The girls were teaching me this morning. Couples are supposed to play this game. Kiss people. See what they like. And if the couple survives, it is strong.”

Ilya swallowed.

“What I *want* is for us to be strong. I want us to be...a couple. A couple that is strong.”

Shane finally looked at him, his lips twitching slightly. “You do? You’re not...thinking of asking Hannah? Or...”

“No.” Ilya cut him off. “Only you.” He shrugged. “I get first choice, so no one gets to have you.” He glanced away from Shane, heart lurching. “But I will not ask if you do not want me to.”

Shane’s hands slid into Ilya’s. “I want.”

He nodded, fully smiling now, his eyes glassy.

“Ilya...I want so much...”

He stopped, voice trembling, shifting against him so their foreheads touched, his hands tracing patterns on Ilya’s joggers.

“It’s like...I understand so much now. Why the guys always talk about hitting the club. Why they rave about their hookups. Chexy’s cute stories about his girlfriend that frankly, just sound normal to me. He likes the way she eats cereal? I don’t know.” Shane shook his head. “The dumb love songs on the radio. All of that.” His cheeks were burning, voice wavering. “It’s scary. Wanting something so much. I feel...broken open with it.”

Ilya swallowed, nose nuzzling Shane’s, letting him get it all out.

“I want you...like I want hockey. But it’s scarier? Knowing that. Saying that. So if I’m not able to be clear, maybe, or say it all the time...it doesn’t mean it’s because I don’t want. It’s just hard to let myself.”

Ilya pressed closer, his thumb wiping away Shane’s tears.

“I understand. Thank you.”

He kissed Shane’s cheek, and then the other one, hesitating above his lips. Shane tilted his chin just slightly, his breath quickening.

Ilya murmured. “Let yourself. Let yourself want this.”

His thumb parted Shane’s lips, feeling the desire there before he leaned forward, lips devouring him. Shane whimpered, Ilya’s tongue slipping in immediately, his hand gripping Shane’s ass and half-yanking him onto Ilya’s lap. Shane responded at once, thighs wrapping around Ilya as he gripped his curls, their torsos sealing together in a wave of heat.

“Make me want it, Ilya. Tell me.”

A low noise hummed against the back of Ilya’s throat and he flipped Shane on the bed, bracing him in with his body.

“You want this, Shane. You want this so bad.”

Ilya pressed his lips against the hollow of Shane’s neck, feeling Shane arch in response, breath thinning as he keened. Ilya glanced down at the cursive scrawled at the foot of the bed, scoffing at the two names there.

“You do not want Rose, Shane. You do not want some girl in your bed like you have been told.”

Shane squirmed beneath him, his breath accelerating, that delicious pink flush creeping up his neck.

“You want *me*, Shane.”

Ilya lowered his body weight without warning, snapping his hips against Shane as let out a surprised gasp.

“You want *my* body pressed against you. My hands on your throat.”

Shane whimpered beautifully, his fingers tugging at Ilya’s wrist and moving it to the flash of skin he offered, head tilting back. Ilya complied, hand bracing at the base of Shane’s neck, trying and failing to ignore the thud of his pulse threading from his neck down between his thighs.

“You want my cock filling you up. Your mouth. Your hole. Anywhere you can have it.”

Shane actually cried out, Ilya’s hand moving swiftly from his neck to mouth to mute the noise. He ground into Shane, hissing at the wetness spreading there.

“Say it, Shane. Say what you want.”

He tore his palm away from Shane’s mouth, gripping the sides of his neck as his hips pumped below, tongue tracing Shane’s earlobe. Shane began to shake below him. Ilya tsked, raising his body off Shane’s, a high whine sounding in response.

“Ah, no. You don’t get to come until you say it. Look at me, Shane. Good boy. Look at me when you tell me what you want.”

Shane’s pupils were wide, vibrating almost, his lips slick and open as he tried to force a word out. Ilya hovered above him, waiting, the centimeter between their bodies killing him just as much.

Shane’s voice came out wavering, breathy. And sure.

“You...Ilya. I want you.”

Ilya grunted, diving down to Shane's lips with a groan, bodies sinking back into each other. Ilya felt himself teetering almost instantly, bracing a second longer so he could pull back to watch Shane's face, his eyes still trained on Ilya, both of them holding the gaze as they came.

Ilya did not leave Shane's side the rest of the day. Shane told him he could, that he's not going to meltdown again, but Ilya just grunted and made Shane ask more of his questions. Shane had a lot of questions.

He wanted to know about how Ilya learned English. *Svetlana. Made me watch many, ah, romcoms, when learning. So I know many cheesy lines to use on you.* A wink.

He wanted to know about Ilya's career. *Yes, fun. Lots of travel. Interesting people. They all think I am a pretty face with no brain. Which is only true sometimes.* A kiss on Shane's cheek.

He wanted to know about Ilya's family, but this is where Ilya stopped, sighing, nestling back into Shane's arms and trading turns.

What about your family? *I'm an only child. My parents are great. A smile. My mom's a bit intense. I have a cat named Pork Belly. I miss him.* A blink of his eyelashes, lips twisting down. A pinch of his cheeks, Ilya saying something under his breath in Russia.

What do you eat for breakfast? *Uh, protein shakes usually. Bagels, sometimes, rarely. If I'm splurging.* A blush from Shane.

What is your type, for guys? *I don't know. Haven't thought about it too deeply. Too busy not thinking about it, maybe.* A shrug. *You, I guess.*

He's rewarded with a lingering kiss.

Night approached quickly. The Islanders were sent upstairs to change into their evening wear. Shane eyed Ilya out of his periphery, observing as Ilya selected a silky button-up, dark, with a cheetah spread wide across it. Shane snorted. It would look garish on anyone but him.

Carefully, he pulled on dark slacks, scanning Leo's closet next to him. He lowered his voice.

"Hey, man. Mind if I borrow something?"

"Help yourself, brother!" Leo clasped him on the back, already outfitted in a royal blue shirt, no whiskers drawn on his face.

Shane tilted his head. "No leopard today?"

Leo smiled slightly. "Nah. Not tonight." He exhaled. "Trying to let Cici see all of me, I guess."

"That's really sweet." Shane blinked at Leo for a second, smiling, before leaning over into his closet.

Ilya walked by him, hand squeezing his waist briefly with a wink, eyes roaming over Shane's bare chest. Leo whistled.

"I don't know where you find the restraint."

Shane grabbed a shirt out of his closet, ignoring him, a smile blooming on his face anyway.

"Islanders." Ariana stood in front of the firepit, a sheer purple dress clinging to her body. "Tonight is our first elimination, and our first recoupling. Please stand."

Everyone rose to their feet, Shane swaying next to Rose, his black blazer hot over his shirt.

He kept his head bent, heart thudding, as phones went off one by one, signaling safety. He squeezed Rose's hand when her text dinged, her hand sliding out of his as she dropped to her seat with relief. At last, Shane's phone chirped. He opened the text.

"Shane Hollander. America has voted. You are not eliminated."

Shane pumped his fist by his side, exhaling as he sat back down.

"Thank god." Rose squeezed his arm, grinning.

The phones kept going until only Zac was left standing.

Ariana sighed. "Zac. I am so sorry, but you have been eliminated. You must pack your bags and leave immediately."

There was a murmur as the other Islanders rose, Hannah sobbing despite her kiss with Ilya earlier that day. Shane clapped him on the back.

"See you on the outside. Nice meeting you."

And then Zac was gone, suitcase thumping down the path as he disappeared from sight.

Ariana tossed her hair behind one shoulder, standing up taller. "Please gather back around the firepit for our first recoupling."

The Islanders shifted back into place, Ariana turning to the side.

"Bombshells, please join us."

Ilya and Svetlana walked out, side by side, and *damn*, Shane swallowed, they looked good. He took in how Ilya's shirt hugged his torso in all the right ways, his pants tight against his ass as he walked. Rose's eyes were trained on Svetlana, her hair pulled up with a few loose coils in front, a layered gold necklace slinking down between her breasts.

They stood on either side of Ariana, Ilya's eyes twinkling at Shane.

"Ilya and Svetlana, you may choose any Islander to recouple with. Svetlana, ladies first."

She cleared her throat, tossing her hair away from her face slightly. Rose and Shane laced their hands together, waiting.

“I would like to couple up with this girl-” A hard squeeze from Rose. “Because she is funny, smart, and *very* easy on the eyes. I know it’s early days, but I truly feel like there could be something there. I feel so lucky to have had such a positive start to my Love Island journey, and I can’t wait to see how things develop.”

She grinned, crinkling her nose.

“And I am *very* excited to sleep in the same bed once we are an official couple.”

Rose practically cut off circulation to Shane’s hand.

“And so, the girl I would like to couple up with is...” Svetlana burst into a smile, finally raising her eyes. “Rose.”

Rose hopped up, striding across the firepit area as the Islanders clapped. She leaned in, cupping Svetlana’s face, and planted a long kiss on her lips, the claps increasing.

Ariana fanned herself.

“Well done, Svetlana. Please take a seat together. Our first new couple from tonight - Svetlana and Rose!”

Shane smiled, still clapping as he scooted over to make room for the pair.

Ilya stepped forward, hands clasped in front of him, face serious.

“This was a very difficult decision for me.”

Shane’s stomach dropped. Ilya grinned at him, backtracking immediately.

“Only kidding. I would like to couple up with this boy because,” he swallowed. “He is the one I came here for. I did not know if it was true. The internet can be very stupid. But I can also be stupid, and I was hoping very stupidly that a beautiful hockey boy with freckles may actually like me. Or at least my nice butt.”

Shane groaned, laughing into his hands, Ilya’s smile dancing across his face.

“So I was very happy to meet this boy. To find out this boy is not only so cute, and impressive, and sensitive, but also open. Open to being brave. To discovering things. To letting himself want what he deserves.”

Ilya let his gaze linger on Shane, his accent thickening.

“So the boy I want to couple up with is...Shane Hollander.”

Shane barely heard the cheers, his eyes trained on Ilya’s. He unbuttoned his blazer, taking his time folding it next to him as he rose, allowing Ilya to track the dark shirt he wore

underneath, the leopard print the most subtle thing in Leo's wardrobe. He crossed the lawn, hands reaching for Ilya. Ilya caught him, his fingers trembling slightly in Shane's. Shane wrapped his arms around him, squeezing, and Ilya murmured into his ear.

"Hope I did good. Are you matching me? On purpose?"

Shane pulled back slightly. "I'm yours, aren't I?"

Ilya didn't give him a chance to say anything else. He crushed Shane's lips, thumbs hungry on his jaw, the world falling away until Ariana tapped him gently on the shoulder.

"Okay, boys, take a seat! Leo, you're up."

The rest of the recoupling floated by like white noise. Shane could focus only on the heat of Ilya's shoulder against his own, their fingers intertwining as Leo chose Cici, Connie changing to Hannah over Shawna, Javi going for Shawna and leaving Lexi I. single and vulnerable.

They were a couple. An official couple. A bed upstairs would have their names placed on it, *Shane and Ilya* in matching cursive. They would sleep together. Wake up together. Do other things together in between...

Ilya smirked at him, lips leaning forward to tease the underside of his jaw. Shane hummed contentedly, eyes fluttering shut as Lexi screamed in the background, hurling curses towards Javi. Shawna got involved, throwing a drink in Lexi's face as Ilya's lips traced a slow path over Shane's jaw, Shane pulsing with each kiss. Javi's voice rose, screaming about hypocrisy, about how Lexi abandoned him for a chance with Ilya and why the hell would he stay with her after that, and so on.

Ilya tsked, eyes fixed on Shane's lips.

"Maybe I should stop. Let you and Javi have a chat. He may need you to comfort him."

Shane shook his head, grinning. "You are such an asshole."

"You love my asshole."

"*Ilya! Television!*" Shane clutched the mic around Ilya's neck.

"Oops." Ilya's lips popped over the 'p' sound, his eyes still trained on Shane's lips. "I am still learning English. You must tutor me."

Shane raised his eyebrows, lips twitching.

"Yeah? Try, *sorry, Shane. My mistake. I am wrong and inappropriate, Shane.*"

"Hm." Ilya considered, dragging his gaze to Shane's sparkling eyes. "What about these words?" He cupped his lips to Shane's ear, letting loose a string of whispered consonants that made Shane flush.

He nodded once, tightly, turning to Ilya.

“Yes. I want.”

NEXT TIME...ON HEATED ISLAND...

Let's check in with our viewers at home. Can Chexy handle another steamy scene of Shane while sitting on the very same couch as said teammates' parents? What *do* Yuna and David think of this Ilya Rozanov? (We know how Pork feels.) Who is going to cry at Shane's confessional speech (all of us!) And what are the online fans saying?

Chapter End Notes

i promise they'll do more than just dry hump soon!! next chapter will be sweet / silly home reactions and then back to the DRAMA.

Chapter 7

Chapter Summary

and now time to hear from our viewers at home!

Chapter Notes

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

Chexy leaned into what he was beginning to consider his armrest, the couch starting to take the shape of his body from the hours he was spending at Yuna and David's. He wished their living room had more seating options. There was nothing quite like watching his teammate dryhump a Russian model in grainy night vision while Shane's parents sat right next to him. Chexy had flushed at the Russian words Ilya had murmured in *Soul Ties*, very grateful Yuna and David were not fluent themselves. He really hoped tonight's episode focused on other couples. Yuna made an excuse to grab a glass of wine anytime things got heated, and he was beginning to worry about her liver.

The episode began, theme music filling the Hollander's living room with its bouncing beat. David had put Pork in a white onesie that had *Love Island* scrawled on the back in pink cursive. He claimed the producers had sent it as a gift, but Chexy had his doubts.

Yuna placed Chexy's plate in front of him, the other in front of David. Chexy smiled, looking down at the pelmeni. Yuna had been experimenting with Russian dishes lately. She claimed Chexy was looking too thin and they both knew he couldn't really cook in his hotel room, no matter how much he told her not to go through the trouble of cooking each night.

David raised one of his dumplings to his mouth, eyes fixated on the screen.

"I'm glad Shane is being more honest." He chewed, half-covering his mouth. "He certainly does not have a future in acting."

Yuna shook her head. "I can't believe he thought his Rose act was fooling anyone."

"Can I say I like him with Javi now?"

Yuna rolled her eyes. "I think *you* might like Javi."

David flushed, choking slightly on his dumpling. Yuna ignored him, watching as the Islanders woke up on their screen. The camera flicked from the communal bedroom to Ilya in *Soul Ties*. He sat up, rubbing one eye and glancing at the empty spot next to him. His mouth twitched downward for a moment, eyes lingering where Shane had been at the end of the episode before. Chexy caught Yuna smiling slightly before she cleared her throat.

“I do want Shane to play the field a bit though. I don’t think it’s healthy to get too fixated on one person too soon, do you?”

Chexy nodded. “Probably good for everyone to, mm, explore? Since it is early. Week one.”

Yuna sniffed. “I mean Ilya doesn’t have to explore, obviously. Shane is the clearly best option there.”

She sipped her wine as she watched Shane in the kitchen. “And he should be making breakfast for Shane!”

The camera panned over to the girls getting ready, Ilya allowing Hannah to pull a headband over his head with a giant bow on it. Pork let out a low hiss and Yuna patted him approvingly.

“See? Pork’s still unsure.”

David took another bite of his pelmeni, keeping his mouth shut.

Ilya sat in the confessional booth, purple headband still on. His face looked tight, his smile controlled.

“Yes. I had a good night.”

There was a subtle cut, one of Ilya’s curls suddenly in a different position over the headband.

“Shane is one of the connections I am very interested in exploring. The only connection, really.”

Ilya’s smile looked natural there. Pork lifted his leg in the air, licking his toes with pauses in between, his green eyes narrowing at Ilya. Ilya shifted in the confessional booth, the tightness back in his face.

“I do not know how Shane identifies. It is none of my business. I kiss him, he likes it, that is all I care about.”

Another subtle cut, more of Ilya’s curls popping out over the hairband, the bow on a different side of his forehead.

“It was a good night, yes. I do not have more to say.” His eyes narrowed menacingly, forced smile disappearing completely, and the scene cut off.

The screen changed to Shawna and Javi chatting by the pool, Lexi making loud clatters in the kitchen as she proclaimed she hadn’t been made a big enough breakfast.

“That was odd.” David crinkled his brow, absently petting Pork.

Yuna waved her hand. “Probably producer influence. They have certain clips they want to get, storylines they try to push.” She allowed herself a small smile. “Good on Ilya for not giving in. Shane deserves that.”

“Producer influence?” David cocked his head, studying his wife.

She shrugged, face heating slightly. “I’ve been researching. It’s very interesting.”

David let out a full-bellied laugh, reaching over to kiss her gently on the lips.

“You’re his coach no matter the setting, huh?” He squeezed her thigh, a smile filling his face.

“I said it’s interesting!”

“I know, honey, I know.” David chuckled, hand still on her thigh as Shane’s face filled the screen.

Pork made a pitiful mew at his owner, Chexy’s heart clenching.

“He loves Shane this much?” He reached over, scratching Pork’s head. “You must mail him to Fiji.”

Their laughter died down as Shane began speaking. He shifted in the confessional booth, one arm wrapping around a garish orange pillow. Yuna could see the slight dampness spreading beneath his arms. She leaned forward, her hand interlacing with David’s.

“Yeah, so, I had an eventful night.”

Shane nodded to himself, not trying to stop the smile spreading on his face.

“I, uh...yeah, am getting to know Ilya.”

He exhaled, steadying himself. He raised his eyes back to the camera lens, voice calmer.

“I’m not bisexual. I think I was hoping I was. Rose is a fantastic woman, one I’d be lucky to date. And dating women would be lucky for me, as a professional hockey player. As a public figure.” He tugged at his shirt’s hem, eyes dropping.

“But what’s luckier is finally being honest with myself about who I am.” His lips parted. “I’m gay. I am a gay man.”

Yuna’s mouth dropped open. She turned to Chexy, questioning, and he shook his head.

On screen, a smile started spreading on Shane’s face. He *giggled*, clasping a hand over his mouth as if he surprised himself. Shane shook his head, sliding his palm over his lips.

“Sorry, it’s just. It’s my first time saying it out loud. I’m a gay man. And I got to hook up with a *really* sexy Russian man last night. A man whose job is to be, like, professionally hot.”

Shane leaned back, running his hands through his hair with a grin. His face stilled by degrees, becoming more serious.

“This is fucking terrifying.” Shane laughed again, this time without any humor in it.

“I know I’m in a bubble right now. I don’t know what’s going to happen on the outside, on the other side of this. People’s perceptions of me...my team...my...” He cut off, voice thickening as he gazed into the camera.

“Mom, I’m sorry I didn’t tell you in person. I’m sorry I wasn’t brave enough to answer when you asked.”

Yuna could feel the tears building, David gripping her hand hard.

“I just...I wanted to be good?” He shook his head, shoulders heaving a bit. “I wanted to bring home the girl, and have the kids, and be normal and not stand out, not even more than I already do.”

Shane picked at his hands, face tight.

“And, honestly, I felt proud, in a way, pairing with Rose. Knowing people would like that. Like I checked another accomplishment off the list of what I’m supposed to be. But it doesn’t last. It all goes hollow.”

He rubbed his eyes roughly, reddened his skin. The camera stayed on him, silence filling the confessional booth. When Shane spoke again, his voice was less shaky. Quiet, but sure.

“This...being gay? Being with Ilya? It’s...the opposite of hollow.” A smile crept back on his face before he continued.

“I’ve spent so long being *terrified* of what people think of me. I’ve tried too hard to be what I’m not. I mean, I made my mom start packing different lunches in elementary school so I could eat the same gross sandwiches as everyone else. I stopped talking about hockey statistics once the other middle schoolers started making fun of me, even though it was something I loved. I, ugh.” He tilted his head up to slow the tears. “I truly didn’t accept I was gay until I flew all the way to Fiji, *truly*, because of how far I pushed down absolutely everything about who I was.”

Shane leaned back slightly against the pillows, exhaling. His breathing steadied, a small smile growing.

“And now...it feels like I’ve burst to the surface. Ilya, whew. I haven’t let myself want something in so long. I haven’t even *known* if I’m wanting something. But I know now. I know what I want. I want to feel alive. I want to feel real, like a real fucking person instead of a cardboard cutout or malfunctioning robot or some shit.”

His eyes burned into the camera.

“I *want* this. And I know things might fall the fuck apart because of it.” Shane shrugged. “But if people have a problem with it, I don’t want to impress those people. If my team has a problem with it, I don’t want to play on that team. All I want is to be myself.”

He blinked, looking down briefly.

“And I am sorry if that disappoints anyone, or lets anyone down. I am. I hope it doesn’t.”

He exhaled, raising his chin.

“But I don’t want to let myself down anymore. I can’t. And I won’t. So, yeah,”

He grinned at the camera with a cockiness that usually only peeked out after a particularly great game of hockey.

“I had a really good night. A super satisfying night with a famous Russian supermodel who came on this show literally for me, because of how...into me he is?” Shane laughed.

“So I’m gay. And happy. And my ribs are feeling great, by the way, so who knows, maybe this time next year, I’ll have a Cup and a boyfriend. What more could I want?”

The show cut to commercial. Yuna was frozen on the couch, eyes watering. Chexy picked up his napkin, passing it to David, whose tears were flowing down his cheeks.

Chexy cleared his throat. “I think we’ll win for the Cup for sure.”

“Oh, Chexy.” Yuna swatted his arm, a sob catching in her throat. She leaned into David, his lips kissing her forehead.

“That’s our boy, David. That’s our son.”

He nodded, shoulders shaking slightly, their tears mixing together. Yuna grabbed the napkin out of his hand, pressing it to her face as well as she tried to get herself together.

“Maybe he shouldn’t explore Javi. Ilya seems nice.”

David let out a wet snort. “Shane can do whatever he wants. God, I’m so proud of him.”

Yuna half-laughed, tears thickening in her throat. “Can we fly to Fiji right now? I need to hug him. And we’ve got to mail Pork there anyway.”

Chexy smiled as listened, pulling up his scarce social media, last post almost a year ago. He found a picture of him and Shane from before he left for Fiji. They were messing around in the locker room, Chexy making a silly face while Shane looked only slightly amused. He had been mid-monologue about what they could improve for their next game and only reluctantly posted for a photo. Chexy posted it with a simple caption, the likes coming in almost immediately:

“My Captain. 🏏 A real fucking person. 💙”



betti~
@sparkle_matrix



now why as a straight woman am i SOBBING rn

9:16 PM · Jul 10, 2026

bunnypuck~ @cog_fata4lism · Jul 10



holy fuck. i cant even explain how big this is for the hockey world. like...



haidennn @uNderscOre · Jul 10



@MontrealMetros better give this man a raise, a medal, and a bulletproof vest



Chexy Dovonchezky | Boston

@Sergeichezk · Jul 10



Raiders

If anyone has a problem, I will introduce them to the boards myself.



bunnypuck~ @cog_fata4lism · Jul 10



omg @Sergeichezk i am a huge fan!! i love your friendship with shane can't wait to see you two back on the ice!! <333





reiiily

@sm00th_scr0ll



i dont even give a shit about hockey but i'll protect this man with my LIFE @MontrealMetros send me ten hollander jerseys stat

9:18 PM · Jul 10, 2026



loustat
@UltraV1nT4g3_

...

LISTENNNNN i called this rookie season yall called me delusional but i know my kindddd



9:19 PM · Jul 10, 2026



louis
@mad1x

...

i can't believe shane hollandar came out and bagged a fucking supermodel on the first try while i spent years risking murder in dark montreal alleys on grindr. some guys have all the luck



9:19 PM · Jul 10, 2026

Yuna peered over Chexy's shoulder.

“Are people being...?”

‘Kind. They are kind.’ Chexy replied automatically, nodding decisively. He pulled up a few tweets to show her, her and David seeming like they might cry again as they read.

“Oh, they love him.”

David bumped Yuna’s shoulder. “Of course they do.”

Chexy’s phone buzzed, a message from the team chat appearing on top of his screen. He fumbled for his phone immediately, not making eye contact with Shane’s parents.

“Ah, it’s back.” He thrust his chin towards the TV, where Zac was reading out the text about the night’s elimination and recoupling.

Yuna’s eyes stayed on Chexy a moment longer, but she didn’t press. David elbowed her once Shane walked over to Javi, wiggling his eyebrows.

Yuna snorted. “He’s literally talking about Ilya.”

“I know.” David laughed wistfully. “I can’t say I want Shane to explore with that Leo guy... and I think that’s his only other option.”

“Ilya isn’t so bad.” Yuna sipped her wine, smiling. She slammed her glass down the next second as Ilya walked over to the firepit, the three girls giggling behind him.

“What is this shit?”

“Yuna...easy...” David hovered next to her.

“Easy?! Ilya’s easy, that’s who’s easy. He’s going to basically fuck our son one night and then what, make out with these whores the next day? In front of him?!”

“Yuna, you can’t call people whores, that’s not- ” David shook his head, sighing. “It’s a dating show. They’re supposed to date.” He sniffed. “But I do think Shane should kiss Javi to even it out.”

“Ah, don’t think that will happen.” Chexy winced as Shane ran off the screen, Rose flying after him.

“That’s my girl! Ugh, look how she takes care of Shane. That is so sweet.” Yuna clutched her chest, still standing and half-blocking Chexy’s view.

“Is Svetlana there?” Chexy peered around her.

“Yuna, sit down, sweetheart.”

She sat down with a loud exhale, scooping Pork into her lap.

“He’s a mean man, Porkie. Should’ve never doubted your instincts.”

David clapped as Rose got in Ilya’s face, raising her voice.

“Thatta girl! Tell him!”

Yuna scoffed. “Shane better cuss him out. The audacity. Oh, you want to be in a couple *now*, Ilya? After someone else’s tongue down your throat a minute ago? *Please.*”

Shane did not cuss him out.

Chexy grinned when he heard his name. “Hey! He’s talking about me! And my girlfriend!”

Shane’s parents did not respond. Yuna was glaring at the screen, David shaking his head. Chexy shut his mouth. Yuna crossed her arms.

“I know my son is not going to-” She inhaled sharply, averting her eyes.

Chexy’s eyes darted away from the screen, grimacing.

“Maybe more wine?”

“Yes, uh, great idea, Chex.” Yuna cleared her throat, striding out of the room as sultry music began to play, the camera zooming in on Ilya’s hand around Shane’s throat, his pupils blown open with desire.

David shifted on the couch. “So, uh, did you like the pelmeni, Chexy?”

“Mhm, yes. Very tasty.”

The camera finally, thankfully, switched to Connie and Javi playing ping pong and talking about why none of the celebrities wanted to pair up normies like them, despite their dashing good looks.

“Yuna, come back, you’re safe!”

Yuna walked back into the living room, wine glass refilled and eyes avoiding her husband.

“I don’t know what you mean. I simply needed a top off.”

Chexy’s lips twitched. “You missed Shane getting a top off.”

“Sergei Dovonchezky!”

Chexy flushed immediately, bowing his head. “I am so sorry. Ah, Yuna, thank you by the way. The pelmeni were delicious.”

She scoffed. “You can go back to calling me Mrs. Hollander for the evening until you remember who you’re speaking to.”

Chexy hid his smile. Yuna took a generous sip of wine.

“I cannot believe Shane forgave him so quickly. He deserves so *much*. Didn’t we raise him better than that?”

She looked at her husband, pausing as he gazed down at her, his grin a little loopy.

“What, do I have something on my face?”

David shook his head. “No, I was thinking about how Shane must have gotten that from me. Immediately caving for a beautiful partner.” His smile deepened. “Remember that first summer we were together, how you called me Peter when we were-”

Yuna clamped a palm over his lips, flushing.

“So it’s genetic. Understood.”

David laughed, gently removing her palm and kissing the center of her lifelines.

“And who’s here now? Not Peter!” He leaned in, kissing his wife.

“Fuck Peter!” Chexy grinned, raising his glass of wine, largely untouched. He preferred beer, but Yuna said *Love Island* was a wine show, whatever that meant.

“Oh.” Yuna’s hand fluttered to David’s leg, the recoupling beginning.

They listened as Svetlana gave her speech, practically swinging Rose around as they embraced in celebration. And then it was Ilya’s turn. Pork shifted between David and Yuna but didn’t quite hiss.

Yuna nodded intensely as Ilya spoke.

“Shane is impressive. And sensitive. And oh, he is so brave.” She sniffed, her eyes tearing up again. She turned to David through watery eyes.

“But maybe Javi still has a chance?”

David snorted, bumping shoulders as he wrapped his arms around her, pulling her in tight.

“Big night for our brave boy.” David kissed her forehead.

“They’re a couple.”

Yuna’s lower lip stuck out, her voice barely audible over the catfight that was breaking out onscreen.

“He’s never been in a couple before.”

She started crying in earnest, letting David hold her, his arms rocking her back and forth. Chexy sat stiffly on the couch until Yuna reached out, pulling him in, the three of them squeezing tight as Pork let out a small squeak of indignation.



demii
@rosegames

...

Imaaaa lexi i is my fav javi was giving nothing but GIRL
you did not give a shit about him till he didnt pick you!!
[#loveisland](#)

9:57 PM · Jul 10, 2026



bibaby
@iwtvlover

...

me, single, alone on my couch, without a boy OR girl
russian supermodel to couple up with????
discrimination.



9:58 PM · Jul 10, 2026

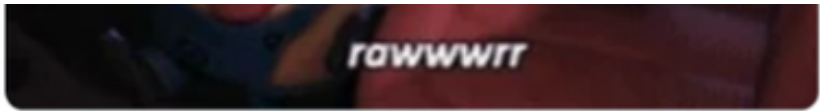


haanna
@_pOrderer

...

i KNOW leo and cici are toxic af but is it bad if they're
my fav couple right now 🏠 [#loveisland](#) [#lici?](#) [#ceo?](#)





9:58 PM · Jul 10, 2026

holliegiri @brittaperry · Jul 10 ...

sooo. rose landry and svetlana are making me question some things...



lindz @Witz_Chic · Jul 10 ...

omfg SAMEEEEE



becky
@hock3ygUrl



shane hollander the man you are. i hope you and ilya
kiss forever. hang this episode in the LOUVE
[#loveisland](#)



10:01 PM · Jul 10, 2026

Montreal Metros @MontrealMetros · Jul 10

...

We support all players regardless of race, creed, color, age, national origin, or sexual orientation. Shane Hollander is a skilled and widely respected player. We look forward to him returning to the ice after a summer in Fiji.

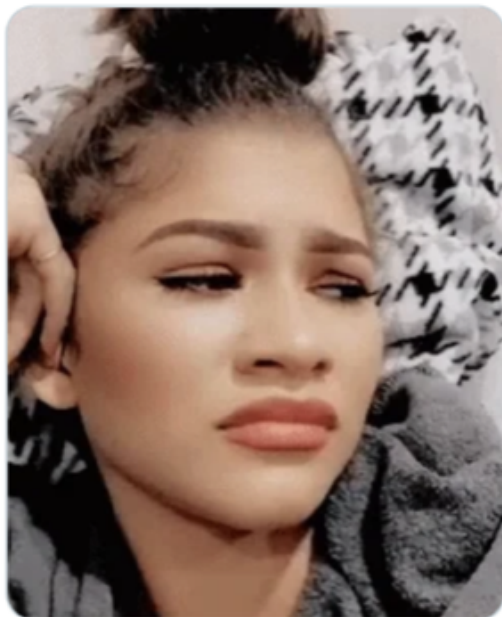
Click the link in our bio to buy a jersey in support!



denise @loopytunes · Jul 10

...

really cause i saw theriault's tweet before he deleted it



crissi @conniebbby · Jul 10

...

chexy can stay, the rest of you speak the fuck UP and support your captain or get run over by a zamboni



mari @armandie · Jul 10

...

Imaoooo omg yall we def peer pressured them into making a statement with all those mentions



renrisa @huddystat · Jul 10

...

not the shameless plug for their online shop smh. ill buy a jersey once theres a pic of them fucking on the back lmaoo



jay william @pike81 · Jul 10

...

i was sweating for this dude!! honestly expected the league to try to sideline him, good to see thats not the case



NEXT TIME...ON HEATED ISLAND...

Tomorrow night...three new bombshells enter the Villa. A professional athlete, a Russian, and...oh, am I the only one having deja vu? I guess some exes refuse to be history. And

speaking of the past, a game about assumptions brings things to a boiling point. Sounds like some of us should have done our laundry before all those dirty bits got exposed!

[outro music plays]

Chapter End Notes

just a lil something to tide us over. next episode we finally get hayden, jackie, and (don't hate me), sasha. the course of true love never did run smooth.

Chapter 8

Chapter Summary

hayden, jackie, and sasha enter as bombshells! shane is NOT happy about ilya's "ex" being back in the picture...

Chapter Notes

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

Shane sighed happily as their kiss pulled apart, his nose brushing Ilya's with a breathy smile. He went to stand up from the fire pit now that recoupling was finished. Ilya scoffed, scooping both legs out from under him and hauling him into the air.

"Ilya!" Shane kicked his feet, mildly panicked, cheeks already flushing. "I can walk!"

"Obviously. I know this."

Ilya jerked his head at Rose, her hands buried in Svetlana's hair as they kissed near them.

"But Rose gave clear instructions earlier. You must be carried all night. And I massage your feet later. And, oh yes, forehead kisses."

Ilya leaned down, smooching Shane's forehead as Shane half-shoved Ilya away, face screwed up into a reluctant smile, no force behind his shoves. Rose emerged from her kiss, eyes blinking back to reality with a growing grin.

"That's what we like to see, Rozanov!"

She clapped, cheering. Svetlana laughed, cooing at Shane.

"Aw, can I kiss him?"

"I'm not some pet!" Shane squirmed harder in Ilya's arms.

"Mm, yes you are. My little kitten."

Ilya nuzzled more kisses against Shane's neck and Shane snorted, ticklish, trying to keep pouting and failing as Ilya's kisses turned deeper, teeth dragging along his skin. Shane let out a sharp inhale.

"Upstairs?"

Ilya nodded swiftly. "Yes, I think so."

Shane waited, then widened his eyes dramatically, kicking his heel against Ilya's ribs.

"*Well?* Hurry up!"

Ilya raised his eyebrows. "What a demanding kitten."

Shane glanced over his shoulder, hands wrapping tighter around Ilya's neck, his voice light and contemplative.

"I mean, I guess I could comfort Javi like you suggested..."

Javi's head was buried in his hands, Lexi and Shawna screaming on each side. Ilya's hands tightened around Shane's body, curling him closer to his body.

"No. I do not think so."

Ilya moved swiftly, mounting the lower staircase with ease as Shane wondered how a model could make him feel like he weighed next to nothing. It wasn't enough that Ilya was a supermodel? He had to have super-strength too? Ilya's voice cut through Shane's thoughts, low and threatening in his ear.

"And you need to remember your manners, Hollander. You do not rush me. You do not comfort stupid Javi. Do you need me to remind you how to be a polite Canadian boy?"

Shane pressed his face closer against Ilya's shirt, cheek nestling against the silky fabric as he grinned. He controlled his voice, tone still light.

"I know you haven't watched the show Ilya, but being in a couple doesn't mean we're monogamous. Maybe Javi would get me to the bedroom faster..."

Shane bit his lip, waiting. He was rewarded with silence, Ilya striding up the remaining two steps at a near sprint, his breathing coming hard. Shane was tossed on the bed before he knew it. *Their* bed, he corrected, his eyes catching the new cursive of their names together.

Immediately Ilya was on him, Shane's wrists pinned to either side, Ilya's face a sliver above his own.

"Do you want to keep talking about Javi all night?"

Shane tried to find the words to keep teasing. He found he was empty, mind flooded with Ilya's piercing eyes and the pulse jumping in his neck as he gripped Shane's wrists harder.

Shane shook his head.

There was a slight twitch of Ilya's lips before his face smoothed, returning to his burning glare.

"I didn't hear you. Do you want to spend our night talking about Javi?"

"...no." Shane swallowed, half-hard already.

Ilya was straddling him but not even touching him yet, other than his wrists caught in Ilya's hot palms, the heat radiating down Shane's arms. Ilya cocked an eyebrow.

"No, what?"

Shane stuttered for a moment, eyes darting over Ilya's face to try to uncover what was wanted.

"No...sir?"

A squeeze to his wrists. A brief smile.

"Good."

Shane felt himself twitch. Ilya glanced down, his smile growing.

"You are being very good now. Very polite. Now..."

Ilya lowered his lips to Shane's neck, tongue tracing a pattern there, the delicate skin vibrating with his touch.

"I will ask again. Is Javi's name what you want to fill your mouth with tonight?"

"No, sir." Shane answered immediately, his breath coming faster, Ilya's face pleased above him.

"What do you want to fill your mouth with?"

"You." Shane exhaled, the word jumping out of his mouth.

Ilya tilted his head, feigning innocence. Shane huffed, turning his head away from Ilya's stare, his cheeks turning red. Ilya tightened his hold on Shane's wrists, Shane squirming against the pressure.

"You need to be more clear, Shane."

"Your cock. I want to fill my mouth with your cock."

Shane turned back to Ilya, his glare flooded with desire, no longer hiding from Ilya's gaze. So he caught it when Ilya's face flickered, his lips parting as inhaled sharply. Shane smirked, raising his hips to graze against Ilya's, confirming the hardness there.

Ilya's eyes narrowed.

"Ah. You were doing so well. Remember your manners. Again."

Shane forced his brain to find the words, everything scrambled from the feel of Ilya's length against his hipbone.

"Your cock. In my mouth. Please."

Ilya assessed him, seeing how far he could push.

“Please, who?”

Shane’s eyelids fluttered, the haze beginning to spread, no resistance left anymore.

“Please let me suck your cock. Sir.”

Ilya jumped up swiftly, hauling Shane to standing by the back of his neck, his voice gruff.

“Showers. Now.”

They stripped as they went. Shane shivered at the feel of Ilya’s gaze on his back as he stumbled to the communal bathrooms, almost tripping as he took off his pants. They reached the showers in only their boxers, Ilya pinning Shane hard against the shower’s glass wall as they entered. His thumbs jerked down Shane’s waistband, a low groan sounding from the back of his throat as he saw the effect he had been having.

“So wet already?”

Shane didn’t bother responding, already sinking to his knees. Ilya slid off his boxers, stepping out of them slower than Shane would have liked, his fingers hastening them off Ilya’s ankles.

Ilya’s cock sprung out before him. The cold cut of the tiles against Shane’s knees disappeared. He stopped thinking about the open doorway, how the shower’s frosted modesty screen stopped at Ilya’s knees, exposing Shane below. He thought only Ilya in front of him, throbbing in need.

Shane leaned forward gingerly, sacredly, fingertips trembling slightly as he traced Ilya’s length. His lips skimmed the tip in a soft kiss, exploratory, Ilya’s shudder above him bringing Shane out of his haze momentarily. He blinked up at him through his eyelashes, self-conscious suddenly.

Ilya traced his jaw, swallowing, forcing his voice to be firm.

“Yes, good. Worship it. Very well-mannered of you.”

Shane’s eyelashes fluttered again, the haze rolling back in as he smiled softly, sinking back down on his heels.

Ilya’s brows twitched together, a tenderness threatening to split open his chest. He watched as Shane kept kissing at first, his lips trailing everywhere and deepening, tongue emerging and starting to take long licks up and down his shaft. Shane’s hand wrapped around Ilya’s hipbone as he came up, stabilizing himself as he took Ilya in his mouth in earnest. Ilya watched as Shane’s lips twitched in an actual smile, breath hot against his cock as he sighed happily for a moment before beginning to slide up and down, taking him deeper, his face focused and content.

Ilya pressed his lips together, head tilting back as he leaned his pelvis forward, hand tangling in Shane’s hair. Shane moaned at that, the vibrations causing Ilya to twitch in pleasure, and

Shane's eyes lit up, mind storing data away for future use. He moaned again, purposefully this time, and Ilya let out a low curse as Shane took him deeper, hand wrapping around Ilya's base as he moved, rhythm rocky but enthused.

Shane's eyes flicked up to Ilya as his head bobbed, free hand shifted from Ilya's hip to ass, fingers gripping as he yanked Ilya forward, closer. Ilya gasped, eyes flying open, Shane pliant below him, wanting it. Ilya paused for a moment, then buried both hands in Shane's hair and began to thrust. Shane's moans streamed out, the small scrapes of his teeth not even calculating as Ilya drove into his warm mouth, his soft chokes pushing him over the edge.

"Ah, *fuck*. I'm close, Shane, off, off-"

Ilya tried to step back, half pulling out of Shane. Shane whimpered, hand grabbing tighter against Ilya's ass, his mouth chasing after Ilya's cock. Ilya shuddered, coming in intense bursts that overflowed from Shane's mouth, cum leaking down his chin and streaking over his chest.

Ilya staggered back against the tile wall, breathing ragged. He gazed down at Shane kneeling before him, his lips a slick mess, his body marked at Ilya's. Ilya's gaze dropped lower, between Shane's legs, mouth falling open even wider.

"Shane. Did you...?"

Shane ducked his head, not meeting Ilya's eyes. Ilya's eyes widened.

"And you did not touch yourself."

"Shut up." It was feeble, Shane's eyes still trained on the shower drain.

Ilya knelt at once, pressing his lips hungrily against Shane, tasting himself in his mouth. He peppered Shane with Russian, kissing over his face and down his throat, palms stroking through his hair. He found his mouth again, lips warm and sure as they pressed against him, tongue slipping in with a moan before pulling out.

Shane was finally blinked up at him, his eyes hesitant and waiting.

"Shane Hollander. No one has ever sucked my dick like that. We should go back to where there are cameras and do this again."

Shane snorted, his shoulders relaxing. Ilya kept his hand cupped against Shane's cheek.

"No. Shane. The world needs to *know* this. You must quit hockey. You need to suck cock fulltime. This is a talent."

Ilya leaned forward for another kiss, cutting off Shane's retort, and pulled him gently to his feet. He wrapped his arms around him, swaying with small, tight, squeezes, waiting for Shane to drift back into his body.

"So good for me, дорой. Let's get you cleaned up, hm?"

Shane nodded against Ilya's shoulder, letting Ilya run the water until it was the right temperature, his warm hands moving over Shane's body and making him clean. Ilya washed his hair last, fingers moving over Shane's scalp with a small smile. Shane let him, tangling his fingertips in Ilya's chest hair as he sighed contentedly, thoughts still slow and languid, his muscles at ease.

At last Shane tilted his chin up to meet Ilya, murmuring against his ear.

"Don't forget the foot massages. And I expect to be carried back to the bedroom."

He felt Ilya's grin against his cheek. Ilya gave his ass a tight squeeze, chuckling.

"Ah. There go the manners. A shame."

Shane was finding it hard to sleep. It wasn't because of Leo and Cici like usual. It wasn't because Svetlana and Rose weren't being subtle about celebrating their new couplehood either. It was Ilya's arm, warm and steady around his waist, his soft snores tickling the back of Shane's head.

They had gotten teased instantly after stepping out of the shower, the girls complaining about how they needed to start getting ready for bed, the trail of clothing having kept everyone at bay until they were finished. Ilya and Shane had joked around with the guys as they changed into pajamas, the boys rallying around Javi who looked depleted. Ilya had made Shane switch sides of the bed because he refused to sleep where Rose had been, making both Rose and Shane roll their eyes even as Shane complied.

All of that had been light-hearted and fun and easy. Nighttime, like this, was different. Shane tried to adjust to all the newness: sleeping on a different side, Ilya's weight behind him instead of Rose's, the day's events piling up on him like boulders. He had really come out on national television. He had really sucked his first dick on national television (in the shower, where they didn't film, but *still*). And now Ilya, snuggled up against him like he had always done this. Like Shane wasn't more used to nights with one hand beneath his sheets, Ilya's latest model shoot pulled up on his phone, as he had tried to hide who he was from himself.

Cici let out a particularly loud shriek beneath the covers and Ilya grunted awake. He lifted his head, blinking at Shane's glazed look at the wall. Ilya sighed.

"Move."

He scooped Shane to him, manhandling him over his body and back into Shane's old spot.

"Now sleep. You are tired."

Ilya gave him a sloppy kiss behind the ear, already drifting back into snores. Shane felt a small smile darting over his face. He exhaled slightly, burrowing his head into his old pillow. He pulled Ilya's arm tighter over him, burrowing back, and Ilya pulled him closer even in sleep. Shane exhaled, closing his eyes, and told himself he could want this. He could want

this. He could have this. And if he woke up in the morning and it had all been a *really* vivid dream, that was okay too.

“I got a TEXTTT!”

Leo hollered from where he stood downstairs, the girls running to the balcony in various stages of dress. Shane frowned, looking down at the breakfast Ilya had just given him. It was unlikely he would have finished it anyway, but still, he didn’t love the interruption. Ilya had made both Shane’s usual protein shake as well as three bagels, telling Shane he needed his energy for certain activities later.

Shane grabbed the shake and joined the congregation forming around Leo. Ilya’s warm hand suddenly slid up the small of his back, making him shiver. Shane looked up. Ilya was holding one of the bagels. He lowered it to Shane’s mouth and Shane opened without thinking, taking a bite without taking his eyes off Ilya. Ilya smirked, a thumb rubbing a crumb off the corner of his lips.

“Such a good boy,” he whispered, making Shane flush as he elbowed Ilya in the stomach.

“Islanders!”

Leo spun his water bottle in one hand, eyes scanning over the text.

“Hope you’re ready for company! Three new bombshells are speeding across the sea on their way to the Villa!”

The crowd broke out in screams and claps. Lexi I. raised her palms to the sky, praying for a decent man. Next to her, Javi rolled his eyes.

“Three lucky islanders will get a chance to get to know the bombshells first in one-on-one villa dates.”

Leo closed his phone, glancing around him.

“Oh, shit.” Javi jerked his head.

Three small tables were arranged on the edge of the villa, overlooking the ocean but not nearly secluded.

Ilya’s phone chimed. He slid his phone out of his joggers with exaggerated leisure. Shane gave him a death glare.

“Ah. Such a surprise. A hot new bombshell has chosen me for a date.”

He preened in Shane’s face, swooping the bagel near Shane’s mouth like an airplane. Shane kept his mouth closed.

“Oh!” Connie beamed as his phone went off. “I got a date too!”

Shane felt a noise from his shorts. He didn't even try to stop his grin, purposefully avoiding Ilya's gaze now burning daggers into his back.

"Huh. Yup. I've been chosen by a bombshell who...the text says is...the hottest of the three?"

"So funny. Mr. Humor. Mr. Comedian." Ilya huffed.

Lexi wrinkled her nose.

"Seriously? No one wanted to ask a girl on a date? This is fucked."

She pouted, stalking off to the kitchen to make a breakfast Javi was certainly not about to prepare for her.

The other Islanders trailed back upstairs to finish getting ready, while Rose and Svetlana burst into the boys' dressing room, ignoring Connie's blush as he pulled half of his co-ord set up over his boxers.

"What are you going to wear for your date, Shane?" Svetlana danced around Shane's closet, skimming the selection.

"You're going to look cute no matter what." Rose squeezed his shoulders.

"Wow. This is betrayal." Ilya glared at Svetlana.

She waved him off. "You'll be fine. Oh, how about this, Shane? I don't think Javi will mind if you borrow it."

She held out a deep blue polo, the fabric luxurious and sheer. Shane rubbed his fingers over it, feeling the texture and nodding approvingly.

"Ah, no." Ilya's eyes darted over. "You can borrow my hoodie, Shane. It is big. Baggy. And has my name on the back, personalized."

Shane grinned at his feet, shaking his head. Rose tugged off Shane's pajama shirt like a dress-up doll, hanging him the polo as she looked over at Ilya.

"Eyes to yourself, Ilya. This is Love Island, Shane's freshly out, and he is allowed. To have. Fun." She tugged the polo down.

Svetlana whistled approvingly. Ilya shoved a shirt over his head, slamming his wardrobe door shut.

"Well, I hope Svetlana has so much fun here too, Rose. *So much fun.*"

"Boo!" Rose laughed as he left the room, turning her focus back to Shane.

Shane looked at himself in the mirror, his chest starting to tighten.

“You’re sure I look okay?”

“You look great, honey.” Svetlana nestled next to him, arms wrapping around his waist as she studied him. “But will you let me do your hair?”

Shane frowned slightly, looking at his bangs.

“Why? What’s wrong with my hair?”

Ilya cursed under his breath as Shane came down the stairs. The polo looked fantastic. Too good for the other Islanders to even look at, much less for a date. And Svetlana had worked her damn magic on him, his adorable bangs pushed up and away over his forehead. Making him look more masculine. Older. Dangerous. Ilya forced himself to exhale.

Shane bounced up to Ilya like a puppy, his enthusiasm breaking through the magnetism of his appearance.

“Do you like it?”

Ilya considered whether to tease or be honest. He sighed.

“It is too beautiful. You will kill me.”

Shane stepped closer, fingers playing with the hem of Ilya’s shirt.

“It’s probably not even a real date. Maybe the guy just felt bad for me.”

“Hey.”

Ilya’s voice was cutting. He raised Shane’s chin, his thumb pressing hard beneath his lower lip.

“No. People do not ask out Shane Hollander out of pity. Have you seen yourself in the mirror? Or will I have to take you up there, show you how to look at yourself properly?”

Shane’s lips twitched up in a grin, shoulders relaxing slightly.

“We probably don’t have time for that before the dates.” He exhaled. “Thanks, Ilya.”

“You are a force, Shane.” Ilya kept his eyes narrowed for a moment longer. “Do not forget this.” He rolled his shoulders back. “And do not forget who you are in a couple with.”

“I won’t.” Shane smiled softly, looking at him beneath his eyelashes.

Ilya glanced off into the distance, face stoic.

“And you should not let this man touch you. You will be so disappointed.”

“Is that so?”

“Of course. I have not even shown you what I can do in a shower yet. You think about that while this boring man talks to you.”

Ilya turned his gaze back to Shane, stepping closer as he lowered his voice.

“You should think of me sinking down before you. My lips teasing you until you earn it. Until you are begging for it.”

Shane stiffened, his throat tightening.

“And then. And only then. Will I show you exactly what I can do with my mouth.”

Ilya stepped back, widening the distance between them. Shane tilted forward on autopilot, eyes fixed on Ilya’s lips. Ilya grinned, patting his cheek.

“Enjoy your date, Shane!”

“I’m so nervous.”

Jackie paced back and forth, second-guessing every choice that had led her here. The other bombshells were waiting with her, intros recorded and now only the group entrance left to film.

Hayden Pike, the freshly retired NFL player, gave her a reassuring smile.

“I’m sure they’ll make us look great. We’re gonna be the sexy bombshells, after all.”

“Exactly. I’m a neuroscientist!” Jackie groaned, laughing into her hands. “What am I doing here!”

Hayden’s eyes moved slowly over the outfit they had put Jackie in: a sequined dress made to evoke a mermaid in all blues and purples, clinging to a body with curves Hayden felt might defy science. Jackie caught him looking, her cheeks pinking.

“You look great to me.”

Sasha rolled his eyes from where he leaned against the wall, his voice beyond bored.

“No use flirting with her, Pike. You’re here to seduce Islanders, not either of us.”

Hayden found it was his turn to flush.

“I’m not -” He cleared his throat. “I only chose Hollander because it was really brave of him, what he did.” He looked back at Jackie. “Honest.”

She shrugged with a small smile. “Oh. I don’t care. I thought it was nice that you picked him. An NFL player being open like that.”

“Yeah, of course, there’s nothing wrong with it.”

Fuck. Hayden was getting even more flustered. This was not helping his case.

“I’m just saying I like women. Like, I *really* like women. That’s what I like.”

“Okay.” Jackie turned away, a producer motioning for her to come with him for her final touch-ups.

Sasha snorted as she left. “Very convincing.”

“Shut *up*, I don’t need to convince anyone of anything!”

“Mm, so you’ve watched every episode so far, and chose Hollander for the only date you might get. Over the single woman who would keep you safe next recoupling.”

“That’s not...I’m not trying to play a game.” Hayden forced his fingers to relax from the fists he found them in. “Not like whatever you’re doing.”

Sasha just smirked, unfazed. “When you finally get your first boyfriend, Pike, you might begin to understand how some exes stay on your mind.”

“Yeah, well, Ilya seems pretty happy in his couple.”

“And yet you choose his partner.” Sasha fluttered his eyelashes. “Why, we should be teammates, Pike, instead of all this bickering. Maybe we’d both walk away with what we want.”

Hayden was glad the rest of the shoot went by quickly. Before he knew it, they were driving to the Villa, his mouth running nonstop to try to calm Jackie’s nerves. He and Sasha wore matching outfits: long-sleeved white shirts with generous v-necks and skintight jeans. Nothing like Hayden would usually wear. His eyes darted to Sasha. Objectively, Hayden was far more attractive. He was solid muscle, still in great shape despite the recent injury that had ended his career a few years earlier than planned. Sasha was slender and willowy, almost feminine. But maybe that was more what gay guys were into? Not that Hayden cared what Shane Hollander’s type was.

He swallowed, leaning his head back against his seat. He had only seen a couple episodes of past *Love Island* seasons, but naturally he had watched every episode the producers provided while he waited in his hotel room for his appearance. Shane was...captivating. At first, it was obvious admiration. Hollander was a phenom on the ice, a fantastic athlete. Hayden could appreciate that. But as he watched the actual show, he found himself tracking Shane even when he was in the background of scenes, peering close.

As he had waited for producers to put him in, Hayden had rewatched each episode multiple times, even Unseen Bits, the hour-full fluff of ‘bloopers’ and other braindead content too boring for an actual episode. Hayden had fast-forward through the montage of Leo growling and mewing at people, stopping at Shane’s section. The producers had mashed together snippets of Shane making small talk with awkward music playing in the background, each conversation a different variation on some aspect of the Villa’s architecture. It had cracked

Hayden up, something tender stirring in his chest. And yeah, he had also cried at Shane's coming out speech in the confessional booth, but that's because he had a heart. Anyone would get emotional.

All he wanted was to tell the guy, good job. Once that was done, he would pursue Lexi I., or Shawna, or whatever the other girls' names were. It was an opportunity to have a private conversation without embarrassing Shane in front of everyone. That's all it was. If it had to be called a date, so be it.

"Here we are. They'll direct you but remember, Jackie goes first, boys flanking."

The trio nodded, Hayden slipping out of the car first. He held his hand out for Jackie, guiding her to the ground so she didn't trip on her dress. He turned before Sasha stepped out, resisting the urge to slam the door in his face. Smug motherfucker.

Production gave them the signal. They started walking, floor flans blowing back Jackie's long dark hair. Hayden smiled to himself, watching her hips. He could tell she was starting to feel it a bit, swishing from side to side as they walked through the Villa's entrance.

The Islanders cheered as they entered and Hayden felt that familiar prickle of adrenaline, not unlike before a game. He heard his name whispered on the Islanders' lips, the sole celebrity in this round of bombshells.

The producers had instructed them to grab their bombshells and head to the date area. He watched as Jackie approached Connie. He had seemed like a sweet dude in previous episodes, but Hayden felt like Jackie could do better somehow. Hayden started walking towards Shane when Svetlana inhaled.

"Sasha."

Hayden watched as Shane's head turned to the man striding towards Ilya. Svetlana's hands covered her mouth in shock. Ilya was unreadable, his face a vibrating mask of forced blankness. Shane's eyes darted towards Rose, who raised her shoulders in confusion.

Sasha stopped in front of Ilya.

"*Ilyusha*. Lovely to see you again. Sweet of you to dress up for me, though of course, I've seen it all before." He winked, lips spreading in a grin.

There was a minute where Hayden thought Ilya might punch him, but then Svetlana hurried over, whispering something in his ear. His hands twitched and he nodded, following Sasha stiffly to one of the tables. Hayden stood in front of Shane, rocking back slightly on his heels.

"Um. Hi?"

Shane blinked, tearing his eyes back to the man in front of him. Hayden braced himself, forcing a smile.

"I'm your date? If you want to go sit?"

Shane nodded numbly, stumbling a bit as they walked. Hayden hesitated, then leaned a palm on the small of his back, guiding him. He could feel Shane relax against his touch, body weight surrendering. Hayden looked at him in concern, gently pulling out his chair and lowering him into it before taking the other seat.

“Are you okay?”

Shane did that nod again, his eyes elsewhere. This is not what Hayden had planned for. Hayden scooted closer, bringing his chair around the corner of the table near Shane instead of across from him.

“Listen, man, I don’t really watch this show too much, but I know they do things for the drama. That dude is a real dickhole, let me tell you. If Ilya doesn’t punt him into the ocean, I’m more than happy to.”

Shane actually cracked a smile at that. Hayden felt warmth flood his chest. He grabbed Shane’s knee, shaking him slightly.

“C’mon, man. Don’t sweat it. It’s so embarrassing for him. I mean, by the sounds of it, Ilya dumped his ass and now he’s crawling back for more? Pathetic, right?”

He didn’t get another laugh. Instead, Shane looked even worse, slumping down into his chair.

“Ilya told me he had never had a boyfriend.”

Hayden froze. Shit.

“I could...punt both of them into the ocean?”

Shane snorted. Partial victory.

“Look. I don’t know the guy, but you two seem pretty happy. Maybe there’s an explanation?”

“For lying?” Shane shook his head. “Sure.”

“Well.” Hayden shifted. “If he is some asshole liar, then better to find out now. You can do way better than that.”

Shane blinked, seeming to realize where he was.

“Oh...oh, no. I’m being the asshole, aren’t I? Freaking out about my...about Ilya, while I’m supposed to be on a date with you.”

He rubbed his forehead, shaking his head.

“I’m so sorry. I obviously don’t have much experience with this. Not that that’s an excuse, I mean.”

“Hey, don’t worry.” Hayden laughed, slapping Shane’s thigh.

Shane exhaled, glancing at Hayden.

“I am sorry. I want to respect your time. And respect this date. I mean, we are supposed to explore.” He trailed off, almost to himself. “Those are the rules of the show. That’s how it goes.”

Hayden considered correcting him. Telling Shane he wanted to tell him he was a brave motherfucker, but Shane didn’t need to stress. Hayden was straight. Definitely straight. So this definitely wasn’t a real date.

Hayden looked at Shane, still half-slumped in his seat. That would be cruel, though. He could go along with it, for one brief date.

Hayden cleared his throat, putting on a smile.

“Soo, what’s your sign?”

Shane tilted his head.

“Sorry, man, bad joke. First date, cliché questions? I don’t know. I’m not good at this either, I guess.” He laughed, tilting closer and lowering his voice. “My first date with a guy and all that.”

Shane gave him a soft smile and Hayden felt that warmth flooding back.

“I’m not good at this either. Obviously. So. Are you...?”

Shane raised his eyebrows. Hayden took a sip of the wine from his glass on the table, shifting in his seat.

“Um, Shane, before this ends, I wanted to tell you how impressed I was by you. I mean, I get it, sort of. Being an athlete, the things that are said...I don’t know. It was...you’ve got balls, man. Coming out like that. And yeah, it was, it’s good to see. So.”

Hayden took another sip of wine to stop his babbling. Shane was looking at him with big eyes, the warm brown of his irises swirling under a layer of liquid and oh, fuck, was he -

“Sorry.” Shane wiped his eyes. “That’s really nice. I haven’t thought about people watching me. Like I think about it, but. I don’t know how I come across I guess.”

Hayden’s eyes flicked up and down Shane.

“Yeah, I won’t lie, you look good on screen, dude.”

Shane snorted, rubbing his eyes again. His eyes lingered back on Hayden for a moment, dropping down to trace the deep dip of Hayden’s chest emerging from his white shirt, the wind rippling the fabric and giving him a better view of Hayden’s pecs. Shane reached for his wine glass, then stopped, folding his hands tightly in his lap.

“So, are you out?”

Hayden choked, coughing loudly and wiping his mouth.

“Oh. So.” He shifted in his seat. “I’m not...I’m straight. Sorry.”

Shane blinked. “You asked me on a date. As a straight guy?”

“Yeah, no, I know. I wanted to say how much it meant for like, the athletic world, and shit?”

Shane looked down, brows pushing together.

“Oh.”

Hayden’s heart almost broke in half. Fuck. He was the worst. Against his will, his mouth kept moving.

“Yeah, like, I’ve never...been with a guy. Or *thought* about it. I’m really into women. Like the girl bombshell, Jackie? Hot as fuck.”

“Yeah. I get it.” Shane crossed his arms.

“Fuck, I’m doing this all wrong.” Hayden rubbed his face. “Like, I’m not into *guys*. But, uh. You’re...”

Shane’s eyes flicked over to him. Hayden closed his eyes.

“You’re interesting or whatever. I don’t know. I did like watching you. I wanted to get to know you, more than anyone else here. I’m not saying I’m, gay, or anything, I’m definitely not, and obviously, you’re not a girl, so. It’s...I’m curious? I’m curious about you maybe? I don’t know.”

Hayden squinted his eyes open, stomach clenching. But it was worth it. Shane had a full smile on his face that he was doing his best - and failing - to hide, his eyes sparkling for the first time the whole date. Shane licked his lips, looking at him seriously.

“I want to make sure I understand.”

Hayden nodded tightly.

“You’re...how old?”

“Twenty-five.”

“So you spent twenty-five years experiencing no same-sex attraction. You played in the NFL and felt nothing for any ripped teammates, any male fan of your choosing, any famous hot guys sliding into your DMs. And then you saw me, on a screen in your hotel room, and...”

“And, nothing!” Hayden flushed, shoving Shane’s shoulder playfully. “I’m...being open to connections! Like the show says!”

“Mhm.”

God, Shane was glowing. Hayden felt his breath catch, taking in the way the sun lit up Shane's warm eyes even more. He groaned.

"Sasha is gonna give me so much shit for this." Shane's face flickered immediately. Hayden winced. "*Fuck*. I'm an idiot. Forget I said anything."

Shane's eyes unfocused for a moment, some sort of mental calculation happening before he looked back at Hayden

"So you are curious. And open."

Hayden nodded slowly. He could hear Sasha's laugh behind them, Ilya facing away from Hayden, Shane's back to the both of them. Something sealed in Shane's face and his smile returned, only a hint of tightness around the corners.

"You're curious, and open, and on a date with me. And dates can involve kisses."

Hayden's whole face turned red. Shane laughed then, actually laughed at him, a quiet giggle that he tried to cover with his hand.

"Shut *up*! Damn, Hollander. I wasn't expecting you to be so bold."

Hayden rubbed the back of his neck, thought flying. He really hadn't planned this out.

Shane shrugged, still smiling. "I'm full of surprises." His face darkened for a second. "The good kind, I mean."

Hayden gnawed on his lip. "So...what? The seasoned gay guy of like, twenty-four hours is going to convert another professional athlete to your side?"

Shane rolled his eyes. "I would never disrespect your bisexuality like that."

"I'm *not* bisexual! I'm like...Shane...sexual."

Hayden's ears burned. That was so much worse. Shane's mouth fell open slightly before he pressed his lips together, one hand reaching for Hayden's. He interlaced their fingers, squeezing once as he grinned down at the table. Hayden felt his palm gathering sweat already at Shane's touch. His heart amped up, brain suddenly sending out flares of Shane in different compromising positions. Hayden thought he might be having a heart attack.

"That's seriously sweet, Hayden."

Shane leaned in closer, their knees bumping together. Shane's hand slipped out of Hayden's and up onto his thigh, tracing circles there. Hayden's eyes flickered to Shane, the tantalizing polo, only slightly sheer, the mere suggestion of his nipples poking through. Why the fuck was he thinking about a man's nipples...why did he want to *suck* Shane's nipples...what the actual fuck was-

Hayden inhaled, Shane's breath tickling his ear, his face angling closer.

“Would you want to do something about your curiosity? Your openness?”

And then Shane turned his gaze fully on Hayden, not flinching, just waiting. Hayden soaked in his gorgeous face, the freckles sprinkled across his nose that were barely visible on camera, the full lips so close to his.

Hayden felt his head nod once, twice.

And then Shane leaned in, a gentle hand caressing his cheek, tilting Hayden closer. His lips met Shane's. His whole body was an exploding sun, everything warmth and tremors and heat, and Hayden pressed Shane closer, hands gripping in his hair, no longer curious. Definitely still open. And absolutely, completely, *fucked*.

Ilya cracked his knuckles under the table, leaning as far back from Sasha as possible while still remaining at the table. He spoke in Russian, Shane far too close for his comfort.

“What the fuck do you want, Sasha?”

Sasha's eyes flickered behind Ilya, taking in Shane's back with a smirk. He replied in English.

“I can't say hello to my ex?”

Ilya leaned forward swiftly, his nose inches from Sasha's face.

“I am not your ex. We were casual.”

Sasha did not flinch. He leaned in even closer, nose grazing Ilya's as his lips parted in a grin.

“So casual. You seem so very unbothered.”

Ilya smothered a yell and immediately moved backward, crossing his arms. He exhaled through his nose, forcing himself to speak calmly.

“Sasha. I am not interested. Had I not made that clear already?”

Sasha's lips drooped and Ilya felt a twinge of guilt. Sasha's voice softened, his cockiness dissipating by a degree.

“I understand, Ilya. Maybe I wanted to...clear the air.”

“About trying to sext me when I was grieving?”

Sasha exhaled, eyebrows drawing sharply together.

“Ilya, our entire relationship was you using sex to cope. I thought that's what you wanted. What you needed from me.”

“No, I needed someone to care about my mother dying, actually.”

Ilya bit off the words, turning his head towards the ocean. He could feel the tears burning behind his eye sockets. He sniffed loudly, sucking them back inside, deep down into the dark vault where he shoved everything.

“I did care, Ilyusha. I do care. And I’m sorry.”

Ilya glared at the ocean, blinking twice to clear the water from his eyes.

“Whatever. It does not matter. We are fine. You will not be here long.”

“No?”

“No.” Ilya turned back to him. “I am not interested.” He glanced around the villa, scoffing. “Unless you pry Leo away from Cici, you will go home soon. You should not have come.”

Sasha’s face hardened, his manicured nail digging a line over the linen tablecloth.

“Leo isn’t my only option. Shane’s hot.”

Ilya felt a blaze spread through his stomach. Sasha held his gaze, eyebrows raised, challenging him.

“He would never look at you.”

“So confident, Ilya.” Sasha leaned forward, folding his hands. “It has been less than a week of him being here with you. Less than a week of him realizing he’s *gay*. Do you remember how wild you said you were when you first came out? How many bodies you ran through?”

Ilya shook his head. “Shane is not me. Everyone is different.”

“Mhm. Okay. Let’s say it works. Shane, a famous athlete, stays with you and only you the entire time he’s on a dating show filled with attractive people. But what happens when the bubble bursts, Ilya? When reality hits? Are you the kind of man *Shane Hollander* will bring home to his parents?”

Sasha sighed theatrically, shaking his head.

“Imagine meeting his sweet mom and dad after you were the one to drag him out of the closet. You may have ruined his entire career at this point for all we know.”

Ilya’s jaw ticked, ears filling with muted static. He wondered what would happen if he punched Sasha’s smug face, if they would kick him off the show immediately. Why had he slept with this man ever, much less on and off for one of the hardest years of his life? He should’ve never opened up. Should’ve never shared anything.

His stomach twisted, sour. Sasha wasn’t wrong. And on top of that, Shane was squeaky clean. A role model. Completely at odds with Ilya’s lifestyle, his campaigns always raunchy, edgy, provocative. Shane’s perfect little family - Ilya had absorbed every bit of media about the Hollanders available - and Ilya could offer...what? A freshly dead mother? A father he left in

Russia, whose wounds on him still ran deep? A brother he no longer spoke to, the absence like a rotting tooth?

Sasha reached a hand out, tracing the back of Ilya's. Ilya flinched away, fingers curling in on themselves.

Sasha sighed. "Fine. Maybe I'll leave your Shane alone."

Sasha's eyes moved languidly from Ilya to the table behind them and then back again with a growing smirk.

"It looks like I'll have more options now, anyway. Seems Hayden is *very* open-minded."

Ilya snapped his head over his shoulder, throat seizing shut as he took in the back of Shane's head, two stupid American hands buried in that hair of his, Shane's hand cradling the man's cheek like he wanted it, like it wasn't a nightmare without explanation.

As soon as the dates ended, Ilya headed straight for Shane. Shane was still lingering next to that man, a bland cut-out of some bad American cliché, all blonde and big-shouldered and stupid.

"Shane!"

He looked over his shoulder at Ilya. Ilya watched as his open smile turned to ice, eyes falling into a deep blankness, as if Ilya was no one. A stranger. It was enough to make Ilya stumble, pausing as he recalculated.

A hand gripped his arm. Rose was glaring up at him, her hair swept up into a ponytail that bobbed fiercely as she hissed at him.

"Why did you tell Shane you had never had a boyfriend?"

Ilya shook his arm free, stepping back towards Shane. She clamped down again.

"*No*. You are going to give him space and let him flirt with whoever he wants to, as much as he wants to, while you explain to me this instant before I stab you with one of my stilettos."

Ilya groaned, giving in and turning to her as the other Islanders welcomed the new arrivals.

"I did not lie. I am not a liar. Sasha was *not* my boyfriend." He cursed in Russian. "Just a very big mistake."

"Really? Because I heard something different from Svetlana."

Ilya's jaw snapped shut, narrowing his eyes at Svetlana across the lawn as she embraced Jackie in a hug.

"It was not...nothing. This is true. But he was not my boyfriend. We fucked. We hung out. Sometimes we didn't. Then we would start talking again. You get the picture."

“So...friends with benefits? While you strung him along for how long?”

Ilya waved his hand. “Maybe a year, at most, with many months of not talking. It was convenient. He is a hairdresser. Sometimes he would be at my shoots, or in the same city. He’s Russian. He can understand things others can’t. Svetlana met him, yes, became friendly. None of this is a boyfriend.”

Rose raised her eyes. “You are very precise with that word. *Boyfriend*. Are you sure you know what it means here, in English? ’Cause I gotta say, it’s sounding like Sasha was your boyfriend.”

“Yes, Rose Landry, I am not an *idiot*.” Ilya stepped closer to her, his patience gone. “He is not my boyfriend because I never *asked* him to be. Because I never wanted him to be. I wanted comfort. I wanted a distraction. My family was falling apart and I was trying to hold myself together. Sasha was willing. But yes, go gossip with Svetlana about me, about how stupid I am for not knowing every fancy English word. I do know this one, Rose, and I know how to count, and my number of boyfriends is zero. Just like Shane.”

Rose swallowed. “Okay. I’m sorry. That was low of me.”

“Yes.” Ilya glared, the idiotic tears pressing behind his eyes again. He shook his head, clearing his vision, and then looked again. Shane was no longer with the dumb American. He was sitting on a daybed next to Sasha, their heads bent towards each other, bodies angled far too close for Ilya’s comfort.

Shane forced himself to focus, his eyes flickering up compulsively to study Sasha’s face. The two of them looked nothing alike. Sasha was lithe and delicate, with a self-satisfied air about him that Shane felt sure he would never possess. He took in Sasha’s tousled locks, noticing Svetlana had styled his hair similarly earlier. Is that what Ilya liked? Was he just some placeholder as Ilya nursed a secret heartbreak?

“And I only wanted you to be in the know, as a courtesy.” Sasha gave him a pitying smile and Shane forced himself back to reality.

“Yeah, sure, of course. Appreciate it. Ilya didn’t, uh, mention any exes. So.”

“Oh, *Ilyusha*.” Sasha drew out the diminutive, his lips seeming to savor the consonants. “He does keep things close to his chest, doesn’t he?”

“I guess...” Shane’s brows drew together.

Sasha sighed. “I mean, even with his mother. I knew his family situation, of course, and still it was hard to get him to open up. Even after a year!”

Shane short-circuited, his hands gripping the pink sheen of the daybed’s cushion. Ilya had shared nothing about his family. Nothing about this man before him. Apparently was still

secretive even after a year (a *year*?) and Shane had been idiotic enough to think their few days together had meant something.

Shane should've known. He had heard the locker room chat about clingy virgins, how girls always get so attached after their first time, all the other misogynistic bullshit that Shane had pretended to know about so it wouldn't be so obvious he was different.

But maybe parts of it were true. Shane had gotten overly attached. Had confused his first experiences for something more. Something significant. While to Ilya it was probably...only fun.

Shane felt Sasha's eyes on him and he forced a smile back on his face, raising his gaze.

"Sure, right. Well, I appreciate you being honest with me, even though you don't owe me anything."

Sasha's eyes darted behind Shane.

"Of course, Shane." He pressed his hand over Shane's, squeezing as he scooted closer. "And while I am interested in seeing if things with Ilya rekindle, I can't say you haven't caught my eye too."

Shane stared at him, eyebrows tangling together, mind fully imploding.

And then a hand was lifting Sasha up by his shirt and hauling him through the air, Shane standing up with a jolt to see Ilya manhandling him across the lawn. Sasha's feet dragged helplessly against the fake turf before Ilya lifted, tossing him clear into the pool.

Sasha let out a half-shout before disappearing under the water. He splashed to the surface a minute later, gasping. He pulled himself up, white shirt clinging to his body, highlighting his nipple piercings, the denim heavy with water and sinking lower around his waist.

Sasha shook his hair like a dog, splashing Ilya, and tore off his mic and mic pack. He stepped closer, nearly as tall as Ilya but half as wide, a slim finger tracing a line down Ilya's chest as he leered.

"If you wanted to get me all wet, you could've just asked."

Shane couldn't see Ilya's face, only saw Sasha tumbling backwards as he was pushed back into the pool.

Shane scoffed, standing up rigidly from the daybeds. He was silly to think Ilya might have wanted to come over to talk to him, to try to explain himself. Clearly Ilya couldn't handle Sasha even talking to someone else without getting insanely jealous. Ex or not, Shane didn't want to see any more of it.

He strode towards where the other Islanders were, beelining towards Hayden. He ignored Jackie at Hayden's side, ignored everyone's low murmurs as they looked towards Ilya and Sasha with wide eyes.

Ilya turned as Shane passed, his voice strangled.

“Shane.”

Shane didn't move his head, didn't reveal anything with his voice.

“You're going to owe the producers a mic pack. Try to keep your jealousy in check next time.”

Ilya's chest tightened, Shane striding even further out of reach.

Behind him, a squirt of water splashed against his ankle. Sasha reclined back in the pool, grin back on his face. Ilya wondered what the going prison sentence was for drowning. It might be worth it.

Hayden tried not to grin as Jackie whispered into his ear, filling him in on her date.

“He's *so* nice. But I don't think I feel the chemistry?” She grimaced. “But it is early.”

“Yeah, you really can't force that stuff though.” Hayden didn't bother lowering his voice, hoping Connie would overhear.

“Speaking of dates...” Jackie lifted her head towards Shane approaching them. “Seems like yours went well.”

“Oh.” Hayden felt his face burning, his smile unconscious as it spread automatically across his face.

“Hey, Shane.”

“Hey. Um. Sorry to interrupt.”

Hayden looked to Jackie, who was already disappearing with Javi to the beanbags.

“No, you're okay, man.”

Hayden waited, Shane stayed silent. Ilya and Sasha spewed things in Russian back and forth in the distance.

“Uh. Everything okay with...all that?”

“Not really.” Shane tried to smile. “Trying to distract myself I guess.” He blinked, face panicking. “Not that I'm trying to use you or anything. You're not just a distraction.”

“Hey, you're okay.” Hayden laughed, grinning a bit. “I don't mind being used.”

He stepped closer, throwing an arm over Shane's shoulder. He pressed his lips against Shane's forehead, pulling him closer. Hayden could feel Shane's body loosen, his body relaxing against Hayden's chest. Shane's voice was muffled against Hayden's shirt.

“Don’t want to hurt you or anything.”

Hayden leaned back a bit to peer at Shane.

“Hey. I just met you. I’m not in love or anything.”

Shane flushed, wincing, as Hayden squeezed his shoulder.

“Besides. It’s a good look for me too. We’re hot commodities, right? Nothing wrong with making people a little jealous.”

Hayden’s eyes scampered to Jackie, catching her eye as she looked up from Javi. She smiled, raising her glass in his direction. Hayden bit back a smile. Shane exhaled.

“Okay. Good.”

Shane let himself lean back into Hayden and Hayden shifted to better hold him, their breath slowly starting to sync together, neither needing to figure anything out at this moment.

Ilya’s leg bounced as he sat on the second-floor lounge chairs, Svetlana by his side. Ilya tracked Sasha below, recently out of the pool with his wet clothing discarded in a pile. Leo and Cici were chatting him up and looking more at his damp clinging boxers than his face.

“You need to breathe, Ilyusha.”

“How am I supposed to breathe when there is this scum in the Villa?”

“Don’t you think that’s a bit harsh?”

Ilya snapped his head to Svetlana, his eyes blazing.

“No, Svetlana, I do not. This man was nothing to me, *nothing*, and now he has come here to ruin the one good thing I have ever had?”

Svetlana exhaled, leaning back against her chair. She contemplated, choosing her words carefully.

“I do not think he meant nothing to you. I was there, remember?”

“There for what? The late night calls for hookups? Months where we didn’t even meet up? There when he couldn’t handle any actual emotions? What, Svetlana?”

Svetlana tensed her hands, voice low.

“Ilya. It is me.”

She switched to Russian, despite no one nearby other than the cameras.

“You were the one who couldn’t handle emotions, my love. Sasha was the first man you had spend the night. The only one you texted more things to than just time and place. I remember, Ilya. Your mother. How he was the one you called.”

“And see how that turned out?”

“How could he know, Ilya? You do not let people in. He was trying. And I think you wanted him to try.”

Ilya shook his head.

“I do not want him.”

“You don’t have to.” Svetlana moved closer, gently brushing his arm. *“I only....”* She sighed. *“It was nice to see you have feelings, my favorite manwhore. It seemed like maybe you wanted more feelings, in your life, at that time.”*

Ilya did not say anything for a long moment, his eyes fixating on Shane, his blue polo a beacon, Rose and the new bombshell flanking him.

“Maybe I did. But what I wanted did not happen. Does not matter now. Sasha is not the one I want.”

“Okay.” Svetlana interlaced her fingers with his, squeezing his hand. *“I only thought you should give it a chance. Now that time has passed.”*

Ilya grunted. Svetlana sighed, leaning into Ilya, her hair brushing his shoulder.

“Rose is mad at me.”

Ilya glanced at her. He slid a thumb over her pout.

“Why?”

“She is very protective of Shane. I don’t think I explained myself well.”

“Shane is mad at me too.”

Svetlana managed a smile.

“Wonder why?”

“I know. But still. I do not understand him. He is mad about Sasha but won’t even speak with me. Won’t let me explain.”

“He’s hurt.”

“Not too hurt to kiss that man.”

“Hayden Pike. You’ve watched his games, Ilya, you know his name.”

Ilya snorted, ignoring her.

“Pike, yes, whatever. Shane kissed him. Was sitting with Sasha. Then told me to keep my jealousy in check. Like I should be so relaxed about it all.”

“It is the nature of the show.” Svetlana raised her shoulder.

“Not a good look, then? For me to be so freaked out about one kiss? Even though it is disgusting?”

“Don’t be a homophobe.” Svetlana laughed, trying to tease him. Ilya did not smile. They were silent for a moment.

“What if he won’t talk to me, Sveta?”

She kissed his shoulder, rocking him back and forth once in her arms.

“He will talk, Ilya. Or at least listen. You can whisper to him as he dreams.”

Ilya sighed, resting his head on top of Svetlana’s, trying to build up the energy to return downstairs.

Shane avoided Ilya all night. It reminded Ilya of his first night in the Villa but turned sour, Shane running from him not with tense flaring desire, but with a hard apathy, his face a shield each time Ilya caught a glimpse.

Ilya made himself be patient, waiting in their bed with his leg still jostling. Across the bedroom, Rose got into bed next to Svetlana, turning immediately away from her. Svetlana looked miserably at her back and then over to Ilya with a sigh.

Lexi and Hayden walked in together, which brightened Ilya’s mood. Javi and Shawna were already whispering in bed, their eyes only mildly frightened when they saw Lexi.

And then Shane entered. Ilya’s posture straightened, his fingers kneading the comforter.. Shane did not look at him, merely grabbed his pillow from his side of the bed.

“Sleeping outside tonight.”

Hayden’s head turned. “Want company?” He glanced at the bed with his name on it. “I don’t think I’ll fit in this tiny twin.”

“Sure.” Shane shrugged.

Ilya’s breath seized, his hand reaching out for Shane’s wrist before he could process fully.

“Shane. Do not go. Let me explain.”

Shane slid his hand coolly out of Ilya’s grasp, glancing up at Sasha as he sashayed into the bedroom.

“Tomorrow. I’m sure you two still have a lot to catch up on.”

And then he was gone, Hayden clasp ing a hand on Shane’s back as they left, blanket thrown over his shoulder. Ilya seethed. If Hayden dared to sleep in Soul Ties, where he and Shane had...He forced himself to exhale, pulling his brain back from his growing hit list.

Shane said they would talk tomorrow. That was something.

Outside, Shane hovered awkwardly in front of one of the daybeds, more self-conscious now that it was only him and Hayden.

“Is this okay?”

“Yeah, wherever you want, buddy!”

Hayden jumped back onto the daybed, flopping out as he tossed the blanket between them.

“You really don’t mind?”

“Nah, man. I don’t know how you get used to sleeping with that many people in the same room.” Hayden propped himself up on an elbow. “Plus, I heard Cici talking about how she wanted to dominate Leo tonight so I don’t mind missing that.”

Shane let out a laugh.

“Yeah, they can be a lot.”

Hayden looked over at him, settling down into his pillow.

“You wanna talk about it?”

Shane froze, his eyes darting sideways.

“Uh. I don’t know. Guess I’m still pretty pissed off that he lied?”

Hayden half-smiled. “I meant our kiss.”

“Oh. Sorry.”

“It’s okay. I just wanted to check in. Make sure we’re cool.”

“Yeah, we’re cool.”

“Good.” Hayden flipped onto his back, hands crossing over his chest. “Cause I’ve never done that. Kissed a dude. And I still don’t think I’m...you know.”

Shane smiled. “Gay. You can say it.”

“Right. Yeah. Gay.” Hayden exhaled slightly. “Can you keep a secret?”

“Obviously.” Shane smiled again.

“Duh, right.” Hayden waited another beat. “I kinda like Jackie?”

Shane’s eyes widened. “Oh.”

“What? Is that bad?”

“It’s...bombscest.”

“It’s *what*?”

Shane turned, laughing into his pillow.

“Sorry. I know it’s a stupid word. It’s just what they call it when two bombshells get together.”

“Ew. Bombscest?”

“Yeah. ’Cause your purpose is to shake up existing couples, not date each other.”

“Oh.”

“It doesn’t mean you can’t.” Shane shifted, tugging the blanket up to his chest. “Only that you may have to wait.”

“Hmm.” Hayden exhaled again. He didn’t like the idea of waiting.

“Oh, you really like her.”

Hayden’s head snapped. Shane was grinning at him, his finger reaching out to poke Hayden’s red cheeks.

“Shut up!”

Hayden grabbed Shane’s finger, wrestling his hand closer until Shane was closer to him. He folded his palm over Shane’s hand, resting it on his chest as Shane nuzzled into his neck. Hayden’s other hand started drawing slow circles on his back, causing Shane to let out a contented sigh.

“Glad I met you, Hayden.”

“Glad I met you too, Shane.”

“Kinda crazy. All this.”

“Yeah.” Hayden let out a short laugh. “I’m trying not to think about it.”

“Good.” Shane snuggled closer, his breath sending goosebumps across Hayden’s skin. “I like not thinking.”

NEXT TIME...ON HEATED ISLAND...

Tomorrow night...a game about assumptions gets things messy! Sometimes the enemy of your enemy...is the person you kiss?

And don't forget to vote, America - the least popular Islander will be dumped from the Villa.

[outro music plays]

Chapter End Notes

sorry for the angst!! this IS a reality show after all, we gotta have the drama! they'll get to their happy ending eventually, it may just take a minute...

and once again i am more long-winded than planned so we'll get to our next challenge game next installment. it'll feature lots of kissing. everyone kissing everyone. probably while crying. this IS love island.

Chapter 9

Chapter Summary

miscommunications multiply! in a challenge game about assumptions, feelings get hurt and people who have never kissed before do in fact, kiss!

Chapter Notes

Y'all everyoneee needs therapy. Heads up that Shane gets a bit slut-shamey in this one. He's working on it, promise.

Also, the boys get a little pushy/shovey here. No one is hurt and it's not done with intention of causing bodily harm etc, but in case anyone is sensitive to that, I wanted to give fair warning!

Translations:

Не думайте, что я так легко сдамся.
Don't think that I will give up so easily.

Ты моя. Моя.
You're mine. Mine.

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

Ilya woke early, willing himself not to throw back the covers and immediately check Soul Ties for Hayden and Shane. He waited for the lights. He waited for the other Islanders to grumble and chitchat. He waited until his heart wasn't pounding hard enough to make him dizzy, and then he stood up and exited the bedroom.

Soul Ties was empty and undisturbed. Ilya let out a breath he hadn't known he was holding, a smile flitting to his face. He jogged downstairs, heading straight to the kitchen to whip up breakfast for Shane. Ilya placed a bagel in the toaster before pressing the lid down on the blender for Shane's protein shake. He rolled out his neck and shoulders, the tension from his poor night's sleep still lingering. His gaze drifted, catching on the daybeds where two figures were lumped together.

Ilya's stomach dropped. He stared as Shane sat up and stretched, laughing at something Hayden said below him. Ilya forced his eyes back to Shane's protein shake, pouring it into a

glass. Soul Ties was intimate, sexual. But the daybeds...had Shane just cuddled with him all night? Talking until they fell asleep in each other's arms?

"Hi."

Ilya jerked his head up at the familiar voice. Shane stood in front of him, his eyes fixed down at the counter. Ilya's voice was gruff, aiming for unaffected.

"Ah. You're speaking to me now?"

Shane looked up with a glare and Ilya couldn't help the instant smile that spread across his face. Ilya missed those live wire eyes, that angry spurt of red that happened when Shane got pissed off. Far superior to the way Shane had been looking through him like a ghost lately.

Hayden tiptoed behind them at a safe distance, walking up the stairs to give them space. Ilya flipped him off regardless. Shane half-turned. His glare draining away, something like guilt replacing it, though his shoulders stayed stiff

"I figured it was only fair to let you explain."

Ilya exhaled. "Thank you. I would like to. I did not trick you - I would not do that to you."

Shane made a face and Ilya moved closer, caressing his wrist across the counter.

"Shane. I promise. I...should have explained more about my past, maybe. But he was never my boyfriend."

A slender hand snaked around Ilya's waist, the protein shake clinking in a glass Sasha held in his other hand.

"Thanks for breakfast, baby." Sasha pressed a kiss to Ilya's cheek, murmuring loud enough for Shane to hear. "думайте, что я так легко сдамся."

Ilya short-circuited, Sasha sashaying across the lawn as Shane scoffed and strode in the other direction, his voice wavering over his shoulder.

"Sure you don't want him to be?"

"Shane! *He* is the liar!"

Ilya's voice behind him continued, getting fainter as Shane's walk sped into nearly a run. His brain buzzed, stimuli overlapping: Hayden's warm arm wrapped around him all night, how Ilya's face had broken wide into a smile that fixed something in Shane's chest, the Russian words Sasha said like a secret Shane would never know.

Suddenly arms were around him.

"Shane, whoa, slow down." Rose peered at him. "What happened?"

“Can’t. Need to be alone.” Shane shoved her off, ducking into the Speakeasy. Thankfully, no one was trying to hook up this early in the morning. He faceplanted into the velvet couch, hands pressing over his ears, eyes pushing into darkness. He made himself breath slowly, waiting for the vice on his chest to lessen.

Rose hovered at the edge of the kitchen. Ilya was slumped on the floor with his hands over his eyes, knees pressed to his chest.

“Um, what is going on? Y’all are appropriating lesbian levels of drama right now.”

Ilya didn’t laugh. Rose softened her tone, dropping down next to him.

“Hey. I promise I’m not here to pile on. I unfortunately need your help because Svetlana says she likes the special way *you* usually make eggs for her.”

Ilya scoffed slightly, rolling his forehead across his knees. “I am not good for anything right now.”

Rose reached out a tentative hand, stroking his back.

“He still won’t talk to you?”

“He did. He tried.” Ilya brought his face up, his hands tightening. “Fucking Sasha ruined it. But Shane... he won’t *try* to trust me. It’s like he’s waiting for me to fuck up. To let him down.” Ilya shook his head.

“Oh, honey.” Rose’s face softened, scooting closer to him.

She exhaled, leaning her head back against the cabinets.

“I can’t say I know exactly how Shane feels. He’s pretty private. But from what I gathered... you’re kinda like...his celebrity crush and gay awakening wrapped into one? And then you were here, in person, and kissing him? And liking him? I don’t know...I could see how he’d freak out a bit about that. It probably feels too good to be true.”

Ilya shook his head. “I am not too good.” He frowned, face darkening. “And he has no problem kissing Hayden.”

“Ilya. Please remember that Shane is a massive rule-following, competitive *freak* on a show that revolves around hooking up.” Rose laughed. “Plus Hayden’s cute.”

“Hey!” Ilya pushed against her shoulder, laughing a bit in shock. “I thought you were supposed to be comforting me.”

“Mm, I’m actually just buttering you up so you’ll make Sveta eggs already.” She sniffed the air, getting a whiff of the burnt bagel. “Though maybe today’s not hte best morning.”

“Sveta, eh?”

Rose flushed. "Shut up."

She glanced behind her, the boys starting to come down the stairs as she squeezed his shoulder, standing back up.

"Don't doubt yourself Ilya. Aren't supermodels supposed to be vain? Where's your ego, hm? If that's your man...well. Remind him of it."

Shane stood in front of the bathroom mirror. He had slipped out of the Speakeasy once his breathing had stabilized, muscles less shaky now. The Islanders' laughter drifted from the dressing rooms, production having brought in themed outfits for their challenge that day. He'd have to join them soon.

Shane stared at his reflection. His eyes were red and puffy, though not as obvious as earlier. His skin was pale, drained, freckles popping out against his sallow skin.

So maybe Ilya hadn't lied. Not completely. But Sasha was here, in the fucking Villa, brushing by Ilya every chance he got. Maybe he had even snuck into Shane's bed last night when he was with Hayden, keeping Ilya warm. Shane's stomach seized. He was too proud to ask Rose. He had been avoiding her and Svetlana all morning, cutting her off each time she tried to explain something. She was supposed to be on his side, not Ilya's. And Rose looked at him with too much understanding for someone who had only known him for a week, her eyes piercing straight to his stupid bleeding heart.

At least there was still Hayden. Shane's chest eased somewhat. He took another look at his reflection, glaring at his pathetic face crying over the first guy he had kissed. So Ilya had other men. Big deal. He was Shane Hollander. This was being filmed and broadcast into more households than he wanted to think about. He wasn't going to be some little bitch for a supermodel who had been around the block and then some.

Shane raised his chin. This was a game. And he was going to play it.

The cameras rolled, filming footage that would be switched to slow motion for the broadcast. The girls went first, flouncing over the green hills in tea dresses, all tight bodices and short layered skirts, florals and soft pastels everywhere. Svetlana and Rose held hands as they skipped, the bows on their knee-high sheer tights bobbing with each stride, not having to exaggerate their smiles for the camera.

The boys came next, dapper sets for everyone with only suit vests provided, leaving muscular arms and chests exposed. Ilya was in a deep burgundy pin-striped outfit, the lines curving around his thighs and ass so lewdly Shane had to tear his gaze away. Shane's pants were aubergine, the wide matching cumberbund tight around his waist to hold in the billowy white dress tank above.

Ariana waited for them on set, her teeth sparkling. She twirled the frilled parasol resting on her shoulders, swishing her off-the-shoulder houndstooth dress, white scarf knotted at her

neck.

“Welcome Islanders! So good to see you again!”

The Islanders formed a semi-circle around her, clapping.

“Today’s challenge is *Spill the Tea*. Islanders, this phone will ring and ask a question.” She gestured to a red telephone booth standing to one side. “You will kiss an Islander to indicate your answer. The first round is factual, however, so if you answer incorrectly, the Islander you chose will display their displeasure.”

Ariana reached for the teacup on a table next to her, tossing the liquid in the direction of the Islanders with a cheeky gasp and a wink.

“For the second round, the questions are about opinions - no right or wrong answers. Merely kiss or spill tea on whichever naughty Islander you think fits best.”

Ariana took a sip of the remaining tea, looking up coyly over the rim of her cup.

“Choose wisely, Islanders. Now spill. That. Tea!”

Rose was in the booth first. The phone rang, automated voice booming out of loud speakers.

“Which Islander has vowed to save themselves for marriage?”

Rose stepped out of the telephone booth, bouncing down the line of Islanders, finger wiggling over each person.

“Hmm. I think I’ll choose...Svetlana.”

Shane frowned as they kissed, long and deep, continuing even after a buzzer sounded.

Lexi I. huffed. “Obviously. Everyone knows it’s me.”

Svetlana grinned as she grabbed a teacup, carefully running the liquid over the top of Rose’s dress where the bodice scooped up her chest into quite the receptacle. Svetlana lowered her tongue, drawing a line over the liquid that pooled there, dipping slightly into Rose’s cleavage until she let out a shivering sigh.

Svetlana flounced off the phone booth while Rose returned to the line, Shane actively scowling now.

“That’s not how you play, Rose. You knew the answer was Lexi. And she’s supposed to *toss* the tea, like she’s mad, not whatever the fuck that was.”

Rose scoffed. “Oh, quiet, Shane. If you’d just kiss him already, maybe you’d start having fun too.”

“That’s not how the game *works*-”

Shane was cut off as Svetlana chose Rose for her question, incorrect again, their tongues seeming to search for something buried in each other’s mouths. Shane rolled his eyes.

Jackie entered the booth, Hayden whistling as she walked past. The automated voice started once she picked up the phone.

“Which Islander has previously cheated on a past partner?”

Shane crossed his arms tighter, not bothering to lower his voice.

“Probably Ilya.”

Ilya scowled, starting to say something. Jackie shrugged, biting her lip apologetically as she motioned to him.

“Sorry, I don’t know anyone well enough to guess!”

“Is fine.” Ilya looked at Shane, then Hayden, then back to Shane before smirking. “But remember, you must kiss me if I am your answer.”

“Oh, right.”

Jackie flushed slightly, leaning up as she placed her hands around Ilya’s shoulders. He looked down at her through his narrow red sunglasses before grabbing her waist, pulling her in closer, her pink skirt flaring up slightly with the motion. Hayden cursed under his breath. Ilya’s eyes slid past Jackie, pinning down Shane as he lolled his tongue into her mouth for an extended kiss. He finally released her, Jackie stumbling slightly before straightening, hands smoothing down her bodice.

The buzzer sounded. Ilya spread out his hands, eyes still on Shane.

“I have never cheated. Hard to do when you do not have a boyfriend.”

“Yeah, it’s me. It was only one time, ladies, I swear!” Javi winced, waving his hands in surrender as the girls booed him.

“Sorry, Ilya.” Jackie grabbed her teacup, offering it to him for the spill, her eyes clamping shut in preparation. Ilya considered it with a growing smile and shook his head.

Ilya’s gaze drifted back to Shane as he unbuttoned his already low-cut vest, baring his chest for her. Ilya held her wrist gently, moving it towards him. His eyes didn’t leave Shane as the tea poured over him, Shane’s tongue flicking over his lips involuntarily as the liquid ran in rivulets over Ilya’s sizable pecs.

It was Shane’s turn. He walked stiffly to the booth, turning over his shoulder.

“Just a reminder that the person who got the question wrong is supposed to get spilled on. Since no one is playing this game right.”

He thought he saw Ilya's lips twitch before he stepped inside the booth, picking up the phone to listen to the question.

"Which Islander has had the highest number of sexual partners?"

Shane's jaw twitched. "This one actually would be you."

Ilya met his gaze with an eyebrow raise, daring him. Shane felt stuck. Ilya had made no secret of his openness when it came to sex, which was just another reason it was stupid for Shane to put any stock in their meager handful of hookups. But choosing Ilya would mean...

"Well? Are you going to stay in your little box all day?" Ilya tilted his chin up, smirking.

Shane's nostrils flared. He strode out of the telephone booth, grabbing Ilya's wrist roughly and yanking him towards him. Their lips met harshly at first, pressure almost painful. Then Ilya moaned, a quiet thing that only Shane heard. The effect was immediate. Shane could feel his muscles surrender, coming undone at an embarrassing rate. He whimpered back, hands running up beneath the back of Ilya's open vest on instinct alone, hot and desperate. Ilya's hand snuck into Shane's top, broad palm cupping one of his pecs, thumb tweaking his nipple. Shane felt his cock twitch and he pushed Ilya back roughly, wiping his lips on the back of his hand, breath catching.

The buzzer sounded.

Ilya's gaze was steady behind his shades, something almost melancholy around the corners of his smile.

"You are wrong about me. Again."

"Yeah, c'mon, Shane, women can be whores too!" Cici flipped her hair back and forth over her shoulders, grinning widely. "As if Ilya could have my number beat."

"That's my baby!" Leo kissed her cheek, patting the side of her ass with loud smacks.

"And now your punishment."

Ilya held up his teacup, moving closer to Shane. Shane squeezed his eyes shut, trying not to think about the sticky residue that would cling to his clothes and skin. A firm touch pressed against his chin, pulling slightly on his lower lip. Shane's eyes fluttered open, Ilya nearly chest-to-chest with him.

"Open for me."

Shane's jaw opened automatically, tongue extending before he could feel the shame of it. Ilya raised the cup, pouring the liquid in a long line into Shane's mouth, thumb closing his jaw with a gentle snap as the slight overflow dripped out the sides of Shane's lips.

Shane swallowed, legs suddenly shaky. Ilya looked at him, inhaling slightly. He leaned in, a soft swirl of his tongue drifting over Shane's chin to clean the liquid that had escaped his lips,

the edge of his tongue barely skimming Shane's bottom lip. Shane forced his lips to stay closed.

"*Wow!*" Ariana fanned herself with her cue cards. "Do you boys need a private tearoom?"

The Islanders burst into laughs and whoops and Shane pulled away harshly, not looking at Ilya as he rejoined the line, pulse jumping rapidly.

The first round continued, Ilya trained on Shane without pause. He strode to Shane before questions even finished, mouth swallowing him whole without hesitation. Shane's head felt murkier and murkier, Ilya's skin soon coated in sticky tea from all his incorrect answers, more ridiculous each time.

Shane shook his head. "Obviously I haven't been with two women in the same night? You're getting these all wrong."

Ilya grinned, squeezing Shane's ass as he pulled him in tighter for another kiss. "For a smart man, you can be so very stupid."

Shane pushed him away, again, as he had been, but with barely any force this time.

Ariana's voice rang out. "This is the final question of this round. And there are multiple correct answers!"

Svetlana danced into the booth, dress absolutely drenched in tea from Rose's many incorrect answers, only further highlighting her curves as the fabric clung tighter to her body.

"Which Islander has never been in love?"

Svetlana's eyes went to Shane first. He felt his ears burn, all his inexperience on clear display. But she merely held his gaze, purposeful, as she walked over to Ilya, pulling him forward. She jumped in his arms, him receiving her like second-nature, and only then did she turn her eyes from Shane down to Ilya, kissing him short and sweet.

There was no buzzer.

The Islanders clapped. Ariana smiled.

"Well, done, Svetlana. Shane and Hayden also would've been correct answers."

Hayden glanced at him, Shane giving him a small smile back. A few people down from Hayden, Sasha scratched the ground with his left foot, face drawn. Shane's stomach twisted, and he looked away.

"It is now time for round two! No right answers this time, just tea to be *spilled*. Remember, you can choose your answer with either a kiss or a toss of your tea!"

Hayden was first in the telephone booth, listening as he cradled the phone to his ear.

“Who is the best kisser in the Villa?”

Shane’s lips quirked. Hayden had kissed a couple Islanders in the first round, but Shane was the only one he’d kissed outside of a challenge.

Hayden scratched his neck, a shy smile on his face.

“Well. I don’t know for sure yet...but I’d like to find out.”

He extended a hand to Jackie, pulling her forward. They hesitated for a moment, eyes scanning each other, and then he leaned down, soft and tender. Shane frowned, something turning in his stomach. He glanced to his right and saw Ilya frowning too, turning away sharply once Shane noticed him staring.

Hayden and Jackie parted, holding hands until they stepped back into line, Sasha making his way to the booth. Shane narrowed his eyes. Sasha had been quiet so far, intentionally choosing Islanders other than Ilya during the first round though his eyes tracked him regardless.

“Who is here for clout over love?”

Sasha meandered down the line of Islanders. Leo hovered forward, eager for another kiss from him, but Sasha ignored him. Shane felt the double drop of his stomach as Sasha stopped in front of Ilya, his mind scrambling again. Sasha knew Ilya on the outside, and intimately. Most people did come on these shows for publicity. It wasn’t that hard to believe, or necessarily bad. In a way, Shane could be said to be on for clout too, but-

Shane’s brain stopped forming thoughts as Sasha slung graceful arms around Ilya’s neck, leaning into him like a dancer. Ilya’s hands stayed at his side, his body stiff. Sasha’s lips parted, spreading Ilya’s as he leaned forward, the kiss only lasting a moment. He said something in Russian as they parted, Ilya saying something sharp in retort. Shane’s stomach twisted again, desperate to know what had been said.

Sasha switched to English as he stepped back in line.

“Not an exhibitionist anymore, Ilyusha? Remember that afterparty in Paris, where you had me on stage? So funny to see you so shy now.”

Shane’s ears flared, heat rising. He might prefer Russian.

His turn was next. Shane avoided Ilya’s gaze as he walked to the telephone booth, head aching. Was it all a marketing ploy for Ilya? Ilya said he came here for Shane...was that proof? Was he riding the rumors of Shane’s sexuality for some extra press, stoking the romance storyline for more screentime?

The phone message blared, pausing the whirlpool of his thoughts.

“Which Islander would you couple up with if your current partner wasn't here?”

Shane focused on the automated voice, considering. The safe answer would be Rose, since they had been partnered before Ilya. But that would be a lie, and Shane didn't like lies. If the truth would also would cause a bit of...jealousy, he couldn't say he hated that.

Shane reached for Hayden's hand with a soft smile. He could feel Ilya radiating heat a few people down, his eyes burning into him. Hayden followed Shane like a puppy, bumping against him as they stumbled back slightly.

Shane felt his face flush, not prepared for the audience, the Islanders starting to chant. "*Kiss, kiss, kiss!*"

Hayden laughed, then eased forward slightly, nose skimming Shane's in a question. Shane closed his eyes and let himself be kissed. It was sweet, dipping deeper enough for a flame of warmth to spread under Shane's skin. He smiled, pulling back, and Hayden stumbled, chasing his lips slightly, his eyes still closed.

Shane felt himself flush again, kissing Hayden's neck briefly and squeezing his shoulder. Hayden's eyes flickered open and he cleared his throat, stepping back.

"Thanks, man."

"Man?" Shane grinned, snorting.

"Hayden, you are so bad at being gay." Sasha rolled his eyes.

"I'm not *gay*, I'm-

"Shane-sexual." Shane grinned wider, not bothering to hide his glee.

The Islanders whooped louder at that, Shane laughing and bumping shoulders as they returned to their place in line.

Ilya stalked into the telephone booth. Shane's laughter died instantly, taking in the tight roll of Ilya's shoulders, rage coming off in waves of heat Shane could almost feel.

"Who is the least trustworthy Islander in the villa?"

Ilya slammed the phone back down as he hung, his teeth bared in a poor imitation of a smile.

"Easy. Pike." He whistled, motioning for Pike to join him in the center.

Pike approached warily, raising his eyebrows.

"All right dude, just don't waterboard me with the tea or something."

"Oh, I am not tossing tea on you." Ilya patted the side of Hayden's face with restrained softness, the eerie grin still on his face.

"But..." Hayden tilted his head.

“Pucker up, Pike.”

Shane’s mouth dropped open. Ilya had been choosing only Shane for kisses whenever possible, keeping everything short or dispassionate after his kiss with Jackie.

Hayden looked similarly unsure. Ilya waited, his hand remaining on Hayden’s cheek, the rest of his body not making any movement.

“Um. Okay. I guess...”

Ilya tilted his head, tone gentler for a moment. “Are you sure?”

“Yeah, man. For the game. Whatever.”

“Whatever.” Ilya’s lips shot up in a grin again.

He stepped closer, crowding Hayden’s space, his hand tracing down Hayden’s cheek and lifting his jaw up. Shane could see Hayden’s breath quickening, probably from sheer panic. Ilya leaned in, his lips tender as they brushed over Hayden’s. Hayden tilted his head up further, leaning in slightly, wanting more.

Ilya descended. His mouth moved over Hayden’s with trained skill, hands coming around to grab the small of Hayden’s back, pulling him closer. They pulled apart for a moment and Shane could see the slide of their tongues as they dove back in. Shane could feel his heart accelerating, each rapid beat seizing his body in a wave of dizziness.

And then Hayden’s hand reached up, threading through the nape of Ilya’s neck, anchoring in his golden curls. Shane’s stomach seized, sour bile burning up his throat. Rose reached over Cici to squeeze his hand but Shane released quickly, eyes fixated on Ilya, who was doing exactly what Shane had been afraid of.

Kissing Hayden like he kissed Shane. Like he was interchangeable. Like it meant nothing.

And now he had the visual to match his fears, hard proof that Ilya could kiss someone else as deeply, as passionately, as it felt when he kissed Shane. Shane couldn’t see anything different about the way Ilya held Hayden than how he held him, nothing to differentiate, to make Shane feel like he mattered. It was so stupid. A closeted gay guy falling for a supermodel and thinking they might, what, end up *boyfriends*? Shane’s fingernails dug into the flesh of his palms, piercing through so the pain would keep him standing.

They finally parted, Ilya’s lips red and full, eyes coming up to snag Shane’s. Shane started him down, mind finally clear. He felt his senses hone in like it did in the rink, when he found an opponent’s weak spots, spotting the chinks in their armor where he could glide in and wrestle victory out of their overconfident arms.

Shane waited for his turn patiently, other questions background noise behind the white static of his muffled hearing. When it was finally his turn, his question was perfect.

“Which Islander do you think has an active roster on the outside?”

Shane scoffed. “Clearly.”

He jutted his head at Ilya, who stepped forward, shaking his head with a scowl. Ilya’s scowl deepened when Shane reached for the tea cup, the liquid hitting Ilya across the face. Ilya did not flinch, but when he opened his eyes again, they were flat, nothing there threading between them. Shane hesitated, the teacup almost slipping out of his hand.

He returned to the line a halfstep after Ilya. It was supposed to feel victorious. Hayden leaned over with a loud whisper.

“Hey, I’m really sorry I kissed him, man. I think I kinda got carried away, but you’re way better, I promise. Still Shane-sexual, dude!”

Shane forced his lips to smile as he nodded tightly, his eyes drifting back to Ilya as the Islanders nearby snickered. Ilya’s glower was back, replacing the empty expression, something sparking back to life in Shane’s chest.

More questions flew by. Since Ilya kissed Hayden, the other Islanders took that to mean he was fair play. Shane forced himself to watch as seemingly endless kisses unfolded before him, Ilya resisting none, his eyes not even bothering to find Shane’s anymore. It was like he didn’t exist anymore.

“Final question for our challenge! Shane, it’s all yours.” Ariana gestured to the phonebooth.

Shane stepped in.

“Which Islander is the biggest threat to your couple?”

Well, that was obvious. And humiliating after a round of humiliations. Shane dragged his eyes to Ilya. His vest was plastered to his chest from the tea, his lips swollen from all his kisses. Cici had left a fading mark on the side of his neck that Ilya hadn’t bothered to prevent.

Shane’s mind whirled as he walked slowly to Sasha, gesturing him forward. Sasha sighed, his back to the Islanders as he faced Shane with a bored expression, a smirk playing on his face.

“Just try not to toss it in my hair, yeah? My styling products are not cheap.”

Shane’s hand hovered over the teacup. He glanced over at Ilya, his face nearly a mirror of Sasha’s: bored and devoid of emotion, eyes passing over Shane as though he was just a part of the landscape. Shane set his jaw. Fine.

He stepped to Sasha, whose eyes widened as he processed that Shane was leaving the tea behind. His lips curved into a smile, eyebrows raising as he leaned in. Sasha was taller than him, but Shane was not about to go up on his fucking tiptoes. He scruffed Sasha by the neck, dragging him down to his lips.

Shane pressed hard and deep, tongue instantly slipping inside. Sasha opened for him, body yielding to Shane’s touch. Shane’s brows furrowed, tongue mapping the anatomy of Sasha’s mouth, tracing where Ilya had been, where Ilya had wanted to be for nearly an entire year.

His hands were desperate as they roamed over Sasha's body, feeling what Ilya had felt, wanting to know, wanting to understand. Ilya had been here, pressed against this body, and Shane wanted to dissect it like an anatomy project, his fingertips tracing Sasha like scalpels. He couldn't find the answers. Even if he could peel back each layer of Sasha's skin, there would be no answer. No solution. Nausea and desire collided within him, his eyes starting to water embarrassingly.

Shane ripped his mouth away, pushing down a soft sob, and yanked Sasha so he was behind him, chest cradling Shane's back. Shane grabbed Sasha's hand, cupping it to his neck as he arched back, eyes finding Ilya's.

Ilya was vibrating with rage. Shane sighed out a smile, taking in the tight hold of Ilya's body, the way his lips were pressed against each other in a shaking line. Shane narrowed his eyes, his lips spreading in a challenge, letting a moan ramp up from his throat and vibrate into the air.

Shane fell to the ground. He blinked, glancing behind him as he pushed himself up on the artificial turf. Ilya had shoved Sasha off, his long limbs tangled a few feet away. Then Ilya was in front of him, raising him by the scruff of his neck, sealing his lips in a deep kiss. Shane gasped, feeling the line of hardness between Ilya's legs.

“Ты моя. Моя.” Ilya's voice was a low snarl in his ear and Shane whimpered, genuinely this time.

The producers hovered at the edge of the scene, eyeing the three of them. The cameras kept rolling, not stopping unless the violence switched from good television to something they'd get backlash for if they kept shooting. One camera swung to Ariana, who quickly composed herself, blinking into the lens.

“Islanders! Thank you for playing *Spill the Tea*! Now return to the Villa and get ready to party - a farewell party that is.”

Murmurs spread across the Islanders. She lowered her head.

“Yes, unfortunately, America has been voting, and one of you will be leaving. Tonight.”

Ariana held her grim smile until the cameras cut. Shane looked up, starting to say something to Ilya, but Ilya let go and scrambled back from him without another word, striding away to join the others.

Shane's heart stayed at a steady vibration throughout the farewell party. He watched Ilya without approaching, everyone dressed in all black, Ilya's skin looking particularly golden with the contrast. Even Sasha kept his distance, taking in Ilya's set jaw, his hand gripped tight around his wine glass as the Islanders were encouraged to dance to bad pop music for a montage.

Shane barely reacted when the texts started coming in, blinking once when Hannah let out a scream when she was voted off. He patted her back in a loose hug, murmuring something

generic.

The Islanders followed her upstairs to say their farewells as she packed, many of them sobbing dramatically. Shane's senses sharpened as Ilya took a sudden turn by the staircase, slipping into the Speakeasy instead.

Shane hesitated, then opened the door after him, closing it softly behind him.

Ilya spun around.

"What do you *want*, Shane?"

The force of his voice flattened Shane against the wall, full of self-doubt again.

"I. Wanted to check on you. Make sure you weren't grieving too hard about Hannah. Since you kissed her and all."

Shane raised his jaw.

"Just like everyone else."

Ilya strode across the room, boxing Shane in with his arms on either side, his face twisted into something furious.

"Ah, yes, I am some slut to you. You have made that clear."

"You're the one who made it clear." Shane pushed off the wall, forcing Ilya to step back.

"And you're so pure? Only me, and Pike, and Rose sometimes when you are confused, and whatever new man may come in as a bombshell? Yes, so superior, Shane."

"Sorry you won't get to be my first for *everything*! Must be a real bummer not to laugh at my inexperience all the time."

Ilya's face froze.

"What did you and Pike do?"

"What? No, we didn't..." Shane trailed off, taking in Ilya's face. His voice softened. "I haven't done anything more than what I've done with you."

Ilya exhaled. "Good."

Shane's anger flared up again, his palms pushing Ilya's chest back so that he stumbled against the velvet couch.

"Good?! So...what, I just wait for you to play with me like some toy? Once you're done with Sasha and Cici and literally every other Islander in here?"

Ilya's lips twitched up into a smile. "You are insanely jealous. It is very concerning."

Shane pushed Ilya's wrists into the couch, mounting him.

"I am not insane." Shane blinked rapidly, his eyes teary again.

Ilya easily slid a wrist out of Shane's grip, his thumb sliding over his face, the teasing in his voice gone.

"Hey, it is okay. You are okay."

He leaned up to kiss Shane's cheek, but Shane pushed him back.

"Stop treating me like I'm so fucking fragile!" Ilya blinked at Shane. "I'm not some virgin!"

"Aren't you?"

"Well, at least I'm not a whore!"

Ilya groaned, tossing Shane out of his lap as he stood, his tone cutting.

"Hollander. I am sick of this. Yes, I love to fuck. Men, women, whoever, *yes*. So what? This is not some evil thing. I do not judge you for not having much experience. Do not judge me for the opposite."

"Of course you judge me!" Shane stood up from the couch too, his cheeks blotchy. "You laugh at me all the time, and I *know* I don't know what I'm doing yet, and...Sasha...and other people do, and - "

"Ah, Hollander, no." Ilya waved his hand. "I do not laugh at you. If I laugh, it is because of you. You are funny, sometimes. Cute. This is why I laugh. I am never mocking. Never with this." He motioned between them.

Shane said nothing, his hands curling and unfurling into fists. Ilya tilted his head.

"What? You are used to being the best, at everything, always?"

Shane sniffed. "No."

"Then what is the problem?"

Shane swallowed, not able to look at Ilya. "I want to be. I need to be. For you."

He heard Ilya step closer, his footsteps steady. A hand grazed his jaw, tilting his gaze up.

"And if I said you already are. Would you even believe it?"

Shane trembled, gazing at Ilya for a moment. Ilya's eyes were questioning, something sad beneath the teasing. Shane broke, crashing into him, his mouth needy, hands clawing at Ilya's dark shirt. He felt a low chuckle against his lips, Ilya lifting him and flipping him onto the couch, straddling him and pinning his wrists. Ilya leaned in, jaw scraping against Shane's neck, his voice low.

“Who is the whore now?”

Shane squirmed, flushing. Ilya pressed harder against Shane’s wrists.

“Who am I to you, Shane? Hm? Am I just your whore,” Ilya leaned down, licking a strip of skin up the side of Shane’s throat. “Or will you let me be something more than that?”

Shane whimpered, thrusting his hips up, feeling his cock harden even more. Ilya leaned down, kissing him harder this time, a bit of an edge behind his lips. Shane met him there, licking into his mouth with the fervor of everything that had been trapped and building inside him, moaning it all into Ilya’s mouth in a trembling release.

They rolled again, Shane back in Ilya’s lap as they half-rose towards each other, panting. Shane shoved Ilya’s chin up, his mouth swallowing the tender skin beneath his jaw. Ilya winched slightly, hands flexing against Shane’s ass.

“Ah, you are trying to mark me? Like rabid kitten?”

“Yes.” Shane dragged his teeth against Ilya’s neck, Ilya shivering in response. “You’re mine.”

Ilya groaned, grabbing Shane’s ass tighter, his hips bucking beneath him.

“Say it again.”

“You’re mine, Ilya. You’re fucking *mine*.” Shane burrowed into his neck, lips covering the pitiful mark Cici had left, branding it with his own, his muscles shaking.

“Your clothes. Off.” Ilya pushed back, breathless, struggling out of his shirt, Shane eagerly discarding his own before grabbing at Ilya’s pants.

Shane sank down, nosing at Ilya’s boxers with a low groan, his breath hot over Ilya’s hard cock. Ilya lifted his hips, letting Shane pull off the clothing that remained. His cock sprung free, Shane nearly salivating at the sight. He lowered himself immediately, lips parting as he began to bob up and down, the motion still new to him. His mind tried to remember every detail from the shower even as he began drifting into a blissful haze, everything fading to just the feeling of his lips around Ilya, his mouth finally full, body finally complete.

All too soon, Ilya was grabbing his hair, cursing under his breath and hauling him up. Shane whined, straddling him again, sliding back and forth over his shaft as he drew Ilya’s fingers into his mouth instead. Ilya threw his head back, his curses multiplying, throat already mottling with Shane’s marks.

“I want you so bad, Ilya. Too much.” Shane mumbled into his ear, nuzzling himself tighter against Ilya’s body.

Ilya let out another curse, flipping Shane so that he was spooning him, Ilya’s arms wrapping firmly around Shane’s body. His cock slid in between Shane’s muscular thighs, Shane pressing them together automatically and smiling at Ilya’s inhale behind him. Ilya began to thrust, his hips snapping against Shane’s ass, the slaps echoing across the small room.

Shane's breath quickened as Ilya's shaft skimmed over his hole before pushing forward between his thighs again. Ilya's speech was mostly Russian now, an ongoing stream of consonants streaming over Shane's shoulder as he thrust forward, his English faltering.

"Fuck, Shane. So good."

Shane reached his arm back, grabbing the nape of Ilya's neck and holding him closer, arching his ass back to grind into him deeper.

"Say...say I'm better than him. Tell me."

"*Fuck.*" Ilya's breath was hot on Shane's ear. "Better, Shane. Best. The best."

Ilya kissed his shoulder sloppily, hand coming down to wrap around Shane's twitching cock. Shane whimpered, the sensation of Ilya's tight grip mixing with the English words he could understand. *Better. The best.*

"Fuck, Ilya, don't stop, please, I'm so close..."

"Mine, Shane. Mine." Ilya gave his dick an extra squeeze, his voice a growl in Shane's ear.

"Yours. I'm yours, Ilya, *fuck* - " Shane seized, feeling himself spill over his stomach, Ilya thrusting between his thighs twice more and then joining him, the aftershocks ripping through his body.

They exhaled, shakily, Ilya's hand slowly unwrapping from Shane's cock, splattered with both of their cum. His hand trailed up, Shane parting his lips to receive his fingers, eyes closing as he hummed around the fullness. Ilya's voice came out ragged.

"You will kill me, Shane Hollander."

Shane hummed happily, still half-dazed, dick twitching hopefully at the feeling of his brimming mouth.

"And Shane?" Ilya's voice lowered, steadier. "You do not sleep with Pike tonight. You sleep in *our* bed. You are *my* couple. You understand this?"

Shane mumbled out an affirmation around Ilya's fingers and Ilya grinned, slowly withdrawing his fingers and squeezing Shane's cheeks with them.

"My good boy. The best boy, yes?"

Shane flushed, turning and curling into Ilya's chest with his head bowed, Ilya's voice breathy against his ear as he rubbed soft circles over Shane's back.

"After Hannah, of course. She was my favorite. I should probably leave the island with her."

Shane leaned back, smacking him with a grin, Ilya's eyes dancing above him as they settled.

NEXT TIME...ON HEATED ISLAND...

Tomorrow night...a favorite challenge returns. It's Snog, Marry, Pie! And if that's not messy enough, the Islanders are scrambling before the recoupling that will shake everything up. Remember, it's Bombshells' choice...

Chapter End Notes

We finally survived some Dumb Boy angst! Next episode they get to relax and be more lovey dovey and smutty smutty...most of the time anyway :) But at least Shane is getting over some of his insecurities and Ilya's chipping away his emotional armor. Svetlana and Rose are basically already married just shaking their heads at them both I swear.

If you want some soundtrack accompaniment, Shane was giving me heavy Kim Petras/I Don't Want It At All bratty vibes this installment. If he can't get Ilya right now he doesn't want him AT ALL okay (he wants him sooo bad).

Also I usually have some plot ideas in mind when "America votes" but always feel free to shout out your least fav side character to get voted off or what dates you wanna see - after all, you ARE the Heated Island audience :D

Chapter 10

Chapter Summary

A challenge has Shane and Ilya going down on their knees in more ways than one

Chapter Notes

warning - this installment has a brief mention of suicidality within the Love Island franchise

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

Shane scratched his neck in the confessional booth the next morning, a dopey smile on his face.

“Yeah, we, uh, talked it out. We’ve agreed to prioritize our couple. Sorry to Sasha.”

Shane shrugged, his smile stretching, the kind of grin he made after a particularly good chirp on the ice.

Shane woke up that morning snuggled tight against Ilya’s chest. He had fallen asleep with Ilya’s lips close against his ear, low voice seeping into his dreams: How it was a hard year. How Sasha was a comfort, but never more. How maybe Shane could be. More.

The dreams had been so sweet Shane had almost forgotten what led them to reconcile, but the bright lights of the communal bedroom quickly reminded him.

The other Islanders slowly stirred, Javi’s eyes drifting to Ilya’s neck.

“What the *fuck*, dude? Are you okay?”

Leo’s mouth fell open, taking in the mottled hickies that coated Ilya’s neck like a collar.

“Damn. And I thought I was a freak.”

Ilya just grunted as Shane flushed, lips twitching upward in something like pride. Sasha shot a look over from his single bed and Shane weaved a hand through Ilya’s curls, pulling him closer with a kiss that lasted long enough for Sasha to stand up and head to the bathroom.

Ilya pulled back, tugging on Shane’s lower lip. “You are a menace.”

“And?” Shane raised his eyebrows.

Ilya made a noise against Shane’s throat, nipping his jaw.

Hayden shuffled by and Shane jerked away, guilt suddenly flooding his stomach.

Ilya cocked his head, eyes narrowing.

“Oh, do I need to mark you too?”

Shane shivered, scooting tighter against Ilya’s chest with a grin.

“Maybe.”

He felt Ilya’s hands drift down, anchoring on the small of his back as Shane arched forward, teasing. Ilya had woken up hard. Shane listened to the faint hiss between Ilya’s teeth, hiding his smile against Ilya’s blemished neck.

“Mm. I have other ways of reminding you that you are mine.”

Ilya’s hands gripped Shane’s ass, spreading him slightly, and Shane let out an embarrassing whimper.

Ilya laughed, smacking him gently and throwing the covers back.

“I will be up with breakfast soon, котенок.” His lips skimmed Shane’s cheek. “I will even serve you in bed, like a little princess.”

Shane wrinkled his nose. “Ew, Ilya, that’s gross. The crumbs-” He glanced up, catching Ilya’s amused expression, and flushed again. “I mean, thank you, though.”

“Mm. As long as you do not make breakfast for any of these men, you can eat wherever you’d like. Agreed?” Ilya cocked an eyebrow.

Shane nodded, feeling stupidly breathless. “Agreed.”

“Good boy.”

Ilya kissed the side of Shane’s lips, just close enough that Shane turned his head to catch the shadow of their touch. Ilya pulled back, laughing, and Shane threw a pillow at his retreating back.

Svetlana grabbed Ilya as soon as he dropped off Shane’s breakfast, Rose intercepting Shane. Ilya looked back at Svetlana as Rose dragged Shane to the beanbags, flopping back onto one of the daybeds.

“What is this? Rose Landry trying to steal my man again?”

Svetlana’s lips curved upward around the tea Rose had made, her eyebrows skyrocketing.

“Oh, *your* man, now?”

“Yes. We talked.”

Svetlana dragged a finger across Ilya’s neck, tracing the marks there. Ilya squinted towards the pool, trying to hide his smile. He shrugged.

“Among other things.”

“I see. Shane seems happy this morning.”

“He understands now. That Sasha was nothing of importance.”

“Hm.” Svetlana lowered her cup, gazing into the distance with Ilya. “And you think Shane could be something of importance?”

Ilya shrugged. “Could be. Maybe. Probably, yes.”

Svetlana was too slow to hide her smile. Ilya pushed her shoulder, cursing in Russian.

“Do not be so smug, Sveta! It is nothing yet!”

“I cannot believe my Ilyusha is so *smittennnnn*.”

“What is this word, smitten? It’s not fair to tease me with unknown words.”

“It’s like...having butterflies. Being twitterpated. Besotted, beguiled. Sweet on someone. You know.”

“None of that is helpful. Shane is fine. We will see.”

“Fine. Yes.” Sveta nodded once, a small sigh escaping from her lips. “I hope he can be someone, Ilya. That you’ll let him be someone. You wouldn’t let Sasha, you know. Even if Sasha was not...fine...like your Shane is.”

“He is not my Shane.”

“No? That’s not what I heard outside the Speakeasy last night.”

“Sveta!” Ilya stood up, pink in his cheeks.

“Ah, and now you are blushing. My cute little Ilyusha. *So* twitterpated.” She pinched his cheeks.

“Stop or I will throw you in the pool.”

“You will not.”

Ilya paused, then pounced, crouching and throwing Svetlana over his shoulder. She let out a scream of laughter, legs kicking against his back.

She was saved by Ariana Madix striding into the Villa, all the Islanders standing to attention. Rose jolted up from the beanbags, Shane peering over her shoulder. Ilya's jaw twitched.

"If this is about another bombshell, I will throw myself in the pool."

Svetlana *tsked*, squeezing his arm as he lowered her.

Ariana strode to the firepit, white minidress fluttering as the Islanders followed in her wake. The lace of her dress was cut in subtle lattices, a delicate red veil streaming off her hair that matched her bold red lip. Ilya caught Shane's hand as the Islanders congregated, yanking him closer as they walked together, his freckles disappearing into a sea of pink.

Ariana reached the firepit and turned, hands clasping in front of her with a wide smile.

"Islanders, we have another challenge for you today. A classic: *Snog, Marry, Pie!*"

The Islanders burst into claps and cheers. Ilya leaned closer to Shane, shaking his head.

"I have heard so many fake words today."

"No, they're just British." Shane's face lit up, whispering quickly. "*Love Island* was a British show first. There's so much cool slang I learned while watching. The UK version got hit with some controversy, though, because there have been multiple suicides both from contestants and even the original host, which is really tragic and brings up complex questions of—"

Ilya's mouth hung open. "Shane. Enough." He swallowed, palming Shane's hair with a tight squeeze. "Tell me later, okay."

They turned their focus back to Ariana, Shane rocking happily next to Ilya.

"In today's challenge, Islanders will choose one person to kiss, one to propose as their strongest connection, and a third to pie in the face! Today is *not* a good day to have enemies."

Shane's smile deepened, his eyes trailing to Sasha standing a few people down from him.

"Leo! Get us started!"

Leo ran forward, clapping his hands as the Islanders let out a cheer.

"Snog...snog..." Leo paced down the line of Islanders, pausing slightly as he passed Shane before continuing. "I mean, I don't mind going back for seconds after yesterday."

He reached his hand out for Sasha, pulling him forward. Shane huffed as they kissed, Leo reaching up to tug his hands through Sasha's silky hair.

Ilya gave him an amused look, whispering into his ear.

"Don't pout, you are still the belle of the ball. You have probably scared people off by mauling me, is all."

Shane scoffed, glaring at Ilya and crossing his arms.

The kiss ended, Leo stumbling back with a wide smile.

“Awesome. Whew. Okay. Obviously I have to marry my girl - get up here, Cici!”

Ariana handed Leo a ringbox, a gaudy piece of costume jewelry inside. He bent on a knee, Cici jumping up and down while fanning her face.

“Cici, you’re the hottest girl I’ve ever known. The freakiest freak I’ve ever met. Will you pretend-marry me?”

“Only if we can go on a real honeymoon tonight!” She stuck her tongue out, the rest of the Islanders groaning as Leo and Cici engaged in an extended makeout session.

Leo then pried Javi for taking too long in the shower and always using up the hot water, and it was on to the next.

Rose chose Cici for her kiss, Svetlana rolling her eyes when Rose laughed and pulled back after, Cici still trailing her with full tongue. She softened once Rose chose her for her proposal, saying something clunkily in Russian that made Svetlana’s eyes tear up. Ilya sniffed, shaking off Shane’s squeeze when he teased him for getting emotional. Then Rose pried Sasha full in the face, smiling triumphantly after and giving Shane a wink.

Svetlana was next.

“Who to snog? Wish I could choose you twice.” She squeezed Rose’s hand, then stopped in front of Jackie who stumbled forward with a flush. Svetlana held her gently, Jackie relaxing as the kiss deepened, her hands coming up to tentatively touch Svetlana’s waist before grabbing tighter. The kiss continued, a low moan escaping from Jackie’s mouth.

“Okay!” Hayden clapped twice, mouth tight.

“Wrap it up, you’re good.” Rose paced in front of them. “That’s a snog, yup. You did it.”

Svetlana pulled back with a laugh, eyes turning to Rose. She wiped Jackie’s lips, wet from the kiss, and Rose cleared her throat.

“Come here, Rosochka, let me marry you.”

Rose stepped forward with her arms crossed, avoiding Svetlana’s gaze but extending a hand and allowing a ring to be slid onto the right finger nonetheless. Rose stepped back in line and Svetlana picked up a pie dish of whipped cream, her grin deepening as she approached Shane.

Ilya moved in front of him, shaking his head at Svetlana.

“*Tch*, so noble, but move. Shane, sweetheart, this is for not letting Ilya explain himself, because god knows Ilya’s too whipped to stay mad at you himself.”

She grinned, throwing the pie at Shane's face, whipped cream splattering over his cheeks. Shane gave her a small nod, accepting his fate. Ilya licked a broad stroke up his cheek, smiling.

"Mm. You taste better than usual."

Shane blinked, the whipped cream stuck in his eyelashes, and tried to smile back, his body tense. Ilya looked at him for a moment, frowning, and then peeled his shirt off over his head. Gently, he tilted Shane's face up, wiping as much of the whipped cream off his face as he could manage.

"Better?"

"Yeah." Shane shrugged, rubbing at his sticky skin as he exhaled. "I'm not a baby."

"No, you are not." Ilya's thumb caught a bit of cream stuck above Shane's eyebrow. "But you are a very clean man. This is good to know for future things. I will avoid the face when it comes to sticky things."

Shane gasped, blood immediately rushing to his cheeks, Ilya chuckling as Shane sputtered.

He wasn't chuckling for long, as Hayden was up next. He stood in front of Shane with his shoulders back, his eyes darting towards Ilya the only hint of any nervousness.

"You up for a snog, mate?"

Shane snorted. "That's a terrible accent, Hayd."

He shook his head as Hayden grabbed his hand, stepping forward. Ilya's hand trailed down Shane's back, cupping his ass in a tight squeeze that made Shane look back with a jump.

Ilya grinned, silently mouthing *mine*.

Shane's face darkened to a deeper tone of red and Ilya's smile deepened. His fingertips skimmed his throat as he looked on, a small distance possible now. Ilya could almost... appreciate...seeing Shane with someone else. Watching how Hayden's fingers clutched hard against Shane's waist, his stupid pale neck turning pink from the exertion, his entire body reacting just from his lips meeting Shane's.

And Shane. Being able to be on the outside, watching it all. How Shane's body both melted and came alive with urgency, the press of his shoulders as he pulled Hayden in closer, tongue slipping in to explore further - Hayden's knees shaking with it.

Ilya blinked, shifting on his feet as his hand reached down, subtly adjusting himself. That was new. But he supposed Shane brought out many new sides of him.

The kiss ended, both men pulling back breathlessly. Shane nearly jogged back to him, looking up at Ilya beneath his eyelashes, his hand slipping back between his fingers.

"You okay?"

Ilya slid his hand beneath Shane's jaw, leaning down for a deep kiss. Shane's lips were already warm, the faint taste of Hayden's morning orange juice lingering beneath Ilya's kiss.

Hayden was on a knee in front of Jackie as she bit her lip, tucking a strand of hair behind her ear.

Ilya didn't notice, kissing Shane harder, lengthening the kiss until Shane let out a soft whimper before pulling away with a grin.

"I am more than okay. It is like a free show, seeing how good my котенок is. How wanted. How well-behaved you are, to trot back to me after."

Shane tightened in Ilya's arms, eyes flashing darker as his lips parted, hips pressing closer. Ilya let out a low laugh, murmuring into Shane's hair.

"Patience. You can prove just how good you are later."

"Seriously?" In front of them, Sasha gave a firm shake of his hands, whipped cream splattering on the artificial grass.

Hayden shrugged. "Seriously."

Shane let out a sudden laugh, half-muting it by turning into Ilya's shoulder as Ilya chided him, still smiling.

"But sometimes you are very bad, Hollander. Where is your sportsmanship?"

Shane shrugged, looking up at Ilya with a steady gaze. "Guess I'm a sore winner."

"Winner, hm?"

"Yes. I've won you." Shane reached his hand up, trailing it down Ilya's jaw, eyes fluttering to Ilya's lips. "Haven't I?"

Ilya exhaled shakily as Shane's eyes flicked back up to him, his pupils as dark and wide as a black hole, and just as gravitational.

"Earth to Shane!" Ariana laughed, gesturing him forward. "Your turn."

Shane dipped his head, stepping forward. He headed towards Hayden on instinct, then paused, his ears getting warm.

"Um, sorry Hayd, I'm gonna try something...different."

Hayden tilted his head, watching as Shane reached for Leo.

The Islanders burst into cheers, Rose starting to laugh. "No way."

"Taste the rainbow, man." Hayden scratched his jaw, bemused.

Leo looked at Shane with wide eyes. "Whoa, okay yes, dude, let's *do* this."

Shane nodded, steeling himself, and took one long look at Ilya before moving closer. Leo waited patiently. Shane forced himself not to look down at Leo's far too tiny leopard print Speedo.

Leo was shorter by an inch or so and Shane found he wasn't used to being taller, to taking up more space. It was somewhat thrilling, the way he found his body stretching, widening as he pulled Leo closer. His palms ran up Leo's torso, exploring, feeling Ilya's eyes basking it in. Shane raised one of Leo's hands to his mouth, watching Leo's eyes widen as Shane's lips curled around two of his fingers, sucking them inside. Shane's eyes flicked to Ilya, who was watching with lidded eyes, his hands carefully clasped in front of his legs as he swallowed thickly.

Shane relaxed more, leaning into it, taking Leo's fingers a bit further before sliding them out again. He grabbed Leo's ass with one hand, finding it surprisingly plump, and then lowered his lips, Leo meeting him with unhidden eagerness. Shane lost himself in it, the very back of his mind cataloging the differences from other men, other kisses, as he let himself be consumed, Leo's hands running over his body with wild enthusiasm.

Shane finally pulled back, Leo panting a bit before him, his hair mused as he floundered back to the line.

"Your ring." Ariana handed Shane a small, simple box.

Shane looked to Ilya, extended his hand. Ilya approached with a cocky grin, leaning close.

"Were you trying to kill me, Hollander? I should have worn looser shorts."

Shane snorted, feeling himself flush pridefully all the same. He straightened, clearing his throat.

"Um. Ilya, I'm choosing to marry you because I do feel we have the strongest connection. And I'm glad you explained yourself, even if Svetlana thinks I took too long to let you. And I appreciate you letting me explain myself too. So, will you marry me?"

Ilya smiled at him softly. "No."

"What? No? The fuck, Ilya?" Shane tightened his fists, neck straining.

"No." Ilya looked him up and down. "You are not kneeling. You need to be on your knees for proposals, Shane. I am surprised you of all people do not know this."

Shane felt his ears burning. He glared at Ilya, sinking down to one knee.

"Fine. There. Now marry me, asshole."

Ilya grinning. "Since you ask me so sweetly."

Ilya held his left hand out, fluttering his fingers for the silly ring. Shane felt something swoop in his stomach as he slid it on, Ilya's smile stuttering as they made eye contact. They stayed

like that for a moment, Ilya's hand cradled in Shane, his knee still bent, eyes locked as though this meant something - nevermind the fake grass, the fake ring, the fake proposal.

Shane cleared his throat and rose, shaking his brain back to reality. He found Sasha in the line-up, Ilya's hand still in his. He felt Ilya track Shane as he spotted him, and then Shane shifted, dipping Ilya into a kiss, lips angry and possessive.

Shane spun Ilya back up to standing, Ilya's blue eyes blinking a bit hazily as Sasha scowled and turned away.

"Oh, and I almost forgot."

Shane smiled sweetly, grabbing a pie from Ariana and sauntering over to Sasha, delivering the pie full to his face without hesitation.

"That's for trying to break up my fiancé and I."

Shane practically skipped back to Ilya, intertwining their hands as they returned to line. Ilya swallowed, leaning down.

"No, seriously, I am not kidding about the shorts. You are going to kill me."

He gazed down at Shane, Shane's heart stuttering at the unabashed desire there.

"You owe me a very long honeymoon, Hollander. *Very* long."

Shane hadn't taken his ring off. He twirled it around his finger as they lounged on the daybeds, his head lolling against Ilya's bare chest.

"I would get you a much better one."

Shane's head jerked up, Ilya's eyes catching his and smirking down at his hand.

"Shut up. You kept yours on too."

"Yes." Ilya fluttered his hand out. "Such a sweet proposal, how could I not?"

"Are you going to tell me what you said in yours?"

"Of course not."

"I could ask Svetlana, you know. She seemed very surprised by whatever you said."

"She will tell you nothing if she knows what is good for her."

"Hmph." Shane flopped back against Ilya, facing forward.

Their hands intertwined, plastic facets throwing off muted rainbows across the daybed.

"How would you do it, if you had to propose to someone? For real?"

“To someone?” Shane could hear Ilya’s smile, but he kept his gaze forward. “Well. If I did propose to *someone*, for real, I would probably not kiss Pike first.”

Shane huffed, drawing Ilya’s arm tighter around him. “Yeah, not romantic.”

“No.” Ilya’s lips skimmed the top of Shane’s head, pressing down against his dark hair hot from the sun. “I thought you might like it. Like I liked watching.”

“I did not.” Shane bent further into Ilya’s arm, bottom lip sticking out in a pout.

“I am aware.” Ilya pulled Shane closer, both his arms wrapping around Shane like a vice, squeezing him hard. “That is why he is still Shane-sexual. I stopped before he could fall in love with me.”

Shane scoffed, turning a bit. “You really don’t mind? Me kissing other people?”

Shane lengthened along Ilya’s reclining body, stretching as he flipped to his stomach. He caught as Ilya’s eyes trailed downwards and made sure he arched a bit more than necessary as Ilya’s eyes snagged on his ass.

“So naughty.” Ilya swatted Shane’s ass with a grin, then dropped his head back against the daybed’s pillow. “And...no. Not when it’s like this.” He clinked their rings together.

Shane frowned. “Like what?”

“Like...you coming back to me. Before, you kiss like you are running away. Now, you kiss like you are...coming home.” Ilya shrugged, avoiding Shane’s eyes.

“You don’t get jealous? You don’t wish it was you?” Shane’s chest panged.

“Ah, of course I wish it was me. Always.” Ilya cupped Shane’s face softly, thumb tracing his jaw. “But it is still me in a way, yes? You kiss all these boys, any man you want. And still you come back to me. It is like the opposite of jealousy. It makes me...” Ilya shrugged. “Proud? Shane Hollander, choosing me. You could have anyone. But you choose me to be yours.”

“Please, you’re Ilya Rozanov. You’re a fucking supermodel. You’re the reason I even realized I’m-” Shane flushed, ducking his face into Ilya’s neck.

“Oh? What was that, Shane?” Ilya grinned, dipping his head down closer to Shane.

“Shut up, okay! You already know that.”

Ilya reached out, tracing the blush of Shane’s cheeks.

“Ah, but you should say it ten times a day. You should have said that in your proposal.”

“Asshole.”

“Your asshole.”

“Yes.”

Shane kept his face buried in Ilya’s neck, his hand toying with Ilya’s necklace. Ilya stroked his back in slow circles, both of them falling into silence, the sun warm over their bodies.

“Do you want marriage? Like, in life?” Shane’s voice was muffled.

Ilya didn’t tease, considering.

“I never really thought of it. My parents had a bad marriage. So, it was not something I considered. Maybe with the right person. Could be good. Maybe.”

“Mmm. My parents have the best marriage.”

“Of course they do.”

Shane pulled his face up, frowning, and shifted to the side so he was spooning against Ilya.

“How would you know?”

“You are famous, Hollander. There are so many interviews where you babble about them. Little specials where you show off your cottage and your yoga and your perfect little family.”

Ilya’s tone was light on the surface, an undercurrent of longing and bitterness swirling below. Shane kept staring at him with that pinched expression, long enough that Ilya leaned down and kissed the lines between his eyebrows.

“Relax. You’ll give yourself worry lines and then Rolex will not hire you for any more campaigns with me. You will be so sad without my ass to stare at.”

Shane rolled his eyes, face relaxing somewhat. “Whatever. I’m just saying my parents are happy, so what.”

“It is good they are happy. Really.” Ilya’s eyes flicked down to Shane then away again. “So you have been dreaming of your wedding since you were a little boy?”

“God, shut *up*, Rozanov. No. I’m only saying some marriages can be...really nice.”

“Yes. I believe you.” Ilya threaded his hands through Shane’s hair, pulling slightly. “You would be a beautiful blushing bride.”

Shane flushed but didn’t take the bait, his gaze staying on Ilya. “So, your parents are divorced? You never talk about your family.”

“Ugh, because it is so *boring*. No, no divorce. Unhappy marriage, over now.”

Shane’s worry lines returned. “Wait, but if they didn’t divorce? They just separated? Or what?”

“Death, Hollander. It divorces us all. Enough questions now.”

Shane stilled by his side. Ilya reached for his sunglasses, sliding them over his eyes and shifting Shane closer.

“Anyway. Tell me about the history of *Love Island*. I want to learn these British words you were so excited about.”

Shane perked up, checking to see if Ilya was serious.

“Okay, well, there’s grafting, which is basically flirting, and then banter, or bants, which is more like, flirty teasing I guess? Being mugged off is getting rejected, and doing bits is, well, sexual stuff, and-”

“Ah, stop, I like this one. Doing bits? We will have bants and do bits? Is this correct?” Shane rolled his eyes, Ilya leaning closer to unfurl on top of him. “What, you need me to do it in a stupid accent like Pike, is that it?”

“Ilya, no-” Shane pushed him away, laughing as Ilya bent into his neck with ticklish kisses. “I haven’t told you all the slang yet! There’s buzzin’, and aggy, and cheese toasties, and being a bit of me, and- !”

Shane was smothered in kisses, Ilya swallowing any remaining slang with a persistent and skilled tongue, Shane going limply happy beneath him.

Hayden finished his chat with Cici, which consisted mostly of avoiding her deep despite to sit in his lap and make out, and headed over to Shane in the gym, Ilya snoring on the daybeds nearby.

“Hey man! Can I pull you for a chat?”

Shane dropped his weights, skin sheened with sweat.

“Course. Where to?”

“Uh, the docks, maybe?” Hayden took in Shane’s pause. “Or, the swing over there?”

“Yeah, swing works.”

They sauntered over, Hayden making small talk about Shane’s routine, the two athletes trading tips. Hayden held the swinging bench steady as Shane scooted on, a bit of gallantry that made him dip his head in a smile.

“Thanks Hayd.”

Hayden swallowed. “So. We’re due for a recoupling soon.”

Shane studied his feet, pumping slightly so the swing began moving.

“I’m pretty sure I know the answer, but I have to leave it all out on the field. You definitely want to recouple with Rosanov, right?”

Shane nodded slowly. “I do. I’m sorry, Hayden.”

“Hey, no sweat, man.” Hayden’s eyes flickered over the ring still on Shane’s finger. “I’m glad you worked it out, really.” He sighed, scanning over the Villa. “Just wish I could choose another bombshell at the recoupling.”

Shane’s mouth twitched up. “Yeah, you and Sasha have a lot of chemistry.”

“Ugh, gross dude!” Hayden shoulder-checked him. “I wish we could vote him out.” He risked a glance at Shane, his words careful. “Has Sasha said anything about who he’s going to pick?”

Shane’s stress was immediate, his face tightening before smoothing over with faked nonchalance. “Sasha has no reason to talk to me. And Ilya has already made his feelings clear.”

“Mm. Good, then.” Hayden tilted his head, squinting at Leo on the beanbags, Sasha looming above him. “Maybe he’s gonna try to steal Leo from Cici.”

“Huh. You could go for Cici then? For this recoupling?”

“Could do.” Hayden sucked on his water bottle, contemplating. He felt Shane’s gaze snag slightly on the motion and he turned, smiling around the straw.

“Something on your mind, Shane?” He slid the straw deeper in his mouth, holding his gaze.

“No, god.” Shane shrugged, ears turning red. “I mean. Ilya and I. He doesn’t have a problem with- we’re not closed off. Obviously. It’s too early for that.”

“Tell that to the ring still on your finger.” Hayden jutted his chin towards Shane’s hand.

“Whatever. I’m just saying. Ilya and I said we would prioritize our couple. But I’ve enjoyed getting to know you. And I don’t want you to feel like I was just using you.”

“Heard. Appreciate it.” Hayden took another slow drink of water. “So...was Leo a better kisser than me?”

Shane coughed, sputtering as Hayden laughed and scooted closer to pound his back.

“I’m kidding. Mostly.” Hayden tilted his head, soaking in Shane’s face, his long dark lashes, his cupid’s bow of a mouth.

“You’re staring, Hayden.”

“Is that a crime?” Hayden didn’t pull back, his arm resting along the back of the bench, thumb skimming Shane’s shoulder.

Shane's voice was soft. "No. I guess not."

"Can't believe you didn't choose to kiss me back in the challenge."

Hayden held his gaze, moving a centimeter closer. Shane didn't stop him, tilting forward just enough to close the distance. The kiss was soft. Tender. Their lips parted, foreheads lightly touching.

"If it's not Ilya for you...you'll let me know?"

Shane's lips twitched into a smile, his hand trailing down Hayden's jaw as he slowly pulled back.

"I'll let you know, if you're not sewed into Jackie's skin."

Hayden burst into a laugh, shoving Shane back. "Fair enough."

Shane returned to the gym after finishing his chat with Hayden, but hadn't even picked up his weights again when he saw Sasha loitering by the daybeds. Ilya was sitting up with one arm thrown over his face so that it was hard to make out his expression.

Shane stiffened, striding over to Leo.

"Hey, man! Think you might partner up with Sasha next recoupling?"

Leo looked up at him, smiling and shaking his head. "Listen man, I'm flattered, but Cici and I are really happy. Now, Sasha may try and steal me away, but I'm gonna be honest, you'll have to get to the back of the line."

Shane rolled his eyes. "I'm not hitting on you, Leo. I'm- nevermind."

"Don't be embarrassed! Once you get a taste of the kitty, you can't quitty!"

Leo licked the back of his hand, running it slowly down his body. Shane groaned, stalking away to the kitchen. Rose was on the counter, swinging her feet as Svetlana fed her grapes, giggling as she tried to catch them with her mouth.

Shane scowled. "I hope you're not putting the rest back in the fridge afterwards. It's unsanitary."

"Thuch a -" Rose coughed, spitting out two grapes. "Spoilsport. Why aren't you somewhere inhaling Ilya's pits or something?"

"Jesus, Rose." Shane huffed, crossing his arms.

Svetlana clucked her tongue. "Ah. I see. It looks like the coast is clear now."

Shane turned, watching Sasha walk towards the pool where Javi and Connie were swimming. Shane waited a minute, for his pride, and then beelined for the daybeds.

“Ah, you are back.”

“What did he want?” Shane folded his arms, lower lip jutting out.

“Hollander, you are blocking my sun.”

“*Ilya.*”

“*Shane.*”

Shane collapsed onto the daybed, lying stiffly next to Ilya and leaving an inch of space left between their bodies.

“How is Pike?”

Shane’s head snapped to his left.

“He’s...fine.”

“Just fine?”

Shane cleared his throat. “He wanted to make sure I was going to couple up again with you. And then...” Shane looked away, voice harsher. “You said it was okay to kiss other people. You said you liked it.”

“I do not *like* you kissing other people when I am not involved. But I will tolerate it. Depending on how you answered his coupling up question.”

“How did you answer Sasha’s?”

Shane’s eyes blazed into Ilya’s. Ilya forced himself not to let out a small smile.

“Мой прекрасный глупец, how do you think I answered?”

Shane kept staring, his eyes becoming alarmingly watery. Ilya scooted closer, pressing a soft kiss against Shane’s lips before tapping his plastic ring against Shane’s.

“I told him I am not interested. I only want to couple up with this pretty boy, who doubts me always, who has a rock on his hand and in his brains. Okay?”

Shane’s shoulders eased down, his whole body humming as he nuzzled into Ilya’s neck.

“Okay.”

“Now go use some mouthwash, I can taste Pike on you.”

“You can not! We didn’t even use tongue!”

“Disgusting, Hollander, I do not want to know details. Or else I will tell you about how Sasha-”

“Yes, point made.” Shane glared at him.

Ilya smiled, exhaling.

“So. You said you would choose me at the recoupling? Make a big speech about how you choose this boy because...?”

Shane scoffed, grinning. “Maybe. If you’re good.”

“Ah, I thought you were the good one.”

“Where’s my reward, then?”

Ilya raised his eyebrows. “A ring is not enough?”

“I was promised a honeymoon.”

“This is true.” Ilya let his gaze linger on Shane. “You know, I liked the proposal.” He leaned closer, breath tickling Shane’s ear. “Being on my knee for you.” He felt Shane inhale. “Since I went down on one knee for you. Maybe I should do two?”

Shane squirmed against Ilya, his hair tickling Ilya’s neck as he nodded rapidly.

“Mm, so eager. Go upstairs. See if anyone is in the restroom. If not, you will get to see me on my knees for you. Again.”

Shane practically ran upstairs, Ilya waiting solely for the pleasure of seeing him bound up the stairs before following.

The bathroom was empty, Lexi stumbling out with a look of disgust behind her.

“Careful, Ilya, Shane’s apparently having explosive diarrhea so no one should go in there for a while.”

Ilya let out a laugh. Lexi looked at him, then pinched the bridge of her nose with a loud sigh.

“Oh. Ew. Even more disgusting. Please bleach *everything* when you’re done.”

Ilya edged past her, striding into the restroom.

“Explosive diarrhea?”

Shane froze from the shower, clothing already discarded on the tile floor.

“Oh. Um. You weren’t supposed to hear that.”

“So sexy, Shane.” Ilya slid his shorts off.

“Shut up and get in here.”

“I mean it.” Ilya stepped inside, corning Shane against the wall. “Scaring people away, you’re so eager to have your dick sucked by me. It’s hot.”

He pushed closer, tilting Shane’s jaw up and running his tongue underneath Shane’s jaw, ending in a rough kiss behind his ear. Ilya reached down, palming Shane with a grin.

“Ready for me so quickly? What an eager husband.”

“Fiancé.” Shane bit back a moan. “I can still break off the engagement.”

“No, you will not do that.”

Ilya sank to his knees, thumbs bruising into Shane’s hips as he dragged kisses down Shane’s body, smirking as Shane’s flesh twitched beneath his touch.

He exhaled before Shane’s cock, his breath making Shane groan, his hands gripping Ilya’s shoulders.

Ilya started slowly, delicate long licks up and down Shane’s shaft, his eyes trained above. Shane’s face was broken open, mouth agape, eyes alternating between gasping at Ilya between his legs and squeezing shut as if it was too much to behold.

Ilya’s smirk faded as he lapped up the precum already pouring from Shane, a deep heat twisting in his stomach as he swallowed. Unable to restrain himself any longer, Ilya lowered his mouth over Shane, taking him in full, Shane’s whimpers guiding his pace. Ilya had barely begun when Shane squirmed. His hand reached down and caught around Ilya’s, Shane’s palm rough over his ring, a half-word squeaking out his mouth before Ilya realized what he was trying to say.

Ilya leaned in, swallowing, riding out the twitches of Shane’s hips. He pulled off Shane’s cock with a growing grin, panting slightly as Shane’s hips jerked to a stop.

“That was barely anything, Hollander. Scared everyone out of the bathroom for what, two minutes?” He smirked up at Shane, licking at the salty sweat of his happy trail.

Shane was beyond argument, Ilya’s arms the only thing keeping him standing.

“Fuck. I might...I might propose for real.”

Ilya laughed, a low deep chuckle that vibrated against Shane’s ear as he stood. He kissed Shane’s cheek tenderly, tugging on Shane’s hair.

“You must raise your standards. We will go again.”

Ilya lowered himself back to the shower floor, Shane’s eyes widening. Ilya paused, tilting his head up at Shane from below.

“But I want a three carat ring, at least.”

Shane's head lolled back against the tile, eyes already drifting shut in a gasp as Ilya mouthed at the base of his cock.

"Yes. Whatever you want. It's yours."

"Mine." Ilya swallowed him again, humming as Shane's pleased sounds echoed around the room.

NEXT TIME...ON HEATED ISLAND...

Tomorrow night...a recoupling shakes *everything* up. How will our viewers at home react? At least America can vote for which Islanders they want to send on dates, regardless of what new couples the Islanders may find themselves in...

Chapter End Notes

OOF this was a struggle. i wanted to touch base with the hollanders+chexy+pork belly but it wasn't working so I kept changing the POV back and forth before scrapping things completely and here we are.

so instead enjoy some brief moments of domestic bliss before love island love islands on our poor boys again. i will be visiting yuna next installment because you know she has OPINIONS on everything that has been going on, and then i'll see if i can start getting into some date stuff!

and for those of you who follow love island IRL, i'm hoping to have two more updates before we finallyyyy get my absolute favorite - CASA AMOR. it's coming and it's gonna be sooo fun. for me, not for any of our characters. and i hear the sasha feedback but i still need him for (soon to be resolved) Reasons but i hope the pies to the face make things a bit sweeter <3

Chapter 11

Chapter Summary

we watch the recoupling with our viewers at home~

Chapter Notes

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

“I don’t know, I still think Hayden is a better match. They could do so many athletic campaigns together, really send a message.”

David squeezed Yuna’s knee, gesturing to Shane in the confessional booth.

“Shh, honey, I’m trying to hear what he’s saying.”

Chexy knew enough to keep his mouth shut, though he did sort of agree with Yuna. Hayden Pike’s storyline was picking up even more media coverage than Shane’s. Canadian hockey commentators were suddenly a lot more open-minded now that there was a second queer athlete on screen. #Shayden had even been trending for most of the past week, along with some very amusing fanmade videos of the two of them.

“Oh, Shane. That’s not very classy. Do you think he realized it would bruise like that?”

Yuna turned to David, concerned, as the camera caught a close-up of Ilya’s neck. David’s cheeks pinked as he avoided her eyes.

“Well, yes, honey. I think that may have been the point.”

“Oh.”

She turned to Chexy, who was staring at the TV with an intensity he hoped would prevent her from engaging further.

“Interesting.”

She leaned back, sipping her wine.

Chexy finished his dinner, pushing his plate forward.

“Delicious as always, Yuna. And I agree with Ilya, these words seem fake.”

“Blame the British.” Yuna took another sip of wine. “Though I do like *snog*. Wait, where’s Pork?”

She stood and scooted by David, searching in the kitchen before returning with a wriggling cat in her arms.

“Look, Pork. That’s Sasha. Yes, good, hiss at him!”

“He may be hissing at you, sweetie.” David tilted his head, trying to see around Yuna holding Pork to the screen.

“Still counts. I cannot believe this man tried to sabotage Shane. I hope he gets a million pies to the face.”

Yuna dropped Pork unceremoniously to the floor, fluttering her hands.

“Ooh, ooh, quiet, it’s Ilya’s turn!”

David and Chexy exchanged an amused glance, neither pointing out that Yuna was the only one talking.

“Ugh. He should not be kissing Pike.” Yuna crossed her arms. “Besides, Hayden is obviously going to prefer Shane no matter how much Ilya tries to prove he’s the better kisser.”

“He has to kiss someone.” David squeezed her shoulder. “And look, Shane got what counts.”

They watched as Ilya sank to one knee, opening the box from Ariana to reveal a tacky plastic ring, his eyes trained up at Shane. Ilya spoke swiftly, voice softer in his native tongue. Shane’s brows furrowed as he blinked down at him, catching only his name among the rush of Russian.

“Chexy.” Yuna gripped Chexy’s arm, her eyes remaining on the TV. “What was that? What did he say?”

Chexy felt his face heat, a small smile growing on his face. He cleared his throat, vocal cords tight for some reason.

“Ah, he said, something like -” Chexy stumbled slightly, his brain trying to flip back and forth.

“I know this is pretend. I know I do not know you so long yet. I know this is madness to say, but you do not speak Russian, not yet, even though you are so perfect I am a little scared you might. Shane, I have not felt like this before. Not ever. And if you are crazy like I am crazy, maybe one day this ring will be real for us. And Sveta, shut your mouth, I hear you gasping back there.”

Yuna blinked at Chexy.

“I might have gotten a word or two wrong, but.” Chexy shrugged. “Yes.”

Yuna turned to David.

“Oh.”

“*Oh.*” David smiled, blinking rapidly, and pulled her into a hug. “Are you still Team Shayden?”

Yuna let out a garbled laugh from David’s chest. “They could team up on projects as friends? Their agents would be happy with that, I think.”

David laughed, kissing her hair. Yuna pushed herself up, wiping her eyes.

“Ilya really likes our son, huh?”

“Seems like it.”

They turned to the TV, the couples in the confessional booth recounting the challenge. Leo and Cici kissed through the whipped cream Javi had pied him back with. Rose and Svetlana fluttered their hands for the camera, showing off their rings. And Ilya just kissed Shane’s cheek, his eyes tracing his profile with a tenderness so open it made Yuna’s heart contract, Shane gazing down at his ring as if it was the Cup.

“Okay. My palms are sweating.”

Yuna bustled back into the living room, wine glass refilled. She handed the second bowl of popcorn to David.

“Hey, let me hold those sweaty hands.”

David reached over, squeezing her hand as Ariana returned from the commercial break, standing ominously in front of the fire pit.

“We will now begin the recoupling. Whoever is left single will leave the Villa immediately. Jackie, please begin.”

Ariana motioned to Jackie to step forward. Sasha and Hayden stood beside her while the rest of the Islanders sat in their couples around the firepit.

Jackie exhaled, smoothing down her dress.

“Okay. I would like to pick this boy because every time we talk, he is a complete gentleman. He is a great listener, fantastic at making me breakfast, and someone I already consider a friend. It is early days, so I’m not sure what the future may hold.”

Her eyes flickered briefly to Hayden.

“But tonight, the boy I’d like to couple up with is...Connie!”

Connie beamed, standing up from where he was sitting alone after Hannah’s departure. He spread his arms to receive Jackie as she strode forward, head leaning towards her lips. She gave him a quick peck on the mouth and then they sat, settling closer to one another as the Islanders clapped around them.

Ariana smiled for a moment, letting the applause die down.

“Connie, it must feel great to be back in a couple!”

“Oh yes, especially with Jackie.” Connie smiled at her again. Jackie squeezed his leg before looking down at the ground, avoiding Hayden’s gaze.

“Well, Sasha, it is now your turn. Lexi I. is currently the only single Islander left, but as a bombshell, you can choose any Islander coupled or not.”

The camera cut to Shane and Ilya, Ilya’s arm wrapped protectively around Shane’s shoulders. Shane looked at Ilya with a steady smile, tilting his jaw up for a quick kiss.

Yuna chewed her lip, David watching her with a small grin.

“Honey, it’s not the playoffs. It’s going to be okay.”

“Right. Of course. I mean, Sasha knows Ilya doesn’t want him. So he’ll choose Leo. He would be an idiot not to choose Leo.”

Chexy patted Pork, who had squished himself next to his leg, and watched nervously as David handed Yuna her wine glass.

Sasha swayed a bit in front of the firepit, his hands clasped in front of him.

“This was not an easy decision for me. I came here with a purpose, as many of you know, but also with an open mind. I think I can say confidentially that I have truly been open to getting to know as many of you as possible.”

From the curved bench, Leo nodded aggressively, Cici giving him a glare. Sasha cleared his throat, eyes still trained on the floor.

“So I want to choose this boy not because he is my only option, but because he is the only option for me. I can’t- I can’t get myself to choose anyone else. I want to leave here knowing I didn’t hide behind anything. That I put all my feelings into the light of day and let the cards fall where they might.” He exhaled. “If there is even the barest hint of a chance, of a possibility for us, I need to take it. I need to know, for sure, one way or another.”

Sasha straightened, finally raising his eyes, his face exhausted and wrecked. “The boy I would like to couple up with is...Ilya.”

“NOOOOOO!”

Pork sprinted from the room at Yuna's shriek, David quickly grabbing her wine glass as she shot to her feet, arms flailing.

"What is he *doing*! Is he *trying* to ruin everything! I swear to god, Chex, you better teach me some Russian because I have some CHOICE WORDS FOR THIS MAN."

David gently tugged on Yuna's arm, easing her down to the couch.

"Look, look, Shane seems okay, honey."

The camera had zoomed in on Ilya and Shane. Ilya looked frozen in anger, his jaw twitching. Shane was whispering something in his ear, his fingertips lightly tracing Ilya's neck beneath his mic.

Captions flashed on the screen, the camera tighter around Shane's lips as he cupped Ilya's face.

"Let him try, hmm? Who am I?"

Ilya's lips pried open. *"Mine."*

"And who are you?"

"Yours."

"That's right."

Ilya's posture relaxed by a hair, his eyes sliding to Shane. Shane leaned forward, kissing him long and deep. Ilya spoke louder this time, the captions disappearing.

"I told him I didn't want - I said-"

"I know. I trust you."

Shane raised his shoulders with a sad smile, thumb sliding over Ilya's lips.

"And trust me. I also know how hard it is to walk away from you."

He kissed Ilya once more, a soft peck, and then scooted to his left.

Sasha approached awkwardly, Ilya turning his face away as Sasha sat beside him, the seat still warm from Shane.

"Wow." Ariana raised her eyebrows. "Quite the shake up, Sasha."

Sasha nodded mutely.

"I hope you find the answers you need." She gave him a small smile, then turned to Hayden.

"Our final bombshell. Please step forward."

David threaded his hand through Yuna's hair, pressing a reassuring kiss to her temple.

"See? Shane is okay. Confident, even."

Chexy nodded. "Captain mode."

Yuna sniffed. "I still hate that man."

"You hate whoever you want, baby." David smiled, kissing the side of her head again.

On screen, Hayden rocked back on his toes, hands stuffed in his pant pockets. He glanced at Jackie, leaning into Connie, and then at Ilya, who was glaring at a fake plant in the distance.

"Right. Okay. Well. That was kind of a curveball so...here we go. Um. I've really enjoyed getting to know all of you."

Cici fluttered her eyelashes at him, Leo scowling next to her.

"This is an amazing group of people. But a few connections have definitely stood out to me. So. I want to choose this person because they immediately made me feel comfortable here in the Villa. They've never judged me or made me feel embarrassed as I explore who I am."

Cici snapped her fingers a few times, throwing her hair over her shoulder with a smile.

"I feel like we can talk for hours without running out of things to say. And uh, the way they kiss definitely doesn't hurt either. Okay. So. The boy I'd like to couple up with is..."

"Boy?" Cici straightened, turning to her right.

Hayden's cheeks pinked. He rubbed the back of his neck, exhaling.

"Shane Hollander."

The Islanders burst into loud applause, Cici and Ilya's hands noticeably still.

Ilya snapped his neck back to the firepit. Shane was already looking Ilya's way with a smile. Shane drew a slow curve around his own neck, fingertips mirroring the path of Ilya's bruises. Ilya exhaled slightly, shoulders lowering.

Shane turned his gaze away and stood as Hayden approached, opening his arms. Hayden leaned in, his hand reaching up to cradle Shane's jaw as he tilted forward. Ilya let out a very loud, very aggressive cough. Hayden hesitated, then let his lips graze Shane's cheek at the last second as Shane pulled him into a hug.

"Is this okay? Sasha threw me off, so-"

"Absolutely." Shane squeezed Hayden harder. "I'm glad you like me more than Cici."

"Oh, I never said that."

Shane pulled back, laughing as he slapped Hayden's shoulder. Their hands fell into one another's easily and they sat back down, close enough that their thighs touched. Ilya stared from behind Sasha, lips turning downward.

Ariana shook out her hair, her smile wide.

"Well then! Our bombshells have created *three* new couples. Remaining Islanders, it is now your turn."

Yuna sniffed as the other Islanders proceeded with their speeches.

"Well, that's okay then. Shane likes Hayden."

"And the internet *loves* Shayden." Chexy scrolled on his phone, snorting at the reactions already happening.

"Told you it would be okay." David rubbed Yuna's arm, leaning his head against hers. "Aw. I like Rose and Svetlana together. I'm glad they recoupled"

"I can't believe Cici and Leo keep coupling."

Yuna shifted, her face growing more animated as her gameplay mindset slowly returned.

"They're the only couple from week one, you know. That could be a problem if Shane makes it to the finals. The audience loves an original couple..."

Chexy shrugged. "They seem sort of sad about it this week. Maybe they break up soon."

"Oh, wow!" Yuna straightened, leaning forward towards the TV. "Javi's going *back* to Lexi? That means..."

Ariana made a sad face on screen, bowing her head.

"Shawna, as you have not been chosen for a couple, you unfortunately will need to leave the Villa. Please gather your things and say your goodbyes."

Shawna huffed, breathing faster in her strapless dress as she turned to Javi with her head cocked.

"Oh, I'll say my goodbyes, alright, you fucking two-timing-"

Yuna looked over at David as Shawna began charging at Javi, Lexi smirking smugly behind him.

"Honey, do you have your app up? Chexy, pull yours up too."

“I can never figure this thing out.” David squinted at his screen, his pointer finger jabbing at different things.

Chexy laughed. “Careful, you will send Shane a date with Lexi or something.”

“God, let’s not do that.” Yuna skimmed through the options. “We vote Ilya, yes?”

“I mean, Javi is an *option*...”

“David. Javi is not happening.” Yuna leaned over, hitting Ilya’s headshot for him. “There. Now. Who wants dessert?”

NEXT TIME...ON HEATED ISLAND...

Tomorrow night...the Islanders cope with their new couples.

And six will head off on dates outside the Villa, regardless of who they are coupled with...

Chapter End Notes

quick lil update to get us through the recoupling! i'm getting antsy for casa (can you tell) but we have to get through another recoupling first. so next update will see us having some cute dates, and then likely one more update with a challenge/new bombshell before it is FINALLY my favorite part of love island! oooh i cant wait for the drama :) enjoy the relative bliss while you have it!!

Chapter 12

Chapter Summary

Islanders go on dates! Shane and Ilya continue to be desperate gay sluts for each other on and off their first date

Chapter Notes

tw: we go into irina's suicide here and there's some mental health discussion in this chapter

also some love island terminology that may be helpful if you don't watch the show!

- open: being open to connections other than your current couple
- closed off: not seeing anyone else in the Villa, including any future bombshells that may come in
- exclusive: usually means you're closed off AND plan to be exclusive after leaving the Villa too (bigger commitment)
- turning heads: if you can be tempted by anyone outside your couple or if your head can't be turned anymore (usually a precursor to being closed off)
- testing connections: hooking up with other people to see if you still want your couple the most. this is a love island thing where you basically HAVE to hook up with other people to "prove" your couple is strong enough to be with other people and still return to the original couple. often couples aren't taken seriously if they don't test connections and people are even voted out for playing it safe/not testing. and often yes, people test connections and realize they want a new couple haha

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

Ilya didn't give Sasha a chance to chat after the recoupling. Instead, he beelined for Shane, grabbing his hand roughly and pulling him away from Hayden.

"Shane, you know I did not want this, yes?"

"Yes, Ilya, it's okay." Shane stepped closer, dipping his head into his shoulder with a smile.

"I know I was a bit...dramatic about Sasha before. I promise I'm not mad now, okay?"

Ilya's eyes darted from Shane to Hayden a few feet away, then narrowed.

“Why are you not mad?”

Shane shrugged, idly tapping Ilya’s chin with his fingertips, his gaze soft.

“I guess...I trust you? That you’re not interested in him?”

“Ah.” Ilya’s lips curved into a smile. “That is okay then. So you finally trust me?”

Shane squinted at him. “I said I guess I trust you. Why?”

“Trust me that you should sleep outside tonight.” Ilya stepped closer, crowding Shane’s space.

“Do not sleep with Hayden in your dumb couple bed. Come to Soul Ties. Sleep with me.”

Ilya’s lips trailed along Shane’s earlobe, causing goosebumps to ripple up his arms.

“It is so private. No one will see us. We can be completely alone. Together.”

Shane forced air through his lungs, valiantly trying to make his voice steady.

“Yeah, private except for the cameras.”

“I will make you forget about the cameras, Shane Hollander.”

Ilya’s fingertips skimmed lower on Shane’s waist, dipping just a hair beneath his waistband. Shane nodded rapidly.

“Fine. Okay. I’ll sleep outside with you tonight. Let me just...I should go tell Hayden.”

Ilya groaned, half-collapsing against Shane’s body, lips smushing against Shane’s cheek in a whine.

“*Noo*, do not leave me for Pike, he is so boring and stupid. There is nothing to tell him. He has eyes, he will see you are not there in bed tonight.”

“Ilya...”

“Shane...”

Shane snorted, pushing up on Ilya’s shoulders and steering the man to standing.

“He’s my friend and we are in a couple until the next recoupling. I’m not going to be an asshole to him.”

Ilya sniffed, raising his jaw.

“You are right. That would be rude.”

“Thank you for understanding. I’ll see you in a little bit for bed?”

“Of course. That is, if my conversation doesn’t take too long.”

Shane raised his eyebrows. Ilya raised his eyebrows back, gesturing behind him at Sasha.

“My conversation with *my* couple? I would not want to be an asshole.”

Shane’s eyes narrowed, lips pressing together. Ilya’s grin only grew as he gave Shane’s cheek a quick pat.

“So glad you trust me, kotik. Very sweet of you.”

Shane kept his eyes fixed on Ilya as he raised his voice in dripping sweetness.

“Hey, Hayden? Can I pull you for a chat?”

Hayden approached them cautiously.

“Uh, sure Shane. Is now...” Hayden looked between the two men. “...a good time?”

Shane widened his teeth in a smile, eyes still not moving from Ilya’s.

“It’s a *great* time.”

He reached out for Hayden’s hand, finally breaking his gaze from Ilya as their fingers interlaced. Ilya watched their arms swinging between them as they walked away from him. Shane turned with a final flutter of his fingers over his shoulder, his grin turning absolutely evil as Ilya tightened his shoulders with a shout.

“Soul Ties, Hollander.”

“Maybe!”

Shane laughed and Ilya’s lips twitched into an almost smile. Ilya watched for a minute, taking in Shane’s shoulders lowering as he leaned into Hayden, their hands loosening slightly but not separating. Ilya ignored the sour feeling spreading through his stomach. It was banter. Bants, as Shane had said. That was all.

“Did you actually want to talk?”

Sasha’s voice was low as Ilya stalked past the firepit. Ilya froze, turning slowly to him and switching to Russian.

“*Sasha. Are you actually that idiotic?*”

“*Ilya...I only...*”

Ilya stepped closer.

"You only took me away from the one person I wanted to pair with. Selfish, Sasha. As always."

"Selfish, yes."

Sasha met his eyes, looking down at him from his willowy height.

"I have to be selfish with you, Ilya. You forget I've seen you. Mere glimmers, true, but I've seen you. The real you. The softness."

He pushed his foot off the edge of the firepit, coming closer.

"That morning in Berlin? You woke up with words pouring out of you and I took them. We wandered the gardens before your photoshoot, took a nap in the sunlight. I opened my eyes. Exhaled. Said, this is perfect. You moved closer. Let our pinkies touch. You said-"

"Now it is." Ilya swallowed, nodding curtly. *"I did not lose my memories, Sasha."* He looked at the other man, sighing with sudden fatigue. *"I simply do not want them anymore."*

Shane brushed his teeth in the bathroom, Svetlana and Rose flicking water at each other at one of the other sinks. Hayden spit in the sink next to Shane, wiping his mouth and speaking quietly.

"Maybe I should join you two so I don't have to see Jackie sleeping with stupid Connie. Guy looks like a cherub brought to life."

Shane's lips quirked. "Mm, Ilya would love that."

"Yeah." Hayden sighed. "I guess I like being alive."

Hayden dropped his toothbrush in its cup, Shane's joining a moment later. He extended his arms for a hug and Shane went to him, allowing himself to relax in Hayden's warm embrace.

"I'm glad it's you, Hayd. I'd hate to be coupled up with someone random."

Hayden gave him a tight squeeze and then released.

"Me too, man. Now make sure you leave me the blanket. I'm gonna be *so* cold without anyone to snuggle with."

He pouted and Shane rolled his eyes with a laugh, walking back to the bedroom. The sleeping arrangements had been updated, cursive script marking where the new couples would sleep. Shane walked past his old bed with Ilya, Sasha now on his side. He already had his eyemask on, knees curled to his chest, only a thin sheet left on the bed. Shane smirked.

He bent to grab his pillow from his new bed with Hayden and paused. Shane's name was freshly pasted in the trademark pink cursive, but next to it, Hayden's name was shredded, as if a rabid animal had tried to peel it off.

Hayden padded next to him, scratching his stomach.

“Hmm. Looks like Ilya stopped by.”

Shane forced himself not to smile, tucking his pillow under his arm.

“Night, Hayd. Sleep well.”

Shane gave him another hug, lips briefly skimming his cheek, then headed outside.

His heart rate sped up as he approached Soul Ties, which was silly. He knew Ilya better now. Knew things were more grounded. But as he turned the corner, he felt for a second like it was back to their first night, when his breath caught in his throat and he teetered on the edge of something terrifying and miraculous.

“Took you long enough.”

Ilya was stretched out in the pillowy pit of Soul Ties, propped up on an elbow. He had swapped out his typical joggers for a pair of silky black boxers, inseam short enough that Shane tripped slightly over his feet. Ilya smirked.

“I feel overdressed.”

Ilya’s eyes roamed over Shane’s matching dark navy pajama set, taking in the white piping on his shirt and the row of neat white buttons.

“Your pajamas are very cute. Very modest.” He cocked his head. “But you are not very modest, are you, Shane?”

Shane stepped down into Soul Ties, his knees sinking into the soft padding.

“I can be modest.”

Ilya clucked his tongue.

“You say this. But here you are...stepping out on your couple. Sneaking out to see another man.”

Shane’s lips twitched upward, following Ilya’s lead.

“You’re spoken for as well. Or have you forgotten?”

Ilya leaned closer, his nose skimming Shane’s.

“Oh, it is a very unhappy marriage, remember. I was such a young bride, forced to marry that hideous man.”

His finger trailed down Shane’s cheek. The word bride did something confusing to Shane, heat flooding his cheeks. Ilya cocked his head, noticing, his lips warm against Shane’s ear.

“If only there was someone to rescue me. Take me away from him. Claim me.” He pulled back, fluttering his eyelashes slightly. “So helpless, Shane. So trapped.”

“I...I can help.”

“Oh, really?”

Ilya’s smirk was back as he reclined down against the pillows. He arched his chest up slightly, neck lengthening to show off his bruises. Shane felt his mouth water as he moved forward, his hands sliding above Ilya’s shoulders, one leg swinging over to straddle him. Ilya’s eyes moved down, assessing the tent beginning in Shane’s pajama bottoms.

“See. Not so modest, after all.”

Shane’s fingers tightened against the pillows, his face flushing even as he spoke, letting the words out before he could let himself overthink.

“Maybe you want to go back to your husband then?”

Shane lowered himself fully against Ilya, letting him feel how hard he was before raising up just an inch.

“If I’m not modest enough for you?”

“No.” Ilya gripped his hips, pulling him closer and flipping them over. “Only you.”

Shane let out a light moan, his lips finding Ilya’s as he rose up, Ilya leaning down to meet him from above. They rocked together, rough and desperate, before Ilya grabbed at Shane’s bottoms, pressing kisses along his throat.

“I know you do not like being dirty after.”

“Ilya-” Shane’s eyes flew around the outdoor area, tracking the cameras.

Ilya nodded, drawing the duvet up over them, hiding their bodies. He tossed Shane’s shorts to the side, hand disappearing back under the blanket. His silk boxers followed a moment later, then Shane’s top.

They pressed back together, nothing between them now. Shane’s breath came hot against the crook of Ilya’s neck, his fingers tightening against his shoulders. Shane’s hips moved insistently.

“I wish-”

Shane cut himself off, knees wrapping around Ilya’s waist instead. Ilya groaned, tracing his tip briefly against Shane’s entrance before shaking his head, his words soft against Shane’s ear.

“I know. But not like this. Not the first time.”

Shane groaned again, more in frustration, his fingernails cutting into Ilya's skin. A smile flitted across Ilya's face.

"We save it for your wedding night, yes?"

Shane scrunched his face, a bright flush spreading across his cheeks nonetheless.

"I thought you were the bride."

"Right. Yes. My terrible husband."

Shane rocked harder against Ilya, exhaling as they skimmed against each other, his precum slick between them.

"Don't go back to him."

"No?"

Ilya reached down, taking them both in hand. Shane's voice pinched, panting.

"Get divorced. Don't stay with him."

Ilya grunted, his hand moving faster over them.

"I won't, Shane. I'll run away. I'll run to you."

Shane's eyes fluttered shut, a high moan keening out of him. Ilya watched him, cheeks flushed with exertion, his lips pink and parted. Ilya let out a low curse as he tightened his hand around them both, increasing the pace as Shane spilled out words like a litany.

"Leave him. Leave him for me, Ilya."

They came together. Ilya felt Shane shudder a second before he did, his fist suddenly overflowing as he slowed his hand. He collapsed down onto Shane, burying himself into his chest, teeth giving a small bite to his pec.

Shane exhaled, his chest steady. He ran a hand through Ilya's hair.

"Sorry if that was, um,"

"No."

Ilya cut him off, his clean hand reaching up to capture Shane's face.

"Was perfect."

His lips covered Shane's, deep and purposeful. He reached for his pillowcase, shaking out the pillow, and wiped them clean before collapsing next to him. Ilya pulled Shane close, ignoring the flutter in his chest as Shane curled into him without hesitation, Ilya's lips finding the tender crown of his head.

“You are perfect, maybe.” Ilya whispered, Shane already halfway asleep.

“We should go back.” Shane stretched in the morning light, his hair ruffled against his pillow.

“No.”

Shane snorted, running his thumb over Ilya’s pout. Ilya pouted harder.

“You want me to return to my cruel husband?”

Shane flinched, a deep flush spreading over his cheeks.

“Ah, you are so innocent in the light of day, hm?”

Shane shoved him, Ilya catching his arm and rolling him on top of him.

“Mr. Modest. Go put your pajamas on. If Hayden tries to make you breakfast, I will poison it.”

“Wow. Very chill, normal response, Ilya.”

Ilya shrugged. “I am cooking for you. I will make sure you are fed.”

Shane smiled, his fingers tangling in Ilya’s necklace.

“Guess you better get up then. Or Hayden might beat you there.”

Ilya gasped, giving Shane a slap to the side of his ass.

“You are a terror. Fine. Up.”

He moved Shane off of him, grabbing his silk boxers and sliding them low over his hips, smirking as he felt Shane’s gaze as he walked away.

“Wait!” Shane sat curled in the duvet like an adorable duckling, his hair sticking up in the back.

“I was thinking. What if we, um, had a signal?” Shane pushed through his blush, voice serious but eager. “If we want to meet. Just us. Since we’re not in a couple anymore.”

Ilya nodded slowly, smiling.

“You will break your poor boyfriend’s heart. I love it. What should the signal be? Me pointing to my cock?”

Shane huffed, rolling his eyes.

“No, Ilya, it should be subtle. So no one’s feelings get hurt.”

“Hm. Subtle. You should think of something then.”

“Well. I did think.” Shane’s blush deepened. “We could tap our hands. Like this.” Shane gave his ring finger a quick tap.

Ilya’s chest squeezed. He kept his voice calm, shrugging.

“Yes, okay. It works.”

“Cool.” Shane smiled, his wide one that he never did for the press conferences or the cameras, and only sometimes for Ilya.

“Cool. Get dressed, Hollander.” Ilya tossed Shane’s pajamas at his face, laughing at Shane’s sputtering as he jogged down the stairs to make breakfast.

Shane hummed happily as he sucked on the straw of his protein shake, Hayden dropping off avocado toast with an eyeroll when he saw the feast Ilya had already prepared in front of him.

Svetlana and Rose were hip-checking each other in the kitchen, each trying to make the other one food, when both their phones went off at once. Their twin squeals made Shane cover his ears.

“America is sending us on a date!” Rose hopped up and down, hair bouncing.

“Out of this godforsaken Villa!” Svetlana threw her head back, laughing.

The Islanders surrounded them, clapping and celebrating as they sprinted upstairs to get ready.

Rose threw an arm around Shane on her way out of the bathroom. He held her close, smiling into her shoulder.

“Don’t come back married.”

She laughed, kissing his cheek. “It was never over between us, Shane. It’s still not over.”

She swooned dramatically and Shane shifted, catching her with an eyeroll. He hoisted her up and Rose checked her hair once more in the bathroom’s mirror.

“Also Shane, it’s *Love Island*. Not *90 Day Fiance*. Not sure if you got that memo...”

Shane flushed. “Shut up. We’re still open. And not even technically in a couple right now.”

“So you’re fine with him exploring Sasha again?”

“What?! Who told you that?” Shane clenched his fists, pulse quickening.

Rose let out a loud laugh, smacking his chest. “Please *try* to hold out for ninety days.”

Shane glared at her for a beat, then reached out and mused her hair with one hand. Rose gasped, smacking him with more force before pushing him away and gluing herself back to the mirror. Shane left her to it, twirling slightly as he swung around the doorframe, calling out in a sing-song.

“It’s not true love unless she accepts you, messy hair and all!”

Rose replied in the same high-pitched forced tone.

“Shut up Shaneee! I hate you so muchhh!”

Shane chuckled, jogging down the rest of the stairs.

When Rose returned from her date, she still held a grudge, shooing Shane off to sit with Svetlana’s group as they recapped. Shane plodded over to the four Islanders huddled around Svetlana, sliding next to Ilya.

“So? How’d it go, girl?” Cici leaned forward.

“It was nice. We went on a big boat.” Svetlana gave a small smile to the group.

“And?” Connie widened his eyes. “Did you two close off? It seems serious between you two.”

“Mm. Nothing that important happened.”

Across the Villa, there was a scream from Rose’s cluster. Shane looked back at Svetlana, then at Ilya. Ilya was smiling wide.

“Ah. You told her?”

Svetlana cut her eyes at him. “We spoke. Words were said.”

Javi sighed. “Svetlana, this is the worst recap ever.”

Another round of screams exploded. Shane caught Hayden’s eyes, laughing a bit as he tried to mouth something to Shane, pointing at Rose in excitement.

Svetlana shifted on the daybed, rolling out her neck.

“Sorry my date is not more exciting for you. Maybe America will pick you and you can have a big exciting date instead.”

A final scream erupted and Shane scoffed.

“Okay, clearly some things happened. Please tell us?”

Svetlana exhaled, considering, then crossed her arms. Shane looked at Ilya, who smiled mischievously.

“Obviously Svetlana is in love and they have closed off. I am Russian, I know this.”

The group started to tentatively half-whoop as they looked between Ilya and Svetlana.

Svetlana snapped her eyes at him, uncrossing her arms.

“False, Ilya. I told her I could *see* myself falling in love, and would like to close off, after we properly test the relationship, even though I can’t imagine a test that would turn me away from her.”

She froze, pressing her lips together after the rush of words. Ilya leaned back smugly as Svetlana’s group finally let out a loud round of cheering. Rose looked over her shoulder at them with a flushed grin.

Shane stood up, pointing with a grin. “Who’s the *90 Day Fiance* now!”

Rose turned red, turning her back to him again with a loud scoff. Svetlana and Ilya exchanged a look, switching into Russian.

“I fear these Canadians are trying to marry us off, Ilyusha.”

“Yes. Very scary. We should run.”

“And fast.”

Ilya looked at her for a moment. *“I’m happy for you, Sveta.”*

“Another word and I’ll tell Shane what you said during your marriage proposal.”

“What? Did you say my name?”

Ilya fixed his gaze on Svetlana, squeezing Shane’s shoulder. “No, Svetlana has no reason to talk about you or even to you, about anything.”

Svetlana laughed, her eyes trailing across the villa to Rose. Ilya forced himself not to say anything about the incredibly laughable, incredibly embarrassing, incredibly tender thing her eyes were doing.

Shane had just reclined next to Hayden, wanting to make sure he was still investing in his other connections. And not because of anything related to what Rose had taunted him with earlier.

Hayden’s phone chirped and he sat up, face breaking into a smile.

“JACKIE AND I ARE GOING ON A DATE!”

Jackie flushed, sliding off the daybed she was sitting on with Javi and trying to hide her grin as she hurried upstairs to get ready. Shane felt his stomach dip. Only one date left.

“Don’t tell me you’re missing your second-choice already.”

Shane made a strangled noise. “Hayd, don’t call yourself that!”

“Well, am I wrong?” Hayden was still smiling, but there was something bittersweet beneath it.

Shane shifted, turning on his side to face Hayden.

“You’re telling me you’d rank me above Jackie?”

“Hey, I didn’t say that.” Hayden’s smile was full sweetness now, his palm shoving Shane playfully.

“Exactly.” Shane huffed, relaxing a bit.

Hayden pulled him into a warm, close hug, squeezing him with the amount of pressure Shane loved. They rocked like that for a moment, the stress fully leaving Shane’s body, Hayden’s voice at his ear.

“It’s okay to get attached to him, Shane. Even though I’m clearly better.”

Shane snorted, Hayden’s arms firm around him. He felt his skin flush. The embarrassment of everyone seeing plainly what he was still trying to hide, to master, to control. Hayden, familiar and solid. And yes, not unattractive, lips a mere headtilt from his.

“Hey.” Hayden pulled back, his hands rubbing Shane’s shoulders. “It’s going to be okay. And if not, I’ll drown him in the waters of Fiji. Now please stop trying to make out with me before my date.”

“I’m not-!” Shane sputtered as Hayden slipped his hands off and headed upstairs, cackling as he left him behind.

The Islanders saw Hayden and Jackie off, waving as they disappeared into the distance before breaking off and dispersing. Ahead of him, Shane watched as Sasha said something to Ilya, who nodded and followed him. There was no resistance, no scowl on Ilya’s face. They peeled off, and - Shane’s pulse jumped - it looked like they were heading towards the docks.

Without thinking about it, Shane accelerated his pace and cut across the lawn, walking in front of them a few minutes later. Shane’s head jerked towards Ilya and he tapped his ring finger, striding away before he could look back and risk disappointment, his shoulders already tight by his ears again.

Shane stalked towards the Villa’s interior, mind racing. Maybe Rose hadn’t been finding things to joke about before. Maybe there was some truth in it.

A hand grabbed his waist, pushing him against the wall. Shane felt the breath go out of him as he looked up.

“Eager this afternoon?” Ilya grinned wolfishly down at him.

Shane didn't think, only reached, tugging Ilya's hair and bringing him to meet his lips, hands hungry and wild. Ilya deepened the kiss, his hand palming Shane's entire jaw before moving his hand down the column of Shane's neck, then pressing firmly against his chest where the tightness lived.

Shane tilted his head back, catching his breath.

"Are you okay?"

Ilya's lips skimmed beneath his jaw, his tone light but coiled. Shane nodded, running his hands over Ilya's firm torso as he calmed.

"Better now."

Ilya's eyes studied his face. "Pike is on a date. Somehow." He shrugged. "America has no taste."

"Yeah."

Ilya parted his lips, restarting. "You got upset after Pike's date?"

"Oh." Shane blinked at Ilya, a flush crawling up his neck. "No. That's not--"

He cut off his own sentence, leaning forward into Ilya again, softer this time. He glanced around them, the flush deepening, and told a half-truth.

"Um. I wanted more pictures in the photobooth. Like the ones we took after the challenge yesterday."

Shane wasn't sure what Ilya had done with his copy. Shane had slid the four-gridded photo of them beneath his pillow. He had already memorized the frames: he and Ilya showing their rings to the camera; Ilya smooshing his lips against Shane's cheek as Shane's face cracked open in a smile; their lips meeting in a deep kiss, hands grazing each other's jaws; and Shane's favorite, the last frame, where they had barely pulled away, a fraction of space between them, eyes gazing at one another.

"Ah, yes. You want more free model shots of me. Exploiting my life's work."

"Something like that."

Shane smiled, tugging Ilya forward and into the Villa's photobooth, the thin neon pink curtain fluttering shut behind them. Ilya crowded him on the tiny bench, his broad shoulders barely fitting in the booth.

"I've been thinking about what you said yesterday." He nosed against Shane's neck.

"I say a lot of things."

"About...wanting."

Ilya's hands trailed down Shane's shorts. His palms traced the curve of Shane's ass, drifting dangerously close to a spot that made Shane immediately remember what conversation Ilya was referring to. Ilya's voice was low in his ear.

"I want that too. I want to take you apart. And put you back together again."

Shane pressed his lips together, trying to stop his gasp.

"But you wanted pictures, yes?"

Ilya smiled innocently, removing his hands and hitting the button that began the five-second countdown. Shane whimpered at the loss of touch. Ilya caved instantly, dragging Shane half into his lap as his hands returned to Shane's ass, insistent and sure.

"Smile, Shane."

Ilya turned to the camera with a polite smile as the first flash went off, the pad of his finger pressing against Shane's hole over his shorts. Shane gasped, trying to recover as Ilya circled two fingers there, letting out a buried groan as Shane arched back into the pressure.

Another flash went off.

"Think you can cum before the pictures finish?"

Ilya's voice was low as he licked up his neck, Shane startling. Ilya didn't wait for his response, simply slid his other hand down the front of Shane's shorts, Shane clinging tighter to his neck.

"*Oh.*"

Ilya could feel the wetness already spreading, his thumb moving quickly over Shane's slit as his other hand circled behind.

The third flash went off, Ilya not even pretending to pose anymore.

"Hurry. Come for me, Shane."

"*Oh, fuck.*"

The final flash went off, Shane's head thrown back blurrily against Ilya's neck. Out of frame, Ilya's hand was still buried in Shane's shorts, coated with the evidence of Shane's pleasure. Ilya peppered kisses over his face, grinning as he wiped himself clean.

"Not your best angle. But you are not a world famous model, so I will allow it."

"Shut *up*." Shane flushed, trying to compose himself, his limbs still floaty. "I guess I'll keep both photo copies then, if my poses aren't up to your standards."

Ilya's face became serious immediately. "Absolutely not. You will do no such thing."

Shane grinned, then pushed past Ilya. Ilya grabbed him on his way out and they roughhoused in front of the photobooth, laughing, shoving one another back and forth as the pictures printed. They stilled only when the pictures dropped into the bin, both reaching out to grab one.

“Fuck. That’s hot, Ilya.”

Shane studied the four small images of his face, broken open with desire. He had never seen himself like that. Had never seen them like that, him and Ilya, together. Wanting, and having.

“They’re back!”

Leo’s voice rang out over the Villa, Jackie and Hayden strolling back in with clasped hands, identical grins on their faces.

Shane smiled automatically. Hayden was absolutely gone. Jackie looked not far behind. He scooted next to Rose on the daybed, circling Jackie as she filled them in. She tucked her hair behind her ears, face still pink.

“Well, for our date, we went snorkeling. Which at first I was a bit bummed by, because it’s hard to look cute with that giant mask!”

Lexi nodded assuringly.

“But yeah, I don’t think he minded because, um, he said he’s had his eye on me from the start.” She flushed deeper.

Shane smiled. “It’s true. He’s told me.” Jackie’s eyes stuttered to Shane’s, something relaxing in her shoulders. “He won’t shut up about it, really.”

Jackie laughed then, a happy unfettered thing that Shane hadn’t heard before.

“Good. I can’t really shut up about him either.”

She glanced across to the beanbags where Hayden sat, recounting their date to his group. She looked guiltily at Connie before drawing her attention back.

“We got to talk a lot. Hayden seems very kind. And genuine. And honestly, from a neurological perspective, I am so fascinated by his TBIs? He should not be functioning this well.”

Rose laughed. “Are you going to use him as a test subject when you’re back in the real world? Cutting-edge neuroscientific breakthroughs because of Hayden Pike’s addled brain?”

“I might.” Jackie smiled, looking down at her lap. “It might even need to be a longitudinal study. Years. Decades maybe.”

Lexi squealed, clapping her hands. “I am so happy for you, girl! And did you align with the important stuff? You want kids soon, right?”

“Yeah, and if anything, he’s more ready than me.” Jackie laughed, tracing her lips absently.

Rose reached out to grab her hand. “Jackie. Did he try to impregnate you on the date?”

Jackie flushed. “Not quite.” She grinned. “But I wouldn’t mind if he did.”

The group let out scandalized cheers. Rose laughed, clapping.

“Our first *Love Island* baby!”

“Oh my god, you would get *so* much engagement on socials.” Lexi’s face was deadly serious. “Depending on your ovulation cycle, you could time it so you’d be able to announce at our season reunion.”

“I’m ready, but not that ready.” Jackie shook her head, smile stuck to her face. “But I’m excited to see where it goes. It’s early days. But we’re interested in exploring each other, so.” She shrugged into her shoulder, batting away the whoops that resulted.

Shane’s phone made a sound. He froze, trying not to get his hopes up, and then drew it out.

He flew to his feet, eyes already searching for Ilya among the beanbags.

“SHANE AND ILYA! America has selected you for our final date!”

The Islanders started clapping. Shane felt Rose squeeze his shoulders, Jackie cupping her mouth to cheer louder.

Their first date. Shane wondered what he should wear.

Something formal?

“You look very nice.”

Ilya’s lips twitched up as Shane descended the stairs. Shane was wearing dark pants expensive in their simplicity and a semi-sheer black button-up that his stylist assured him would ‘play well’ on screen.

Ilya was wearing a loose tee that looked like moths had gotten to it and a pair of very tight mid-length shorts. He tilted his head, extending a hand to Shane as he stepped down the last stair.

“Didn’t the producers tell you to dress for movement too?”

“Yeah, but it’s our-” Shane cut himself off.

Ilya’s eyes flickered over Shane’s face, softening.

“It is a worthwhile thing to dress up for. Let me change.”

“No, no, let’s just go.” Shane squeezed his hand, bumping his shoulder softly. “We’ve been waiting long enough.”

“True.”

Ilya spun Shane around, kissing him deeply in front of the gathered Islanders and causing them to clap louder. Svetlana laughed, waving them away, and they left the Villa hand-in-hand.

Shane started at the ATV, then down at his outfit. Ilya grinned.

“Clothes can be washed. Here, helmet.”

He placed it gingerly over Shane’s head, buckling it with a focus that made Shane’s stomach flutter.

“I am a good driver, but safety first.”

Shane spluttered. “Who said you would drive? I’m driving.”

He pushed Ilya aside, swinging his leg over the driver’s seat. Ilya watched him suspiciously.

“Shane. I have a feeling you drive like a mom in a minivan. I am a fun driver. I drive fast cars. I can handle a little four-wheeler.”

“And I can’t?” Shane arched his brow. “Now hurry up and get your helmet on.”

Ilya grumbled, shoving the helmet over his curls and tightening the strap. Shane turned forward, smirking as he drew Ilya’s arm around his waist.

“Hold on tight.”

Ilya inched closer, his breath hot against Shane’s ear. “This part is easy. Especially since you’ll drive like a grandma.”

Shane revved the engine, arching his ass back closer against Ilya and laughing as Ilya’s hands gripped him harder. He hit the gas, their bodies sliding as the ATV jolted forward, starting its ascent up the steep mountain hill where they had been dropped off.

Shane wound them around the curves of the Fiji countryside, both of them taking in the lush greenery and views with small gasps as they drove. Ilya let himself tilt forward, leaning his cheek against Shane’s back and relaxing into him. Shane took one hand off the controls, reaching down to squeeze Ilya’s hand before returning to steer.

Ilya, emboldened, reached one of his hands lower to the front of Shane’s trousers before receiving a sharp smack from Shane. Ilya chuckled, pressing his face closer between Shane’s

shoulderblades and soaking in the clean citrusy scent of him. They rounded a final curve and Shane slowed to a stop, both of them silent for a moment.

On the cliff's overlook, a small table was set up beneath a pergola threaded with fairy lights. The sun was just beginning its descent overhead, a single candle flickering on the white tablecloth. Shane and Ilya dismounted, Ilya reaching over to unclip Shane's helmet. They intertwined their hands, approaching the table.

"You are not the worst driver."

Shane snorted, releasing Ilya's hand and moving ahead to pull out his chair for him. A flash of something Shane couldn't recognize passed across Ilya's face and then was gone.

"Such a gentleman."

Ilya cut across the other way and pulled out Shane's chair, gesturing with a smirk. Shane rolled his eyes.

"It's not a competition, Ilya. And thank you."

Shane sat, allowing Ilya to push him in. Ilya then returned to his seat, scooting himself closer to the table.

"So."

Shane smiled. "So."

"Our first date."

Shane shrugged. "Yeah. Not my first date with a man, so not as important, but..."

"You want me to use this candle to burn everything to the ground?" Ilya raised his eyebrows.

"I mean, it would kind of ruin the vibe. Hayden kept everything very romantic." Shane struggled to keep his face neutral.

"I will burn everything, Hollander. Do not tempt me." Ilya narrowed his eyes, reaching out and holding both of Shane's hands, his thumbs tracing Shane's. "I am a much better date than stupid Pike."

"Guess we'll see."

"Have you always been such a little brat?"

Shane flushed, shrugging genuinely this time and avoiding Ilya's eyes.

"I don't know."

He cleared his throat, eyes flitting around the romantic set-up.

"What makes a good date for you?"

Ilya released Shane's hands, leaning back in his chair. He scratched his throat idly, considering.

"Not sure. Don't date too much. Good company, good fucking, maybe?"

"Ilya." Shane rolled his eyes.

"What, you like bad fucking? This will be a bad date for you then."

"Yeah, but, c'mon." Shane exhaled, shaking his head in a laugh. "Wait, so, how many dates have you been on with men? Not a lot?"

"Mm. Not so much." Ilya shrugged. Shane waited, a smile growing.

"Ilya. Am I your first ever date with a man?"

Ilya thumbed his nose, sniffing. "It is not such a big deal."

Shane's face fell for a moment before he plastered on a smile. Ilya sighed.

"Fine. It is a big deal. So what. Just don't give me that fake media smile."

Shane brightened, practically glowing at the admission. Then his face contracted again.

"What fake media smile?"

"The one you do in interviews when you are pissed off or tired or overwhelmed and have to answer stupid questions anyway. You smile like a little doll. It is creepy."

"It is not!" Shane straightened, suddenly wanting a mirror so he could see. Surely his mom or agent would have told him if he looked *creepy*.

"It is not Shane." Ilya said simply.

Shane's shoulders lowered. They gazed at each other for a moment. Shane's brows crinkled.

"You watch so many of my interviews you know when I'm fake-smiling?"

Ilya stretched, his shirt tightening around his biceps, almost distracting Shane from the conversation.

"Yes, after you were so obsessed with me and my great ass at the Rolex shoot, I figure, I should see if this is a dangerous stalker. I find instead you are a very cute stalker."

"I was not a stalker! If anything, *you* were, with all those messages I never replied to!"

"Yes, such a brat, we know this. Making me chase you down like a little bunny when we both know what you want."

Shane's eyes glistened, lips parting as he gazed at Ilya.

“And what is that?”

“Me.” Ilya met his gaze, something hot flaring up Shane’s spine.

Shane swallowed, looking down at his hands.

“I do wonder sometimes...if I hadn’t been so scared...if I had just replied to one of your messages...”

“No. It would have ruined your hockey season. Too many distracting dick pics.”

“Ilya!”

“What?” He shrugged, smirking. “You would not like if I had done that?”

Shane flushed. “That’s not the point.”

“See? I would have ruined your career. Better that we meet this way.”

“Yeah, well, my career may still be ruined.”

Shane’s stomach dipped. He had been avoiding thinking too much about how the real world was reacting. Coming out as gay and hooking up on national television probably wasn’t what his agent had envisioned when she booked the show to elevate his image and distract from the rumors.

“Shane. Come back.” Ilya’s fingers were gentle against Shane’s jaw.

He flinched, swallowing.

“Sorry.”

“It is okay.” Ilya studied him. “I do not think you will be ruined. You are Shane fucking Hollander.”

“Yeah. Maybe.”

Ilya’s face tightened for a moment. His voice was smooth.

“You are an incredible player. If I ever am in the way of that...”

“Ilya, no.” Shane shook his head rapidly, reaching out for his hands with a hard laugh. “I’d be ruined for being, I don’t know, a...desperate gay slut. The league doesn’t care who I’m doing as much as who I am. It’s old school. Stuck in the past in lots of ways. It’s bad enough they can’t pass me off as white. This too...I don’t know. I’m hopeful. But I know it might be rough on the other side of this.”

Ilya nodded. “I’ll be there. Whatever you need. If anyone has a problem, they will become my problem.”

Shane snorted. “You may have lots of problems then.”

“Fine. Is not a problem.”

Ilya grinned. He drew Shane’s hand closer, kissing his palm.

“So. You are...a desperate gay slut for me?”

“Oh my god, shut *up*. You are too.”

“Yes.”

Ilya leaned forward, kissing Shane’s hand again, his shirt falling open. Shane’s eyes trailed down the front of Ilya’s shirt, tracing his pecs and catching on his necklace.

“Are you religious?” Shane motioned. “Your cross?”

“Ah. Not-” Ilya looked out at the sea. “It is complicated.”

Shane waited. Ilya leaned back, crossing his arms.

“Tell me more of your facts about *Love Island*. What was that depressing thing about contestants killing themselves?”

Shane’s face both lit up and fell.

“Oh! Yeah, sorry, obviously it’s depressing. But also fascinating? In a serious way, of course. But yes, multiple people involved with the show have died by suicide. That’s why they give us access to therapists once the show wraps.”

“So, what, they go on the show and then, boom?” Ilya blew a raspberry. “Dead?”

Shane’s nose wrinkled slightly. “No. It’s more complex like that. Each person has their own stressors. But it definitely seemed like the online harassment and pressure after being so visible on the show contributed to worse mental health. It’s really sad.”

“Hm.” Ilya sniffed, shrugging. “Wouldn’t people say they are being...what’s the word...like...spoiled? They get to be celebrities then throw a fit about it? Boohoo?”

“Well, yeah, some assholes might say that.” Shane tilted his head, studying Ilya. “But I really hope most people don’t feel that way. No one knows what goes on in someone’s head. I’ve had dark times - not that dark, of course - but...depression is a real thing. No matter your circumstances.”

Ilya thumbed the edge of the tablecloth.

“You don’t think it is weak?”

“Of course not!” Shane’s face scrunched up, serious and intense. “It’s a tragedy. To suffer and not know any other way of getting out.”

He leaned forward, eyes drifting somewhere left of Ilya.

“I audited this psych class and the professor described it like jumping out of a burning skyscraper. But other people might not see the fire, or know how big it is.”

Shane kept talking, his words coming faster like he did when he was deeply interested in something.

“So hopefully we can do things that help people see each others’ fires. And help people put out their fires, or make them smaller, anything we can do. But if we can’t? I don’t think we should ever judge someone for that.”

Ilya crossed his arms tight, squeezing hard against the vice in his chest.

“Why is it so complicated? I see your fire, I put it out?”

Shane’s brows furrowed again, considering.

“I think maybe the seeing is already hard? Letting people know you’re struggling? And yeah, even if you open up...maybe the fire has been going on for a long time. Maybe you need to fight it with lots of different things or maybe you put it out and it starts burning again. I’m not exactly sure.”

Shane tilted his head.

“Maybe I can reach out to that professor again. And obviously, tons of people have depression that can be very well-managed with therapy, or medication, or just having a strong community, or time in nature, or-”

Shane sat up suddenly, swallowing.

“Oh, sorry. I didn’t mean to talk this long. This is a really depressing topic for a date. Fuck.”

“Shane.” Ilya gave him a ghost of a smile. “You are okay. I like hearing you talk as long as you want to.”

“Oh. Okay.”

Ilya swallowed, gradually uncrossing his arms.

“The cross I wear. It belonged to my mother.”

Shane blinked at the sudden change in topic. Ilya’s hand absently cradled the cross around his neck, his voice thickening.

“She was maybe my favorite person on earth. Probably. Definitely.”

“She’s not...?”

“She is dead.”

Shane’s eyes widened a bit. He nodded once, tightly.

“I’m so sorry, Ilya.”

Ilya could see Shane’s brain rewinding, his eyes darting back and forth on the tablecloth before his lips parted again.

“Did she kill herself?”

“Yes. She did.” Ilya exhaled.

No one had ever spoken so plainly. There was something calming in the clarity. In the naming of it.

“How?” Shane sat patiently, waiting.

The words were rusty on Ilya’s tongue.

“Pills. Too many. I found her.”

“Oh my god.” Shane’s eyes filled with water, the tears not yet running over. “When?”

“Last year. I went home to visit.” Ilya shrugged, running a thumb over his nose. “I do not know if she was waiting to see me one last time or not thinking of me at all.”

“Maybe both?” Shane reached for his hand. Ilya let his hand be held.

“Yes. I think maybe both.” He cleared his throat, eyes fixed on the tablecloth. “I was mad, mostly, at first. The burning building...sometimes I wish she would have taken me. So I am not in the flames alone.” He let out a short laugh. “But now I am the one not being romantic.”

“We can talk about this stuff, Ilya. I like that you can talk to me about this stuff.”

Shane squeezed his hand. Ilya blinked and drew his hand back, suddenly aware of all the words that had poured from his traitorous mouth.

“So...” Shane tilted his head. “That was when you were with Sasha?”

“Yes.”

“And what about your father? Is he...?”

“Alive. In Russia. Enough questions, now.”

“Okay.”

Shane kicked Ilya lightly under the table.

“So you like fast cars? Ugh, sorry. Question.”

Ilya snorted. “Yes.”

“Fine. You can drive the ATV back. My vision isn’t so great at night anyway.”

Ilya smirked a bit, kicking Shane back and then gradually locking their ankles together. In unison, their gazes shifted to the sunset. The sky was a haze of oranges and pinks, the fairy lights twinkling overhead.

“Shane?” Ilya didn’t turn, his eyes taking in the view. Shane didn’t either, both gazing forward.

“Yeah?”

“Can I tell you something?”

Shane’s eyes darted over before returning forward. He slowly nodded once, voice serious.

“Anything, Ilya.”

“I am glad you are *such* a desperate gay slut for me.”

Shane let out an incredulous laugh, turning back to face him. Ilya caught his eye, grinning, and then held up his palms as Shane stood and hurtled around the table, hands flying.

“I told you to shut *up!*”

Ilya grabbed Shane’s wrists, pulling him onto his lap. He gripped the ends of Shane’s hair with his hand, the other holding him close around his waist, the sun’s last rays shining around them.

“You are the one talking. You should shut up.”

Shane looked down at him, smile dancing on his lips, breathless already, his eyes full of an adoration Ilya felt so far from earning.

“Make me, then.”

This - this Ilya knew how to do. He brought his lips to Shane’s, his mouth opening wider for his tongue already, sucking out Shane’s tiny moans as they pressed closer together, desperately, desperately, desperately.

NEXT TIME...ON HEATED ISLAND...

Tomorrow night...the Islanders meet a new bombshell of America’s choosing!

Cast your votes now, and choose wisely, because we are due for another recoupling as we head into Casa Amor...!

Chapter End Notes

shoutout to leah and rob on s6 of love island for their secret dock signal i've stolen

also i was planning on following canon a bit more with irina/ilya not sharing that till way later in their relationship, but the whole point of these dating shows is to kinda speedrun the trauma and emotional bonding soo! it's writing itself at this point we'll see what happens next lmao

also also legit feel free to vote for the bombshell guest appearance! we're almost at casa amor so i have tons of characters i want to play with but not picky about the order they pop up in :)

Chapter 13

Chapter Summary

our newest bombshell arrives and shane and ilya are SO NOT INTO him. plus, a sudden departure and our final recoupling before casa!

Chapter Notes

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

Ilya and Shane stirred in Soul Ties, the sunrise hitting them almost as brutally as fluorescent lights. Shane sighed, snuggling closer into Ilya's chest and relaxing deeper as his hands threaded through his dark hair.

"Our date last night was so nice." Shane murmured.

"Mm." Ilya pressed a brief kiss to his forehead. "Up now. Islanders will be coming."

Shane pouted, his hands tightening around Ilya.

"No. This is our bed now. They can wait."

"Too bad. They will be pulling people for chats over these cum-stained cushions soon."

"Ilya!" Shane shot up, looking down in panic.

Ilya chuckled. "Kidding. I always clean up, don't I?"

Shane slowly reclined again, grumbling. Ilya patted his thigh once before standing.

"I'll make breakfast."

"No, wait, it's my turn to make it for you."

Ilya shrugged, already walking away. "I don't mind."

Shane exhaled, stretching his arms out on either side of him for one long moment before forcing himself to rejoin the rest of the Villa.

Javi's phone went off midmorning, his voice bellowing from the gym.

"I got a TEXT!"

He propped a foot up on the exercise bench, projecting out as the Islanders came closer.

“Islanders! Today’s challenge will put your lips to the test in a ranked kissing challenge. Tempted to put your couple first? Too bad - blindfolds will take care of that. Now slide on some lip balm and pucker up!”

The Islanders let out loud cheers. Shane felt the familiar flare of competition, immediately followed by self-doubt. The blindfolds meant he would be judged truly on skill alone...and what if he was actually a terrible kisser and no one had told him yet?

Ilya’s voice cut through his thoughts.

“Thinking about our first kiss? Maybe you are sad there won’t be handcuffs too?”

Shane flushed, turning to catch Ilya’s smirk.

“Sounds like you’re the one thinking about it. The only thing I’m sad about is upsetting you when I come in first place.”

Ilya’s eyebrows shot up, lips twitching. “Very bold, Hollander.”

Ilya leaned in closer, Shane arching automatically to close the distance. Ilya pulled away at the last moment, smirking openly now.

“Ah, no kisses before the competition. You will try to steal all my good moves if I kiss you now.” He patted Shane’s cheek, then walked away, trying not to laugh at Shane’s sputter behind him.

“Welcome, Islanders!”

Ariana grinned as the Islanders jogged in, all adorned in various shades of pink and red. A giant pink scoreboard with the Islander’s names loomed in the background, the name of a prominent makeup company scrawled at the top.

“I hope you’re ready to pucker up! We have some fantastic lipsticks, lip glosses, and lip balms available courtesy of our sponsor to make sure your lips are in tiptop shape.”

She smiled at the camera, her own lips a deep red.

“Now, in a moment, you will place on these blindfolds so there is no bias involved. When I tap you on the shoulder, remove your blindfold and head down the line with the best kisses you got! The Islanders will call out their ratings for you while I record it on the scoreboard behind you. Blindfolds on, and may the best kisser win!”

The Islanders cheered again, Shane doing a small fist pump by his side.

Shane only knew they had started when Cici called out a number to his left. Before he knew it, lips were on his, tentative and half-laughing.

“Rose?” Shane cocked his head, fingers coming up roughly against his lips to shush him.

“Score, Shane?” Ariana waited in front of the scoreboard.

“Um. A two out of ten? I don’t want to be mean, it just didn’t seem that passionate?”

A smack hit his shoulder. Yup, definitely Rose.

The kisses continued, Shane trying to track who he recognized. He figured if he recognized Sasha’s kiss, he could bite his tongue and make it seem like an accident.

Finally, he felt a light tap on his shoulder. Shane paused, then slid off his blindfold, Ariana nodding before him encouragingly. Shane blinked a bit, letting his eyes adjust.

He started with Cici. Her tongue was immediately eager in his mouth, Shane’s hands hovering in the air as she gripped his biceps and pulled him closer. He felt like that was maybe cheating a bit, her hands roving over his body, but Cici didn’t seem as concerned with anonymity or figuring out who she may be kissing so much as with merging their bodies into one skin.

As he continued kissing Islanders, Shane relaxed slightly, letting himself loosen. He noticed how each person had their own style: Jackie tender and slow, Leo rough and messy. Shane let himself lean into what each person wanted, matching their rhythm and speed. He grinned as each Islander called out ratings after - a 9, an 8, another 9, even a 10 from Javi, which made Shane flush a bit.

And then Ilya was standing in front of him, hands clasped behind his back, head tilted up a bit in boredom. Shane’s stomach fluttered, his grin deepening. Shane stepped closer, just enough for Ilya to sense his presence. He watched as Ilya lowered his head, eyebrows coming together for a moment. Shane took another step, not fully touching yet, his lips barely ghosting over Ilya’s. Ilya parted for him, tilting forward in anticipation of the kiss that Shane withheld. Shane exhaled, his breath warm against Ilya’s neck. He trailed his lips over Ilya’s jaw, watching as he shivered. Only then did he raise his hand to cup Ilya’s cheek, bringing him closer into a deep kiss.

Ilya pulled back, both of them breathing faster. His voice was rough against Shane’s cheek. His lips curved up beneath his blindfold.

“Shane.”

Ilya unclasped his hands, palming Shane’s ass firmly with a smirk that deepened when Shane let out a surprised squeak. Ilya’s tongue dipped into Shane’s mouth, a groan slipping out as he explored deeper. Behind them, Ariana fanned herself with her cue cards, giving the camera a scandalized expression.

Finally, Shane stumbled back from him, wiping his bottom lip with his thumb.

Ariana cleared her throat. "Ilya? Your rating of this kiss?"

"Forty million."

Ariana chuckled. "I'll round down to a ten as the highest score."

Shane flushed. He tried to get his bearings, refocusing on his technique as he moved down the line. Connie gave him a 7, Svetlana a 9, though he suspected that may have been to make Ilya jealous. He managed a 6 from Rose for sucking on her bottom lip the way she liked even though she guessed it was him. Sasha was last, and as competitive as he was, Shane settled for the 3 he was given from his very brief peck.

Shane took his place back in line, Ariana waiting for his blindfold to be securely on before she started moving to the next Islander. Shane scowled a bit as he heard the numbers being called out, too high for his liking, though he estimated he was still in first place. He scowled more when he heard Ilya's sharp intake of breath and what might have been a fucking *moan* followed by a "nine." Shane's hands tightened into fists.

And then the lips were on his. Soft but firm. Assured. Exploratory. Light stubble grazed his chin, steady hands gliding up his hips before stopping, respectful, instead of moving elsewhere. Shane found himself unwinding as the kiss deepened, his hands tracing the man's very defined biceps before drifting over his pecs, his mouth opening further to welcome the man's tongue.

And then it was over, Shane swallowing a small gasp in the absence.

"Your rating, Shane?"

"Um." Shane stumbled, mind scrambled.

He tried to place who the kiss may have been from. The man was built similar to Javi, but Shane had just memorized Javi's preferences - Javi was more dominant, his kisses deliciously overpowering Shane instead of the steadier give and take of this kiss. It obviously wasn't Ilya or Hayden, but it didn't seem like Leo either. Shane doubted it could have been Connie, but-

"Shane? You still with us?"

"Uh, sorry. Um. I guess...an 8.5 maybe. Or I mean...a 9? 9.5?"

Shane squeezed his eyes shut tighter behind his blindfold, trying not to imagine Ilya's face.

Ariana laughed. "We need a final answer, Shane."

"A nine then. Yeah."

"Very well." Shane heard Ariana write his response on the scoreboard, the marker squeaking.

"So who the fuck was that?" Ilya's voice rang out.

Shane winced, but Ariana's voice was pleased.

“Funny you should ask, Ilya. Islanders, please remove your blindfolds. I’d like you to meet our newest bombshell!”

Shane lifted his blindfold, blinking against the sudden light. Next to Ariana stood a very chiseled man with dark brown hair and a neat beard. His hair looked like it had been styled neatly too, but now it looked a bit wild, as if fingers had been musing through it. Shane didn’t want to think of whose.

“Please give a warm welcome to Scott Hunter! He’s a barista joining us from sunny California!”

Ilya’s jaw clenched. “He is a million years old, how is he a barista? That is a job for hot babies, not old grandpas.”

Scott raised his eyebrows. “Guess you have an age kink then, the way you were moaning into my mouth a minute ago.”

Shane gritted his teeth. “Yeah, what are you so fucking built for if you’re just a barista?”

Ilya shot him a disgusted look. “Is that your idea of an insult, Hollander?”

Scott pushed down a smile as he looked at Shane. “I live in WeHo, so yeah, I kinda have to be this built. Thanks for noticing, though.” He winked.

Ariana stepped forward immediately to position herself in front of Ilya and Shane, both of whom were glaring at Scott Hunter like they were about to lunge any second.

“All *right*, boys, save it for the Hideaway! And let the other Islanders get a chance to meet our newest member!”

The Islanders broke into cheers again, Shane and Ilya quiet and seething.

Back at the Villa, a long line formed in front of Scott, everyone trying to introduce themselves. Shane’s eyes narrowed as Hayden shook Scott’s hand with a wide grin before he caught Shane’s gaze, giving him an apologetic shrug. Shane didn’t bother looking for where Ilya had gone, his stomach still sour about Ilya’s rating - his own conveniently ignored. Shane was glaring down at a patch of grass, his brain a scramble, when he felt a shadow over him.

“Hollander. Figured we should meet properly.” Scott Hunter extended a hand, lips cocked up in a smile.

Shane grunted, extending a tepid hand. Scott took it anyway, his hand warm and strong around Shane’s.

“Wanted to say congrats to you, man.”

“For being the best kisser?”

Scott let out a short laugh. “What- oh. I didn’t-”

“I was in first place. They didn’t tally the scores, because I guess this show cares more about the drama than finishing competitions, but I was in first place when we stopped. So.”

“Okay...well...yeah congrats for that.” Scott cleared his throat. “But I also wanted to say congrats for coming out. I’ve never been that into sports, but me and a bunch of my friends have gotten into hockey now because of you. It’s huge what you did.”

Shane swallowed. He forgot that new bombshells still had access to their phones up until they entered the Villa. He tried to push down the questions he wanted to ask, the answers he was scared to know.

Scott clapped him on the back.

“Seriously, man. You did a huge thing. People love you.”

A smile flitted to Shane’s face, tentative. Scott gazed down at him, his hand warm as it lingered on Shane’s shoulder.

“And, uh, I’ve seen the episodes, I know you’re pretty locked in. But, I would like to get to know you, if you’re open to it. That’s what bombshells are about, right? ”

Shane swallowed. “Right.”

Scott’s hand trailed down Shane’s arm, fingertips tracing Shane’s biceps. He leaned closer, smiling conspiratorially.

“I mean, I wouldn’t mind a chat with the Villa’s number one kisser. I didn’t get a chance to give *you* a rating, you know?”

Shane flushed. He started to stammer something out when he saw Ilya behind Scott, jamming his finger against his hand. Shane squinted, tilting his head. Scott turned too, brows creasing.

“Shit, is he okay? Is he having a muscle cramp or something?”

Ilya seethed, dropping his hand and crossing the short distance between them in a few strides.

“*Shane*. I am tapping my *finger*.” He stared, waiting.

Shane blinked. “Fuck, right, yes! Got it!” Shane nodded like a bobblehead.

Ilya narrowed his eyes.

“I’ll see you at the dock.”

He turned to Scott.

“You cannot come. You may look out over the water and remember you are actually the old lady in *Titanic*. Too risky.”

“So many words for someone whose tongue was down my throat.” Scott smirked.

Shane’s face burned. He grabbed Ilya’s arm, hauling him away. He tossed out a comment over his shoulder.

“Shut up Hunter! We wouldn’t give you a door to grab onto if you were drowning!”

Cici turned around, a hand raising to her throat in shock. Shane flushed deeper, dragging Ilya forward until they were away from the rest.

“Stupid old man.” Ilya paced at the end of the dock.

“Yeah, so stupid you made out with him.” Shane collapsed onto the padded bench, crossing his arms as he eyed Ilya’s back.

“You clearly hated it too, Mr. Nine Point Rating.”

“Whatever.” Shane picked at the cushion. “I came in first, you know. Even though Ariana didn’t announce it.”

Ilya turned, a smile ghosting around his lips.

“Ah, so you want a trophy? For kissing so good?”

Shane shrugged. “Maybe.”

“Hm. How about this as a reward?”

Ilya leaned down, both hands cupping Shane’s face. Shane felt his body go limp the second Ilya touched him, eyes fluttering shut as his thoughts were replaced by sensations alone. After what could have been minutes or hours, Shane felt himself returning, Ilya’s hand patting his cheek.

“You like your reward, huh, Hollander?”

“Yeah.” Shane smiled, eyes still hazy. He leaned into Ilya, sighing happily as he snuggled against his shoulder.

“Good. You don’t taste like the elderly anymore.”

Shane snorted. “Ilya.” He reached out, squeezing Ilya’s hand. “Just because someone is maybe a...decent...kisser. Doesn’t mean you need to worry. Especially after our date last night.”

He reached up, fingers tangling in Ilya’s necklace. Ilya pulled back automatically, stiffening. Shane blinked, tilting his head.

“Sorry. I should-” Ilya gestured towards the Villa. “Sasha is waiting.”

Shane turned, spotting Sasha lingering just far enough away to seem casual.

“Sasha? Are you kidding me?” Shane exhaled, pressing his fingers to the bridge of his nose.

“Sorry. It’s just. You can talk to me too, you know. I know he was there when...but...I can also...”

Ilya pressed a slow kiss to his forehead, standing up.

“Shane. It is like you said. You do not need to worry. Promise.”

Ilya left him, Shane suddenly feeling the chill in the early evening air.

The text came when Shane had half-drifted off against Hayden in the day beds, Hayden’s palm making lazy circles over Shane’s back as the sun dropped in the sky. Shane shot up at his phone’s chime, his hair sticking up on one side. Hayden let out a loud laugh, ruffling it further.

“Fuck off, man!” Shane batted away Hayden’s hand, searching for his phone.

“What, were you dreaming deeply of Scott Hunter’s tongue?”

“Let it go already!” Shane flushed, punching Hayden’s arm as he sat up, locating his phone behind his legs. He cleared his throat, sliding off the daybed to stand.

“Islanders! Please gather around the firepit!”

Murmurs swept through the Villa. Shane looked back at Hayden.

“That can’t be good. We already had a new bombshell.”

Hayden scooted closer to grab Shane’s hand, putting on an exaggerated sad face. “Maybe America’s been voting for their least favorite couple...”

“Hey, shut up!” Shane laughed. “We’re a decent couple together!”

“Yeah, I guess we are pretty cute.” Hayden stood, pressing a sloppy kiss to Shane’s cheek. “Let’s go see what this is then.”

The Islanders sat around the firepit, tense and fidgety, as they waited for Ariana to arrive. Shane cast furtive looks at Ilya and Sasha. Their shoulders skimmed each other where they sat. Shane swallowed, forcing himself to relax.

Hayden squeezed his thigh reassuringly, lowering his voice to a whisper.

“Listen, man, if he leaves you, you’re still my number three choice.”

“Three?!”

“Well, Jackie’s first, of course, then Scott...but hey, top three, man, top three.” Hayden gave him a shit-eating grin.

Shane shook his head, biting down on his smile.

“You’re real supportive. Thanks a lot, Hayd.”

“Anytime!” Hayden responded cheerfully. His face fell. “Oh, shit. Here she is.”

Ariana entered in a deep purple dress, the fabric slit high up one side to flash her thigh as she strode forward. Javi let out a low whoop before Lexi glared at him.

“Not the vibe, Javi.”

Ariana reached the front of the firepit, hands clasping in front of her.

“Dear Islanders. I know I’m back so soon. Miss me?”

She grinned, not waiting for an answer, then took a dramatic exhale.

“Tonight we will have a recoupling.”

The Islanders burst into whispers, Scott looking dumbfounded where he sat next to Connie. Ariana raised her hand to quiet them.

“One thing about *Love Island*? You should *never* get too comfortable. Now, as our newest bombshell - Scott Hunter, please join me up here.”

Scott stood up, walking towards Ariana.

Sasha rose to his feet, swallowing, all eyes turning to him.

“Actually. If I could say something first?”

Ariana raised her eyebrows. Sasha half-turned, awkwardly facing the Islanders, his words rushed.

“Um. It’s been lovely meeting you all, really, but I will be self-eliminating tonight.”

A murmur spread through the Islanders.

“I, uh, came here for Ilya. I don’t think that’s a surprise to anyone. I didn’t like how we ended things. Or how we never started things, maybe. But today we had a good talk.”

He gazed at Ilya, Ilya meeting his eyes.

“And I think we both were able to say what we should’ve a long time ago. And I was able to hear what I needed in order to move forward. So, I want to thank you all for everything, and

hopefully I'll see some of you on the outside. And uh," He shrugged, smirking slightly. "If anyone knows any sexy, emotionally available men, please give them my number."

Ariana cupped her hands to her mouth, lowering them to reveal a pout. She spread her arms.

"Oh, Sasha, we will miss you."

She embraced him, the other Islanders rising to say farewell too. Shane shuffled behind Hayden as they pressed around Sasha, flinching slightly as Sasha's arms moved to wrap around him.

"Take care of him please, Shane." Sasha shook his head, embarrassed. "I know you will, I-"

"I will." Shane swallowed, squeezing Sasha's shoulder once before stepping back.

He watched as the other Islanders said their farewells, until finally only Ilya was left. They embraced in a way that was clearly familiar, their hands drifting automatically over each other's backs, Ilya's head nestling in the crook of Sasha's neck. Shane let his stomach twist, let himself feel the rush of blood up his neck. Let himself feel too, how soft Ilya looked in Sasha's arms. Like he was a boy again. Like the wall between him and the world hadn't been built yet.

After another moment, Ilya released the hug, saying something low to Sasha in Russian before stepping back.

"Well then!" Ariana clasped her hands together. "As if the recoupling wasn't enough excitement! Scott, as you were."

"Right." Scott stepped forward, brows furrowed. "I've, uh, been here all of a few hours? So. Just have to go with my gut on this one." He squared his shoulders.

"I want to couple up with this boy because he's attractive, funny, and seems open to new possibilities. Plus, it's a nice bonus that he doesn't let out a stream of insults any time I look his way. So. The boy I want to couple up with is...Leo!"

Cici shrieked, Leo beaming beside her as Scott strode towards him. Ilya scoffed, trilling his lips together.

"Too afraid to pick a real man instead of some half-animal hybrid, huh, Hunter?"

Shane snorted. Leo was in leopard print again tonight. "Yeah, Leo's basically a bad knockoff of me, so, have fun with that."

Leo paused, his palm resting against Scott's chest as he pulled back from their kiss.

"What the fuck, guys? I have been nothing but nice to you?"

Shane blinked, staring down at the ground. "Sorry."

Ilya said nothing, arching his neck as he looked the other way.

“You two want my dick bad, huh?” Scott grinned, pulling Leo closer for another long kiss.

“All *right!*” Ariana cleared her throat. “Svetlana, please join me.”

Shane forced his heartrate to return to baseline as Svetlana gave a sweet speech to Rose, and ignored the emptiness beside him when Hayden stood for his turn.

Hayden shuffled next to Ariana, his face already pink.

“So, I’ve been excited to give this speech for a minute now. I want to couple up with this girl because I’ve had my eye on her since we both came into the Villa together. I love that we’re open to other connections but that we keep drifting to each other. Our date together just solidified how much we have in common. So, uh, the girl I want to couple up with is, of course, Jackie!”

Jackie laughed, Rose and Svetlana squeezing her in a big hug. Shane clapped with them, smiling as Hayden dipped Jackie into a kiss before sitting down next to her.

“Shane?” Ariana gestured beside her.

Shane tugged on his dress shirt, standing and making his way to the firepit. He cleared his throat, ignoring Ilya’s gaze.

“I want to couple up with this boy because...so many things really...” Shane blinked rapidly. “It’s hard to find the words. But when I met him, I felt something. And not because he has a great ass. But because I found he has a great heart too. I don’t take it for granted when he reassures me. I don’t take it for granted that he offers to sacrifice things for me. I don’t take it for granted that he opens up to me, especially when I know that doesn’t come easily for him. So, well, that’s probably long enough.”

Shane’s ears burned.

“I also chose this boy because I’m really, really ready to sleep in a bed with him again.” The Islanders let out a laugh. “So the boy I choose to couple up with is...Ilya.”

Shane raised his eyes. Ilya sniffed, standing with a trembling smile. Shane walked towards him, his pace quickening as he closed the distance. And then they were kissing, lips searching, hands buried in each other’s hair.

Ilya murmured something against Shane’s neck, then pulled back, a thumb running over his freckles.

“You forgot to mention how good I am in bed.”

“Oh, shut *up*.” Shane laughed, smacking his chest and yanking him back to seating.

Shane studied Ilya’s profile as Javi chose the newly single Cici, leaving Connie to choose Lexi. Ilya’s lips did not steady, his eyes still blinking even after two more speeches. Shane squeezed his hand, willing him back to him. When Ilya turned, Shane tapped his ring finger, his head motioning towards the dock.

They slipped away as the rest of the couples mingled, Ariana departing once again.

The dock was lit up with soft white lights in the evening dimness, the water a dark shadow in the distance.

“You okay?”

Ilya nodded, sliding down onto the bench. Shane sat beside him, waiting.

“Ilya. Look. I know the emotional stuff isn’t the easiest. It isn’t for me either.”

“No?” Ilya gazed at him, face fond. “It seems easy enough. Those were many sweet words.”

“Well, yeah. I try. For you.” Shane swallowed. “I know you say not to worry. And I know it’s silly, maybe, that I do.” He shifted. “But sometimes I need to hear it. That you care. That you’re not...scared...or, regretting anything.”

“What if I am scared?” Ilya looked out at the water.

“Well. I’m scared too.” Shane moved his leg a centimeter, their thighs touching.

“I shared...too much, maybe. On the date.”

“No? Not for me. I want to know about you. Everything about you. If you’ll let me.”

Ilya’s lips curved up as he looked back at Shane, hand running through Shane’s hair.

“For me. It was maybe too much to share at once for me.”

“Oh.”

“Not because of you. I am trying to say things. Since you want me to talk. Even though not talking is easier.”

Ilya squeezed Shane’s shoulder, pulling him closer into his chest. Shane stretched up for a kiss. His lips lingered after they parted.

“I guess not talking isn’t the worst.”

Ilya snorted, smiling down at Shane in the soft light. He paused, exhaling.

“Here.”

He reached behind his neck, fingers fumbling at the clasp. His mother’s necklace slid off into his hand, the lack of weight around his neck immediately foreign. Ilya latched it around Shane’s neck, pressing his palm against the gold cross for a moment before releasing.

“Ilya. I can’t.”

Shane’s eyes widened. His fingertips traced over the necklace, his gaze at once panicked and reverent.

“Only for the night.” Ilya gave him a soft smile, kissing his cheek. “So you can hear it. Without me having to say it. Okay?”

Shane exhaled, reaching for Ilya’s hand.

“Okay.”

Shane parted his lips, certain words crowding his throat, but then he swallowed them down and settled back next to Ilya, hoping that Ilya could hear it without Shane having to say it.

NEXT TIME...ON HEATED ISLAND...

Tomorrow night...at long last...it is CASA AMOR!

Get ready for not one, not two, but TWELVE new contestants trying their hardest to break up our couples as the Islanders split between two Villas!

Who will stay faithful and who will be seduced? Only time will tell...

Chapter End Notes

i am so delirious but wanted to get this done before i jetset off to a friends wedding!! SO EXCITED for casa amor hijinks soon...who do you think will be coming in to stir up trouble 🐼🐼🐼🐼🐼

Chapter 14

Chapter Summary

it's casa baby! time for a horny competition that won't cause any confused, hurt, or sexual feelings!

Chapter Notes

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

Shane snuggled closer into Ilya's chest, his sleep light. It had been hard to transition back into the communal bedroom, each sound hyperexaggerated after the quiet of their nights in Soul Ties, the awareness of other bodies around them pressing on his chest. Shane had finally drifted off after long, slow kisses with Ilya, his eyelids closing at some point between the soft graze of his lips.

"Shane." Rose hissed at his ear, hand gripping his shoulder.

Shane squinted his eyes, blinking as she motioned him out of bed. Shane sat up gradually, noticing other crouched forms sneaking out of the room.

Rose's smile caught in the dim light. "Casa, baby."

Shane shot up then, sliding his legs over the side of the bed. He threw one last look at Ilya over his shoulder, curled in himself and snoring gently, and then Rose was yanking Shane forward towards the dressing rooms.

Scott Hunter was the only other man in their dressing area. Scott threw the few clothes he had unpacked back into his suitcase with a grin at Shane, which Shane pointedly ignored. He shook the residual sleep off him, moving swiftly to pack his belongings.

Within minutes, he and Scott wheeled their suitcases into the make-up room, where Rose, Lexi, Jackie, and Cici were manically clearing their stations. Rose paused to uncap her lipstick, writing a message to Svetlana on her mirror. Jackie glanced over and then sprayed her perfume on her sleep shirt, sliding it over her head as she got changed and folding it neatly on her vanity for Hayden. Shane's fingers twitched, wanting something for Ilya, anything.

He scrambled in his suitcase, digging around for his Rolex watch case. Shane had been encouraged to wear at least one of the watches each day; his mom had emphasized this before he left for Fiji. Shane had figured if he wasn't advertising any other watches, Rolex would forgive him for not wearing any of their ridiculously expensive watches on a beach vacation show where he was more than a little preoccupied with Ilya's dick.

Shane popped open the case, glancing down at the five watches gleaming back. He grabbed one at random, sliding it onto Rose's vanity where hopefully Ilya would find it, and then Cici was grabbing his arm and telling him they had to go.

The six of them rolled their suitcases out of the Villa, the sun barely cresting the skyline. Shane's brain was still trying to catch up and join the excited murmurs of the other five. He felt his lips move to join the chant, *Ca-sa! Ca-sa!*, a smile breaking over his face despite himself. And then they were in the producers' car. And then they were driving away. And then Shane's stomach was dropping, the Villa disappearing in the rearview with Ilya slumbering inside, his mother's necklace around Shane's neck.

The lights blared on. Ilya winced, having gotten used to the slightly more gradual wakeup of the sunrise out in Soul Ties. He turned immediately, the space next to him cold.

"They're gone." Svetlana stood in the center of the room, scanning each bed.

"Are you kidding me?" Leo groaned, hitting his fists against the mattress. "We just recoupled!"

"No way." Hayden slid out of bed, running to the dressing room to check for Jackie.

"You guys! There's some stuff in here!"

Hayden called out from the make-up room, the others jogging to join them. Ilya pulled up the rear, his stride lagging.

"Aww, it smells like her." Hayden cradled Jackie's shirt to his chest, burrowing his nose into the soft fabric. Ilya snorted.

"What did Rose write?" Connie peeked at the vanity, Svetlana already smudging the message away with her thumb.

"Nothing for your eyes." She smirked.

Javi burst in from the dressing rooms. "Man, there's nothing in there. Cici didn't leave me anything."

Connie shook his head. "Neither did Lexi, because we've been coupled up for like two minutes, dude."

Leo sighed. "Scott could've left *something*. We went to second base last night." The Islanders looked at him. Leo raised his eyebrows, squeezing his pecs together.

Ilya rolled his eyes. He forced his face to remain a mask. He knew how Shane's brain worked a bit by now. Understood that he had likely been disoriented, overwhelmed. And really, Shane was sensitive to cologne, didn't own lipstick. It didn't mean anything that Ilya hadn't been left anything either.

“Aw. So sweet of Rose.” Svetlana extended her arm, a heavy glimmering watch wrapped around her wrist.

Ilya’s eyes widened, darting from her face to the Rolex. She laughed at him, stepping closer and unclasping the watch.

“Not my taste. Maybe yours, though, Ilyusha.”

Ilya shrugged, not able to push down his grin as the cool metal slipped onto his skin. He turned the watch face back and forth in the light. It was so like Shane to try to be a good brand ambassador even while getting his dick sucked on national television. Ilya’s chest seized and he swallowed. Stupid Shane. Stupid him.

Shane shifted on the large outdoor couch overlooking the pool. They were only a few minutes drive away from the Villa, and the same set designer had clearly decorated Casa Amor too. There were the same neon lights, the same bright furniture, and yet everything was slightly off. The beds were a different color upstairs. There was an additional pergola covered in fake vinery. The pool was smaller. There was no Soul Ties.

Shane breathed out through his nose, trying to calm the needling sensation spreading over his skin. He was hyperaware of Ilya’s necklace around his neck, an albatross. He could not believe he hadn’t taken it off before leaving. *Only for the night*, Ilya had said. And now here Shane was, separated for days at least, the necklace burning against his skin.

Rose nudged him, checking in. Shane tried to force a smile, turning his focus to Ariana in front of them.

“Welcome to Casa Amor, Islanders!”

Shane made himself let out a whoop with the others.

“We have six new contestants for you to meet and mingle with.” Ariana cocked her eyebrows suggestively. “And as none of you are closed off, I hope you take the opportunity to explore and test your existing connections.”

She turned to Rose.

“Rose, how are you feeling? You and Svetlana have obviously developed a strong connection so far.”

“Absolutely we have. But on our date, we said we need to test what we have before we’re ready to close off. I have some doubts that my head can be turned at this point, but I’m *very* excited to see these new arrivals try.” Rose grinned.

“Love to hear that.” Ariana smiled back. “Cici, Lexi. You both entered into new couples just last night. Are we feeling ready to explore?”

The women exchanged a look, bursting into loud giggles while nodding.

“I’ll take that as a yes! Scott, same for you?”

“Of course. I owe it to myself to explore all connections with the new arrivals as well as with existing Islanders.”

Shane felt Scott’s gaze move towards him and stared at the ground, flushing.

“Well, well. And how about you, Jackie? Seems like you were a bit torn up leaving?”

Jackie sighed. “I was really looking forward to being in a couple with Hayden and deepening that connection. But, it’s still early days for us so I’m trying to make sure I don’t shut myself off too early. And I’m sure he’ll be exploring too.”

“Well, I think you’ll be happy with some of our new Islanders.” Ariana winked. “And finally, Shane. You and Ilya have had quite the journey already during your time in the Villa. How are you feeling?”

Shane swallowed. “Yeah, we’re. Not closed off or anything. So. I guess I need to test the connection?”

“Try not to sound too excited about it!” Ariana and the Islanders broke into light laughter. “We’ll see if some of our new friends can cheer you up. I’ll leave you all to it...”

She gave them one last coy look and strode off, Shane’s heart starting to accelerate. As she exited, she raised her hand, high-fiving the six new people striding into Casa Amor. Shane’s eyes scanned quickly, brain registering things like *tall* and *hot* and *fuck*...

Five men stood in front of them, the sole woman in the middle.

Scott was the first to speak, a smile growing on his face.

“Please, sit with us.”

The existing Islanders scooted down on the outdoor couch, Shane’s thigh pressing against Scott’s as they made room for the new arrivals. Ariana had left a bottle of champagne on the table, flutes filling and passing down as everyone shifted to get more comfortable.

“Well.” Cici grinned, leaning forward. “Don’t keep us waiting.”

The man on the end laughed, dipping his head. “Sure. I’ll start. I’m Miles.”

“As if we need an introduction.” Cici grinned wider. “You’re that indie music guy, right?” She pointed her finger at a man sitting a few down from him. “And you...you were on *Survivor* last season?”

“Yeah, that’s me. J.J.” He extended his hand to Cici, squeezing it once.

“Okay, Cici, stop hogging the men.” Jackie laughed. “So, Miles. What are you looking for?”

“Well, I would love to find a serious relationship. I’m on the road a lot, so it can be tricky to find meaningful connections.”

“And your type?” Cici raised her eyebrows.

“Men only, I’m afraid.” Miles gave her a soft smile, his eyes drifting to Shane. “Love an athlete, to be honest.”

Rose ribbed Shane and he elbowed her back, face burning.

J.J. leaned forward. “Don’t worry, Cici, I go all ways. Though I never say no to athletes either.” He winked at Shane, who considered jumping in the pool to cool down.

“Ugh, I love this already.” Lexi clapped. “And you are?”

A shorter man straightened next to Miles, running a hand through his hair.

“So I’m Tiff. No celebrity here. I have a boring office job so honestly I’m really happy for this free vacation if nothing else. And I’m a trans guy, just to get that out of the way.”

Rose tilted her head, eyes flicking up and down appraisingly. “And your type?”

“Not to be a broken record, but I’d be lying if I said athletes disgust me.” Tiff grinned. “But uh, I love a movie star too. Your early coupling was giving me heavy bisexual panic to be honest.”

Scott snorted. “Okay, to make this easier, is there anyone who doesn’t want to fuck Shane?”

“Jesus, Hunter, just cause no one wants to jump your bones.” Shane glared at him.

“Wouldn’t say that.” A man waved his hand. “Hi. I’m Kip. I work at an art gallery in L.A. And um, I would definitely jump on those bones.” He swallowed, tearing his eyes from Scott to glance at Shane, lips twitching. “Frankly yours too Shane, just because you get so cute when you’re flustered.”

“Oh. Okay.” Shane rubbed his palms over his knees, shaking his head with a half-smile and a cough.

“Stop inflating his ego, everyone!” Rose scoffed. “Please, you two, tell me you’re immune?”

“Yeah, I love women. A lot. So.” The man closest to Rose cleared his throat. “Name’s Troy. I work in construction and uh, my type is women. Like I said.” He scanned the couch. “I love a woman who can take initiative, so Cici definitely has my eye.”

Cici fanned herself.

“And I’m Iris. I’m in grad school right now for psychology but I promise I’m not psychoanalyzing any of you...too much at least! I’ve been with men, but I’ve realized women are definitely more my speed. And while Shane is a cutie, I don’t really want to do

the whole hooking up with my ex's ex thing. I get enough of that as a lesbian in the outside world."

Shane's lips parted slightly, his eyes narrowing at Iris. She held her hands up immediately.

"Oops, not *ex ex*. Sorry. I know that's sensitive for you. I meant *ex* as in, like, we fucked a bunch? Casually? Sorry. That's probably not better." She swallowed. "Anyway, Rose is definitely my type but I'm open to getting to know Cici and Lexi too!"

Shane's jaw twitched. He gave Iris a tight nod, Ilya's necklace suddenly slightly less oppressive around his neck. Shane's fingers toyed with the chain, catching as Iris recognized it, her mouth parting somewhat before she looked away. Shane smirked.

"*Hellooo*, Islanders!"

Javi slapped Connie's chest, jolting up from the beanbags and cupping his hands over his mouth.

"We got company, Villa!"

The remaining Islanders assembled around the firepit as the new arrivals streamed in, two women flanked by four men. Javi lost the color in his face, sinking deeper into the cushions as he turned to Connie in a whisper.

"Fuck. I knew that voice was familiar. That's my fucking ex, bro."

Zara grinned at Javi, wiggling her fingers as the new arrivals squeezed in. She slid in next to Connie and leaned forward, her bikini top barely holding its knots.

"*Heeey* everyone. I'm Zara, and yes, I am Javi's ex. I'm a flight attendant. Some *boys* get a little pouty with my work schedule, which is why I'm looking for a *man*."

Javi grumbled. Leo clapped, a wide smile on his face as his eyes roamed down all the new arrivals.

"I can go next. I'm Dakota." The other woman flipped her hair behind her shoulder. "I'm a club promoter, and while I wouldn't say I'm Ilya's ex, exactly, we definitely *know* each other."

Ilya tilted his head. She raised her eyebrows.

"Miami? The Roxy?"

Ilya shook his head slowly.

"You did body shots off me? With Pitbull?"

"Oh...yes..." Ilya squinted. "We did it in the alleyway? With those bricks that tore up my shirt?"

“...yes. That was me.” Dakota crossed her arms. “*Anyway*, I’m looking for more of a gentleman these days.”

Ilya scoffed. “You had a great time! You came twice, no?”

She flushed. “True. The romance just left a bit to be desired.”

Connie swallowed, looking between him and Ilya. “So, is he kinda your physical type, or?”

“Yeah, I like cute blondes.” Dakota gave him a grin.

“I like blondes too, boy or girl, does not matter.” The man next to Dakota ran a hand through his hair, his sizable bicep flexing, some scars catching in the light. “I am Serge. I am, ah, professional dancer, for parties when girls get married? I am Russian, so, Привет.”

He nodded to Ilya and Svetlana, who said hello back.

Leo pouted. “Lot of blonde talk in here.”

“I prefer darker-haired men myself. Name’s Harris.” A stocky man smiled back at Leo. “I work in social media, but behind the scenes, unlike some of you. I’ve been out for ages but I still haven’t found that special guy yet, so here’s hoping!”

“Good for you, man. I’m Cliff, but my buddies call me Marly. If I look familiar, yes, I was on *Too Hot to Handle*.”

Leo laughed. “Didn’t you lose immediately?”

“Yeah, celibacy isn’t really for me.” Marly gave him a cheeky grin. “Which is why I’m hoping this will be a better fit.”

The group turned to the last newcomer, who ran a hand through his swooped hair.

“Well, hello, everyone, I’m Hudson. I work in food service but I’m trying to be a filmmaker so watch this space.” He flicked his wrist, voice pitching upwards. “And uh, yeah, listen, I’m here to make some memories. I’m ready to be emotionally naked, physically naked, you name it, I’m ready, baby.”

Leo let out what might have been a whimper just as Hudson’s phone chimed.

“Ooh! My first text, how cute!” He stood, cocking his hip, his knee turned in slightly. “Okay, let me do this right.” He cleared his throat. “I GOT A TEXTTTTT!”

“We are literally right here.” Ilya rolled his eyes, fighting back a smile.

Hudson continued, oblivious. “Islanders-”

“Islanders.” Shane read off his phone, squinting closely. “Tonight, you will compete against the other villa in a game of *Raunchy Races*! Islanders will be sent a series of dares. Whoever

completes each dare with the most speed and style will win a point for their villa. The winning villa will be rewarded with a welcome party. Get ready to race!”

Shane clicked his phone off. He threw it down on the padded bench and pressed his palms together, starting to pace.

“Okay. We all need to have our heads in the game. Jackie, Rose, you are *single* here, understand me? No hesitation. We leave it all on the field. We are *not* losing to them.”

Jackie raised her hands in surrender. “Of course, captain.”

The new arrivals eyed each other. Rose leaned over.

“Shane’s great at parties. Loves making fun, sexy games into cold, regimented competition.”

“It can be both!” Shane’s ears turned red.

Cici’s phone chimed. Her eyes widened. Shane waved his arms.

“Pick it up, hurry!”

She scrambled for it, reading fast. “Okay, um, the tallest boy must french kiss the new islander he most wants to get to know!”

Shane started snapping his fingers. “Hunter, that’s you, go, go, go!”

Scott stumbled to his feet, eyes darting before seizing on Kip. He grabbed him, pulling Kip to him and smiling briefly before plunging his tongue down his throat. Shane leaped up onto the cushioned bench, all the Islanders cheering them on.

“More style, Scott! More style!”

Scott pulled back. “The fuck does that mean, Shane?”

“I don’t know, but do it! And don’t stop frenching until we win the point!”

Kip laughed, still in Scott’s arms, resting his forehead gently against his shoulder. Scott squeezed his waist, shaking his head.

“Shane’s just grouchy because his couple has his tongue down someone’s throat right now.”

Shane fell silent. Ilya was the tallest of the original Islanders, his model stature hovering over the rest of them. Shane’s brain scrambled, no idea what strangers were in the Villa with Ilya. Who might be sitting next to him. More than sitting, giving the challenge...

“Tallest boy french kiss the uh, new islander you most want to get to know!” Leo finished with an exhale, Ilya already jumping to his feet.

He grabbed Marly, the handsome man in reach. Marly was already grinning as Ilya pulled him close. His lips opened for Ilya at once, their tongues sliding into each other's mouths like second nature. Ilya gripped the man's muscular waist, spinning him around and pushing him down where Ilya had sat. Marly let out a noise of protest, but Ilya didn't let up, tongues tangling as he started gyrating between Marly's legs, the Islanders cheering louder.

"That's style, baby!" Hudson whooped, the others crowding close.

Marly got the message, pumping up from below, their hips gyrating in beat with their tongues, slick and hungry against each other. Leo's phone chimed again and Ilya pulled back at once, grinning as he wiped his lips. He extended a hand to Marly, pulling him to his feet.

"Good sport."

Marly let out a snort. "Yeah. Anytime." His gaze flickered up Ilya's body as he returned to his seat.

Leo let out a scream. "Yes! Point to the Villa!"

"Fuck." Shane scowled at Cici.

"Damn, don't shoot the messenger." She shrugged, head turning as Rose's phone went off.

"Okay, the Islander whose name starts with L! Suck the toes of the new arrival you'd like to share a bed with tonight!"

Lexi squealed, covering her face. Shane groaned into his palms.

"Hurry."

"Jesus, okay." Lexi scowled at him, then looked at Iris. "Can I, um..."

"Oh, yes, sure!" Iris slid her feet out of her sandals, cringing. "Sorry if um, they taste weird? I don't usually have my toes sucked?"

"I don't usually suck toes!" Lexi laughed, holding Iris's gaze for a moment before Shane let out a louder groan.

"Start sucking, Lexi!"

She huffed, then lowered herself to Iris's foot, tentatively licking her big toe. Iris giggled.

"Sorry, I'm ticklish!"

"Oh my god, we suck." Shane paced around the edge of the pool, shaking his head.

Svetlana's phone chimed. "Another point to us!" She beamed, face falling as she glanced to her left. "Leo, you can stop now."

Leo rose begrudgingly off Serge's toes, slick from his saliva. Ilya's phone chimed, interrupting the chirp he had half-formed in his head.

"Professional athlete have a steamy make out in the pool with the oldest Islander. Go!"

Ilya watched as Hayden ran around the firepit, asking ages, before grabbing Marly's hand and running towards the pool. Svetlana squeezed Ilya's shoulder. He shrugged it off.

"Like Shane will enjoy kissing a dinosaur. It is a game, no big deal."

"...with the oldest Islander!" Jackie looked up from her phone, Shane already flying towards the pool with Scott in tow.

Shane didn't stop to take off his clothes, merely kicked off his sandals and mic pack and threw himself in, Scott right behind. Shane surfaced, shaking his hair out of his face, his t-shirt wet and clinging to his torso. He blinked at Scott, similarly soaked, and swallowed. For the game, he reminded himself.

Shane leaned in, gripping Scott's jaw and pressing himself tight against him, crowding Scott against the pool's wall. Scott hesitated for a moment, and then wrapped his arms around Shane's lower back, tugging Shane closer. Shane parted his lips instinctually, opening deeper, his fingertips gripping as he slid up Scott's shirt and felt the thick muscle there. He felt a sharp intake of breath, Scott's hips a bit more insistent against him.

Shane pulled back from their kiss, breathless. He locked his arms around Scott's neck and pushed himself up, legs wrapping around Scott's waist in the water. Scott's hands palmed his ass as Shane slid his tongue inside Scott's mouth, insistent, swallowing their moans. Beneath the water, he tugged at the hem of Scott's shirt, leaning back as they both stripped, Shane's abs flexing, his wrapped thighs the only thing holding him stable against Scott.

Shane threw his shirt towards the Islanders and exhaled, running his nails hard across Scott's bare back. Scott's tongue chased a bead of water dripping down Shane's neck, licking it up from collarbone to jaw. Shane let out a small sound, tilting his head back further as Scott gripped his ass before leaning forward to devour his lips again. Then Scott shifted Shane's weight, one hand coming free before striking hard against Shane's ass in a wet slap, followed by a soft squeeze that softened the hot jolt of pain. Shane moaned louder into Scott's mouth, his skin tingling, and Jackie's phone chimed.

She hoisted it above her head, jumping up and down. "Point for Casa! Point for Casa!"

"Speed and style, Hollander." Scott murmured at Shane, who gazed back at him with unfocused eyes, still somewhat dazed. Then Scott released his hands, letting Shane fall backwards into the pool with a loud crack against the water, his laughter muted as Shane sank underwater.

Marly hoisted himself out of the pool, holding out a hand for Hayden, whose cheeks were still pink.

“Sorry we lost, Pike. Should’ve manhandled you more or something.”

“Yeah. Definitely.” Hayden nodded, his eyes tracing Marly’s soaked shirt, beads of water dripping down Marly’s biceps as he rose to standing.

Hayden’s phone chimed. “Um, okay!” He licked his swollen lips, the taste of Marly lingering there. “An Islander with blue eyes must lick the abs of the new Islander-”

“-you most fancy!” Lexi looked at Rose. “Hurry, Rose!”

Rose moved swiftly, yanking Tiff up from his seat and practically throwing him down onto the artificial turf, one arm already prying his shirt off. Tiff collapsed back in only his binder as Rose straddled him, her tongue already painting lines over his torso.

“More, Rose, come the fuck on!” Shane bobbed up and down on his toes, the other Islanders circling around them.

Rose’s eyes darted up in a glare but she didn’t break her focus, instead turning her eyes to Tiff, smiling slightly at the awestruck look she found there.

“Serge, shirtless. Now. Do your little dance moves as you strip. Style, remember?”

Ilya wondered if he needed to speak in Russian to speed this fucker up. No way he was losing this round, not after whatever Shane had pulled with ancient Scott Hunter to win the last point. Ilya supposed modern humans had evolved from prehistoric aquatic lifeforms, which probably gave Scott the edge.

Serge stood up as Ilya motioned at Marly, snapping.

“Hand me the champagne.”

Serge started swaying in place, rotating his hips to an unheard beat as he gradually peeled his shirt off over his head in a strip tease, the Islanders cheering and clapping along. Serge was an objectively attractive man, similar enough to Ilya that they could have been related. In another universe, maybe Serge would have been the supermodel, if his skin didn’t bear the evidence of what looked like a thousand car accidents.

Ilya took in Serge’s chiseled torso, noting the fine blonde hairs that swept around his navel and disappeared below. Ilya swept the point of his tongue up that hairline, Serge’s muscles twitching involuntarily.

“Such nice abs you have.” Ilya murmured, his lips vibrating against the other man’s skin.

He took another lick, larger this time, flattening his tongue and sweeping it left and right as he painted Serge's body with a trail of his slick saliva, eyes trained on the man looking down at him with hooded eyes. Ilya grinned, fingers wrapping around Serge's ankles and pulling gently so he stumbled backwards. Ilya guided him the rest of the way down until he was lying flat on the ground, then reached towards Marly for the champagne.

Ilya held the bottle above his head, pouring out a long, thin stream and angling it so it poured over Serge's torso, coating his muscles in a golden sheen and welling in his belly button. Then Ilya leaned forward, rounding his head to Serge as if in prayer, tongue darting into his navel and sucking it dry. Serge grunted, hips rising up slightly as Ilya withdrew the tip of his tongue.

Ilya braced Serge's hips with his palms. His tongue lapped over the bubbles sliding over Serge's skin, popping them flat, the fizz of the champagne dripping down his throat. *Shane would hate this*, he thought - the sticky residue, the way the air made a cool shiver over Serge's skin, the tangle it made of the hair there. *Shane would hate this*, Ilya thought - unless Shane was in one of those states where his eyes went all hazy and he looked up at Ilya like Ilya could do anything he wanted to him, anything at all.

Hayden's phone chimed. "Point to us! The Villa has it!"

Ilya's tongue flicked up one last stripe of Serge's skin and he rose to his feet, pulling Serge up with him, forcing his mind to focus on the here and now. The points. The game.

"*Fuck*." Shane exhaled, hands clasped behind his neck. His foot flew out to kick a beanbag. "Pull it together guys, we're falling behind!"

Rose rolled her eyes, wiping her bottom lip as Tiff put his shirt back on.

"Shane, you seriously need to relax. You are absolutely *killing* the vibe."

Jackie glanced towards Shane, speaking quietly. "Connie has blue eyes too, you know. He could have taken the dare."

Shane stiffened, pretending like he didn't hear.

Ilya stared off into the distance as Javi and his ex made out upside down, clearly battling both faked disinterest and copious amounts of sexual tension. He itched at the Rolex at his wrist, telling himself the distance didn't matter. If Shane was here, letting himself be manhandled in front of Ilya all in the name of winning, Ilya wouldn't mind it. He'd like it even. He liked when Shane got that serious crunched expression on his face. Liked seeing how loose his body got when firm hands were all over him, even when they weren't Ilya's. Liked most of all how Shane always came back to him when it was done. His eyes shy. Wanting praise. Wanting Ilya most, no matter how many hands touched him.

So it would be a few days of these strangers. Of these silly games. Of silly kisses so they could say they kissed other people. Ilya could be patient. Before Fiji, Ilya had been patient unread message after message after message, knowing in his bones that Shane had wanted him during that campaign shoot. Trusting that Shane would acknowledge it eventually.

Shane's Rolex caught the dying sun on Ilya's wrist, and he made himself exhale, even smiling briefly as a phone chimed and announced that they had lost. He knew Casa would be celebrating. That Shane would be grinning that rare wide victory grin of his, maybe pumping his fist as he shouted, *let's go!*

"Yes, Cici, *let's go!* That's what we need, people!" Shane threw his arms around Cici despite her looking alarmed at the rare display of physical affection from him.

Iris laughed. "What, I don't get any credit?"

"Yes, fuck, you too!" Shane reached out and pulled her into the hug with Cici, squeezing them both tight. "Let's keep it up, everyone, we can win this!"

Scott's phone chimed. He grinned, looking up at Shane.

"The Islander whose name starts with S must do a sultry dance with the Islander whose name starts with M for the length of the alphabet song."

"Are you fucking kidding me." Shane's face constricted. He did not dance.

Scott smirked. "You can take this one, Shane. Keep it up. We can win this, right?"

Shane's fists tightened. He stalked over to Miles, nodding stiffly. Miles spread his legs with an easy smile, patting his lap. Rose began singing in a breathy Marilyn Monroe voice, the other Islanders joining in.

"A, B, C, D...E, F, GGGGG..."

Shane's face was bright red. He knew he couldn't move the way a dancer was supposed to, knew his hips were jerking side to side instead of swaying seductively. Still, Miles was resting his hands over his hips, trying to guide him, smile staying on his face. Shane swallowed, thinking of the embarrassment of losing.

He slid fully onto Miles' lap, his thighs bracketing Miles' waist. He began to move like he did when he was with Ilya, his hips rolling in small waves. Miles made a tiny noise in his throat, hands gliding down the small of Shane's back. The Islanders started clapping, singing out letters more like a cheer as Shane felt himself relaxing more, his hips doing figure eights now over Miles' lap. Shane's red cheeks faded into a softer pink as he felt the effect he was having on Miles, and he decided to lean into it, wrapping one palm around Miles' neck and arching his back, the other hand thrown up in the air like a cowboy as his hips grinded deeper. Shane laughed as he heard the Islanders cheering, Miles' hands guiding his rhythm. He could win this after all.

There was no way they weren't going to win this. Ilya grinned, soaking in the view as Svetlana danced up on Marly. Marly looked like Christmas had come early, his eyes reverent, hands hovering in the air like he was afraid to touch. Svetlana was pure liquid, dipping down in front of him before rising back up, her ass rippling in his face before she turned. One leg rose next to his waist, her hips rolling forward as she wrapped her fingers around his neck and pressed him into her chest, tits bouncing around Marly's blissed out face. Svetlana slid a thumb between his lips, letting him suck as he looked up at her with puppy-dog eyes, his jaw slack when she withdrew. Svetlana let out a soft snort before turning away from him again, her nails gliding down his thighs as she threw her ass back in earnest, the Islanders screaming the last few letters as Marly pumped his hands into the air, mouth open in amazement.

"We got the point! Go Villa!"

Ilya let out a whoop with the rest of the Islanders, Svetlana doing a few more victory twerks before dismounting completely from Marly. Ilya thought he should make Shane do a lapdance for him once they were reunited. It would be worth it for the way his face would flush alone.

Shane barely had the energy to motivate his team through the next challenge, fully stewing in his loss. Troy, Scott, and Cici swapped spit in a sloppy three-way kiss as directed. Shane wrinkled his nose, watching as Troy kept leaning towards Scott and then veering towards Cici at the last minute like a self-correction, unless it was meant to be some kind of sexy tease.

In the distance, Shane felt like he could almost hear the echo of cheers from the other Villa. He knew they weren't far. Knew that, hypothetically, noise might carry. Shane bit back the thought of bellowing loud enough that Ilya could hear, coming to pick him up like his mom would whenever he tried to have sleepovers as a kid, embarrassed and overwhelmed by midnight like clockwork.

Ilya raised his eyebrows at the kiss unfolding in front of him. Leo had been prompted to three-way kiss the two Islanders next to him, and as luck would have it, he was flanked by Hudson and Connie.

Leo's eyes lit up as he faced Hudson, the men almost twins in profile. His tongue was in his mouth immediately, Hudson matching him beat for beat, their hips rolling together in unison. Then Hudson reached out and grabbed Connie's collar, pulling him in. Leo opened his mouth, expecting a passive brush of the lips from Connie, but felt nothing but the hot air of Connie's breath, heavy and irregular.

Leo paused for a moment, pulling back and flickering his eyes open. Connie's hands were tangled deep in Hudson's hair. Connie's eyelids squeezed shut as a flush crept up his pale

cheeks, their lips wrapped around one another. Hudson broke the kiss first, lips rising into a smile, before wrapping his hands around the backs of Leo and Connie's heads and pulling them all together again. Leo closed his eyes, leaning into the wet slide of lips and tongues without another thought, Connie's face forgotten almost instantly.

Shane started cheering louder, joining the Islanders escalating chants. Troy had stopped avoiding Scott, his hand now gripping his hair as he pressed hard against him, Cici grinding against Troy's other thigh. Troy's hand moved over her ass, tracing up and down her body, turning briefly to give her more of his lips before tilting back to Scott. Shane thought he heard a small whimper from Troy as he leaned deeper into Scott's kiss, Scott's fingertips leaving half-moons in the small of his back.

Shane's phone chimed. "Yes! Point to Casa! We're only one point behind now!"

Cici started jumping up and down, throwing her arms around Scott and Troy. They leaned into a brief group hug, Shane studying as Troy's eyes flickered up at Scott for a moment before glancing away hurriedly.

Lexi's phone chimed. "Okay! An international player should kiss the Islander with the best tattoos, *in bed!*"

Rose glared at Shane. "Hello? Mr. Competitive? Go!"

"Oh, fuck, Canada counts, right." Shane's gaze stuttered, landing on J.J.'s sizable arms, a dark snake weaving around his elbow and bicep.

"You, let's go."

"Yes, sir." J.J. gave him a lopsided grin, reaching out for Shane's hand and letting himself be yanked upstairs.

"...best tattoos, in bed!"

Svetlana went to stand up and Ilya cut her off with a shake of his head. She arched an eyebrow.

"Competing with the Canadian?"

"Замолчи. Я просто пытаюсь победить."

"If that's what you need to tell yourself." She sat down, crossing her arms.

Ilya motioned to Hudson, his skin dusted all over with tiny assorted tattoos, like an ink version of Shane's freckles. Hudson jumped up with a grin, racing Ilya up the stairs to the bedroom, the other Islanders not far behind.

Ilya paused in the doorway, hit with Shane's absence. He took a sharp right, pushing Hudson onto Hayden and Jackie's bed instead, pinning his arms above his head. Hudson flexed his arms, testing Ilya's grip, and gave him a cheeky smile.

"Spit in my mouth."

Ilya jerked back for a second. Hudson nodded to confirm, eager.

"Yeah. Spit in my mouth. Style points, right?"

He didn't wait for Ilya to respond, merely tilted his head up as he lowered his jaw, tongue unraveling beneath Ilya. Ilya bit back the ridiculous thought that he should be doing this with Shane first, as if he and Shane had any true claim to each other's firsts. As if this was some romantic gesture he was giving away.

Ilya made himself stop thinking. He pursed his lips, slowly dripping a stream of spit to Hudson beneath him and following it with a harsh hawking glob, some saliva splattering over Hudson's cheek. Ilya watched as Hudson took it, swallowed, and opened his mouth again, tongue sliding out clean. Ilya felt himself twitch. He leaned down with a growl, parting Hudson's lips open as he ground harder against him. Hudson met him there, tongue already sliding past to meet his, limbs open and pliant beneath Ilya.

Ilya kept his eyes shut, listening to the whoops of the Islanders gathered around them as they tossed out suggestions and cheered them on. He released Hudson's wrists, allowing him to grab Ilya's ass as the Islanders demanded, Leo's voice the loudest. But Hudson ran his hands over Ilya's arms first, lips crooning up to him, his fingertips settling over Ilya's wrists.

Ilya felt Hudson's warm grasp around the band of his watch and jerked back, his own face as surprised as Hudson's beneath him. Ilya tried to fake it off, tossing a smirk onto his face and leaning back down to continue the kiss. His tongue now felt like lead, mechanic as he tried to remember how kissing even worked. Hudson seemed oblivious beneath him, his hands still roaming over Ilya's body like burns to his skin. Ilya lasted another few seconds before stumbling back to break contact, his hand grasping his own wrist, gripping the Rolex there.

Hudson sat up, his shirt askew, hair falling into his eyes with a question.

Svetlana had enough kindness not to look at him. She said nothing when, after an agonizing few seconds of Ilya leaning back against his own bed, Shane's name still in cursive on the base, Javi's phone finally broke the silence and he announced that they had lost.

Shane sprinted with J.J. up the stairs. He took the wrong turn at first, his body still back at the Villa, before shoving J.J. onto the nearest bed in the new bedroom. Shane could feel the thundering of footsteps behind him, the presence of an audience doing something to him even before his lips met J.J.'s.

Shane slid eagerly on top of J.J., running his hands up the man's firm biceps. J.J. gripped the small of his back, pressing him closer as Shane's hips started making small thrusts almost

despite himself. One more point and they would be tied. One more point that Ilya would know Shane had won for Casa. One more point that would prove he was desirable, that he was skilled, that he was *good*.

J.J. pulled at his bottom lip and Shane threw back his head with a moan, almost laughing in delirium. This time last summer he hadn't even admitted he liked men, not even to himself, and now-

J.J. leaned up on one hand, pumping his hips in a slow roll, the other hand pulling Shane back to his lips.

"Hot!" Cici whooped somewhere out of sight, Shane's dick twitching slightly at the reminder. "Take your clothes off!"

The Islanders let out another fresh round of cheering as Shane peeled up J.J.'s top, his lips kissing each inch of newly exposed skin. He whirled the shirt around his head like a trophy before tossing it into the corner with a laugh. His body only ever felt like this on the ice. Muscles activated, mind clear, the only input pure sensation. J.J. flipped Shane so he was below, yanking his shirt off over his head and stretching the soft cotton in a knot around Shane's wrists.

Shane's breath caught as J.J. pushed him down hard, his body heavy over him as he lowered fully onto Shane, lips finding his once more. Shane was somewhere both in and out of the room, the tightness of his wrists tied together mixing with the happy shouts of the Islanders around them, everyone watching him, praising him, cheering him on. J.J.'s tongue flicked out of Shane's mouth, drawing down his throat instead, and Shane felt himself sinking down and floating up further, both at the same time, everything expanding everywhere. Without trying to, Shane flashed back to that first kiss with Ilya. His wrists handcuffed. His eyes blindfolded. How Ilya had pressed himself against Shane like he already knew exactly how to handle him.

Shane let out a moan, J.J.'s kisses going lower, tongue tracing his collarbone. Somewhere in his mind, Shane tried to remember to bring this up with Ilya, that they definitely needed to find a pair of handcuffs in the Villa, that they should recreate their first kiss maybe ten times each day.

J.J.'s lips circled Shane's nipple and his thoughts were gone again, J.J.'s fingers warm against Shane's chest as he moved his mic off his neck, tongue licking back upwards. Shane murmured J.J.'s name, hips arching, sure he would start babbling soon if he didn't get more. J.J. laughed softly against Shane's skin, lips parting at the dip above Shane's collarbone. He let out a slow lap of his tongue, Shane shivering in delight, and then wrapped his lips around the cross circling Shane's neck, drawing it into his mouth as his lips curved up in a smile.

Shane felt the weight shift around his throat. Consciousness slammed back into him at once, his body shooting up so fast his head collided with J.J., a dull pain spreading across Shane's forehead.

J.J. started to say something, his own hand gripping his temple, but Lexi let out a squeal.

“Point to Casa! We’re tied!”

Rose’s phone chimed. “Islanders! To determine who wins this challenge and earns a party, all Islanders must immediately get into a sex position and kiss like it’s your last night on earth!”

The group let out screams as they ran back downstairs, Shane’s hand somehow in J.J.’s as he was pulled downstairs. The lawn was a blur of limbs and gyrating bodies.

J.J. was asking him something. Shane managed a shrug and J.J. cautiously laid him down flat, wrapping Shane’s legs around his waist as he stimulated thrusting.

Shane let himself be kissed, J.J.’s lips more hesitant now, less urgent.

Someone’s phone went off.

Scott was shouting.

“Point to Casa! We win! We win!”

Shane was swept into the group hug, everyone jostling each other, everyone now somehow caring.

Only Rose looked at him with questioning eyes, Shane’s face still blank. She parted her lips to say something.

The sky exploded, fireworks painting the night sky in their victory, Ilya’s necklace heavy against Shane’s neck.

NEXT TIME...ON HEATED ISLAND...

Tomorrow night...both villas receive a very special video to see what their better halves have been up to! Or should we say, worse halves? If a picture says a thousand words, just imagine what a video can do...

Chapter End Notes

Translation:

Заткнись. Я просто пытаюсь выиграть.

Shut up. I'm just trying to win.

fyi that serge is connor's clown/snl stripper character, bless his sexy battered heart
yes i brought in characters from another work of mine even though it makes no sense
because different universes shh

and finally, in my head, i like to think that a hookup with ilya rozanov increases your likelihood of being gay by 10000% i want his roster to look like a pride parade

Chapter 15

Chapter Summary

basically the heated rivalry club scene only we're on a sex-themed reality tv show and ilya is doing more than tonguing ears through hoops

Chapter Notes

tw for characters being concerned about a potential lack of consent in the beginning of this chapter (did not actually happen but in case the concern itself is triggering, take care of yourselves!)

highly recommend blasting tatu during this read, it's kinda the whole vibe. sad angsty boners all around. god help a bisexual russian terminator with attachment issues, sex as his only coping skill, and no developed frontal lobe to manage impulsivity with smh

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

Shane raised his glass to everyone else's in celebration, clinking together on autopilot. He caught Rose's gaze, her face illuminated by fireworks, but shook his head firmly at her as he placed down his glass and slipped away.

Shane speedwalked inside, his empty hands starting to shake. The new villa was still unfamiliar and disorienting. The layout was similar enough to be even more jarring when things weren't where he'd come to expect. None of the rooms held Ilya.

Shane made it to the bathroom just in time, splashing cold water over his face before sinking down to the floor, his knees pressing against his chest. His chest was burning with tightness, his breath hot against his kneecaps. Shane's fingers scrambled against the golden chain around his neck, tears beginning to leak out the corners of his eyes.

"Hey, man, um, are you okay?"

Shane looked up through a blur. Scott Hunter towered over him. Shane let out another high-pitched sob, starting to laugh hysterically as he pressed his face back into his knees.

Scott's hand hovered in the air over his back as he sunk down to Shane's level.

"Hey, hey, Shane. I know I irritate you for whatever reason, but I'm here, okay? Did...did J.J. do something to you? Listen, just because we were doing a challenge doesn't mean people

can touch however they want.”

Shane rocked forward slightly, letting his shoulder lean against Scott’s chest. Scott’s hand lowered, palm making contact and moving in firm circles over his back. Scott stopped speaking, letting Shane focus on his breath. His inhales decreased. His exhales stretched out.

Finally, Shane let out a long breath, shifting out of Scott’s embrace and straightening his legs over the cool tile floor.

“Sorry. No. It wasn’t, with J.J., it was nothing like that.”

“Okay. You don’t have to apologize.” Scott studied him, watching as Shane nervously toyed with the necklace. “I’m here if you ever want to talk, though. Even if I’m sure Ilya would hate that.”

At the sound of Ilya’s name, Shane burst into tears all over again. He raised his palms over his eyes, shaking his head to try to throw off the sobs.

“Whoa, shit Shane, I’m sorry! You’re missing him, is that it?”

Shane nodded, forcing out a few cracked words.

“I feel so fucking guilty.”

Scott’s hand returned to his back, voice thoughtful. “Hey, sure, that makes sense. Everyone can tell you two really like each other.”

Shane lowered his head between his knees, voice muffled. “Well, he’s not going to like me anymore.”

“Shane.” Scott laughed. “That man is obsessed with you. And we’re *supposed* to kiss other people. Testing the relationship, right? If anything, the fact that you did all that and still can only think about Ilya shows where your head’s at. You know?”

Shane sniffed. “Really?”

“Really. And I’m sure he’s doing the same thing. Testing the connection and then pouting that it’s not you.” Scott grinned playfully.

Shane shoved him, wiping his eyes with his other hand.

“Shut up. You’re the worst.”

“I’m actually the best.” Scott smiled wider. “And listen, if you need more incredible kisses from me to fully test what you have with Ilya, I can try to help you out. Again.”

“Shut *up*.” Shane rolled his eyes, letting out a loud sniff.

Scott’s hand fluttered up to Shane’s face, thumb briefly wiping away the last of Shane’s tears.

“There he is.” Scott smiled, softer. “I am glad everything’s okay. Now you better come down and celebrate after being such a fucking tyrant during the game.”

Shane took the hand Scott offered and stood up, eyebrows furrowing. “I wasn’t being a tyrant, I was being encouraging. People needed to get their heads in the game. And which villa won, huh?”

“Yeah, yeah, Hollander.”

They headed down the stairs, running into Rose on the way up. She paused, looking at Scott suspiciously. Shane gave her a small smile.

“He was being...helpful.”

Scott opened his mouth in mock surprise, clasping Shane on the back.

“Never thought I’d see the day. I’ll leave you two to it.”

Scott continued down the stairs, disappearing back to the party. Rose sighed, taking in Shane’s splotchy face.

“I know you didn’t want to talk. But...”

Shane exhaled. “Sorry. I was trying to...I don’t know. Keep it together?”

She leaned against the wall, voice soft.

“What happened? Scott helped?”

“Surprisingly, yes.” Shane snorted, rubbing his palms over his face. “Ugh. Rose. It’s all just a lot.”

“It is.” Rose looked at him with concern, pouting. “My poor Shanebug. If you want me to sleep outside with you tonight, I will. Tiff can survive alone.”

“You’re sharing a bed with Tiff tonight? What about Svetlana?”

Rose leaned back from Shane, raising her eyebrows. He cleared his throat.

“Sorry, uh, that came out judgmental.”

“You think?” Rose scoffed. “Svetlana and I talked about things before Casa. We want the most out of this experience, so yeah, I’m exploring all my options. It doesn’t mean I don’t miss her just as much as you miss Ilya.” She gave Shane a small smile. “It also doesn’t mean you have to move like I’m moving. Do whatever feels right for you.”

She reached out to squeeze his hand.

“Do you feel up to joining the party? Or do you need somewhere quiet for a bit?”

“No, I think I can...I want to apologize to J.J.”

Rose winced. “Yeah, he’s a bit worried he did something wrong.”

“Fuck. Okay. I’ll talk to him.”

“You can always talk to me too, you know.” She squeezed his hand one more time. “You don’t have to always keep it together.”

“Yeah. I know.”

Rose rolled her eyes. “Sure, sure, you know.” She bumped his shoulder, tugging him down the stairs with her. “I mean it, though.”

“You made it!” J.J. approached Shane at once, champagne flute in hand, and then backed up a step immediately, almost tripping over his own feet.

“Yeah, sorry.” Shane smiled at the man’s eagerness. “Listen, I want to say, you didn’t do anything wrong earlier. I was, uh, having a moment.”

“Oh, thank god.” J.J. exhaled, raking over Shane’s face. “I thought maybe I did too much? Went too fast, or too far, for just a challenge?”

“It wasn’t *just* a challenge, but-”

J.J. tilted his head, starting to smile. “Not just a challenge...?”

“Oh. Like, winning mattered.” Shane flushed. “But kissing you was, um, very nice as well. Even though it was in a challenge.”

“Shit.” J.J. laughed. “I was getting ahead of myself, huh?”

“Not necessarily.” Shane scuffed at the ground. “You’re definitely a good kisser.”

J.J. scratched his neck, looking around the gathering before stepping closer.

“All right. So...if me and you are okay, and I’m definitely a good kisser, would you want to share a bed tonight? No funny business if you’re not in the headspace for it. I’d just like to get to know you better in here, if you want.”

A tingle went up Shane’s spine. He bit into his bottom lip, looking at J.J.

“Um. Yeah. I’d...I would be okay with that. Even some funny business, maybe.” He felt the heat rising in his cheeks. “Only, um, it may sound weird, but, this necklace is really important to me. And I don’t want anyone touching it at all, if that’s okay?”

J.J.’s eyes widened. “Fuck, of course, man. I’m so sorry I did that.”

“You didn’t know.” Shane shrugged, avoiding J.J.’s eyes. “Actually, I’ll probably take it off for safekeeping. I don’t want anything happening to it.”

“Totally.” J.J. swallowed nervously. “Makes sense.”

“Okay.” Shane gave a tight nod. “I’m going to do that. But then I’ll be back. And then we can go for a chat.”

“Sure.” J.J. looked at him, eyes serious. “Take your time, Shane.”

Shane gave him a smile and slipped back upstairs, the noise fading the farther he ascended. He walked into the dressing room, unclasping the necklace with trembling hands. He looked at it for a moment, thumb tracing the gold, and then gently slid it into his Rolex case where the watch he left behind had been. Shane closed the case and placed it back in his suitcase, hand sliding over it once almost like a blessing before zipping everything up.

Shane stepped away, neck feeling strangely naked, and took some deep breaths by himself. Casa Amor did not last forever. He exhaled, and told himself it again. He imagined the old Villa. His old routine. His...He imagined Ilya.

Casa Amor did not last forever.

Hayden hauled his duvet over his shoulder, glancing at Ilya.

“You coming?”

“Yes, relax, Pike, I know you are so excited to sleep together.”

Hayden huffed, cheeks burning slightly.

“Shut up, I take back saying you could crash on the daybeds with me.”

Hayden turned and headed for the stairs, Ilya laughing at his back. Humming, Ilya yanked the duvet off his bed and went to grab Shane’s pillow. Shane had only slept there half a night before leaving for Casa, but still, Ilya considered it Shane’s, despite it smelling only of plain cotton which was more disappointing than Ilya wanted to admit.

Ilya lifted Shane’s pillow and paused, revealing photo strips resting against the mattress. Ilya dropped the pillow on the bed and peered closer. There were all the pictures they had taken together. The most recent strip Ilya remembered, and of course the ones with their fake engagement rings after the challenge. But there were also the ones from earlier days, like the afternoon they had almost napped away before Ilya got restless and manhandled Shane in the photobooth, pressing him against the wall as the lights flashed. There was even their first ever photostrip together, where Rose and Svetlana had squished them all into the booth, Shane flushed red and trying hard not to stare at Ilya in every shot, Ilya muscling closer and closer in each progressive frame.

Ilya exhaled, his chest expanding as a smile crept across his face.

“*Ooh*, what’s got you blushing?” Hudson cocked his hip in the doorway of the bedroom, a facemask plastered over his skin.

“Nobody. Shut up. I can see your pores from here.” Ilya hid the photos beneath his pillow, scowling. Hudson let out a high-pitched cry and hurried back to the bathroom.

Javi snorted from his bed, Dakota already snuggled under one arm. Svetlana, in bed next to Javi’s ex, gave Ilya a once over as he passed by, checking in. He gave her a nod and continued on, glad he wouldn’t have to hear whatever noises Leo made with Serge that night. The two of them were both in leopard print pajamas, cuddling as Serge explained the stories behind each of his scars, Leo already letting out loud giggles as he traced Serge’s skin.

Outside, the brisk air hit Ilya’s bare chest, his neck feeling strangely exposed. He shivered as he dumped his duvet down on the daybed next to Hayden, who was already turned on one side.

“Wow, asleep already? No wonder boring Shane Hollander likes you.”

“So you admit he likes me?” Hayden rolled over with a smirk. Ilya hit his face with a pillow, not at all softly. “Ow, the fuck, man!”

Ilya smiled, leaning back against the daybed. He looked up at the sky for a moment, exhaling.

“You and Shane.”

“Ugh, for the millionth time, he obviously likes you the most. Do you just like hearing me say it?”

“Yes.” Ilya’s grin widened before faltering somewhat. “But. You talk a lot, I mean. With Shane.”

“Yeah...? We’re friends?” Hayden raised his eyebrows. “Don’t you talk to your friends?”

Ilya made a face. “Not especially. We sort of...guess. Instead of saying the things. But Shane likes when things are said.”

“Yeah, he’s pretty straightforward that way.”

“Mm.” Ilya nodded, considering.

Hayden studied Ilya, propping himself up on his shoulder. “Wait. Are you...are you asking me how to talk to your boyfriend?”

“He is not my boyfriend.” Ilya countered hotly.

Hayden looked ahead again, hiding his smile.

“Whatever you say, man.”

He darted a look at Ilya, clearing his throat.

“I noticed Shane gets in his head about social stuff a lot. So sometimes I like to share more about myself until he’s comfortable joining in, or ask him specific questions so he doesn’t have to stress about where to start. And if you say literally *anything* about hockey, he’ll talk your ear off, but you probably already know that. Um, what else...yeah, I mean, probably just say things out loud even if you think it’s obvious already. And if nothing else, say his hockey talent makes you want to have gay sex and I’m sure you’ll be fine.”

“I didn’t ask for your advice, Pike.”

Hayden snorted, sighing. “Okay, Rozanov.” He heard the daybed shift as Ilya turned on his side, pulling the duvet up to his shoulders.

“Thank you.”

Hayden grinned at the night sky.

“You’re welcome, Ilya.”

“And I hope you’re not calling Shane talented and saying you want to fuck him. It would be such a shame if all your bones were to break overnight.”

“Jesus Christ. I regret letting you sleep out here.” Hayden muttered.

“Sweet dreams, little Pike. Don’t let your bones break.”

“That’s not how the saying goes, Rozanov.”

“If you say so.” Ilya hummed innocently, the stars twinkling above them.

Over at Casa, Shane tried not to toss and turn next to J.J. He had given Shane a brief sweet goodnight kiss and then fallen asleep almost immediately. Shane’s brain was still racing far too much for sleep to come. The guilt came as steady as his heartbeat. Guilt over the necklace. Guilt over J.J. sleeping beside him instead. Guilt over Jackie sleeping outside all alone, apparently more faithful than Shane.

Shane woke up feeling more settled. The bedroom was becoming more familiar, the mix of new and old faces in the space less jarring. He yawned, some of his sleep having been interrupted by the kissing sounds coming from Rose and Tiff’s bed near daybreak.

Shane let J.J. lean over and draw him into a slow kiss, their lips curving up in matching smiles as the kiss deepened.

“Careful...” Shane warned.

“What if I don’t want to be?” J.J. raised his eyebrows, one hand trailing down Shane’s torso in a question.

Shane let out a small groan, stopping J.J.’s hand reluctantly.

“I am testing my connection. But I don’t want to be disrespectful about it.”

“Understood.” J.J. withdrew his hand at once, laughing at Shane’s obvious pout. “Hey. Just say the word if you change your mind.”

J.J. slipped out of bed. Shane threw his arms over his eyes, his morning wood still at attention. Miles’s eyes flickered over him with a growing smile as Shane flushed, scrambling up to change into something thicker than his pajama bottoms.

Ilya squinted at the sun, forgetting for a moment where he was. He rolled over, spotting Hayden asleep next to him, and paused for a moment before letting out a loud bellowing scream.

“Jesus, man, what the fuck!” Hayden shot up, covering his ears.

Ilya laid back, giggling. “Ah, so sorry. Gave me such a fright, waking up next to such an ugly man. Has never happened to me before.”

“You are *literally* the worst.” Hayden groaned, wiping the sleep out of his eyes.

“And Shane still likes me more. What does that say about you, Pike?”

“It says Shane must have shit taste.” Hayden scooped up his duvet, heading upstairs. “Get your own daybed tonight, Rozanov!”

“Never. Who will I cuddle, sweet Pike?” Ilya crooned, laughing as the tips of Hayden’s ears went red.

Ilya took his time getting ready. It was strange not making breakfast for anyone. The others were trying to suck up to the new arrivals, but Ilya already knew he wasn’t recoupling with anyone other than Shane. And he didn’t need to make any avocado toast to rack up hookups to test their connection. Marly was already leaning over the countertop, his eyes trailing slowly over Ilya’s bare torso. Ilya gave him a lazy grin, stretching purposefully so he could scratch a hand down the vee of his groin.

“I got a text!” Svetlana’s voice rang out from the balcony upstairs. She untangled herself from Javi’s ex and squinted closer.

“Oh. Shit. It’s a video from Casa Amor!”

The Islanders glanced at each other, then all made a mad dash upstairs, swarming Svetlana where she stood. She held out her small phone screen best she could, everyone’s shoulders jostling for position as they gazed down at it. She swallowed, and then pressed play.

The video showed a series of brief vignettes. There was Jackie miming reverse cowgirl on top of Troy, other Islanders visible on the lawn behind her. There was nightcam footage of Rose and Tiff in bed together, intertwined with kisses. A close-up of Scott’s tongue sliding into Kip’s mouth. Then footage of Shane reclining in bed, eyes wide at J.J. above him. J.J.’s tongue as it looped around the necklace. Shane’s lips moving, audio loud enough to hear him

say J.J.'s name. A brief shot in grainy night vision, their noses skimming in bed as they kissed, necklace now gone from sight.

The video cut off. No one said anything for a second.

"Can't believe Scott's moving on already..." Leo said shakily with a laugh, eying Ilya.

"Play it again." Ilya's voice was low. Coiled.

Svetlana looked at him. He reached past her, pressing play himself, the Islanders uneasily watching the video again.

"Head up, Hayd, that was clearly a challenge." Connie patted Hayden's back reassuringly as he braced through Jackie riding on top of Troy.

Connie continued. "And Svet-"

"Don't." She gave him an icy look. "Rose and I agreed to explore. I don't need anyone's pity. Did anyone forget I had Zara in my bed last night? Do I need to remind anyone, louder, perhaps?"

Zara giggled from the outside of the huddle, twirling her hair.

The group fell silent as Shane reappeared on screen. Marly cleared his throat from where he peered over Javi's shoulder.

"That's fucked up, man."

"Yeah, like, obviously I'm sex positive." Hudson winced. "But...that's brutal."

"Everyone. Shut. Up." Ilya grabbed Svetlana's phone out of her hand, stalking off so he could watch again in private.

Ilya played it on repeat until he had memorized everything he needed to. Shane's eyes, wide like they got for Ilya, but apparently not only for Ilya. Shane's lips, murmuring a name that was not his. His fucking mother's necklace, used like a prop for foreplay and then discarded. Just like Ilya. Shane in bed with that man while Ilya slept outside with the mosquitos and Hayden Pike.

This is why his stomach had ached when the words about his mother spilled out on their date. This is why he kept things simple, so no one could gut him and laugh as he bled.

Shane was having fun?

Ilya could have more.

He strode outside, people quieting as he passed by. He stopped in front of the beanbags, his broad back blocking the sun. He gazed down at Leo and Hudson, arching his brow.

"Want to fuck?"

Leo's mouth dropped open. "Me? Or him?" He scrambled upright, beanbag slipping below him. "Cause I mean, always, yes, but..."

Hudson reached up to squeeze Ilya's forearm, his brows scrunched. "Hey, listen sexy. You can talk about how you're feeling, okay? As men, we're told to repress all these things, but this is a safe space, all right?"

Ilya stared down at him, not blinking. "How I am feeling is like I want you to suck my dick."

Hudson swallowed, eyes falling to Ilya's tight shorts. "Yeah, yes, that is definitely a feeling. That I share."

"And me too! Right?" Leo craned forward, trying to get into Ilya's eyesight.

"Yes, of course. I love desperate sluts. Now follow." Ilya snapped.

Leo hopped up eagerly, pulling Hudson up behind him. They trailed Ilya like ducklings, whispering excitedly to each other.

Svetlana was leaving the photobooth with Zara when Ilya entered on the way to the Speakeasy. She let out a breath.

"Ilyusha..."

"Your phone." He tossed it at her, not daring to look at her face. "I saw enough."

Svetlana started to say something else, but Ilya was already inside, the door slamming shut behind Hudson and Leo.

"Sit."

They practically scrambled to sit on the couch in front of him. Ilya felt his muscles unclench slightly for the first time all morning.

"Such good boys. So cute how you are holding hands."

Hudson and Leo glanced at each other, flushing. Ilya took two purposeful steps backwards, leaning against the wall and crossing his arms. He raised his jaw.

"Now kiss. Show me how much you like each other."

They hesitated, checking in with one another, and then Hudson leaned forward. He closed the distance gradually, the first kiss almost chaste. And then they were both scooting closer, Leo's mouth opening hungrily as Hudson's tongue dipped inside, his hands grabbing Hudson's biceps.

"So good." Ilya crooned, sauntering closer.

They pulled apart, lips red, eyes tracking him for further instructions. Ilya's voice grew serious for a moment.

"Limits. Say red or tap me twice. Yes?"

The two men nodded like bobbleheads.

"Such fast learners." Ilya chuckled under their chins. His fingers lingered, sliding down their necks.

"Because I can be rough."

Leo shivered. Ilya grinned.

"I can be mean."

Leo bit back a whimper, his lips chasing Ilya's thumb.

"But I have a feeling we will have a great time together. Yes?"

He laughed at their fast nods, the sound fading as he glanced down at his wrist. He strode over to a side table, unclasping his Rolex.

"Strip for me."

Ilya tossed the watch onto the table, the clink of contact loud in his ears. He turned sharply, forcing himself to not to check for any scratches.

Hudson and Leo's clothing was tossed at their feet, both of them fully nude and eager. Ilya's fingers twitched at the mess of clothes, unfolded before him. His voice came out rough as his eyes dragged upwards.

"So. Ever been to Paris?"

Shane stretched out on a lounge, eyeing J.J. on the beanbags across the lawn laughing with Lexi.

"Should I even bother?" Miles laughed lightly, glancing at Shane from his lounge. "I have a feeling I'm at the bottom of a growing list."

"Sorry, no." Shane cleared his throat, pushing a smile to his face. "I'm listening."

Miles raised his eyebrows, still grinning, and continued on.

"I was just saying your mom has started livetweeting every episode. It's *very* entertaining."

"Jesus." Shane rubbed his face.

Miles reached out, batting his arm with a laugh.

“No, seriously, she’s hilarious. It’s nothing bad, promise.”

“Did you pull me for a chat so you could cozy up to my mom?” Shane tossed Miles a grin, shaking his head.

Miles took a long seductive sip of his water bottle, eye contact not wavering.

“I mean...*maybe*. Can your dad fight?”

Shane was interrupted by Scott standing up from a daybed, Kip sliding off his lap.

“Got a textttt!”

Rose and Tiff hoisted themselves out of the pool, Rose making sure to shake her hair just close enough to Shane so that he was sprayed with a cool mist.

“Oh, fuck you.”

Rose laughed. “Nah, you wouldn’t let me!”

Shane scowled, letting Miles link their arms together and pull them closer to the crowd growing around Scott.

“It looks like a video.” Scott tried to angle it so everyone could see, Kip reaching over his shoulder and pressing play.

Shane studied the tiny screen. Grainy black-and-white footage showed Svetlana in bed with a blonde woman, arm wrapped tight around her waist. Next was a zoomed-in shot of Hayden, wet and soaking, his tongue exploring the mouth of a ripped, bearded man with no small amount of passion. Shane cleared his throat, the image doing things to him he tried to quickly distract himself from, lest it become obvious to everyone around him too. And then it cut to choppy film of the Speakeasy, video lingering on Leo and another man, their chests bare, followed by a shot of the Rolex lying on a table. There was a final cut of Ilya’s back, his low voice echoing: *want to fuck?*

The video paused. Jackie was blinking hard as Cici rubbed her back. Rose was chewing her lip but seemed composed. Shane didn’t realize he was still staring at the blank screen until Scott lowered his phone, waving gently in front of Shane’s eyes.

“Hey...you good, man? That can’t have been easy to see...or hear...”

Shane swallowed, shaking his head. “No. It’s fine. We’re testing our connection. That’s how the show works.”

Everyone’s eyes looked towards Rose, who let out a long exhale.

“Right...but Shane...that looked like...”

“They edit stuff like this all the time.” Shane’s voice cut through her. “This is why I watched every past season. So I could be prepared for this kind of thing. Producers want drama, I get

it, but I'm not going to be goaded into a reaction. You can't even see Ilya saying those words. It could easily be out of context or a frakenbite." Shane shook his head harder. "He didn't even kiss anyone in the clip, so, really, like, what's the big deal?"

Rose lowered her eyes. "Sure, you're right. It's probably edited worse than it is."

"Yeah. Exactly." Shane let out a harsh exhale. "We're both exploring. That's it. In fact, I hope he's exploring so I don't have to feel guilty about giving everyone here a fair shot at returning to the Villa like they deserve."

"Well, I definitely think your hope has come true..." Scott muttered.

Shane ignored him. He turned to Miles, jerking his head to the loungers.

"C'mon, Miles. Let's finish our chat."

Miles gave him a hesitant smile but followed behind him, Shane's breath still coming fast as he strode in front. So Ilya took off the Rolex. Maybe like the necklace, he wanted to keep it safe. Shane wouldn't let the producers get in his head. He wouldn't let *himself* get in his head. Not anymore. Not when Ilya had reassured him every step of the way.

They were allowed to explore. They were allowed to test. And maybe Shane would indulge in that just a bit more now that he could assume Ilya was doing the same. There was no reason for his stomach to feel sick. He couldn't trust video clips thrown together, edited who knows how, but he could trust Ilya. He could trust what they had.

"Just so into each other, hmm?" Ilya smirked, watching as Leo straddled Hudson on the couch, their moans starting to magnify as they rocked against each other. "Come here now, Leo."

He gestured Leo closer, pulling him to stand against his chest, Hudson on the other side. The two of them lavished Leo's body for a moment as he swayed between them. Ilya's lips swept down his neck, hands grounding Leo by the small of his back. His fingertips skimmed Hudson's, both of them tracing palms over Leo's ass. Hudson's hands rose over Leo's pecs, fingertips brushing his nipples and making him squirm. Ilya let out a chuckle at that, his throat vibrating against Leo's cheek, before he swallowed and stepped back.

"All fours." He snapped, Leo falling to his knees at once.

"Yes, Ilya."

Ilya stilled, the room tilting briefly back into the room with Shane, Shane's voice calling his name.

"No." He pulled his hand back, letting a small slap ring out over Leo's ass, studying his face for any needed check-in.

"Yes...sir?" Leo panted, eyes closed in pleasure.

“Better.” Ilya removed his hands and walked around Leo’s crouched body to the couch, each step slow and intentional. He let himself collapse into the cushions, kicking his ankles up to rest on Leo’s bare back. He heard another whimper leak out Leo’s mouth.

“Hudson.” Ilya crooned. “Why don’t you open Leo up now? So he can be more useful to us than a footrest?”

Hudson let loose a lopsided grin, sliding down between the backs of Leo’s thighs. Ilya tilted his head back, eyes drifting closed. He could hear the wet licks of Hudson’s tongue, Leo’s pitched cries echoing in return. Still, the room throbbed with whispers of Shane’s voice.

you’re mine/i’m yours/you’re mine/i’m yours

Ilya felt his cock harden with the memory. How Shane had practically mauled his neck, his lip-suctioned bruises a collar, marking Ilya as Shane’s for everyone to see.

Ilya straightened, leaning forward. Hudson was three fingers deep, cheeks flushed pink as a light sheen of sweat dripped off his skin.

“Very good.” Ilya smirked, Leo already far gone. “My turn.” He snapped at Hudson.

Ilya walked to where Leo was resting on his forearms, face half-collapsed into the rug. The sight of Ilya’s feet seemed to revive him, his tongue slipping out desperate and wet, tracing up his leg. Leo got to his dick eagerly, Hudson joining him a moment later, their mouths combining, tongues tangling as they licked up and down.

Ilya let out a low groan, the sensation finally erasing any other thoughts, any other memories. After a few minutes, he let Hudson roll the condom on with his teeth, sending a silent thanks to the producers who kept every room stocked with supplies. He glanced down, running a rough hand through the man’s thick hair, and Hudson flicked his gaze up, a cocky smile around his lips. Ilya looked away immediately, the eyes not Shane’s, the face all wrong.

He pulled out of Hudson’s mouth, walking over to kneel behind Leo.

“Are you ready for me, Leo? I need to hear you say it.”

“...ready, sir...” Leo’s voice was breathless, his cries breathing through as soon as Ilya pushed in.

Ilya stilled inside him, tutting.

“Hudson, I think Leo needs something to fill his mouth, no?”

Hudson knelt and lifted Leo’s chin up, letting out a low gasp as Leo leaned forward eagerly. Ilya reached for Hudson’s hands, gripping them as he thrust back in, Leo bobbing back and forth between them on all fours.

Ilya could feel Hudson’s gaze across from him, his gasps ticking up as Leo’s mouth rode up and down on his cock. Hudson’s hands squeezed his, pulsing like a heartbeat. Ilya kept his eyes down on Leo between them, that wide plane of flesh that could’ve been anyone, an

unremarkable spine, a body just like the other bodies he had been with before and would be with again.

“You like that, don’t you Leo?”

Leo’s response came out muffled against Hudson’s dick. Ilya increased his pace, pelvis pounding into Leo beneath him.

“Desperate, aren’t you? Such a pathetic little thing.”

Ilya felt Leo clench around his cock, words coming out faster now as he drove in and out of him.

“No shame. Here on your knees for us. You’ll take anything. Anyone. Won’t you?”

Hudson moaned, Leo sliding him deeper down his throat as Ilya thrust forward behind him.

“We should pass you around this whole island, Leo. That’s how much of a slut you are. Common property.”

Hudson chimed in, spitting out what passed for his version of dirty talk around his broken moans. Ilya closed his eyes briefly, trying to shut out the distraction. Hudson’s hand slipped slightly in his, the touch nearly tender as his fingers circled Ilya’s bare wrist instead.

Ilya came, suddenly and shortly, the pleasure dissipating almost immediately. He watched Leo tremble beneath him and half-collapse just as Hudson finished in his mouth, Hudson’s hands dropping from Ilya’s to tangle in Leo’s hair. Ilya withdrew slowly, knotting the condom. He shook his body out as he crossed the room to the trashcan, composing his face before turning around.

Hudson was sitting on the rug, Leo half in his lap. Ilya knelt before them, tilting their faces towards him one at a time.

“Good? Good?”

Hudson grinned, Leo nodding dreamily. Ilya’s eyes dropped to the rug with a *tsk*.

“Should have made you come on the laminate. Ah, well.”

Leo bit his lip, nuzzling further into Hudson’s chest with a smile. Hudson ran a hand through his hair, leaning down to press a kiss to his forehead. Ilya’s stomach turned. He stood, nodding jerkily.

“Good.”

He turned his back, their soft murmurs scratching against his ears. Ilya slipped on his clothes and then slipped out the door, the bright sunshine jolting him back to reality.

Ilya rolled his shoulders back, striding back out to rejoin the Villa. Marly passed him with a grin.

“Sounded like you had fun. We could hear Leo squealing from the kitchen. Count me in next time?” He winked. “Could head to Soul Ties whenever you’re ready to go again...”

“No.” Ilya’s voice came out harsher than he intended. He covered it with a quick smirk. “I would much rather in the bed. Make everyone listen to how I make you moan instead.”

Marly stepped closer, his chest close enough to skim Ilya’s. “Are you sure it won’t be me making you moan, Rozanov?”

Ilya felt a shudder pass through his body, his smirk softening into a genuine grin.

“Guess we will find out, Marly.”

“Counting on it, Roz.”

Ilya did not waste time. As soon as the lights cut off overhead that night, his mouth was on Marly’s, the man’s surprise sucked into Ilya’s mouth. Ilya’s body hummed, all his restlessness pouring into the man in his grip, his lips grinding as hard as his hips against the physical contact. He needed more, everything harder. Anything to get out of his mind.

Hayden’s bed deserted, the only Islander now sleeping outside.

Shane’s pictures under Ilya’s pillow, Marly next to him instead.

Flashes of Leo and Hudson in the Speakeasy, fleeting sensations so different than the bite of Shane against his neck, the fierce, flat way he had said *mine*.

Marly grabbed Ilya’s ass, pulling him closer, the tight dig of his fingers tearing Ilya from his thoughts. He palmed at Marly’s sweats, needing more distraction, flares of Shane already going off again inside his brain. Marly yanked down his waistband, springing his cock free, and then reached for Ilya’s, a loud moan escaping as he touched Ilya bare.

“Could y’all shut the fuck up?” Connie tossed a pillow their way, Dakota shifting in bed beside him. “We’re trying to sleep.”

“You shut the fuck up. Enjoy the show.” Ilya bit back, his fingers already curling into fists.

Marly laughed into his mouth, lips moving to cover his again. The agitation rolled off him slightly, Ilya allowing himself to get lost in the stroke of Marly’s hand over both of them. Marly flipped him onto his back, Ilya falling against the pillows as Marly stroked faster, both of them slick with precum now, their hard cocks bobbing together.

Marly leaned into his elbow, free hand pushing down against Ilya’s wrist, pinning him. The sudden weight against his bare pulse broke something loose in his chest. Ilya felt the press of tears, turning his head suddenly into the pillow to stifle the noise, letting out only a low grunt as he came at once into Marly’s fist, Marly following a moment after. Ilya stayed curled on his side, shifting slightly to let Marly wrap a heavy arm around his waist, his face nosing against Ilya’s shoulder.

Ilya exhaled, not bothering to get up. He would let it dry, a reminder in the morning. Proof of who he wasn't catering to anymore. Tangible evidence of the distance from what he was leaving behind.

Marly's breath steadied behind him, drifting into a light snore. In the darkness, Ilya heard a small clink on the bedside table. He cracked open his eyelids, the face of his Rolex twinkling dimly back. Svetlana's shadowy profile moved away as she slipped back into bed next to Hudson. The crack in Ilya's chest widened. He pressed his lips deeper against Shane's pillow, his fingertips slipping underneath to hold the edge of a photostrip, the polaroid paper slippery in his grip.

NEXT TIME...ON HEATED ISLAND...

Tomorrow night...the Islanders scramble to solidify connections as the Casa Amor recoupling approaches. New lovebirds might indulge in one last temptation. Playboys might find out how it feels to be played. And sometimes seduction can be a way to be saved...

Chapter End Notes

and you thought hayden's fanmail video was bad! angst before joy wheww

(also in my brain hudson starts doing dirty talk in a bad imitation of ilya's russian accent as like an adhd stim and leo is like yes i love it and ilya is like jesus christ i miss shane so bad FUCK im not allowed to miss shane FUCK i hate my life)

(also also this shane absolutelyyy gets into reality tv as sport, a la the game of roses podcast, and is onto all and any producer manipulation like the pro that he is. ilya not so much.)

(except rip to shane because in this case the producers aren't fucking around and just can't show actual sex tape footage so it's actually worse than shown and not manipulation at allllll my poor shaneyyy)

Chapter 16

Chapter Summary

the islanders make moves in the final day before the casa/villa recoupling

Chapter Notes

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

Shane woke up with Miles' arm still thrown around his waist. He sighed sleepily, studying Miles' profile. Miles seemed like a kind guy, if not a little bland. Shane found he was enjoying having enough experience for once to actually compare. He liked that J.J. was more mischievous than Miles, more likely to initiate even though Shane batted him away. He liked that J.J. looked at him in a way that seemed to go deeper, asked him questions that led to further conversation. Miles was nice. J.J. was interesting. And Ilya - well. Shane told himself he should focus on the people in front of him, at least until Casa was over.

Shane accepted Miles' good morning peck, giving him a quick smile as he got out of bed. The other Islanders were already stirring, Rose yawning into Troy's chest as they snuggled in bed a bit longer. Shane threw his pillow at her face, laughing as she shrieked and threw one back. He frowned at Troy, the man's eyes fixed on him and Miles since the lights came on.

Shaking off Troy's weirdness, Shane jogged downstairs to the kitchen. He thought maybe he'd make J.J. something for breakfast, show that he was taking this time in Casa seriously. But downstairs, J.J. was already seated at the counter, Lexi pressing a strawberry to his lips. She was laughing at something he said around the fruit in his mouth, his hand reaching out to pull her closer. Shane's stomach fell, his plan shifting. He turned and headed back up the stairs, gradually this time, to get ready for the day instead.

Connie gave Shane a nod as he headed out of the shared bathroom. His eyes averted from the towel around Shane's waist, his cheeks flushing. Shane blinked, then stepped into the second shower. His skin crawled at the random hairs scattered around the tile. He couldn't wait to be back home and not have to share one bathroom with a million strangers.

Shane heard the shower next to him turn on, a low voice humming some half-familiar tune. Shane scrubbed himself quickly, knowing there might be a line forming soon. He stepped out as the other shower turned off, Scott emerging a moment later.

Shane froze, his hair dripping onto his bare shoulders. Scott looked at him, securing his towel around his waist.

"Okay there, Shane?"

Shane parted his lips to say something, eyes stuck on the expanse of Scott's muscular torso. His tongue was thick in his mouth, his days without release suddenly stacking.

"Um..." Shane's eyes lingered at Scott's lips. He pushed on.

"You said...if I ever wanted to...?"

"Shit." Scott swept his gaze up and down Shane's body, starting to grin. "Seriously?"

Shane shrugged, flushing. "It's important to -"

"Test the connection, yes, yes, you've said."

Scott took a step closer, then paused, looking at Shane with concern.

"I'm getting to know Kip, and I'm feeling serious about it. Is that a problem for you?"

"No, god." Shane reddened further. "I'm not fucking in love with you or anything! You're just, hot, or whatever, and I'm away from my -" Shane cut himself off.

Scott's grin widened. He took another step closer.

"You just called me hot."

"Or *whatever* -" Shane retorted, words trailing off as Scott gently lifted his jaw.

Scott studied Shane for a moment as he leaned in, questioning, and Shane didn't flinch. Scott's skin was cool beneath his touch, Shane's hands gliding over his arms and chest still wet from the shower.

Scott moved closer, their lips finding each other. Shane let out a contented moan, his body unfurling into Scott's solid weight. He liked how Scott squeezed him, arms embracing around him. Shane took note of the give and take, how Scott's lips would pause, following Shane's. How he used less tongue than J.J. but more than Miles. How Scott seemed pliant, open to direction. His hands were warm on Shane's hips but not bracing, his thumbs drawing small circles over the skin there. Shane deepened the kiss, experimenting, one hand threading through Scott's hair with a brief tug. Scott made a happy little sound, Shane's mouth twitching at the result. His towel lifted slightly, Shane grabbing at it with one hand as Scott broke the kiss fully, laughing into his shoulder.

"Shut up." Shane smiled, rolling his eyes.

"You know I'm not gonna let you live this down." Scott eyed Shane's towel.

Shane gave a pointed look at Scott's own towel.

"It's a *miracle* Kip likes you. And be grateful I didn't get to him first. Didn't he say I was his type?" Shane tilted his head innocently.

Scott made a face. "Okay, shutting up seems wise."

Shane shoved his shoulder playfully. “Go get your guy. I know you want to stay here and ogle me, but...”

Scott raised his eyebrows. “Shane Hollander. What has Casa Amor done to you?”

Shane bit his lip, laughing, and strode out of the door into the dressing room, swishing his hips a little just to hear Scott chuckle.

Once dressed, Shane found Jackie by the pool sunbathing. He dropped into the chair next to her, grinning.

She sat up slightly, lowering her shades.

“Someone’s got a big smile for so early in the morning.”

Shane glanced at her, then back at the pool, his voice hushed.

“I had a little makeout with Scott.”

“You dirty dog!” Jackie laughed, taking off her shades completely. “Was it good?”

“Yeah.” Shane smiled wider, then looked at Jackie, turning on his side as he scooted closer to her. “It’s so interesting. Everyone kisses so differently. It’s like...fingerprints. But for kissing?”

Jackie cocked her head. “You are a fascinating person, Shane Hollander.”

“What?” He flushed. “Don’t you feel that way?”

“Mmm...I think I just sort into good or bad. Though maybe at this point, Hayden or not Hayden.”

“Yeah?” Shane gave her a soft smile. “All bad kissers here? Or no Haydens?”

“Both.” Jackie laughed. She lowered her voice, eyes darting around the Villa. “Troy pulled me for a quick chat during breakfast and we did kiss...but I don’t know. There was *no* chemistry. It felt like kissing you would.”

“Wow, thanks a lot, Jac.”

Jackie covered her face, laughing.

“No, sorry, that sounded bad! I guess I’m missing Hayden a lot. I felt *nothing*.”

“Yeah...” Shane’s face grew serious.

“And it doesn’t mean anything *to* have chemistry with people and still miss your couple.” Jackie rushed the words out. “I’m just saying, for me.”

“Right, of course.”

“And you’re new to...being you. It makes sense to explore!”

“Jackie, it’s okay, really.” Shane gave her a small smile.

“Okay. I don’t want to make you feel guilty. Especially after-” Jackie cut herself off.

“The video?”

She winced.

Shane picked at the hem of his swim trunks.

“You think it could be real?”

Jackie didn’t respond for a long moment.

“I don’t know. And I don’t know Ilya too well. Not like you do.”

“But you think it could be.” Shane meant it as a question, but the words came out flat.

Jackie sighed.

Shane shook his head, his voice cracking.

“I would freak the fuck out, Jac.”

She reached over, squeezing his hand.

“I’d freak out with you. But hey, focus on you. You just had a steamy morning makeout!”

“Yeah, for the last time, probably.” Shane laughed, gesturing towards the pergola. “Looks like Scott’s proposing or something.”

Scott was passionately saying something as he sat on the edge of his seat, Kip’s hand clasped in both of his. Kip was nodding at regular intervals, Scott scooting further and further forward until he was nearly crouching in midair. He finished whatever stream of words he had prepared and there was a moment of silence, then a final nod and smile from Kip. Then Scott was springing to his feet, scooping Kip up and spinning him around in a circle. The other Islanders started clapping, something bittersweet blossoming in Shane’s stomach. His hand fluttered to his neck, finding only the mic at his collarbone.

Jackie squinted over. “Think they’re official already?”

“Maybe.” Shane shifted in the chair. “I don’t think we’re supposed to say that until the recoupling though. It’s not good for dramatic tension.”

Jackie snorted. “If hockey doesn’t work out, maybe you have a future as a producer.”

Jackie laughed. Shane didn’t. She raised her hands in surrender.

“Sorry, take it back. You’ll play hockey until you’re a hundred and three.”

“I better.” Shane stood, stretching. “I guess I should pull some people for chats. And not just because you sent bad hockey karma into the universe.”

“Have fun!” Jackie reached for her shades, reclining back already as Shane headed off.

Ilya woke up feeling disgusting. It wasn’t just the dried cum tangled above his waistband, or the way Cliff’s breath felt too hot on his neck. It was the stuckness of it all. With Sasha, he had been able to call, burn through his feelings with the thrusts of his hips, and be back in his apartment by morning. Each year on his mother’s birthday, he could tick by the late hours in a club with women whose names he wouldn’t remember and didn’t have to feel bad about forgetting by the time daybreak came. He was an expert at ghosting, practiced in the art of slipping into thin air, floating like the smoke from his cigarettes back into the nothingness that he was.

This? Being trapped inside a villa, stuck on a literal island, the bodies around him accumulating like quicksand? Ilya had not done this before.

He tossed Marly’s meaty hand off his hip, standing quickly. On the way to the bathroom, he grabbed the Rolex from where Svetlana had left it, curling the cool metal in the palm of his fist.

Ilya spent the morning working out his frustrations in the Villa’s outdoor gym, muscles screaming beneath nonstop reps. Javi and his ex had shared a bed the night before and now were shouting at each other in the kitchen, fridge door slamming. Ilya watched them as his biceps trembled, sweat pouring off his forehead, the Rolex a dead weight in his pocket. Svetlana and Hayden were occupied, recruited to act as waiters for a date Connie planned on the dock with Hudson. Connie was all fresh-faced and embarrassed, his eyes watching Hudson anxiously as each new plate of food arrived, oblivious to the way Hudson’s eyes never strayed from Connie’s face.

Ilya’s weights slammed to the ground, the restlessness burrowing under his skin like ants. It was so *cute* that Connie was having a gay awakening, so *cute* that Hudson was all blushy and starry-eyed on his picnic blanket. Good for everyone.

Ilya collided with Zara on his way to the showers, her legs striding as fast as they could away from Javi. Ilya caught her by the waist, stabilizing her. She glanced up at him, cheeks still heated from her argument, lips parted. The ants swarmed in Ilya’s hands. His eyelids lowered, his lips twitching.

Then Svetlana passed by with an empty plate on her way back to the kitchen, knocking hard into Ilya’s shoulder as she passed. Javi looked up, face twisted.

“Oi! Fuck you doing, Rozanov?”

Ilya raised his hands off Zara's waist, dropping his fingers to leave just the middle ones.

"Sorry. Seems your beautiful ex wanted a real man to comfort her."

"What is your actual problem?" Javi bellowed, stalking closer so they were chest to chest.

"I'm sorry Shane is off sucking better cock than yours, but it doesn't mean you get to act like a dick to everyone else. The *fuck*, man."

"What did you just say to me?" Ilya glared down at him, his muscles tensing.

Svetlana appeared at his elbow, her voice controlled and pushed into false apathy.

"Zara, if you need a break from Javi, you know you can always find me instead." She gave her a wink. "Now go shower, Ilyusha, you stink."

Ilya made a face at her, then exhaled, tearing his eyes from Javi. He ambled on, fingers still twitching at his sides. Dakota was coming down the stairs, having run up to change her bikini. Ilya's pace slowed incrementally.

"Ilya! Shower!"

He hissed, turning. "You are worse than the cameras, Svetlana. Go mind your own business."

She smiled without humor, flipping him off.

"Try a long *cold* shower, babe. Or else I'll need to chop your dick off for you."

Dakota snorted, easing past Ilya. She flicked her hair over her shoulder.

"She's right. You do stink."

Ilya pretended like the shower cleared his head. He did leave it on cold, freezing really, the icy streams burning off some of the itchiness clawing through his veins. He would focus. He would have chats. He would do what everyone else was doing even though he was the only one getting shit for it.

Toweled off, Ilya threw on the first clothes he grabbed out of his messy suitcase. He hesitated, then slid the Rolex back in his pocket. Just so no one stole it. He didn't want to get sued by Shane Hollander for property loss.

As Ilya walked downstairs, he figured he'd start with Harris. He hadn't pulled him for a chat yet, but had a feeling the man wouldn't be immune to Ilya's tight shirt and the designer shorts that cinched at his waist.

"*Fuck*, sorry."

Ilya peeled back from the lump of flesh that had hurled into his arms.

“Pike, what? Are your pants on fire? Where are you going?”

Ilya took in the man’s reddened eyes, his skin puffy. Hayden glared back at him.

“Please. You’re the last person I want to talk to.”

Ilya stepped back, widening his arms.

“What did I do to you?”

Hayden paused on the stair above him, turning slowly.

“What did you *do*? How about your sloppy threeway that everybody heard? And then god knows what with Marly last night? You know, if it wasn’t enough that you’re *literally* screwing over one of the best dudes I know, you could at least try to muzzle your loud mouth while you do it.”

Ilya felt a hot wave of anger pulse over his skin. His arm lashed out, grabbing the back of Hayden’s shirt.

“Did you not see the video? Do you not have eyes that work, Pike?”

Hayden turned back to him, exasperated.

“Oh, so what, Rozanov. So Shane got handsy with some other guy, I’m sure he’s not getting *fucked*.”

Ilya’s stomach twisted at the concept. Hayden shook his head.

“I mean, shit, I just kissed Harris at the end of our chat and I feel *sick*. If Jackie doesn’t forgive me, I don’t...” Hayden shook his head, eyes tearing.

Ilya’s anger drained. He raised a hand, giving Hayden a heavy pat on the shoulder.

“Hey. Pike. So what. It is one kiss. Jackie knows how you feel.”

Hayden let out a weak snort, rolling Ilya’s hand off in a shrug. “Yeah well, reassurance from you doesn’t feel so great right now. No offense.”

He turned, continuing on up the stairs, leaving Ilya alone with what was said.

Shane headed towards Tiff, casting a look at Troy over his shoulder. Cici was straddling him, licking up and down his neck, yet his eyes were fixed on Shane. The man had been staring him down all day, Shane’s muscles tensing whenever he felt his gaze.

“You good?” Tiff looked at Shane.

“Yeah, sorry. So,” Shane plopped onto a beanbag, motioning to the one next to him. “Hi. Tell me about yourself?”

Tiff laughed, letting himself sink down deeper.

“Broad question!” Tiff tilted his head. “Now. Cut to it. Are you actually interested in pulling me for a chat or are you running down time until you’re back with Ilya?”

Shane’s eyebrows scrunched. “Ilya is not... We’re not closed off.”

“Yeah, but...” Tiff shrugged. “Listen. We got to see every episode until right before we were dropped here. I have eyes.”

Shane shrugged too. “Well. That was before Casa.”

“Mm. The video?” Tiff raised his eyebrows.

Shane huffed, rolling his shoulders back. “Why is everyone so caught up on the video?”

“Nevermind.” Tiff threw his hands up, laughing. “Only checking in on you.”

“No need.” Shane crossed his arms.

“Okay, then.” Tiff glanced across the villa, eyes lingering on Rose across the way. “So, obviously I’ve been getting to know Rose.”

“Don’t worry, I asked her for permission first.”

Tiff’s eyebrows shot up again. “Well, aren’t you the gentleman?”

Shane flushed. “I mean, I don’t know. I don’t want to step on anyone’s toes?”

“You’re in Casa, baby, toes are meant to be stepped on.” Tiff smiled, his fingertips reaching out to skim Shane’s knee. “Anyway, I was gonna say I really enjoy Rose, but that said, I’m open to getting to know you too.”

“Good, that’s what I want as well.” Shane gave Tiff a small smile.

“I’m not dumb though.” Tiff laughed. “Rose has been clear that Svetlana’s very much a priority, and video or not, I wouldn’t bet against you and Ilya with chemistry like that.” Tiff tilted his head. “So, just be upfront with me about where you stand as we head into recoupling. Fair?”

“Fair.” Shane nodded, smile growing. “I appreciate it. Communicating like that.”

“You got it, Shane.” Tiff leaned back, eying Shane up and down.

Shane felt the air thicken, Tiff’s eyes steady on his own. He shifted forward, beanbag tilting him closer to Tiff’s lips. Then Lexi hopped up, pulled to the side by a producer, and let out a scream.

Ilya moseyed up to Harris, stretched on a daybed. Ilya smirked, tossing his curls back out of his eyes.

“Harris. If you were desperate enough for a man to kiss, you could’ve come to me. Didn’t have to suffer with poor Pike.”

Harris cocked his head, blinking patiently. “Come again?”

Ilya sputtered somewhat. “Just - nevermind. I’m pulling you for a chat.”

“Oh. Thanks, Ilya, but I’m not interested.”

Ilya felt the blood rushing to his face, his stomach plummeting.

“Ah, you come again.”

Harris blinked up at him. His calm gaze made Ilya’s skin even tighter, the restlessness back with a vengeance.

“I mean what I said. I was interested in getting to know Hayden and Leo, and Hayden doesn’t want to explore further. So I’d like to spend my remaining time getting to know Leo more before the recoupling.”

Ilya scoffed, rubbing his neck. “And what, you cannot get to know me and Leo?”

“Frankly, Ilya, you don’t seem that interested in me.” Harris gave him a pitying smile as he scooted off the daybed and stood up. “You seem mostly interested in trying to forget the person you’re coupled with. And from what I watched of Shane, he’s not easily forgettable.”

Ilya felt a flare of jealousy light up his chest before he could remember to be nonchalant. He twisted his face into a scowl.

“Whatever, Harris. As if I would want Pike’s sloppy seconds anyway.”

Harris raised his eyebrows.

“Wow. I get you’re hurting, but you better learn to deal with that quickly. Otherwise this island is going to feel really lonely for you really fast, Ilya.”

Harris walked away before Ilya’s mind could process a rebuttal. He clenched his fists, knuckles crackling as he scanned his surroundings.

Serge was alone on the beanbags. Ilya plopped next to him, barely trying to seem seductive.

“We should chat, yes?”

“Sure.” Serge shrugged, face morose.

Ilya studied the man’s muscular body, pitted here and there with deep scars and faded marks.

“What the fuck happened to you?”

Serge looked down absently.

“Ah. Life of bad luck.” He hovered over a long scar on his torso. “Car ran me over on way to lady’s bachelorette. My second job. So nervous to dance for the pretty girls.” His finger moved to a burn mark on his left thigh. “This one was party bus. I was too close to exhaust. My tear-away pants got tangled. Trap me.” Serge dropped his head back, closing his eyes against the sunlight. “Worst was when I dance at cabin for these ladies, couldn’t find cabin. Legs got all torn by thorny branches. Heard bear and got so scared I peed a little. The cuts burned so bad.” He shook his head sadly.

Ilya wrinkled his nose, moving back. He motioned at Serge’s left ankle, which sat at an odd angle.

“Your pee burns hurt more than whatever the fuck happened to your ankle?”

“Oh, yes.” Serge nodded. “Sometimes pain that hurts most is not what you’d expect.” He let out a heavy sigh. “Leo is not interested in me anymore. We seemed so...what is the word... compatible.”

Ilya snorted. “Liking leopard print doesn’t mean you’re destined to be together.”

“No. Guess not.” Serge gave another heavy sigh.

Svetlana appeared behind Ilya, her voice low and sultry.

“Serge, I was *just* looking for you.”

“Leave it, Sveta, the man is too depressed for me to try to flirt with.” Ilya grumbled to his feet, casting a last look over his shoulder. Serge was sinking deeper into the beanbags, a broken man.

“Good. Then we can finally talk.”

Svetlana threaded her arm through Ilya’s, practically pulling him towards the dock. Ilya groaned louder.

“What is your problem?”

She switched to Russian, voice low.

“My problem, Ilya, is your dick. I know you are hurt, but please. This isn’t some afterparty after a modeling shoot. We live with these people.”

“Half of them won’t make it through the recoupling.”

“But some will. And what happens when Shane comes home?”

Ilya ripped his arm out of Svetlana, glaring out over the water.

“What about it?”

He heard Svetlana let out a sigh as she leaned against the railing.

"Ilyusha. I am on your side. I know that necklace. I didn't like seeing that either."

"I told him, Sveta. You don't understand. I told him about her."

Ilya blinked hard at the ocean, the wind making his eyes water and nothing else.

She tsked, moving to rub a firm hand over his shoulder.

"That was brave to share."

"Yes, so brave of me, brave for what? So some stranger can suck my dead mother's necklace like it's a cock in his mouth?"

"I know." Svetlana exhaled. *"But Shane did not do that."*

"Shane let him, Svetlana." Ilya whirled around, his eyes wild. *"Shane was too fuck-happy to stop him. My mother's necklace - and now- he doesn't even wear it, Svet. If he has lost it...If anything happened to it..."*

"Then I will murder him with you." Svetlana's tone was even, her eyes serious.

Ilya's shoulders lowered somewhat. He nodded tightly. They looked out at the ocean, watching the tide ebb and flow. When Svetlana spoke again, her voice was cautious.

"I only worry - if it is not as bad as you fear..." She stopped.

Ilya chewed his lip.

"What? Go on."

"You don't react in halves, Ilya. Already what you've done..."

Ilya swallowed, an image of Shane flying into his mind. Those wide open eyes, so warm, so trusting. How his brows furrowed when he was explaining something. Cheeks a million shades of pink depending on which way Ilya prodded him. Those stupid seductive freckles.

Ilya's voice was rough.

"We're not closed off. Not committed."

"No." Svetlana looked at him meaningfully. *"You are not."*

Shane gave Lexi a brief hug, stepping back to let others get to her for their goodbyes. The producer had shared something about a family emergency, urgent enough for Lexi to depart immediately.

Shane was a bad person. Shane knew he was a bad person because he was looking at J.J., newly alone on the daybeds without Lexi, instead of feeling concerned over whatever family member of Lexi I.'s had died.

Shane teetered for a moment, trying to decide, and then J.J. looked up. He caught Shane's eye with a smile, head tilting in a question. Shane let himself smile back. Let himself walk towards the empty spot next to J.J.

He wouldn't do anything excessive.

He would keep it respectful.

And besides, wasn't an emotional test more telling?

Marly plopped down next to Ilya, who had stayed at the docks after Svetlana departed.

"Seems like you've had a rough day."

Ilya grunted.

Marly gazed out at the horizon, the sun beginning to set.

"Well. Now that you've tried to get a taste of everyone, do you have a front runner?"

Ilya tore his eyes away from the skyline, giving Marly an irritated, confused look. Marly raised his eyebrows.

"The recoupling coming soon? It's not like Casa is gonna go on forever."

"Ah. Right."

Ilya said nothing further.

"Still Shane then? Makes sense." Marly nodded

Ilya's jaw twitched.

"No. Not still Shane." He shifted on the dock, hands digging into the wood. "If I have to choose right now...you, I guess."

"Wow, so romantic, man!" Marly let out a laugh, shaking his head. He cocked his head. "I guess since Svetlana shot me down, you'd be my top choice too."

A smile fluttered over Ilya's face.

"You tried with Sveta?"

"Oh, yeah. Pure disaster."

Ilya let out his first real laugh in days.

“I wish I had seen.”

“Yeah, well, think you were too busy trying to seduce Harris at that point. Or maybe Hayden?”

Ilya made a face.

“I will never seduce Pike.”

“Yeah, he’s pretty set on Jackie.”

Ilya scoffed, Marly’s lips twitching at the offense.

“Well. Good. I’m glad we talked then.” Marly tilted his jaw up towards the sunset, letting the last rays of light catch his face. “I know you’ve been trying to act like you don’t care about Shane. But I’ll get it if your tune changes once he’s back. I want to get to know you so, I wanna throw my hat in the ring either way.”

Ilya’s throat tightened. He nodded again, pushing down the *why* in this throat.

“Thanks, Marly.”

“Anytime, babe.” Marly leaned slightly closer, their shoulders skimming. He exhaled. “Beautiful sight.”

“You hitting on me?” Ilya grinned.

Marly turned from the sunset, eyes sliding down Ilya’s body.

“Guess you’re not a bad sight either.”

His eyes lingered on Ilya’s wrist, the reflection shimmering back at him. Ilya’s face froze. He turned away. They sat and watched as the waves swallowed the sun, the metal links of the Rolex heating Ilya’s wrist until it burned.

NEXT TIME...ON HEATED ISLAND...

Tomorrow night...it’s the recoupling of all time as Casa Amor reunites with the Villa.

Who will choose to stay single and who will recouple?

Is murder legal in Fiji if it’s for good reason?

And will Yuna Hollander be unbanned so she can livetweet again?

(She promises she was making those threats against Ilya in jest. Every detailed one of them.)

i miss yuna hollander yall! i know i've totally dropped the ball on the viewers at home pieces sigh but the social media stuff can be hard to format and frankly i just wanna get into the DRAMA of it all. but just know yuna has ten secret accounts and is writing the NASTIEST stuff about ilya ever typed

OKAY YALL NEXT CHAPTER IS THEEEE CHAPTER!!! OUR BOYS ARE BACK IN TOWN AND THE TOWN IS ON FIRE AND EVERYONE MIGHT DIEEE!!!

love island is notorious for their [cheesey specific musical interludes](#) (🎵🎵 ooooh betraaaayal shane is getting betrayyyed 🎵🎵) but drop in the comments what soundtrack we're imagining for the big momentttt! what is shane belting out when shit finally hits the fan? are we sticking with the rihanna theme and doing a little Take A Bow moment? what is ilya sobbing into his pillow to like the pathetic mess he is? what toxic love songs is he boomboxing over his shoulder to try to get shane back? what will shane be blasting at the gym to show off his WELL deserved fuck you glow up? 🦁🦁🦁

Chapter 17

Chapter Summary

it's explosive recoupling timeeee!

Chapter Notes

warning that they're some slut shaming slung back and forth

PLEASE PICTURE:

shane as channeling the incomparable serena from season six

ilya as channeling lestat I HEARD YOUR HEARTS DANCING de lioncourt

a side dish of scott as tom cruise jumping on oprah's couch

and gun by chvrches being scream-sung in the background!

(also so sorry hudson williams for the minor rpf i have sinned)

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

Ariana stood in front of the Villa's Islanders, her long shimmering dress catching the evening light. She cleared her throat.

"As you know, Javi and Zara choose to self-eliminate together, having found what they were looking for in each other."

Svetlana and Ilya exchanged a dubious glance.

"For the rest of the Islanders, it is now your time to decide if you want to stay faithful to your original couple, or mix it up with one of our newcomers."

She gestured to her left where Marly, Serge, Hudson, Harris, and Dakota stood.

"Connie. I'll start with you. You were coupled with Lexi I. before Casa Amor. She unfortunately had to depart the island due to a family emergency. You can choose to stay single, or you can recouple. What would you like to do?"

Connie stood, tugging on the hem of his button-up. His cheeks pinked as he eyed his feet, voice quiet but sure.

“I’m really glad that Casa happened. I got to discover a lot of things about myself, and I don’t think I’ve ever felt more me. So I’d like to couple up with this person because they made space for me to be my true self. They laugh at my jokes and jump into random dance moves with me. They may even outweird *me*, which is saying a lot. So, the boy I’d like to couple up with is...Hudson.”

Ariana beamed, motioning Hudson forward. The two men embraced, lips meeting in a kiss that deepened, Hudson’s hands coming up to cup Connie’s face. The Islanders let out cheers, clapping louder as Ariana motioned for them to sit.

“Our first new couple, everyone!”

She waited for the applause to die now.

“Now I will bring in Cici, who was coupled with Javi. Since Javi has self-eliminated, she also was given the option to stay single or recouple with someone from Casa. Let’s see what she decided to do...”

Ariana stepped to the side, looking towards the path behind the firepit. Cici appeared in a tight dress, hand in hand with Troy. They took their places next to Ariana.

“Cici! I see you’ve recoupled with Troy.”

“I have.” Cici bumped their shoulders together. “Troy is not intimidated by a woman who takes charge. He let me have my way with him and I just had to bring him back!”

“Welcome, Troy.” Ariana smiled, the rest of the Islanders clapping for the new couple. “Now before you sit down, you were coupled with Leo for a long time before partnering with Javi pre-Casa. Do you feel like that door is now fully closed?”

Cici met Leo’s eyes. “I mean...never say never. Leo and I needed to explore for sure. I think we were way too locked in way too early. But obviously feelings don’t disappear overnight.”

Harris caught Troy’s eyes, tilting his head as the man blushed.

“Troy, does that make you nervous?”

Troy tore his eyes away. “What? Uh, sorry, no. Or...I mean, I trust Cici. So.”

“All right...” Ariana raised her eyebrows, extending her hand towards the curved seating. “Welcome again to the Villa, Troy.”

After they sat, she motioned for Svetlana to stand. Ilya squeezed her hand once, his Rolex sliding out from under his sleeve.

“Now it is your turn, Svetlana. Viewers have watched you and Rose together for weeks now, but you were not closed off before Casa. It is now time to make a decision.”

Svetlana nodded, looking towards the newcomers.

“As wonderful as you all are, I am choosing to stick with Rose. We had spoken about wanting to test our connection and seeing if our heads could be turned. Mine most certainly could not be - it’s Rose for me.”

Ilya let out an *aww* that got him an elbow to his shoulder.

Ariana smiled. “Svetlana, you have chosen to stay with Rose. If Rose comes in alone, you will be back in a couple. *However*, if Rose has chosen to recouple with someone from Casa Amor, you will be single and vulnerable.”

“I understand.”

“Let’s see what Rose chose...”

Ariana tossed her hair over her shoulder. Svetlana swayed slightly in place, her hands clasped tightly at the wrist. There were a few moments of agonizing silence, and then the click of Rose’s heels sounded across the lawn. She turned the corner, beaming, no one by her side.

Svetlana let out a low sound, dipping to her knees as her hands flew up over her mouth. Ilya leaned forward to rub her back, his eyes suddenly misty as the Islanders burst into cheers.

“Rose! Welcome back!” Ariana beamed. “As you can see, Svetlana has stayed faithful to you as well. How does it feel to be back in the Villa?”

Rose’s gaze did not leave Svetlana. “Yeah, it feels great, Ariana. Now can I please go get my girl?”

Ariana laughed, nodding, and Rose strode forward, wrapping Svetlana in a hug and spinning her in a circle, their faces pressed tightly together. At last, Svetlana landed on her feet again, their lips finding each other as they kissed again and again.

Ariana held a hand over her heart, fanning her face.

“You’re going to make me cry, girls!” She inhaled, shaking out her hands. “Please take a seat as a couple.”

Rose let out a soft squeal, slipping her hand into Svetlana’s as Svetlana sat back down next to Ilya.

Ilya leaned forward, whispering. “Welcome back, Landry.”

She shot him a cold glare, the happiness snapping off her face. Svetlana looked at her, then back at Ilya. Rose didn’t bother to whisper.

“We saw your little video. Or should I say sex tape?”

Leo’s head shot up, Hudson looking over with wide eyes. Ilya’s mouth went dry.

“It’s not-”

Ariana's voice broke through them.

"Hayden, please stand. You were coupled with Jackie. Would you like to stay with her, or try someone new?"

Hayden shook his head. "I absolutely do not want to try anyone new. Uh, no offense guys." He shot the newcomers a quick look. "I've missed Jackie so much, and trying to kiss anyone else made me literally want to puke. Uh, no offense again." He swallowed, avoiding Harris's eyes. "I'll stop talking. I just want to see her."

"Very well. If she comes back alone, she's all yours. If she doesn't, you're on your own."

Hayden inhaled, bracing himself. He craned his neck, straining to see any movement, and then there was Jackie, striding towards him with a wide smile. Hayden pumped his fist, Hudson clapping him on the back in celebration.

"Welcome, Jackie" Ariana grinned. "I see you have no one on your arm."

"Yeah, turns out there's only one guy I want there." Jackie gave Hayden a smile.

"Did you enjoy your time in Casa?"

"I tried." Jackie gave a rueful smile. "I really did want to trust the process, so I tried to stay open. I did kiss Troy - sorry, baby." Hayden shot a glare at Troy behind him. "But all it showed me was how much I want Hayden and only Hayden."

"Me too." Hayden nodded dopily.

Ariana laughed. "Okay, you two, go reunite!"

Jackie scurried into his open arms, letting out a deep sigh as she relaxed into his embrace. They sat down, the Islanders bunching closer as the seating filled up.

"Leo, you're up."

Leo stood, clad in a white blouse with a subtle leopard print if you looked closely.

"Leo, you had just paired with Scott before Casa. Are you hoping to stay with him, or have you built a connection with someone new?"

"I wish Scott and I had more time together, 'cause that is one nice package of meat there, Ariana. But I've spent more time with these guys than with Scott, so it was natural for me to build deeper connections here."

"I heard you built some connections with existing Islanders too." Ariana raised an eyebrow.

Leo flushed. "Yeah, um, well, I am a single guy." Ilya could feel Rose seething on the other side of Svetlana.

"And do you want to stay single or would you like to recouple?"

“I’d like to recouple. I really enjoyed getting to know two of the men standing before me. Both are incredible dudes. But I found one was able to get beneath the leopard print to the man I am inside. I realized I’ve been hiding a little behind this bit, behind the character I am online. And so I’m choosing this boy because I appreciate him seeing the guy behind the growl.” Leo let out his signature growl with a laugh, hands flexing. “So the boy I’d like to couple up with is...Harris.”

Harris gave him a soft smile, moving forward to hug him. They held hands, squishing in next to Cici and Troy. Harris’s leg pressed against Troy and Troy flinched, eyes darting away.

“Now we will see what Scott has chosen to do. If he has chosen to remain with you, Leo, your recoupling will render him single and vulnerable.”

Leo winced, lowering his head. The Islanders turned, looking towards the entrance. Scott came striding out hand-in-hand with a shorter man, both of them smiling. Leo let out a relieved whoop, the other Islanders joining in.

“Welcome, welcome!” Ariana motioned for the couple to stand next to her. “Who do we have here, Scott?”

“This is Kip.” Scott glowed. “I’ve always been an intense guy. I’ve always been told I’m too much. So I really wanted to be open-minded on this journey and give everyone a chance.” His eyes caught Ilya’s for a moment, smiling like he had a secret. “And I definitely did give *everyone* a chance. But the more I talked to Kip, the more it was clear he was the only one for me. I don’t want to spend a minute without him. I want him to be there when I go to sleep and when I wake up. Hell, I want him to be waiting for me outside the shower even if it’s only a few minutes. I’m obsessed with this man!” He laughed, raising their clasped hands together. “It was a no-brainer bringing him back.”

“Wow!” Ariana nodded. “That’s a lot of enthusiasm. And what about you Kip?”

Kip looked at Scott, smiling. “Yeah. What he said.”

“Okay, then! Scott and Kip, please take a seat with the other couples.”

The Islanders clapped as they made their way to sit.

“Ilya. It is now your turn.”

Ilya rubbed his palms on his dress pants. Svetlana gave him a tight nod, voice low and quick in Russian. “*Backing you however this goes.*”

He exhaled, nodding back at her as he stood.

“Ilya, you and Shane were coupled before Casa Amor. Would you like to stay with Shane and hope he has remained faithful, or make the leap to someone new?”

Ilya cleared his throat, voice scratchy.

“Yes. Ah. So.” He exhaled again, trying to grab at the English words, brain suddenly blank. “I came here for Shane. I have pursued Shane. I was happy to be back in a couple with Shane.”

He shifted his weight, fiddling subconsciously with his Rolex.

“I do not trust that Shane will be faithful to me.” He ignored Rose’s scoff, pushing on. “We had a video that showed me enough of what I needed to know.” Rose was whispering to Svetlana, confused.

“Shane likes rules.” A smile came to Ilya’s face despite himself. “He wanted to do this right, to explore, to test. We are not closed off. This is allowed. But I will not wait forever. I will not give and give and give for nothing back. It is safer, I think, for me to trust myself. So I will not wait for him now. I recouple with Marly.”

Ilya tried to ignore the intakes of breath from the other Islanders. He raised his jaw.

“Marly is a good guy. Understanding. Nice. Hot. Will be a fun couple to be in.”

Rose rolled her eyes. Ariana tilted her head, her voice soft. “Is this the end of the road for you and Shane?”

Ilya gave a jerk of his head, eyes dropping. “I cannot say that. I...I cannot deny what I want. But there is a lot to answer for. If he comes back alone...if he can show me that he’s giving to this too...Then yes, maybe.”

Rose let out a loud laugh. “What a load of absolute bullshit.”

“Rose, is there something you want to say?” Ariana gestured towards her.

“I just think it’s hilarious that he’s acting a victim after what, running a train on the whole villa?”

Ilya slowly turned his head to her. “The fuck are you talking about?”

“The video, genius. With you and the two dudes who look most like Shane here?”

He looked at her blankly, lips curling. “Ah. Yes, we had sex, Rose. People fuck. Big deal.”

She raised her hands. “Sure. My bad. I’m sure Shane won’t think it’s a big deal either.”

Ilya looked back at Ariana, his jaw tight. She cleared her throat, motioning to Marly.

“Marly, you can join your new couple!”

He and Ilya didn’t embrace. Marly simply walked silently to Ilya’s side. Ilya could see the nervous sweat gathering around his hairline, Marly’s eyes shifting across on the ground. Ilya reached out, engulfing his hand with a reassuring hold. Marly shot him a thankful glance, shoulders relaxing somewhat.

Ariana leveled her eyes at Ilya.

“Ilya. You have recoupled. We will now see if Shane has done the same.”

Behind the cameras, Shane rubbed his hands over his pants before reaching out to clasp J.J.’s hand again.

“Sorry.” He winced.

“You’re fine.” J.J. gave him a smile. “It’s nerve-wracking, I get it.”

“What if I’m making the wrong choice?” Shane’s eyes drifted into space, then snapped back to J.J. “Fuck. I don’t mean-”

“Yes, you do.” J.J. laughed. He moved his hands to Shane’s shoulders, shaking him slightly. “Look. We’ve talked about this. I’m not expecting you to suddenly feel nothing for Ilya. I know I’ve got an uphill battle to even have a chance with you once you’re in there. But I’m willing to take that risk.”

He squeezed Shane’s shoulders, eyes locking in deeper.

“Now, we’ve got about two minutes before they tell us to walk out there, and you know the producers won’t let you change your mind at the last second. So just breathe. You’ve got this. It’s going to be okay.”

“Okay.” Shane nodded like a bobblehead, eyes glassy. He exhaled. “Okay. Thanks, man. Seriously.”

“Of course. And listen, if it doesn’t work out between us, I’m counting on what you said about that slutty leopard-print dude who looks like you.”

Shane rolled his eyes, laughing. His hand found the necklace around his throat, fingering it gingerly right before the producers motioned them forward.

Ilya held Marly’s hand in a vice, unaware of how hard he was gripping the man’s hand as he waited for footsteps.

He saw Shane first, curving around the corner. His hand fell from Marly’s, swooping up to cover his face, a wide smile already bursting open for anyone to see.

It was impossible to remember Shane. Impossible to keep in memory just how endearing the slight shuffle of his gait was, the tight flickering of his emotions over his face, the beauty of his nose. Ilya had been unable to retain the exact sheen of Shane’s dark hair in his thoughts - pushed to the side tonight instead of his usual flat bangs, and Ilya wanted to ask who had done that for him, wanted his fingers to mess with it immediately.

Ilya needed to study Shane’s eyes, so he could do a better job of capturing that warm brown hue when they were apart. Needed to count every single freckle so Shane could be recreated

in his mind, even though Ilya knew already what an impossible task it would be, to try to preserve the uncapturable in front of him.

The light caught Shane's neck. Ilya's knees caught at the line of gold there. His mama home safe. Shane keeping her safe.

And then time moved forward and Shane's hand was connected to another man, and that man was a familiar man, the man from the video, whose tongue had defiled his mother, his couple, the thick slab of pink muscle deserving to be chopped off and burned at once.

Shane's throat bobbed, stomach dropping through the floor. Ilya was standing next to a broad, stupidly attractive man. He looked like the one who had kissed Hayden in the video and made Hayden's eyes go all fluttery. Shane tried to force his eyes away but he couldn't stop staring, already cataloguing all the differences and deficiencies between him and Ilya's new partner.

It was only when he and J.J. reached Ariana that his eyes gradually tracked over to Ilya. Shane took in his long model legs, the toned muscle hidden beneath fabric tonight. The wide chest, shirt unbuttoned enough to see a whorl of chest hair. His thick neck, the absent necklace causing another sour kick in Shane's stomach. And then that face, Ilya's features doing a million things Shane couldn't read fast enough, his fingers skimming the lips Shane had missed so much and - oh. Shane's stomach finally unclenched, warmth spreading out instead, a tentative smile mirroring Ilya's as he spotted his Rolex shining on Ilya's wrist.

"Shane! Welcome back to the Villa." Ariana gave him a smile. "How do you feel?"

"Yeah, happy to be here. Good to see everyone again." Shane gave a quick scan of the Islanders he hadn't seen in the past few days, nodding. He paused at Leo, who caught his eye, lips mouthing something that looked like *sorry*. Shane's brow furrowed.

"Well, as you can see, Ilya has chosen to recouple. As have you."

Shane gave a nod, avoiding Ilya's face. He could feel him nonetheless, some invisible tie pulled tight between them.

"Did you expect Ilya to recouple, Shane?"

Shane cleared his throat, face twitching as he half shook his head, shoulders jerking into what passed for a shrug.

"Yes and no. I know that we're expected to explore and we haven't tested the connection yet really. So. It makes sense."

"Did you want him to?"

"Of course not." Shane's voice was deceptively monotone, eyes blinking back any sign of emotion. "I thought about him a lot."

“I thought about you too.”

Ilya’s voice was rough, the Russian lilt roaring back into Shane’s ears. He felt his body almost shake with it, everything threatening to burst at once. Ariana refocused him.

“So what made you bring someone back, Shane? What about J.J. caught your eye?”

“Oh, well, J.J. is a really great person.”

Ilya made a raspberry noise Shane pretended not to hear.

“But um, I think most people know there were rumors about my sexuality before I came on the show. About Ilya specifically. And so, yeah, I had a crush and then it was... overwhelming, almost, that people were right. And that the real thing was even better than the fantasy.”

Ilya’s heart picked up, Shane’s voice soft as his eyes studied the ground.

“I was kind of obsessed with him, to be honest. Before and after. And I don’t want to be one of those people who gets fixated on a person and goes all in - that’s not me.”

Scott blinked at the glances thrown his way. Shane’s face was still furrowed at the ground.

“I’m...careful. I consider things. So yeah, we’re supposed to explore and I’m doing that. And I think recoupling was the right decision to make, since Ilya did the same.”

“You both received a video from the other villa...” Ariana rotated between the two couples, eyebrows raised in question. Ilya rolled his neck, bones cracking. Shane swallowed.

“Yeah. I, um, wanted to let Ilya speak for himself on that. But obviously it didn’t look good...” His eyes darted to Leo again.

Leo’s voice burst out, his fingers digging into his thighs.

“I’m really sorry, Shane. I didn’t think you’d see actual footage, that’s...” Leo shook his head, Hudson swallowing as he looked from Leo to Shane.

Shane blinked at Ilya for a moment. “Oh. So it is true?”

Ilya sniffed, rubbing his nose. “Yes, it’s true, but so-”

“So you fucked two dudes while Shane was keeping it classy, is what.” Rose huffed, rolling her eyes.

“No one asked you, Rose.” Ilya bit back.

Svetlana’s voice cut through. “*Hey*. Cut it out. The both of you.”

“Rose has a good point.” Hayden crossed his arms, Jackie nodding next to him.

Next to Ariana, Shane smiled tightly, J.J. moving closer to comfort him. His hand reached up to squeeze Shane's shoulder, his pinky skimming the golden necklace around Shane's neck. Ilya's voice came out like a caged animal, low and dangerous.

"I wouldn't call what Shane did classy either."

"What was that?" Shane's smile was still pressed to his face, his teeth sharp.

"We got a video too, Shane." Ilya let out a harsh laugh. "Did not take you long to bring him to bed, hm? I slept with Pike the first night, outside with the mosquitos. But glad you jumped right into bed with a stranger. Very *classy* of you."

Shane scrunched his face. "Okay, well, no one told you to sleep outside. We were open."

Svetlana bit her lip. Ilya's voice tore out of his chest.

"Yes, Shane, *so* open! So why is everyone on my dick for using it!"

Shane's smile finally dropped, his face reddening as it twisted.

"Because I didn't use my dick! I set boundaries every step of the way! I always said I wanted to respect you, *always*, and anyone here can vouch for that."

"Big fucking deal, Hollander, I tell Marly the same shit!"

Shane snorted. "Whatever. Glad you found someone who's fine with you using your little head instead of the big one."

Marly let out a noise but Ilya cut him off.

"Oh but it's okay for you to let anyone put you on your back? Calling out his name the second he tells you to get on your knees? Or did he not even have to ask?"

"You don't know what the fuck you're talking about!"

Shane took a step closer, hands balled into fists, Ariana's gaze darting between them both as Shane's voice rose.

"At least I'm not pathetic enough to find two of your dopplegangers to fuck! It's not enough to betray me, you had to humiliate me on national television too?"

"*I am the one who's humiliated!*" Ilya roared, Shane stepping back a moment in shock. "I open up to you, tell you things I've never-" He cut off, voice tight. "And in that necklace, Shane? Really?"

Shane's gaze fell, his voice quieting. "Ilya. That wasn't on purpose. It's not-"

J.J. spread his palms, face confused. "Shane told me not to touch it after that, man, don't worry."

“Do not speak to me!” Ilya whirled, practically spitting in J.J.’s direction, face beet red. “I saw you two together! I had to see it! Over and over again! The kissing, the murmurs, the way you slipped into bed together easy as a *whore*, cuddled up together as if I didn’t matter to you, Shane, as if I never mattered!”

A cool hand touched the small of his back, Svetlana’s low words coming out in Russian.

“Ilya. Calm yourself.”

Ilya stuffed back a scream, his skin crawling with everything still unsaid. He and Shane stared at each other, Shane’s face just as pink as when he was kissed breathless, eyes as angry as that first day when he had run from Ilya at every turn. His eyes watered, J.J. stepping closer protectively.

Ilya’s fists jumped at his side. He forced himself to lower his voice, words coiled with forced calm.

“I can see that I hurt you. I will not disrespect how you feel about what I did. But-”

Shane shook his head, tears gathering faster. “Why not? You didn’t respect anything else... you barely respected yourself...”

Irritation tingled over Ilya’s skin like static. He forced another exhale as Shane spoke again.

“I recoupled with J.J., Ilya. Try respecting that at least.”

“Shane. Please.” Ilya’s voice cracked slightly. He raised his jaw, exposing the bare column of his throat, looking only at Shane.

Ariana let out a loud exhale, steadying herself. “Whew. I feel like I’m watching live heartbreak, boys.”

Shane shrugged, eyes glistening with tears, jaw set.

“May the best heartbreaker win, then.”

As soon as Ariana finished announcing the eight official couples to the cameras, Ilya bolted from his seat. He shook off Svetlana’s arm on his sleeve, ignoring Marly and plowing a path to Scott Hunter.

“With me. Now.”

Scott gave a confused look back at Kip as he was dragged forward, Ilya pulling him to the nearest daybed.

“Tell me everything that happened in Casa. How serious is it?”

“Uh, what the fuck? Hello, nice to see you too?”

“I did not miss your old ancient face. I look out at the mountains of Fiji and am reminded of how long you have been alive, okay. Now details. Go.”

“What do you want to know?” Scott’s eyes slipped from Ilya’s for a moment, nervous.
“Like...about me?”

Ilya stiffened.

“What about you?”

Scott swallowed. “What did you see about me?”

Ilya’s eyes narrowed. “Tell me everything or I will murder you where you sit, I do not care about elder abuse.”

“You are so irritating.” Scott exhaled, leaning forward onto his knees. He rubbed the heels of his palms into his eyes, glancing at Ilya. “It’s not very reassuring to share when you’ve already brought up murder.”

“Fine. No murder.” Ilya’s foot vibrated against the ground, leg jostling. “Tell me. Shane said your name in bed too? Everyone fell in love? What?”

“No, I think you’re the only one having casual threesomes.” Scott caught Ilya’s glare and exhaled. “Okay, fine. Shane and I kissed in the challenge and um, one other time. Outside of a challenge.”

Ilya’s leg stilled. His arms gripped his torso tighter.

“Just a kiss? Or?”

“I mean...” Scott smirked, then dropped his teasing voice immediately after looking at Ilya.
“Yeah, just a kiss.”

“He...he says he likes you? Or?”

Scott snorted. “No, we’re not starcrossed lovers. He’s a freshly out gay dude and believe it or not, I’m super attractive.”

Ilya made a barfing sound, his face still serious.

“Disgusting. Now about the man he coupled with.”

“J.J.?”

“Whatever. What is the situation?”

“Um, yeah, I do think they actually like each other. They chatted all the time, laughed a lot. Obviously have physical chemistry...”

Ilya let out a low exhale. Scott paused, looking over with a grimace.

“You asked, man.”

“Yes.” Ilya chewed on his lip, boring a hole into the ground with his gaze.

“For what it’s worth...he clearly missed you. I feel like he’s just doing what he’s told and seeing who else is out there.”

“Shane does like that. Doing what he is told.” Ilya’s face looked almost fond for a moment.

“Okay. Leave now.”

“Wow, man, you really have to work on your manners.”

Ilya raised his eyes. “Oh? I thought you would have separation sickness from your little Kit or whoever by now.”

Scott scoffed, standing. “Your jealousy is showing, Rozanov.”

Ilya wrinkled his nose. “I do not want your old man body, get over yourself.”

“No. But you do want what I have.” Scott gave him a pitying, smug smile, striding over to where Kip was standing with waiting arms.

By the firepit, Shane had asked J.J. to give him a minute. He had watched Ilya leave without wanting to, an odd disappointment at the sign of his back moving farther away from him.

Shane focused.

“Leo. Hold back a moment.”

Leo paused, Harris nodding and going on without him. Shane waved Rose and Hayden away, the twosome reluctantly giving him space.

Leo hovered next to Shane as Shane motioned for him to sit.

“Relax.” Shane made himself smile. “It’s not a trap.”

“Sure?” Leo looked around nervously. “I, um, feel like I’m a toy in some psychosexual game...not that I mind that!”

Shane gave a short laugh, then sighed.

“It’s okay. Really. I just want to...know what happened. Obviously, you, Ilya, and the other guy all...” Shane swallowed. “Had sex?”

“Oh, well, I was the only one penetrated if that makes it better? We were doing the Eiffel Tower, where you know, I was getting fucked on both sides, and they were above me and-”

“Okay, yup, thank you.” Shane felt his chest tightening in a squeeze. “Was that the extent of it?”

“With us? Yes, totally.”

Shane let out an exhale, steadying.

“With other people though, no, I mean he was really making his rounds.”

“What?” Shane’s voice came out like ice.

“Well...with Marly, and um, trying to pick up Javi’s ex, and generally anyone around him...?” Leo grimaced. “Sorry.”

“No, that’s what I asked for. I wanted to know.”

“*Hollander!*” Ilya strode towards them, nostrils flaring. The other Islanders looked over like meerkats, eyes wide and captivated.

Shane rolled his eyes, face cold. He leaned closer to Leo, running a hand through his hair as the other man almost purred.

“What? I thought I’d see what all the fuss was about.”

Ilya jerked his head up.

“Chat. Now.”

Shane let out a harsh laugh. “I’m not at your beck and call anymore.”

“Clearly.” Ilya’s eyes bored into him. “But unless you plan on stealing family heirlooms, I need that necklace back.”

Shane pressed his lips together, standing stiffly.

“This way.” Ilya turned, walking away without looking to see if Shane was following.

Shane trailed him with his muscles tensed, letting out a loud scoff as Ilya wound towards the deck.

“Seriously?”

Ilya turned, shrugging. “Just a place. Sit. Turn.”

Shane folded his arms, purposefully not sitting. He tilted his body slightly, the back of his neck facing Ilya and displaying the necklace’s clasp. Shane forced himself to breathe naturally as Ilya’s footsteps thudded towards him, one after another. He held himself steady as Ilya paused, not touching quite yet, his chest separated from Shane’s back by a sliver. Shane inhaled, taking in the smoky scent of Ilya mixed with something that he could never name that simply smelled like home.

Then Ilya’s hands reached up, making contact with Shane for the first time since his return. His thumbs skimmed the sensitive skin of Shane’s neck, pressing down firmly as they drew

up towards the necklace. Shane leaned back despite himself, some cord cut in his knees as he collapsed into Ilya's touch. Ilya stepped closer, his body bracketing Shane's as his fingers worked the clasp. His voice was low in Shane's ear, dangerous.

"Did those other men kiss you like I do?"

Shane gasped, turning as the necklace fell from his neck into Ilya's hand.

"Like you have the right to fucking ask."

Ilya didn't move back, his eyes honing in on Shane's.

"Ah. I didn't think so."

He continued staring at Shane, eyes taut with desire, then let his gaze drip slowly to Shane's lips, voice steady.

"No one kissed like you either."

Shane's mouth parted in outrage, some other quip struggling to burst forth. But then he jolted forward, hand fisting Ilya's shirt and yanking him close. Their lips collided together, Shane swallowing Ilya's small noise of surprise. And then Ilya was groaning into him, hand threaded hard through his hair, Shane's tongue trying to devour him as he pushed forward, desperate for all he had missed. Ilya nudged his waist with a closed fist, trying to give Shane relief as his hips jerked forward, the necklace scraping Shane's skin.

Shane pushed away suddenly, palms flying back against Ilya's chest.

"The fuck are you doing!"

Ilya blinked at him, lips red and swollen. "What? You kissed me."

"We are not doing this!" Shane hissed. "You- you can't just kiss me and act like you didn't treat me like shit!"

Ilya let out a hiss of air, shoulders rising. "Tell me why I'm a piece of shit, then, Hollander."

"Why? Why?!" Shane's voice rose. By the daybeds, Cici sat up higher, Troy craning his neck.

"Why do you *think*, Ilya? We were a couple, we open up to each other, we - I thought we are going somewhere, and the second I leave you fuck everyone in sight?"

"*Not* the second you leave, that was you, Shane. I slept outside, remember?"

"Yeah, congrats, for that." Shane paced, shaking his head. "You really held it together for a few hours there."

"Longer than you!" Ilya stalked closer, muscles shaking. "Mr. Respectful, ah? I watch you with Pike, with this new man, and then even the elderly are not safe from you?"

Shane's cheeks flared pink. "Oh my god, it was one kiss!" Scott scratched his neck on the swing, Kip raising his eyebrows. "That is different than going on a fuck rampage!"

"HOW! How is it different!" Ilya pulled at his own hair, staring up at the sky in frustration.

Shane let out a scoff, tears collecting. "I don't...I didn't even know what the Paris sex thing was, Ilya. I'm not like that. I thought what we were doing...I thought that was special."

Ilya wrinkled his face, voice lower. "Of course it is special."

"How can it be when you toss it away like that? Doing things with people you just met when you haven't even done it with me yet?"

Ilya blinked, processing.

"Shane. It is different with us."

"But you wouldn't- when I wanted to-" Shane broke off, turning his face away.

"It was not because I didn't want to." Ilya crossed the distance, his hands reaching up to cradle Shane's face.

Shane threw his hands off, striding a few steps away, face back to being a tight mask.

"Whatever. Good to know I'm worth waiting for."

"Shane, I don't understand."

Shane snorted. "What, you can't go a few days without getting your dick wet? And then you recoupled on top of it? You've been my only experience with...*You*, Ilya. And you didn't have to be. I could've-"

Ilya pinched his eyebrows with his fingers, eyes squinting shut.

"Yes, Hollander, I know. You're very desirable, I get it."

Shane shook his head again, voice flatter. "I didn't cross that line. I kept it respectable. Even if it would've been fun, even if it would've been fair even, for me to explore a bit more."

"Ah, so congrats on not being a whore like me? Is that it?" Ilya stepped back, his voice rising. "Is not so impressive when you fall for anyone like a puppy. All giggle-giggle with Pike, now Hunter says you do the same at Casa?"

In the kitchen, Hayden and Jackie exchanged a look. J.J. grinned from the beanbags, Rose shaking her head next to him.

Ilya's voice swelled to a crescendo. "I never have feelings for anyone, Shane. No one but you."

Shane stuttered. “They’re just...crushes. It’s not anything serious. Not compared to-” He cut himself off, Ilya blazing over him.

“Why bother sharing with you, huh? Why bother carving out pieces of me to give to you like offerings if you’ll just explore, explore, explore?”

“It’s the game, Ilya, it’s how the show works...”

“How do *you* work, Shane? I share things with you, I lend you *this*-” He shakes his fist, the necklace rattling inside. “And you still want to explore?”

“You didn’t close off either!” A hot column of red was barreling up Shane’s throat, skin flushing deep. “At any time, you could’ve claimed me, but you didn’t *either*.”

“So close off now.” Ilya crossed his arms, jaw snapping shut.

Shane’s mouth fell open. “You’re insane.”

“See.” Ilya snorted. “You’re the real asshole here, Hollander.”

“Because I don’t want to jump back in bed with someone who’s been with the whole villa?” Shane arched his eyebrows. “Excuse me for second-guessing you now. We share a fucking bedroom, did you think about that? How I have to sleep next to not one, but two guys who know you better than I do now? Who have done-”

Shane’s voice cracked. He pushed on. “And it wasn’t just the two, was it? Marly makes three? Did you keep going after that?”

Ilya grinded his teeth, scratching his jaw.

“I am telling you, it was no big deal.”

Shane scoffed. “And I’m telling you, that’s what makes it worse.”

He went to walk away. Ilya’s hand shot out to grab his arm like a vice. His eyes drilled into Shane’s, his voice quiet.

“Shane. *Shane*.” He jerked his head, eyes pleading silently.

Shane shook his grip off, blinking through the water in his eyes.

“No. I- I can’t do this, Ilya.” He shook his head again, firmer. “You made your bed. Go fuck in it.”

NEXT TIME...ON HEATED ISLAND...

Tomorrow night...the new couples face off in a gameshow about who knows their partner best. Meanwhile, two of the most competitive Islanders play their own game about who can

make the other most jealous. And does it still count as break-up sex if you were never official to begin with...?

Chapter End Notes

bout to run off into the woods and be gay for the weekend so sorry if there are typos but hope you enjoy!! i wanted them to fight more but tbh i didn't have it in me they're too stupid and love each other too muchh

Chapter 18

Chapter Summary

Ilya and Shane play the newlywed game, but not together (but kinda together)

Chapter Notes

yall this update was like pulling TEETH idk the creative juices were not flowing so sorry in advance and send all the creative energies my way so we can keep these episodes going ugh! ive got one more chapter before i can do the heartrate challenge so fingers crossed it flows smoother than this one (that one at least will be fun i have Ideas)

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

Ilya mashed the avocados as if they had personally done him wrong, his biceps flexing as he ground down while circling his neck to try to get the crick out. Svetlana raised her eyebrows, plucking a banana off the counter as she waited for Rose's coffee to finish brewing.

"Keep going and you'll make avocado juice..."

Ilya grunted, easing up slightly. She tilted her head.

"So you heard too, hm?"

"How could I not?" Ilya pushed off the counter, stalking over to the pantry. "Hollander made sure to really project. And stupid initial man could have kept his mouth shut too."

Ilya's hands flexed around the bag of bread, nails ripping through the plastic as he thought about how Shane's name had sounded in the other man's mouth. He jammed two slices into the toaster, Svetlana leaning back against the counter.

"You are doing such a good job not being mad about it." Ilya glared at her. Svetlana laughed, shaking her head. Actually, though. You could've been a dick again. Literally."

Ilya thought about Marly next to him in bed, how easy it would've been to push away his thoughts with solid sensations instead. How he could've shown Shane just how loud two men could really be.

Svetlana picked up Rose's coffee mug, tucking another banana under her arm. She didn't turn as she headed up the stairs, tossing the words over her shoulder like a gift.

“He noticed, you know. When you went to sleep in Soul Ties alone. It got oddly quiet after that.”

Ilya froze. The bread popped out of the toaster. He smiled for the first time that morning.

Shane hugged his knees to his chest, barely fitting in Rose’s makeup chair. She dotted some moisturizer under his eyes, her cool fingers sliding over his skin to rub it in.

“I think it’s good you’re not letting him off too easy.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

She pulled back, rolling her eyes. “Shane. No one is naturally that loud in bed.”

Shane bit back the impulse to say that he was - with Ilya he was - but that wouldn’t help his argument.

“I wasn’t thinking about him at all.”

“Well, good. You should be thinking about J.J. That man is hot as hell and doesn’t appear to be sexually chaotic, thank god.”

Shane picked at his socks.

“Ilya said it didn’t mean anything.”

Rose tilted her head with a *tsk*. “But clearly it meant something to you. I swear, Shane, if Svetlana had fucked half the girls in here, there would be blood on my hands. And you would’ve helped me bury the body, obviously.” She sighed. “You’re allowed to be mad, no matter how much he tries to sweet talk you.”

“Obviously. I know that.”

Rose reached out with more lotion and Shane pushed her hand away. She rubbed it into her own cheeks instead.

“Good. Remember it. Let Ilya and stupid Marly have fun together. Just focus on J.J.”

Shane’s stomach seized, face scrunching as the door swung open. Svetlana entered first, beelining towards Rose. Ilya stood behind her. Shane’s brain shortcircuited for a moment, jealous of whichever girl Ilya was bringing breakfast to in the makeup room before remembering he was coupled with Marly.

Ilya sauntered closer, his face a smug mask.

Shane exhaled, avoiding his gaze. “Marly’s not in here, Rozanov.”

“And why would I give a fuck about Marly?”

Ilya was close now, his bare torso eye-level with where Shane sat, sizable biceps holding out a plate of avocado toast. Ilya rested the plate right above the thatch of hair that snuck down lower into his sweats. He leaned in, voice low.

“For you.”

“Avocado toast?”

“Yes. I’ve been learning about the show from Sveta, trying to beg for you properly. Since you like the rules so much.”

Shane angled his head tightly behind him, Svetlana meeting his eyes.

“Well, she must’ve misinformed you. Usually a shitty breakfast isn’t enough to forgive a psychotic fuckfest.”

“Shane.” Ilya moved closer, offering the plate again. Shane stood suddenly, hand shoving the plate up against Ilya. The toast hit him with a soft thump, plate clattering to the ground.

Ilya’s jaw tightened as he looked down at the mess.

“Ah. Not to your taste. Well, maybe I could have cooked better if I wasn’t exhausted from your noise last night.”

Shane smiled wide, all teeth showing. He pitched his voice high. “Oh? I’m so sorry. J.J. and I can always sleep in Soul Ties if that’s better for you.”

Emotions flickered across Ilya’s face faster than Shane could catch. Something settled and he leaned closer, a finger running over his own stomach and collecting the smashed avocado there.

“You forget, Hollander, that I know *exactly* what you sound like. Come see me when you get tired of faking it.”

Ilya raised his two fingers between them, tipped with green. Shane found his lips parting to his horror, body swaying forward as if compelled. Ilya smiled slowly, dipping the fingers between his own lips instead, not breaking eye contact as he sucked them clean.

A couple hours later, Shane jogged into the challenge area hand in hand with J.J., which he told himself explained his high heart rate. Everyone was outfitted in wedding outfits, apparently the more ridiculous the better. Svetlana and Rose were in what seemed to be matching poofy princess dresses while Scott and Kip were in pastel suits and ruffled shirts. Shane had lucked out with J.J., both of them in more traditional suits. Ilya meanwhile was in a hideous blue velvet blazer that he still managed to look good in, Marly in a green one. Shane tore his eyes away from their hand-holding, coming to a stop in front of Ariana.

“Islanders! So good to see all of you. Welcome to the Newlywed Game!”

She gestured to the set behind her. White bleachers stood on either side, graced with pink florals, while two ornate chairs were placed back-to-back in the middle on a giant heart.

“Couples will answer questions to test how well you know each other. Each right answer earns you one point. The couple with the most points earns bragging rights!”

The Islanders clapped on cue. Ariana motioned behind her. “Now please separate from your partner so there can be no strategizing before the questions begin.”

Couples began splitting off. Shane gave J.J.’s hand a squeeze, letting the back of his hand be kissed as he peeled off. Shane headed to the bleachers on the left and immediately Ilya was by his side, gliding past in his velvet monstrosity as if it was a coincidence. Shane huffed, rolling his eyes.

Shane chose a seat behind Ilya, ignoring the wide berth Ilya had left next to him. Leo claimed it aimlessly, plopping down next to Ilya with a brief nod of his head. Shane’s hands gripped into fists at his side, the cut of his nails into his palms the only thing grounding him. Ilya cast a look over his shoulder, turning back to Leo with a scowl. Shane did not let himself smile as Ilya stood up without a word and moved to the end of the bench, sitting down next to Svetlana instead.

Ariana gathered their attention. “Let’s get started with Rose and Svetlana!”

Rose and Svetlana strode to their chairs from opposite sides, Rose blowing her a kiss before they sat back to back.

“First question...what is your partner’s go-to guilty pleasure?”

The two women scrawled on their whiteboards for a moment.

“Rose, you first.”

Rose tossed her hair behind a shoulder. “Okay, so, whenever I get nervous on set or before a big project, I absolutely *devour* salt and vinegar chips even though they give me the worst acid reflux, so I’d have to go with that.”

“Svetlana?”

Svetlana raised her board, the Islanders cheering as she revealed ‘*salt n vin chippies*’ scrawled out across in marker.

“Well done! Now you, Svetlana?”

“Ugh, I don’t know if Rose will get this one, because I just don’t believe in guilty pleasures.”

“Rose?”

Rose stood up, waving her hand to increase the cheers, ‘*no such thing!*’ written across her board.

It continued on like that, the pair never stumbling until they got to favorite colors, which apparently they had never bothered to talk about. Cici and Troy went next, answering every question incorrectly. Harris seemed to feel bad for them, flashing little smiles at Troy each time the man responded.

And then it was Shane's turn. He stood, ignoring the heat of Ilya's eyes at his back as he walked towards J.J. Shane gave him a smile. The night before flashed back into his mind, his stomach lurching somewhat as he forced himself forward, dropping into the chair with a thud.

Shane faced away from J.J., forcing his eyes away from where Ilya and Svetlana sat. Ariana's voice rang out between them.

"All right, boys, first question! What is your partner's go-to drink for a night out?"

Shane frowned at his whiteboard. It wasn't like that had come up in conversation. He had seen J.J. drinking champagne at the Casa party, but that definitely wasn't anyone's go-to drink, right?

"Okay, Shane, what do you think J.J.'s answer is?"

"Um, beer?" Shane croaked out his response, his neck growing hot. Behind him, he could hear J.J. chuckle.

"Rum and coke actually, it's all good. For Shane, I guessed maybe an old fashioned?"

Ilya snorted from the bleachers, loud enough for Shane to look up. Ilya mouthed the words already written on Shane's whiteboard, Shane's eyes flitting away as he revealed *ginger ale* to Ariana.

"Shoot." J.J. laughed again. Shane could hear him tilt slightly closer, his chair creaking.

"Sorry, Shane. We'll get the next one!"

Shane gave him a smile he couldn't see, and then they were onto their favorite vacation spot. J.J. went first this time, his voice still carefree.

"Man, these are hard, Ariana! I know Shane's from Canada so I guessed somewhere warm - Florida! I love it there."

Shane couldn't help but snap his eyes to Ilya, who wasn't bothering to hold back a boastful sneer. His cupid bow parted, lips mouthing two syllables: *cot tage*.

Shane swallowed, shaking his head as he flipped his board. "Sorry, I'm pretty boring. When I have time off, I like going to this cottage I have outside-"

"Ottawa." Ilya's voice broke through, Russian accent coming out in a lazy drawl. "He built it a couple years ago. Filmed a whole special about it. You can watch him do yoga in little shorts." His voice softened by a degree. "Is his favorite place in the world."

“Thank you for sharing Ilya, but this is a game for *couples*. And you are certainly not that anymore.” Ariana raised her eyebrows, swaying her hair over her shoulder as she turned back to J.J. and Shane, Rose and Hayden letting out affirming whoops from their size of the bleachers.

“For the *real* couple, last question! What is your partner’s biggest dream?”

Ariana went to Shane first. He stumbled, shaking his head. “I...I’m not sure. I wrote down go back on *Survivor*? Like if J.J. wanted to do an all-stars season or something?”

Ariana let out a soft groan as J.J. flipped his board. “Ah, sorry, Shane! J.J.’s biggest dream is to retire in France before forty. J.J., what do you think Shane’s biggest dream is?”

“Stab in the dark, but I know he’s a phenomenal hockey player. So winning the hockey championship or whatever?”

Shane beamed as he flipped his board, *winning the Cup* scrawled in his handwriting.

The Islanders clapped with Ariana, who motioned for them to return to their seats. “One point for Shane and J.J.! That places you ahead of Cici and Troy!”

Shane’s eyes trailed back to Ilya. Shane had wanted to win the Cup since his feet first hit the ice. But something in him wanted to confirm, wanted to know what Ilya thought his biggest dream was. Ilya was looking away, brows drawn, something in his jaw ticking tight.

Shane sat impatiently through the rest of the game. He felt a hot flame of irritation when Connie and Hudson answered almost all of their questions correctly, outdone only by Scott and Kip, who seemed actively pained when they were forced to sit in separate areas instead of on each other’s laps. J.J. was there, catching Shane’s eye every now and then with a smile, and it only made Shane feel coiled tighter. He suddenly, ravenously, missed the ice. He wanted to slice through on sharp blades, feel the strength in his muscles, the power in his body, that icy silence that took over his mind and left only hockey in its wake.

Ariana called for Ilya and Marly. Shane stilled. Ilya stood leisurely. He walked across the bleachers, striding directly in front of Shane so he was forced to push back his legs, bare calves still skimming Ilya’s as he strode by.

And then Ilya was in the chair, and the questions were coming, and Shane knew every single one. Marly finally got the third one right, *your couple’s biggest accomplishment*. Because Ilya told everyone how huge it was when he got his first billboard. How he knew he finally made it. How it meant he didn’t need to worry about going back to Russia anymore. How he looked *so* good jumbosized, he’d finish with a smirk.

Ilya said all of that to anyone who would listen. But he gave only Shane the whys. Why it mattered so much to have his face plastered on a building, impossible to ignore, or overlook, or neglect. Why he was running from the place he was born, pressure and death hot on his heels. And why, though Ilya never said this part out loud, it meant so much to be desired, to have bidding wars over his face, his flawless body. For people with money in rooms he’d never enter to say, yes, this one is *worth* something. This one can stay.

Shane sat quietly, counting up his points as he answered every question correctly inside his mind. The only one he could not supply the answer to was the last one, when Ariana asked the couple to write down their worst fear. Shane studied Ilya's face - safe to do when Ilya was bent over the whiteboard - and wondered. Something about rawness, perhaps. About the words that spilled from his gut like bile. How Ilya's eyes shifted after he shared something, shell-shocked and suspicious at once, even though Shane held each morsel like a prize. Ilya was jumpy like that, easily startled. As if blaming himself for whatever words leaked out of his mouth. As if blaming Shane for listening, and not leaving.

Ilya turned his board over, showing *spiders* to the group. Shane smiled despite himself, Ilya's eyes lighting on his in confused curiosity, and Shane's smile stayed a moment longer before he remembered all Ilya had done. Worst fears, indeed.

J.J. sauntered towards Shane once the challenge ended, Shane reaching for his hand like a liferaft.

"Guess we need to do less kissing and more talking, huh? Sorry about that, I know how competitive you get." J.J. squeezed Shane's hand with a wince.

"Oh. No, it's fine. Don't worry about it." Shane shook his head absently, eyes tracking Ilya up ahead. He was walking next to Marly, voice too low for Shane to catch any of the words.

J.J. tracked his gaze, but didn't say anything further.

By the time they made it back to the Villa, there were still a few hours left before dinner. The Islanders milled about, some napping, some splashing in the pool. J.J. reclined in a pool chair, eyes drifting shut behind his shades. Shane leaned forward in his chair, forearms resting on his knees. His eyes blankly took in Troy and Harris swinging their feet in the water on the opposite side of the pool, Troy letting out an almost girlish giggle at something Harris said.

Then there was a canon ball, water splashing cold and sudden all over Shane's torso. He jumped to his feet, sputtering backwards from the shock. Ilya emerged from the water like a shark, grinning wide. Shane pushed down his irritation. He averted his gaze, sitting back down and acting as if nothing had happened. Ilya splashed him then, a big wave that spilled over the pool's edge and washed over Shane's toes.

Shane let out a low exhale, glancing away again. A grin began to grow on his face. He stood, sliding smoothly onto J.J.'s lap. J.J. pushed up his shades with a smile, hands going to Shane's waist automatically and pulling him closer. Shane let out a little sigh of contentment as they kissed, rocking his hips a bit as he let out a soft moan. The pool went quiet, splashes stopping completely. Shane tried to deepen the kiss, his hands cradling the back of J.J.'s head, but J.J. pulled back.

"What?" Shane blinked, looking down to avoid J.J.'s stare.

J.J. leaned up, landing a kiss beneath Shane's ear. "So. I'm not complaining. But I *am* starting to get very excited every time I see that Russian man, the way you scramble onto me." He raised his hips suggestively.

Shane turned his face away, lip jutting out. "I don't know what you mean."

"Shane." J.J. turned his face gently, tilting Shane's gaze towards him. "This, last night...you don't see the pattern?"

"You didn't like it?"

"I loved it! Until the sudden blue balls the second Ilya left the room."

"I didn't mean to-"

"Hey, it's fine, okay?" J.J. grabbed Shane's hand, pressing it to his chest. "We can go at your pace. I like you, remember? I just need to know if I should start hitting on Leo yet."

Shane frowned, collapsing against J.J.'s chest with a grumble. J.J. pulled back slightly, bemused.

"See, I can't tell if you're jealous over me or because of what Leo did with-"

"Can we not?" Shane's voice was pained. He exhaled, breath hot against J.J.'s chest. "And obviously you're allowed to explore with whoever you want. We're open."

J.J. ran his fingers through Shane's hair, contemplating. "I am. But I'm not sure if you are."

Shane sat up with a groan. "Why does everyone think I'm going to run back to someone who fucks anything in sight at the first sign of a problem!"

"Okay, hey, I hear you." J.J. ran his hands up and down Shane's thighs, sighing. "But it's not like there's nothing there. I want us to be honest with each other." He cleared his throat. "So, I wanted you to know that I'm interested in pulling Marly for a chat."

Shane wrinkled his nose. "Really? Him?"

J.J. raised his eyebrows. "Again with that confusing jealousy." He leaned in, gracing Shane's lips with a kiss. "Go amuse yourself. It's okay. But maybe if you want some time with me later...we could do it when Ilya's not in sight?"

Shane scoffed, turning behind him. "He's not even in the pool anymore. I don't know where he went."

J.J. leaned back, arms stretching behind his head. "Great."

"Great." Shane bit his lip, leaning forward to press a brief kiss to J.J.'s lips. "Well, I'll leave you to your chat then."

J.J. studied him for a minute longer, something undefinable in his eyes, then nodded once. "All right. Catch up with you later, Shane."

Ilya swept through the Villa, leaving wet footprints in his wake. The sight of Shane swinging a leg over J.J., easing down with that arch in his back, the dimples there winking tauntingly back at Ilya...Ilya shook his head, damp curls throwing off a spray of water.

Svetlana and Rose tumbled out of the photobooth a few feet before him, Svetlana's smile fading as she grabbed his arm with concern.

"Ilyusha, what now?"

"Nothing."

"Ilya."

Ilya glanced over at Rose's crossed arms, her face fixed in a glare as they spoke in Russian.

"I made my bed, right?" He thumbed his nose, shrugging. *"I get what I deserve, I guess."*

Svetlana rolled her eyes. *"The drama, really."* She scanned his dripping body. *"Have you actually apologized to him yet?"*

Ilya scowled, looking off into the distance Svetlana sighed.

"Maybe try that first. Before whatever sad pool tricks you tried."

Rose cut in, her voice icy. "Sveta, can we go now? I'm getting hungry."

Ilya rolled his eyes. *"Your girlfriend is so annoying, 'Svetaaa.'"*

Svetlana flushed, glancing away. *"She's not my girlfriend. Not yet."*

Ilya froze. *"Yet?"*

She shrugged, lips curving into a small smile. *"I will ask her soon."*

Ilya grinned despite himself, pulling her into a quick hug as Svetlana shrieked at his dampness.

"Happy for you. Really. Will try to be better so she doesn't murder me before your wedding."

"Hey, slow down! Let her say yes to being my girlfriend first." Svetlana shoved him, then reached her hand out for Rose, whose eyes darted between the two of them suspiciously as they walked away.

Ilya walked upstairs alone, his limbs heavy. He was happy for Svetlana. Truly. At least one of them would walk away from this experience with something. Ilya headed for the dressing room, kicking off his slides and easing out of his damp swim trunks. He pushed open his mirrored closet and reached up to grab his towel. Footsteps sounded outside the room, Ilya covering himself just as Shane burst around the corner.

“Why the fuck did you have to ruin everything, huh? It wasn’t enough to wreck us? Now things with J.J. are weird and-” Shane stopped abruptly, his eyes dropping down Ilya’s naked body to the towel hovering between his legs.

“No, please, continue Hollander.” Ilya rested a palm against the closet, his other hand swinging the towel slightly in front of him. Shane’s eyes followed it like he was hypnotized.

“Put on some damn clothes.” Shane finally snapped and strode across the room, yanking open his mirrored door and throwing some shorts at Ilya.

Ilya pouted. “If you insist.” He dropped the towel, Shane turning away with a flush.

“Okay, I am decent now. You can go back to yelling at me.”

Shane’s hands flexed in and out of fists, his eyes slowly coming up to meet Ilya as he turned back. Shane glared at him, bottom lip trembling. Something in Ilya softened, his eyes blinking.

“Shane. I am sorry. I don’t think I’ve said this.”

Shane shook his head, throat tightening. “Whatever.”

Ilya didn’t move, his palms turning upward like Shane was a frightened animal.

“I mean it. Was fucked up. I’m stupid sometimes.” His nose twitched. “Stupidest thing I’ve ever done.”

Shane let out a huff of air, his whole body coiled with tension.

“I hate that I still want you.” His voice cracked. “I really, really hate it.”

“Shane.” Ilya swallowed, voice thick.

And then Shane was on him, hands shoving him back against the mirrored closets, his lips on him like a punishment. Ilya’s hands hovered in the air, unsure for a moment, but Shane didn’t pull away, didn’t stop. He leaned deeper into Ilya, hands gripping hard at his curls, his scalp tingling. Ilya finally gripped Shane’s waist with a low groan. His fingers sunk in Shane’s flesh, digging into his sides possessively as Shane’s mouth moved to his throat. Ilya threw his head back, feeling the line of Shane’s hardness as he slotted between his thighs.

“*Fuck*, Shane.”

Shane said nothing, just panted against Ilya’s pecs as he pulled one of Ilya’s hands down to his waistband, sliding it to the back of his shorts. Ilya raised his eyebrows as Shane pushed

Ilya's hand lower, Ilya's palm cupping his ass.

"You want?" Ilya tried to follow Shane's eyes, his hand pausing despite Shane's tugging.

Shane's words murmured against Ilya's collarbone.

"Did you do this with them? With anyone here?" He arched his back, sliding Ilya's hand down deeper, his fingertips skimming Shane's hole.

Ilya sucked in an inhale, letting out a curse in Russian.

"Did you?" Shane's voice was sharper now.

"No, no, I didn't-

"Do it then." Shane's eyes finally cut to Ilya's, a challenge.

"Shane. Not like this."

Shane scoffed, pulling Ilya's hand out of his shorts.

"Oh, so *now* it means something?"

"Yes, now, it means something. It is you who means something, Hollander. This is what I've been trying to tell you."

Shane shook his head, crossing his arms. Ilya stepped closer.

"I am not going to do something you haven't done before as if it means nothing."

Shane cocked his head, sneering. "What makes you think I haven't done it? You're that self-centered?"

Ilya froze. He forced his face to remain blank. "With J.J.?"

Shane shrugged. Ilya leaned back against the closets, waiting for his pulse to slow.

"What else? With J.J.?"

"None of your business."

"Fine. So what? You want to see who's better?"

Shane's eyes darted from Ilya's face down to his own shorts around Ilya's waist, Ilya's thighs swallowing most of the material.

"You miss my dick? Spit it out, Hollander."

"Whatever, forget it." Shane's fingers dug into his own biceps.

"Tell me and I'll give it to you."

“I don’t know, okay! I know I shouldn’t...I shouldn’t want this.”

“But you do.”

“Obviously.” Shane’s eyes snagged on Ilya’s shorts again.

Ilya studied him for a moment, then nodded. He pushed off the mirrors, walking slowly to stand in front of Shane. His lips hovered next to Shane’s ear, their shoulders skimming.

“Then get on your knees for me.”

Shane folded with a deep sigh, sinking to the neon pink carpeting at once. His hands reached towards Ilya’s hips, grabbing at the fabric blocking his lips from Ilya.

“Ah. No.”

Shane’s hands paused in midair before gradually floating back to his thighs. He looked up at Ilya, confused, who motioned down at him with his index finger.

“Turn. Clothes off.”

Shane sputtered. “But - what?”

“Is that not what you wanted?” Ilya raised his eyebrows. “You are, how they say, baby gay? Though everyone is baby to old Hunter, but still. He says you want to explore, yes? Do the things? Compare the people?”

Shane hesitated. Ilya’s voice lowered, softening by a degree.

“If you do not want, you can walk away. I will not stop you.”

Shane swallowed, peeling his eyes away from the outline of Ilya growing in his shorts. Gradually, Shane rotated, presenting himself to Ilya.

“Good. Now your shorts.”

Shane tensed, then yanked them down in one motion. He shuddered, acutely aware of the mirrors surrounding them, the open entrance around the corner.

“Very good.”

Shane heard the slightest shiver in Ilya’s voice and fuck, had he missed it. His eyes flickered to the mirror, tracking as Ilya knelt behind him, his face almost reverent as he kicked Shane’s knees farther apart, forcing his chest to curve deeper towards the floor.

Ilya’s gaze caught Shane’s in the reflection and held it, two of his index fingers disappearing into his mouth and coming out slick. Shane let out an involuntary moan at the sight, his cock jumping beneath him. He lowered his head, eyes fluttering shut as Ilya’s fingers teased his entrance. And then Shane jolted, a thick swipe of tongue spreading over his hole.

“Ilya-”

Ilya’s face appeared in the mirror, one eyebrow cocked.

“Oh, has J.J. done this too?”

He waited for Shane to reply, teasing one finger at his entrance. Shane lowered his head with a half-groan, his chest sinking against the carpet, back arching further as Ilya spread him open. Shane let his mind go at last as Ilya’s tongue resumed its messy licks, his skin alight with each stroke. It didn’t take long before he started squirming, Ilya holding him in place and waiting until he was babbling before sliding his fingers inside.

“Hurry-” Shane murmured. He turned his cheek against the floor, eyes blinking hazily at the wide open entrance to the dressing room.

Ilya’s fingers began to thrust harder, crooking just so. Shane let out a gasp, his thighs starting to shake. Ilya let out a flurry of Russian, his other hand coming down to slap hard against Shane’s ass, the jolt sending him forward with a whimper. Shane gazed at the mirror, taking it in: his lips, slack against the carpet rubbing red against his cheek, his ass arched in the air behind him, Ilya moving with intense focus, hips following his wrist as if more than his fingers were driving in and out of Shane. Ilya crooked his fingers slightly more and the pleasure suddenly crested with a violent burst. Shane felt himself break, his eyes squeezing shut as he spurted over himself, Ilya letting out a low curse behind him as he held Shane up from total collapse.

Shane went limp, Ilya dragging a soft kiss over the side of his ass as he pulled his fingers out, gently lowering Shane to lay prone. He lowered himself over Shane, his body weight a heavy comfort as he nuzzled into Shane’s hair.

“Well? Am I better?”

Shane smiled, his mind still floating. “I didn’t...with J.J. Just handjobs, sort of...”

Ilya stilled above him, then Shane squealed, his neck tickling as Ilya planted kiss after sloppy kiss there. Shane flipped over, curling his neck into his shoulder and soaking in Ilya above him. He trailed a hand over Ilya’s necklace, then down his bare torso.

“Hey...do you need...” Shane palmed the front of Ilya’s shorts, frowning.

Ilya glanced away, ears reddening. “Ah, no. I already - when you did.”

Shane fully grinned, mouth falling open a bit.

“Wow.”

“Yes, wow.” Ilya rolled his eyes.

Shane hummed happily. “I like you like this.” His eyes roamed over Ilya, stroking through his curls. “Soft.”

“Mmm. For you, maybe.”

Ilya leaned down, pressing warm kisses up the column of Shane’s throat. He kissed Shane’s face like his personal map - north to the forehead, south to the chin, west and then east on the corners of his mouth. Ilya leaned in for Shane’s lips, the kiss so tender Shane felt himself tremble.

“You are the only one I’m soft with.”

Shane gazed up at him, Ilya’s thumb stroking the side of his face where he had a smattering of freckles, and suddenly Shane’s brain was no longer floating and suddenly it was all flooding back. He sat up, Ilya falling to the side with a frown.

“Just not the only one you’re hard for, right?”

Ilya let out an exhale. “Shane.”

Ilya ran his hands through his hair, pressing his lips together. Shane pulled up his shorts, shaking his head with a sad laugh.

“Sorry, it’s fine. Seriously. I can have fun too. So. This was fun. Thanks.”

Ilya slowly pushed himself up from the floor as Shane strode out of the dressing room. He looked down, calling after him.

“Want your shorts back with my cum inside? Or should I wash them first?”

Ilya thought he heard a faint huff from outside, and then there was nothing but fading footsteps. Ilya chewed his lip, and then popped open his closet. He took out the Rolex he had tossed into his suitcase the previous night and slid it on his wrist again, something settling as it clicked back into place.

NEXT TIME...ON HEATED ISLAND...

Tomorrow night...a tweet challenge reveals truths some people have been trying to deny. Plus, a fresh-faced bombshell makes an appearance and chooses an unlikely twosome to take out on a date...

Chapter End Notes

some of yall have never blasted selena gomez's the heart wants what it wants and it shows (and by shows i mean plz give me the name of your therapist cause whew well done you)

Chapter 19

Chapter Summary

it's the social media challenge, a threeway bombshell date, and a surprise couple elimination oh my~

Chapter Notes

if you're a commenter you may make an appearance in this one...👁️ 👁️ 👁️

(also had to throw IWTv line in here, sorry not sorry. my heated rivalry hyperfixation is making room for the return of my babygirl lestat soonnnn <333)

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

Shane slept fitfully. Sometime before lights out, Ilya had returned Shane's shorts. Folded on his pillow. Unwashed. Ilya had also been kind enough to leave one of their photobooth strips on J.J.'s pillow. Shane had taken advantage of Ilya's pre-bed shower to return the photo back to Ilya's pillow instead. The shorts he balled up and placed in his closet, thumbs lingering slightly over the stiffness.

Shane was in bed long before most of the other couples were, which gave him the chance to watch Ilya's brief scowl as he spotted the boomeranged photo back in his bed. Shane watched as Ilya smoothed his face, tucking the photo beneath his pillow instead. Something in his chest twisted. Ilya collapsed, spreading out as if he owned the whole mattress, and drew a lazy hand beneath his waistband, daring Shane to meet his gaze. Shane didn't.

J.J. slipped in just before the lights shut off, Marly on his heels. Shane didn't say anything about Marly's tousled hair or J.J.'s reddened lips. He let J.J. snuggle closer, arms sliding over his waist, and kept his eyes sealed instead of looking at what might be happening in Ilya's bed across from him. Shane dreamed of tongues, and sharp teeth, and a golden chain that kept swaying in and out of sight like a magic trick.

In the morning, Ilya did not try to give Shane another plate of breakfast. Shane came into the kitchen and Ilya merely chewed on his toast, eyebrows raised, voice low when he asked, "Want something, Hollander?" in that accent of his. Shane's eyes stumbled, as always, on the deep vee of his waist jutting into his shorts and Ilya laughed as Shane turned away. By the time Shane retreated to take his morning shower and found the protein shake that had been

waiting on his bedside table, the condensation had leaked into the cheap neon fiberboard and the shake had gone warm and undrinkable.

By the challenge, Shane was underrested and underfed. It was barely his fault if when the girls went to change into newspaper print minidresses and the boys went to change into slutty newsboy outfits, that he lingered on purpose. And it definitely wasn't his fault if Ilya lingered too. And if there were a few minutes when they were alone before stupid Scott Hunter popped back in to grab something, Shane couldn't really be blamed. Because alone, his body gravitated towards Ilya. Alone, his hands might do desperate things. Alone, his mind might be dangerously close to forgetting why they weren't tangled up together every night instead.

Rose raised her eyebrows as Shane emerged from the dressing room, her face darkening as Ilya followed a moment later.

"Might want to fix your little cap, Shane. It's crooked."

"Rose..." Shane let out a frustrated huff, turning to glare at Ilya.

Ilya grinned, adjusting the gray cap on Shane's head for him and tugging down on the hem of Shane's form-fitting shorts.

"You look good like this. Very natural for you, to be a sexy little newsboy." Ilya snapped Shane's suspenders and waltzed away, leaving Shane to take in the impressive art of how a Russian supermodel could make a miniscule vest and knickerbockers look like a wet dream.

"Islanders, Islanders! Read all about it!" Ariana cupped a hand to the side of her mouth, laughing as she waved them in. "Welcome to the Headliner Challenge! Today, you'll be having your first contact with the outside world. We will project social media on that screen," she motioned behind her, "that has to do with specific Islanders, but their names will be blacked out. Your job is to identify the Islanders in question."

"In front of the screen, you may notice a little bike path. You'll hop on this bike," Ariana dinged the bell with a smile, "and try to deliver all five newspapers. You can only deliver a newspaper if you get the answer right. So without further ado, may the best Islander win!" She winked. "But don't worry, you all get to choose someone to kiss at the end."

The Islanders clapped and Ariana strode over to the screen, sliding behind a faux newsdesk that had been set up in front.

"First up is Cici!"

The Islanders cheered as Cici swung a leg over the pastel bike, ringing its bell with a grin as she pedaled forward to her first stop. The Islanders looked to the screen, BREAKING NEWS

flashing before it revealed the post. Ariana held up a bedazzled microphone to her lips as she read it outloud:

so am i crazy or do [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] totally wanna get it on...that fiji water's turning everyyybody gay

Cici chewed her lip, looking across the Islanders. "Okay, not trying to stir up drama, but I feel like this has to be Shane and Ilya, right?"

Shane's face turned red. Ilya crossed his arms. "I am bisexual, not gay, so the water is failing."

Ariana motioned to the screen, the unredacted post appearing before them.

"I'm sorry, Cici, this post was actually about Harris and Troy."

Cici looked at Troy, who avoided her gaze. "Wow, that's real interesting then. What's the audience seeing that I'm not, huh, Troy?"

Harris looked over at him, fingers skimming Troy's elbow. Cici rolled her eyes, getting back on the biking and pedaling with a bit more force than necessary to get to the next stop a foot ahead of her.

Ariana cleared her throat. "Okay, next post!"

is this sexist island or what, only three girls left?! who's my bi queen [REDACTED] supposed to uhaul with now ugh

Cici tilted her head. "Is it...me?"

Ariana smiled, revealing the answer. "Yes, Cici is the bi queen of this post!"

The Islanders cheered, Cici making a big show of bending over in her low cut dress to grab a newspaper from the bike's floral basket, arching it towards the nearest facade of a house and landing it on the miniature front lawn.

Cici got the next one right as well, guessing that Marly was the guy who never put the seat down in the communal bathroom, but she missed the rest. She rested her bike at the end of the small course, scanning the row of Islanders until she landed on Jackie.

"Well...I am a bi queen after all!"

Jackie smiled, coming forward to kiss her as Scott covered Hayden's eyes, the two of them going at it for a few seconds before Jackie pulled away with a laugh.

Jackie was next and missed every single question. Not wanting to insult anyone who was named as being "the most forgettable person I've seen on screen" or "an abysmal example of plastic surgery gone wrong," she chose herself for every answer instead. She chose Hayden

to kiss to no one's surprise, lingering long enough that even Ariana cleared her throat to wrap it up, and then it was Hayden's turn to straddle a bicycle far too small for him.

"All right, let's see..." Hayden rubbed his hands, studying the screen for his second question. "Gonna go with Shane?"

Ariana shook her head. "Unfortunately, this thirst tweet was referring to Marly having a body sculpted by God himself, but good guess!"

Ilya rolled his eyes. "Wow, Pike, still hung up on Shane I see."

"Makes two of us!" Hayden volleyed back at once. He paused, freezing, eyes flicking to Jackie as his face reddened. "Wait. No. I didn't mean - just that, *Ilya's* the one stuck on Shane, obviously!"

Jackie shook her head, smiling to herself. Hayden practically flew to the next spot, waiting for the screen to refresh impatiently.

god i miss lexi i and serge so much. their chemistry on aftersun is already a million times better than [REDACTED] and [REDACTED], like lovee them but it's giving already married with ten kids. wish he had tongued [REDACTED] more before going all boring hubby on us sigh

"Wow, uh, this is hard. So a couple...um...is it Scott and Kip? And Scott should have tongued Shane more?"

Ilya rolled his neck, the bones cracking. Shane swallowed from a few people down.

Ariana let out a groan. "Oh, you got one right! But no, the couple referred to was you and Jackie."

Hayden's face turned a deeper red. "Are you kidding me? These people are so stupid!"

"Agreed, you should not tongue Shane any more."

Hayden whipped his head to the left. "Shut up, Ilya. I wasn't even talking to you."

Hayden missed the remainder of the questions, flushed, somehow guessing Connie in a post that only talked about the female Islanders. He then finished with a very deep kiss to Jackie that definitely wasn't compensating in the least.

"We get it, Hayd." Rose laughed. "Stop mauling your future wife's lips now!"

Rose went next, and the posts began to accelerate in a clear trend. Shane frowned, aware of the need for storylines from hours of mostly uneventful footage. And also aware that these were real viewers posting about what they were seeing on their screens each night. And it seemed like almost all of them were talking about him and Ilya. Sure, Rose correctly guessed

that a post describing someone as either very sweet or a secret serial killer was about Scott, but after that, each post shown to the Islanders seemed to be about Shane:

[REDACTED] HAS THE BACKBONE OF A CHOCOLATE BAR LEFT INSIDE A HOT CAR, STAND UP!

[REDACTED] also did physical shit AND was the first one to do it AND was the one insistent on not closing it off AND is the only one with other emotional connections. Tell me again how he's the victim?!

[REDACTED] needs to be honest with his poor couple even though it's pretty obvious tbh... can't be wasting this man's time just because your pseudo-ex banged all the relevant options...

Shane flinched each time his name was guessed correctly, looking away from Marly's shrug, Hudson's apologetic smile, Kip's braced teeth. And to be fair, it wasn't like Ilya was doing any better...

[REDACTED] you better sit down, you CANNOT call Shane a whore for frenching when your response to that was GOING TO PARISSS HAVE YOU LOST YOUR MIND?!

don't know why [REDACTED] is so hurt, gonna act like community dick, gonna get treated like community dick...

[REDACTED] is lucky his dick's still attached to his body, it would not be if i was in that villa!!

Worse, Shane was pretty sure he recognized his mom's username on one of the especially vicious posts towards Ilya. Things didn't get better once it was J.J.'s turn. Shane thought they might cut him a break after the first post flashed on the screen.

i know everyone wants to talk about the messy gay boys but can we have a moment for [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] being the best couple ever?! Like ugh i might actually believe in love again go lesbians go

J.J. tossed a newspaper out of the bike's basket after correctly guessing Rose and Svetlana, and then pedaled to his next post where things slid backwards again.

me wearing my DUMP HIM shirt and waving red flags at [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] smh! getting treated like second-rate choices when they're honestly finer than their counterparts?! pleaseee. plus is it just me orrr are there some sparks flying between them too...

J.J. ran a hand over his jaw, considering.

"Well, this will be really embarrassing if I'm wrong. But is it about me and Marly?"

Ariana revealed the names, Ilya and Shane clapping faintly with the rest of the Islanders.

“That’s right!”

Marly gave J.J. a crooked smile. J.J. bit his lip, grinning back as he remounted the bike. Shane tried to pay attention to the remaining questions but the increasing buzzing in his ears made it difficult. He saw rather than heard when J.J. chose Marly to kiss at the end, the two tangling together, muscular arms dragging each other closer and closer as they pressed up against each other, separating with shaky breath and disheveled hair.

By the time it was Ilya’s turn, the producers had either decided to ease up or had simply run out of posts. The only time Shane’s name was mentioned was in a post begging for more screentime of his and Hayden’s friendship, and when someone wrote in to say he and Ilya clearly wanted to have a threesome with Scott, which he and Ilya both scowled about as Scott cackled.

At the end, Shane couldn’t help but tense a bit as Ilya eased off the tiny bike and lowered it to its kickstand. Ariana gestured across the Islanders.

“Great job getting most of those right, Ilya! Now choose your Islander to kiss.”

Ilya didn’t hesitate. “I choose Shane, of course, always.”

There was a slight surge of applause, Rose begrudgingly clapping her palms together twice at Svetlana’s prompting. Shane stepped forward, face red. Ilya rocked back on his heels, starting to grin, and Shane couldn’t stop himself from smiling back.

“Wow. You’re letting me kiss you in public, Hollander?”

“Shut up. It’s for a challenge.”

“If you say so.” Ilya breathed into his ear, his hand coming up to tease Shane’s suspenders.

Shane let out an irritated huff, grabbing the small of Ilya’s back and thrusting them together as his lips found Ilya’s. Shane’s eyes closed as he started sinking into that place only Ilya seemed to take him, the social media posts like fading lightning strikes in his storm of thoughts.

Maybe he was weak. Or acting unfairly. Or not being harsh enough. None of it seemed to matter as Ilya leaned into him, tongue finding his, Shane’s body alighting in pure sensation.

It was only when he pulled back that he stumbled, Ilya looking down at him with such unhidden adoration. That flame of uncertainty twisted his stomach again. What if he had looked at Leo like that? At Hudson? At Marly? Shane thought, not for the first time, about what it would take to bribe the producers for footage so he could study Ilya’s plays in detail, like he did with hockey games. Tracking his maneuvers. Comparing the goals.

When it was Shane’s turn to pick someone to kiss, he gripped the handlebars of the bike and mumbled Rose into his chest. It was silent except for Rose.

“Ew. Really, Shane?”

She gave him the briefest peck on the lips, and Shane didn’t look at Ilya, and none of it made anything better.

“All right, my newscrew, I hope you enjoyed the game!” Ariana leaned back against the faux newsdeck, glittering microphone in hand.

“But you know what they say. News is a 24/7 cycle. So please welcome our newest bombshell!”

The Islanders turned, a fresh-faced blonde boy attempting to strut over to join Ariana. His face betrayed his self-consciousness, a deep flush already spreading over his pale skin.

“Welcome, Luca.” Ariana squeezed his shoulder, offering him the mic. “Tell us a little bit about yourself.”

“Um, hi. I’m Luca. I’m a freelance artist. I’m looking for something more serious here? I know I’m young, but I take that stuff seriously. Like I just um, said. So.”

He took off his cap and ruffled his blond hair nervously, looking to Ariana with something like panic in his eyes.

“Read all about it, boys and girls! I could eat him up!” Ariana laughed. “Now, this fine young newsboy has been granted a double feature - him and two Islanders of his choice! So, my sweet Luca...” She ran a hand down his open button-up, smoothing over his suspenders. “Which two will it be?”

“Okay, so, I’ve been watching and, um, while it might be, awkward. Um. I’d like to choose Shane Hollander and Ilya Rozanov?”

Whistles and laughter broke out from the Islanders.

“Brave boy!” Leo shouted out, clapping harder.

Luca pushed on.

“Well, I’ve been a fan of hockey my whole life so, um, yeah, it would be an honor to get to know Mr. Hollan- um, Shane, better? And obviously, Ilya’s a model, so he’s obviously, very, um, attractive. And same with Mr.- Shane, too, clearly, like he looks- well, anyway. Yeah, I chose them.”

“No.” Ilya’s voice rang out, flat and firm. Luca’s face fell immediately, his flush turning a mottled purple-red. Ilya’s voice gentled.

“Ah, it is not your fault, bombshell. I do not do threesomes anymore is all. Even with the beautiful Mr. Hollander.”

“What?” Shane whipped his head to Ilya. “You can’t just say *no*. That’s not how the game works. I mean, look at him.”

Ilya rolled his eyes. “Yes, very cute, have fun, Hollander.”

“*No*, I mean you’ll crush him.” Shane lowered his voice, darting a look at Luca, who was looking even more mortified. He raised his voice again. “Fuck, I mean, of course you’re also very cute, Luca.”

Ilya narrowed his eyes at Shane. “You were clear you do not like me with other people. So no more other people for me.

“Ilya, say yes to the date.”

“I will not be trapped.”

“It’s not a trap!” Shane’s voice cracked.

“Should I choose someone else?” Luca asked weakly.

“Ilya.”

“Shane.”

“Say yes.”

“For you?”

“Yes.”

Ilya raised his voice. “Then yes.” He shook his head, lowering his voice to Shane. “You are a library of confusion.”

Luca shook his head glumly. “This is the most embarrassing way I’ve had someone say yes to a date.”

Ilya moved closer to Shane, slinging an arm around his shoulder with a grin.

“Don’t worry, sweet Luca. We’ll make up for it.”

Shane and Ilya were herded into a producer’s car with Luca to drive to their date as the rest of the Islanders returned to the Villa. Shane was squeezed in the middle, Luca apologizing every time they hit a pothole and his body pressed closer, Ilya intentionally crowding Shane’s space with a smile that dared him to say anything.

“All right, guys, here we are.” The producer in the passenger seat turned back with a smile. “First time doing a trio. Enjoy!”

A triangular table was set up on the edge of the beach, the tablecloth flapping in the wind. A bottle of champagne sat in the middle of the table as always, glasses waiting.

Shane went to sit down. Ilya let out a disapproving sound.

“Wow. You’re not going to be a gentleman? Pull out the chair for your date, Hollander.”

Shane glared at Ilya, yanking out the seat in front of Luca. Luca sat down uncertainly, glancing between them. Ilya gave a satisfied nod, pushing Luca in gently before sitting himself.

“Well, Shane? Get us started. You are the man-dating expert, no?” Ilya turned briefly to Luca, studying him. “Unless this innocent-looking one is hiding something?”

“Oh, no. I just moved out of my parents’ place so um, I don’t have much experience at all. With this sort of thing.”

Ilya grinned deviously. “So sweet.”

Shane huffed. “It’s not that sweet. And I literally came out a few weeks ago.”

“Ah, but you are not so inexperienced anymore. It’s what, old hat to you now.”

“Not that old.” Shane picked at the tablecloth.

Luca leaned forward, words blurting out of his mouth. “It was so cool that you came out. Like, *everyone* freaked out. I couldn’t believe it! And not that it should be a big deal but like, it is a big deal, and- well, yeah.” He slumped back, face burning.

Ilya tilted his head, hiding a smile. “Luca, how many posters of Hollander do you have? Are they plastered all over your bedroom?”

“*Ilya.*” Shane smacked his thigh under the table. “Stop teasing him.” He looked at Luca, eyes softening. “I really appreciate that, Luca. I wasn’t really planning on coming out, but I’m glad it meant a lot to you.”

Ilya leaned back in his chair, tapping his chin. “Hollander, what was it that made you come out again? Weren’t you so happy with Rose Landry at first?”

Shane narrowed his eyes, seething. Luca’s eyes darted between them. He cleared his throat, fingers picking at his cuticles.

“Um, do you, uh, miss hockey, Mr.- Shane?”

Shane tore his glare away, forcing his bloodrate down.

“Yeah, I mean, of course. I try not to think about it too much. I’m definitely going to have to double my workout regime when I’m back, I’ve let myself get out of shape.”

Luca’s eyes trailed over what he could see of Shane in his newsboy outfit.

“Doesn’t look that way to me.”

Ilya took a long swig of champagne, the bottle clanking as he reached for more.

“So tell me, little Luca, how long have you been a fan of Hollander’s? Since diapers?”

Luca didn’t seem to take offense, brightening instead.

“Oh yeah, I’ve been watching him forever. I wasn’t super into sports growing up. More of like an indoor kid? But as I got more into art, I found that drawing athletes really tested my skills. Trying to capture the motion, the intensity. And well,” He turned to Shane. “You were so fun to draw. So fast on the ice. So focused.”

A soft smile was drifting across Ilya’s face, reminiscent.

“Ah, so you are an expert in Hollander’s body too.” He leaned into Luca conspiratorially. “Have you noticed how he favors his left just *slightly* during breakaways? It’s always fascinated me since he’s not a lefty. And that little fist bump he does when he’s excited... makes my teeth ache, it’s so sweet.”

Pink spots blossomed over Shane’s cheekbones.

“Oh. I got a knee injury when I was young. In juniors. Right side.”

“Hm.” Ilya nodded. “It does not impact your play, do not worry. Now Luca, do you do commissions? Perhaps you could draw Hollander in his little yoga shorts, getting all sweaty? But instead of his cottage, draw me in the background. I can be in short shorts too.”

Luca made a muffled sound in his throat and Ilya let out a deep laugh.

“I’m assuming you’ve seen his specials too if you’re such a fan. It’s a shame. We should’ve had a watch party together.”

Shane took a deep sip of champagne, wincing at the bubbles.

Luca blinked, trying to focus. “Um, yeah. Well, um, Shane, is your mom as intense as she seems in those videos?”

Shane half-coughed on the liquid as he started to laugh.

“Yeah. Yeah, she can be pretty intense. But in a good way. Mostly. I don’t think I would’ve done most of the things I’ve done without her pushing me to do it.”

“So you’re close, you and your mom?”

“Very.” Shane smiled, Ilya studying his profile. “Maybe too close? I probably need to be more independent. Start making more of my own decisions. Not worry about letting her down so much...and don’t get me wrong, we definitely butt heads. She’s as stubborn as I am. But yeah, she’s - I’m lucky.”

Luca gazed at him for a moment, dopey-eyed. Then he blinked, looking suddenly to Ilya.

“Oh, sorry, I’m not trying to ignore you, Ilya. Are you close with your mom too?”

Ilya’s fingers tightened around his glass. He parted his lips, brain searching for something neutral, and then felt the soft press of Shane’s sandal against his.

“Don’t apologize, Luca. It’s fine to play favorites.” Shane gave Luca a smile, causing his blush to start all over again, and then darted his gaze to Ilya. Ilya gave Shane a small nod, something unfurling in his chest, painful and warm and overwhelming.

The three of them barely had time to change out of their challenge outfits after the date before Ariana appeared again, breaking up the huddle that had formed around Luca as people tried to get to know him. A text had sounded what felt like the second they had reappeared, Cici covering her mouth when her phone pinged.

“Islanders. America has been voting. This evening there will be a surprise elimination.”

Shane had changed in silence, not even tempted to stop as Ilya entered on his way out, stomach already a tense mess. When Ariana arrived, her face was serious, her dress a more somber jewel blue as she floated into the Villa, all amusement from the earlier challenge gone. Shane felt sweat trickle between his shoulderblades, dripping down the back of his dark button-up.

“Islanders.” Ariana exhaled. “Please stand. America has been voting for their favorite couple. When your couple is called, you may sit down. The least popular couple will be eliminated tonight.”

Murmurs sounded around the firepit. Shane felt J.J.’s hand sneak into his own, squeezing once. Shane gave him a tight smile, eyes flicking across the circle at Ilya and Marly.

Ariana motioned to Luca. “Luca, as you had not yet entered the Villa when voting occurred, you are safe from elimination. Please take a seat.”

Luca practically collapsed onto the edge of the firepit’s seating, looking anxiously around the circle.

Ariana raised her chin. “Results will now be revealed in no particular order.”

Jackie’s phone went off. She clicked open the message, trembling.

“Svetlana and Rose are safe from elimination.”

Rose let out a little cry, pressing her lips against Svetlana’s before they took their seats. Hayden gripped Jackie’s hand harder.

From the bench, Rose’s phone went off.

“Cici and Troy, you are also safe from elimination.”

Troy's eyes bugged out, his hands cupping his face as he sank down to sit. Harris exhaled next to Leo, Cici snorting as she shook her head.

"You're lucky I have so many fans, Troy."

Her phone trilled.

"Hayden and Jackie, you are safe from elimination."

Hayden let out a whoop, spinning Jackie off the ground in a tight hug. They took their seats, Jackie pressing a hand over her heart. Shane shifted his weight side to side, his chest feeling increasingly tighter.

Hayden's phone beeped next. He squinted down.

"Leo and Harris, you are safe from elimination."

Shane's breath quickened, his body swaying a little in place.

Harris's phone rang next. He exhaled.

"Scott and Kip, you are also safe from elimination."

Scott let out a low keen, sinking to his knees and pressing his face into Kip's dress pants. Ilya scowled, shaking his head irritably. Shane forced himself to unclench his jaw.

Ariana shook her hair back with a sigh.

"May the couples in the bottom three please step forward."

Connie and Hudson, Ilya and Marly, and Shane and J.J. all took their places at the front of the firepit. Shane scanned the eyes of the safe Islanders he had grown to know, emotion suddenly surging through his body. He leaned into J.J., whispering.

"If we go- I'm so sorry. I know it's my fault and-"

"Hey." J.J. gripped his arm, shaking it slightly. "It is what it is, huh? The journey is the journey."

Shane gave him a tight nod. He darted his eyes over to Ilya, who was staring blankly at the ground, jaw twitching. Shane's breath picked up again, stomach clenching.

Ariana looked between the three couples.

"The next couple safe from elimination is...J.J. and Shane."

Shane felt his knees buckle momentarily, J.J. embracing him in a tight hug. He rubbed the back of his hand over his eyes as they walked to take a seat. Hayden squeezed his knee, the two men leaning into a quick, warm hug. Shane felt his eyes water again, his breath still shaky.

Ariana looked between the final two couples.

“Connie and Hudson, how does it feel to be in the bottom two?”

Hudson let out a sad snort. “Not great, obviously. But you know, even though it’s been such a limited time, Connie and I have had the perfect journey for us. I wouldn’t change it one bit.”

Connie nodded beside him, eyes glassy. “Yeah. It’s been a miracle getting to meet someone like Huddy, here in Fiji of all places. I really hope we have more time, but if not, I’m so grateful for what we did have.”

They gazed at each other for a moment, both letting the tears fall as they cupped each other’s faces. Ariana started tearing up, dabbing gently at her makeup.

“Goodness, boys! Whew.” She shook her head, exhaling. “Connie, any idea what landed you in the bottom two?”

Connie shrugged, smiling. “We’re on a celebrity edition of *Love Island* and we’re two unknown waiters? I get that we probably won’t have the votes compared to other couples. And we kinda stay out of the drama.”

Ariana gave a wise nod, turning to Marly and Ilya.

“And you two are another recent couple. Think your timeframe worked against you tonight?”

“Ah, no, I think we all know that is not the problem.” Ilya smiled ruefully, looking at Marly. “I freak out about Hollander, everyone hates me, no one votes for me. It makes sense. Marly chose poorly.”

Marly clapped him on the back. “Nah, man. Here with you every step of the way.”

“Very well.” Ariana nodded. “The final couple safe from elimination will now be revealed.”

Shane leaned forward, hand braced over his mouth, left leg tapping nervously as he waited. Ariana reached out with a sad smile, squeezing the arms of the two boys on either side of her. She frowned at Ilya, tilting her head.

“Not to ruin the moment, but Ilya-”

“Yes, sorry, fashion accessory, not tumor.”

Ilya unbuttoned his sleeves, pushing the fabric up to his elbows. Both tanned forearms were covered with stacked Rolexes. Shane’s mouth fell open.

Ariana made a noise. “Well. That’s...a choice?”

Ilya shrugged, his voice soft. “Borrowed them from Hollander. In case I go home tonight. Maybe he sends an attorney to get them back. Or hunts me down himself.”

Shane’s throat ached, squeezing tight. He shook his head.

“You’re such an idiot.”

“Yes.” Ilya gave him a smile. “Good-looking idiot, though.”

He rotated his arms, the Rolexes throwing off refractions from the fire as the Islanders letting out half-snorts of laughter.

“Ugh, I hate this part!” Ariana laughed thickly, wiping her eyes again. “Okay.” She straightened. “Our last couple safe is...”

Shane gnawed his lip, Hayden’s hand drawing slow circles on his back.

“Ilya and Marly.”

“*Oh.*” Shane collapsed forward, Hayden squeezing his shoulders with a short laugh.

Ilya and Marly embraced tightly, pounding each other on the back. When they pulled away, Ilya’s face was red and wet. He turned into his shirt, wiping his cheek quickly. They sat on the edge of the bench. Shane couldn’t look, his breath gradually starting to flow more normally.

“That means Connie and Hudson, I am so sorry, but your time has come to an end. Please pack your things and say your goodbyes.”

The Islanders surged to embrace them, tears streaming all around. Shane rocked back and forth in a hug with Connor, finally extracting himself and turning to see Ilya stepping back from Hudson. His stomach only twisted a little bit.

Ilya caught his eye but stood rooted in place. Shane moved forward, pushing through the other Islanders and pausing right in front of him. He still couldn’t look at him directly, muscles shaky, body feeling like it was stuffed with goo. He fixed his eyes on the necklace around Ilya’s neck instead.

“You know, I don’t think this is what Rolex had in mind when they made you an ambassador.”

“No? But I will make them so much money showing off all their products at once, begging for the cute hockey boy to like me back.”

“You already know I like you back.”

“Yes. But I don’t know if you’d come after me.”

Shane reached out, trailing his finger down watch face after watch face after watch face.

“I’d come.” He exhaled, finally bringing his eyes to Ilya’s.

“You would?” It almost sounds like Ilya’s voice cracked.

Shane nodded, Ilya’s blue-green eyes boring into his own. A wave of heat flooded his body.

“Yes. It’s valuable property, after all.” Shane swallowed. “Even if it does make dumb decisions sometimes.”

Ilya took a step closer. “Models are not known for their smarts.”

“No. Especially seeing as this counts as theft.”

“Oh? And what does Shane Hollander do to thieves?”

Shane shook his head, a smile tugging at his lips.

“If you can prove you’re a reformed criminal, I might let you find out.”

NEXT TIME...ON HEATED ISLAND...

Tomorrow night...it’s time for the one, the only, Heartrate Challenge! Whose heart will spike for who? Plus, see which couple closes off, and in the meantime, keep voting on your favorite Islanders!

Chapter End Notes

the goodbye confessions with connie+hudson would be so memeable. rip my kings :')
now what songs do we think our islanders will be grinding to in the heartrate challenge??? (besides leo getting down to buttons, of course)

fix your shit and stay sexy friends!! till next time <3

Chapter 20

Chapter Summary

one couple becomes official, heart rates spike, someone goes home, and the hideaway is now opennn

Chapter Notes

credit to so many s6/s7 moments but especially to the one and only JaNa (and her ass), and incredible tv moments by rob and amaya

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

“Shane. Over here.” Rose hissed across the daybeds, jolting her head to the side.

Shane frowned, saying a quick goodbye to Hayden as he stood up and jogged over.

“What’s going on?”

Rose bit her lip, grinning. “I’m going to make things official with Svetlana.”

“Rose! That’s fantastic!” Shane patted her shoulders as Rose laughed and pulled him into an actual hug. “Do you mean official like, closed off? Or exclusive? Or are you labeling things?”

Rose pulled back. “What are you actually talking about?”

Shane rolled his eyes. “Did any of you even study this show before coming on?” He sighed. “Closed off is basically not entertaining any future bombshells. Exclusive means not exploring with anyone else in the Villa. And labeling is essential being official girlfriends - even once we’re back in the real world.”

“Yeah, that one.” Rose smiled.

“Seriously?” Shane blinked. “Wow. You don’t want to see how things go outside of Fiji first?”

Rose raised her eyebrows. “No, I do not want to let the supermodel I’ve spent, like, twenty hours each day talking to for the past few weeks go back unleashed into the real world. I’m locking her down now.”

Shane pursed his lips. “Okay, fair enough. So what do you need me for?”

Shane collided with Ilya as he passed by the kitchen.

“Oh. Sorry.” Shane swallowed. Ilya had given up on wearing shirts completely, his skin deepening to a tawny hue from the constant sun. “Do you know where Svetlana is?”

“Ah, yes, but she’s busy. Do you know where Rose is?”

Shane narrowed his eyes. “Yes, but she’s also busy.”

A smile tugged up the corner of Ilya’s mouth.

“Is Rose busy planning something romantic that you’re helping with?”

“Possibly.” Shane crossed his arms.

“It is possible for me too.” Ilya let out a short laugh. “Shall we join forces?”

“I suppose that’s allowed.” Shane’s eyes lingered a bit on Ilya’s mouth before he forced himself to focus. “Meet back here in ten?”

“It’s a plan.”

“Rose?” Shane poked his head into the dressing room, where Rose was standing amongst a pile of discarded outfits.

“Ugh, is this okay? I want to look perfect.”

“That dress looks great. Really.” Shane smiled. “Almost good enough to tempt me back.”

Rose snorted. “Well then. You sure?”

“Positive. Hey, Svetlana is waiting where you told me to get her.”

“Shit, okay.” She exhaled, giving herself one more look in the mirror. “Let’s go.”

“Ilya, I’m not done spreading rose petals on the balcony, what is so urgent?”

“Hush, Sveta.” Ilya squinted in the distance. His shoulders loosened.

“What’s going on?” Svetlana looked at him suspiciously, then back at Rose and Shane growing closer.

Rose arrived in front of her, breathless. She reached out her hands, their fingers interlocking.

“Hi, baby.”

“Hi...” Svetlana smiled, tilting her head. “Want to tell me what this is all about?”

Rose smiled.

“We’re standing on the lawn where we first met. Even though I couldn’t see you, couldn’t touch you, I knew there was something between us when we kissed.”

Svetlana murmured something in Russian, her face heating. Hayden and Jackie jogged over, Ilya giving them a small nod.

Hayden cleared his throat. “Now come with us.”

Rose raised her eyebrows, Svetlana starting to laugh. “Tell me, are we headed to the beach?”

Ilya shushed her. “Don’t ruin your own surprise.”

The foursome trailed the couple as they headed to the slight skirt of sand melting into the ocean. Svetlana turned to Rose, smiling.

“My Rose. Before I was intercepted by these meddling boys, I planned to bring you here. Our first date was a beachside picnic, not nearly as private as I wanted.” Rose let out a small laugh. “But it was there I first learned that not only were you a devastatingly good kisser, even when not blindfolded and cuffed, but that you also had such a big heart and such a fascinating mind.”

“Sveta.”

Rose pouted, her eyes blinking fast. Svetlana leaned in, gracing her with a soft kiss.

Scott cleared his throat behind them, Kip at his side.

“I require your presence at the swinging bench.”

Rose let out a laugh. “I cannot *believe* we had the same idea.”

“In sync, no?” Svetlana leaned in for another kiss, their hands swinging as they followed Scott and Kip to the bench.

“Okay.” Rose did a small twirl as they reached the bench, turning to face Svetlana. “This is important because it’s where-”

“- we said we liked each other for the first time.” Svetlana stroked Rose’s cheek, Rose melting into the touch.

“Wow, this is so embarrassing, Sveta, you have a huge crush.”

Svetlana turned, snapping with a smile.

“Shut up, Ilyusha, yours is bigger.”

Shane blushed, clearing his throat in Cici's direction, Troy hovering behind her.

"Right." Cici clapped. "To the photobooth!"

The group crossed the Villa, picking up steam. Once outside the photobooth, they turned to the couple expectantly.

Svetlana gave Rose a sneaky grin.

"You remember why this place is important, yes?"

"Yes..." Rose's cheeks pinked.

Shane made a face at Ilya, who elbowed Leo.

"Right, we don't need the details. To the firepit!" Leo headed off, Harris slowing to walk in step with Troy.

The Islanders filled in around the firepit, sitting down as Svetlana and Rose brought up the rear.

Rose reached for Svetlana's hands.

"And here is where we chose each other. Again, and again, and again."

Svetlana nodded furiously, her eyes catching Rose's before moving to the ground, blinking fast. At last, Svetlana swallowed, voice thick with emotion.

"Final stop. Come upstairs with me."

Rose nodded, Svetlana pulling her towards the stairs. Marly got up to follow them but Ilya reached a hand out, shaking his head.

The Islanders talked among themselves in murmurs, quieting at once as Svetlana's curls appeared on the balcony overlooking the lawn. Rose appeared next to her a moment later. They watched as Svetlana spoke, then Rose, and then there was a very long kiss. They parted, and leaned over the balcony, intertwined hands jutting into the sky.

"WE'RE GIRLFRIENDS!"

Rose hopped up and down, Svetlana grinning wide as the Islanders below broke into wild applause. Shane looked towards Ilya, Ilya's eyes suspiciously glassy as he looked up at Svetlana. He cast his gaze towards Shane and for a moment they held there, locking, something in Shane's chest settling.

Marly sniffed, tears streaming down his face as pulled back from a hug Luca.

"I love them so much."

Ilya shook his head, biting back a smile. "You have known them for barely a week."

“Whatever, dude, it’s just,” Marly let out another shaky sob, Luca patting him hesitantly on the back. “Like, love is love, man. Love is love.”

Marly looked across the firepit towards J.J., his lip starting to tremble all over again.

Cici sighed, looking up at the balcony wistfully. “Crazy to have our first official couple.”

“Well, not the *first*.”

Everyone looked at Scott, including Kip.

“What? We’ve already been closed off.”

Kip’s mouth opened slightly, then closed. He lowered his voice and leaned towards Scott.

“Um. Have we?”

“Seriously?” Scott’s voice cracked. He stared at Kip. “I can’t believe you’re saying this. You don’t want to be closed off? What, you want to explore the cute babyfaced blonde?”

“Whoa, honey, slow down.” Kip squeezed Scott’s arm. “I just don’t remember us having that discussion?”

“That *discussion* was the look we both had in our eyes when we first met?! I cannot believe you’re saying this!” Scott shook his arm free, storming off.

Kip sighed and followed him, Luca purposefully avoiding his gaze.

The Islanders began to disassemble, drifting back out across the Villa. J.J. headed over to Marly, wrapping him in a bear hug and wiping his still flowing tears.

Shane felt a bump to his shoulder.

“Pretty romantic, yes?”

Shane gave Ilya a soft smile. “Very.”

“Better than any of those romcoms Sveta used to make me watch.”

They gazed up at the balcony together. Ilya leaned in closer, his voice a low rumble against Shane’s ear.

“Want to be my date to the wedding?”

Shane turned his head, his lips millimeters from Ilya’s.

“I GOT A TEXT!” J.J. held his phone over his head, beaming. “My first one!” He peered down at the screen. “Islanders. Start stretching, because tonight is the Heartrate Challenge! Whose dance moves will spike the most heart rates?”

The Islanders whooped. Ilya moved even closer to Shane. “Mm, new plan. Wedding date after. Dance partner first.”

“You wish.” Shane turned to him, their lips almost skimming.

Ilya’s eyelids lowered as Shane tilted his lips back more, running his fingertips over Ilya’s throat. Ilya’s pulse jumped beneath his touch. Shane smirked.

“Wow. You won’t even need a dance for me to spike your heartrate.”

Ilya’s eyes flew open, scoffing immediately despite the flush creeping up his neck.

“Ah, so if I touch you right now, your pulse won’t quicken?”

Shane took a step back, still grinning.

“Guess you’ll have to touch me and find out.”

“It’s time, Islanders!” Ariana spread open her arms in front of the firepit.

Cameras captured every inch of her neon pink dress that featured a large heart cut-out over her chest, smaller cut-outs scattered lower to the hem.

“Now, you’ve all been equipped with heart rate monitors to measure which Islander’s performance gets your heart pumping the most. Obviously on this show, all things go in challenges unless your couple has decided otherwise. I suggest leaving it all on the dance floor, but beware. Data doesn’t lie...”

She clapped her hands together, looking towards Luca.

“Luca is going to start us off. The rest of you can take a seat, a deep drink of water, and get ready to enjoy the *show*! Let’s raise some heart rates!”

The Islanders burst into shouting and applause, cheering Luca as he jogged off with a producer to change into his challenge outfit. J.J. leaned into Shane.

“We’re cool to do whatever, right?”

“Of course.” Shane furrowed his eyebrows. “It’s a challenge.”

“Right, cool, that’s what I figured, I think that’s what most people are doing.”

J.J. glanced across the firepit at where Marly was sitting. Shane followed his gaze, eyes drifting to Ilya instead.

Music started blaring, some new pop song Shane wasn’t familiar with. It must have made Luca feel confident - the producers let them dance to their own music even though they’d replace it by airing. The Islanders straightened, straining to see Luca. He finally emerged out of the entryway and strode up to the firepit, hips swaying to the music. Luca gave a slow

twirl, letting the Islanders appreciate his bare chest and tiny plaid shorts before he snapped his suspenders and pushed up his pair of oversized glasses.

“Class is in session!” Luca warbled out, grinning a bit as the Islanders cheered louder.

He swung a leg over Cici, gyrating clumsily as he tried to remember lines producers had clearly fed him.

“Um, I can teach you a thing or two, young lady!”

Cici squealed, smacking his ass as he dismounted. Luca moved onto Troy, kissing up his neck, Troy not stopping him when he hovered over his mouth. The Islanders burst into louder applause as Luca slipped his tongue in, Troy grinning through the kiss before breaking it with a wolf whistle.

Hair mused, Luca moved onto Kip. Scott shot him a look and Kip kissed Luca’s cheek instead. Luca kept moving down the line, shaking ass and giving kisses to whoever would receive them. When he reached Shane, Shane reminded himself to stay still to keep his heart rate steady. He kept his hands at his sides, stonefaced as Luca flushed in front of him, rotating his hips.

Rose scoffed, batting Shane’s shoulder.

“It’s supposed to be fun, Shane, Jesus.”

“It’s a competition, Rose, and I’m going to win.”

She shook her head, grabbing Luca’s suspenders and pulling him onto her lap instead. Once Luca was done with her, he moved onto Marly and then Ilya. Shane noticed Ilya had stolen his strategy of nonreaction, literally sitting on his hands with his eyes closed as Luca bent over in front of him. Luca leaned back farther, sinking into Ilya as he rubbed up and down, and Ilya tensed, tossing a panicked look at Shane.

Shane’s brow furrowed. He supposed it was in his best interest to keep all heart rates low so Shane had a better chance of winning himself. He called over.

“Make sure to breathe through your nose, Ilya! Restricting your breathing will only raise your heart rate faster!”

Next to him, Rose let out a loud exhale.

“Shane. My sweet stupid idiot.”

“What?” Shane looked away from Leo, who was devouring Luca’s face. “If everyone keeps their heartrate down, it’ll be easier for me to win comparatively.”

“Yes, that’s the only reason Ilya’s not touching a hot boy. Not because he’s rightfully scared shitless after his last trip to Paris.”

Applause broke out, Islanders standing to their feet as Luca took a bow in front of them before skipping off to change. Scott disappeared next to get ready for his performance.

Shane looked from Rose to Ilya and then back again, processing.

Marly shook his head. "I don't think I'll beat that. It was almost hotter that he was so nervous? I wanted to just bite him, ugh."

Ilya snorted, withdrawing his arm from Marly's biting motions. "Yes, his glasses were very adorable."

Shane looked over with a glare.

"Big deal, I wear glasses."

Ilya looked over at Shane, eyebrows raised. Shane flushed. A smile spread over Ilya's face.

"Oh? When are you going to show me these glasses? Will you do a little dance with them too?"

"Shut up, asshole." Shane crossed his arms, leaning forward to look for Scott, a small smile betraying him nonetheless.

Shane did his best to tune out Scott's performance, which was essentially a gross mating call for Kip, who smiled gleefully the whole time. Scott was bold enough to draw his tongue up the side of Ilya's face and, after catching Shane's glare, come over to deliver the same before Ilya let out a stream of Russian and Shane shoved Scott away playfully.

Ilya shook his head, lip curled.

"Sit down before you break a hip, Hunter."

"Yeah? If you say so." Scott motioned to Shane's lap, moving closer. Ilya cursed again.

"Take him to a home, Kip, he is clearly losing his fucking mind!"

"Gladly." Kip grinned even wider, extending his hand towards Scott. "Lemme take you home, baby."

Scott pulled Kip towards the front of the firepit, smiling deviously. Scott began doing the usual grinding, Islanders whooping as he rolled up and down on Kip's body, but then he and Kip seemed to forget there was an audience.

"Oh. I don't want to see that." Svetlana turned away, Scott and Kip's faces pressing together as their hips started jerking together frantically.

"All right, boys! Okay!" Ariana clapped loudly from the sidelines, not unlike correcting a misbehaving pet. "Back to your seats now!"

The Islanders barely had time to settle before the seductive beat of *Buttons* flooded the Villa. Leo strutted out with a cap pulled down over his eyes, an oversized blazer hiding most of his body. A long black feather boa drifted almost to the floor. Leo paused in front of the firepit, music swelling as he did a few slow body rolls, his muscular legs flexing. Then he leaned forward, mini leopard-print shorts finally emerging as he shook his ass back, the Islanders roaring with approval. At the next crescendo, Leo tore open his blazer, buttons popping in every direction. The cheers were deafening, Shane the only one not stomping his feet. He pressed a finger to his pulse, trying to regulate.

Leo started moving around the circle, pausing in front of Shane to thrust his leopard-print covered bulge up and down in his face. The feather boa tickled Shane, Leo sliding it around the back of his neck as he thrust. Shane pushed down a grin and tried to remember his breathing, even as he heard Ilya's laugh down the line, Leo flushed and proud.

Leo dismounted from Shane and crawled slowly to Luca. He paused when he arrived, lowering his face to Luca's feet. His tongue traced a circle around his ankle and then drew a slick line up his leg as the Islanders screamed. Finally, Leo pulled Harris to the front as his couple. Harris laid down flat, Leo flipping around and shaking ass in his face, biceps flexing as his ass bounced up and down. At last, the music cut off and Leo gave one last growl before prancing off stage, the whole Villa going wild behind him.

It all became a blur after that. Harris was next, outfitted with puppy ears and a leash. Troy barked along eagerly to the Sir-Mix-a-Lot song Harris chose and had a bit too much fun with his leash, Cici looking on disapprovingly. Jackie followed, tottering on tall heels that matched her sexy nurse outfit. She made a big deal of checking Hayden for concussions while leaning him into her low-cut top, and got a standing ovation from Rose and Svetlana for giving Cici an extended kiss, which seemed to perk her up after Harris's performance. Jackie ended with Hayden spread-eagle on the ground, his shirt torn open for chest compressions, her mouth on his as she gave him life-saving mouth-to-mouth. Shane stood and clapped with the others as Jackie bowed, forgetting for a moment that going from sitting to standing would inevitably raise his heart rate.

Shane did not feel the urge to stand after Kip's performance. He supposed it was sickly sweet to watch Kip croon the lyrics from Demi Lovato's "Fast" to Scott, even if he was thrusting his dick at everyone while doing so.

J.J. came out next, wearing a barely there cowboy outfit that did make Shane avert his eyes, his pulse accelerating noticeably. Shane's arms stayed stiff as J.J. rolled seductively over his lap while "Pony" played, hoping nothing else would get stiff as well. They kissed briefly, a familiar shiver thrilling for a moment in Shane's stomach. Then it faded - no lasting heat, no urge for more. J.J. pulled back with a little smile, something tender in his eyes, and then he was off lassoing his next victim.

For his finale, J.J. reached out to Marly instead of Shane. Marly looked to Shane, confused, and Shane nodded to him. Marly sprung to his feet, letting J.J. guide him to the front of the firepit and tie him up with the lasso before dragging his tongue up and down his body. Then J.J. gestured for Marly to get on all fours and he rode him off for a few jolting steps before staggering off with a laugh, giving Marly one last deep kiss before jogging off.

Svetlana followed J.J. off and before long, music started in the distance. As the first few bars of “yes baby” by Madison Beer played, Rose stood to her feet in anticipation.

“Prepare yourselves, y’all!”

Svetlana came around the corner, clad in white lingerie, a veil hitting at her thighs. She held a bouquet in front of her, pausing for a moment in a pose before striding towards the Islanders with her signature model walk. Rose faux-fainted onto Shane’s lap, kicking her feet in the air.

“That’s my *girlllll!*”

Svetlana smirked, dropping her bouquet and taking her time as she worked her way down the line. Shane’s heart stopped as she paused in front of Ilya, her hands tracing over his chest like muscle memory. She traced a gloved finger over Ilya’s chin, tilting his face towards Shane, and before Shane knew it, she was sliding onto his lap instead. Shane’s hands hovered, his vision a blur of white lace. Svetlana’s hair bounced as she moved over him, her hands firm as she covered Shane’s and placed them on her ass. Shane looked back at Ilya, almost laughing at his scowl, and gripped Svetlana harder, her body fluid as she rolled over him, Rose smacking her ass from the other side.

Svetlana finally dismounted, reaching for Rose’s hand and kissing up her arm before bringing her to the front. Cici let out a cheer as Svetlana pulled Rose closer, their bodies moving in sync, fingers tangled in each other’s hair as they kissed. At last they parted, Svetlana bending to scoop up her bouquet from the ground. She dipped back, tossing it in a high arch behind her, and the Islanders’ applause doubled as Shane blinked down at his hands, ruffled flowers somehow resting between his fingers.

Shane left the bouquet behind on his seat, following the producers into the changing area to prepare for his turn, his heart thudding harder than it had all evening. He quickly shed his clothes, folding them on the chair in the changing stall. Then he pulled on the tight leather shorts he had chosen and slid the matching deep cherry harness over his bare torso. He swallowed, and stepped back out. A producer gave him a nod, starting the song Shane secretly always used as his personal pump-up jam.

...na-na-na come on...

Shane turned the corner, spotting the chair he had asked for waiting behind the firepit. The low heels of his boots clicked against the pavement, his palm starting to sweat over the handle of his flogger. The Islanders came into view, cheers starting already. Shane raised his jaw. He would win.

The beat deepened, thudding in Shane’s ears as he brought the flogger into the air, bringing it down with a loud crack. The Islanders cheered louder, Ilya stretching his arms out, fingers scrambling over people’s eyes.

“No one look! Turn away!”

Shane didn’t break his stride, heading straight towards Ilya. He hauled him roughly to his feet, shoving him into the chair. Ilya’s voice was low against his cheek.

“Wearing a throwback outfit for me, Shane?”

Handcuffs clicked around Ilya’s wrists bound behind the chair. Shane pulled back with a smile, projecting his voice.

“All flights to Paris have been cancelled.” He turned, throwing Ilya a look over his shoulder. “You can sit there and watch.”

The Islanders whooped louder, Shane’s boots striking the ground as Ilya’s mouth fell open in a half-smile, his wrists jerking once against the metal.

Shane did not hold back. He started with Luca, trailing the flogger up his legs as he pushed them open, Luca’s face redder than Shane’s outfit. Shane handed the flogger to Luca, arching his back over Luca’s lap as his eyes caught on Ilya with a grin. Shane reached for Harris, pulling his lips to his as Luca brought down the flogger on Shane’s ass with a tentative smack. Shane straightened with a grin, Harris and Luca both cherry-cheeked, Leo grabbing Troy next to him as he squealed.

Shane then turned to Rose, ducking down between legs and prompting her to shriek. He wrapped his biceps around her thighs and stood, curling her up and down as she clung to his neck. Shane dumped her back into Svetlana’s lap before grabbing both women, pressing them to his lips in a three-way kiss. He released, giving Rose a wink.

“Thanks for being my first couple.”

He moved on, Rose sinking off the bench and onto the ground, mouth open as she fanned herself, Svetlana nearly crying with laughter. Shane looked over his shoulder at Ilya, his eyes tracking Shane like a hunter.

Hayden was next, his eyes widening as Shane swung a leg up and sunk into a straddle over his lap, his pecs pressing into Hayden’s face.

“Those hockey stretches do wonders, Hollander!” Ilya called out, metal clinking again as his wrists flexed. “You should not waste them on Pike!”

Shane turned, flipping to grind his ass into Hayden as he faced Ilya with a smirk. He raised Hayden’s hands, pressing them over his pecs and dragging them down his body, Ilya shaking his head in response.

“He was not a good couple, Shane! Let Jackie have him!”

Shane stood up with a snort, gyrating the few steps over to Scott and Kip before sinking into a partial split before them. Despite the music and the Islanders’ screams, Shane was sure he could hear Ilya’s breath change, his pulse no doubt hammering by now. From the ground, Shane reached up, sliding first Scott’s and then Kip’s fingers into his mouth, head bobbing with ease. Now he could hear Ilya easily, the Russian curses carrying over the beat.

“Hunter is a million years old, you are risking a heart attack!”

Shane grinned, sliding their fingers deep before pulling them out, his tongue flicking at the tips. He reached J.J., turning and bending at the waist as he shook his ass, hoping his practice session with Rose earlier that day had paid off. J.J. cheered appreciatively. Shane's eyes flicked to Ilya, checking in, and eased as he caught Ilya's face.

Marly sat next to J.J., biting his fingertip with an eager expression as Shane came closer. Shane grinned, dropping to his knees and drawing his tongue in the air right above his crotch, Marly's hips bucking in response. Shane rose, sliding sideways onto his lap and crossing his legs as he leaned back coquettishly.

"I don't know, Rozanov, is it worth a taste?" Shane trailed a finger over Marly's chest, dipping lower towards his waistband.

"No, for the millionth time, it was not worth it! I would take it back if I could!" Ilya arched against his chair, chest pushing forward, a ghost of a smile darting over his face.

Shane laughed, leaning down to kiss Marly. He kissed dirty, tongue slipping in as he devoured Marly's mouth. All the while he felt Ilya's eyes taking in every inch of his body, pinpricks of pleasure exploding as he performed under his gaze. Shane finally pulled back, a string of saliva still connecting them, and ran a thumb over Marly's lips. Shane stood, crossing over to fetch his flogger from Luca as Marly swooned into J.J., the other Islanders pounding their feet against the ground as they cheered.

Shane thwacked the flogger against his palm as he strode to Ilya.

"Now. What should I do with you?"

Ilya's eyes raked over him, dark with desire.

"Absolutely anything you want."

Ilya's eyes dipped down between his own thighs, his legs spreading slightly for Shane. Shane swallowed at the bulge there, his resistance breaking. Shane straddled Ilya, his thick thighs pressing against Ilya's as they locked together, both letting out a low moan. Shane hitched his hips forward, pressing closer against Ilya's chest. Ilya angled his lips to his ear.

"I fucking love it when you come back to me."

Shane said nothing, just swallowed Ilya's lips in a burst of furious desire, his hands yanking against Ilya's curls. Ilya's hands rattled behind the chair, his fingers touching only air.

"You should close your eyes." Shane murmured. "Like you're blindfolded."

Ilya gazed at Shane's flushed face, his freckles bright against the pink, and then obeyed. The world went dark. Ilya gasped as sudden suction erupted on his throat, his skin more sensitive with the lack of sight. Ilya let his head loll back, Shane's lips devouring him, his stiffness pressing down hard against Ilya's hips.

The last beats of the song sounded and Shane slowed, his tongue lazily licking over Ilya's earlobe.

“You’ve been my favorite couple, you know. My favorite person to kiss. Despite it all.”

Ilya’s heart stuttered. His eyes flew open, studying Shane.

“Are you saying that because you mean it, or because you want to win?”

Shane’s thumb moved over Ilya’s wrist coiled behind the chair. He hovered over Ilya’s pulse point with a grin, then released the handcuffs.

“Why can’t it be both?”

Shane returned to the firepit in his civilian clothes, smugly sitting back down and receiving claps on the back with a smile. He purposely did not look over at Ilya, even when ‘Hotel Room Service’ started playing and Marly emerged in what could only be described as a sexy maid outfit.

He brandished a feather duster above his head as the music blared.

“I’m here to clean up *all* your messes! And I sure see some dirty boys and girls!”

Marly didn’t hesitate, immediately launching into a string of Magic Mike-esque dance moves. Shane wondered briefly if he had danced professionally. Marly gyrated on the floor in front of them, his maid skirt apparently backless, tight briefs revealed as Marly made love to the ground. He popped up, hands caressing everyone, his bulge seemingly everywhere at once. Marly finally made his way to Ilya as the song neared the end, booping him on the nose with his feather duster.

“I know you said no touching, so let me please you hands-free.” Marly gave the Islanders a big wink, foot planting on the bench next to Ilya, his hips starting to rock towards his face.

Shane’s throat tightened, even as he saw Ilya’s hands anchored at his sides, the Rolex glinting on his wrist. J.J. looked at Shane, then cupped his hands over his mouth.

“Hey Mr. Worldwide! Forget about your boyfriend!” J.J. patted his lap. “I got all the hands you need.”

Ilya grinned, shoving Marly off with a sloppy kiss to his cheek. Marly strode over to J.J. with a wide smile. He lifted him one-handed, J.J. letting out a shriek, then eased him back down to his seat as their lips found each other. Shane edged away to avoid the way Marly’s hips were thrusting, clapping along with the other Islanders to the beat as the song faded out.

After Marly bowed, then turned around for a curtsy to show off his ass again, he headed off for the changing room. Ilya followed close behind to prepare for his turn. Shane returned to his steady breathing: in through the nose, out through the mouth. He tried to keep his mind calm, blank, unexciting. But Images kept breaking through. Maybe Ilya would be in some kind of uniform, giving Shane orders...He shook his head. Back to breathing. Maybe some kind of gladiator costume, muscles exposed and flexing...Shane pinched his thigh, forcing

himself back to the present. He swallowed as two producers wheeled a freestanding pole to the front of the firepit, setting the base down with a heavy thunk.

Marly returned, sliding next to J.J. with a smile, their hands squeezing together. Rose gripped Shane's shoulder, smiling slyly. Shane rolled his eyes, shrugging her off. He straightened, ears straining to hear the music that had started.

There were no heavy beats, no pounding lyrics. It was soft. Tantalizing. Slow.

Ilya emerged and Shane stopped breathing completely.

He had seen Ilya's modeling campaigns. All of them. He'd memorized each look, each stance, all under the excuse of improving his own campaigns and under the lie that something else wasn't drawing him in.

And still. He had never seen Ilya like this.

The walk was trademark Rozanov - all long, powerful legs obliterating the path forward. But his feet were in heels, sky-high blue ones that made him even larger than life. His curls were pushed to one side, his eyelids sparkling, lips outlined. None of it was over the top, or cheap, or for a laugh. He was editorial. He was miraculous.

And what prevented any hope of keeping Shane's heart rate at a respectable level was Ilya's muscular body cloaked in Shane's jersey, the oversized uniform hanging off one sleek shoulder and skimming - just barely - over the tops of his thighs.

The Islanders were not hollering or whooping. They sat silently, in awe as Ilya looked only at Shane, his eyes dark and feline as the singer crooned on.

...bring me back to life...oh, spring me new...

Ilya reached a hand up to the pole, fingers wrapping one by one around the metal. It was deliberate enough for Shane to notice the plastic ring on his finger, gaudy and ridiculous and theirs. Ilya's other hand reached higher and then he was airborne, body lifting into the air and spinning in a blur of blue and red, HOLLANDER flashing on the back before Shane's eyes.

Shane watched, hypnotized, his mouth slightly open. Ilya's muscles flexed as he inverted, jersey dropping to reveal a flash of a lacy blue g-string before he flipped upward again. The Islanders' cheering came from far off, Shane's ears fuzzy. Shane had heard the guys in the locker room talk about puck bunnies, groupies, the women they slept with and then discarded. He knew he'd never have that. Never wanted that, not really. Wanted it only so the anvil would disappear from over his head, threatening annihilation. But this, Ilya, muscles straining beneath the lace - it *was* unraveling him. Wish fulfillment on steroids. The girl he was always supposed to want and the man he tried to deny.

Ilya's heels fell onto the stage with a clap as he landed from another spin. He sank down deeper, his legs spreading outward as Shane's face heated.

Slowly, tantalizingly, Ilya crawled towards him, Shane's jersey swaying over the arch of his back. Eyes still trained on Shane's, Ilya lifted one of Shane's legs over his shoulder, tongue sending a delicate stripe up Shane's calf. He returned it gently to the ground, his head snapping to the left and then the right.

"Look away, perverts. This is for Hollander only."

Hayden huffed. "Dude, that's literally not how this challenge works."

"I know, you're *so* jealous, Pike. Shut up and close your eyes."

"I'm not closing-"

Jackie yanked Hayden's face to hers with a grin, shutting him up with a kiss.

Ilya straddled Shane, the jersey pooling around his thighs. He studied him for a moment, a soft smile on his face, and then he tilted Shane's jaw up for a deep kiss.

Shane tried to remember how words worked. Ilya's makeup was even more cutting and breathtaking up close, his face all angles and artpiece.

"Ilya...you're not touching anyone else..."

"So smart, my Shane." Ilya slid Shane's hands up under his jersey, guiding him to the sparkly red pasties on his pecs.

Shane let out a low whimper, his thumbs rubbing over Ilya's nipples, hidden from view. Ilya wrapped his hand around Shane's throat, just enough to thrill, dipping his tongue in for another deep kiss. Shane bucked up, grabbing Ilya's ass, lips chasing him as Ilya pulled back with a grin. Shane's hands traced up and down his back, his fingertips lighting on his own name stitched across the back with a shiver.

"Only you, Shane." Ilya whispered to him, the plastic ring catching against Shane's jaw.

"But you're gonna...you'll lose..." Shane tried to keep his eyes from fluttering shut, his senses overpowered.

Ilya let out a low chuckle.

"We have different definitions of losing."

His hands grabbed Shane's waist, pressing him closer as he swallowed a new wave of moans, the song winding to an end in the background.

...bring me back to life...oh, fly me through...oh, can't wait another moment to unravel me, unravel you...

Hayden flicked Shane's shoulder on the daybed, the sun beginning to set in the sky.

“You seem to be taking the loss surprisingly well.”

Shane shrugged, a vague flicker of frustration in his chest.

“I guess Marly earned it.”

Shane thought of Ilya’s thigh pressing against his as Ariana read out the results. How everyone heard how Ilya’s heart rate had raised the most for Shane, and vice versa. Hayden looked over at him, studying his profile.

“I heard that in his confessional, Ilya was babbling over your performance.”

Shane tried to stop his lips from smiling and failed. He shrugged again. Hayden flopped onto his back.

“Shane Hollander. Man of few words.”

Shane snorted, lying down too, his shoulder skimming Hayden’s.

“Is that why you left me for Jackie?”

Hayden laughed, turning to Shane and wiggling his eyebrows.

“Hey, you still have time before the recoupling to convince me otherwise.”

Shane leaned forward in exaggerated slow-motion, his tongue dipping out of his mouth. Hayden pushed him away with another laugh.

“*Gross*, dude.”

“Mm, that’s not what you used to say.”

“Yeah, yeah.” Hayden looked away, cheeks pinking. Shane bumped his shoulder.

“You’re happy with Jackie, though? It’s still going good?”

“Yeah.” Hayden nodded, sighing deeply. “Really good.”

“Good.”

They laid there for a moment, breathing quietly before Shane spoke again.

“I think J.J. is going to couple with Marly.”

“Oh? What gave you that idea?” Hayden’s lips quirked.

They both glanced towards the beanbags, where Marly was in J.J.’s lap like an oversized lap dog. Hayden looked back to Shane.

“Don’t try to pick me now. You’ve lost your chance, mister.”

Shane rolled his eyes, picking at the hem of his shirt.

“Do you think-” He sighed. “Can I trust him?”

Hayden let out a long sigh, contemplating.

“I wanted to beat the shit out of him, Shane. Seriously. What he put you through?” He glanced over, shaking his head. “But the thing is, I think you already do.”

Shane’s voice was small. “Is it stupid? If I do?”

Hayden shifted on the day bed, his hands resting over his stomach.

“Listen. I don’t know what I’d do if Jackie did something like that. But I know how hard it would be to walk away. Especially if she was trying to make up for it.” He sighed again, propping himself up on an elbow. “As much as I hate to say it, he’s obviously all in for you. He was stupid as *fuck* but...none of that stuff meant anything to him.”

“No?”

“C’mon, Shane. You know that.” Hayden looked at him with a small smile before flopping back down. “But you might want to invest in a chastity belt just to be safe.”

Shane snorted. “It’s a chastity cage, actually.”

“Jesus, you guys are freaks.” Hayden ran a hand over his face, huffing.

Shane smiled at the sky, his hand reaching out to squeeze Hayden’s. They laid there, staring up at the last streaks of sunlight.

“Hey Hayd? Thanks for everything.”

“You’re welcome, bud. And listen. If you two do recouple tonight, please just let me get my earplugs in first before lights out.”

Shane grinned. “I can try. But no promises...”

Ariana stood in front of the firepit, the fire flicking ominously. Shane darted his eyes towards Ilya. Ariana motioned to Luca at her side.

“Luca, as our newest bombshell, you are safe tonight and will have first choice of who to couple with.”

He stepped forward.

“Right. Well. As much as I enjoyed my, uh, interesting twosome date, I’ve also enjoyed getting to know the other great Islanders here. So I want to couple up with this boy because he’s fun, caring, and he’s definitely open-minded. And I think there’s a lot more to discover beneath the surface. So, the boy I choose to couple up with is...Leo.”

The Islanders clapped, Leo beamed as he rose to meet Luca with a kiss. They locked hands, Luca's cheeks glowing as they sat down.

Rose was next. She tossed her hair behind her shoulders.

"While you all know which girl I'm going to pick, I want to take a minute to sing her praises. Never have I met someone as devastatingly attractive, cunning, talented, and interesting as her. She keeps me on my toes, in her arms, and often on my back." Rose winked, Shane shaking his head. "So, the *girlfriend* I want to pick is...Svetlana!" Rose hesitated, smiling, her mouth moving awkwardly over the foreign words. "Вот это моя девочка."

Shane looked to Ilya, his face openly tender as the women embraced.

Jackie went next, Hayden blushing as she delivered her speech, and then Kip, Scott practically vibrating until his name was called. Troy followed, stringing together some stilted sentences about his *Love Island* journey also being a journey of self-exploration before he called Harris's name, the Islanders cheering longer than usual. J.J. stood next, exhaling a bit beside Ariana.

"All right. So. I want to couple up with this boy because he truly is one-of-a-kind. He's so open with his heart and has never once made me doubt myself. I love how honest he is, even when he does shit like suggesting a foursome--"

Marly spread his hands out in defense. "I swear Leo and Luca were coming onto *us*!"

J.J. laughed, shaking his head. "Anyway. I hope this boy and I can make the most of our time left together. Just the two of us - to start." The Islanders laughed. "The boy I chose to couple up with is...Marly!"

Shane clapped along, watching the two men kiss, his heart beginning to accelerate.

"Shane?" Ariana gestured to her side. "You're the last to recouple. Ilya and Cici remain single." Cici rolled her eyes.

"Right." Shane gave a small smile. "Not to spoil, but I choose this boy to couple with for many reasons. We've both made mistakes. We've both been scared to trust each other. But I've seen how he opens up for me in ways he doesn't for others. I've watched how he repairs what's broken. I've felt how much he cares even when he tries to hide it. I don't want him to cover himself in a thousand watches to get me to stay. I want him to know I will. So, the boy I choose to couple up with is...Ilya."

Ilya strode over to him in three paces, his eyes misty. He grabbed Shane's face with both hands, pressing a warm kiss to his lips.

"Finally," he murmured as he broke the kiss. Shane nodded back, their foreheads pressing together.

Ariana smiled, gesturing for them to sit. "Unfortunately, this leaves Cici single and vulnerable. Cici, please join me."

Ariana looked across the Islanders. “America has been voting. The two Islanders with the fewest votes will now join Cici as vulnerable for elimination.”

Troy’s phone pinged. Harris looked at him, face tight, and pressed a quick kiss to his lips before Troy rose to join Cici.

“Karma...” Cici sang under her breath.

Kip’s phone went off next. He gave a sad shrug, squeezing Scott’s hand and rising to his feet. Scott sat shell-shocked, his mouth open.

Ariana exhaled, looking at the three Islanders beside her before facing forward.

“You as the fellow Islanders will determine who stays. One by one, you will be called to stand behind the Islander you want to keep. Whoever has the least Islanders standing behind them will be sent home.”

“*What?*” Marly’s lip trembled. “We don’t want to do that!”

Leo and Luca huddled together, Harris wiping his eyes next to them.

Ariana nodded sadly. “I know this is difficult. Rose, please rise and choose your Islander.”

Rose swallowed, smoothing her dress as she stood. She walked slowly over to Cici, sliding behind her. Cici blinked rapidly, mouthing *thank you*. Rose nodded back.

“Us girls have to stick together.”

“That’s *bullshit*.” Scott rose to his feet. “I swear to god, Rose, I thought we were friends!” He turned to the rest of the Islanders, voice rising. “If Kip goes tonight, you won’t be sending just him home. You’ll be sending *two* home!”

Ilya yanked Scott’s pant loop, forcing him to sit.

“Careful, old man, you will give yourself another heart attack.”

Ariana raised her eyebrows. “Harris, it’s your turn.”

Harris went immediately to Troy, kissing him briefly as he stood behind him.

“Scott. Though I don’t think it will be a surprise?”

Scott didn’t respond to Ariana, bee-lining instantly to Kip and wrapping him in a long kiss.

Svetlana joined Cici, standing behind Rose. Jackie went behind Troy: “for Casa.” Shane hesitated, then stood behind Kip, Scott finally stopping his death-glare in Shane’s direction. Next was Leo. He hesitated, then slowly made his way over to Cici.

“I love my boys bad, but Cici is my OG freak for freak. We went through so much together in here. I gotta have her back.”

Cici nodded, sniffing, her mascara running beneath her oversized falsies as she squeezed Leo's hand.

Hayden followed Jackie behind Troy, and Ilya followed Shane behind Kip. J.J. and Marly remained, holding hands as they waited for who would be called next.

"J.J., please choose your Islander."

J.J. let out a heavy breath, making his way to Troy. "That's my Casa boy. I have to stick beside him."

"Marly. You are the final vote. Troy has four Islanders behind him. Cici and Kip have three. Your decision will decide who goes home."

Marly sniffed, rubbing his eyes into his forearm briefly.

"Fuck, this sucks. I *hate* that this will end someone's journey." He exhaled. "Okay. I'm choosing this because I love love so fucking much. But Cici, I swear, you're a baddie, and you're gonna find that person."

Marly made his way to Kip. Scott, Shane, and Ilya patted him on the back as he went to the back of the line, his tears still flowing. Cici sank silently to her knees, hands rising over her mouth, Rose rubbing circles on her back.

Ariana looked at her sadly. "Cici, this means that your time on *Love Island* has come to an end. Please gather your belongings and say your goodbyes."

Svetlana and Rose surrounded her, rocking her in a hug. The other Islanders came over one by one, saying farewells and trailing her as she went into the dressing room, throwing her clothes into her suitcase. Once packed, she walked down the staircase, Islanders following her like a massive shadow. Leo grabbed her for a final hug, whispering something into her ear that made her snort through her tears. And then she was gone, suitcase clanking into the darkness before fading completely from sight.

Leo's phone went off. He cursed, rubbing his face as he opened it.

"What now?"

His mouth fell open, a smile hovering on his puffy face.

"ISLANDERS! The Hideaway is now open! Pick a couple to enjoy a private night away!"

Instantly, the Islanders started chanting Rose and Svetlana's names, the women grabbing each other with a squeal. Shane and Ilya joined the rest in cheering when, a little bit later, Rose and Svetlana strode down the stairwell in lingerie. They clapped as the women disappeared to the corner of the Villa that stood behind a locked door, opening into a whole bedroom of their own. And still, as Shane and Ilya joined the crowd going back upstairs, hands slipping into one another's, they thought there was no place they would rather be.

NEXT TIME...ON HEATED ISLAND...

Tomorrow night...the Hideaway stays open while more couples close...

but not before a cozy group film we like to call...Movie Night!

Chapter End Notes

WHEW i wish there was a better way than my own words to capture the incredible combination of camp and seduction that the heart rate challenge performances are, because they are my FAVORITE.

i think season 6 was my all time favorite dances ever so if you haven't seen them - give them a watch and thank me later (kordell's nerd performance? unmatched. aaron's adorable femmy finger bite? almost had me forgiving his sins)

see you next episode!!!

Chapter 21

Chapter Summary

couples closing off! movie night! campy gay bickering!

Chapter Notes

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

Ilya turned, yawning. His arms stretched out above him, his wrist hitting a warm body.

Shane turned, squinting.

“Good morning to you too.”

Ilya gave him a wide grin. “You chose this boy.”

“Regretting it now.” Shane tried to hide his smile.

Ilya launched himself closer, wrapping Shane tightly in his arms.

“*Noo*, Shane, you cannot. You said you will stay with me in front of Ariana, this is sacred.”

Shane rotated in Ilya’s arms, snorting into his chest as he gave up on escaping.

“Fine. Happy?”

“Mm, no.”

“No?”

“No.” Ilya kissed the top of Shane’s head, his lips disappearing into his dark hair. “Sveta and Rose are fucking in some cushy room.” He sighed dramatically. “It should’ve been *mee*.”

“Us, you better mean.” Shane raised his eyebrows from the crook of Ilya’s elbow.

“Of course us, you are my couple. You chose me so sweetly and everyone all over the world watched and knows this now.” He kissed Shane’s forehead.

Shane’s cheeks burned. “Will you shut up?”

“Make me then.”

Ilya grinned as Shane blushed further, his smile disappearing as Shane reached up and grabbed his face in a deep kiss. They parted, slightly breathless, Ilya going pliant beneath

Shane's touch. Shane cleared his throat.

"Hey, Ilya? I, um, I don't want anyone here but you."

Ilya blinked slowly, his thumb tracing Shane's cheek.

"Yes, you coupled with me, I know this."

"No, I—" Shane shifted, pulling back to look fully at Ilya. "I want only you, Ilya. Like, exclusively."

Ilya's face broke into a smile. Shane's eyes darted over his face.

"So that's okay, then? That we're exclusive?"

Ilya leaned in. He kissed each of Shane's freckles he could find, steadily, greedily, hungrily. When he spoke, his throat was tight.

"I chose you too, Shane."

"Shane, can I borrow you, buddy?" Hayden hovered over Shane at poolside, his eyes looking furtively around the Villa.

Shane's face scrunched behind his shades. He pulled his feet out of the pool, looking at Hayden more closely.

"C'mon, hurry. Over here." Hayden jerked his head towards the kitchen.

Ilya surfaced from beneath the water, squirting a stream of water out of his mouth directly onto Hayden's shirt.

"*Jesus.*" Hayden took a step back, scowling. "Was that really necessary?"

Ilya shrugged, pushing his wet hair out of his face.

"Depends. Are you trying to seduce him? We're exclusive now, so. Don't try."

Hayden looked to Shane. Shane shrugged with a small smile.

"Oh, wow, well...congrats, buddy!" Hayden leaned forward, clasping Shane in a hug.

Ilya gripped the side of the pool, tsking.

"No touching. Did you not hear? *Exclusive.*"

"Would you shut up?" Hayden pulled back.

Shane bit back a laugh. "Ignore him. Now what did you need me for?"

Ilya's eyes narrowed. He pulled his eyes away from Hayden, widening them innocently as he looked towards Shane.

"Gimme kiss?"

Shane leaned down with a performative grumble, grinning as his lips met Ilya's. Ilya snuck his tongue in, dripping hands sliding up the back of Shane's neck.

"Ilya!" Shane shouted, pushing him away. "Get off me, you're all wet!"

Ilya pouted, sinking down into the pool until only his eyes remained above the surface.

"C'mon, Hayd, he'll be fine."

Hayden eyed Ilya suspiciously as Shane fell into step beside him, shrieking as Ilya lobbed one last arc of water at his back as they walked away.

"So, you and Ilya? For real?" Hayden waited until they were out of hearing distance of the pool.

"Yeah." Shane exhaled, a grin floating back to his face. "I asked him this morning."

"Well, that's...that's good. Right?" Hayden clapped his back. "Focus on each other. See what's there."

"Exactly." Shane smiled back at him. "Now, what could you possibly need my help for?" His voice became syrupy-sweet. "Nothing to do with Jackie, I'm sure?"

Hayden steered Shane towards the kitchen, a flush already creeping up his neck.

"He's rubbing off on you."

A while later, Rose and Svetlana finally emerged from the Hideaway, the midday sun bright as they strode out in their lingerie sets.

"*We're back!*" They shouted, cupping their hands over their mouths.

The Islanders swarmed around them, catcalling and cheering. Rose let out a laugh, leaning into Svetlana's shoulder.

"Did we miss anything fun?"

Hayden threw an arm around Jackie's shoulder.

"Well, Jackie just agreed to be my girlfriend, so..."

Rose shrieked, the Islanders letting out more applause.

Ilya wrinkled his nose, gesturing at Jackie's necklace.

"What is this, Pike? You gave her pasta jewelry as a girlfriend gift?"

"It's a macaroni necklace, Rozanov." Hayden huffed. "Kids make them. It represents the future I see with her, the kids we could have together one day."

"Aww!" Marly pressed a hand over his heart.

Ilya raised an eyebrow. "So...you are a child then?"

Shane batted his arm. "Knock it off."

"Yeah, no, it's really...cute." Rose forced a smile to her face.

Jackie looked to Hayden, her hand on her necklace.

"I love it, sweetie."

Hayden smiled, the tension leaving his shoulders as he leaned down to kiss her. Ilya shook his head.

"This is all because Pike did not ask me for help. Sveta asked and she got romance, yes? Pike asked Shane and see what happened."

Ilya sighed, looking towards Shane.

"At least *you* did not give me some pasta monstrosity when you asked this morning."

Rose's eyes widened. Svetlana's face lit up, her head tilting.

"Ilya. What did Shane ask?"

Ilya's chest puffed up.

"Ah, he got on his knees and said, please Ilya, I want no one else, please be exclusive, please please!" He pinched Shane's cheeks.

"Yes, it was exactly like that." Shane rolled his eyes.

"You *guys*." Rose's eyes welled up. "That's big news!"

"Took you long enough!" Harris grinned.

"Happy for you two!" Luca added.

Hayden scoffed. "I mean, Jackie and I are actually label-labeled, which feels like bigger news, but okay..."

He was shoved out of the way by Kip and Scott reaching forward to hug the new exclusive couple. Scott gave Ilya a warm embrace, Ilya making a face as he patted him on the back.

“Welcome to the club, guys.”

Kip paused, drawing back from Shane.

“Oh. Are we...you said closed off, I thought?”

Scott turned to him, voice breaking.

“What is *wrong* with you!”

He stalked off, Kip at his heels as he shouted out behind him.

“No, babe, I want to be exclusive with you! You just never tell me anything!”

Marly slung an arm around J.J.’s shoulder, shaking his head as he watched them go.

“Those crazy kids.”

Leo leaned his cheek against Marly’s shoulder, sighing.

“They’ll figure it out.”

Luca pressed closer to J.J., shaking his head as he looked after the couple.

“They always do.”

As dusk settled, the Islanders filed onto the lawn, the air heavy. Rose and Svetlana had their arms looped around each other but weren’t talking. Hayden and Jackie were holding hands, Hayden gnawing at his lip. Shane and Ilya barely brushed shoulders as they walked to their seats.

“I have told you everything.” Ilya whispered.

“I know that.” Shane snapped. “Let’s just get through this.”

Ilya let out a frustrated sound, but dropped it.

They parted as they entered the seats arranged in front of the blown-up screen, couples splitting down the middle. Shane settled between Rose and Hayden, shifting in his seat as he tried to get comfortable.

Ariana entered behind them, striding up the red carpet laid between the separated couples, her golden dress sparkling.

“Good evening, Islanders and welcome to Movie Night! I see a lot of glum faces out here tonight. But remember, films come in all genres - not only drama. Although,” she tsked. “I can’t say there won’t be a lot of that tonight.”

She straightened, hair falling over her shoulders.

“Let’s get started. I’ll pose a spicy trivia question. Whoever answers it correctly the fastest will get to choose a movie clip from our collection.” She shuffled her cue cards. “Ready? Here goes. Our first question is: what is the average length of an erect penis?”

Shane’s hand shot into the air.

“Five inches.”

Ariana looked down at her notes. “That’s...yes, between five and five and a half inches. Correct.” She motioned to the screen. “Which clip would you like to choose?”

Ilya looked at him, mouth agape. Shane looked back at him smugly before turning to the screen to scan his options. “I’ll choose THERE’S SOMETHING ABOUT MARLY.”

Ariana nodded. The clip enlarged, filling the screen as it began to play. The footage was in black-and-white, clearly night vision as the bedroom came into focus. Ilya’s curls were visible next to Marly, the covers yanked up high. The sheets moved in steady jerks, mics picking up Marly’s low voice whining Ilya’s name, Ilya’s breath hot and fast before a cut-off moan. The video stopped.

Rose squeezed Shane’s shoulder, Hayden rubbing his knee. Ilya’s fists were tense. He looked towards Shane, waiting.

Ariana tilted her head. “How was that to watch?”

“Not great. Obviously.” Shane made himself swallow. “But he already told me about that. So.” He ignored the sourness in his stomach.

Marly looked towards Shane, eyes earnest. “He’s definitely louder with you, buddy! He was just on a sex rampage then, it didn’t mean anything!”

J.J. winced. “Marshmallow, hush.”

Ariana cleared her throat. “Next question!”

Kip won the next round, choosing the clip SOME LIKE IT SCOTT.

Shane felt his neck heating immediately. On screen, he watched as the cameras picked up outside the Casa Amor shower, he and Scott bantering back and forth. The cameras were angled overhead, catching the way Shane’s eyes dragged slowly over Scott and then back to his lips. The clip cut to another angle for the actual kiss, zooming in as Scott moaned into Shane’s mouth, his hair jerked back between Shane’s fingers. The cameras panned down to their towels, shifting in front of their hardness, and then the screen cut back to black.

Shane looked over at Ilya. His arms were folded, lips pressed together.

Kip scoffed loudly, speaking before Ariana could even pose a question.

“Takes a lot of audacity, accusing *me* of not taking our relationship seriously.”

Scott strained his neck forward, trying to catch Kip's eye.

"Babe, it's not even like that! I literally say in the video that I'm serious about you!"

"Yeah, serious enough to kiss Shane." Kip shook his head, avoiding Scott's gaze. "Maybe I'll be serious too. Kiss someone else here."

"Pookie, c'mon, you don't mean that!" Scott half-stood, pleading. "We just said we were exclusive!"

Ariana's eyes flicked between the two of them.

"Let's take a breath and move forward. Our next question is: What is the highest amount of orgasms a man's had in an hour?"

Shane's hand was up first.

"Um, two! Or, wait, if it's a record...four?"

Ariana winced. "I'm sorry, Shane, that's incorrect. Ilya, your hand was up second."

"Ah, yes, I will guess fifteen."

Svetlana turned to him. "What is *wrong* with you?"

"It's not me! It's a record, it has to be high!"

Ariana covered her smile, forcing her face still. "The correct answer was sixteen! Ilya, as the closest guess, you can choose next."

"Great. Obviously, I am choosing FORGETTING ILYA ROZANOV."

Ariana nodded, moving to the side.

Shane and J.J. appeared on the screen. Shane tensed, watching as the montage played with soft romantic music: the two of them meeting, footage slowing to a crawl as their eyes met. Laughing on the daybeds, Shane's smile shy and eager. Morning light over their bed, J.J. pulling his hand away as Shane pouted, his pajamas tight. And then a confessional, Shane's face perky in the booth, his neck bare, his lips traitorous: *I'm really enjoying getting to know J.J. We get along well and the chemistry is there. Casa is supposed to test connections, and it seems like Ilya is doing that so...*

Shane watched as his past self shrugged.

Besides, isn't an emotional test more telling?

The video stopped.

"You didn't tell me that part." Ilya's voice was soft.

"I...I told you I liked him." Shane stumbled, aware of everyone listening. J.J. shifted uncomfortably in the row behind him.

"An emotional test, Shane? Really?"

"Yes, really, but you clearly passed? Even with all your behavior back here." Shane rolled his shoulders back, a flash of irritation tightening his voice. "We've been through this."

"Whatever." Ilya looked away from him.

Next to him, Marly shook his head, lips trembling. "It's really hard for me to watch too, Ariana."

Ariana tilted her head, confused. J.J. looked at Marly.

"Baby, I hadn't even met you yet?"

Marly just sniffed, leaning into Ilya's shoulder with a small huff.

Ariana tucked her hair behind her ear.

"Moving on. Our next question is: What is the most popular sex position?" She looked up. "Harris, go ahead."

"Is it doggie?"

"Ding ding! Which clip?"

"This one has Troy's job in the title, so I'm guessing it's about him? BUT I'M A CONSTRUCTION WORKER, please."

"Very well."

Troy leaned forward, face furrowed.

The video began playing, a series of Troy's confessionals interspersed with clips around the Villa.

Yeah, it's been great being at Casa. Can't complain about beautiful women, right? Super excited to hopefully pair up with Cici. The camera zoomed in on Troy's stiff smile, waiting a beat before the next confessional clip started.

It feels great to be in the actual Villa! Everyone's been cool so far. Um, Harris seems very welcoming, so that's nice. Everyone's nice, really. Troy's face heated in the confessional booth. A camera panning over Troy at Cici's side, his eyes drifting towards Harris at the firepit. There was a close-up of their hug as they introduced each other, Troy's fingers lingering as he pulled away.

Yeah, I think things with Cici are solid enough? Is she saying they're not? I know she wants more time together, but like, it's also important to invest in your friendships. The video cut to

Troy and Harris at the pool, feet dipping in the water. Harris said something and Troy let out a loud laugh, doubling over at the waist. Ilya passed by in the background, muttering to Svetlana, “Harris is not that funny...”

Cici and I are definitely hitting some bumps. I don't know, I get that she was pissed about the social media challenge today, but like, I don't think she needs to worry. It's not like Harris is actually hitting on me. Right?

The camera showed more lingering looks between the two of them, then back to Troy in another confessional. His head leaned back, eyes scanning the ceiling.

I just don't...I'm not like that, okay. I hang out with my boys, I go to church sometimes, I'm a construction worker, for fuck's sake. On screen, Troy leaned forward, burying his head in his hands before slowly looking into the camera lens. *Shit. I'm a full-fledged homo, huh.*

The video flickered, two figures appearing at a distance, the sun slinking low in the sky. The taller one leaned in, hands wrapping around the other one's face. They kissed, soft and sweet, and then the camera zoomed in, catching Troy pulling back with a smile.

The screen dimmed, Islanders breaking into roaring applause. Ariana grinned.

“I told you we'd be having different genres! Glad you figured it out, Troy. I'm sure Harris is especially glad.” She laughed with the Islanders, looking down at her cue card.

“Our next question is: What percentage of the time do lesbians report orgasming during sex?”

On opposite sides of the audience, Rose and Svetlana's hands shot up. Marly slowly lowered his hand, looking between them.

“Rose, you were the quickest. Your answer?”

“75%.” Rose grinned. “I kill at trivia night.”

“You are correct!” Ariana smiled, gesturing to the screen. “Your choice?”

“I feel like I have to choose SVET'S JUST NOT THAT INTO YOU.” Rose shot Svetlana a look. “Hopefully the title will be worse than what is shown...”

The movie began playing. Svetlana appeared on screen as the new arrivals came into the Villa, Zara and Dakota introducing themselves. The camera cut into brief vignettes: Svetlana's hand on Dakota's hip in the kitchen, lips whispering something in her ear, then her and Zara on the daybeds, Svetlana's hand trailing up her thigh. The camera changed to nightvision, covers moving rhythmically as soft moans echoed from the speakers. The camera panned down on Svetlana's name written in cursive on the bottom of the bed, slowly drifting to Rose's written on the other side just as Zara let out a loud, lingering cry.

Ariana blinked. “Wow.”

Svetlana sat stiffly. “Rose and I already shared everything that happened.”

“That is true.” Rose pressed a smile to her face.

Ariana looked at Rose. “You don’t sound too happy.”

Rose shrugged. “Like Shane said, it’s still not fun to hear it, even if you already know about it.” She sighed. “At least she didn’t go too far with Ilya’s leftovers.”

Shane shifted next to her, his face tightening. Ilya let out a low groan from the other side, his head tilting back.

“Well. Our final question for the night is: Which state reports having the highest amount of sex per week on average?” Ariana gestured in front of her. “Scott, go ahead.”

“I feel like it’s Alaska? ‘Cause it’s cold and there’s not much else to do?”

“You are...correct! Which of the remaining clips do you want to choose?”

“Hm...I don’t know what THE PROPOSAL is about, but that one seems the least dangerous?”

The video began playing, footage showing from the Snog, Marry, Pie challenge. Shane felt himself scoff automatically as Sasha appeared onscreen before the camera tilted to capture Ilya on a knee before Shane. Ilya began speaking on the video, Shane taken back to the moment in his memory. He could remember the look in Ilya’s eyes, the silly oversized rings, both in his mind and captured on film in front of him. But now there were captions in neat little letters, lining up with each movement of Ilya’s lips:

“I know this is pretend. I know I do not know you so long yet. I know this is madness to say, but you do not speak Russian, not yet, even though you are so perfect I am a little scared you might. Shane, I have not felt like this before. Not ever. And if you are crazy like I am crazy, maybe one day this ring will be real for us. And Sveta, shut your mouth, I hear you gasping back there.”

The video cut off. The audience was silent for a moment. Shane slowly looked to Ilya, who was blinking down at the ground.

Ariana looked between the two of them and then spread her arms in the air.

“That’s all folks! Luckily, we have a double feature for a private screening - the Hideaway is open again tonight!”

Shane felt his lips joining in chanting for Hayden and Jackie, the two of them beaming as they hurried upstairs to get changed. As the Islanders started congregating at the bottom of the stairs, Shane found himself floating towards Ilya, feet moving on autopilot. He moved past Kip and Scott, still bickering back and forth. He eased around Svetlana, whispering something soothing into Rose’s ear, a hand draping over her hip. He wound around Marly, half-held in J.J.’s arms, and Luca and Leo swaying together next to them.

Finally there was Ilya, staring up the stairs with an intent expression. Shane’s feet felt on solid ground again. He let out a gradual breath, taking in Ilya’s profile for a moment before

he spoke, his voice somehow level.

“That excited to see Pike in his Hideaway outfit?”

“Ah, yes, obviously I’m so deprived of eye candy I must stoop to Pike’s level.”

Shane tilted his head. “I think this is the first time you’ve joked about sex since, y’know. The Paris incident.”

Ilya’s eyes snapped to him, alarmed. Shane gave him a small smile.

“I’m not mad about it. Maybe it’s a good thing? You feeling more comfortable.”

Ilya shrugged. Shane stepped closer, watching Ilya’s shoulders stiffen. He wrapped his hands leisurely around Ilya’s neck, taking his time as he threaded his fingers through his curls, his eyes soft over Ilya’s face.

“You know.” Shane leaned in, pressing his cheek to Ilya’s. “I haven’t felt like this before either. We are probably both crazy. But I still feel it. Just like you do.”

“You do?”

“Yeah. I do.”

Shane felt Ilya go lax beneath his touch, his body crumpling against Shane’s. Shane’s fingertips grazed over the chain of Ilya’s necklace, his chest expanding.

“Mais si nous finissons par nous marier un jour, je t’offrirai une bague bien plus belle.”

Ilya pulled back, eyes widening.

“So now we are speaking French?”

Shane shrugged. “Yeah. Might want to go to Paris one day, after all.”

Ilya narrowed his eyes.

“No, not funny. No more jokes. You can only go to Fiji, with me.”

Shane smirked, leaning deeper into Ilya’s arms, his eyes lidded.

“Guess you better take me then.”

Ilya started to say something, but was cut off by Hayden emerging shirtless at the top of the stairs, clad only in very tiny, very tight boxers.

“Ugh.” Ilya looked at Shane. “He has ruined it.”

Shane laughed, his fingers sliding out of Ilya’s hair, ring finger bare for now.

NEXT TIME...ON HEATED ISLAND...

Tomorrow night...did someone get too wild in the Hideaway? Because it's The Baby Challenge! Alas, just as new life starts, others will end. At least another couple will get to liven things up as the Hideaway stays open another night...

Chapter End Notes

french translation: But if we do end up getting married one day, I'll get you a much more beautiful ring.

if yall wanted drama for movie night...! i fear i am just a softie sorry. thankfully we are now at the point of love island where it's so much fluff all the timeeee let's go! should hayden get ten babies in the baby challenge? i think yes. will this get even campier as we approach the ending? almost definitely.

also next chapter will be longer cause we're getting the baby challenge, some eliminations, ANDDDD a certain couples first night in the hideaway...yuna look away now

wish me luck pushing through this and not getting distracted by IRL love island trying to suck up my free time!!!

Chapter 22

Chapter Summary

babies and baby-making and a very sad farewell!

Chapter Notes

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

Svetlana sat up in bed, tearing off her eyemask.

“The *fuck* is that?”

Wails echoed through the Villa. The bedroom lights overhead were still dark. Grumbling, the Islanders slid out of bed, moving en masse to discover the source. At last, Kip opened the door to the Speakeasy, his hands flying to his face. The furniture had been removed and replaced with a tidy line of cribs, familiar pink cursive scrawled along each end.

“Oh my *godd*!” Scott stepped forward, scooping up a tiny animatronic baby. “We’re parents!”

The Islanders shuffled to their respective cribs, Shane plugging his ears against the noise. Ilya reached their crib first, reaching down to nestle the infant in his arms as if it was second nature.

Shane squinted at him. “Do you have a secret family out there?”

“What? No. I am simply talented at everything.” Ilya cooed at the small robot, her tinny cries finally stopping. “See?”

Luca’s phone rang and he scrambled for it, handing Leo their child.

“I got a text!”

“Shh!” Ilya hissed. “Our perfect angel just went back to sleep.”

“Oh, sorry.” Luca continued in a whisper.

“Welcome to parenthood, Islanders! Your couple is now responsible for a child (or two!) and these robotic sweeties will be tracking your parenting skills *very* closely. Whoever keeps baby happiest will be crowned the winners of today’s challenge! And today’s win comes with perks...Good luck!”

Shane and Ilya looked at each other, immediately locking in. Shane glanced at the closets set up in the back of the room.

“I’ll pick out some clothes. Maybe there will be style points too.”

Ilya shifted her in his arms. “Then I should choose, obviously.”

Shane rolled his eyes, both of them going over to the closets and starting to browse.

“Shane, look!” Ilya held up a poofy pink dress, his eyes begging.

“No, that can’t be comfortable.” Shane rubbed the fabric between his fingers. “See? Way too scratchy.”

Ilya sighed, flipping through the miniature hangers.

“Look, an Adidas set. And it’s purple.” Shane held it out to Ilya. Ilya looked at it with a sigh.

“I suppose it’s fine...but we’re getting her these sunglasses too. And a bow.”

Ilya slid the oversized sunglasses over the infant’s eyes, followed by an enormous bow. Shane forced down a groan, grabbing an impossibly small pair of slides before Troy could beat him to it.

The Islanders started to stream outside, babies strapped into strollers or in the crooks of their arms.

“Ah, wait.”

Ilya gently transferred their baby to Shane, turning back into the room. He emerged with a double stroller, a boy and girl strapped side by side within. He grinned at Shane.

“Pike must have been busy last night.”

Ilya wheeled the stroller to the front of the Hideaway, pounding loudly at the door. The twins burst into loud mechanic cries as Ilya jogged away.

“What in the world?” The door opened a moment later, Hayden peering down at the babies, Jackie over his shoulder.

“Should’ve used protection!” Ilya shouted over to him, cackling. “Macaroni and Noodle have been crying all morning! Very bad parenting, Pike.”

“That’s not...we’re not naming them that.” Hayden huffed, leaning down to scoop both infants up, the screaming only increasing.

Ilya jogged back to Shane’s side, looking down at their child.

“What should we name her, hm?”

“Well, since Macaroni is taken...” Shane looked at Ilya with a smile. “I don’t know. I’ve never really thought of it.”

“I like the name Anya.” Ilya cooed as the infant blinked twice, her fake eyelids whirling. “I was going to use it for when I finally get a dog, but...”

“Ilya, I’m not naming our baby after a dog.”

“It was *if* I got a dog, I do not have a dog. It is a good name.”

Shane huffed, studying the baby’s face. “Anya, huh?”

“Anya.”

The baby let out a gurgle and Ilya’s mouth dropped. He looked to Shane with a wide smile.

“Shane, she loves it!”

“Okay, okay. Anya it is.” Shane grumbled with a grin.

“And we can give her Yuna as a middle name. So your mother stops hate-tweeting me.”

“Anya Yuna Rozanov-Hollander? That’s kind of a mouthful.”

“No, it’s okay, I will take your last name. I’m a very progressive wife.”

Shane shook his head, snorting, a blush creeping over his cheeks nonetheless.

Rose and Svetlana strolled over to their daybeds, their daughter buckled into her stroller. They had dressed her in a graphic tee and baggy jeans, a miniscule chain glinting around her neck.

“*Shaneee*, why does our daughter not have a chain! She looks poor!”

“Oh my god.” Shane let out a long sigh. “You go back and change her then.”

Svetlana unbuckled her child, lifting her into her arms.

“Don’t bother, Ilyusha. Anastasia will always be the cooler cousin.”

“You wish.” Ilya narrowed his eyes at the doll, shaking his head. “Your mommy is so mean. She always bullies Uncle Ilya. So evil.”

Scott and Kip walked by, slowing as they passed. Their son was slotted into a baby carrier facing out from Scott’s chest, Scott’s hand wrapped loosely around the baby’s ankle.

“Hey guys! Meet our son, Skip!”

Ilya made a face. “No thank you.”

Scott rolled his eyes and they kept walking, heading towards Leo and Luca near the pool, their infant dressed head-to-toe in leopard print.

Anya let out a little cry. Ilya lifted her immediately, murmuring as he rocked her to his chest.

“Who’s the bully now, hmm? Your daughter sounds very disappointed in you.” Svetlana looked on smugly, Anastasia emitting happy noises from her arms.

Ilya let out a low curse, turning to Shane. “I will take her on a walk, calm her nerves. Seeing such a geriatric father probably frightened her.”

“Here, take her bottle in case she gets hungry.” Shane slid two bottles into Ilya’s diaper bag before slipping it over Ilya’s shoulder. He pressed a quick kiss to Ilya’s lips and then one to Anya’s forehead, waving them off as they started their lap around the Villa.

He turned back to Rose and Svetlana’s amused looks.

“What?” Shane asked, his neck heating.

“No, nothing.” Rose looked back at Ilya, who was gesturing to things as he walked and showing them to Anya. “Just seems you two have u-hauled faster than I previously thought possible.”

“Honestly.” Svetlana smirked. “It’s sweet, switching stereotypes like that.”

“In fact,” Rose looked Svetlana up and down. “Shane, why don’t you babysit for a little bit? I wanna roleplay being DINKs with Svet.”

“Don’t have to tell me twice.” Svetlana grinned, dropping Anastasia unceremoniously into Shane’s arms as she looked hungrily at Rose. They flounced off, Shane shouting uselessly at her back.

“Hey! This is a challenge! You’re going to lose!”

Anastasia started crying and Shane winced, jostling her up and down.

“You keep this up and I’m stealing your chain for Anya to have.”

Ilya returned just as Hayden and Jackie approached, easing Anya into Shane’s arms as he kissed Shane’s cheek.

“Shane, you are so smart. She needed a bottle halfway through. You do the diaper change later, yes?”

Shane shot a glare Ilya’s way. Hayden parked their double stroller, plopping down next to Shane on the daybed and jostling Anastasia lying discarded behind them.

“Well, how was your night?” Shane grinned, looking between Hayden and Jackie.

“Productive, clearly.” Ilya eyed their two babies, quiet at the moment.

“Right.” Hayden ran a hand over their plastic foreheads, smiling. “I’d like you to formally meet Mildred and Shane.”

Ilya’s jaw dropped.

“Mildred is hideous. And you cannot name your child after my couple.”

Hayden rolled his eyes. “Mildred’s a family name. And Jackie agreed to let me name the boy too!”

“Jackie, how could you do this?” Ilya looked at her, horrified.

She laughed, leaning into Hayden. “He was just so excited about it!”

Ilya looked at baby Shane with open disgust, shaking his head.

“It is unnatural.”

“I think it’s cute.” Shane looked at Ilya smugly, reaching out to tickle the baby’s chin. “Hi, little Shane.”

“*Stop*, it is so cute, we need to rename Anya immediately.”

“Whoa, no way, you can’t steal our baby’s name!” Hayden scoffed.

“You stole Shane’s name first!”

Jackie and adult Shane looked at each other, shaking their heads.

Ilya crossed his arms. “Well, get them away from me. Anya doesn’t want to play right now.”

“He’s such a drama queen.” Shane cooed into Anya’s face.

“Do not tell our daughter lies.”

They were interrupted by J.J. and Marly, who were splitting off from Harris and Troy and heading their way, their child hoisted on top of Marly’s shoulders.

“Hey everyone! Isn’t this so cool? I can totally see us all having kids now!” Marly beamed, looking between the two couples. “Aww, you guys got twins?” He turned to J.J., face becoming serious. “I want another.”

“Well, let someone babysit and I’ll try to knock you up.” J.J. grinned, sidling closer to Marly.

“Absolutely not, why is everyone forgetting this is a challenge?” Shane sighed.

He glanced at Anastasia behind him, her eyes staring blankly into the distance. Shuddering, he placed Anya’s sunglasses over her eyes.

“Worth a shot.” J.J. shrugged. “So, which one’s yours?”

“Obviously this one.” Ilya leaned over Shane’s arms, his fingertips tracing Anya’s painted-on freckles beneath her dark eyes. “She looks just like her dada.”

Marly sniffed, lip trembling slightly. “She really does. She’s so beautiful, you guys.”

“What’s yours called?” Hayden nodded towards their baby, J.J. reaching up to ease him down from Marly’s shoulders.

“If you say Shane, I will murder someone.” Ilya glared.

“Not in front of the baby.” Shane reprimanded, fussing over Anya’s bow.

“Oh, no, man, but great name idea!” Marly smiled. “We actually don’t have a name yet? We were stuck between Marlietta or Em-Em, but then we realized we actually have a little dude instead! I mean gender is kind of fake anyway, but we figured we should do a name redo.”

“Ilya is a great name for a boy.” Ilya smiled.

“Yeah...we’ll keep thinking...” J.J. gave him a polite smile.

Ilya leaned back against the balcony after lunch, looking down at the lawn below. Troy, Leo, and Rose were having a stroller race, their babies bouncing wildly as they careened across the Villa, their partners laughing from the sidelines.

Ilya huffed, snuggling closer to Shane, Anya in his arms.

“They are all terrible parents.”

“Yes. We’re clearly the best.” Shane grinned, pressing a kiss first to Anya’s forehead and then to Ilya’s lips, lingering a bit before pulling away.

Ilya groaned. “You cannot tempt me in front of the baby.”

Shane smiled innocently. “I don’t know what you mean.”

Shane reached out for Anya, easing her from Ilya and securing her snugly in the crook of his arm. Ilya let out a low groan, reaching for his camera.

“Do not move.” He snapped a few pictures, then dug his teeth into Shane’s shoulder in a quick bite. “You both are too cute. It’s dangerous.” He pulled back, tilting his head down at Anya. “I think she will be a model like her papa.”

“Or a hockey player!”

“Hockey player slash model. Like you, Mr. Rolex.” Ilya grinned. His smile flickered. “But is hockey too dangerous? What about broken bones? Concussions? She can’t turn out like

Pike.” His eyes flicked to Shane, concerned. “What about your head? How many concussions have you had? Is that why you liked Pike? And Hunter?”

“I’m fine, Ilya.” Shane laughed, shaking off Ilya’s hand against his temple. “I’ve been fine. I’ll stay fine. It’s just a physical sport, not the end of the world.”

Ilya’s brows stayed furrowed, his tone more serious.

“Yes, I knew that, but now I lo- I have to look out for you.” He cleared his throat. “For my sake.” Ilya leaned in, dragging his lips against the tender spot of Shane’s neck and making him inhale sharply. “I cannot use you as my personal sex toy if you are a pile of broken bones, hm?”

“Not in front of the baby!” Shane flushed, covering Anya’s ears.

Ilya pulled back, satisfied, his smile slow as he traced the side of Shane’s face with his palm. Shane shifted, eyes downcast.

“I- I wouldn’t want you getting hurt either. God forbid there was some kind of runway accident.”

Ilya let out an offended scoff. “Excuse you! My job can be very dangerous. Once I had to pose with actual bears. I could have died.”

“Mhm. I think I remember that one.”

“See? Now what would you do without your supply of sexy pictures of me?”

“I don’t know how I would go on.” Shane looked at him, still smiling, his eyes serious. Ilya looked away, cheeks pinking.

“Does she need to eat again? I can take her.”

Shane handed Anya over, an amused smile flitting across his face. Ilya busied himself with the infant, making nonsensical sounds as he pressed the plastic bottle to her lips. Once finished, he hoisted her to his chest, patting her a few times until she burped.

“You’ve very serious about this.” Shane remarked.

Ilya stared at him. “Hello. Is Hollander there? It is a competition. We will win. Of course I am serious.”

Anya let out a faint gurgle and Ilya shifted her to his knees, bouncing her with a smile as he looked into her face.

“No, like. The whole baby thing.” Shane cleared his throat. “You’d be a good dad.”

Ilya’s legs paused for a moment.

“Ah. Maybe.”

“Definitely.” Shane’s voice was soft. Ilya shot him a glance.

“You too. You keep her on a good schedule. Remember when to check her diapers. Don’t let me roughhouse her too much.”

“Well, you were throwing her *really* high.”

“It was not so high, I have great hand-eye coordination! You’re lucky I didn’t become a hockey player.”

“Still.” Shane snorted. “I guess. I don’t know. I wouldn’t want to be too overbearing, you know?”

“Mm, no, tell me?”

Shane shrugged again, searching for the words. “I guess...I love my parents. But. Sometimes I feel like I made it to my twenties without having too many thoughts of my own? I wake up and everything is scheduled, everything is on track. I just stand there and let it happen.”

He looked down at Anya, running his palm over the back of her head.

“I’d want her to have more voice, maybe. And not be scared of the world either. Do what she wanted to do.”

Ilya blinked at him, nodding once.

“Yes. I agree. But this would be easy for her to do, with such a brave father.”

“Shut up, I’m not that brave.”

“Liar. You came out on national television. Didn’t wait for Yuna or your coach to tell you it was okay. Maybe they would have told you not to, even.” Ilya’s eyes drifted back to his knees. “But Shane Hollander is a very brave man, Miss Anya. You are lucky.”

Shane snorted softly, studying Ilya’s profile.

“You’re lucky to have your papa too, Anya. He talks a tough game but he’s a big softie inside.”

“Do not tell her my secrets!” Ilya smiled, bumping his shoulder against Shane’s, his necklace sparkling in the sunlight.

Shane licked his lips, the words lodged in his throat. He pushed forward.

“Ilya. I think she’d be proud of you. Your mother. I know I never met her but- I just think she would be.”

Ilya stared at Anya, his thumbs circling her small back in repetitive moments. He blinked a few times, then he looked at Shane. Ilya didn’t say anything. He simply leaned in, kissing Shane soft and steady until they both had to come up for air.

“I GOT A TEXT!” Harris shouted from the kitchen, Reid rocking in Troy’s arms next to him.

The Islanders ambled over. Anya’s bow had been replaced with a hat due to the bright midday sun, Shane insisting she needed to be protected from sunburn (never mind her plastic skin). Next to them, Skip kept crying, his mechanical eyes fixed open on Scott.

Ilya cradled Anya closer to him, covering her ears. Shane glared at Scott.

“Control your kid, Hunter, you’re going to wake ours up.”

Ilya tsked. “It’s helpless. Sperm degenerates the older you get. That baby is practically made from dust.”

“It’s literally a robot?” Scott rolled his eyes.

“Shocked you lived long enough to see such technological advances.”

“I’m not even that much older than you!”

Kip laid a hand on Scott’s arm. “Honey, ignore him. Let Harris read the text.”

Scott refocused, Harris waiting for the group to grow silent. He swallowed.

“Hope you’re enjoying parenthood, Islanders! Part of parenting is making tough decisions. Each couple must now vote for the three weakest couples on the Island. Text your answers within an hour’s time, and prepare to say some farewells tonight. The babies may not be the only ones crying...”

Silence descended over the group, broken only by Skip’s increasing cries.

“Will you shut that thing up!” Luca flushed, hands curling into fists. “Sorry.” He exhaled. “Just - that text...”

“It’s okay.” Ilya patted him on the back. “You were right the first time.”

Shane and Ilya paced on the dock, their voices low.

“This is so hard. I don’t want anyone to go.” Shane chewed on his lip.

“Well, I do not want to go, so we must choose someone.” Ilya looked at Shane hopefully. “We could try to send Hunter home?”

“Hm.” Shane patted Anya’s back absently, rocking her against his shoulder. “That’s actually a solid choice. He and Kip could definitely work on their communication...”

“Okay, one down. Two to go.”

“I mean, I hate to say it because I like them both, but Luca and Leo are still getting to know each other. They’re definitely not a super strong couple yet.”

“And there are no ulterior motives to voting Leo off?” Ilya arched an eyebrow, grinning.

Shane glared at him. “Like you wouldn’t be happy to see J.J. go.”

“He is also in a new couple! It would make sense!”

Shane sighed, looking down at Anya. “The things we do to give you a better future. Are we locking it in?”

“I will text it.” Ilya’s fingers moved over his phone.

Finished, Ilya exhaled, collapsing onto the bench. He opened his arms, fingers motioning for Shane and Anya. They slid onto his lap, Shane making a face.

“I feel too big for this.”

“Nonsense. You are my baby with my babier baby. Light as a feather.”

“If anyone’s the baby, it’s you.”

“Good, I get my turn next.” Ilya gave a flurry of kisses to Shane’s cheek and neck, wrapping his arms around him with a sigh. “I hope we do not go home.”

Shane looked at him, panicked. “What? You think people will vote for us? I thought people liked us!”

Ilya shrugged. “We liked the people we voted for. Mostly. But I don’t know if people believe in us.”

Shane settled back against Ilya, still frowning. “Well, I believe in us.”

Ilya toyed with the hem of Shane’s shirt, his chin burrowing above his shoulder.

“If we did go home tonight...”

Shane half-turned, waiting. Ilya’s hand curved over Shane’s, both of them cradling Anya.

“Does the exclusive label apply out there?”

“Oh.” Shane blinked. “Technically no, that’s what the relationship labels are for.”

“So you would be done with me, then? Make me a single father?” Ilya kept his voice light.

Shane snorted, looking back at Ilya. His face stilled.

“No. I wouldn’t be done with you.” He swallowed. “Would you be done with me?”

Ilya shook his head slowly, peering down at Anya.

“I think she needs both of us.”

Shane nudged him.

“And what about you?”

“Ah, well. Maybe I need you too.”

Shane’s smile unfurled. He leaned back into Ilya’s arms, his shoulders lowering.

“You know. I don’t think we’re going home. And I know we’re winning this challenge.” His voice softened, eyes gliding to Ilya. “I mean, just look at her. Look at how happy you make her.”

Ilya murmured his agreement, running a finger over Anya’s painted-on freckles, Shane’s gaze like sunshine on his skin.

They gathered in front of the firepit, the babies handed off to production. Scott practically thrust Skip into their waiting arms while Shane held Anya patiently as Ilya pressed a million kisses over her plastic face before finally surrendering her.

Ariana waited in front of the firepit as always, a glittering grim reaper.

“Islanders. You have been secretly voting for the weakest couples among you. Instead of viewers at home, you, the ones who spend every waking hour together, have been tasked with deciding who is least compatible. Let’s see what you thought.”

Scott’s phone dinged. He opened it, voice hoarse.

“One of the three couples up for elimination with the most Islander votes is...Luca and Leo.”

The two men exhaled, nodding at each other as they stood to walk next to Ariana.

She looked at them both, face drawn. “I am sorry to say you two are now vulnerable for elimination. Why do you think the other Islanders voted for you?”

Luca shrugged. “I know I’m newer to the Villa. And it’s true that Leo and I haven’t had as much time together compared to some of the other couples.”

“Even if we are making the most of that time.” Leo squeezed Luca’s hand with a small smile.

“Very well. Let’s see who will be joining you.” Ariana bowed her head.

Troy’s phone went off. He opened it, eyes scanning.

“The next couple vulnerable for elimination after receiving the most Islander votes is...Marly and J.J.”

J.J. stiffened, Marly looking at him with a sad smile.

“Boys.” Ariana gestured next to her.

“I felt like this was coming.” J.J. let out a hollow laugh. “It’s funny how some people think length of time is what matters over the stability of the connection.”

Ariana followed J.J.’s eyes to Scott and Kip, her eyebrows raising.

“Well. Let’s see who our last couple vulnerable for elimination is.”

Svetlana’s phone pinged. She looked down, inhaling slightly. She parted her lips, voice cracking.

“The final couple voted most incompatible is...Shane and Ilya.”

Ilya squeezed Svetlana’s shoulder, murmuring something in Russian. He reached his hand out for Shane, interlocking their fingers as they joined the other couples in front of the firepit.

“Thoughts on your fellow Islanders’ votes?” Ariana tilted her head.

Shane sighed. “It’s hard. I know Ilya and I had a lot of miscommunication, to put it mildly. But I really feel like the difficulties we went through only made us stronger.” He shook his head, brow furrowing. “Hurts a bit that no one else sees that.”

Ilya squeezed Shane’s hand. “We may be opposites in some ways, yes, but we are not incompatible.”

“And we know that. No matter what anyone else thinks.” Shane smiled at Ilya. Ilya smiled back and then looked at Ariana, chin high.

“And when we leave, we will leave together. Whether tonight, at the finale, or somewhere in between.” Ilya shrugged. “Sorry to Hunter.”

Kip looked at him suspiciously. Scott threw up his hands, whispering loudly. “Babe, for the millionth time, I don’t want him!”

Ariana placed a hand over her heart, bottom lip jutting out as she looked at the three standing couples.

“Ugh, I hate this.” She fanned herself as she blinked skyward, exhaling. “Unfortunately, there is not just one elimination tonight.”

The Islanders froze.

“Two couples will be going home.”

Svetlana pressed a hand over her mouth. Hayden gripped Jackie’s leg.

“We will now reveal those couples.”

Ilya's phone rang. The noise echoed across the Villa. Shane started blinking fast, his eyes already welling. Then Shane shook his head, forcing a smile.

"It's okay. It is. We got what we came for right?"

Ilya twitched his nose, nodding.

"Yes. You're right. Okay."

Ilya opened his phone, eyes freezing on the screen.

"Ilya and Shane. Based on how your fellow Islanders voted...you are *safe* from elimination tonight."

"What?" Shane peered over his shoulder. "We're safe?!"

"Oh thank god." Rose cried out, leaning into Svetlana's shoulder with a hiccup. Hayden was already buried in Jackie's arms, his face red and blotchy.

Shane looked at Ilya, stunned, before Ilya brought his two large palms to Shane's cheeks and drew him in for a deep kiss, laughter trickling down his throat.

Ariana gave them a watery smile.

"Shane and Ilya, you are safe from elimination. Please join the other Islanders." She turned to her side.

"Unfortunately, J.J. and Marly, Leo and Luca, that means you received the most votes and are eliminated from the island. Please take a moment to say your goodbyes."

Shane's nails dug into Ilya as he let out a shaky exhale, elation sinking in his stomach. Muffled sobs sounded around the firepit as the Islanders rose. Shane and Ilya rocked in each other's arms for a moment before parting and joining the stream of farewells.

Shane moved towards J.J. first, waiting for Harris to move on before embracing him in a tight hug.

"Thank you for everything. Best of luck with Marly. You make a good couple."

"Of course, Shane. Thank you. Don't be a stranger." J.J. squeezed him back, releasing him with a small smile.

Shane turned and hugged Luca, pulling him in tight before Troy edged in for his turn. He then moved to Leo, who paused once he saw it was Shane.

"Leo, man, I'll miss you. Really."

"Really?" Leo looked at him, lip trembling slightly. "I'll miss you too."

They embraced, Shane rubbing his back reassuringly before turning to find Marly.

Marly and Ilya were wrapped up together, tears running down both their faces.

“If you hadn’t chosen me, I wouldn’t have stayed in the Villa, and I wouldn’t have met J.J., and-”

“Marly, shut the fuck up. Too many tears.” Ilya sniffed, double-taking as he caught Shane’s gaze. He rubbed his face roughly.

“My crybaby.” Shane smiled fondly, running his thumb over Ilya’s cheek.

“No, Russians do not cry.”

“Tell your eyes that.” Shane bumped his shoulder, then opened his arms for Marly.

Marly engulfed him, wrapping him up in a bear hug and lifting him off the ground, his legs dangling.

“I love you so much, dude. J.J. and I will definitely have you boys over once this wraps up. We gotta hit the club together. Roz and I *need* to tear up that dance floor. Respectfully, of course! We can wear shirts with you and J.J.’s faces on it so the dudes know we’re taken, okay? Unless y’all are open, which is also chill, I think us and Luca and Leo kinda have vibes so like, maybe a shirt with three faces for me, and whoever you two choose, but you get what I mean-”

Shane buried his laughter into Marly’s shoulder, finding his own eyes watery.

“Never change, Marly.” He pulled back, shaking Marly slightly with a smile. “We’ll see you on the other side.”

The four men packed then descended down the staircase, turning back for one final wave. Leo gave a final trademark growl into Luca’s ear, causing him to blush. Marly was teary again, his shirt unbuttoned almost all the way to his belly button.

“We should get group tattoos after this, you guys! I mean it!”

J.J. grabbed his hand, tugging him forward with a grin.

“C’mon, *mon guimauve*. It was an honor, guys!”

“We’ll miss you!” Rose shouted, waving goodbye with the rest of the Islanders, their shouts of farewell mingling together until the four men disappeared from view.

Shane’s phone dinged. He drew it out immediately, face falling.

Ilya swallowed. “Did they make a mistake?”

A slow smile spread across Shane's face. He raised his voice to the group still gathered around the bottom of the stairs.

"Congratulations, Shane and Ilya! The data is in. You were the best daddies of the Villa and the winners of today's Baby Challenge. Please enjoy your reward - the Hideaway is now open!"

The Islanders began cheering, jumping up and down around the couple. Shane beamed at Ilya, his smile disappearing when he saw Ilya's gray face.

"What? What is it?"

"I completely forgot about Anya. I am such a bad father."

Shane laughed. "She's in good hands now."

"Not mine." Ilya pouted. "I didn't know that would be our final goodbye."

"It is very sad. But did you happen to miss the text where we get a bedroom to ourselves? All night?"

Ilya perked up. "Oh. Yes. Let's go make another Anya."

"Ilya, babies aren't replaceable like that."

"Obviously, Shane, I was trying to refocus."

"Right." Shane flushed. "Well. Guess we should go get changed..."

Ilya eyed him hungrily, then flashed a smile.

"Race you."

Before Shane could respond, Ilya pushed past the Islanders. Shane tore after him, shoulders knocking as they sped up the stairs, laughter streaming as they sprinted up to change.

Ilya reached the bottom of the stairs first, flexing his muscles as he strode down in white silk boxers. The Islanders wolf-whistled, laughing as they pumped him up until he reached the ground level.

Kip leaned closer, fingers hovering over Ilya's bicep.

"Is that body oil? It smells great."

Scott tugged him back, nostrils flaring. Before Ilya could respond, Shane appeared on the stairs above them. His shoulders were half-caved, as if he could hide the wide expanse of his muscular body. His head bowed shyly, a sheen of black hair falling into his eyes. Ilya watched, lips parted, as Shane moved closer, clad only in tight black boxer briefs with a dangerously short inseam.

The cheering finally penetrated his ears and Ilya's gaze snapped to the crowd around him, his hands flying up.

"No, no, my eyes only!"

"Drop the glute routine!" Harris cupped his hands to his mouth, laughing while Troy looked on in appreciation. Shane finally reached the last stair and Ilya threw his body over him like a shield.

"Yes, okay, that is enough. Shane is very hot. Now shoo."

Shane snorted, shaking his head as Ilya guided him through the throng.

"Enjoy! The bed's super comfortable." Hayden shouted with a smile.

Ilya turned back with a look of disgust, murmuring to Shane. "I hope they changed the sheets. Or burned them."

Svetlana smirked, joining in.

"Rose especially enjoyed the massage oil."

"Gross." Shane wrinkled his nose.

"Do not think about the germs." Ilya hurried him forward, turning back to the crowd.

"Everyone stop talking! You are ruining the mood!"

There were a few final whistles and laughs as Ilya steered Shane towards the Hideaway, pausing only once they reached the door lit up beneath a neon sign.

Ilya looked at Shane, voice soft.

"Are you ready?"

Shane held his gaze, reaching out for the door handle.

"The question is, are you?"

He slipped inside, Ilya on his heels, both of them pausing once inside. The door was like a portal to another world. To their left was a sunken hot tub surrounded by lush greenery, a cheeky neon sign flickering behind it. Directly in front of them was an arched doorway. Inside, a king bed awaited, velvety pillows thrown over a deep wine-red duvet. Shane stumbled inside, eyes panning over a set of shelves. He spotted the massage oil Svetlana had referenced, each plush shelf holding something new: handcuffs, blindfolds, sex dice, ticklers, floggers. The final shelf held a generous bowl of condoms next to multiple bottles of lube, standing at attention.

"Ah." Ilya approached behind him, his hand reaching up to palm the back of Shane's neck.

"We may need more than one night."

Shane turned to him, eying the silky boxers slung low over Ilya's hips. His fingers twitched.

Ilya's eyebrows raised and he took a step closer. "No foreplay?"

Shane shifted his weight. "I didn't say that."

He stepped backwards, controlled, until he was sitting on the end of the bed, Ilya still standing before him. Shane leaned back on his palms, his thighs spreading ever so slightly. He shrugged, eyes roaming around the room.

"Maybe we should just chat tonight. After all, you've already had sex in the Villa."

Ilya's eyes widened a fraction.

"Shane."

"Ilya."

Gradually, Ilya sunk to his knees, as cautious as if he was in front of a wild animal. He reached his hand out, fingertips sliding towards the hem of Shane's boxer briefs.

"Is that what you want? To just talk?"

Shane swallowed as Ilya's fingertips crept higher, forcing his voice to remain level.

"Maybe."

Ilya leaned down, holding Shane's eyes as he dragged a kiss over the inside of Shane's thigh.

"No. I think you are lying."

Ilya moved to the other thigh, teeth nipping at the sensitive skin there.

"I think you want me to beg."

Shane inhaled, Ilya's hands prying his thighs even more open. His tongue drew lines over Shane's goosebumped thighs, fingertips inching up the tight grip of his boxers and slurping a small hickey on the newly exposed skin.

Ilya studied Shane, his breath coming faster now. Ilya hummed, his mouth hovering over the growing mound in the front of Shane's underwear.

"Okay. I can beg."

Ilya lowered his head, letting out a low groan as he nuzzled Shane's crotch, inhaling deeply into the soft fabric. Shane's hand shot out, gripping Ilya's curls as his hips thrust up automatically.

"Beg for me, Ilya. Tell me."

"Fuck Shane, I need you so fucking bad."

Ilya's voice was a growl. His teeth bit at Shane's waistband, fingertips digging hard into Shane's thighs.

"Let me. Please."

Ilya looked up at Shane sprawled back on the bed, his face flushed, chest heaving. Shane looked down at him, dark eyes glimmering.

"Take me then."

Ilya let out a muffled sound, already stripping Shane from his clothing. The fabric fell to the floor revealing Shane bare before him, his cock bobbing and leaking already.

Ilya was not gentle. He was not slow. His mouth descended over Shane's wet, flushed tip immediately, swallowing him as Shane tried to swallow his own moan, high and fragile in the empty room.

Ilya worked his mouth up and down Shane's shaft, his hand anchored at the base, tongue swirling all the words he wanted to say:

Everyone before you meant nothing to me.

No one will ever be better than this, than you.

I hope I die here, on your perfect cock, asphyxiating on your cum.

Ilya's thumb traced over Shane's balls, his lips curling tighter around Shane's tip as Shane whimpered before falling lower, teasing over his hole. Shane jerked violently, Ilya's arms bracketing him down as Shane thrust faster into Ilya's mouth. Ilya welcomed it, his eyes watering as he sucked Shane down.

The room shifted into a kaleidoscope of sensations: Shane's hand buried in his curls, pulling tight against his scalp; the twitch of his thigh muscles beneath Ilya's forearms; the breathy moans echoing around the room, a music of their own making; the salty sharpness of Shane teasing over his tongue as Ilya chased him towards release.

With another deep suck over Shane's cock, Ilya's thumb still ghosting over his hole, Shane arched back. Ilya did not pull back, taking him deeper as Shane shuddered, hands gripping over the crown of Ilya's head, pouring his cum down Ilya's throat with a high-pitched cry.

Ilya swallowed what he could, gradually pulling off with a soft *pop*, his hand wiping the excess off his lips. Shane's eyelids were closed and fluttering, an arm thrown up over his flushed face. Ilya rose from his knees, slinking over the bed and hoisting Shane up to the pillows before collapsing beside him.

Shane's lips moved, his words barely audible.

"I think I'm dead. I think you killed me."

Ilya kissed the hollow of his neck.

“Yes. We are ghosts. You have brought me to heaven.”

Shane murmured something contentedly next to Ilya’s shoulder before sinking into sleep. Ilya smiled down at him, running a hand through his dark hair for a few minutes before his eyes closed too.

Shane woke up with a start, unsure if seconds or hours had passed. He jostled Ilya awake next to him.

Ilya pushed his hand away, trying to roll over.

“Ilya!” Shane hissed, swinging a leg over Ilya to straddle him. “Wake up!”

“Mm, you are so *cranky*.” Ilya opened his eyes, yawning at Shane above him.

“I’m not cranky.” Shane shifted, “I just thought we might not want to waste our limited time in here.” He rolled his hips once, deliberately. “You disagree?”

Ilya made a noise in his throat, his silky boxers suddenly not as loose. Shane continued rocking his hips forward, agonizingly controlled as he skimmed against Ilya beneath him. Ilya’s hands found Shane’s waist and pressed Shane down firmly, the air punching out of his lungs at the contact. Shane grinned, leaning down to kiss him. Ilya stopped him, his voice a whisper in the room.

“Tell me what you want to do.”

Shane paused, his lips almost grazing Ilya’s.

“All of it.”

Ilya swallowed.

“You are sure?”

“Yes.” Shane’s hand moved down Ilya’s neck, his palm pressing over his necklace.

“I want it. With you.”

Ilya nodded once, his coiled restraint threatening to break.

“Then take it.”

He flipped Shane easily, Shane’s breath catching as he landed back on the bed, Ilya caging him in above. Shane gazed up at him, eyes lingering over his body in the bedroom’s golden light. They had time, stretching in front of them like a luxury. They had a bedroom empty of other people and full of only each other

Shane traced his fingertips over every mole of Ilya’s he could see, wondrous. Ilya’s face flashed with something tender and broken. He caught Shane’s chin, turning Shane’s eyes

back to Ilya's before sealing his mouth with a kiss. Russian words murmured against Shane's ear as their lips parted.

"What did you say?"

"Mm." Ilya's lips twitched, a flash of embarrassment crossing his face. "You make me ache, when you look at me like that. Like I'm...worthy."

"Ilya." Shane's brows furrowed, his hands coming up to cup Ilya's face. "Of course you are. I wouldn't be here if you weren't."

Ilya didn't say anything, simply buried his face into Shane's shoulder for a moment. Shane drew small circles on his back with his fingertips, exhaling into Ilya's neck.

Shane felt the moment Ilya shifted, tenderness melting into something more burning. When Ilya drew back, his eyes were aflame, pinning Shane to the bed with their intensity. Shane felt his bare cock twitch against the silk of Ilya's bottoms, his hips raising with sudden need.

Ilya said nothing, only kicked back the sheets and began pressing his mouth over every inch of Shane he could reach. Shane's eyes rolled back, something cutting the string that kept him upright, all his muscles lax and loose as Ilya worked his way down his body.

Ilya's tongue lapped over his nipples, a throaty groan slipping between his teeth. Shane turned his head into the pillow, trying to push down his own echoing moan, Ilya only teasing his nipples further as Shane twitched beneath him. Ilya gave Shane's pec a final squeeze before he sank lower, tongue trailing the fine hair beneath Shane's belly button.

Shane arched in anticipation, but Ilya ignored his cock completely. Without warning, Shane's legs were pushed back to his chest, Ilya's palms pushing him up and apart as he found his entrance. Shane's moan was louder then, uncontrollable as Ilya's tongue continued without pause. His hands grabbed over Ilya's back, scrambling for purchase as Ilya's tongue licked up and disappeared inside, the wet heat of him breaking open Shane's brain into nothing but white noise.

Suddenly the sensation cut off. Shane's head shot up, breath tangling in his lungs. Ilya lounged on his stomach between Shane's legs as if they were in the middle of a casual conversation.

"Wha- why'd you stop?"

"Ah. Did you want something?" Ilya tilted his head, his feet kicking leisurely in the air as he waited.

"Yes, asshole. Obviously."

Ilya trailed his knuckles over Shane's inner thigh, his lips pursed in faked confusion.

"Oh? What is it you want so much?"

Shane exhaled, air jetting from his nostrils, muscles taut again. Ilya held Shane's gaze as his fingers circled Shane's entrance. Shane jerked at the contact, head tilting back to expose the naked column of his throat.

"That."

"Oh?" Ilya's tongue dipped down again, unhurried.

"More. You."

"And how do you ask?" Ilya rose, his thumb pressing down Shane's bottom lip. Shane opened, sucking down Ilya's two fingers greedily, his head bobbing with sweet desperation. Ilya pulled them out with a slick pop, his eyes lidded.

Shane licked his lips, sinking back into the soft haze.

"Please. More, please."

Ilya's other hand was already opening the bottle of lube, his saliva-slicked fingers teasing Shane's hole as the cool liquid poured over his entrance. Shane flinched from the temperature, jolting again as Ilya pushed inside, Shane's body sealing around his fingers.

Ilya paused for a moment, his breath snagging as both of them adjusted. Then he crooked his fingers, arm flexing as he dragged in and out of Shane. Shane gripped the sheets with a moan, legs falling open as his hips chased the sensation.

"More, now."

"Mm, you forget your manners."

Shane's eyes tore open again, Ilya looking just as wrecked over him. Shane pulled him down, his kiss expressing his need, tongue demanding as he licked into Ilya's mouth. Ilya let out a groan, shucking his silk boxers off with one hand. He paused, glancing up at the corners of the room where the red lights stared on steadily.

"Here." Ilya lifted up the corner of the comforter beneath them, motioning for Shane to shift below. He jutted his head up. "The cameras."

Shane looked at him for a moment, calculating, before he shook his head.

"It's too hot in here."

"We will turn on the fan." Ilya frowned. "People will see."

Shane lifted a shoulder. "They won't air anything. Or at least nothing too explicit."

"Yes, but..." Ilya made a small sound. "The producers. It will still be recorded. Watched, as they edit."

Shane shrugged again, his cheeks pinker as he kept his gaze on Ilya.

“Let them watch.”

Ilya stared at him for a second, his eyes sliding up to the discrete cameras and then back to Shane.

“Hollander. You are truly a freak. Have I told you this?”

“Shut up.” Shane laughed, pushing against Ilya’s chest. “They’re definitely going to cut that audio for the episode now.”

“Yes, and? You are a freak, clearly the world should know.” Ilya lowered his head, kissing firmly against Shane’s jaw.

“You don’t mind? We can go under the covers if you want to.” Shane peered at him.

“Mm, no.” Ilya’s hand came up, wrapping slowly against Shane’s throat. “Let them watch as I take you apart.”

Ilya pressed forward, his cock sliding over Shane’s hole. Shane let out a small sound, body liquifying again as Ilya continued to tease him until Shane couldn’t take it anymore.

“Do it now, Ilya. Please, I need it now.”

Ilya let out a low grunt, condom wrapper tearing open. Shane heard the squeeze of lube, Ilya giving himself two strokes before he lined himself up and pushed forward, tip pressed against Shane’s entrance. Shane split at the sensation. It was so full, so encompassing. Ilya’s voice was tender in his ear.

“Okay?”

“Okay.” Shane breathed, letting himself adjust.

Ilya coated kisses over his freckles, Russian falling over Shane like a blessing. Shane dragged his eyes open, tilting his head up for a kiss. As Ilya met him, he arched his hips, deepening the sensation. Ilya moaned in his mouth, Shane whimpering as his cock twitched over his stomach.

Ilya pulled back with a curse, moving at last into a brutal rhythm, eyes never leaving Shane’s face. It wasn’t enough. Shane hooked his ankles over Ilya’s shoulders, Ilya’s face coming undone as Shane took him deeper. Time blurred, sensations pushing away any form of thought. There was only Ilya, filling Shane to completion, fingers wrapped tight around his throat, voice ragged and lovesick in his ear.

“Ilya - I’m going to-” Shane felt the heat rising, his cock bobbing untouched between them.

Ilya cursed again, not softening his pace, the slide of his dick inside Shane unbearable. Shane bucked, then came with a low cry, spurting over his own stomach. Ilya’s hips jerked off-rhythm at the sight.

Shane saw Ilya’s face, his lips parting before he was conscious of what he was going to say.

“On me. Finish on me, Ilya.”

Ilya let out a wretched moan, pulling out swiftly and discarding the condom. A moment later, Shane felt the warm splash of Ilya’s cum covering him as Ilya pumped himself dry, the streaks better than handcuffs, better than a ring, each surge a claim, a reminder of who Shane belonged to.

Ilya collapsed next to him, legs trembling. His large hand encompassed Shane’s face as he pulled him into a long kiss. Ilya exhaled shakily.

“Fuck, Shane.”

“Yeah.” Shane smiled. “Fuck.”

They looked at each other for a long moment, something unsaid passing between them. Ilya scooted closer, pressing himself against Shane.

“Was good for you?”

Shane almost laughed.

“It was great for me.”

Ilya leaned back, satisfied, his eyes drifting over Shane’s face.

“I think I was a virgin too. No one has fucked me like this. Ever. You...you are the first.”

Shane flushed, deep and happy, his freckles standing out across his cheeks.

“Let me know when you’re ready for your second.” Shane eyed the condom bowl. “After all, we still need to try for a baby...”

Ilya looked at him, mouth falling open.

“A freak, Hollander. You are my perfect freak.”

NEXT TIME...ON HEATED ISLAND...

Tomorrow night...America votes for their favorite couple! It’s the final vote and final elimination before the finale...and boy, is that a lot of Fs. Speaking of, the Hideaway will remain open after our five remaining couples return from their destination dates! Whose date will be the steamiest, and whose will be the sweetest? Tune in tomorrow to find out...

yes shane intentionally made a sex tape of him losing his virginity to his parasocial gay awakening, it's his world and we're just living in it

i hope you enjoy!!! im gonna be honest the actual fucking got hard for me to write / felt like a lot of pressure after so much build-up, sooo im just gonna blame the current love island season's disgusting kisses for taking me out of the mood (cause why is everyone trying to tongue everyone to death?!)

also i am DEVASTATED about marly, that is my boyyy. cant wait for their club adventures post villa but alas, it was his time to go.
and like ilya, i too got attached to anya "yuna-don't-hate-me" rozanov hollander, long may she live (which will be forever because she is a robot)

Chapter 23

Chapter Summary

it's final dates and our final elimination before the finale!

Chapter Notes

shout out to past love island dates for giving me the inspo! even if one of the dates was from jana and he who shall not be named or thought of ever again

The sunshine was bright when they finally emerged from The Hideaway, Ilya throwing back one final look as the door to paradise closed behind them.

“Please, Shane,” he purred. “We could barricade the door from the inside. You’re a professional athlete, the producers are so *weak*...”

“Ilya.” Shane attempted to say sternly, his lips twitching. “We cannot lock ourselves in The Hideaway forever.”

“So you hate me?”

“Ilya.”

“No, it’s fine, you hate me. *Love Island* hates me. The universe hates me.”

Cheers sounded as they rounded the corner, the Islanders welcoming them back.

Shane looked around the circle, frowning slightly.

“Where’s Hayden and Jackie?”

Troy grinned. “They got the first final date. Got whisked away at sunrise. Not sure when they’ll be back.”

A radiant smile spread across Ilya’s face. He squeezed Shane’s hand.

“Okay, the universe does not hate me so much.”

Shane rolled his eyes, snorting as Rose tugged at his shoulder.

“This way, Shane. Spill!”

Ilya pouted as Svetlana pulled him in the other direction, stretching his hand out to Shane as if he was being sent away to war.

Shane tried to keep things appropriate, newly aware that every moment of his could be televised if producers so chose. He had only gotten about two or three descriptions in, Rose nodding wisely, Scott acting as scandalized as if he had never had sex before, when his recap was interrupted by movement at the Villa’s entrance.

Hayden and Jackie walked in beaming. Ilya, Svetlana, Kip, and Troy stood up from the balcony, cheering from above, while Shane’s group clapped from the daybeds before motioning Hayden over, Jackie slinking upstairs with a smile.

Shane and Rose scooted apart, making room for Hayden between them.

“Well?” Rose raised her eyebrows. “Make us all jealous, where’d you get to go?”

Hayden bit his lip, eyes sparkling.

“So the final date was basically a sunrise spa session. They had these massage tables set up right on the beach so the sun came up over us, which was incredible. And my masseuse was fantastic, he really knew-”

Harris tilted his head. “He?”

Hayden flushed slightly. “Yeah, he. Jackie preferred the lady one and I didn’t mind, so-”

“I bet you didn’t mind.” Scott grinned.

Shane looked at Hayden from beneath his lashes.

“He wasn’t as cute as me, though, right?”

“Will you all shut up?” Hayden’s face was bright red now.

“Describe him first.” Rose bit her finger with a devious grin. “Are we talking tan? Muscular? Flexible? Like one of those masseuses who straddles your back?”

“Yeah, Hayden, did he straddle you?” Scott leaned closer, eyebrows waggling.

Hayden crossed his arms.

“I’m not going to tell you anything else if you can’t act maturely about this.”

Shane squeezed Hayden’s arm.

“Sorry, sorry. Please continue.”

Hayden waited another minute, then breathed out through his nose.

“Fine. So we had our massages, then facials, and after that-”

The group’s laughter burst through pressed lips, the four of them collapsing into one another as Hayden glared harder.

“You know what, forget it. We had a great time. Made plans for our first visit to see each other once we’re out of the Villa. But sure, keep being children about it.”

“I’m sorry, really-” Rose reached out to him, her eyes teary. “That’s really- that’s really sweet, Hayden.”

“Yeah, man, I’m glad you got your, um, happy ending.” Scott kept his face straight for a minute before they all dissolved into giggles again, Hayden finally giving in and letting out a short laugh along with them.

Hayden didn’t suffer for long before Harris’s phone was going off. Harris reached for his phone just as Troy bellowed from the balcony.

“I got a TEXT!”

Harris scrambled to his feet, grinning as he read out his duplicate message.

“Troy and Harris, it is time for your final date!”

Harris blew a kiss up to the balcony as Troy practically sprinted downstairs, the two of them leaving the Villa to the Islander’s loud applause.

The groups broke apart after that, Islanders mingling as Troy and Harris enjoyed whatever date they had been sent on. About an hour later, Svetlana and Rose’s phones chimed and they were off too. Troy and Harris returned shortly after, the Islanders regathering to hear how they had swam to a secluded cove before having a beachside picnic. Troy looked at Harris with a shy smile and announced they had closed off on the date, the Islanders exploding into cheers as they leaned together for a kiss.

Ilya whined at Shane’s ear.

“This is taking so *long*. When is our turn?”

Shane swatted him.

“Patience.”

Shane’s patience did not last long. Shane smiled as Ilya splashed around the pool, emerging to check his phone at ten-minute intervals before sliding back into the water with a pout. Shane smiled as the other two couples kept stopping by to add details of their dates they had forgotten, Hayden needing to describe how the sunrise had caught Jackie’s hair in a pink-

orange glow, Harris asking if he had mentioned all the flowers arranged in their own private cove. Shane kept smiling as Svetlana and Rose burst back into the Villa, describing the yacht they had been on and the private time they shared on the bow, as if their matching hickies didn't say enough.

But his smile stopped when Scott's phone chirped in time with Kip's just a minute later, his head snapping at the noise.

"Are you *serious*? You guys are going before us?"

Ilya squeezed his shoulder, voice low and reprimanding through his smirk.

"Patience, Shane, patience."

It was evening when their phones finally chimed, Shane half-dozing on Ilya as he caught up on sleep from the night before. He jerked awake, scrambling for his phone. Ilya was faster. He held his phone over his head.

"I GOT A TEXT! Shane and I are going on our final-" Ilya frowned at the screen. "Final date. But for here only. Not forever."

Shane snorted, pressing a kiss to Ilya's shoulder.

"Finally ready for our not final date?"

It was sunset when the car dropped them off, producer idling in the front seat. Shane got out of the backseat first, jogging to open the door for Ilya on the other side even though Ilya's legs were already halfway out. Still, Shane caught a slight flush on Ilya's cheeks as Shane guided him out, hand on the small of his back.

Ilya was wearing a button-down with a splayed tiger over it, the first few buttons open to reveal the golden crucifix dipping into a curl of his chest hair. Shane's Rolex glimmered on his wrist.

Shane's outfit was less flashy. The matching white pants and white jacket didn't quite feel like him - another pre-decided stylist choice - and Shane hoped they wouldn't be eating anything messy on their date.

The car pulled away, leaving Shane and Ilya in front of a curving stone path. The path was lit with what seemed like hundreds of candles, the two men quieting as they reached for each other's hand and proceeded forward. The path took them to a clearing where a table was set for two beneath a sturdy tree, its branches arching over in a natural canopy. Shane's eyes followed the additional blaze of candles that outlined the clearing. He wondered if they would be considered a fire hazard (the producers certainly hadn't given them access to a fire extinguisher), when Ilya's rough voice broke through his thoughts.

"Shane. Look."

Ilya pointed into the tree. Along its branches, heart-shaped notes dangled in shades of pink and red. Shane frowned, reaching for the one already in Ilya's hand. The note was handwritten. Shane had studied enough reality television to know it was likely just one of the production assistants, but it didn't stop his stomach from lurching when he saw the human scrawl over the matte cardstock.

Shane! I'm thirteen. My mom says I'm too young to watch this show but she lets me now. I never thought I could have what you have with Ilya but I can kinda imagine it now. It's cool to see how you love each other. And that you're gay but not a sissy. I'm kind of a sissy. I'm not good at sports. I've tried. But it's made the kids at school sorta less mean since you're a famous hockey player, though they still suck a lot. Anyway, thanks for coming out. I hope you and Ilya win. - Marcus, Odessa TX

"Ilya..." Shane looked up.

"I know." Ilya stepped closer without being asked, opening his arms for Shane to slot into, the letter gripped in his hand.

"Are they all like this?" Shane looked up, slightly horrified, the sunset trickling through the branches.

"Let's see." Ilya reached up, plucking down another one. He gave Shane a grin, then read it out loud.

I had to write to say thanks for y'all being FREAKS. My husband watches with me every night now that he knows this is where I got the idea for some handcuffs and blindfolds in the bedroom... Keep it coming boys! - Alyssa from Mt. Vernon, Ohio

"Well, that one's...different." Shane wrinkled his nose, Ilya chuckling as Shane reached his hand up and caught one off a nearby branch.

Shane read for a moment, his face becoming serious again. He handed it to Ilya.

Ilya frowned, flipping it open.

Ilya. You have a very brave partner! It's not easy for an athlete to come out. But I wanted to write to you. I am also Russian, living in Canada now. I am gay. That is still hard for me some days. I hide who I am from my family. Sometimes I hide from myself. You don't hide at all. Seeing you, so bright and open, has changed me. You are famous online now. I have never heard Russian and bisexual so many times together. You may not be an athlete but I know what it took to be who you are. Thank you. And thanks to Svetlana too for loving you. It gives me hope. Maybe one day I'll have friends, a partner, and parts of Russia too. - Mikhail (Kamloops, British Columbia)

Ilya folded the letter shut, his fingertips tracing the heart as he turned away. Shane said nothing, simply wrapped Ilya in a hug from behind. He rocked him, nestling his chin in Ilya's shoulder, and allowed Ilya to clear his watery eyes in private.

They went through the whole tree like that, sometimes calling out lines to the other, sometimes reading silently. By the time the tree was bare, Ilya and Shane were raw, hearts tender to the touch.

Ilya pulled out Shane's chair, giving him a small grin as Shane collapsed into his seat.

"My favorite was the one that said you had no chemistry with anyone but me. Very smart fan. The best."

"Mhm." Shane smirked, stilling as he looked down at the table. "Ilya. There's more."

Shane picked up the letter waiting on his plate, thumb glossing over his name on the front. He could see a similar envelope on Ilya's plate. Shane exhaled, breaking the seal. His chest caved immediately, emotions already so close to the surface. Chexy's large scrawl covered the piece of notebook paper inside, Shane's eyes darting everywhere before he made himself slow down and start at the beginning.

Shanya!

We all miss you. I have watched every episode with your parents. Your mother may need to detox from the wine once you are back home...she has drunk a lot, after Casa Amor especially. Remind me never to make her mad, Shanya, she is scary.

I have a lot to say to you. We can talk best when you are back. But I need to say, we love you. Your parents were so proud, watching you. I was proud too. It was a big thing to do. The guys on the team will not be a problem. We will talk more in person, but you should see how many people are behind you. It will make your face flush all red like you get! The league even made a statement supporting you after these online people bullied them until they did.

So I wanted you to know that. That we love you, that we are proud, that you still have hockey. I noticed you are not doing as many workouts as you said you would. I thought we were on the same training plan? But maybe a certain other Russian is helping you reach your cardio minutes...I bet you are blushing again! I am excited to meet him. I am also excited to ruin his face if he is bad to you. But I think he will be good. You are certainly good for him.

Your friend,

Chexy

P.S. I tried to stop David from overfeeding Pork Belly. It didn't work. Pork is even fatter now, but very happy. And he only hisses at Ilya on screen sometimes now. Lots of progress!

Shane looked up, a smile still on his face, only to drop the letter in his hands when he saw Ilya's face.

Ilya was crying.

Not eyes watering as he blinked fast enough to pretend they weren't. Not a traitorous tear or two that leaked out despite himself. No. Real tears, flowing down his face.

Shane was next to him in an instant. Ilya's arms were weighted down at his side like stones, his letter fluttering in the evening breeze on top of the table. Shane pried himself into the small space, leg swinging over Ilya as he eased onto his lap, his hands sliding up Ilya's face.

"Hey. Hey. Talk to me?"

Ilya made a sound, hand motioning. Shane half-turned, almost missing the word that slipped from Ilya's lips.

"Yuna."

Shane froze, face scrunching.

"Yu- my mother?"

Shane turned more slowly, picking up the letter. It was his mother's handwriting, neat and tilted a fraction to the right. The same writing that had graced his school lunches, permission slips, notes left on the fridge. Later the contracts sent over by his team, by brands, always in those steadfast neat letters.

Shane swallowed, drawing it closer.

"Can I?"

Ilya nodded, burying his head into Shane's chest, his arms finally twitching up enough to wrap around Shane's back. Shane shifted his weight in Ilya's lap, both hands clutching the letter.

Ilya,

This is Yuna Hollander. I have a lot I need to say to you.

You made my son look like a fool on national television. I know it's a stereotype that models are unintelligent, but you certainly didn't prove them wrong. As I watched, I wondered how my son, with all his goodness, had been unlucky enough to fall into your trap. I did not enjoy watching as you continued using your penis as a weapon of mass destruction, careless in both the people you continued to inflict yourself on as well as with my son's heart. It was not a happy watch.

Skepticism is too kind a word for what I felt upon your reunion. I had liked Hayden for Shane before his connection deepened with Jackie. He seemed like a nice man. And J.J. seemed very promising - attractive and intelligent. Even Scott seemed like he could provide more than you had.

Shane stopped reading, bringing his eyes to Ilya's in horror.

"Ilya. I am so, so sorry. I told you my mom can be really intense. She just needs a chance to get to know you, and then-"

"Keep going." Ilya's words were muffled against Shane's shirt.

But Shane wanted you. Shane kept wanting you. And I appreciated how you seemed to take his words to heart and remain faithful as he healed. Though should you really get credit for doing the bare minimum and not copulating with everything in sight? I digress...

What I am trying to say is: it is hard as a mother to watch your son get hurt. And Shane has been hurt a lot. He was hurt growing up. Some new classroom issue every year, Shane always on the outside. And there are only so many kids you can get expelled before you realize, you can't protect your kid from everything.

I thought it might be better once he found hockey, even though I knew he still stood out. I know he shielded me from a lot of what he experienced, but he took his features from me. I remember the words. I remember the looks. He doesn't need to tell me for me to know.

And David and I, we knew there was more. We never said anything, never pushed him. Well, his father didn't. I may have been guilty of trying to set him up with a girl or two, just in case it was nerves, or those childhood difficulties still. He never has been the most social butterfly.

We knew for sure as soon as that video broke. It was humiliating for him, caught on camera like that. We don't have to deny it anymore. He was obviously checking out your ass (try not to be too cocky about that). Everyone could see it. But he wasn't ready. It was too much.

This show was supposed to help him bury himself. Buy him more time. Give him safety over joy, security over authenticity. I thought it was the right choice for him at the time.

You were the farthest thing from safe. You hounded him, cornering him, dragging out the pieces of who he is with the sharp points of your teeth on my screen every night.

Ilya, I have never seen him smile so much. Do you know how much that aches to say? His whole life, so many stolen smiles he should have had. You gave some back.

He seems different to me, when we watch him lately. His shoulders always used to be by his ears. Even his eyes seemed to vibrate sometimes, the way he'd scan around a room. The only time he'd truly relax was on the ice. You do the same for him. I watch him unfurl the same exact way, only this time, he unfurls into someone else instead of himself.

I love that Shane has hockey. I love that he has you. If you mean what you've been saying in your confessionals, I would also love if you and Shane were to make a future together (However - three years is a respectable time to date before engagement. Then another year or so before marriage).

If you keep treating him well, and letting him be the Shane he has always deserved to be, I would be happy to consider you my second son. Shane may not say it, but he does not look at many people the way he looks at you. I have a feeling you may already be family to him.

Now. If you do not treat him well, remember that you will not be on an inaccessible island forever; I have a very committed husband with knowledge of spousal immunity, and we already know more than one highly esteemed criminal defense lawyer.

If you continue to treat Shane well, then our arms are wide open to you. And Ilya - I would have liked to meet your mother as well. From what you have shared of her on the show, it sounds like you got the best of her.

Love,

Yuna

P.S. I consider myself to be a sexually liberated woman. However, it would've been kind if you and Shane considered warning the audience before any intimacy. It's unnatural for parents to know about their children's lovers, no matter how positive the experiences seem to be. While I agree with David that chemistry is important in a relationship - it's certainly true in our case - I wonder if you forget you are on national television? We will soundproof the guest room before you visit.

Shane dropped the letter, all sorts of expressions flashing across his face, Ilya still cradled to his chest.

"I cannot believe my mom talked about our sex life. And mentioned *hers*."

Ilya sniffed against Shane.

"She is a beautiful woman. She deserves a happy sex life. And it is true that we are loud lovers."

"Okay, gross. Never mention my mom's sex life. And don't call us lovers."

Ilya nuzzled closer to Shane.

"Aren't you my lover?"

"I mean, technically, but-" Shane let out a sigh, running a hand through Ilya's curls and pulling him back gently.

"Can we talk about it?"

Ilya pouted, sniffing and turning his head.

“I am fine.”

“Ilya.”

“Shane.”

Shane gazed at him, eyes soft and waiting.

“Fine, it was a good letter. Nice.” Ilya’s eyes started watering again. “You have not told me much about baby Shane.”

Shane’s cheeks burned.

“Oh. She’s exaggerating. It wasn’t that bad, really. Other kids...I just missed things sometimes. And was kind of gullible.”

“My Shane.” Ilya pulled him in, wrapping him again in a tight hug. “I would do more than expel them. I would murder them and use your mother’s attorney to go free.”

“Okay, no one is murdering anyone. I’m fine.” Shane tilted back, thumb stroking Ilya’s chin. “Are you?”

Ilya nodded slowly.

“I love her, Shane. She is so mean for you.”

“Yeah.” Shane scoffed, swallowing. “Not too mean though?”

“No. It is good. She loves you.”

“She sees you too, Ilya.” Shane ran a hand through Ilya’s curls, his gaze tracing the circles of hair. “I-” His throat thickened. “I’m glad she can see a little of what I see in you. How caring you are. How you bring me out of my shell.”

“She mentioned visiting.”

A smile flickered across Shane’s face.

“Yeah. That would be nice, right? If you could come stay for a bit? I know our schedules might be crazy after this, and it would take some coordination and-”

“Yes. I will come. Yes.” Ilya leaned up, enveloping Shane in a kiss.

“Good.” Shane looked down, playing with the hem of Ilya’s shirt as he shifted in his lap.

“She was right, you know. How I look at you. Like you’re family already. Like we belong.”

“We do.” Ilya threaded a hand through Shane’s hair, his lips pressing to Shane’s again. He pressed their foreheads together, shuddering. “Shane, I love-” He swallowed, his hand sliding from Shane’s hair to his cheek. “I love your freckles. I love them so, so much.”

Shane looked at Ilya, starry-eyed as Ilya traced his thumb over the sprinkling of freckles across the bridge of his nose and cheekbones.

“Ilya...” Shane murmured, easing closer to his ear, hiding his face against his neck. “Do you think...do you want to be my boyfriend?”

Ilya laughed, a surprised sound, then laughed even harder, Shane’s grip tightening on Ilya’s shirt just as Ilya finally spoke.

“Yes, Shane, I think so. Probably, yes. Boyfriends. To start.”

Shane felt his body go easy and limp in Ilya’s embrace, a deep breath sinking out of him.

“Good.”

“My boyfriend.” Ilya rumbled in his ear, hand anchoring against Shane’s hip.

Shane’s breath hitched, the word sending a wave of heat through his body.

“Oh, um...and Ilya? I got a copy of our footage from yesterday night.”

Ilya pulled back, eyebrows rising into his hairline.

“You did? How?”

Shane shrugged. “I have money. More than I need.”

“You bribed a producer?”

“I guess technically-”

“For our sex tape?”

“Don’t say it like *that*.” Shane’s cheeks flared pink.

“I will say it like that, it is the hottest thing I have ever heard.”

Ilya’s eyes roamed around cameras hidden in the clearing, his voice rising to a proud shout.

“Excuse me, Yuna and David and any other Hollander relatives! Shane has made me concerningly horny! We are about to embark on intimacy! Look away now! This is your warning!”

“Ilya!” Shane hissed. “I don’t think that’s what she meant.”

“Close enough.” Ilya grinned, and then leaned in to kiss Shane again, Shane’s protests disappearing the second their lips made contact.

They were descended upon the second they returned, Islanders clambering for details. Shane looked at Ilya, unsure how much he wanted to share, but then Ilya thrust their joined hands

into the air.

“Meet my boyfriend!”

The Islanders went wild, jumping up and down and merging into them in a giant, gyrating group hug. Rose was shaking a half-open bottle of champagne, trying to spray it over them. Shane laughed, taking in everyone’s already emptied glasses.

“Lightweights! All of you!”

“Drunk on *love*.” Svetlana cooed, tweaking Ilya’s ear.

Shane looked around the group, frowning.

“Wow, are Scott and Kip still on their date?”

The celebratory atmosphere cooled. Hayden winced.

“Eh, no, man. They’re upstairs...”

“Fighting.” Jackie took another sip of her drink.

“Or fucking.” Troy shrugged.

“What is this, what happened? I want all the gossip immediately.” Ilya pulled out a stool from the kitchen, getting comfortable, and motioned for Shane to sit on his lap despite the open stool right next to him.

Harris sighed. “So it sounds like they had a nice enough dinner, but then Scott wanted to make things official.”

“And Kip thought they should see how things go outside of the villa before putting a boyfriend label on it.” Troy added.

“Which, I could get feeling hurt!” Rose piped up. “But apparently Scott was talking about moving in together as soon as we’re out of here, so I get if Kip wanted to pump the brakes a bit.”

Svetlana swirled her drink. “And apparently this all happened in front of a hired singer who kept serenading them as they fought louder and louder. Mess.”

“I am so mad. I wish our date was watching their date.” Ilya shook his head, looking towards Shane with a pout.

As if on cue, Scott and Kip emerged onto the balcony over them, hands intertwined. Kip raised his phone, his voice croaky.

“I got a text.”

“Oh no.” Jackie covered her mouth.

Kip cleared his throat.

“Islanders, America has been voting. Please gather around the firepit.”

The couples stood in a semicircle, so much more space now than when they had started. Shane glanced at Rose briefly, thinking back to their first coupling. He pressed the line of his body closer against Ilya, hoping they wouldn't be joining the ghosts in the spaces between them tonight.

Scott and Kip were basically mounting each other, the fight as always only seeming to have brought them closer. Scott ran his hands all over Kip's body from behind, Kip nuzzling into his shoulder.

Svetlana leaned in to Ilya, whispering.

“It's like that couple we were behind at the amusement park last summer, remember?”

Shane wrinkled his nose, Ilya grinning as he gave Shane's ear a quick nip.

“What, jealous? We can be just as obnoxious if you want.”

Shane slapped his hand away, looking straight ahead at Ariana.

“Islanders. America has been voting on their favorite couples. We will now hear the results.”

Ilya's phone pinged. Shane stared at his pocket, heart thudding as Ilya drew out the phone.

“Harris and Troy. You are up for elimination.” He gave them a sad smile as they nodded, heading forward to stand by Ariana.

Rose's phone chimed next.

“The second couple up for elimination is...Scott and Kip.”

Kip let out a gasp, clinging tighter to Scott behind him. They shuffled together to the front, arms wrapped around each other.

Ariana let out a slow exhale.

“Unfortunately, the couple who received the fewest number of votes, leaving them dumped from the island, is...Harris and Troy.”

“Oh.” Svetlana's hand flew to her mouth, Shane's stomach sinking.

Harris shrugged, blinking quickly as he looked at Troy with a small smile. Troy reached for his hand.

“I got what I came for. I wish Harris and I had more time. But I have a really good feeling about where we're going.”

“Yeah.” Harris sniffed, nodding. “And now we don’t have to wait for The Hideaway - we can just go home!”

The Islanders let out weak giggles before Ariana motioned them forward, allowing them to say their goodbyes. After the two of them had packed, giving one final wave as they rolled out of the Villa, Shane looked around at who was left.

The Villa felt suddenly too large with only four couples. Rose and Svetlana leaned against each other, Jackie wiping her eyes next to Hayden. Scott and Kip had their foreheads pressed together, whispering feverishly about how it could have been them and kissing with heavy amounts of tongue every few sentences. Shane looked away with a grimace.

Kip’s phone chimed as Scott’s tongue was deep down his throat. Hayden slapped Kip on the back.

“Dude! Come up for air. You got a text.”

Kip pulled back, glassy-eyed. Scott’s hand slid lower, extracting the phone from Kip’s back pocket. They pressed their cheeks together, reading in unison.

“Islanders, cheer yourselves up with one final visit to The Hideaway. One couple will enjoy the last night away before The Hideaway is closed for the summer!”

The three couples looked at each other over Scott and Kip’s heads. Ilya rolled his eyes.

“I vote Scott and Kip for Hideaway.”

There was a chorus of immediate agreement. Scott looked at Ilya, eyes soft.

“Wow, thanks man. We appreciate it.”

“Do not flatter yourself. No one wants to hear your noisy makeup sex. Better to do it privately.”

“Oh.” Scott sniffed. “Well, we will enjoy it.”

“It is a fun time.” Svetlana kissed Rose’s cheek, grinning.

“Just wear protection so we don’t get more robotic babies,” Hayden laughed.

“And don’t think too hard about what Shane and I did on that mattress.” Ilya patted Scott’s cheek as he walked by, heading upstairs with Shane. “Unless that ah, enhances your experience?”

“Oh, fuck off.” Scott swatted at Ilya’s hand before returning to Kip, kissing him messily as the Islanders let out a suppressed groan.

NEXT TIME...ON HEATED ISLAND...

Tomorrow night...it's time to meet the in-laws. Families land in Fiji and they may work for the FBI with how much they're interrogating! Then our Islanders spend their last night in the Villa before our epic finale...

Chapter 24

Chapter Summary

family visit day means a day of both grief and love!

Chapter Notes

tw: grief, death of a parent, suicide

because it's family day, there is irina content in this chapter. proceed accordingly!

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

“Ilya, that’s way too formal.” Shane laughed, looking at Ilya from the entrance to the dressing room.

Ilya adjusted the tie of his three-piece suit in the mirrored front of his closet, glowering at Shane behind his shoulder.

“It is family day, no?”

“Yes, and,” Shane came closer, loosening Ilya’s tie. “I don’t want you overheating in the tropical weather because you thought you needed to go black-tie.”

Ilya looked at himself in the mirror, shoulders slumping as he murmured at his reflection. “Что ты делаешь, чувак?”

Shane squeezed his shoulders, burrowing his nose into Ilya’s neck.

“It’s going to be okay. Promise. And honestly, they’ve already seen you in a kinky leather outfit from your bombshell entrance so...”

“Shane, do not remind me.” Ilya groaned, covering his face.

Shane laughed. “It’s supposed to be reassuring! Like, anything is better than that.”

“So it was that bad?”

“Ilya.” Shane sighed, still smiling, his hands easing Ilya’s suit jacket off his shoulders.

“Mm, maybe you just want me undressed. Is that it?” Ilya turned towards Shane, a grin growing on his face.

Shane focused on unbuttoning Ilya’s dress shirt, his gaze steady as he brought them to Ilya’s eyes.

“Maybe.”

Ilya let out another low groan, Shane’s fingers slipping over bare skin as he tugged Ilya’s shirt free.

“You are killing me, Hollander. I am trying to be a good boy for your parents.”

Shane shrugged. “Maybe you should be a bad one for me.”

His hand found Ilya’s belt buckle, undoing it one-handed as he kept his gaze on Ilya. The metal clinked open, Ilya’s trousers parting to reveal the golden tangle of his hair disappearing into his boxer briefs.

Ilya’s mouth gaped.

“Who are you, and what have you done with my Shane?”

Shane gave a tug and Ilya’s pants fell completely to the ground, the fabric pooling around his ankles. Shane stepped closer, a palm gliding down the front of Ilya’s underwear, his voice too innocently casual for the words he was saying.

“We have a bit of time... Hayden and Jackie are outside with their parents already. Scott and Kip are probably off fighting or fucking somewhere. And Svetlana and Rose-”

A high-pitched shriek emitted from the open dressing room door. Rose covered her eyes and turned sharply, running into the wall, causing her to shriek louder.

“Is right here.” Ilya bent quickly, yanking up his pants.

Shane turned bright red, even his ears tingling as he half-hid behind Ilya, his hands covering the tenting already happening in his shorts.

“Sorry!” Rose thrust a searching hand out into the air, stumbling as she gripped onto the doorway. “I was looking for Shane to make sure my outfit is okay, we just got the text.”

“Shane will give you very poor advice.” Ilya commented dryly, looking down at his loosened pants.

Shane smacked his arm, his voice still strained.

“You look fine, Rose. Svetlana’s family will love you.”

“Are you just saying that to get rid of me?”

There was silence. Rose huffed, fumbling her way out of the dressing room.

“Fine, but you owe me one, Shane!”

Ilya looked down at his pants gripped in one hand, his underwear still half-exposed. He raised his eyebrows.

“Yes, Shane. You owe me one too.”

Once Ilya had changed into more casual wear, they strolled outside, taking in the other couples. Hayden and Jackie had merged their families across two daybeds by the pool, the six of them looking like they fit seamlessly together. In the distance, Ilya glimpsed Kip straddling Scott on the dock, and glanced away before having to see anything more.

They headed towards the kitchen. Ilya’s stomach rumbled. He had been too nervous for the breakfast Shane made him that morning. He tore into a banana, glancing up as Rose and Svetlana waited at the Villa’s entrance. Screams erupted, Rose jumping up and down as her parents arrived, her three bulky brothers shuffling in after.

“Jesus, they’re tall.” Shane looked over Ilya’s shoulder, appraising. Ilya shot him a glare.

“So now you want to go back to a Landry?”

“Relax, I’m just saying.” Shane grinned, leaning against Ilya’s chest.

Ilya turned, catching sight of two women scooping Svetlana up into a hug. He recognized the lighter-skinned one, her curls piled on top of her head: Katya, a Russian woman who could’ve been a model herself if she had been a few inches taller, with the audacity to call herself Svetlana’s best friend. And - Ilya’s face broke into a smile as he glimpsed her profile - of course he knew Yelena, Svetlana’s mother.

Rose and Svetlana split into their family units, heading to different parts of the Villa to catch up and gossip about the other partner. Ilya watched the familiar sway of Yelena’s back, Svetlana already looking younger in her presence like the cheeky child she had been.

Ilya felt something twist in his chest. Had he been on the show alone, he would have named Svetlana as his family, her mother as his second one. He didn’t know who the producers had flown out for him instead. Did they bribe Alexei, seduced by the promise of a free trip to Fiji? Ilya hated the thought of him shaking Shane’s hand, meeting the Hollanders at the same time and polluting their already dubious opinion of him.

But would it be worse for there to be no one? For Shane and his parents to look at him with pity, a self-created orphan, his living father notwithstanding?

Shane’s hand tugged Ilya’s necklace gently, pulling his back to the present. Ilya refocused watching as Shane’s freckles danced in the sunlight. Shane opened his lips to say something, but then Ilya heard the chime from his pocket, his face blanching.

Shane’s face lit up. He looked at Ilya, eyes sparkling.

“Apparently I have a surprise waiting for me in the Hideaway...”

“Better not be a bombshell.” Ilya’s thumb traced over Shane’s chin ruefully.

Shane snorted, hands coming up to clamp around Ilya’s jaw, pulling him into a deep kiss. They parted, Ilya swaying forward slightly, chasing Shane’s lips.

“Don’t be ridiculous.” Shane murmured.

His hand trailed down Ilya’s neck, sliding down and tightening around Ilya’s wrist.

“I can’t wait for them to meet you.” Shane’s palm cupped the Rolex, fingers like a brand over Ilya’s pulsepoint. “They’re going to love you, Ilya. Like I love you.”

Shane swallowed, pulling away before Ilya could quite process the words. Ilya watched Shane’s broad shoulders stride across the Villa, his mind stuttering as Shane approached the Hideaway’s door. Love him like family. Love like maybe something more. Ilya exhaled, bracing himself against the kitchen counter, and waited to be invited in.

Shane peeked in the Hideaway’s door, the outdoor area newly transformed. A bamboo divider shielded the hot tub now, the amphitheater steps overlaid with cushions. And there, on the third row, waited the people Shane had been aching to see.

His parents were around him at once, squeezing tight. He buried his head into his dad’s shoulder, eyes prickling embarrassingly.

“I missed you guys.”

He pulled back, spotting Chexy waiting awkwardly behind them.

“Chex!” The men embraced in a bear hug, Chexy grinning and showing off the gaps where his teeth were still missing.

“Shanya. You are so tiny now.” He squeezed Shane’s arms. “Your muscles are all gone, so weak.”

“Shut up.” Shane shoved him, hard, then glanced down at his biceps to check.

“Only teasing.” Chexy laughed. “Coach will have you working overtime anyway.”

“I miss it.” A smile flitted across Shane’s face.

“Only you would be excited about grueling training sessions.” David smiled at Shane, gesturing to the steps. “Shall we catch up?”

Shane sat between his parents, Chexy on the step below. His foot tapped against the steps.

“Well? What do you think of...everything?”

David sighed dramatically. “I was so sure you’d end up with Javi.”

“*Javi?*” Shane laughed, nose wrinkling. “He wasn’t even gay.”

“I think your father was projecting.” Yuna rolled her eyes.

“Well, you’re the one who said he looked great with Rose.” David countered.

“He did look great with Rose!” Yuna scoffed. “Just not...you know...”

“Compatible.” Shane grinned briefly, smile disappearing as quickly as it came. “So. Um. About that.”

“*Oh.*” Yuna’s face crumpled, understanding at once. “Oh, honey. Of course we’re okay with it.”

David nodded behind her, his hand warm on Shane’s shoulder.

“So proud of you, son. That took guts.”

Shane’s eyes darted to Yuna.

“It didn’t create too much trouble? With the league? Or sponsors?”

“Your mother’s the one who created trouble. Did you hear she’s banned on three social media platforms now?”

Shane’s face drained. “People were that mean about it?”

“*No.*” David laughed, shaking his head. “The internet loves you. Your mother was the bully. The way she went after Sasha and then Ilya...I thought she was going to get charged with Russian hate speech or something.”

“I said as a Russian, it was okay.” Chexy grinned. “But she is still banned.”

Shane shook his head, starting to smile again. Yuna sniffed.

“I didn’t care for how you were being treated, so sue me!”

“They might.” David laughed as he looked at Shane. He paused, really looking at him. His hand gently cuffed the side of Shane’s face.

“We love you, buddy. You know that right?” He looked to his wife. Yuna’s tone softened.

“Of course we do, Shanebug. More than anything.”

Shane felt his eyes prickling again. Chexy grinned from the step below.

“I love you most of course, Shanyabug.”

Shane snorted, shoving Chexy with his foot.

“Okay, enough.” He shifted, eyes not looking at anyone in particular. “So...what do you think about him?”

“Did he share my letter with you?” Yuna tilted her head.

Shane nodded, catching her eye. “Yeah. He did.”

“Well, then.” She held his gaze, a smile dancing around her lips.

“You’re still going to interrogate him, huh?”

“Of course she will.” David laughed. “Don’t worry. I’ll be here for moral support. Even if he’s not sexy Javi.”

“*Dad.*” Shane rolled his eyes, David laughing harder.

Shane picked at the bright pink cushion they were sitting on, chewing on the inside of his cheek.

“What has Ilya been saying in his confessionals anyway? You mentioned it in your letter.”

Yuna and David exchanged a glance, Chexy avoiding Shane’s eyes with a smile. Yuna’s voice was gentle when she spoke.

“Things he should say to you first.” She squeezed his knee.

“We can see it, Shane. The way he talks about you...” David trailed off, turning to hold Yuna’s gaze. “It reminds me of when I met your mother. It was like she was a...star, exploding my whole universe. Nothing was the same after.”

“Gross.” Shane wrinkled his nose.

“Hey, this is a big deal for a Russian man.” Chexy chimed in. “My girlfriend gets mad when she sees clips online. Asks why I cannot be like this Ilya, all soft and romantic.”

“Yeah?” Shane tilted his head, cheeks flushing. “I really need to see those tapes then.”

“Let him pretend to be cool a little longer.” Chexy laughed. “Once you are home, there will be no more secrets. He is a big baby for you. In good way.”

Shane looked down, trying to hide the grin stretching across his face.

“Okay, well, speaking of. I guess we should go get him.”

Shane’s parents stood up, starting to walk towards the door. Shane grabbed Chexy’s arm and pulled him back a step, his voice low.

“Hey, Chex, could you teach me something in Russian real quick?”

Ilya sprawled on a day bed, taking up as much space as he could by himself and trying to look very occupied as he ate an apple. Hayden and Jackie were saying farewells to their parents all teary-eyed, and he wasn't in the mood for a recap after they left. He had already snuck a few glances Svetlana's way, enough to ensure all was going smoothly. Rose's brothers certainly liked Svetlana based on the way their jaws seemed perpetually open as they ogled her.

The real show was sure to be in front of him though. Kip was sitting between his dad and a young woman Ilya assumed was a friend. Hunter sat across from them with a man who looked around his age - decrepit and on the brink of becoming a senior citizen, obviously.

Ilya took another crunch of his apple. It was shocking Hunter even had a friend show up. Still, something softened in his stomach. Ilya wouldn't be the only one without a nuclear family to parade around. Not the only one to follow if the producers tried to set him up for a pity storyline.

Ilya studied the group for a while, waiting for Hunter to do something overly intense or for Kip to have another miscommunication leading to a freakout. But it didn't come. Instead, they spoke quietly, smiles on all their faces. At one point, Kip's dad reached out and clasped Hunter's hand in both of his, both of their eyes becoming teary.

Ilya turned away. He forced another bite of apple down, throat suddenly dry. So Kip's dad was an over-the-top emotional drama queen too. Explained everything. Ilya didn't let himself think about how open Kip's dad looked, how caring, how welcoming towards the man across from him. As if Scott Hunter was deserving of that care. Deserving of his only son.

Ilya sat up, rolling his shoulders back. He was not about to sit around feeling...jealous...of some fossil. Maybe Hunter was in an elaborate make-a-wish scheme for the elderly and Kip and his dad were paid actors.

"Did you think you'd avoid me?"

Ilya startled, turning at the fluent Russian. Svetlana's mother stood before him, looking down at Ilya with an amused smile.

"Of course not, Tyotyа Yelena. I was giving you time to see Svetlana and meet her partner."

"I'm not talking about today, Ilyusha."

Yelena eased into the daybed next to Ilya, the smile remaining on her face even as her eyes became more serious.

"I know everyone grieves differently." She drew a hand down Ilya's cheek, thumb briefly pinching the flesh there before releasing. *"But you could have come to me. Answered my calls."*

Ilya shrugged, eyes sliding away.

"I didn't go to anyone."

"Exactly." She exhaled, leaning down to chase his gaze, her eyes tender. "Svetlana was worried. I was worried."

"I am okay now. Better, anyway. No need to worry."

"Mm. I am your second mother. I will always worry. It is what we do."

Ilya blinked, head jerking slightly as he tried to clear the tears. She leaned back, crossing her arms, tone lightening.

"If you're done avoiding me, then can I hear about this boy you're in love with?"

"I'm not-"

"Oh, sweetheart." Yelena threw back her head, laughing. "You've always been a terrible liar. Remember when you first came to Manhattan, and Svetlana was foolish enough to let you drive that Mustang?"

Ilya bit his lip, trying to stop his smile.

"Trying to pass off that sideswiped damage on a deer? In the middle of the city? Terrible, unconvincing. Just like now."

"I haven't told him."

"Of course not. You are scared still."

Ilya's face snapped to hers, nostrils flaring.

"It's not-" He sighed, shoulders collapsing under the steel of her gaze. *"Fine. Maybe a little."*

"He is very brave, your Shane."

"Yes."

"However. I was ready to pull a Tonya Harding if he kept making you prove how obviously you wanted him."

Ilya gasped, shaking his head as he laughed.

"Shane would kill you if you took hockey from him."

"I would kill him first if he broke your heart." Yelena looked at him steadily for a moment before leaning back, cocking her eyebrow. "Though I take it you've learned your lesson about how to express your frustrations? With your words and not with-"

"Yes, you do not need to say more." Ilya flushed, his legs drawing closer together.

"Good then." She eyed Ilya, then looked out across the Villa. "You seemed quite angry with Sasha."

“You did not know him. He...” Ilya shook his head, collapsing inward again. “Maybe he tried. In his own way. I don’t know.”

“Have you let yourself be angry at her?”

Ilya’s eyes drew up to Yelena’s, questioning.

“Yes. Irina.” She looked back across the Villa, letting Ilya study her profile. *“I was furious at her. Leaving all of us like that. Not asking for help. Letting you find-”* Her voice cut out.

Ilya let out a slow exhale. Yelena studied him.

“It is okay if you are. It is okay if you are not. I have enough anger for both of us.” She sighed. *“Even before. I wish...well. I suppose we both felt helpless when it came to Grigori and you boys.”*

She turned fully to Ilya, her hand finding his knee.

“I will only say this once. I know you do not like these kinds of talks. But I wish she had done more. I wish I had done more. Watching you, seeing how you have let yourself unfurl here... god, Ilya. I had not realized how walled off you had grown. One moment you were a little boy laughing with my Sveta and then...” She shook her head, squeezing his thigh a final time before releasing. *“I am very glad you met him.”*

Ilya rubbed the back of his hand over his eyes.

“Yes. Me too.”

“I am so angry she can’t meet him, Ilya.” Yelena tweaked his ear gently, tears swelling in her eyes. *“Oh, she makes me mad. But it is only because of how much I loved her. And wasn’t she lovable?”*

“Yes.” Ilya leaned in, Yelena’s arms coming up to wrap around him. *“Yes. Yes.”*

Ilya shifted at the sight of Shane’s parents coming out of the Hideaway, his face dry now. The Hollanders were different from how they appeared in quick pans during hockey games. More frail, maybe. More human.

Ilya turned to Yelena, his smile easier now.

“Like I said, she is in good hands with Rose. And I promise to call more. And visit more than just holidays.”

“Good.”

Ilya looked back at the Hollanders, his lip curling.

“The fuck is that?”

Yelena snorted, taking in the broad-shouldered man besides Shane.

“Language, Ilya. And I know you recognize him. It wouldn’t shock me if you have Shane’s entire roster memorized. For hockey, that is.” She smiled sweetly.

Ilya rolled his eyes.

“This is where Svetlana gets it from, you know.”

“That and this beauty.” Yelena winked, standing and doing a semi-twirl.

Ilya laughed despite himself, opening his arms for a hug.

“Until next time.”

She held onto Ilya’s forearms, head tilted with a smile.

“And where do you think I’m going? Isn’t it time for the families to meet?”

Ilya blinked, processing.

“You- you’ll come with me?”

“Of course, Ilyusha.” She threaded her arm through his, pulling him forward towards Shaen. “You know we’re family. Now let’s see if these people are worthy of you.”

Shane caught Ilya’s eyes from behind his parents, enthusiasm coiling in his muscles as he tried to hold himself back. Ilya found himself similarly formal, nodding at Shane with a smile as the six of them formed a tentative circle.

Yuna looked at Shane.

“All that talk and you’re not even going to say hi to him? Please, Shane, I’ve seen far worse on my screen. I was having violent flashbacks just sitting in the Hideaway.”

Yelena let out a loud laugh, Shane’s face scowling as he crossed his arms. Ilya’s shoulders eased. He leaned forward, pressing a kiss to Shane’s cheek.

“Good.” Yuna nodded, then turned to Yelena, hand extended. “Yuna Hollander. Shane’s mother.”

“But of course. Yelena Vetrova, Svetlana’s mother by birth and Ilya’s by force.” She grinned at him. “I’ve known him since he was a little child.”

Shane and Ilya hovered between them, reduced to smaller versions of themselves as they glanced at each other shyly. Yelena extended her hand to David, introducing herself again, and then looked back at Ilya.

“Why don’t we chat while you three boys catch up?”

Ilya allowed himself to glance at Chexy, forcing his face to stay neutral. He looked back at Yelena and swore she was reaching his mind as she grinned deviously, guiding the Hollanders to a daybed nearby.

“Nice to meet you.” Chexy thrust his hand out.

Ilya took it, squeezing perhaps harder than necessary. Chexy didn’t flinch, just tilted his head in curiosity, smiling wide enough to show the gaps in his teeth.

“Ilya, this is Chexy.” Shane bounced between them, leaning closer to Ilya now that his parents were farther away. “He’s my teammate and like, my best friend, I guess.”

“Aww, so sentimental, Hollander.” Chexy ruffled Shane’s hair.

Ilya stiffened. Then he felt a hand slipping into his own. Shane looked at him knowingly. Ilya made himself exhale as they sat down together, Shane still pressing close.

“So. Tell me about Hollander, Chexy.”

“Hollander? You don’t want to know about me?” Chexy teased, laughing again. It was irritating.

Ilya tugged Shane into his lap, ignoring his weak protests.

“No. I want to know about my Hollander on the ice. How good he is. How everyone fears him.” Ilya bit his teeth at Shane in an exaggerated growl, making him giggle.

“Mm, all true. He’s the best in the league. Must be boring, having no one to rival him. But I think he likes being captain. Bossing us around, yes?”

“Ah, this is a different side of him then. I thought it was the reverse?”

Shane flushed, squirming under Ilya’s hands.

“Shut up. Someone has to keep them in line.”

“Yes, we are a rowdy bunch.” Chexy leaned back, shaking his head with a grin. “So lucky to have Shanya give us bag skates until we are dead.”

Ilya’s hands hardened around Shane. He barely heard the small gasp Shane let out at the sudden vice of his palms. Ilya leaned forward, eyes dark, slipping into Russian.

“Shanya? What is this?”

Chexy’s eyebrows rose, his lips twitching, his voice firm enough to be a warning.

“Yes, Shanya. I thought you were Russian. You have not heard this before?”

“Shane said you had a girlfriend. Is that a lie? A cover?”

Chexy snorted, rolling his sizable muscles forward as he leaned closer to Ilya.

“What, it must be romantic? No one else has ever softened your name for you? Loved you enough to rename you?”

Shane’s eyes darted between them, taking in their fixed stares.

“What are you two saying? It’s very rude to leave me out, you know.”

Ilya slid his eyes from Chexy, tilting his jaw upward and engulfing Shane in a kiss. Shane let out a surprised sound, sinking into Ilya for a moment before pulling back, cheeks pinked.

“Ilya. That’s rude too.”

“Don’t care.”

“Well, care! I need you two to get along.” He frowned at Ilya. “It matters to me.”

Chexy leaned back, relaxing his posture.

“Truce?”

Ilya eyed him.

“I do not trust you.”

“You don’t have to. But know that while you’ve been here, I’ve been handling the team at home. Keeping them in line. Being very clear about just how accepting they will be when Shanya returns home.”

Ilya flinched again at the diminutive, rubbing his jaw as he made himself focus on the other words.

“They have been that bad?”

“They are hockey players. They have not been great.”

“But they will cooperate? They’ve been listening to you?”

“Yes. And I will be there in the locker room. On the ice. On him like a shadow. No one will touch him. No one will say anything to him. Not without consequences.”

Ilya processed for a moment, his head snapping forward in a nod.

“Thank you, then.”

“And Ilya. As pretty as Hollander is, I do find my girlfriend prettier. Besides, it’s clear he only has eyes for you. Look at him.”

Ilya glanced at Shane, who was following the Russian back and forth with a deepening frown. He looked at Ilya, petulant. Ilya felt a crushing softness flood his chest. He buried his face into Shane’s neck, squeezing tight around his waist as he exhaled. Shane’s hand came up to trace Ilya’s back.

“What was that for?”

“Nothing. Everything.” Ilya jerked his head at Chexy. “He is okay. We will be friends. I will buy the good vodka for us to drink together, yes?”

Chexy grinned.

“Good. Friends. Even though I know it kills you to be the second most important Russian man in his life.”

“Do not push it, Dovonchezky.”

“Ah, don’t be like that. I know you love me already. But I’m taken, remember. I’m not interested in you and your pissed-off little wet fish face.” Chexy let out a laugh.

Ilya scoffed, leaning back.

“I do not look like this!”

“Shanya, doesn’t Ilya look like an angry little fish when he’s mad?”

Shane looked at Ilya, confused.

“I’m going to have to learn Russian, aren’t I?”

Yelena and the Hollanders approached, smiles all around. Ilya felt his stomach flipping nervously as he scanned their faces, bracing for the worst.

Instead, Yelena pulled him into a hug, her voice low against his ear.

“They love you, as you should be loved. Now believe it.”

Ilya grunted, tightening the hug before they parted. Yelena turned to Chexy with a smile.

“I love to watch you play. You and Shane have *great* chemistry on the ice.”

Ilya rolled his eyes. She laughed, leaning towards Shane.

“He is too easy to rile up, Shane. I hope you take advantage of this. Sergei, let me steal you for a moment. My daughter would love to meet you. And it is so nice to discuss hockey in our native tongue, no?”

“Of course, ma’am.”

Yelena turned to Shane, Chexy by her side.

“And Shane. Treat him right. I fear your Russian bodyguard here will be outnumbered by me and Svetlana if you cross him.”

Shane swallowed, startled by Yuna’s laughter behind him as they walked away.

“I love her! She is so delightful, Ilya. I’m so glad we were able to meet her.”

“Yes.” His fingertips grazed his necklace. “She is family.”

Shane leaned into Ilya suddenly, his face serious, lips meeting in a firm kiss. Ilya traced Shane’s jawbone before pulling away, suddenly very aware of the Hollanders smiling at him.

“Remember when we started dating, David?” Yuna looked at Shane and Ilya, laughing. “I could not *pry* this man off me. Seriously, I think he would have quit his job to stay in bed all day if I hadn’t kicked him out each morning.”

“*Mom*, Jesus.” Shane covered his face, groaning.

“What, son? It’s healthy! You should be glad your parents love each other.”

David beamed at her. Yuna motioned for the boys to scoot over, her and David sitting on the daybed next to them.

“Now, Ilya. Speaking of jobs, you know Shane’s hockey career has to come first, right?”

“Mom, that’s not-”

“Of course.” Ilya nodded, face serious. “I would never interfere with that. I know how much it matters to him.”

“So how is long distance going to work? Between his schedule and your modeling campaigns? The time difference and then some, if you’re shooting internationally? And when-”

“*Mom*.” Shane groaned, leaning into Ilya’s shoulder.

Ilya wrapped an arm around Shane, bringing him closer. Yuna raised her hands.

“What, Shane? You have to think about these things. Otherwise this whole thing will end before it starts.”

“They are good questions, Mrs. Hollander. My schedule will be easier to change than Shane’s. I plan on choosing jobs closer to Canada, and take time off when he is off.”

“You would do that for me?” Shane looked at Ilya, face furrowed.

“I would do anything for you.” Ilya kissed the tip of his nose, looking back at Yuna seriously. “What else?”

“Well,” Yuna shifted. “What’s your five-year plan? Men can obviously model for much longer than women, which is idiotic by the way, but at some point, you will age out of the business. Do you plan to pivot to long-term sponsorships? Go into acting? Lots of models try to if they have any talent. And you know, you could probably host your own reality show, I have some contacts that-”

“*Mother.*”

Ilya laughed, elbowing Shane.

“It is okay. Helpful. I don’t know yet, Mrs. Hollander, but yes, good to think about.”

“Please, call me Yuna. And fair enough. But how about sooner, when this show wraps? We really should capitalize on the momentum. Rolex has already reached out. They want to do another campaign just the two of you, and-”

“Can we please not talk about business any more today?” Shane scowled at his mother. “You’re supposed to be getting to know my boyfriend, not becoming his manager.”

Yuna blinked, mouth snapping shut. David rubbed her knee reassuringly as she changed tracks.

“You’re right, you’re right. So Ilya, do you see yourself as a dad someday?”

“*Mom!*”

“What! That’s not business, it’s a getting-to-know-you question! And he seemed very besotted with your little robot daughter. Great middle name, by the way.”

Shane grumbled into Ilya’s shoulder, Ilya ignoring his distress with a grin.

“Yes, I would very much like to be a dad someday. Obviously, not soon. Not before Shane retires. Though I would be a very sexy stay-at-home-dad, yes?”

Ilya grinned at him. Shane flushed, shoving Ilya back.

“Everyone. Stop. Talking.”

“We’re getting to know each other.” Ilya’s grin deepened. He looked back to Shane’s parents. “Please tell me all the embarrassing Shane stories you have. He won’t share any.”

“Do *not*.” Shane stiffened.

“Oh!” Yuna’s eyes lit up. “This is one of my favorites.”

“Mom, I swear-”

“It was maybe his second time on the ice? He was a natural, and I’m not saying that because I’m his mom, he truly is. And he *loved* it, was just skating and skating and skating. But it’s time to go, he’s fighting, he’s only about, hmm, what David? Four? So probably needed a nap too, but anyway, we *finally* get him to go home and wouldn’t you know it? He had *peed* himself. Because he loved hockey that much, even then, he wouldn’t stop even for the potty!”

Yuna clapped her hands, beaming. Ilya turned slowly to Shane, his face beet-red.

“This is the cutest thing I have ever heard.”

Shane raised his eyebrows. “Seriously. Me pissing myself?”

“Yes. Because you were a little obsessive hockey star already.”

Ilya looked at him, his laughter fading as a surge of emotions from the day shot through him. His eyes soaked up Shane. Those freckles, always, but also the fierce look of his eyes, tender and intense. The line of his nose that he always wanted to trace, the strength of his jaw, masculine and...

“Ilya.” Shane’s fingers threaded through his nape, teasing his curls, his gaze impossibly sweet.

Yuna blinked, turning to David.

“I see it too, honey.” David looked at her, throwing his arm around her shoulders. “It’s the same way I look at you.”

The Villa was quiet that evening, everyone drifting around each other in the aftermath of the family visits.

“She was glad to see you.” Svetlana approached Ilya, sprawled in one of the beach chairs overlooking the sea.

She sunk into the neighboring chair, studying his profile. He exhaled, looking skyward.

“It was good to see her too. And? Did she and that other woman approve of Rose?”

Svetlana snorted. *“You know her name. And you cannot throw a fit every time Katya’s around. She’s my best friend.”* Svetlana pressed a reassuring hand to Ilya’s chest. *“You, however, are family.”*

“Mm.”

Svetlana shifted in the chair, looking up at the emerging stars with Ilya.

“But yes. They did love her.”

They sat in silence for a few moments, the soft Villa chatter becoming white noise in the distance.

“I let myself be angry at her today. Mama.”

Svetlana blinked, muscles locking. She kept her voice steady.

“Irina?”

“She shouldn’t have left me before meeting Shane. Shouldn’t have left me, ever.”

Svetlana said nothing, simply moved into Ilya's chair. She curved herself into the space around his body, her hand flat over his chest, palm heating his necklace as Ilya continued.

"Why did I have to find her? I've thought over and over. Was it carelessness? Was it intentional?" His voice broke. *"That image - it is the only image now."*

Svetlana swallowed. She squeezed Ilya tighter, voice whispering into her collarbone.

"I hate her sometimes. For what she did to you. But god, do I miss her, Ilya."

Ilya just nodded, crumpling slightly into her embrace.

"And there are other images. I won't let you forget. You laugh the same, you know. When she let herself really laugh?"

Ilya's breathing faltered, hiccuping within Svetlana's embrace.

"And that look you get when you're up to no good - I remember that from her. A sly little look she'd get out of the corner of her eyes, remember? Like a mischievous child you can't even be mad at. Remember when she'd sneak us extra dessert? I'd see it then."

Ilya let out a wet laugh against Svetlana's chest.

"We needed extra. We had such sweet teeth."

"Yes, we did." Svetlana rocked him for a bit, running her hand up and down Ilya's arm. *"And I know you remember this image. You must. Of how she'd look at you. Not when she was tired and somewhere else. Or when she was so exasperated with all the trouble we'd get into together, even when we were older. But when she was just looking at you, lovingly. Remember?"*

"Mm." Ilya exhaled. *"I remember her eyes. Her eyes would go big and soft and beaming. Lit me up like sunshine."*

"Yes. Yes." Svetlana leaned forward, nestling a kiss in his curls. *"This is the image you can't forget. I'll help you remember if you do."*

Ilya brushed his teeth next to Shane, bumping his hip to earn a glare as the minty froth smeared over his lip. Hayden spit into the sink next to them, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand.

"Last night in the Villa, boys!"

"I hope you're not a sore loser, Pike."

"Shut up, Rozanov. Winning isn't the point."

Shane's lips tweaked up. "I mean, technically, it is a competition."

“Whatever. Unlike some people, I came here for love. Pure of heart!” Hayden flicked Shane’s forehead on the way out, heading to his bed with Jackie.

Shane opened his mouthwash, sighing slightly.

“Our last night.”

“In the Villa.” Ilya massaged his shoulder with one hand, face stern. “Not forever.”

“Mm.” Shane leaned back into Ilya, tilting his head up to get a kiss.

Scott and Kip entered the bathroom, Scott’s arms wrapped around Kip’s waist from behind as they walked in shuffling lockstep. Shane and Ilya gave each other a look and quickly vacated the shared restroom.

As they walked into the bedroom, Ilya’s hand slid lower on Shane’s waist, his voice a whisper.

“Want to take this to Soulties?”

Shane’s eyes lit up. He turned to Ilya, leaning in for a kiss, his nose still grazing Ilya as he nodded his assent. They gathered their things, ignoring the whoops of the other Islanders.

“You are welcome.” Ilya shouted, tossing their duvet over his shoulder. “Though you will probably still hear us from out there!”

“Ilya!” Shane hissed, a smile betraying him as he hustled Ilya outside.

Ilya would deny it if anyone asked, but what he was really craving was a cuddle. He spread out their blanket beneath the flickering neon sign, fluffed their pillows, and pulled Shane in close to his chest, his muscles relaxing immediately.

“Big day, huh?” Shane peered up at him, his black hair sticking out from the cocoon Ilya had wrapped him in.

“Yes, very.” Ilya yawned, nestling in closer.

“Was...was my mom too much?” Shane looked at him anxiously.

“Oh, yes.” Ilya laughed, hand squeezing the back of Shane’s neck as his face fell. “I love her too much. I see where you get it from. She is so intense. So focused. Best at what she does.”

He felt Shane unwind slightly in his arms.

“Yeah, she is. She, um, was already talking about your management when I walked her out. Wanted to know who your current agent is, if you have exclusivity clauses and things like that. I guess she’s been researching the top modeling agencies while the show’s been airing...”

Shane's face flushed as Ilya remained silent.

"I mean, because I do campaigns too. So it's still helpful. And no pressure, obviously, it's a lot to have your boyfriend's mom involved in your career so early and-"

Ilya opened Shane's lips in a deep kiss, his hands gripping him hard before he pulled back.

"Thank you. Thank her. It is very kind for her to care so much."

Shane studied Ilya's face, shoulders relaxing as he catalogued Ilya's expression.

"Okay. Good. You can always tell her, though. If it gets to be too much."

"There will never be too much of Hollanders caring about me." Ilya shifted, scowling slightly. "And Chexy is...fine."

"Mhm." Shane looked at him, amused. "I think you'll come around. Plus, wouldn't it be nice to have more Russian friends? You sound different when you speak it. More yourself."

"Do I?" Ilya's fingers ran absently over Shane's back.

"Yes."

Shane swallowed, his eyes trailing over Ilya's necklace. His fingertips traced the line of gold, hovering over the cross with reverence.

"Ilya?" Shane looked at him, his brown eyes pooling into Ilya's. He turned on his side, scooting closer. "Y-ya tebya lyublyu."

Ilya stared at him. Shane's brown eyes, so big and wide and hopeful. Looking at him like sunshine. Looking at him like his mama had.

"Shane." Ilya's voice cracked. "I love you too."

They stared at each other for a moment, soaking each other in. And then they were kissing, melting into one another, their moans intermingling.

"Fuck, Shane." Ilya gripped him harder, his eyes wild as he looked down at Shane beneath him.

Shane let out a breathy groan, arching up against Ilya. Ilya bent down, tongue sliding up Shane's neck, his teeth nipping at the underside of Shane's ear. His voice rumbled against Shane, low and heated.

"I can't believe I get to have this. Have you. Did you ever imagine we could have this..."

"All the time." Shane exhaled, his fingertips digging into Ilya's scalp.

"Mm, yes, the Rolex shoot. Your imagination ran wild, hm?"

Shane sucked Ilya's earlobe into his mouth, pulling out a whine from Ilya.

“Earlier.”

Ilya paused, pulling back slightly. “Earlier?”

Shane huffed, throwing a hand over his head.

“Maybe...maybe years now. Since you first started gaining a name for yourself.

Ilya stared at him. Shane pushed him off and sat up, crossing his arms.

“It was for my modeling shoots! My agent’s the one who suggested your name to me, okay.”

“Shane. You need to tell me everything.”

Shane risked a glance at Ilya, whose face was anything but mocking. The intense blaze of his eyes sent a shiver over Shane’s body. He chewed his lip.

“What, um, do you want to hear?”

Ilya pulled Shane on top of him, letting his muscular thighs brace against Ilya’s hips. He ran his hands through Shane’s dark hair.

“All of it. You studied me, is that it?” He stretched closer, teeth grazing Shane’s throat.

“Memorized every inch of my body?”

Another shiver went through Shane. His hips rocked a bit, Ilya’s voice making his heart thud.

“Yeah. I studied you.”

Shane leaned in, his pecs eye-level with Ilya as he wrapped his hand into Ilya’s curls, back arching slightly.

“That car commercial? Where you’re in a white tee,” Shane’s hips moved more intentionally, gliding over Ilya with his full weight. “All soaked. And sudsy. And slippery.”

“Fuck.”

Ilya’s hands gripped Shane’s waist, tongue licking out towards Shane’s pecs. His mouth sealed around one of Shane’s nipples, sucking hard. Shane let out a high moan, jolting.

“Did you touch yourself to it, Shane?”

Ilya moved to Shane’s other pec, tongue lapping over the nipple there, skin already goosebumped and sensitive.

“Yeah...of course I did.”

Ilya’s teeth bit down, Shane’s hips jolting forward again. Ilya’s hands moved lower, guiding Shane’s rhythm.

“So when you finally met me. You’d already imagined me. Imagined us?”

“Ye-yes...fuck, Ilya.”

Shane squirmed, Ilya pulling off his chest again with a soft *pop*, flesh reddening from where his lips had been.

“I knew it. On set that day, I could tell. You wanted me to chase you, didn’t you?”

Ilya’s hand dipped below Shane’s pajama bottoms, Shane already dripping for him.

“Did you want me to pin you against the wall? Have my way with you? Let the Rolex people listen to how pretty you scream?”

Ilya’s hand circled him tight as Shane fucked into Ilya’s hand, panting.

“God, yes, Ilya, I wanted you so bad. I didn’t know what to do with myself. I needed you. Needed this.”

Ilya’s hand disappeared. Shane started to let out a protest when suddenly he was flying, flipping to his back as his bottoms were yanked into the air. Shane threw his head back against the pillow as Ilya’s tongue reappeared between his legs. Shane’s mind went blank, wiped clean from the sensation.

Ilya paused, tongue flicking up from Shane’s entrance as he raised himself beneath the duvet cover, eyes ablaze.

“Keep talking. Keep telling me.”

“O-okay.”

Shane tried to reach for the words, the waves of pleasure interfering with his brainwaves.

“I-I touched myself. After getting home that day. Thought of you on set, how good you looked. How real you were. How it wouldn’t be impossible to touch you, not really.”

Ilya’s tongue thrust deeper into his hole, opening him up.

“I imagined if I had. If I had stayed after the shoot. If you had wal-walked in on me changing. If you had just- *fuck* - if you had just sucked my dick in front of everyone- *Ilya*.”

Ilya batted Shane’s hand away from his cock, nipping the tender inside of his thigh with his teeth.

“You will wait for me.”

Ilya slid a finger in where his tongue had been.

“See, you are eager already.”

Shane grabbed for Ilya’s wrist, drawing two of his fingers into his mouth. He sucked greedily, eyes not leaving Ilya’s face, watching the effect he was having.

“God, my perfect boy.” Ilya slid his fingers out, slick with Shane’s spit, and teased his entrance before pressing inside.

Shane arched, spreading his legs further, grinding down on the feeling of Ilya inside him. Ilya watched him, dumfounded, Shane’s muscular body taking what he needed from Ilya’s hand.

“Slow, slow, let me get the lube.”

Ilya fumbled in his pocket with his free hand, Shane squeezing internally just to hear Ilya swear, his cock bobbing between his legs as he looked at Shane like a miracle.

“Okay. Ready for me, sweetheart?”

“I’ve been ready. Been waiting.” Shane stared down at him, his eyes half-lidded and hazy.

Ilya cursed again, lining himself up and then pressing in, the air punching out of Shane at the feeling of fullness. Ilya hovered over him, necklace dangling between their bodies, his lips catching Shane’s in a messy kiss.

“I’ve been waiting too, Shane.” Ilya began to thrust shallowly, letting him adjust. “Each message I sent. I imagined you reading them. Wanting me. Even when you didn’t respond.”

Shane relaxed into the stretch, taking Ilya deeper inside as Ilya increased his pace.

“Thought about sending a picture of how hard you made me. Imagined what you’d do. If you’d touch yourself to it.”

“Fuck, Ilya.” Shane squeezed around Ilya, his eyes fluttering shut. “I would’ve.”

“Look at me, Shane.”

Shane opened his eyes, the sight sending a shudder through Ilya as they gazed at another.

“I want to watch you. When I make you come from my cock. Can you do that for me, sweetheart?”

Shane nodded, his hand grabbing onto Ilya’s necklace to pull him closer for a kiss. Their teeth clanged briefly, lips messily finding one another. Shane turned his cheek, hands burying in Ilya’s hair.

“Ya tebya lyublyu, Ilya. Ya tebya lyublyu.”

Ilya panted against Shane’s neck, hips jerking as he tried to slow the inevitable. Shane’s words fractured as Ilya pounded harder into him, his dick dripping heavily between them as he neared release.

“Ya- ya tebya - ya- *Ilya* -”

Ilya let out a low moan, his lips murmuring back, hips chasing Shane as he felt the sudden spasm around his cock, buried deep within. Ilya felt the hot spurts shoot across Shane’s

stomach, Ilya following a moment later, both of them shuddering with the aftershocks.

Ilya barely had the strength to pull out, wiping them lazily with his discarded shirt before collapsing back to Shane and hiding them from the cameras with a tug of the covers. Sleep took them almost immediately, Shane's ears still ringing with the sound of Ilya's voice, breathy and haggard: *i love you i love you i love you* on repeat.

NEXT TIME...ON HEATED ISLAND...

Tomorrow night...tune into the finale of the summer as we reveal who America voted for the couple of the season!

Chapter End Notes

we are almost at the end yall can you believe ittt! next chapter will be the the finale and then im planning on writing an epilogue before it's wraps :')

(also i fully blame About Summer by chaentics for some of the grief feels this installment because whewww did that work destroy me in the best way)

Chapter 25

Chapter Summary

it's time for final speeches and the reveal of who our love island winners are!!!

Chapter Notes

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

Ilya and Shane woke to women sliding into their makeshift bed in Soul Ties. Rose and Svetlana practically cannon-balled into the padded cushions, Rose wrapping her arms around Shane while Svetlana grabbed Ilya with a laughing scream. As Ilya and Shane started to stir, Jackie and Hayden followed as Scott and Kip brought up the rear.

“It’s our last morning in the Villa!” Rose shook Shane fully awake, the other Islanders poking and prodding him and Ilya.

“Only one more day of tolerating you all?” Ilya threw an arm over his eyes. “Thank God.”

“You’ll miss us.” Scott cooed, snuggling in between Ilya and Shane.

Shane clutched his blanket to his chest, cheeks flaming red.

“I’m not- I’m not dressed, you guys!”

Scott’s eyes flickered over Shane’s duvet-wrapped body. He raised his eyebrows.

“Afraid of what’ll happen if I get too close?”

Ilya shoved Scott away with a grunt, Scott grinning as he bounced to the other side. Rose hoisted Shane’s discarded pajama bottoms in the air, nose wrinkled.

“I hope these are clean.”

Shane snatched them out of Rose’s hand, rustling beneath the covers as he slid them on. Ilya stretched out wider, spreading his hands beneath his head.

“Don’t bother getting mine, Rose. I know you all have been wanting a glimpse.”

“Ugh.” Scott stood up, giving Kip a hand as they stepped out of Soul Ties.

Jackie laughed, following Scott out with Rose. Svetlana stood, smacking the side of Ilya’s head before following them.

Ilya wagged his eyebrows.

“Pike, I notice you are lingering...”

“Am not!” Hayden jumped up, cheeks red, and followed the others at a fast clip down the stairs.

Shane looked at Ilya, exasperated. “Must you always be such a menace?”

“Menace?” Ilya pouted. “I am body-shamed by the whole Villa and you call me a menace?” He sighed loudly, eyelashes fluttering at Shane. “Not a single person wanted to peek a look at me...I must be hideous...”

Shane rolled his eyes with a growing smirk.

“Fine. If it will help your ego.” Shane pulled the covers up, giving Ilya a perfunctory glance. He shrugged. “Yeah, okay.”

“Okay?!” Ilya tackled Shane, Shane’s laughter muffled against Ilya’s pecs. “That’s not what you were saying last night!”

“Remind me then.” Shane breathed out, Ilya’s hands pinning him against their pillows.

Ilya’s laughter faded as something fiery heated behind his eyes instead.

Ilya and Shane finally emerged from Soul Ties, a thick air of sentimentality permeating the entire Villa. All day, couples strolled around in slow remembrance. *That’s where... Remember when... And this was where we first...*

Shane was not immune. His eyes kept drifting to Ilya, more tender than normal, making Ilya’s stomach do that swoopy thing.

“Ah, no. You cannot make me cry this early.”

Shane said nothing, simply kept looking at Ilya, his gaze so big and kind and wondrous.

“Isn’t it wild to think about though? Everything that had to happen to get us here?”

“Onto these synthetic cushions?” Ilya picked at the daybed, ignoring Shane’s question.

“Ilya.” Shane pushed him, rolling closer into his arms. “Think about it. I mean, imagine if I had said no to being on the show.”

“There’s no universe where you say no. You were very determined to show everyone how straight you were.” Ilya smirked.

“Well, whatever, *you* could have said no.”

“Ah, never.”

Shane tilted his head, looking at Ilya more closely as Ilya’s face gained color.

“Never?”

Ilya shrugged.

“I may have known you were going to be on the show.”

Shane tried to sit up, Ilya’s arm tugging him back down against his chest.

“And...?”

“I may have pulled some strings after Svetlana was cast so I could be cast too.”

A slow grin stretched across Shane’s face.

“So you’re a cheater?”

“I think a winner.”

“Mm, we have to wait until tonight for that.”

Shane nuzzled closer into Ilya’s chest, fingertips tracing over his skin. He pressed his hips against Ilya’s, hiding his smile as Ilya’s breath began to accelerate.

“Well I’m glad you cheated and got on the show. Imagine my gay awakening happening with Hayden. Or Hunter.”

Ilya went still.

“Shane, you ruined my hard-on. And all future hard-ons. My dick is broken. You broke me.”

Shane laughed, a deep evil thing that made Ilya consider if he truly was a bad influence like Rose always said, and then Shane covered Ilya’s face with kisses and cleared all possibility of thought.

Ilya bobbed up from the water, wrists grabbing Shane’s ankles from the side of the pool. He shook his damp curls out of his face.

“What’s the first thing you’ll do when you’re out?” He made a face. “Other than snuggling your naked cat that apparently hates me.”

Shane smiled, moving his feet gently to lift Ilya up and down in the water.

“Pork will come around. If you behave.” He leaned back against the cement, palms heating from the sun-absorbed warmth. “I don’t know. Probably hit the rink.”

“Will you let me watch?”

Shane felt his face heat too, suddenly shy under Ilya’s intense gaze. “Maybe.”

“You won’t disappoint me?” Ilya grinned, eyes drilling into him.

“No.” Shane flexed his thighs suddenly, bringing Ilya close. “I’m the best.”

Ilya leaned up out of the pool, cool lips trailing across Shane’s.

“Mm. My champion.”

He sunk back into the water, Shane slightly breathless.

“What about you?”

Ilya shrugged, floating up on his back.

“Maybe go to Tokyo. Or Milan, I like it there too.” He treaded water, his eyes closing against the sky. “I heard Ottawa can be nice.”

Shane felt his chest expand, his mind quieting its rapidfire calculation of time differences.

“Yeah. I’ve heard that too.”

“No, Shane, this is supposed to be a good one!”

Shane didn’t move from Ilya’s lap, his eyes hazy and hungry as he traced over Ilya’s face, lips already red and swollen. A light flared behind them, making Ilya squint.

“See? Now I will only have pictures of your back and nothing else.”

“I’ll just have to visit a lot to remind you.” Shane wrapped his arms tighter against Ilya’s neck, his thighs pressing down firmer below.

“I need to remember each detail.” Ilya’s fingers traced over Shane’s freckles, his eyes flickering. “Again. Behave this time.”

Shane slid reluctantly off Ilya’s lap, grumbling.

“Could’ve said the same to you when you wouldn’t pose for my pictures.”

“Ah, I don’t remember you complaining. And I think the camera caught the top of my curls between your legs, no?”

Ilya grinned, Shane flushing as he started the photobooth again.

“But you are right, sweetheart.” Ilya pressed a kiss to Shane’s temple. “We will retake them. Because I am absolutely keeping those pictures for myself. I want to remember my gorgeous boyfriend, completely undone for me. My mouth. My tongue.”

Shane’s lips parted as the first flash went off, catching his deepening blush. Ilya’s grin deepened.

“Maybe I keep this round too.”

Ilya reached towards Shane's waistband, Scott and Kip walking hurriedly past the other side of the thin photobooth curtain as noises other than camera clicks began to echo around the Villa.

"Almost time to get ready for dinner." Ilya squinted off the dock, taking in the fading sunlight.

"Mm." Shane leaned against the railing, eyes closing in the warmth.

"I am-" Ilya's voice thickened.

Shane's eyes flickered open, watching as Ilya sucked a breath in. Ilya looked out into the sea, lips twisting.

"I am a little scared. It will be very different. Not waking up to you. Not having all day with you."

Shane blinked. He stood, sliding behind Ilya and resting his chin on his shoulder, arms wrapping around his torso.

"Yeah. It will be different."

They breathed together for a moment, Ilya's face scrunched against the sunlight.

"How I feel won't be, though." Shane kissed the nape of Ilya's neck. Ilya sniffed.

"Promise?"

"Promise."

Ilya wrapped his arm over Shane's, kissing his palm, both of their faces awash in the dying sun.

Shane pulled at the collar of his shirt, popping the top button so the fabric wouldn't be as constricting against his throat. He adjusted his navy jacket as he waited at the bottom of the stairs, the last to be reunited with his partner. Rose and Svetlana stood next to him, Kip and Scott holding hands on his other side, Hayden and Jackie closest to the landing where Jackie had just walked down in her evening gown.

Shane pulled at his collar again, swallowing. He was in his lucky suit, the one he wore before home games. The fabric was expensive, luxurious, and he knew he looked good in it. He had tried to have Rose do his hair, pushing his bangs off to the side a bit and off his forehead, though he wasn't sure how long it would hold in the Fiji climate. Shane fiddled with his left hand, the plastic ring there the only aberration to the sleek lines of his outfit.

"Leave it to Ilya to want the grand entrance." Hayden shook his head.

"Fashionably late." Svetlana smiled.

Shane said nothing. His guess was confirmed when Ilya finally appeared at the top of the stairs, his eyes redder than normal if you knew to look. His gaze found Shane, holding for a second before his legs began to move. Shane stared, throat tightening.

Each day he had to remember that yes, his boyfriend really was a supermodel, and really was *that* attractive. Ilya moved like water down the stairs, the dark cut of his tux elongating him even more, all rippling muscle and grace. Shane's eyes trailed down his body until snagging on his left hand, finger adorned with a matching ring.

Ilya caught his look and smiled, cupid's bow turning up as he extended his hand to Shane on the second-to-last step. Shane took it, his other hand guiding Ilya by the small of the back as he reached the ground floor. Shane raised their hands, allowing Ilya to do a small twirl before Shane bowed him back in a quick dipped kiss.

"Showing off, Hollander?" Ilya murmured.

"You started it." Shane replied, taking in the tuxedo beneath his fingertips, brain short-circuiting for a moment.

Ilya studied his face, lips twitching. "What dirty thoughts are you having now?"

Shane flushed, clearing his mind of the parallel universe he had slipped into, where they both wore suits like these before hockey games and then got sweaty during, gear dropping to the floor of a locker room afterwards where Ilya would take him apart against the cool tile of the showers.

"Secret, hm?" Ilya grinned, his knuckles grazing Shane's cheek as Ilya took in their matching suits and rings, mind drifting in a fantasy of his own.

Shane leaned in, kissing him, the rest of the Islanders already moving towards the candlelit table on the lawn. It was beautiful even without the editing that would happen when broadcast, the large table laden with food and drink, warm light throwing shadows over the shimmering tablecloth.

The couples were arranged across from each other, Shane fighting Ilya briefly over who would pull out the chair first before accepting defeat and sinking into his seat.

Jackie stood, raising her champagne glass.

"To the best people and the best summer I could hope for!"

The Islanders raised their glasses in return, clinking together with cheers.

Rose leaned forward, her hair tumbling over her shoulder.

"Let's share our favorite memories! Hayden, you start."

"Definitely meeting Jackie." Hayden smiled, reaching his hand across the table to hold Jackie's.

“He forgets you so fast.” Ilya shook his head, taking a sip of his champagne as he smirked at Shane.

“My favorite memory was...obviously kissing Lexi I.” Rose fluttered her eyelashes, Svetlana tilting her head with a suppressed smile. “But honestly, I actually think these last few days have been my favorite. Just seeing everyone settle into their couples and deepen their relationships has been really special.”

“Cute.” Svetlana tapped her nails against her lips, thinking. “Mine is...when Rose and I went for that night swim.” She smirked. “Naked.”

“Not appropriate for dinner talk.” Ilya shook his head.

“As if your favorite memory isn’t some version of Shane in your mouth?” Svetlana cocked her head sweetly.

“Ah, yes, good times.” Ilya smiled back at her. “But no. For me, it was our first kiss.”

“Aww.” Jackie held a hand over her heart.

“Jac, they were doing, like, a kinky BDSM challenge. Shane was spreadeagle on a cross.” Hayden made a face.

“Oh, right.” Jackie’s face faltered. “Still...sweet?”

“Very.” Ilya smiled, his gaze turning only to Shane. “He was giving in completely. Holding nothing back. It was intoxicating. I knew how tightly wound he was. Assumed he was deep in the closet. So it was very special, to feel him let go like that.”

Shane flushed, swallowing the bite of food in his mouth as he gave a small smile back at Ilya before the Islanders turned to Kip.

“Yeah, sure, well, my blowjobs have been very sentimental.” Kip rolled his eyes with a laugh.

Scott looked at him, lip jutting out. “Haven’t they?”

Kip froze, fork halfway to his mouth. Scott shook his head, looking away. Jackie cleared her throat as Kip whispered reassurances to Scott.

“Um, I really liked family day! I think that was my favorite day in here. How about you, Shane?”

“Hm. I think mine is the first time waking up next to Ilya. Yeah.” He raised his eyes, taking in the man across from him. “I never thought I’d be able to have that with anyone. Much less someone like him.”

Ilya murmured something in Russian, half-standing so he could lean across the table and grab Shane’s cheeks, planting a kiss on his lips.

“I have a real one- another one! Because our sexual intimacy does of course mean a lot!” Kip looked nervously at Scott, still staring down at his plate. “But Scott complimenting me after I made breakfast for him the first time...I didn’t make anything special, but he was so appreciative. That’s how I knew he was a good pick, a good guy. *The* guy for me.”

“Baby.” Scott’s eyes filled, lip jutting out more. “All my memories with you are my favorite ones.”

“So sweet. I have a toothache.” Svetlana grinned, reaching for her drink.

Hayden’s phone dinged. Rose sighed, pressing a palm to her cheek.

“I’m gonna miss that sound.”

Hayden shifted in his seat, reading aloud.

“Islanders, it is now time for your final speeches.” He slid his phone back in his pocket, licking his lips. “Well. Um. I guess I’ll start us off.”

He stood up, rolling his shoulders back as he drew out a piece of paper in his suit jacket.

“Jackie, you are the one who has made my *Love Island* experience filled with love.”

Ilya made a gagging face at Shane and received a quick kick to the shins beneath the table.

“I was taken with you from the moment we walked in together as bombshells. I wished we could’ve coupled up right away, but someone told me ‘bombcest’ was frowned upon... though looking back, he may have had ulterior motives.”

The Islanders laughed, Shane sputtering in protest as Hayden continued on.

“I *am* glad I took a little detour on our journey together, not only because I met someone I now consider one of my best friends,”

Shane sat back in his chair, face still grumpy.

“But because I got a better insight into myself and what I want. And Jackie, I will always want you. My brain might be a little banged up with all my concussions, but that’s one thing that I’ll never forget. I love you, Jac. So much. And I can’t wait to get out of this Villa and start the rest of our lives together.”

He folded the paper back up, Islanders clapping as Jackie walked around the table to embrace him, her eyes brimming.

She pulled back, sniffing, and reached over for her letter beneath her dinner plate.

“Okay. Whew.” She blinked, airing her mascara once more before beginning to read.

Shane leaned in to Ilya, his face tender as he opened his lips to say something. Ilya shushed him sternly, motioning to Jackie.

“I need to hear this. Like, really. I need to understand.”

“Shut up, Rozanov.” Hayden scowled from where he stood in front of Jackie. She squeezed his arm, refocusing him with a smile.

“Hayden Pike. I didn’t know anything about you before coming on this show. I’m not the biggest sports person, and to be honest, I spent most of my time at work. But you were the most familiar stranger I’ve ever met. From the minute you saw me in that ridiculous sequined dress, I felt like I could trust you. Count on you. Lean on you.”

Hayden let out a sniff, Jackie flipping her paper to the back.

“I’ve joked about finding your brain fascinating from a neurology standpoint, but I truly find you fascinating in general, Hayden. How you let yourself be soft. How you stay curious about parts of yourself you may not have discovered before. How you try to understand my nerdy science talk because it matters to me, and I matter to you. So, Hayden Pike, never doubt that you matter to me too. I want to conduct longitudinal studies on your brain, and your heart, and all the other parts of you.”

“Is that a sex joke?” Ilya’s eyebrows shot up.

“Shut up, you’re ruining it.” Rose hissed.

Jackie laughed, sighing as she looked into Hayden’s eyes.

“And I’m really, *really*, looking forward to practicing trying for all those future kids without the presence of these people here. And yes, that is a sex joke, Ilya.”

“Get it!” Kip shouted, smiling.

“I love you, Hayden Pike.” Jackie leaned forward, paper folded in her hand, and let Hayden envelop her in a kiss.

The Islanders clapped as they sat back down. Kip stood next, motioning for Scott to come and join him.

“My Scotty. I should have known my life was about to change from the very first kiss we had. And no, I’m not talking about the one where we had to messily French kiss during a challenge while Shane screamed at us.”

Ilya raised his eyebrows across the table. Shane shrugged.

“So I’m competitive.”

“I’m talking about our first kiss outside of a challenge, after a day of talking and learning so much about each other so fast. You asked if it was okay before you kissed me, and checked in on how I felt after, even though I think both of us knew it was a *great* kiss.” Kip looked around the table. “And a lot of people here can vouch for his kissing skills, unfortunately.”

Shane and Ilya looked away, faces reddening.

“But that kiss with you told me everything I needed to know about your character. You are intentional, devoted, and caring.” Kip swallowed. “I think sometimes it scared me how much you seemed to want me. How sure you were. I realized I had some doubts of my own, some low self-worth I never examined. You made me question why I didn’t feel I deserved someone pouring himself into me. Someone who would prioritize me always. Who would share exactly how he was feeling so we could get back on the same page whenever we slipped into different books. I love you so much, sugarlips.”

Hayden made a face, shaking his head. Ilya motioned quickly to Shane, who rolled his eyes before landing a kick towards Hayden too.

“And I’m so, so excited for our journey to continue on the other side.”

Scott rubbed at his face, a few tears having escaped down his cheeks.

“Wow, thanks, honeypie. Whew.”

They kissed briefly before Scott braced himself, clasping his hands in front of him as he began his speech.

“My Christopher.”

“That’s what *Kip* is short for?” Ilya mouthed at Shane, wincing when he earned another kick to the shins.

“I never imagined I could meet someone who’d make my life complete. And I know no one can actually make your life complete. I’ve spent a lot of money in therapy being reminded of that.”

Kip laughed, tilting his head fondly.

“But I guess what I mean is, you enhance everything I already have. Yes, I have a job and friends and a shitty apartment that I still love. But those things are brighter now knowing you’ll be a part of them. I can’t wait to make you coffee, introduce you to more of my people, snuggle up to you on my cheap-ass couch.”

Scott let out a slow exhale, voice trembling a bit as he continued.

“I’ve ruined a lot of relationships by going too fast and trying to rush to the ending. I know I’ve been trying to fill the void of my parents for a while now, plugging just anyone into the hole where family should be. But you, Kip, you make me slow down. You check in. We grow around each other, seeing who the other person is, instead of shoving square pegs into round holes. And by doing that, you’ve become my family.”

“Oh, pookie.” Kip reached out for Scott’s hands, his lip trembling.

Shane glanced at Ilya, his leg stilling as he took in Ilya’s watery eyes. Scott let out a shaky exhale.

“I can’t wait for us to become even closer. For you to show me the pieces at the gallery you said reminded you of me, of our love. For us to hang out with your dad again and go to bottomless brunch together.”

“Mm, will it actually be bottomless then?” Ilya picked at the tablecloth, eyes finally clear of water, as Svetlana hissed at him to be quiet.

“And I am especially excited to get away from these assholes.” Scott grinned, looking back at the table. “Guess some feelings aren’t ancient history. Don’t be too worried, Rozanov. I’m a one-man guy.”

Ilya’s face flushed, arms crossing over his chest. “*You’re* the ancient one.”

“Hush.” Svetlana laughed, skimming his shoulder as she stood. She waited for Scott and Kip to be seated. Her gaze found Rose across the table as she pulled out her letter.

“Любимая. This is little I can say to a crowd that I haven’t said already in your ear. Early on, we promised to keep the inner parts of our hearts private. An impossibility on a show like this. But we carved out chances to fall in love within our secret moments. When the mic packs lifted off at the end of the night. Under the steam of the shower. Among the loud splashes of the pool.”

Svetlana paused, composing herself before continuing.

“How you pulled me into the bathroom to say *I love you* for the first time, so the cameras couldn’t have it. So the audience was only me.”

Her voice cracked. Shane pressed his foot against Ilya’s beneath the table, his throat thickening. Ilya pressed back, ankle warm against his.

“Rose, I will not spin you endless lines about how much I cherish you. You know all this already, and more. You know you have melted the ice I kept around my heart. You tasted it as it melted. Я люблю тебя за пределами камер, за пределами игры. When the cameras shut off tomorrow, my love will be the same.”

“Baby.” Rose rounded the table, throwing her arms around Svetlana and hugging her for a long moment before pulling back for a kiss.

“God, you make that hard to follow for me!”

The Islanders let out a low laugh, Rose’s hands shaking as she retrieved her speech.

“My Svetlyachok. You light up my world. I love how easily everyone sees how much we care for one another, but I also love the bits we keep for ourselves. You scared the shit out of me when we first met, and that was even after the blindfold came off.”

Shane grinned, eyes snagging on Ilya’s.

“But as intimidating as you seemed, you let me into that soft underbelly within. I will protect that softness with everything I have. I know it is an honor not everyone gets.”

Rose gave Svetlana's hand a long squeeze.

"And when I first told you I loved you, I wished for a more romantic setting than a communal bathroom."

Hayden laughed, Jackie's hand pressing over her smile.

"But in the end, I think it was meant for us. Our love is not fluff and fairytales and fantasy. It is real. It is grounded. It is the cold-ass tiles of the restroom where cameras aren't allowed to go, so that only you got to hear my lips say those words for the first time. And only my ears got to hear what yours said back. I love you so incredibly, stupidly much, baby. It's actually kind of disgusting?"

Ilya looked up at Svetlana, Svetlana fighting back tears and losing.

"But there is no one else I'd rather be this disgustingly mushy with. Stay soft for me, and I promise to stay soft for you too. I love you beyond, baby."

Rose lifted her palms to Svetlana's face, holding her there for a moment as something passed between them. And then they kissed, soft and slow, so tenderly intimate that the Islanders looked away until it was done.

Shane scooted his chair back, his fingers reaching into his jacket pocket. Ilya slowly rounded the table, his hand solid on the small of Shane's back for a fleeting moment before he took a step back. Ilya waited in front of him expectantly, plastic ring visible over his clasped hands, Rolex beneath his sleeve. Shane focused on them both as he took a deep breath in, eyes dropping down to his paper.

"Unlike the other couples in here, our story started before we even arrived. I don't think it's a surprise to anyone with an internet connection that there were rumors about my sexuality after the Rolex campaign we did together. How I looked at you was obvious to everyone but me."

Shane closed his eyes for a moment, transported back.

"Shouldn't have covered them." Ilya's finger, motioning in the air around his face.

"What?"

"Your freckles. Makeup artist should have left them. Prettier that way."

The smirk on his face lingering even in the expanse of Shane's silence. The blush exploding over Shane's cheeks at the perceived insult. How, after what felt like a lifetime, Ilya had waltzed away, jeans low on his waist, back muscles flexing as he headed to wardrobe, the lines of his ass still visible through the denim.

Some assistant in the corner streaming a behind-the-scenes video for her small online following. Unknowingly catching Shane's eyes tracking the man leaving. No mask on for once, the want hungry and clear on his face.

Shane blinked his eyes open, inhaling deeply.

“It was so scary to look at myself, really look at myself. I thought I might lose everything. But it was worth it, to me, to gain you.”

Ilya did a small involuntary shake of his head. Shane smiled, nodding.

“Ilya, you are worth so much more than I can ever put in words. I’m not leaving this Villa the same person I was when I entered. And that’s thanks to you.”

“What, I don’t get credit?” Hayden smiled from the table, Scott chiming in after.

“Yeah, I feel like I was part of that journey too!”

Shane’s ears burned. He pushed down his grin.

“Okay, yeah, thanks everyone for the experiences. *Anyway.* Ilya.”

“Yes, hear my name, everyone?” Ilya cupped a hand to his ear. “This is for me.” He sniffed, standing straighter.

“Ilya, as embarrassing as it is to admit on record, I was thinking of you long before this show. I think it’s easy, as a closeted athlete, to live in a secret fantasy world sometimes to survive. I didn’t let myself think about what it meant, but I watched all your commercials, looked at all your shoots.”

Shane swallowed.

“I also never let myself think about if reality could be better than the fantasy. Ilya, you are better than my wildest dreams. The real version of you, with all your flaws and all your beauty, is so much better than my mind could dream up watching you in some car commercial. Never doubt that, please.”

Shane squinted down at the pronunciation he had written out, his words slowing.

“Я выбираю этого мальчика. Now and for as long as you’ll have me. I love you.”

“You kill me.” Ilya murmured, moving forward to palm Shane’s face as they kissed. He pulled back, eyes narrowing. “Did Chexy teach you that?”

“Relax, Ilyusha.” Svetlana grinned from the table. “I can be a very good teacher.”

“Oh. That’s okay then.” Ilya leaned in, giving Shane another quick kiss.

He shook a curl out of his face, raising his jaw a bit as he began, his hands holding Shane’s.

“I wrote nothing down. My English is not perfect and with writing, it is harder. So. Shane. My Hollander. Sweetheart. You have been so much to me. I too, stalked you like a creep, though I started later than you did since you must be best in everything.”

Rose snorted, shaking her head.

“I became very fixated on this sexy freckled man who so blatantly checks out my ass, but who says, no I am not gay. No, I don’t look at this great ass.”

“Maybe cause it’s not *that* great.”

“Shut up, Hunter.” Shane and Ilya said in unison.

“As I was *saying*. You fascinated me. So I message you. You ignore me. I try to get your number. Your team is very protective. No way for me to see what is happening underneath those freckles in that brain of yours. Until this show. While it may have taken you literally being strapped down and blind to what was in front of you, I finally had you. And you had me.” Ilya grinned, watching as Shane’s cheeks pinked.

“It has been ups and downs, yes. It was not easy for us to love each other at first. You have so many worries. I have so many fears. We make mistakes. But we fix them, together.”

Ilya smiled again, looking down at his dress shoes.

“Like you, I also can not believe how much better reality is than all the things I imagined. I watched you on the ice, in interviews, the silly specials you did with your parents showing off your childhood bedroom. None of it compared to meeting you. To seeing those brown eyes melt in real time. How you listened to me, really listened, even when talking didn’t come easy.”

Ilya reached behind his neck, unclasping his necklace and letting it spool in his palm.

“Last time I lent you this, it was, mhm, a minor disaster. But I gave it to you then as a show of trust, of closeness. And I give it to you again for the same reasons. You have made my words easier, my heart more open. And you no longer run away from me. You run towards me, full speed, as fast as you skate on the ice. You are a champion in every place and the winner of my heart. So here is your medal. Я люблю тебя, мой чемпион, мой вечный победитель.”

Ilya stepped forward, fingers sliding the clasp into place around Shane’s neck. He tilted his head, palm running down the chain and closing briefly over the cross at the bottom. Shane’s hand covered his, lips already angling upward. They barely heard the claps of the Islanders around them as Shane’s fingers slid deeper through Ilya’s curls, Ilya’s hands firm around his waist, the weight of his mother’s necklace right around Shane’s neck.

“Did you miss me, Islanders?”

Ariana rounded the corner in a cut-out silver dress, waltzing closer. The Islanders stood up from the table, cheering as she approached.

“Sorry to cut short your meal, but I think it’s time we had dessert.”

She motioned behind her. A large curved arch soared in front of the pool. Flickering neon script nestled in the greenery: *the secret ingredient was you*. The four couples made their way over to the platform beneath the arch, each rising onto a heart-shaped dais. Ilya pulled Shane close, his hand firm over his hip.

“Islanders. We are about to find out who America has chosen as the winners of *Love Island* this summer. You’ve all had such incredible journeys. I’ve truly loved seeing your love stories unfold.”

Ariana looked across the line of them, a smile on her lips.

“Now. Coming in fourth place is...”

Ilya’s hand tightened on Shane’s hip. Shane stared down the ground, fingernails digging into his palm.

“Scott and Kip!”

Shane let out a breath he didn’t know he was holding, joining the rest in clapping along. Ilya reached out and thumped Scott on the back twice, nodding in respect as he and Kip dismounted the stage and stood on the side of the lawn.

Ariana turned to them.

“Scott and Kip, you’ve had such beautiful growth in here. What are you most looking forward to outside of the Villa?”

“Oh, so much Ariana.” Kip looked at Scott, his eyes sparkling. “I can’t wait to get to go on dates in the real world. And I’ve already made him promise that *I’m* going to be the one to pop the question.”

“Oh?” Ariana’s eyebrows raised.

“Of being boyfriends, sorry!” Kip laughed, leaning into Scott. “One thing at a time. But yeah, since Scott has initiated pretty much everything, I want him to have a chance to be on the receiving end.” He looked to Scott again, kissing him sweetly as Ariana looked on with a smile.

She turned back to the stage.

“Our third place winners are...”

Rose’s bracelets jingled at the end of the stage, her arm fidgeting by her side.

“Hayden and Jackie!”

Shane reached over, hugging Hayden tight and then Jackie, Ilya murmuring to them as they stepped down too. Ariana waited for them to reach Scott and Kip.

“Hayden, Jackie. How does it feel to be at the end of this journey?”

“Well, to be honest, we see it as just the beginning for us.” Hayden squeezed Jackie’s hand, smiling.

Jackie laughed. “I had such a good summer, Ariana, but I cannot wait to get the hell out of her and start our normal life together!”

The Islanders let out some whoops, clapping as Jackie leaned into Hayden’s shoulder.

Ariana’s tone grew serious as she looked forward again.

“Shane and Ilya. Svetlana and Rose. Please stand together in the center of the stage.”

Svetlana and Rose moved closer, Svetlana picking up the trail of Rose’s dress as they stepped up onto the heart platform next to the two men. Ariana gazed at them.

“America has chosen you as the final two couples. We have been watching from first sight, to first kiss, to first *I love yous*. And it will be another first tonight with an LGBTQ+ couple winning the show. It is simply a matter of which one...”

Ilya nudged Shane’s shoulder. Shane glanced up, Ilya’s face steady, and stopped chewing on his bottom lip. Ilya’s hand moved upward, kneading Shane’s shoulder, his fingertips resting on the golden chain of his necklace.

“You got this guys!” Hayden shouted, clapping.

“May the best gays win!” Scott grinned.

Rose let out a shaky laugh, her hand sweaty in Svetlana’s. Shane refocused on the ins and outs of his breath. Svetlana lifted her chin up, lips mouthing something in Russian to Ilya. He grinned, pressing a kiss to the top of Shane’s head.

Ariana’s voice echoed across the Villa for the final time.

“And the winners of this season’s *Love Island* are...”

Shane closed his eyes.

“Svetlana and Rose!”

The Islanders erupted into cheers, Rose half-sinking to her knees before Svetlana pulled her up with a laugh, drawing her into a deep kiss.

“Congratulations!” Ariana beamed, raising her hands as she clapped even harder, bouncing up and down in her heels.

Ilya’s voice was low and amused in Shane’s ear. “It is okay, sweetheart. You must try to be a good sport now, hm? Bad to look homophobic on the big screen.”

“I am a good sport!” Shane hissed. “I just-”

“We did win, сердитый котёнок, yes?”

Shane exhaled, finally looking at Ilya. His shoulders softened. “Yeah. We did.”

Ilya patted the side of his face and then reached over for Svetlana, bringing her into a hug. Shane shook his head a bit and then embraced Rose, her earrings scraping his suit.

“You’re really being a sore loser, huh?”

“I’m happy for you!”

Rose pulled back with a laugh. “You have to work on your acting. I’ll give you lessons.”

Then they were swarmed by the other two couples, everyone running back on stage to hug the winning couple. Ariana pointed skyward as fireworks began to explode into the evening sky, trying to distract from the tears growing in her eyes.

After a few minutes of tears and celebration, Ariana reset, motioning to Svetlana and Rose.

“Tell us, how does it feel to be the winners of *Love Island*?”

Svetlana and Rose looked at each other, Rose’s thumb drawing small circles on Svetlana’s waist.

“Yeah, incredible! Finding Svetlana in this crazy way, and knowing viewers saw the love that we have for each other...I don’t have words. Just tears!”

“Very grateful.” Svetlana smiled at Rose. “Very grateful.”

“And our runner-ups, Shane and Ilya! How are you two doing?”

“Be nice.” Ilya murmured.

Shane cleared his throat. “It’s really well-deserved. As Rose’s first couple, we became such fast friends, and I feel lucky that our partners are friends too. I’m excited for some double-dates on the other side of this.”

Ilya looked at him, bemused. “You did so good.” He purred in Shane’s ear, pressing a kiss to his temple.

“I’m a good sport!”

“Ah, so now you’re competitive about this?” Ilya laughed, tilting Shane’s chin up for a deep kiss. They parted, Ariana motioning to them with a smile.

“Shane and Ilya, I’ll have you join the other couples over here.”

Ilya took Shane’s hand, leading him off the stage. Shane threw one yearning look over his shoulder before letting it go, leaning his weight into Ilya.

Ariana cleared her throat.

“Svetlana and Rose. On *Love Island*, we are all about putting relationships to the test. And today is no different. I have two envelopes. One contains the \$100,000 prize and the other contains...absolutely nothing. Whoever receives the envelope with the prize money has the choice to share it, or send their partner home empty-handed.”

Ariana strode forward, presenting two glittering folded envelopes to the couple. Rose and Svetlana gave each other a smile as they took them.

“Please open your envelopes.”

There was a moment of silence as the envelopes opened. Both women turned their envelopes outward. Rose’s was red, \$0 scribed on the inside. Svetlana’s was gold, \$100,000 written in bold text.

Ilya cheered, Shane booing over him as Ariana smiled.

“Svetlana, that means you now have a decision to make. Let’s find out if you were here for love, or for the money...”

A smirk played around Svetlana’s face.

“I have decided...to keep the money.”

Scott gasped next to Shane, Kip clutching his arm. Hayden whispered rapidly to Jackie under his breath. Shane looked at Ilya, brows furrowed, then back to the couple. Ariana tilted her head.

“Wow, well, that’s another first for *Love Island USA*! Care to say more?”

“I’d be happy to.” Svetlana reached for Rose’s hand. “As celebrities, neither of us need any more money. We have more than enough as it is. So we decided that if we did win tonight, we’d use the prize money to start a charity arts camp for LGBTQ+ youth.”

Rose nodded. “It’s hard to be in the closet, whether because of your county, your career, or general fears about how society will treat you. We want our arts camp to be a place where queer teens can come together and express themselves in a safe environment. And it’s important to us to raise money for mental health awareness as well.”

She looked at Svetlana, waiting for permission. Svetlana swallowed, nodding.

“Yes. As Rose and I got closer, we opened up about hard times we both experienced growing up. Not as a result of being queer, but because of how people act towards queer women. We had times where we were made to feel dirty, perverted, wrong. Even though there is nothing wrong about our love.”

Rose squeezed Svetlana’s hand, tearing up as Svetlana continued.

“So our charity will also raise awareness about mental health, to support these kids like we wish we had been supported.”

“That is so beautiful.” Ariana pressed her palms to her eyes. “You’ve broken my waterproof mascara completely, ugh!” She let out a wet laugh before composing herself. “Thank you two, for sharing your love and your hearts with us. Do you have a sense of when your charity will be founded, so viewers can support you?”

“Yes.” Svetlana nodded. “We hope to launch our first summer camps this time next year. And we already have a name picked out.” She looked over at Ilya. “The Yelena Irina Foundation. After two women who loved me, just as I was.”

Shane leaned into Ilya, tracing his profile as Ilya’s eyes blinked rapidly. Shane squeezed his hand three times, a silent message, and Ilya squeezed back.

“What an incredible finish to an incredible season.” Ariana clasped her hands, looking across all of them. “Thank you all for sharing your stories, your hearts, and your love with us. Now give it up for Svetlana and Rose, our *Love Island* winners!”

Another round of fireworks went off, loud and smoky across the night sky. Rose dipped Svetlana into a deep kiss, the other couples turning to celebrate too. Ilya’s hands cupped Shane’s face, kissing him again and again and again. And then the Islanders were kicking off their heels and slipping jackets from their shoulders as they ran through the arch towards the pool.

Ilya looked at Shane.

“Ilya...”

“You don’t want to be a sore loser do you?” Ilya grinned, peeling the jacket off Shane’s body. “And besides. I want to see you wet.”

Shane rolled his eyes, shoving Ilya back a step as he kicked off his shoes.

“Fine. Race you.”

And without waiting another second, Shane sprinted towards the pool. Scott cannonballed before him, the splash of water still in the air as Shane pushed off the pool’s edge, hands arching above him in a dive, Ilya, as always, right behind him.

NEXT TIME...ON HEATED ISLAND...

Two months from now...summer has ended but the heat is still on! Tune into the reunion as we bring back familiar faces to see who’s still together, who’s still fighting, and who is bringing nothing but drama. Not to mention unseen footage and behind the scenes clips...this is one reunion you won’t want to miss!

end of the show but not the end of our story!!

the last chapter will be the reunion/epilogue of sorts <3

so shout out any characters you wanna see pop back up or drama you want them to get into for our final hurrah!!! (besides pork belly and ilya oil wrestling and ilya obviously losing)

Chapter 26

Chapter Summary

the reunion~

Chapter Notes

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

TWO MONTHS LATER

“Welcome to the *Love Island* reunion! Hosted by me, Ariana Madix,”

“And me, Andy Cohen!”

Andy grinned at the two rows of contestants, his teeth glinting in the studio light.

“It’s great to see you all again, though you may need to remind the audience of your names...”

Ariana hit his chest with a cue card, a smile plastering back to her face.

“Please, Andy, who could forget our OGs? We’ve got Hannah-” The crowd began to clap politely. “Shawna, Lexi I., Javi,” A few boos sounded out. “And Sasha.” The boos got louder.

“And in our back row, welcome back to Connie, Hudson, Cici, Leo, Luca, and Serge!”

Backstage, Ilya popped a few chocolate peanuts into his mouth, looking up at the screen in the small room they had him waiting in.

Scott wrinkled his nose as he passed by. “What are those?”

“Ah,” Ilya tilted his head to read the box. “...Goobers? Whatever the fuck that is. But you have been on this earth forever, you should know this already.”

If Shane was there, he would hiss at Ilya not to insult the reunion’s sponsor so loudly. But Shane was not there. Shane was too busy with serious hockey business, and Ilya, and the rest of them, would have to settle for a livestream of him for the reunion instead. Undeterred, Ilya whipped out his phone, Shane’s text thread already at the top of his messages.

Ilya: *sponsor candy looks like rabbit poop*

Ilya: *you might like though*

Ilya: *close to rabbit food?* 🐰

He waited a minute, already grinning as he saw three dots appear.

Shane: *Shut up. And be nice. Brands talk. You'll get a bad reputation.*

Ilya settled back into the couch, thumbs humming happily as he taunted him. On the screen, Hannah was updating Ariana about how she was still single. Ariana gestured to the crowd for anyone who might be interested, Hannah laughing into her palms.

Ilya: *ah hannah's still single shane*

Ilya: *cant remember if she was a good kisser or not...maybe need refresher since i am here all alone* 😞😞

The audience aww'ed as Javi shared he broke up with Zara, again. Shawna and Lexi I. didn't appear to have much sympathy for him. Ilya's phone buzzed.

Shane: *Huh. Looks like Javi may need some company too.*

Ilya straightened.

Ilya: *how are you seeing this are you a wizard*

Ilya: *if this is david typing on your phone hello mr.hollander i will not tell yuna*

Ilya: *if this is shane how dare you* 💔

A response came a few moments later, Ilya narrowing his eyes as Javi talked on the screen above him.

Shane: *They gave me a link to watch. In case anyone shittalks me before our section, I guess.*

Ilya: *no one will shittalk. but i will defend your honor if they do* 😞😞😞 *my perfect boyfriend who should not even look at ugly javi* 🍷💔😞😞🙒

Shane: *Lol.*

Ilya beamed down at his phone, imagining the smile Shane would have on his face.

“Now Lexi, it looked like sparks were flying with you and Serge after you both left the show?”

Lexi shook out her hair. “We did get to know each other a bit, but I think we’re just in different places in life.”

“Because I am in hospital?”

Lexi winced, looking behind her and taking in Serge's neck brace and arm cast.

“No, like, in terms of what we want from life? I’m ready for a ring and you’re...”

“Being put through the ringer.” Andy laughed, leaning forward. “Serge, tell me, do you have any insurance? Because I feel like you’re at a, ten hospital trips get one free, kinda deal at this point.”

“Ah, no, I have, how you say, Fund Me Please?”

“A Go-Fund-Me, yes.” Ariana nodded. “We are putting that QR code on the bottom of the screen now if viewers at home would like to support.”

Ilya’s phone vibrated.

Shane: *You didn’t hook up with him, right?*

Ilya: *no my sweetheart i told you everything all of my mistakes during dumb casa time* ❤️ ❤️ 🥹👦👧

Shane: *I mean, it wouldn’t be that dumb. Serge is very attractive.*

Ilya: *...too far*

Shane: *You literally look like him, so.*

Ilya: *...not too far*

Ilya: *but close* 😞😞😞

Ilya: *stop looking at his face, i will send you pictures of me instead* 🙄

Ilya sent off two shirtless selfies immediately. He didn’t get a response, his texts not even marked read. Ilya looked up at the screen. He took in Serge’s broad muscles, dark bruising visible over his shoulder from whatever-the-fuck latest mishap he had been in. His eyes narrowed as he looked back at his phone.

Ilya: *shane.*

Ilya: *shane.*

Ilya: *SHANEEE*

Shane: *Oh my god, what?*

Ilya: *do not put another sexy russian in your hockey fantasy*

Ilya: *that is for us*

Ilya: *i’ll get real bruises if you need me to*

Ilya: *let you slam me into the boards*

Ilya: *fuck you on center ice*

Shane's texting bubble appeared and disappeared and reappeared. Ilya could imagine Shane perfectly, red creeping up his neck, mouth full of denials that his eyes would contradict.

Shane: *It's not even like that!*

Ilya: *shane.*

Shane: *Would you really get bruised just for the roleplay?*

Ilya: *omg my boyfriend has fallen in love with the stripper 😭😭😭 shane this never works*

Shane: *Wait, how would you know?*

Ilya: *maybe when you're busy replacing me in pervert sports fantasy i am out at strip clubs having strippers love me*

Ilya: *shane?*

Ilya: *shane i am just kidding you know i would never do this*

Ilya: *and i love your fantasy it was very hot last time*

Shane: *Good. We can do it again then.*

Ilya: *you are evil man leaving me on read like that*

Ilya: *you love to torment your innocent boyfriend what have i ever done*

Shane: *Well.*

Ilya's eyes flicked up again. He groaned. Sasha was on screen, talking (thankfully) about some new guy he had started seeing.

Ilya: *see nothing to worry about. nothing ever to worry about* 💕💕💕

The audience clapped as a picture of Sasha and his new man was projected onto a drop-down screen on stage. Ilya leaned in, mouth falling open a bit.

Shane: *Lol.*

Ilya: *LOL?! i am not fucking laughing shane why does he look like temu version of you*

Shane: *Guess he liked kissing me that much...*

Ilya: *shane. you are in timeout. i am not talking to you. i am telling yuna you are grounded.*

Ilya scowled as Connie and Hudson updated Ariana on a new amateur film they had finished together, Andy asking prying questions about just what their relationship status was now.

Then, as Luca and Leo were sharing how they remained good friends but nothing else, Ilya's phone got another text.

Shane: *There's no one I like kissing as much as you, you know. No one I've ever liked kissing as much as you.* ❤️

Ilya: *you used emoji for me 😭😭😭😭😭😭 ok timeout done come fly here and kiss me right now*

It had been two weeks since they last saw each other. Shane was on the road playing everywhere but where Ilya was it seemed, as Ilya finished up the last of his precontracted modeling shoots.

Ilya let his phone lull in his palm as bickering broke out on the main stage. Apparently Leo and Cici had started talking again, but Leo had also been talking to Serge at the same time. Ilya grinned.

Ilya: *hollanderrr you have competition it seems*

Shane: *You think I'd have to compete with Leo?*

Ilya: *fuck, no, of course my love has no competition at all i am stupid boy 😭😭😭*

Ilya couldn't wait for this dumb reunion to be over. He and Shane had long moved past their bumps on the show, but the last thing he needed was old wounds reopened. Which, he supposed, was the whole point of this reunion for everyone else.

Shane: *Should we donate to Serge's Go Fund Me though? I'm actually concerned.*

Ilya's eyes flicked back to the screen. Andy was grinning ear-to-ear.

"So let me get this right. Cici, you thought Leo was talking to you exclusively? But Leo, you were seeing Serge on the side?"

Leo groaned, his leopard-print blazer shifting as he covered his eyes.

"No one was on the side! Nothing had gotten that serious with anyone yet. I didn't think I needed to mention everything!"

"Uh-huh." Andy looked to Serge, who tried to make eye contact with the host despite his neck being stuck in its brace.

"And Serge, you were driving to a gig when Leo texted you, distracting you to the point where you crashed your car?"

Ariana looked into the camera. "Please practice safe driving. Do not text and drive, even in the pursuit of love!"

"Was not texting." Serge shifted his entire body, moving one millimeter at a time until he could face Andy more fully. "I have a phone stand thing. For hands-free."

“Love hands free.” Andy grinned wider.

“At stop light, I click on Leo’s text. Is picture. I miss green light. Car behind me goes, hits me. I go into intersection, another car hits. Boom boom.” He motions over his body with the arm that wasn’t in a cast. “Ouch.”

Andy’s eyes narrowed as he turned to Leo.

“Leo...what kind of picture did you send?”

Leo turned bright red. Serge smiled deeply, revealing two missing teeth towards the back of his jaw.

“Was very good picture. Worth the pain.”

Ariana inhaled sharply, cocking her head and looking away from his mouth with a wince.

Ilya shifted, picking up his phone.

Ilya: *yes will donate right away, need to get his teeth fixed before you get horny again*

Shane: *Haha.*

Ilya: *not laughing shane* 😞

Shane: *I’ll donate too. We’ll need him in top shape for our future bachelor party.*

Ilya’s heart did a series of rapid contractions, his fingers texting and then deleting.

Shane: *Kidding* ❤️

Ilya’s fingers froze, wondering what part Shane was kidding about. His chest was punched with warmth a second later.

Shane: *You can dance for me as entertainment instead. When it’s time.*

Ilya: *yes. yes yes yes. when it’s time* 💕🏡💕👧

Shane: *Maybe in my jersey again...*

A producer knocked on the door. Ilya’s head snapped up, glaring.

“They’re ready for you.”

Ilya pinched the bridge of his nose.

Ilya: *looks like time for our segment sweetheart*

Ilya: *but do not forget that thought*

Ilya: *i am so proud of you for sexy texting*

Ilya: *actually i do not care keep texting they can film us having sexy sexy conversation and we can add it to our home movie collection hmm 🤔🤔🤔*

Ilya: *shane*

Ilya: *shaneeee no come back*

Ilya sighed, sliding his phone into his dress pants. Shane was probably already logging onto his livestream like the good boy he was. Ilya shuffled into the hallway, stepping to the side as the other contestants filed off during the commercial break. He let himself be prodded, adjusting his mic as he went to his marked spot behind the stage.

“And now, please welcome the rest of our Islanders with us tonight!” Ariana motioned to the side.

“Marly and J.J.!” The crowd cheered as they strode out, sliding into the empty seats from the previous round. “Troy and Harris!” They smiled out at the crowd, sitting next to the other two men.

Andy motioned to the other side of the stage.

“Scott and Kip! Hayden and Jackie!”

The crowd kept cheering, the noise echoing in Ilya’s ears. A screen slowly descended from behind the Islanders with the *Love Island* logo, the front row of seating still empty.

“Ilya Rozanov!”

Ilya walked out, the stage lights flaring in his eyes. His legs jerked beneath him, chest tightening as he passed the other couples. Ilya slid into his seat, palm covering his Rolex as he took a deep breath.

“And finally our winners, Rose and Svetlana!”

The crowd rose to their feet, cheers deafening as the couple strode out hand-in-hand, laughing as they made their way to center stage.

Ariana waited for the noise to die down slightly.

“It’s so good to see you all again! I know a lot of us have heard rumors of what you’ve all been up to, but you can’t always believe what you read. So let’s get into it, direct from the source.”

Andy turned to Marly and J.J. in the backrow.

“Let’s start with you two. You didn’t have a long time on the show together, but you definitely seemed to connect. Where are things at now?”

“Truthfully,” J.J. cradled Marly’s hand in both of his, smiling wide. “Marly and I are really thriving.”

“Thriving as friends? Boyfriends? What are we calling it?”

Marly beamed. “We’re in an open soul-bonded homoflexible aspiring polycule and honestly, I’ve never been so happy!”

Andy started to speak, then closed his mouth, then started again.

“I’m sorry, please repeat all of those words?”

J.J. looked at Marly. “Essentially, Marly and I can pursue other partners in whatever form we happen to connect.” He glanced offstage with a quick smile in the direction Luca had gone. “And while we both lean towards the masculine, we do continue to explore whatever souls come our way.”

“Yeah, what was that soul-bonded part?” Andy tilted his head.

Marly looked at J.J., his entire body melting. “Well obviously we’re soulmates. Whatever’s in each of us is just meant to be with other one. Like how cream cheese goes so fucking good with bagels? It’s like that, dude. But with love. And also sex. The sex is fire. But the love is also fire? Like a *megafire*. That’s the biggest type of fire, Andy.”

“O...kay.” Andy cleared his throat. “Great. Happy for you two. I think. What about you, Troy and Harris? And uh, fire-bonding over here?”

Troy smiled, looking at Harris. “I guess in a way? We *are* officially boyfriends.”

The audience broke into applause, Harris leaning into Troy’s shoulder.

Ariana covered her mouth. “Oh, tell me all the details, boys!”

Troy glanced at Harris again. “It was an ordinary Tuesday. I knew I wanted to ask, but neither of us are too over-the-top. So. Harris has this really cute dog, Chiron.”

On the screen behind the Islanders, a picture displayed of the two men with an adorable dog. Ilya’s head snapped behind him, his face breaking into a smile.

“I rolled up this piece of paper that said, *will you be my boyfriend*, on it and Chiron carried it over to Harris-”

“And I unfurled it and of course, immediately said yes!”

The picture changed to Harris and Troy kissing, a slightly damp piece of paper visible in Harris’s hand. Ilya’s fingers twitched. He resisted the urge to pull out his phone on live television and send a flurry of texts to Shane about how they needed to adopt ten dogs at once.

Ariana pressed a hand over her heart.

“I am so happy for you boys. And I believe that’s not the only piece of news we have tonight...Scott and Kip? How have things been going outside of the Villa?”

Scott and Kip gazed at each other for a moment. Scott leaned in, rubbing his nose against Kip's. Andy leaned back, smacking his cue cards against his knee.

"All right. Seems great. Next couple!"

Scott and Kip broke apart with a laugh, Scott shaking his head as he looped his arms through Kip's, resting his head on his shoulder.

"Sorry. Yeah, we're doing great." He bit his lip, looking over at Kip. "We've been looking at places together for when Kip's lease is up. And in the meantime, yeah, I've really been enjoying my time with my boyfriend."

The audience broke into applause again, Ariana leaning forward.

"So Kip, did you follow through on being the one to ask?"

"I sure did." Kip's eyes trailed up to the screen.

A video began playing, filmed somewhat shakily. Kip was in a suit, pacing in front of a path of rose petals in what looked like an art gallery. Scott's voice called off-camera. Kip responded, then took a deep exhale as Scott rounded the corner. Scott froze. Kip laughed, reaching for his hands. He tilted his head to the painting they were standing in front of, saying how it reminded him of Scott, of their love. Scott's lip started trembling. Kip's lips parted, asking Scott to be his boyfriend as a blurry thumb moved into a portion of the camera, partially masking the view as the two men embraced, the camera shaking slightly before flipping upside down and cutting out.

The stage lights went back on, the audience clapping as the screen returned to the *Love Island* logo.

"That was so sweet, Kip." Ariana passed a tissue to Scott. "Who was that filming?"

Scott let out a watery snort as Kip grinned.

"My dad. He's not the best cameraman, but he tried his best."

Andy turned to Ariana.

"You know, I think this is the most successful season of *Love Island* yet."

"Who says men can't commit!" Ariana laughed.

"Speaking of - Hayden and Jackie, I hear things have been going *very* well for you two?" Andy arched an eyebrow.

Jackie slid her hand out from under her leg, laughing as she held it to camera.

"I'd say so."

Her ring glimmered as the camera zoomed in on her left hand, Hayden grinning ear-to-ear.

Scott shook his head. “And they say *I* move fast?”

Hayden just tugged Jackie closer. “It might feel fast, but to us, it felt right. We’re so ready to settle down, start our lives together, get ready for a family together, you know. Felt like the right first step.”

Jackie patted his cheek, leaning in to give him a quick kiss.

“No lingering questions about your, uh, identity...?” Andy tilted his head, lips twitching as he smiled at Hayden.

Hayden’s cheeks pinked slightly, his face firm.

“I know who I am, Andy. I don’t have any questions about that. I still have eyes so yeah, I still find certain men attractive. And I most certainly find Jackie attractive and know that she’s my life partner.”

Ilya clapped along with the audience.

“Congratulations, Pike. None of us wanted you anyway, so, kind of Jackie to say yes.”

“Uninvited from the wedding.” Hayden pointed at Ilya, Jackie laughing as she lowered his hand.

“You’ve got a lot to say, Ilya.” Ariana turned to him. “And I know everyone can see that you’re here alone, and might be wondering...”

“Do not even joke, Ariana.” Ilya looked at her sternly. Hayden snorted in the background. “Shane is off being very impressive and talented. We are still very much in love. He is very much *not* single and available.”

“That’s a relief.” Ariana smiled. “I imagine you miss him while you’re doing long-distance?”

“Of course I miss him, will all questions be this stupid?”

Ariana tried to hide her smile. “I just wonder if anyone is missing you...” She swiveled so she could see the screen behind them.

The feed connected, Shane coming into focus. He waved, his forehead very close to the camera. Ilya beamed.

“Shane! Hello, sweetheart!”

“Hi, Ilya.” Shane flushed. “Hi, everyone. Sorry I couldn’t be there in person.”

“No worries, Shane.” Ariana smiled. “We already heard you’re busy being impressive and talented.”

Shane dipped his head. “Sure, I mean, we are having a great season. And lots more fans showing up to our games because of the show, which we appreciate.”

The crowd cheered.

“I see you’re still wearing a certain necklace...” Ariana tapped her chin.

“Oh, yeah.” Shane’s hand pressed against his collarbone, a soft smile drifting across his face. “Long distance isn’t ideal, of course. So it helps us feel close when we can’t be in person.”

“How has the long distance been going?” Ariana looked to Ilya.

“Miserable, Ariana, I am dying every day.” Ilya sighed dramatically. “But we will have more time together soon. And then I will be able to go to every game and be added to the WAG chat, I cannot wait.”

The audience laughed, Ariana turning back to the screen.

“And Shane, how has it been for you?”

He froze, screen pixelating before cutting out. Andy winced.

“Oof, looks like we lost him. We’ll see if we can get him back, but in the meantime, let’s check in with our winners!”

Rose and Svetlana updated the audience on their relationship, but Ilya couldn’t stay focused. His palm pressed over the phone in his pocket, eyes flickering to the blank screen behind him. He had wanted even those few moments together, virtually, instead of sitting here alone, reminded of what he couldn’t have quite yet.

“But yes, going very strong even though we’ve resisted the call of the UHaul...so far!” Rose laughed, leaning into Svetlana as the audience applauded.

Ariana straightened, fingers touching her earpiece briefly.

“So happy to hear that. And it sounds like we were able to get Shane back. Shane? You there?”

The video feed restarted, camera angled below Shane’s chin now, close enough that you could only see his face in view. Ilya grinned, shaking his head.

“Sweetheart, the camera is too close. You are so beautiful, but we can see all your pores.”

“Oh, sorry.” Shane glanced down, hand jostling. “Let me just-”

The video cut out again, the audience groaning. And then there was movement from stage left, Shane striding out with a shit-eating grin. Ilya’s mouth fell open, his legs pulling him to his feet without thought.

“You...you tricked me?”

Shane barreled into him, arms wrapping tight around him.

“Mhm. Had it planned for a week.”

Ilya exhaled, taking in the smell of Shane’s shampoo, the feel of him in his arms.

“My sneaky sweetheart.”

The crowd’s cheering finally died down, Ilya forcing himself to pry his fingers away from Shane and sit back down. He let Shane carry them through a few more minutes of conversation with the hosts, his gaze trained on Shane’s profile, re-memorizing him.

It was a shock each time, how much more captivating he was in the flesh. How Shane’s beauty couldn’t be flattened into a digital display, the excessiveness of it almost overwhelming in person.

Ilya barely looked at the screen behind them as they began playing unseen footage, wholly uncaring about the stream of clips: outtakes of Hayden failing miserably at making Jackie pancakes, catty insults about Javi in the girls’ dressing room, a series of Marly doing mantras in the mirror, his lips smooshing as he kissed his own reflection at the end.

Ilya only straightened when he saw his own face loom on screen. He looked somehow younger, despite it only being a few months ago, his face looping in short bursts of video: his confessional after their first date, agonizing over Shane’s feelings, if he was reading into things. His smirk after their first night in Soul Ties, thanking the universe that Shane Hollander was not so proper after all. His head between his knees, jealous over Hayden, irate about Sasha. His eyes, gooey and unfocused as they looked down at a plastic ring. His body fetal position on the small couch, cheek pressed into the cushion after Casa. Murmuring that he’s fucked up so bad, that he should chop his own dick off, let Shane use it as a dildo since he’s clearly done with the rest of him.

Shane reached out for Ilya’s knee, squeezing as he looked at him. Ilya grumbled, pressing his forehead into Shane’s shoulder, face flushed in embarrassment as outtakes from his confessionals kept playing.

“You got a really flattering edit. You only looked half as pathetic when this aired.” Shane’s lips twitched against Ilya’s curls. Ilya reached his arms out, tugging Shane closer.

“Well, should I share the video I screen-recorded of you the other night, when you were missing me?”

Shane flushed, his lips pressing together. Ilya grinned, pressing a kiss to Shane’s temple.

“Ah, I didn’t think so.”

Ilya’s face thankfully disappeared from the big screen, replaced by fan edits for each of the couples. Shane burrowed closer to Ilya as they watched.

“How long do you have?” Ilya murmured.

“I fly out tomorrow morning.” Shane sighed.

Ilya's hand squeezed his thigh, watching the screen absently. He suddenly jolted up, a laugh flying out of his mouth. Yuna's name was visible at the bottom of the vertical video next on screen. Shane froze next to him, his eyes wide. Ilya grinned as the song *This Kiss* began playing over clips of him and Shane, spliced together from each kiss they shared in the Villa.

"Mm, that was a good one..." Ilya elbowed Shane after a night-vision clip from Soul Ties played. Shane said nothing.

The video finished and Ariana clapped, motioning to the screen.

"It seems like Yuna's finally gotten unbanned, huh! Is it safe to say she's no longer cyberbullying you, Ilya?"

Shane groaned. "I think this is worse."

Ilya grinned even wider.

"I love it. Rewind, please, Ariana. Let's watch it again."

Stay tuned for next summer, when Ilya and Shane host a very special premiere party...!

Chapter End Notes

ok the reunion got away from me and was longer than planned so the epilogue will be its own (FINAL!) chapter.

excited to have one final wrap up for everyone to interact and be adorable (ft pork + more relationship milestones) before i say goodbye to them foreverrrr

Chapter 27

Chapter Summary

epilogue the next summer!

Chapter Notes

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

THE NEXT SUMMER

“I feel bad making everyone come out here. It’s not exactly local.”

Ilya scoffed, leaning back against the kitchen counter.

“Please, they’re happy to have a chance to be at famous Shane Hollander’s house.”

“Cottage.”

“*Mansion. Lakeside mansion.*”

Shane shook his head, smiling as he arranged the charcuterie board.

“It will be nice to see everyone. Or mostly everyone.”

“Still pouting that Serge is not coming?”

“Now that you mention it...”

Ilya grumbled, stepping closer to Shane and wrapping his arms around him. Shane slid out of Ilya’s embrace to set out some drinks.

“You weren’t the one who spilled all that water at the old folks’ home were you? Right after he was on the mend too.”

“Shane, that was obviously piss, I don’t know why Serge won’t admit it. Serves him right for expanding his business. Old people cannot handle striptease like that.” Ilya crossed his arms.

“It was probably Hunter who pissed himself. I bet he has a VIP suite there.”

“No more piss talk once my parents get here.”

Ilya handed Shane a bowl of snacks to put on the counter, Pork Belly padding into the room at the scent of food.

“You are no fun. First you sanitize our summer home of signs of love-making, now I cannot even discuss piss.”

“You’ll survive.” Shane rolled his eyes, smiling.

The doorbell rang. Shane’s head jerked up. Ilya passed him, squeezing his shoulder once as his heart accelerated.

“Relax. Everyone will have a fun time.”

Shane sipped his ginger ale, appraising the party. His dad was manning the grill outside and chatting with J.J. while Marly talked with Yuna, standing a bit too close for Shane’s comfort. In the distance, Harris and Troy were walking back from the dock, hand-in-hand. Hayden poked at the firepit on the lawn to keep it going, Jackie supervising closely.

In front of them all, Ilya had successfully set up the outside projector, the huge screen inflated to its full height. Shane found himself smiling despite himself as he took in Ilya’s puffed chest, his arms gesturing to Scott and Kip about something Shane couldn’t overhear.

Rose slid the door open, slipping inside.

“Ogling your boyfriend?”

“Maybe.” Shane grinned. “Where’s your better half?”

Rose motioned to the door. “About to arrive. She was finishing up some things for the foundation. We only have two weeks to go before we open.”

“Everything coming together?”

“Just about! It’s so exciting. Though probably not as exciting as things for you...”

Shane grinned wider.

“Yeah, I don’t hate winning cups.”

Rose snorted, shaking her head.

“Ilya seems to love being a WAG. I barely got to see gameplay with how much the cameras cut to him in your jersey.”

Shane shrugged, smiling down at the floor.

“Must be good publicity for him too.” Rose mused. “Especially if he’s only doing solo shoots now.”

Shane lowered his ginger ale. “Huh?”

“Ilya.” Rose glanced behind her at the crowd outside. “He was saying how he can only book solo shoots now, out of respect for your relationship?”

Shane blinked. “That’s not true…”

Shane stared back at Rose, her eyes narrowed.

“No, seriously. I never said that.”

Rose burst into laughter.

“Wow. Well, he was *very* insistent.” She put on a horrible impression of a Russian accent. “Yes, cannot model with any pretty, sexy people anymore. Only me. Hollander is very jealous man. Wants me all to himself. Is sad for bank account, but, ah, happy wife, happy life.”

“He did not call me his wife.” Shane’s ears burned.

Rose shrugged with a smile, taking a sip of her drink. “Apparently, you’re one possessive bride.”

“I’m going to kill him.”

“No, don’t, he might actually die if you’re not threatened.” Rose laughed. “He went into way too much detail about how you can’t even handle old photoshoots where he’s with other people.”

“I’m literally *in* old photoshoots with him and other people!”

“Let him have it.” Rose shook her head, smiling as the doorbell rang. “That must be Sveta.”

Shane exhaled, walking outside to address things with his boyfriend.

“Hey man, am I doing this right?” Hayden poked at the fire, scratching his head.

“Yeah, dude, that’s fine.” Shane slowed down, tearing his eyes from Ilya approaching in the distance. “Congrats again, by the way.” He gestured to Hayden’s wedding band.

Jackie beamed, rubbing a hand over her stomach.

“Best year of my life. Until this little one arrives that is.”

Shane felt a warm arm land across his shoulders.

“Our Anya will still be cuter. Because of Pike’s genes, not yours, Jackie. You are glowing and perfect.”

“Fuck off, man.”

“Mm, looks like you’ve done enough fucking. Did you even wait until your wedding night?”

Hayden’s cheeks flushed. “None of your business.”

Ilya looked at Shane, sighing.

“We keep trying to conceive too, but I think Shane is infertile.”

“Hey!” Shane frowned. “Maybe you’re the infertile one.”

“Ah, no, my sperm are great swimmers.” He leaned in to kiss Shane’s cheek. “Guess we will need to keep trying then.”

“Dude. TMI.” Hayden wrinkled his nose.

“Like it was not TMI when you text Shane and I,” Ilya pitched his voice up. “Oh, Jackie and I have been trying for a baby!” He scowled. “No one wants to imagine you hitting it raw, Pike.”

“Dude! First of all, no one told you to imagine that. And you only got texted ’cause Jackie won’t let me kick you out of the group chat.”

Shane snorted, shaking his head. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Marly tuck a strand of Yuna’s hair behind her ear.

“Um. I’ll be right back.”

He squeezed Ilya’s hand, sliding out from under his arm and heading across the backyard.

“Got any more beer, Rozanov?”

Ilya rolled his eyes as Hunter approached.

“Trying to enjoy your final years? Fine, yes, follow me.”

“Hey, mom.” Shane approached Yuna, giving Marly a stern look.

“Oh, hi, sweetie. Did you hear they want Marly on *The Traitors* next season? Wouldn’t that be fun?”

Marly beamed.

“I’m super pumped, man! I’m *so* good at keeping secrets. But I don’t know about lying, that seems real hard. Like, imagine backstabbing your bros?” Marly looked at Shane, his face falling as he shook his head.

“Mhm. Sounds tough.”

J.J. wandered over, pressing a kiss to Marly’s cheek.

“Chin up, *mon guimauve*. You can do anything you set your mind to.”

Marly looked at him, pressing their foreheads together.

“I literally love you so much.”

Marly sighed happily, shifting in J.J.'s arms as he looked at Shane.

“But how have you been doing, man? How are you and your boy? I was *so* bummed the other week, 'cause Roz said he can't go out to the club anymore, you know, out of respect. But we had just gone shopping and he had bought *such* a dope outfit and I was like, *ahh*, you know! Like, people need to see! But what did he say...oh right, yeah, happy wife, happy life. Which, *totally*. Respect, man.”

Shane started to say that there was no such rule about Ilya not clubbing, and he wasn't a wife for that matter, but then he snapped his mouth shut.

“Yeah. Right.” Shane swallowed. “What, um, outfit was it? That he got?”

Pork Belly half-purred, half-growled in Ilya's arms. Scott eyed the cat apprehensively.

“That thing looks like a naked chicken.”

Ilya scoffed. “How dare you. Pork is the most handsome cat. Looks better than you any day.”

Ilya adjusted the hockey jersey Pork was wearing, looking down at him fondly as he ran a thumb over the embroidered name on the back.

Scott made a face.

“Why does that thing have your last name on the back?”

Ilya sniffed, palm sliding over Pork's body as he stroked him.

“I could have been famous hockey player in another life. And Shane likes seeing my name in his colors.” Ilya smirked.

“Jesus.”

“Ilya, actually. And don't be homophobic.”

“I'm literally-” Scott scoffed, sighing. His gaze drifted to Ilya's arms, streaked in lines of red. He made a face again.

“Those from Shane or the cat?”

“Both.” Ilya's smirk deepened.

Scott let out a long exhale, eyes closing.

“My fault for asking.”

Pork let out a low hiss, eyes fixating on Scott as he opened his mouth, sharp teeth jabbing into Ilya's skin.

"Jesus."

"Ah, no, it is fine." Ilya laughed, scratching Pork's head as a drop of blood welled from his teethmarks. "He is merely disturbed by your presence."

"Well, the scratches were already there before me."

Ilya shrugged. "Pork doesn't know what to do with his affection sometimes. Much like my beautiful Shane."

Scott snorted. "Sounds healthy."

"Oh yes, like you would know."

Scott took a sip of his beer, nodding.

"I would, actually. Kip and I did a few sessions of couples therapy and it was truly so helpful. Our communication's never been better." He tilted his head. "Would you say you're anxiously attached or more avoidant?"

"I don't know these words you're saying but, ah, avoidant, if it means avoiding you." Ilya gave him a sweet smile.

Scott rolled his eyes. "You're a great host, Rozanov."

The glass door slammed shut from the outside, Shane hurrying across the room with his shoulders around his ears. Pork purred, slashing Ilya's forearm with one paw and leaping towards Shane's torso instead.

"Oof. Hi, baby." Shane squeezed Pork, pressing a kiss to his forehead and ignoring Ilya's pout.

"Ah, yes, hello baby, to me too?" Ilya's eyes narrowed.

"Huh. Anxiously attached it is." Scott grinned, taking another sip from his beer and heading back outside.

"Do you think we need couples therapy?" Ilya leaned in, voice lowered.

"What?" Shane blinked. "What are you- no, why?"

"Nothing. Hunter is stupid. Probably was around before therapy was even invented." Ilya sighed, finally taking in Shane's blotched cheeks. "What is it, sweetheart?"

Shane swallowed, stepping closer.

“We need to block off all the bedroom doors.” Ilya raised his eyebrows, waiting. Shane closed his eyes. “Marly was like, flirting with my mom, which was so gross. And then J.J. came over and they were giving each other googly eyes and being all touchy like they are, and then Luca wandered over, and I’m telling you, the air is filled with *something* and absolutely no one is allowed to have freaky sex in our cottage but us. I’d have to disinfect everything.”

“Mm, I agree. Only us.”

Ilya stepped Shane closer to the living room wall, his arm wrapping around the small of Shane’s back to pull him in. Pork let out an angry mew as their chests skimmed. He hopped out of Shane’s arms, scurrying away with a hiss over his shoulder.

“Ilya, I’m serious. Tell ‘your boy’ Marly that an orgy’s off-limits.”

“I am serious. We should stake our claim. Have freaky sex first over every surface.”

Shane bit his lip. “Pretty sure we’ve already done that...”

Ilya leaned in for a kiss, trying to think of any place they hadn’t already christened.

“Laundry room floor?”

Shane furrowed his face.

“We did that Thursday.”

“Ah, no, you were on top of the dryer. Not on the floor.”

Shane’s eyes drifted, his gaze going slightly hazy. Ilya chuckled, lips trailing over the underside of Shane’s jaw.

“You remember how you liked the vibrations, yes?”

Shane nodded, neck lolling in Ilya’s steady palm, the golden chain heating under Ilya’s warmth. Shane licked his lips.

“We haven’t done the walk-in closet yet.”

“Oh? I thought we were done with closets.” Ilya’s lips twitched upward.

Shane ran his hands down Ilya’s torso, his head bowing closer to his chest. Ilya leaned closer to catch the low murmur of Shane’s voice.

“You could model some of your outfits for me.”

“You love exploiting my work for free.”

“Mm.” Shane’s lips grazed Ilya’s earlobe, making him shiver. “I heard you and Marly went on a shopping spree. You should show me what you got.”

Ilya gripped onto Shane's waist, his breathing hitching.

"Cruel to do this in the middle of our party. Hunter will be right about me being a bad host."

Shane pressed his hips up a fraction, dragging his eyes to Ilya as they made contact. His eyes sparkled deviously as Ilya jolted, his hips tilting back and away. Shane's tongue slid slowly over his lips, his gaze dropping to Ilya's mouth.

"It wouldn't take long. Especially if the clothes look as good as Marly was saying. Pretty unfair that you gave him a show before your boyfriend...not a great way to keep me happy..."

Shane's hand gathered Ilya's shirt, fisting the fabric as he kept Ilya close, his lips sucking briefly against Ilya's throat. Ilya exhaled shakily, his hands dipping lower to squeeze Shane's ass.

"Trying to mark me, котёнок?" Shane's nose pressed harder against Ilya's jaw, nuzzling his pulsepoint. "Okay, yes, I think this will not take long. Our guests can host themselves for a little."

"Um, excuse me?"

Ilya whipped his head, Shane groaning as he released Ilya's shirt. Luca swallowed, eyes darting between them.

"Sorry, uh, I'm just looking for the bathroom?"

Ilya's jaw ticked. He forced a breath out of his nostrils, jerking his head to the left.

"Down the hall. Last door on your right. Do not open any other doors, we are not hosting an orgy."

Luca blinked. "Um. Right, of course. Thanks?"

Ilya turned back, Shane already peeling out of his arms with a sad smile.

"I'm gonna make sure everyone's good on drinks. The show's about to start."

Ilya threw his head back with a groan.

"Fine, fine. I will save you a seat. Once I am...calmer."

Shane looked down at Ilya's shorts with a grin, shaking his head as he headed outside.

Luca headed down the hallway, throwing a nervous look over his shoulder. Thankfully, Ilya was no longer glowering at him, the kitchen clearing out as everyone headed to take their seats for the premiere. Luca's eyes roamed the walls, noticing a pattern. The left was devoted to Shane, glossy framed prints of him with various awards at each step, so many that Luca couldn't imagine how crowded Shane's actual trophy room must be.

On the right were displays of Ilya's most famous campaigns. Luca flushed at the Calvin Klein shoot, which he had been *very* familiar with before meeting Ilya on the show. As he neared the restroom, Luca spotted an empty frame next to a photo of Shane hoisting last year's cup over his head, clearly awaiting the latest installment of the Hollander regime.

Luca shook his head, smiling. He paused outside the bathroom door, eyes drawn from a photoshoot of a younger Ilya on top of a car to the end of the hallway. A giant black and white print was centered there. Luca recognized the Rolex campaign from over a year ago. He leaned closer, spotting Shane near the center, Ilya lounging in front, a few other recognizable faces taking up the spaces in between. Both men looked into the lens, unaware of what was to come.

Luca stepped back as his eyes flickered above the print, where a small shadow box was mounted with two plastic rings inside. Luca blinked a few times, his throat closing slightly as he realized he was standing in a trophy room, just a different sort.

"I should get credit for this!" Ilya waved at the screen, moaning as Shane settled next to him on the outdoor sofa. "I'm texting Ariana."

Shane shook his head, nestling under Ilya's arm as the *Love Island* introduction music began.

"As if you are the only bisexual?" Svetlana arched her eyebrows. "Maybe they are doing *Love Bi-land* this summer because of, hm, last season's winners?"

Rose grinned and chucked a piece of popcorn at Ilya's head, blowing a raspberry his way. Ilya mumbled something under his breath but Shane just yanked his curls, Ilya's chest stilling under Shane's head.

Ilya was able to remain silent for another minute, long enough for Kip to whistle at one of the season's male contestants, Scott simply smiling in return. Ilya's hands threaded through Shane's hair as he bent down to whisper in his ear.

"Shane. I am bored."

"Ilya. It's been two seconds."

"Exactly. Already boring." Ilya sighed. "Should've played our Hideaway sex tape instead."

"My *parents* are here." Shane glared at him, jaw tense.

Ilya grinned, eyes trailing down between Shane's thighs. Shane tore his eyes away, frowning at the screen as he subtly adjusted himself.

"Ah, you are missing the cameras? The national audience?"

Ilya's voice rumbled against Shane's ear. Shane pressed his lips together, eyes darting across their backyard. Jackie was nuzzled against Hayden's side, his hand running absently over the slight curve of her stomach. Harris was laughing at something Troy said about a contestant, Scott and Kip leaning forward to chime in. Marly was fully in J.J.'s lap, engulfing the other

man with his hulking body and paying absolutely no attention to the screen. Luca sat next to them, cheeks pink.

Shane looked over his shoulder, catching Rose's eye. Her eyes narrowed suspiciously before Svetlana drew her attention away. Behind Shane, Yuna and David were inside tidying the kitchen. Pork winded around David's ankles, his mouth opening in a silent mew. Shane watched for a moment, a soft smile drifting across his face as his dad caught Yuna around the waist while she put a dish away, his lips finding hers and staying.

"Checking if the coast is clear?"

Shane's eyelashes fluttered as his gaze refocused on Ilya's blue-green eyes, centimeters from his own.

"You're a menace, you know."

"You love it, you know."

"Yeah." Shane smiled at him, body sinking further into Ilya's embrace. "I do."

He let himself unwind into Ilya's arms, only mildly irritated when Ilya stopped Shane's drifting hand, preventing him from tracing further up Ilya's thigh. Ilya laced their fingers together instead, pressing a kiss to the crown of Shane's head.

"We should behave. But later. I will pull you for a chat, hm?"

"Not if I pull you first."

Shane grinned, Ilya's breath catching. He would never get used to it - the unguarded Shane he finally got to have, his freckles like a winding path leading him home. Ilya managed to give Shane a tight nod, refocusing on the screen. He felt Shane cock his head before his gaze followed, both of them attempting to give their attention to the new cast displayed before them.

Ilya shifted in his seat, his hand still holding Shane's. Shane's fingertips had almost skimmed over Ilya's pocket as they explored his thigh, their intertwined hands dangerously close to his secret even now. Ilya was glad the ring box was a narrow one, sleek and elegant. Nothing like the plastic rings mounted in their cottage, though those may always be his favorite. But this ring was meant to last, through chats and challenges and tests and ceremonies both formal and informal, where he would choose, every time, to couple up with the boy sitting next to him.

Ilya let out a slow sigh, forcing his heart to settle. He would wait for their guests to leave. He would let Yuna give him a small wink on her way out the door, David squeezing his arm. He would not trust Pork Belly with the ring around his collar, though he had temporarily toyed with that idea. Instead he would wait, soaking in the last night with Shane as his boyfriend. He would let Shane keep the fire going outside, if he wanted, their voices blending with the sounds of the loons. Or he would let Shane press him against the door as soon as the last guest left, his lips saying, as always, all the things words could never capture. He may even

wait until morning, Shane rumbled and sleepy and made anew in daybreak, hands perpetually reaching for Ilya even before his eyes blinked open.

It could happen a million different ways with a million different details. What it came down to was this: Ilya Rozanov was a man who knew what he wanted.

And what he wanted, what he has always wanted, is Shane Hollander.

Chapter End Notes

AND THAT'S A WRAP!! i didn't plan for it to coincide with the love island finale but here we are!

i cannot thank yall ENOUGH for being such a fun interactive audience <333 writing this has been such a joy and it's been truly so healing to just have fun with writing again and write ridiculous things about some of my favorite fictional people in my most horrifying real life setting (reality tv!)

i hope you all have a FANTASTIC summer overflowing with as much love as shane and ilya have for each other!!!

blasts ~i came here for love~ on a boombox as the screen fades to black

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