Offside

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Offside

by atemonai

Summary

Shane Hollander is eighteen, second overall draft pick, and quietly, a father. He's learned to carry both versions of himself with practiced ease.

Then there's Ilya Rozanov: first overall, unbothered, and already taking up more space in Shane's head than he has any right to.

Their rivalry is the story everyone wants to tell. Shane is starting to suspect the real one is something else entirely.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes

Chapter 1: 2008 - Part I

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

March 2008

“Mom…it hurts.”

Shane was curled up tightly on his bed, his breaths coming in small, uneven pants whenever the pain eased enough to let him breathe. The cramps were hitting him in waves now, so strong that he felt like he was going to pass out. The air in his room felt wrong, too sharp and too heavy. He could even smell it.

His scent had always been warm, a soft vanilla mixed with clean cotton. Now it clung too heavily in the air, overly sweet, but jagged at the edges. Something metallic threaded through it, thin and wrong. It made his stomach twist harder, the scent of fear and pain bleeding into the air around him.

"Breathe, Shane, you have to breathe through them."

His mom leaned in closer as she spoke, and Shane could feel her cedar-dark scent wrapping around him instinctively, steady and grounding in a way that usually calmed him when he was overwhelmed or upset. He tried to focus on that instead. On her scent and on the low, even tone of her voice. In through his nose, out through his mouth. He counted to four, and started over.

He'd done this before. Countless times. In loud arenas, before games, when the hum and the press of people packed too close together started to get to him. It always helped to keep the panic at bay.

But every time he caught his breath, another wave of pain crashed through him and the rhythm broke apart.

No one warned him that presenting would feel like this. Sure, he’d had his share of sexual education classes. Omegas took separate classes altogether once they reached high school, so he knew of presentations and heats. Books said that they were different depending on the person, with some omegas just waking up with light cramping, blood on their sheets, and a brand new status, while others experienced more severe pain.

Shane had woken up that morning uncomfortable with his shorts tinged a watery pink. That part made sense, in terms of what was supposed to happen. His presentation was bound to come sooner or later. He just hadn’t expected it to continue into feeling like this, a crushing and relentless pain that he couldn’t quite categorize.

At first he’d tried to map it to something familiar. A pulled muscle or a bruised rib. He was only sixteen, but he had his fair share of those kinds of injuries. Hockey wasn’t for the weak.

But he couldn’t fit this kind of pain into any of those categories.

And this pain didn’t stay put. It tightened. It built and released and then came back stronger.

Shane whined through it all, sweating so much that his clothes were soaked through, the fabric sticking uncomfortably to his skin. Nothing he did helped, and Shane hated that he couldn't control it.

His mom moved in and out of his room with steady purpose, bringing water, little snacks that he didn’t really eat, and cool cloths for his forehead. They’d talked about this before. Presentation. What it might feel like, what was normal. She’d always said they would handle it together when the time came.

His dad lingered near the doorway, hovering just inside the room. He fetched whatever she asked for without question, and at one point came close enough to rest his hand briefly on Shane’s ankle through the blanket. Just for the moment, just enough to let him know he was there, offering quiet encouragement that drifted in and out of Shane’s awareness. His scent helped too, milder, but just as steady as his mom’s. It smelled like normalcy and made Shane think that eventually everything would be okay.

But five hours in, something changed.

His moans broke into full, raw cries as the waves hit him harder than anything before. His eyes flew open as he struggled to sit up, muscles locking as the pain shifted lower and heavier inside him. The pain felt more like a pressure, deep and wildly unsettling.

It didn’t help that he felt wet beneath his blankets. Not just sweat, something thicker, and warmer. He shoved the blanket away, shifting uncomfortably in his spot.

He could hear his mother’s sharp intake of air, the scent in the room changing as she took in what he hadn’t looked at yet. Even his dad looked alarmed, stepping closer to the bed.

Eventually Shane followed her gaze downward and saw the blood, more than he had expected, blooming dark against the loose fabric of his shorts. This was too much. This wasn’t what the books had described.

“Something’s wrong,” he whispered, the words catching in his throat. “This…this can’t be right?”

For once, his mom didn’t argue or hesitate. She nodded and glanced toward his dad, meeting his eyes.

“We have to take him to the hospital.”

They worked as a team to get Shane to the car, stopping every few moments because Shane was stumbling.

“I- I can’t, I can’t,” he was whispering, but he did get into the car and his mom all but sped on the way to the nearest emergency room. Shane tried to focus on breathing, his eyes

squeezed shut as he slumped in the car.

The hospital was worse than he could imagine. The lights were too bright and the smells were too strong, everything mixing together into an overwhelming mess that made Shane want to hide.

He was taken back almost immediately. Suddenly there were hands everywhere. A cuff squeezing his arm. Cold fingers pressing against his wrist. Questions directed at his parents, not him.

His mom answered everything efficiently, keeping one hand on Shane's shoulder as she spoke. She went into detail about how she assumed this was his presentation that started early this morning, but it had been hours and the pain had escalated past a threshold that they could no longer treat at home.

Shane was trying his best to listen, the pain hadn't exactly stopped now that they were there. He was barely holding on, grabbing blindly at the railing of the bed he had been placed in.

It truly felt like he was dying. Maybe he was. Maybe this was the worst case scenario. Maybe something so terribly wrong had happened inside him that no one would be able to fix. That the pain would just keep building and building until there was nothing left of him.

The nurse checking his vitals exchanged a look with another nurse who was trying to place an IV in his arm.

"Is he sexually active?"

The question cut through the noise in his head, and his eyes flickered open, but he didn't dare look up at his mother. He could feel her reaction, regardless, with the way her posture stiffened, and her grip unintentionally tightened on Shane's shoulder.

"No," she replied immediately. "Of course not. He's sixteen."

The nurse's eyes flicked down to Shane. He managed to glance up, mouth parting to speak, but another wave of pain seized him, stealing his breath and stopping whatever he was going to say.

He doubled forward as much as the bed allowed, fingers tightening around the railing as he groaned.

A doctor stepped into the space then, snapping gloves into place as he approached. Shane felt the air shift with his arrival, but there was no distinct scent change. That made sense since hospital staff were all required to wear medical-grade scent suppression patches.

"Shane?" the doctor said, moving closer to the bed. "Where is the pain centered? Can you tell me?"

"My stomach," he gasped, and the doctor nodded, reaching for the blanket.

“I’m going to need to look, okay?” Shane managed a small nod and the doctor swept the blanket away. His shirt was lifted, the air against his damp skin feeling too cold and leaving him feeling too exposed. The doctor’s fingers pressed carefully into his abdomen. The skin felt tight beneath his touch, muscles tensing automatically as he fought the instinct to curl inward again.

The doctor’s hand paused for a second.

“Is there any chance you could be pregnant, Shane?”

It took him a long moment to process the question, just barely registering what was being asked of him.

Pregnant? *Him?*

“They already asked if he was sexually active, so there’s no chance—” His mom cut in quickly from beside the bed.

The doctor didn’t look at her immediately. He was still focused on Shane, watching the way his brow furrowed, hesitation clear as day.

“Mrs. Hollander,” the doctor said calmly, finally glancing towards her. “If you don’t mind, I’d like to talk to Shane privately.” Shane could feel the shift in his mother, the wave of protectiveness obvious without even having to look up at her. She was his mother. His alpha. She wasn’t going to leave without it being absolutely necessary. She stepped closer to the bed.

“It will only be a moment,” one of the nurses said gently, clearly attempting to ease the tension. “There are still some forms we need you to complete. We won’t be far. He’ll be in good hands.”

His mom hesitated, looking between her and Shane. Eventually she reached to brush her hand against Shane’s shoulder. “I’ll be right outside,” she said, and then slipped away with the nurse. His dad followed her, giving the doctor the privacy he needed.

“Shane,” the doctor said as soon as his parents were gone, directing the remaining nurse to get blood from him. “I need to know if you’ve been sexually active. You aren’t in trouble. This is important.”

Shane breathed in and out quickly, sniffling and looking down at his still bare stomach.

“Just…Just once.” His voice was quiet, but the doctor nodded in understanding.

“And you haven’t had a heat cycle before? Your mom is saying this is your presentation?”

“That’s what she’s been saying. That’s what I thought it was. Is that not what this is?”

The remaining nurse finished taking Shane’s blood and slipped out of the area. “That’s what we’re going to figure out. Is the pain coming and going? You seem to be able to breathe a little better right now.”

“Yeah,” Shane managed to say, “It still hurts, but right now isn’t as bad-” He cut off with a whimper as another wave rolled through him.

The doctor placed his hand on Shane’s abdomen again, watching his face as the pain crested. At the same time the curtain to his area rustled and the nurse stepped back in, his mom following immediately behind her. She went right back to his side, reaching to take one of his hands.

The nurse silently handed the doctor a paper, sharing a knowing look with him after he scanned the paper quickly. “I’ll need an ultrasound, quickly.” The nurse left immediately.

“Ultrasound?! Why would he need an ultrasound?” His mom was stiff at Shane’s side, looking in between Shane and the doctor.

“I’d just like to take a look at what is going on. His blood tests were showing that certain levels were particularly high, and I think the ultrasound could confirm or deny certain diagnoses immediately.”

Shane was whimpering from the bed again, his hand squeezing his mother’s tightly enough that she looked down at him instead of staring down the doctor, going soft at the edges at the sight of her son. “They’re going to figure it out, Shane.”

The ultrasound machine was brought in quickly, wheeled beside the bed. The nurse adjusted Shane’s bed and then helped lift Shane’s shirt, spreading cool gel across his abdomen that made Shane flinch. The probe was placed down gently, and then it was quickly sweeping over the skin.

The doctor was staring at the screen, and Shane couldn’t see the monitor, but he watched the doctor’s face for any reaction. The doctor reached to flip a switch and a loud whooshing sound filled the area. It sounded like static-y noise at first, but soon it became obvious that there was a rhythm to it. A whoosh-whoosh-whoosh that sounded suspiciously like…a heartbeat. It was turned off a moment later, but the probe stayed on his stomach while the doctor adjusted it, his eyes on the monitor.

He then looked down at Shane, voice just as calm as it had been when he walked in. “You’re pregnant, Shane. And based on your symptoms, you’re in labor.”

“What?” They both said at once, voices mingling in disbelief. Before anything else could be said, Shane was crying out again as another cramp hit him, harder than before, his body trying to curl inward. “I…I can’t!” he sobbed.

“Call OB,” the doctor said firmly to the nurse, who rushed to the phone. “We need labor and delivery immediately.”

“Okay, Shane, what you’re experiencing are contractions, not cramps, and from what I’ve noticed, they’re not that far apart. That sound you heard? That was your baby’s heartbeat.”

A few nurses came rushing into the room and prepared to move Shane, unlocking the bed and adjusting the rails. “It was strong. That means the baby is tolerating the contractions well.

Our priority and main focus would be on you now and delivering safely."

His mom seemed to snap out of whatever daze she was in the moment the nurses started to push Shane's bed out of the area, following as they moved through the ER and headed presumably for the elevator that would take him to labor and delivery.

Shane was shaking in fear now, overstimulated from the pain and the activity around him. He didn't understand what was happening. He didn't understand how. He couldn't be in labor, with a baby? An entire baby? He didn't realize he was sobbing until he felt his mother's fingers on his cheek, brushing the tears away.

"Shh," she whispered, her voice trembling despite her effort to steady it. "They're going to take care of you. You're okay, baby, I'm right here."

Shane searched her face, terrified.

He couldn't tell if she was angry.

Or worse, disappointed in him.

Everything was a rush after that. He arrived in the labor and delivery department and there was a new doctor, an alpha woman that had a certain sternness in her voice. She softened her speech when referring to Shane, however, and he couldn't tell if he hated or appreciated it. He was sensitive, between the pain of what was happening and also learning that he was actually *pregnant*.

They hooked him up to monitors and an IV, wrapping a special band around his stomach that monitored the baby's heart rate. It also seemed to track his contractions. It was quickly confirmed that they were actually 5 minutes apart, which meant a lot, but it meant more that he was apparently 6 cm dilated. The check for that made Shane physically feel sick.

"Shouldn't be much longer," she said, smiling at Shane and his mother before she left. They'd been informed that all he had to do was wait.

His dad also got to come into this room and Shane felt some of the tension ease out of him at the sight of him, gratefully accepting the hug and the kiss to his forehead. "You're alright," he told him, brushing back his hair. Shane wanted to believe him, truly, but he knew this wasn't just a bad hit or a broken bone. It wasn't something that would heal with ice, rest, and time. This was a baby, an entire human life that had somehow been growing inside of him – inside of his very flat stomach.

"How did this happen, Shane?" His mother's words were quiet, but no less powerful. "Who did this to you?"

Shane had been waiting for those words. His mother had probably been waiting to ask, waiting until he wasn't writhing in pain before she actually asked. "Mom, I…"

"Shane. This is—"

She didn't finish her words because she could see when Shane's face started to scrunch up, and a quick glance at the monitor showed he was experiencing another contraction.

The rest of the experience was a blur of time.

Shane existed.

He cried, he whined, he pushed. He screamed. He'd later realize he dissociated in order to cope with the circumstances. Eventually he heard a baby cry, and a wet, wriggly human was placed on his bare chest.

Shane stared at her (a girl, he'd given birth to a girl!), his eyes blurry enough that he had to blink a few times. "She's beautiful," he heard, but it sounded muffled to his ears as he carefully reached to touch her. She was still crying, but she calmed as Shane cupped under her bottom. She had turned her face instinctively into his chest, sniffling softly against his skin, and Shane realized with a quiet sort of wonder that underneath the metallic smell of blood, she smelled just like him. Maybe a little more vanilla than the clean cotton, but similar nonetheless. She made a little whining noise and then went completely quiet, obviously content.

Something twisted in Shane's chest.

"Here, let me clean her up a little," a nurse said quietly, breaking the moment by gently scooping his daughter up and carrying her over to a nearby area to clean and clothe her. Shane's eyes followed her for a moment before the doctor pulled his attention back, pressing down on his stomach and making him groan weakly. "Afterbirth," she said quietly, smiling gently up at Shane.

Shane had no idea what that was, but he felt the urge to push again so he did, gasping when a wet fleshy thing passed out of him.

"Good, good… okay. I think you'll need a stitch or two," she murmured, and it was a flurry of activity again, nurses cleaning in between his legs, and the doctor working quietly. Shane let his eyes find the baby in the crib nearby and just stayed there.

His mom and dad were cooing over her, clearly in awe, and Shane just wanted to feel her again.

"Mom," he said weakly, and she glanced at him, smiling gently. "You did good, baby."

Shane preened at the praise, even though he knew it wasn't for long. "I want to see her."

The doctor finished and finally, *finally*, they shifted and closed his legs and pulled the blanket back up his body. "You're good, Shane. We'll give you some time to rest now." She patted his arm and then left.

The nurse who was bundling up his daughter reached to pick her up carefully, walking back over to Shane. "Here you are," she said softly, leaning over to place her in Shane's arm again. Like this he could see her face. She had a cute button nose, it kind of looked like Shane's, but

other than that she just looked like a baby. A freshly newborn baby. She seemed to be asleep, but she wiggled when placed in Shane's arm, like she was trying to get comfortable.

"I'm here," Shane murmured quietly, holding her up closer to his chest. She settled and Shane felt that feeling again, like his heart was clenching.

"She looks like Shane," he heard his mom whisper to his dad. He nodded. "It's uncanny."

The room quieted eventually, the way Shane imagined the aftermath of a storm might. People still came and went. A lactation consultant who spoke gently and didn't make him feel stupid about knowing absolutely nothing about breastfeeding, a pediatrician who examined his daughter with careful hands and declared her healthy despite her surprise welcome, and a social worker who asked questions that his mom answered mostly on his behalf while Shane just held the baby and tried to stay present.

At some point someone brought him food and water and he ate it without really tasting anything.

And then, slowly, it was just the four of them.

His dad had pulled a chair close to the bed, his mom on the other side, both of them close enough that Shane could feel the steadiness of their combined scents anchoring him. He felt better. Exhausted and overwhelmed, but good. His mother was on her phone, probably ordering baby items to be shipped to their home while simultaneously planning out how childcare was going to work. Shane had tried to think of school and hockey, two of the most important things in his life, and he had to set them aside because he felt his anxiety building up.

He didn't know how having a baby would change all of this.

Speaking of his baby, she was awake, blinking up at him with dark unfocused eyes. She made a small sound, more a breath than an actual noise, and turned her face toward his chest.

Shane watched her for a long moment.

"Kiyomi," he said quietly. It came out softer than he intended, directed somewhere between his parents and the baby. "I want to call her Kiyomi." He swallowed, growing more confident as the moments passed. "Kiyomi Hana?"

The room was very still.

"That sounds lovely, Shane," his dad said first, leaning over to gently stroke his knuckles over his granddaughter's cheek. He looked over at his mother, who was still quiet, but the phone had gone dark in her hands.

Shane looked in her direction finally, searching her face the same way he had earlier when he couldn't tell if she was angry or disappointed. But what he found there was different. Her

eyes were wet, her expression doing something complicated that Shane didn't have a name for.

Kiyomi was his grandmother's name. Her mother. She had passed about a year ago, and Shane knew how close they had been. It just made sense to honor her.

"Yeah," his mom finally said, her voice thick but clearly happy. And if Shane wasn't imagining it, he could smell the way her scent flared out — the one that got stronger when she was proud of something he had done. She reached to touch Kiyomi's cheek, but her eyes were on Shane, who forced himself to hold his mother's gaze.

"Yeah. That's her name."

Chapter End Notes

I had an itch that needed to be scratched! Let me know what you think.

chapter soundtrack: forever young by alphaville

Chapter 2: 2008 - Part II

Chapter Notes

> Hello all! Thank you so much for the views, comments, and kudos! It really does mean a lot to me. Quick note before we get into it: I have several chapters written already, so updates should be steady. Also this fic will loosely follow the show's canon with some creative liberties taken along the way because of the obvious world differences, but it will remain entirely in Shane's POV. You have been warned, lol. That's all I'll say for now. Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

8 months later

Kiyomi had learned to pull herself up on things approximately three days ago, and she had not stopped since.

Shane watched her from across the living room, one hand braced on the coffee table, while the other reached determinedly toward the remote control she had decided she wanted. She made a sound, not quite a word, but close enough, and then looked up and found him watching her.

She grinned. Big and toothless and completely devastating, with Shane’s own eyes looking back at him.

Shane crouched down without thinking, holding his arms out, and she let go of the table and took two lurching steps before gravity won. He caught her before she hit the floor, hearing her giggles as he pulled her up against his chest. She grabbed a fistful of his shirt like she was trying to anchor herself to him. Her two little pigtails were sticking straight up on either side of her head, slightly lopsided, like someone had done them in a hurry because Kiyomi wouldn’t stay still long enough for them to be fixed properly.

“You’re going to give me a heart attack,” he told her quietly, feeling her begin to squirm to be let down. She patted his cheek with an open, and slightly wet, palm, obviously unconcerned by his worries.

"Dada…dada!" Shane grinned and nuzzled into her neck, listening to her squeals as she tugged at his shirt.

A year ago he hadn't known she existed. Now he couldn't imagine a version of his life that didn't have her in it. He couldn't imagine not having the late nights and google searches and falling asleep with her on his chest because it was the only thing that settled her. It still felt ridiculous when he thought about it too hard, so mostly he didn't. He just showed up. Every single day, he showed up.

He also had his own dreams, too.

Kiyomi's squirms eventually won and he let her down, watching as she toddled determinedly toward his dad who had just appeared from the kitchen. "Hello bub," his dad said warmly, scooping her up and spinning her around. Her lopsided pigtails bounced with the movement and she shrieked with delight.

Shane's hockey bag was by the front door. Kiyomi's bag was next to it, meticulously packed the night before so he wouldn't forget anything. Looking at them sitting side by side, he felt something settle in his chest. This was happening. Both things, somehow, at the same time.

"Did you pack enough diapers?" His mom came down the stairs, dressed and ready, already scanning the room with that particular alpha efficiency that meant she was running through a mental checklist.

"Enough, and then extra on top of that," Shane replied, nodding toward the bags.

She looked at him for a moment, then gave a small satisfied nod. "Good. Let's go then."

A hat was pulled over Kiyomi's pigtails, her coat buttoned up, and then they were off.

The International Prospect Cup.

Shane had known for a long time that this was more than just Canada versus Russia. He knew what it meant to the scouts sitting in those stands, clipboards in hand, watching every shift. This could make or break everything he had worked toward, and he felt the full weight of that sitting heavy in his chest.

He had his family here. His dad was somewhere in the venue with Kiyomi, probably already being run ragged by her, and his mom was close by doing what she did best, which was managing everything within a ten foot radius of Shane. There were a lot of moving pieces. But that was his life now.

He kept coming back to the same thing. He had worked for this. Harder than most, if he was being honest with himself. He was the only omega on the ice and he knew exactly what that meant, knew the looks and the assumptions that came with it before he ever touched a puck. The suppressants he was on kept his heats short and manageable enough that they barely touched his training schedule. And everyone wore scent patches anyway, so that was one less thing to worry about.

He had removed as many obstacles as he could. Now he just had to play. He had to play his ass off.

There was one person, though. Fellow player Ilya Rozanov. Anyone with ears had heard about him and the way he played like he had something to prove. If there was one thing Shane was good at, it was researching and analyzing, and from the moment he knew about Rozanov, he watched everything he could on him. It was partially fascination and partially something else that he wasn't quite ready to admit.

He knew he wanted to meet him.

He saw him before the first puck dropped.

Russia was running drills on the ice when Shane arrived at the rink, and he told himself he was just observing, getting the chance to see the Russians in action rather than just on video. That was what he told himself, anyway. His eyes immediately found Rozanov amongst the team, like he already knew where to look.

He was exactly what the footage had suggested and somehow still more than that. This was what the recordings couldn't quite capture. The way he moved along the ice like it belonged to him, or maybe that he belonged on it. He was steady and deliberate with his speed, clearly showing he knew exactly what he was doing.

His mom said something beside him that he didn't catch, watching the ice just as intently. But his attention was fully on the team below. Fully on Rozanov.

He cut across the ice and for one brief moment his gaze swept across the stands where Shane was sitting. It didn't land on him specifically, but Shane still felt his heart skip a beat. He looked away. He made himself look at the rest of the team, tracking their formations, and noting their defensive patterns, because that’s what he came here to do. This was all research.

His mom was saying something about the left winger’s footwork and Shane nodded along, contributing enough to the conversation that she didn’t notice where his attention really kept wandering back to.

What was he doing out here? He told himself he was just stepping outside for air. The rink was loud and he was reaching his sensory limit faster than normal, probably due to his nerves already being keyed up from the impending game they were going to play. Fresh air, a few minutes, and then he'd go back inside.

Rozanov was leaning against the outer wall of the rink, a cigarette between his fingers.

Shane stared, going still for a long moment. He did want to meet Rozanov. This was good sportsmanship, right? To want to introduce yourself to your fellow hockey players.

"Ilya Rozanov?" It was too late at this point. "Shane Hollander. I wanted to introduce myself."

Shane stepped closer and held out his hand and Rozanov reached to take it. His grip was firm and Shane felt that feeling again, this time in his stomach. He was close enough now that his brain instinctively reached for a scent that wasn't there. It was just the sharp bite of cigarette smoke and nothing else. Scent patches. Of course. Same as everyone else here, same as Shane himself. He didn't know why that felt like a small disappointment.

He pushed forward, but Rozanov seemed unconcerned, eyeing him with what Shane thought was disdain. He continued on trying to light a cigarette, and Shane spoke before he could stop

himself, "I don't think you're supposed to smoke here." Stupid. That was stupid.

"You're an awesome player to watch," he finally said, getting out what he really wanted to say in the first place. He immediately regretted it, because really, what did he expect the other man to do? Say the same about him? Say thank you?

Rozanov did neither. He took a drag from his cigarette and nodded, agreeing with him with a simple, "Yes."

The silence stretched. Shane should leave. He had said what he came to say, more or less, and Rozanov wasn't exactly rolling out the welcome mat. Not that he expected that. And yet Shane wasn't moving.

Pull it together, Shane.

He cleared his throat and stood up straight again, not even sure when he had mirrored Rozanov's lean against the wall. "I should get back. They're probably looking for me."

Rozanov glanced at him then, indifferent, like he had all the time in the world and Shane was mildly interesting at best.

"Good luck," Shane added, because apparently he wasn't quite done embarrassing himself. "In the tournament."

Something shifted in Rozanov's expression. It wasn't quite a smile, but it was close enough that Shane felt it somewhere in his chest. "You will not be so kind," Rozanov said, his accent thicker up close than Shane had expected, "when we beat you."

Shane felt the competitive part of his brain snap awake like a light switching on. Good. This was what he knew how to do. "That's not happening," he said, and he meant it completely, despite the smile on his face.

Rozanov continued to look at him for a long moment, that smile-not-smile on his lips. He took another slow drag of his cigarette and said simply, "See you in final."

Shane walked back inside.

He didn't let himself think about it until much later. After he had lost the game, and after he had finally gotten Kiyomi to sleep. She was curled up on the bed beside him, her fingers twisted into his shirt like she was anchoring them both. Having her here helped. He got to focus on something else, someone else besides himself and the crushing feeling that always swallowed him whole after a loss like this. His mom had assured him that the scouts had still seen him play hard, that any team would be lucky to have him.

He still felt like shit.

But now, lying in the dark with Kiyomi's small warm weight against his side, he felt his thoughts drift back to Rozanov anyway. The handshake. The way he had looked at him,

steady and unbothered like nothing in the world could touch him. The accent. The stupid cigarette.

Shane stared at the ceiling.

He didn't have a name for what he was feeling. He wasn't sure he wanted one yet.

Chapter End Notes

and there we have it!

chapter soundtrack: intro by the xx

Chapter 3: 2009 - Part I

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

January 2009

Shane finished lacing up his skates and stepped onto the ice.

It was just past six in the morning and the rink was empty, which was exactly how he wanted it. He had slipped out before Kiyomi had woken up, grabbing his gear in the dark and driving through the quiet streets, grey with January cold, the holidays finally over.

Kiyomi's first Christmas was a joyful one. She had no idea what was really happening, but she was spoiled with presents, ripping them open one by one until she was more distracted by the paper than the actual toys. It was good for him to experience because it made him remember what he was doing this for. It wasn't just his future, but for her too.

He was done turning the IPC loss over in his mind night after night. Now he just needed to put the work in.

The rink had its own particular silence at this hour. His blades cut into the fresh ice and the sound of it carried differently without a crowd to absorb it, crisp, sharp, and familiar in a way that immediately slowed something down in his chest. It was moments like this that made him remember why he loved skating. Why he loved hockey, really. Shane breathed it all in and allowed himself to settle, gliding over the ice with ease.

He started with edges. Figure eights at first, slow and deliberate, feeling the blade catch and hold with each lean. Left inside edge, right inside edge, crossovers tightening as he picked up speed. It was repetitive enough to be meditative, and demanding enough to require his full attention. Exactly what he needed.

After twenty minutes he moved into sprints. Blue line to blue line, explosive and punishing, his breath coming out in white clouds that disappeared into the cold air above him. His legs started to burn. He only pushed harder.

By the time the rink doors opened an hour later and the first of the other skaters began to trickle in, Shane was soaked through and his lungs were aching, but he felt, finally, like himself again.

Shane wouldn’t say he was looking for it. He had gotten Kiyomi down after two failed attempts and a lot of patience, and now he was finally on the couch with the remote, looking for something mindless to put on while he ate whatever was left in the fridge. He settled on the sports channel out of habit more than anything else.

It took him approximately thirty seconds to realize what he was watching.

"— and with the draft coming up in June, all eyes are on two names in particular. Shane Hollander out of Ottawa and Ilya Rozanov out of Moscow. Two of the most exciting prospects we've seen enter the league in years, and the question everyone is asking is — who goes first?"

Shane stopped chewing. His eyes narrowed.

"The rivalry is already developing," the commentator continued, "and these two haven't even been drafted yet."

Shane sat with that for a moment.

Then he turned the volume up.

Is that really what people thought about them? Rivals? He could see the point. People loved the idea of that, two people from completely different backgrounds, fighting for the same thing. Shane could feel himself leaning into it. He was naturally a competitive person, so this was good. It gave him something else to look forward to.

And it most definitely wasn’t because of Ilya Rozanov.

March 2009

"Happy Birthday, Mimi!"

She was one year old. The baby that had come completely unexpected into his life, changing the trajectory while also igniting a new flame inside of him. Shane had never felt love like this before. He knew he'd do anything for her.

She was adorable, wearing a red and white kimono style outfit with her signature pigtails that no longer stuck up straight now that her hair was starting to grow longer. Now they stuck out to the sides. His mom had planned out some traditional events for her first birthday, things that she told Shane they had done for him too. He didn't remember that, of course.

The first was an Issho Mochi, where a little rice cake had been wrapped carefully in a furoshiki cloth and fashioned into a small bundle for Kiyomi to carry. His mom tied it carefully onto Kiyomi's back while Kiyomi looked around with great suspicion at what was actually happening to her.

"Okay, baby," Shane said, crouching down in front of her. "You've got this." Kiyomi looked at him. Then she took one determined step forward, wobbled magnificently, and sat down hard on the floor.

The room erupted. Shane laughed before he could stop himself, covering his mouth with his hand while his dad absolutely lost it beside him. Even his mom was smiling, reaching to scoop Kiyomi up before she could decide to be truly upset about it.

"That's good," his mom said, pressing a kiss to Kiyomi's cheek. "It means she'll always come home."

Shane liked the idea of that.

The next event was an Erabitori. His mom laid out a small selection of objects on a blanket on the floor while Shane held Kiyomi on his hip, watching her eyes dart around the room with that particular focus she got when something new had caught her attention. The items were selected for meaning. A calligraphy brush for academia, a book for being excellent in study, money for being rich or not having to worry about money, and a calculator for being good at business or calculating. "Your dad wanted to add something."

His dad looked completely unrepentant. He stepped over at that moment and placed the final object down. It was a small plastic hockey stick.

Shane couldn't help the smirk that spread across his lips.

"It felt appropriate," his dad continued on to say.

Shane set Kiyomi down at the edge of the blanket. She steadied herself, surveyed everything laid out before her with a serious expression, and then she was off. She went straight for the calligraphy brush, grabbing it and waving it about before she dropped it and moved on. She somehow bypassed the calculator, which was surprising since Shane was sure she'd pick that up, given her obsession with remote controllers, and picked up the money. With that clutched tightly in her hand she moved on, and then at the last moment, grabbed the hockey stick too.

His mom was the first to laugh, a real warm laugh that Shane didn't hear often enough, and leaned forward to cup Kiyomi's face in her hands. "Such a smart girl!" she said, the pride in her voice completely unguarded. "Just like her dad."

Shane swallowed past the lump that had suddenly lodged itself in his throat. His eyes felt watery too, but it wasn't out of sadness. He was just realizing that one day, she really would be choosing what she wanted to do with her life. Shane hoped she picked something that made her happy.

"Yeah," he said quietly, and then picked her up, swinging her around while she giggled. "Just like her dad."

With the traditions out of the way, they moved onto the cake. The candle was carefully blown out with Shane's help and then removed altogether. It was a smaller cake than the one meant for the party guests, who were just close family members, and it was meant entirely for Kiyomi to dig into.

And dig into it she did. Once she realized it was okay, she plunged her fingers into the cake and started grabbing fistfuls of it, shoving the mess into her mouth with complete and utter focus. Which was very much like her. It was a trait that Shane was noticing, a part of her personality that he liked to think she got from him.

Shane watched with a small smile, already itching to take her straight to the bath, but this was her big day. And she was definitely enjoying herself.

Gift giving was similar to how Christmas went. Kiyomi was more into ripping open the paper and making a mess of it than the actual gifts. She got more toys, which added to her ever growing pile in her bedroom. Shane had already given her what he got for her. An interactive little playset that his dad had helped him put together in her room earlier in the week. It helped when he needed her to be tired for bed.

Plus, she seemed to really like it.

June 2009

The Draft.

He'd been waiting for this day since the IPC match, and of course it flew by like it was nothing. He woke up that morning with his stomach in knots, and a dull, familiar ache low in his abdomen that had started the day before. His heat, suppressed and therefore manageable, but he still felt just as miserable. Then he was here, suited up, his mom beside him doing a final check of everything while his dad navigated the crowd somewhere behind them with Kiyomi on his hip.

Shane was a ball of anxiety. He had done everything he could. He had trained harder than anyone had asked him to, had shown up earlier and stayed later, had pushed through every heat and every exhausted morning. Now all he had to do was sit and wait for his name to be called.

He smoothed the front of his suit jacket and looked out at the room. It was loud, of course, bright and full of people and cameras. He was already running warmer than usual, the low grade fever sitting just beneath his skin. He could feel the sweat dripping down the back of his shirt and that just added to his sensory overload. He took a deep breath and let it out slowly.

Right now he just had to hold it together for a little while longer. He could fall apart later.

Somewhere in the crowd his daughter was probably trying to climb out of his dad's lap and run amuck. That thought made him feel better than anything else had all morning.

Ilya Rozanov's name was called first.

Shane had known it was a possibility. He had told himself it would be, he'd spoken to his parents about it, he'd damn near repeated it enough times over the past six months that it should have landed softly when it actually happened. It didn't, however.

He watched anyway. He couldn't not.

Rozanov stood up like he had been expecting it, the cameras flashing as he made his way up to the stage with the same relaxed certainty that Shane had watched on TV and in person. He shook hands, and then accepted the Boston Raiders jersey, holding it up for the cameras with a huge grin. Shane felt that feeling again, but it was sharper in his current state, the cramp making him wince.

Thirty seconds later his own name was called.

"Shane Hollander. Montreal Metros. Second overall."

Shane stood up immediately, smiling as the applause broke out. He walked to the stage and accepted the jersey, holding it up just like Rozanov had held up his. His smile was good, it was his media one, the one he practiced in the mirror. He was proud and grateful, everything a second overall pick was supposed to look like.

He was fine. He was good. He kept telling himself that while the cameras continued to flash.

They were arranged together for photos afterward, him, Rozanov, and the third overall pick, jerseys in hand. Shane was aware of Rozanov beside him in a way that had nothing to do with the heat prickling under his skin, which he was already very aware of.

He kept his smile in place.

He could feel Rozanov looking at him sideways, but neither of them said anything.

At some point his smile slipped, in between the flashes. Something in his face just went quiet and still. "Hey, number 2, let's keep up the smile for a couple more pictures, yeah?"

Shane nodded and let his smile come back, straightening up once again. God, he was exhausted.

Beside him, so quietly that Shane almost missed it, Rozanov said, "Second is not so bad."

Shane didn't look at him. "I know that."

"Montreal is good team," Rozanov said.

Shane glanced at him then, just briefly. Rozanov was looking at the cameras, but his smile was a little different. It looked like the one he had that day against the wall in Saskatchewan. He kind of hated that he recognized it.

"Yeah," Shane admitted. "They are."

The cameras kept flashing.

Chapter End Notes

welcome to the beginning of the slow burn, ladies and gents.

chapter soundtrack: novocaine by the unlikely candidates

Chapter 4: 2009 - Part II

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The general manager of the Montreal Metros was a broad, enthusiastic man who shook Shane's hand like his life depended on it. Shane was back in his media mode and returned the shake with the same amount of vigor, smiling to show how excited he truly felt. He was still in mild shock, if he was being honest with himself. Second overall. Montreal. A two hour drive from Ottawa meant he could still see Kiyomi regularly, and that meant a lot to him too. Either way it didn't feel all that real yet. Like he was watching himself from slightly outside his own body, nodding along while the GM spoke.

And his heat certainly wasn't helping with his concentration. He had reached the point where he was visibly flushed, his skin prickling underneath his dress shirt in a way that made him want to roll up his sleeves or shed a layer entirely. The GM's voice was hitting him slightly wrong, just on the edge of being too loud. He could feel himself shifting his weight from foot to foot without meaning to, that restless crawl under his skin that no amount of stillness could quiet. And on top of all of that, he started to feel the slow, warm drop of his slick into the liner he had put on this morning.

He exhaled very carefully through his nose, keeping his expression completely neutral. He was managing. He was always managing. He just had to get through this conversation first.

"We're so thrilled to have you," the GM was saying, directing most of it at his mom, who was nodding with a particular focused energy she got when she was in full business mode. Because that's what this was. His entire life was essentially managed by his mother and honestly, he didn't think he could function without her. His dad stood slightly to the side, listening along just as intently, with Kiyomi perched on his hip. She was distracted by a toy she clutched tightly in her fist, swinging it back and forth before it made its way into her mouth. Most of her toys ended up there nowadays.

"Shane is going to give everything he has to this team," his mom insisted. "You have our word on that."

Shane thought that was a good moment to speak up. "Yeah. I'm honestly still a little shocked. But I really am excited. I will do my best."

"That's exactly what we want to hear," the GM said warmly. "And I'll be honest with you, we're also proud to welcome an Asian-Canadian player of your caliber to the organization. It means a lot to this city."

Shane had no idea what to say to that besides, "Thank you."

He zoned out after that when his mother picked up the conversation again. All of this felt unnecessary now that the main event was over. He just wanted to go lie down. But this was

part of it, the handshakes and the conversations. It was all a part of the performance of being exactly who everyone needed him to be, so he forced himself to be as present as possible.

Kiyomi had been set down at some point during the exchange, and once she found her feet she immediately began making her way toward Shane with the single minded purpose that characterized everything she did. He felt her before he actually saw her, two small fists closing around the fabric of his pants right at the knee.

He looked down and smiled at her, meeting the eyes that looked so much like his own. Her whole face did, her freckles slowly but surely making their presence known. He bent to pick her up and settled her against his hip, feeling pleased when she curled in and rested her cheek against his shoulder. At the same time he caught himself looking up toward the balcony, some instinct he couldn't name pulling his gaze upward.

Rozanov was looking directly at him.

He was standing at the balcony railing with who he could only assume was his father and the Boston Raiders' team manager. They were actively talking, but his eyes were on Shane. Shane wondered if he felt the same way. Like all of this was unnecessary now that the real part was done. He wondered if Rozanov wanted to be anywhere else but here. He wondered if Rozanov had a room at this hotel. He wondered where that room *was* —

Then Kiyomi grabbed his chin with one hand and turned his face toward hers, effectively stealing his attention and ending that thought spiral entirely. It didn’t stop the flare of warmth that had swept through his abdomen, one that he couldn’t exactly explain away as a painful cramp. That was something else.

It was probably a good thing that she took his attention.

After all was said and done, Shane could finally retire to his hotel room. The plan was to get some much needed rest, but Kiyomi wasn't on the same page for once, wanting to play and be entertained by her dad. Normally Shane could handle it, but his body felt so rundown by that point that he couldn't quite deal with her restless energy. It made him feel more restless too, and one long look at him when his dad came to say goodnight made him move in to scoop Kiyomi into his arms. He could tell when Shane was close to shutting down completely.

"I'll take her for the evening. You try to get some alone time," he told Shane, and then left before Shane could argue or Kiyomi could really recognize that she was being taken away from her dad. She was just barely reaching that point where she started to show her dislike of that. It made Shane already dread the away games that were coming.

With her gone, Shane could feel some of the tension ease. Not all of it. He still couldn't sleep. After lying there trying to force it for long enough, he got up out of bed and dressed for the gym, moving like he was on autopilot. He made his way down to the hotel gym and beelined for a treadmill, stepping onto the machine with a small sigh.

This should help.

He settled into a consistent pace, not pushing himself, just enough to quiet the noise in his body and his head. The gym was empty and silent except for the hum of the machine beneath his feet and the sound of his own breathing. It was exactly what he needed.

He had been running for maybe ten minutes when he spotted movement in his peripheral vision. He glanced to his side.

Rozanov.

Shane looked away and returned his focus straight ahead. Of all the machines in an otherwise empty gym, Rozanov had chosen the one directly next to his, which Shane was choosing not to think about. He kept his pace steady and his eyes forward.

Then he noticed Rozanov matching his speed almost immediately. And then, with an exaggerated press of a button, upping it.

Shane hesitated. He hadn't come down here to push himself. His body was already wrung out, still running warmer than it should be, and the smart thing would be to stay exactly where he was and let Rozanov run whatever race he wanted to run by himself.

But now that he wasn't alone. Now that it was Rozanov.

He reached over and upped his speed before he could stop himself.

Rozanov did the same a moment later, and that was how he ended up practically racing the man.

He ran until his thighs were burning, grabbing the railings and hopping off the bottom before he did something embarrassing like fall off. Rozanov followed him, and together they turned off their treadmills and waddled off to collapse in an open area across from each other.

Shane couldn't hear anything past his heartbeat and his panting, the sweat pouring down his face and into his eyes. He rubbed at them, regretting not bringing a rag. Thankfully Rozanov looked the same across from him, but the only difference was he was smiling. That same infuriating smile that made Shane want to wrap his hands around his throat. Or something.

"What a fucking day, huh?" Rozanov asked eventually.

"Yeah. That was a lot," Shane responded, letting his head fall back briefly against the column behind him.

"Is everything you dreamed of?"

"No. No, it wasn't." He had dreamed of getting picked first, obviously.

"Oh, right." He took a long sip from a water bottle. Shane watched his adam's apple bob with an intensity he had no idea he had. He realized he was thirsty too. "Sorry." Rozanov didn’t look apologetic at all, if the fully grown smirk on his face said anything.

Shane let out a short breath through his nose. "No you're not," he said, but he could hear the amusement in his own voice despite himself.

"Montreal is nice, yes?"

At first Shane thought he was referring to the city itself, but then he thought maybe he was talking about the team. "Yeah, sure. They're cool."

"And Boston is nice too?"

Shane had no idea. "Sure. It looks nice enough."

"We will be seeing each other a lot?"

It was then that Shane made the connection that Boston and Montreal would be playing games against each other. Many games, in fact. The thought made his heart beat faster than it already was. Was that excitement? He did enjoy watching Rozanov play. And he had to admit he enjoyed playing against him a little more. Something about the challenge of trying to beat him. He was openly staring as Rozanov continued to take long swigs from his water bottle.

"Boston and Montreal do play against each other often."

Rozanov hummed and focused on drinking while Shane continued to watch, almost dazed, until the man held the bottle out and shook it in front of him. He hesitated, but Rozanov just raised his eyebrows and kept shaking it until Shane reached out to take it, their fingers brushing. He squirted the water into his mouth, looking up at the ceiling and trying not to focus on the fact that Rozanov's lips had just been around the spout.

The same lips that his eyes trailed back to. The same lips that mouthed the word "more" that Shane followed before he had even realized he was doing it.

He quickly handed the bottle back after. Shane was glad he could blame the flush on his face on the workout. And underneath that, the heat. But really underneath that was the arousal he didn't want to name, simmering, intrigued by whatever this was.

Chapter End Notes

It burns so good, doesn't it?

chapter soundtrack: bad guy by billie eilish

Chapter 5: 2010 - Part I

Chapter Notes

Hey y'all! So I'll admit, I was fully committing to updating once a day, but this fic has consumed my life (much like this show) and I really have so much of it written already. That combined with the fact that you guys have blown up the comments in the last chapter (hehe, please don't stop that). So I thought I could express one thing: just keep being patient about some things that haven't been exposed in the story itself yet. Promise I've also thought about it (probably a little too much).

Anyway, onwards!

Additional note (6/30/2026)

I'm online chronically enough to see that this particular chapter has been flagged as having an AI code in it. I was shocked, so I'm here to say that I have never used any kind of AI to write this fic. What I did do was have a friend (this was early on in my world of writing and posting actual stuff. They had access to my account, since we were on diff time zones. I've since parted ways with them), who would read and edit accordingly. I had no idea how it was edited. That said, I will be taking accountability and rewriting that paragraph so it's completely written by me!!! I should actually say thanks for finding that for me.

So thank you 🥰

See the end of the chapter for more notes

January 2010 - International Prospect Cup

Canada won.

From the moment that final buzzer sounded, Shane could feel a weight lifting off his shoulders. This was what he and his team had worked their asses off for. They couldn't allow Russia to come back on their turf and beat them again. He let himself celebrate with his teammates, already scanning the crowd for his family. That was the good thing about the cup happening in Ottawa this time around. They could all be there with him.

He spotted Kiyomi on his dad's lap, jumping with the crowd like she knew exactly what was happening. She probably didn't, but if there was one thing Kiyomi was great at, it was catching a vibe. She was 21 months old and her personality had only continued to blossom along with her vocabulary. Now everyone had to be very selective about the words they used around her or else deal with the consequences.

There was a solid week where she called everything and everyone 'crap' because she heard Shane say it on the phone.

He raised his stick in their direction, grinning when his parents waved back. Kiyomi started jumping more, saying something, but the roar of the crowd was just too loud. It didn't matter. He felt good. Really good.

The handshake line moved quickly. He shook hands with each of the members of the Russian team and said the expected things, genuinely meaning them. They had played well. He was almost at the end of the line when he reached Rozanov.

"Good game," Shane said, squeezing the man's hand. He smiled. "See you in October."

Rozanov didn't verbally respond, but he did smile in return. Just barely, like it had become a ritual. Shane refused to admit that getting that reaction out of Rozanov felt better than actually beating him.

He found his family at the edge of the ice, still in full gear, and Kiyomi reached for him immediately the way she always did. Arms out, no hesitation, absolutely certain that Shane would pick her up. And he would always, even with hockey tired arms. He held her firmly against his chest, sighing.

Her face dramatically scrunched up. "Stinky, dada."

Shane laughed, purposely leaned in closer and snuck a couple of fingers up her side to give her a quick tickle. She squealed and wrapped her arms around his neck, making it obvious she cared very little about how he actually smelled.

"Nana said good job!" she said after another fit of giggles. Shane smiled at his mom, always extra pleased when Kiyomi managed to remember exactly what she was told.

Shane wasn't sure how long he stood there before he turned toward the ice and noticed Rozanov a short distance away, still on the ice. He looked like he was talking to a Russian team official, completely not paying anyone else any mind. And then in the next moment, he was. His eyes trailed over to where Shane stood with his family, and Shane wished he could tell what Rozanov was thinking.

There he was, with his gear still on, his hair plastered to his forehead with sweat, a toddler nuzzling into his neck. His parents stood on either side of him, completing their little familial unit. There was always a story he told about Kiyomi, one that was easy to agree with because people automatically assumed she was his sister, but he hadn’t actually spoken to Rozanov about her. In fact, he hadn’t spoken to him about his family at all. So he could only ever wonder what he was thinking. Could he tell how different his life really was off the ice? He wondered if it even mattered to Rozanov.

Their eyes met briefly, but Rozanov was the one who looked away first, his attention brought back to those around him on the ice.

"Dada, home now?" Kiyomi asked, for once sounding like she was just about ready for a nap. Shane looked down at his daughter and tightened his grip, unconsciously nuzzling into her sweet smelling hair.

"Yeah, baby. We're going home now."

June 2010

After the International Prospect Cup, Shane was fully thrown into his first professional season with the Montreal Metros. The first few months were relentless, to say the least.

The MLH schedule was brutal in a way that the junior leagues couldn't touch and therefore hadn't fully prepared him for. Game after game, traveling from city to city, the days stacking until they actually started to bleed into each other. Shane adapted the way he always adapted, by building systems and sticking to them. He was a lot like his mother in that sense, with her intense way of keeping things on schedule.

Having a system helped him cope with the hardest part of doing this, which was being away from Kiyomi. His system was to drive back home to Ottawa after every home game. And for longer road trips it meant at least a phone call the moment he landed, in order to hear Kiyomi's sweet voice before she went to bed. He lived for those moments. He knew there was some kind of biological aspect to this, being away from his child, and he knew it had to be affecting her too.

That's why his mom worked something out for the longer stretches. She would pack up Kiyomi and meet him on the road, settling into whatever hotel the team was using for a few days at a time. It wasn't sustainable for every single trip, Shane knew that, but it helped ease the ache of being away. It helped more than he could even admit out loud. Thankfully his teammates thought nothing of it. They were used to his mom, and it made sense that his little sister would tag along with her. That was normal. Nobody asked too many questions and Shane was grateful for that.

It was still tough, though. Shane spent many nights after a rushed phone call lying in bed and wondering why he had been doing all of this. What was even the point? He always came back to the same answer. This was all for her.

Kiyomi turned two in March and Shane made it his business to be home for that.

She got a chocolate cake this time, at her very specific request, and she absolutely destroyed it with her signature focused energy. Shane watched her from across the table and couldn't help but think about how much she had changed and how much she hadn't. She was physically bigger every time he saw her, and while it made his heart ache to know he was probably missing those little moments, he also felt proud to know she was doing so well. That she was thriving. She was still so entirely herself, so sure, bold, and loud in a way that Shane had never been.

He hoped she stayed that way.

By June the season was slowly winding down and Shane had proven what he needed to prove. The Metros were pleased with his progress, which meant the media was also pleased. The narrative about the rivalry between him and Rozanov was still simmering in the background, building and being fed by the multitudes of highlight reels and sports commentary. They were almost perfectly matched across the board.

They hadn't played against each other yet. That was coming. First, Toronto. His mom informed him he had a commercial shoot that was actually with Rozanov. At first the idea confused him — why would he be promoting something with who everyone thought was his enemy? But then it was explained that people really loved this stuff.

Toronto

The CCM ad shoot was similar to ones he had done before. His mom came with him, without Kiyomi, who was back in Ottawa with his dad. He was rushed into hair and makeup before the gear was even put on him, which seemed kind of silly considering the helmet covered most of his face, but whatever.

Rozanov seemed different here. Lighter, maybe. Less like the person Shane had been watching on highlight reels all season and more like the person from the hotel gym. Like when there were no real expectations attached, he just was. Shane wasn't sure what to do with that observation so he filed it away and focused on the shoot.

The concept was simple. They would skate at each other from opposite ends of the ice, come in hard, and land in a face off position. Sticks down. Hold the tension. The director wanted it to look charged and dramatic, which wasn't difficult considering who they were to each other, at least on paper.

They filmed it four times.

"You are pretty," Rozanov murmured after the fourth take, while they were waiting for the director to review the footage.

Shane frowned at him. "You're wearing makeup too."

"I know." Rozanov looked completely unbothered. He also sounded like he genuinely meant what he was saying. "But I am not pretty."

"That doesn't even make sense."

Rozanov just shrugged, which somehow made it worse.

After the fifth take, Rozanov seemed to crumble. Out of nowhere he was grinning and then laughing, which was so odd that it made Shane laugh too. They couldn't stop and the director had to call cut with a specific kind of exhausted patience.

The sixth take was worse.

By the seventh they were an absolute mess and the director finally announced that they would just work with what they had.

Shane was still smiling as they skated off toward the rink's exit. The crew began packing things up, and Rozanov was quiet until they reached the edge. "It was my idea," he said. "This shoot. To do it with you."

Shane looked at him in surprise, his brow furrowing. "What?"

"The commercial." Rozanov shrugged like it was nothing. "I suggested it."

Shane didn't say anything for a moment. He wasn't sure what there was to say. Rozanov had sought this out. Had deliberately put them in the same space before they'd even played a single game against each other. Shane turned that over in his mind and couldn't find anywhere to put it.

"Oh," he said finally.

Rozanov looked at him for a moment longer, like he wanted to say something. Shane's mother chose that exact moment to call out to him, breaking the moment. "See you later, Hollander," he finally said, and then left in the direction of the lockers.

After talking to his mom about yet another partnership, Shane made his way into the locker room with the sole thought of taking a shower. It was quiet, which probably meant Rozanov was long gone. That was probably good. Shane moved through the familiar routine of undressing, taking off all of his gear and carefully setting it down on the bench. The last thing he peeled off was his scent patch, rolling it between his fingers for a moment before dropping it on top of his bag.

The shower itself was hot and he stood under the spray with his eyes closed, allowing the water to wash away the weight of the day. Eventually he actually started to shower, rubbing soap over his body and through his hair.

He wasn't sure how much time had passed when he opened his eyes, in time to hear the shower next to him turn on. One quick glance told him it was Rozanov, naked as the day he was born. Shane couldn't help but stare. Rozanov seemed to be going through the motions of taking his own shower, pretending Shane wasn't there, but eventually his eyes flickered over to him, an eyebrow raising when he caught Shane staring.

Shane quickly looked away, his cheeks flushing red. He had half a mind to just turn off the shower and leave, but he was there first. It sounded silly, but he didn't want to be the one to run away.

He focused very hard on the tile in front of him and absolutely nothing else.

"You smell."

Shane's stomach actually dropped. He turned his head slowly to look at Rozanov again, who was still facing him, the water running down his chest. He had an expression on his face that was impossible to read.

"Good," Rozanov finished. "You smell good."

Shane could practically feel the blood drain from his face and then rush back all at once. His hand flew to the spot where his scent patch normally was, mentally cursing himself for thinking he'd be fine without it. "Shut up," he said, his voice coming out lower than he intended. "Don't."

Rozanov didn't say anything, but he did stay where he was, like he was purposely keeping the distance between them. Then his head tilted and he looked Shane up and down, stopping on his face. Like he had figured something out and was waiting for Shane to catch up.

Shane's suppressants were doing their job. They were always doing their job, but without the patch, and in the heat of the shower, his scent was clearly coming through. He could smell himself, the warm vanilla just barely tinged with the sourness of the anxiety he was definitely beginning to feel. Anxiety and something else.

He was so screwed.

"It doesn't change anything," Shane said, which was such a stupid thing to say and he knew it the moment it came out of his mouth. Rozanov's expression didn't change, but something in his eyes did. Like Shane had admitted something he had been thinking about.

And then it hit him.

Pine and crisp cold air, cutting straight through the steam like it had always been there and Shane just hadn’t noticed. His breath caught as the arousal slammed through him, something deep and instinctive flaring up. This was what Ilya Rozanov actually smelled like, underneath whatever professional scent patches everyone wore. Shane's body knew exactly what to do with that information even if his brain was struggling to catch up, the warmth low in his stomach having nothing to do with the hot water.

He swallowed hard and turned away, glancing down at himself to notice he was hard just from looking at him. "Fuck," he whispered, wanting nothing more than to step over to Rozanov.

It was worse because he knew Rozanov was still staring at him. He knew what he looked like, and he could smell him, so there was nothing he could do to hide it. When he finally glanced back, Rozanov had shifted, his hand wrapped around himself, slowly and deliberately. He kept his eyes on Shane.

And Shane watched. For one long, weak moment.

"Not here," he eventually forced himself to say, looking away quickly. They were in the middle of a public locker room shower. Both of their unfiltered scents were probably filling

the area, and their arousal alone was enough to signal that something was about to happen. "Stop."

Rozanov stopped. His hand dropped away, but he didn't look away from Shane. "I didn't know you were an omega." Shane could say the same about Rozanov being an alpha.

"No one knows. No one will know," Shane did say, and then he was turning off the water, moving to leave.

Back in the locker room, Shane dried off and dressed, his skin still damp, but he needed clothes on him. He got a new scent patch out and dried the spot on his neck a few times before he applied it and exhaled. He couldn't believe that almost happened. He couldn't let anything else happen. What if Rozanov immediately went off and told everyone what he was? They'd believe him, because why would he lie? That would turn into all of the media knowing, and then his team would find out, and then...Shane could feel himself spiraling.

He was sitting there, thinking about how to tell Rozanov to forget everything when the man himself sauntered in, with just a towel wrapped around his waist. Worse, he hadn't replaced his scent patch yet.

"Listen, we can forget about that," he immediately started to say, shoving his feet into his sneakers so he wouldn't stare up at Rozanov's unnecessarily beautiful body.

"Is what you want?" Rozanov asked.

"Sure. Yes," Shane immediately replied, trying to focus on tying his shoes. A skill he swore he learned in first grade but now couldn't remember which lace went first.

Rozanov chuckled, stepping away from the locker he had opened. "You are a really bad liar, Hollander." Shane wasn't looking, but he could feel him getting closer. There was a deliberate pause. "What is your room number?"

Shane glanced up then. This wasn't just about a room number. This was Rozanov asking for permission. Permission for what exactly he didn't know, but Shane was suddenly very tired of denying that he wanted it. And he wanted him. That’s what that feeling was, from the very beginning. The shower only solidified it.

"1410." The number slipped out before he could really think about it.

"Well, if I were to come to 1410 tonight at 9…"

"...I might open," Shane finished. This was stupid. God, this was so stupid.

"Then I might knock." He gave Shane one final look over and then stepped back to his locker to get dressed.

He was so, *so* screwed.

Chapter End Notes

😏 who knows what happens next?

chapter soundtrack: wild by troye sivan

Chapter 6: 2010 - Part II

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Being back in his room gave Shane just the right amount of time to regret everything.

What had he been thinking? He hadn't been thinking, that was the problem. He let the way Rozanov looked in that shower, the way his scent enveloped him, affect him to the point that he easily gave out his room number. Like he hadn't been trying for nearly two years to not think about him in any context that wasn't strictly professional. They didn't even know each other. They were supposed to be rivals. Rozanov could use his designation against him. He could find out about Kiyomi and use that against him too. His mind kept spinning around the options, spitting out the worst possible outcomes that made him want to crumble in on himself.

But at the same time, there were some things Shane was sure of. Off the ice Rozanov hadn't been what Shane expected. He kept seeing him in the spaces between the rivalry, at the first IPC, the hotel gym, the commercial shoot, the locker room earlier. What it made him realize was that he did want to get to know him better. Yes, it was probably bad, but Shane didn't think he wanted another person this badly.

Just thinking about it made him ache in a way he didn't know was possible.

By the time he pulled himself out of his thoughts, he checked his phone and saw that it was 8:47. He put his phone back down and took a deep breath, letting it out shakily.

He picked his phone back up. 8:49.

The knock came at exactly 9. Shane scrambled up and practically flew to the door, not bothering with checking the peephole before he opened it. Rozanov moved into his room with his usual languid movements and Shane shut the door behind him. It was quiet for a long moment.

"I thought you might chicken out," Rozanov said from where he stood in front of Shane.

"I'm not. I am not a chicken," Shane mumbled, his eyes looking over what Rozanov was wearing, realizing he hadn't really seen the man in anything other than suits or hockey gear. Shane's eyes settled on his lips, instinctively taking a step back when Rozanov stepped forward.

"You think we should talk?" Shane asked as Rozanov got closer, physically feeling his heart beating harder and faster.

"No," he answered, stopping when they were close enough that Shane could smell him again. Not *his* scent, though, it was something else, cigarettes mixed with maybe a cologne Rozanov used. Shane hated that he immediately liked it, but he knew what scent he really liked the

most. “Not really.” He gently pushed Shane against the wall next to the door with a quiet thump.

Shane swallowed hard and tried to breathe, but Rozanov seemed to be trying to make that particular action difficult.

“This is such a bad idea,” Shane quietly said. But he wasn’t pushing Rozanov away.

He could see the smirk that spread across Rozanov’s lips, his hand reaching to cup Shane’s jaw. He tilted his face up, and Shane’s eyes finally met Rozanov’s gaze. There was something in the way he looked at him that made his stomach twist.

“Maybe.” And then he was leaning in to close the distance, his lips touching Shane’s.

Shane’s eyes shut and at first he just let Rozanov kiss him, his lips moving with obvious care and experience. Shane was by no means a virgin, but he’d only been with one other person. And they’d been just as inexperienced as Shane was. Those were awkward fumbles. This? This was something else.

He didn’t realize he was leaning forward until he felt breath on his lips, Rozanov’s hands moving up to rub anywhere he could reach. The back of his neck, the side of his face. His hair. Shane sighed. When their lips touched again Shane was fully leaning into it, parting his lips for Rozanov’s tongue. He kissed like his life depended on it, like he was going to eat Shane alive and God, it was the sexiest thing he’d ever experienced.

“Mm, Hollander,” he could hear in between the increasingly demanding kisses. “I want to smell you.”

The words made Shane pause. He knew what Rozanov meant. He wanted Shane to take off his scent patch so he could scent him. Shane had never been scented before, not in this kind of context.

“Is that okay?” Shane was nodding before he could think about it. He reached to seek out the sticky patch, digging his nail in slightly to start to pull it away. He saw movement and realized Rozanov was doing the same.

They seemed to both breathe in at the same time. Rozanov’s scent hit his nose like a damn brick wall. If he thought the shower was a lot, here it was damn near overwhelming in the best kind of way. The pine was devastatingly and unmistakably Rozanov.

He gasped softly and heard Rozanov do the same.

Then they were on each other again. This time Rozanov buried his face in Shane’s neck, right at the juncture where the patch usually was, over his scent gland. “Oh, fuck,” he whispered, breathing him in like he hadn’t breathed air for years. Shane was having a similar reaction, but his reactions were still more subtle, more controlled.

Rozanov kissed the spot and then trailed kisses up his neck, along his jaw, and then back to his lips where he started to kiss him again. Or Shane could say devour. They were devouring

each other, tongues sliding against each other and teeth somehow missing each other. Shane wasn't sure when his hands moved to Rozanov's jacket, pushing it off his shoulders before he reached down for the hem of the shirt he wore.

They paused so Rozanov could lift his arms and take off the offensive material and Shane could smooth his hands over the expanse of his chest. They had to pause again so Shane could also get his shirt taken off, but once they were both bare, the kisses continued.

Eventually Rozanov leaned back, one hand going to the wall next to Shane's head, while the other smoothed over his chest, squeezing at each pec. His hand continued up until it was sliding to the back of his neck, massaging the skin there. He wasn't aggressive or demanding, and Shane could feel his breath catch again as another sensation spread through him.

Shane knew enough about their gender designations to know that something was happening. Rozanov's alpha was orienting itself with his omega, his fingers curling gently at the base of his skull. The thought should've scared him, he'd never been with an alpha before and he didn't know how to describe the feeling, but instead of being scared, he just *wanted*. More of this, more of him, more of everything. His instincts were screaming at him to make a move.

Rozanov wasn't just attracted to him, and Shane was realizing he was feeling the same. He just didn't know what to do with that information. Not yet.

"Okay?" Rozanov was looking at him with eyes that seemed darker, and his voice seemed deeper. He was looking at Shane like he was the only thing in the room worth looking at.

Shane had spent a long time feeling like he was something to be managed or accommodated. His designation, his body. There was always something that needed to be worked around. "Okay," he finally replied, feeling breathless.

Rozanov's grip on his neck tightened and he pulled him close, slotting their mouths together again. This time they didn't stop. Not when he felt Rozanov's body roll against his. And definitely not when Shane returned the movement with a small whine against his lips.

He did breathe in sharply when Rozanov bent down slightly to slide his hands under Shane's ass and then picked him up like he weighed nothing. And Shane knew he had some weight on him. He was an omega but he was thick and well muscled from years of work.

"God," he whispered, wrapping his legs around Rozanov as he turned to walk them toward the bed.

"I prefer Ilya," he grumbled, grinning as he tossed Shane on the bed and then climbed up in between his spread legs.

"Maybe Asshole is better," Shane retorted, smiling against Rozanov's lips when they returned.

His hands moved to start to fumble with Rozanov's belt, huffing in annoyance until he leaned back to help. In fact he unbuckled, unzipped, and then pushed his jeans and underwear completely down, kicking the clothes away and then returning to his spot.

Shane took it all in. He had just seen the alpha naked in the shower, but this wasn't the same at all. He was well muscled like him, but leaner where Shane had more padding. He had a smattering of moles and beauty marks that led down to his fully erect cock. Shane's eyes widened, just a little. Was it possible to look bigger than it did in the shower?

"You like?" Rozanov was grinning when Shane's eyes flickered back up to his face.

"Oh, shut up…"

Rozanov chuckled as he leaned down, leaving kisses along Shane's chest. "Have you been with someone before?" he asked, one of his hands reaching to finally unbutton Shane's jeans.

"Yeah," Shane answered, tilting his head up when Rozanov's lips found his again.

"Mm, an alpha?" He managed to get Shane's pants open and was pushing his hand into his underwear.

Shane's hips jerked the moment Rozanov's fingers bumped into his cock, breathing in with a small shudder. "No…"

"That explains your reaction."

Before Shane could respond, Rozanov was leaning up again, tapping his hip and tugging down his pants and underwear in one fell swoop when Shane lifted his hips. His jeans were dropped off the side of the bed and then Rozanov was looking at him.

Really looking at him.

Shane's first instinct was to cover himself and squeeze his legs shut, an old reflex he had spent years quietly managing. His body wasn't like the other players in the locker room and he knew it. His hips were just a little wider, he was softer in places no matter how hard he worked out, and then there was his actual anatomy.

"Have you ever been with an omega?" Shane asked quietly, watching as Rozanov's eyes slowly trailed up his body again.

"Yes…not a male one, though," Rozanov told him, his hands sliding down each of Shane's thighs. "Let me see you."

“You are seeing me,” Shane replied, but he knew what he really meant. He exhaled and let his legs fall open, his feet sliding up as he looked away.

Rozanov was quiet for a long moment. His hands were still touching him, having moved his hands to Shane’s knees.

Shane knew what he was looking at. He spent his entire life in his own body to know exactly what was there. His cock, smaller than Rozanov’s, and right below that was the slick, soft cleft of his opening, the part of him that marked him most unmistakably what he was. No one had seen him like this before, not counting the awkward fumbling he had done with a fellow

hockey camp teen that resulted in Kiyomi, because even then they were in the dark and weren't even facing each other.

He cleared his throat, his legs twitching with the urge to close. "I know it's…"

"Beautiful," Rozanov finished for him, and when Shane looked, Rozanov was looking back at him. He wasn't sure if he could take the intensity he saw there. It made his cock twitch, the ache of arousal making itself known.

Shane felt his face go warm. "Don't make it weird."

"I am not. You are beautiful, Hollander." His grip on Shane's knee tightened and then he was leaning down, kissing him there. He moved down slowly, pressing a kiss on his thigh next. "And pretty." He continued placing his kisses, moving closer and closer to where Shane realized he was already slick and wanting. The thought would've been mortifying if he let himself dwell on it and he really couldn't, not when Rozanov placed another kiss on his inner thigh, having now shifted so he was properly lying down in between Shane's legs.

"And cute."

"Rozanov, just shut up and—"

"Oh? And what?" He looked up at him, one eyebrow raised.

Shane stared down at him, his lips purposely pressed together. He wasn't going to *ask* for anything.

"Well?"

Shane still didn't speak, but he was thankful for the lighting since it probably didn't show that his flush was traveling down his neck. He felt like he was shaking. "Roz—" He cut off into an embarrassingly high pitched squeak when the man started to *lick* him.

He hadn't realized how sensitive he truly was until then, each subsequent lick making his hips jerk. Rozanov's hands tightened on his thighs to keep Shane spread open as his tongue continued to lap, and he could feel himself growing wetter, not just from spit, but from his own slick.

"Oh God," he whimpered, his eyes slipping shut as the last bit of control he had started to slip away. He'd never experienced something like this before, it almost felt obscene the way Rozanov moved, licking, and *sucking*, absolutely overwhelming Shane in a way that made him want to simultaneously move away, but also grind down onto him.

He felt like every single nerve in his body was on fire, and he couldn't keep still, his hips rolling as he panted for air. There was no denying that Rozanov was experienced at this, with the way his mouth worked, his thumbs digging into his thighs and adding to the pleasure of it all.

Soon he could feel the pleasure tightening in his gut, his sounds growing loud enough that he was sure the room next door could hear him. What was worse was he could hear Rozanov,

too, groaning in between the slick sounds of his tongue.

Shane made the mistake of lifting his head to look down at him, only to see Rozanov's dark eyes staring up at him just as he reached to wrap a hand around Shane's cock. Shane's head immediately fell back as he arched off the bed, another sound escaping from him.

He could feel himself dripping, both from his cock and from below, a sensation he only felt when he was at the very height of his heats. It was too much, the stimulation making his brain feel like it was short circuiting because Rozanov didn't actually stop throughout all of this.

"Rozanov," he moaned, "I— I can't…"

"You can," he mumbled, and Shane could feel that too.

His tongue kept flicking against his core while his hand started to stroke, and Shane didn't realize he was crying until he felt the wet tracks leaving trails back into his scalp. He *never* felt this good before, his grip so tight on the sheets that he thought he could rip them.

He'd be embarrassed if he realized he was creating a wet spot below them. And still, *Rozanov didn't stop.*

Shane started to tense up, his toes curling as he shook. Maybe Rozanov could sense it, because the next thing he knew there was a warm heat around his cock and that was when Shane's eyes rolled back.

"Holy shit, Rozanov, I'm gonna, I can't hold it," he whispered quickly, but he didn't move, only sucking harder, his thumb moving to slide through the slick that coated his entrance before pressing inside.

That was what did it.

Shane came with a shout, white exploding behind his eyes as his entire body shook. His thighs tried to close again, but Rozanov pressed down harder and Shane felt like he kept coming, and coming.

"Fuck, Hollander," he heard Rozanov saying, or at least he thought he did, because he had died. Or that's what it felt like. Slowly the full body shudders changed to tremors, his legs still limp and splayed open.

"Good boy," Rozanov murmured, and then he was moving up Shane's body, kissing up his chest until he reached Shane's lips again. He accepted the kiss, tasting himself, but also Rozanov, the combination driving him wild.

"You…you've ruined me." The words left him before he could really stop them and he heard Rozanov laughing, his body shaking against him.

"Barely. Wait until we fuck."

An involuntary shudder went through Shane at the thought of that.

They lay like that for a little longer, kissing, but also nuzzling into each other's necks, seeking out their scents. Shane could smell Rozanov everywhere and he was surprised to realize he could recognize one particular note in it. Arousal.

He could feel him too, hard against Shane's thigh and then his stomach as he moved. "Can I…?"

Rozanov pressed one more kiss to his lips and then rolled away, his brows raised expectantly. "Of course you can."

"You're such an asshole," he murmured, but there was not a single bit of malice behind it as he followed him, moving in between Rozanov's legs. His cock looked even bigger from this perspective, but Shane decided he liked the challenge.

He licked a line up the center of it before he swirled his tongue around the tip, his eyes flickering up to Rozanov as he finally sucked him in between his lips.

He could confidently say he had very little experience in this too, but what experience he did have, he put to use, sucking as he started to bob his head. He used his hand to stroke where he couldn't reach, and every sound Rozanov made went straight through him, low and involuntary, like Shane was pulling them out of him. He let his cock slip deeper into his mouth with each movement, chasing the reaction and wanting more of it. He pulled back when he hit the back of his throat. He wasn't ready for that. Not yet.

"*Da*, Hollander, just like that," he could hear Rozanov saying, his hand sliding into Shane's hair. That made him suck harder, continually pressing his tongue into a spot that made the man's hips jerk each time.

Shane’s thoughts had gone quiet. That almost never happened, his brain was always running something in the background, whether it was a list or worry about something he hadn’t dealt with yet. But right now, there was nothing. Just this. Just the weight of Rozanov’s hand in his hair, the sounds he was making, and the way his hips jerked each time Shane pressed his tongue into one particular spot. Shane’s jaw was starting to ache, but he didn’t care at all. He sucked harder.

He was vaguely aware that he was wet again, slick gathering between his thighs just from this, just from having Rozanov’s hand in his hair and in his mouth. Even the way he said his name made him clench, wishing he had more than just a thumb inside him.

When Rozanov’s hand dug into his scalp and tugged him up, Shane went easily, breathing hard, his lips swollen. He watched as Rozanov reached to take over, stroking himself quickly until he came with a loud groan, spilling over his stomach. Shane unconsciously licked his lips.

He turned his body and leaned in to kiss Rozanov again. "Mm. Yes. Is good," he murmured against Shane’s lips. He hummed in agreement, smiling and just letting himself exist in the moment.

The quiet in his head lasted a little longer before the rest of the world started to slowly creep back in. He felt the anxiety on the edge of it, the thoughts of what this meant and what this could turn into pulling at him. He started to sit up, unable to look back at Rozanov just yet.

"You're not gonna tell anyone about this, right? About me?" He couldn't imagine what would happen.

"Me? Why would I do that?" Rozanov asked.

"No one can know. About us. About my designation," Shane insisted. He needed to know he wouldn't say anything.

"I will not tell anyone, Hollander. Okay?"

"Okay." He felt something ease in his chest, his breaths coming easier.

They were quiet again, but the moment didn't feel awkward. It felt like they were both just in their thoughts.

"I have early flight tomorrow," Rozanov eventually said, shifting to get out of the bed.

"Yeah. Me too."

Shane watched as Rozanov dressed, not even trying to hide that he was watching. When he was fully dressed, Shane leaned over to his side table where he had a few scent patches. He held one out for Rozanov, who smirked and accepted it, busying himself with peeling off the adhesive and then pressing it to his neck. "Thanks."

Shane nodded, feeling overly exposed where he sat on the bed, so he crossed his arms over his chest. He hated that he couldn't smell Rozanov's pine scent anymore.

"Goodnight." Rozanov was lingering, but he looked pleased when Shane met his gaze.

"Night."

And then he was gone, leaving the hotel room. Shane let out a deep sigh, pressing the heels of his hands against his eyes. What had he really just gotten himself into? And why hadn't he done it sooner?

Shane groaned and rolled over in the bed.

Chapter End Notes

😉

chapter soundtrack: rush by troye sivan

see you guys in the next chapter!

Chapter 7: 2010 - Part III

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"You're quiet," Shane's mom said, settling into her seat next to Shane on their flight back home to Ottawa. They'd gotten an early flight so they'd get home as early as possible and Shane could spend some much needed down time before he had his next game.

He glanced at her as he pushed his glasses on, his eyebrow just barely raised. Shane wasn't always the most chatty of people, his mom knew that. "I mean, more so than usual," she added once she got that look. "Are you feeling alright?"

No, he didn't feel *alright*. While he felt fine physically, his mind was going haywire. It had decided to do that thing where it refused to settle on any one thought for longer than a few seconds and it was driving him mad. When he got caught up in his head like this, it showed. It always showed, no matter how hard he tried. That was why his mom was probably nagging him.

"Yes, mom," Shane answered anyway, looking down at the book he had chosen for their hour flight. His opening of the book was purely for show.

Would Toronto be a one time thing? Rozanov didn't say, and Shane hadn't asked. He felt like they were on the same page, whatever page that was, when Rozanov actually left, but at the same time, everything felt up in the air. That wasn't like Shane, he liked knowing things, he liked being able to categorize and put a name to things. This, whatever it was, wasn't normal.

"Are you sure, Shane?" His mom cut into his thoughts and he sighed, blinking rapidly and looking at her.

"I think I'm just tired." He was never fully rested these days anyway.

She hummed in understanding, reaching to pat his leg. He kind of wished he could take her hand and nuzzle into her wrist for her scent like he used to when he was young, knowing it would help calm some of this restless energy. He didn't because he was on a plane, but the want was there.

"You've been working so hard. Make sure you get some rest when we get back. We'll take care of Kiyomi."

Shane nodded gratefully, his fingers flexing against hers. "Thanks, mom."

His eyes drifted back to his book, but as soon as he found the words, his mind drifted again.

Rozanov knew he was an omega.

That was the specific thought that kept resurfacing no matter how many times he pushed it back down. None of his teammates ever knew his designation, and he thought he'd be able to

keep it that way throughout his entire professional career. And yet somehow in the span of one unplanned shower and one hotel room, he had let Ilya Rozanov, of all people, see exactly what he was. What was worse was that he knew he could trust him. Rozanov hadn't given Shane any real indication that he was truly cruel, despite what the public thought about him. He knew Rozanov could be hiding his real self, but remembering how he was in those moments they spent alone, Shane truly trusted him.

Shane turned a page he hadn't actually read, glancing up when a flight attendant stopped in their aisle to ask if they wanted refreshments. "Ginger ale for him, water for me," his mom answered immediately, and Shane smiled in thanks.

Once he received his drink, he looked back down at the book, scanning the page to find the words he had just read.

You're beautiful, Hollander.

Shane audibly sighed and shut his book a little too roughly.

His mom said nothing. But he could feel her looking at him.

He ignored her, closing his eyes. After a few moments he could feel her hand curl around the back of his neck, gripping just tightly enough that Shane could feel it. He breathed out roughly through his nose and then sagged in his seat.

Kiyomi and his dad were waiting for them when they finally reached the door. Kiyomi was in his arms, but as soon as she caught sight of Shane she started bouncing excitedly, her arms outstretched for him. "Dada, dada, dada!"

Shane had just barely stepped inside, dropping his bag and then reaching for her, "Hey, I got you," he murmured and took her, feeling something unknot in his chest the moment she was in his arms.

She grabbed his face immediately with both of her hands, staring at him intently for a long moment. She started doing this when he returned from long trips, like she had to examine him and make sure he was truly who he was.

Shane stayed still for it, his eyebrows raised curiously. Sometimes he wished he could see what she was thinking. Finally she was satisfied, patting his cheeks and then tucking herself into his neck.

Shane continued to stand just in the doorway, burying his nose in her hair. She smelled like his parents' house, baby shampoo, and then something that was entirely her own. At some point her own scent started to break through the warm vanilla that she used to entirely smell like, and it made him feel simultaneously sad and proud that his baby girl was growing up.

His mom slipped past them both into the house, and his dad followed, but Shane continued to stand where he was for way longer than necessary.

"You missed me?" he asked into her hair, listening to her sniffle a few times.

"No," she immediately replied, but the way she kept scenting him, her fingers curling into his shirt, definitely said otherwise.

He laughed, tightening his hold on her. "Yes you did!"

Kiyomi didn't argue, but Shane could smell the way her scent mellowed out, the way it did when she was completely content. He wouldn't be surprised if she fell asleep against him like this, and honestly, Shane would join her for a nap.

Toronto and what happened there felt far away. For now, that was enough.

July

His heat came four entire days early. He knew because he tracked everything, from each individual symptom, to how long it lasted. At nineteen years old he was finally regular enough that this fluctuation made him immediately think of what had changed.

He didn't have to think for that long.

It was well known that having a viable alpha around an omega for long enough could cause the omega's system to go haywire because biologically it thinks there's a healthy alpha around to impregnate them. Turned out that just even one night could trigger the response. So starting his heat early, as miserable as it was, was just a result of his night with Rozanov.

Rozanov, Rozanov, *freaking Rozanov*.

Shane let himself be mad about it for a few minutes, staring angrily up at his ceiling before he just stopped. He rolled over, took his suppressants, put on a fresh patch, and got up.

It ended up lasting three days, which was normal for him, but the period that followed was not normal. It was heavier than usual and meaner, the cramping waking him up on the second night in a way that hadn't happened since he was a teenager. He lay on his side with a heating pad pressed to his stomach and stared at the wall, feeling deeply and privately furious at his own body.

Naturally, Kiyomi chose this particular morning to be at her most energetic. She acted like she owned the house, Shane's room included, so when she pushed open his door and made her way to his bed, Shane peeked open his eyes to watch her.

"Dada." She started to pull herself up on the side of his bed, her face appearing over the edge with an expression of complete and total determination.

Shane glanced at the time. It was 6:47 in the morning.

"Kiyomi."

"Up." She reached for him, gripping his arm and tugging. Shane flopped dramatically onto his back, staring up at her.

"I'm not feeling good, baby," he told her, pouting up at her. He liked to think he looked just like her when she threw her fits.

She seemed to consider this information for approximately five seconds. "Up!" she repeated, and this time she tugged harder at his shirt.

"Yeah, okay," Shane sighed and closed his eyes, shifting to reach around her and pull her closer. Maybe he could get her to lay down with him, but she instead took this as an opportunity to climb on top of him. He winced when her knee found his stomach, but said nothing, shifting the heating pad and letting her get comfortable. She smelled good like always. He buried his nose in her hair and tried to just exist in the moment, focusing on her rather than the pain he was in. He felt his mind drift.

Flashback - May 2008

He told his parents about Kiyomi's other father when she was six weeks old.

He hadn't meant to wait that long, but for the first six weeks of her life he was in pure survival mode. Feeding schedules, barely any sleep, and learning how to be a father all from scratch. His parents hadn't asked him about it, but he could see it in the way his mom specifically looked at him. It was like when she was waiting for him to share something she already knew the answer to, and Shane decided that was worse than just telling them.

It was two in the morning, Kiyomi had finally stopped crying and was asleep. Shane should've tried to sleep too, but he was too keyed up and hungry. He was sitting in the kitchen, far away from Kiyomi's nursery, but watching her still through the small monitor he carried practically everywhere in the house.

His dad was at the stove making them grilled cheese sandwiches, and his mom had just walked in, quiet as she took the seat across from him. He glanced at her and could see she was looking at him with that *look* again, the one that made the omega in him want to just curl up and beg for forgiveness. "Tell me, Shane."

Shane looked at her for a long moment. And then he did.

Tyler Brooks. Beta. Hockey camp, summer 2007. It was one night, neither of them knew what they were doing, and obviously he didn't even know he could get pregnant before formally presenting.

Tyler didn't know. Shane had thought about telling him more times than he could count, but each time he came back to the same answer. He didn't know this person. He had no real way of knowing what he'd do with the information, whether he wanted to be involved in Kiyomi's life or not. And Kiyomi was here now, with him. She was real, she was *his*, and he wasn't going to let anyone disrupt that.

His mom was quiet in the way that meant she was thinking. She still didn't seem mad or even disappointed. Just thoughtful. He unconsciously sniffed the air for any specific shifts in her cedar scent, but it remained the same. His dad placed a grilled cheese in front of him and then sat down, also quiet for once.

"So he doesn't know anything?" she asked finally.

"No."

"And you don't want him to know?"

Shane thought about it. He glanced at Kiyomi asleep on the monitor, chewing on his lip as he watched her. "Not right now," he said finally. "Maybe when she's older. If she asks."

His mom nodded once, and just like that the tension Shane hadn't realized he was feeling started to ease. "Then that's what we'll do. What she needs the most right now is you. And stability. I hope you know you're doing such a good job at both." She reached to curl her fingers around the back of his neck, rubbing the spot gently and making Shane sigh.

He didn't realize how badly he needed to hear that until that moment. Shane's dad leaned in to hug him from the other side, adding to the calmness of the moment.

Back in the present, Kiyomi had fallen asleep on his chest.

Shane continued to lay there with the heating pad and her warm weight, the quiet of the house around him. He thought about how much had really changed since that kitchen conversation, the main thing currently laying on top of him.

Shane had kept loose tabs on Tyler since then. Nothing overly intrusive, just enough to know where he was, what he was doing. He lived in Vancouver now, and the last he heard he was in university. Living a completely different life to Shane, who was now a professional hockey player.

He had more difficult days than easy ones, but Shane knew he wouldn't change it for the world.

October 2010

Shane's new place in Montreal was still mostly unfurnished, but the kitchen table had four chairs, there was a couch and tv in the living room, and there was a bed in his and Kiyomi’s bedroom. And he couldn’t forget to mention the literal mountain of toys that she had already. They were planning on having a little family dinner there later that night, as a sort of good luck thing before the Raiders and Montreal game tomorrow. His parents were off grocery shopping, leaving Shane alone with Kiyomi, who was busying herself with a block set on the floor while Shane lay back on the couch, lazily scrolling through videos on his phone.

"So Ilya, earlier in the season you made a claim that you'd make 40 goals during your rookie season. How do you feel about that now?" the reporter asked.

Shane told himself he was watching Rozanov's interviews for purely research purposes. Preparation for their upcoming game. Nothing else. Rozanov was shirtless in the Raiders' locker room, his skin still glistening from a game he'd just played.

"That's a lie, I said 50 goals," Rozanov said into the mic, and the interviewers chuckled.

"And how are you feeling about finally getting to Montreal tomorrow? Are you looking forward to beating Shane Hollander?"

"Isn't he a goalie now? But yeah, it's about time we play. It will be great to beat him." He looked into the camera and if Shane didn't know better, he would've thought he was looking directly at Shane. He didn't realize he was smiling until he clicked his phone off.

"He's such an asshole," he whispered to himself, but internally he was feeling something else. Excitement, arousal, pride? It was a weird mixture of all three. Shane had watched enough footage of Rozanov to know he didn't say things he didn't truly believe. If he said he'd score fifty goals, he was going to do it or come very close. Shane was similar in that aspect — he only pushed himself toward things he knew he could accomplish, and he was proud of what he achieved when he did. It felt good to know that Rozanov cared enough to do the same.

His parents came back with enough groceries to feed an army, insisting that Shane's fridge was empty so they needed more than just food for dinner. Shane really knew that his mom just couldn't help but mom him, even if she didn't live with him any longer. His dad started on dinner, and soon enough they were sitting down to eat.

"So, I saw that interview," his mom started to say when they were halfway through dinner.

Shane looked up from his pasta, an eyebrow raised. "Which one?"

"Rozanov's. The one where he said he'd do fifty goals? And then basically commenting on how you don't concern him," she explained, clearly looking irritated. "I don't get it, half of Canada is apparently obsessed with him and I just." She leaned over to where Kiyomi sat and covered her ears with both hands, though her voice still lowered. "Fuck him."

His dad choked on his water and Kiyomi lasted about five seconds before she was shaking her head to dislodge her nana's hands.

"He is an asshole," Shane said with a nod, because truly, that was what he portrayed for the public. It was just harder to believe after seeing what he was like behind closed doors.

"Right? Thinking he's better than you."

"Mom, it's not like he's on my team. These are things he has to say," he said, picking up the fork Kiyomi was insisting on ignoring and placing it back in her hand. She held it in her right hand and continued to pick up noodles with her left. Of course.

"Regardless, Shane, you know you are the best," she insisted, and Shane had to give it to her. If there was a number one Shane Hollander fan, it was Yuna Hollander.

"I know," he said, taking a sip from his water. "That's why I'm going to make him regret saying that tomorrow."

He could see the way his mother beamed with pride. "Of course you are."

After a few moments of eating, which included a moment of Kiyomi humming to herself as she slurped another noodle, his mom pulled the glasses she kept tucked into her hair down over her eyes and pulled up something on her phone. "Okay, on to better news, I finally heard back from Rolex…"

The game was tied. They were in the last 43 seconds of the third period and Shane could feel the nerves, not just from himself but from his teammates too. Everyone was pumped at the thought of nearly beating the Raiders, but they also knew the game wasn't over yet. The Raiders could easily score the final goal and that would be that.

It was the final face-off of the game and Shane could actually hear the crowd. They were screaming his and Rozanov's names, chanting for them to be the ones to produce it. It wasn't surprising. The media had been pushing this rivalry like it was some kind of weird reality show, but Shane couldn't say he was all that mad. It gave the fans something to latch onto.

He squirted a last bit of water into his mouth before his coach nodded for him to take the faceoff. He dropped his bottle and turned to skate onto the ice. He heard the crowd react before he actually saw him — the alpha who had been dominating his thoughts since Toronto.

They met in the middle of the ice and Shane found he couldn’t look at him head on. His eyes locked onto Rozanov's lips as they moved instead.

"Shane Hollander," he said, and Shane tried his best to ignore how the words sent a tingle through him. "Will you disappoint them?"

"Nope." And then the puck dropped and Shane's stick moved, hitting it before Rozanov had the chance.

He practically flew down the ice, passing the puck between himself and his teammates in plays they had practiced so many times he could perform them in his sleep. As he approached the Raiders' goalie he didn't let himself think, he just moved, spotting the weak spot moments before he took the shot. The puck flew past the goalie's attempt to stop it and the buzzer went off, the feeling of victory so strong that he couldn't help the shout that left him. He had a moment alone to let it sink in before the crowd erupted and his teammates surrounded him, helmets and sticks going flying.

They beat the Raiders.

Throughout all the chaos, Shane found himself glancing around at the Raiders, unconsciously looking for the tall Russian who dominated his thoughts. It didn't take him all that long to find him amongst his own group of disappointed players, his helmet off with wet curls plastered against his forehead. It reminded him of that night in the hotel gym. Shane stared, immediately entranced. After a moment, as though Rozanov could feel his gaze, he looked in Shane's direction, his head tilting when their eyes met.

Shane couldn't tell what he was thinking. He could assume the alpha was feeling upset with the loss, like he'd feel if he were in that position. But Rozanov really didn't seem like that. He kept their gaze connected and one thing Shane could for sure feel was the warmth stirring in his stomach. He wished they were alone and Shane could just skate over there and —

Rozanov's lips quirked up and Shane's eyes widened just slightly, his breath catching. Could he read his thoughts? Or was he just being that obvious?

The handshake line was quick and routine. Good game, good game, gloves off, grip hands and move on. Shane managed to keep his expression neutral, his breathing even, and he tried not to think of the fact that Rozanov was actually getting closer with every handshake.

And then he was there.

Rozanov took his hand and Shane swore he held it for just a beat too long. He didn't say anything, but now he was looking at Shane up close with the same look he had been giving him from across the ice. Shane felt his heart stutter.

"Good game," he finally forced himself to say, because he needed to say something and move the hell on.

"You too, Hollander," Rozanov replied smoothly, his lips still curved in that smile. And then it was over, their eye contact broken as Shane moved on down the line.

He forced himself not to look back.

Shane didn’t let himself think about it again until the apartment was finally quiet.

Kiyomi had crashed hard after the game, overstimulated and exhausted, so once they were home all he had to do was carry her into her room and tuck her in. His parents had his guest room to settle into for the night, and Shane had a moment to think of how it was to have his parents staying at *his* place for the first time.

He stood in the hallway for a long moment, listening for any kind of noise before he slipped into his room and into his bed. That was when he finally let himself breathe, the thoughts he had been keeping at arm’s length all night finally surfacing. The win was at the forefront at first, but soon enough Rozanov took over, his mind latching onto everything related to him. The hotel gym, their night in his hotel, the way no one had made him feel like Rozanov had.

He wanted that again. He wanted it so badly he ached for it.

Shane didn't realize his hand was in his shorts until his fingers touched his slowly hardening cock, his breath hitching. He turned his face into the pillow as he fully allowed himself to sink into the feeling, his grip on himself warm and solid.

He thought about every moment, from the way the alpha looked at him in the shower, his want barely disguised. He thought of the way they kissed later on that night, like they were starving for each other. He thought of the way Rozanov smelled, his scent strong and perfect with the way it sank deep into his lungs.

Shane was writhing, hurriedly pushing down his shorts so he could spread his legs, his fingers moving down further to his very wet entrance. He gathered the slick he found and started to rub, his mind supplying the memory of how Rozanov had driven him wild with just his mouth. His tongue moved like he belonged there, between his legs, and Shane could feel his heart racing as he practically humped his hand.

He pressed two fingers into himself as he remembered the way Rozanov had teased him with his thumb.

"Fuck," he gasped, pressing his fingers in as deep as he could, feeling himself clench around the digits. He wished it was Rozanov, wished they had done more that night.

He thought of how it looked when Rozanov pulled him off his cock and came, his stomach clenching at the memory of how he looked and smelled. He swore he could hear him speak, teasing him about waiting till they actually did fuck.

Then his mind, unhelpfully and completely without permission, supplied the rest. He imagined how it would feel if Rozanov fully pressed him down into the mattress. That pine scent everywhere, inescapable, his alpha bearing down on him and Shane just took it. Opened for him. Let him in.

Shane came so hard he had to clamp his free hand over his mouth to muffle his cry. His whole body shook with it, clenching around his fingers that were still buried inside him as though it were a substitute. It took him a lot longer than usual to come down from the high, his hips still weakly rolling even after, chasing the last of it.

He eventually let his fingers slip out, letting his hand fall to the side while he stared up at the ceiling, his chest heaving.

That was new. And deeply inconvenient because Ilya Rozanov was the last person he could afford to want like that.

Not at this point.

Chapter End Notes

well, someone is down bad, huh?

chapter soundtrack: all i wanted by paramore

Chapter 8: 2011 - Part I

Chapter Notes

I'm back! Thank you to all of your lovely comments and kudos, I am still living off of them. Literally. Also shout out to that_one_meh for catching a timeline inconsistency! It's been corrected.

Ok, now onward!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Shane's bag was by the door when Kiyomi found him.

She had her favorite blanket dragging behind her, which meant she had just woken up from her nap and was still in that soft and warm sleepy place that meant she wasn't fully awake just yet. Shane had told her before her nap that he was going to be leaving soon, but obviously something had woken her up before he could leave.

"Where going?" she asked softly, rubbing at her eye with her free hand. She had noticed his bag by the front door, of course.

"Nashville," Shane said, crouching down to her level once she reached him. Shane was a big proponent of speaking to her normally, knowing that only baby talk really did nothing for helping enhance her vocabulary. Especially once she started to respond to him. "Just for a few days. I have a game."

She seemed to contemplate this, her fingers curling into the blanket as she yawned. "No," she said finally, shaking her head.

"No? Baby, we spoke about this. Daddy has to leave sometimes, but I will be back. You have Nana and Papa here with you."

Her bottom lip pushed out just slightly, and Shane could feel it before her full pout even came out. He wanted to look away because it always hurt and something told Shane she knew that. "Come back?"

"Always," Shane confirmed, reaching to tuck back her loose hair. It was long and thick enough that it was just barely curling under her chin and always getting in her face. They usually kept it up in some kind of ponytail to stop her from getting too frustrated with it. "I always come back."

Her grip tightened on her blanket, bringing it up to just barely chew on the end of it before she held her arms up for him. Shane immediately reached to scoop her up in his arms,

shifting so he was sitting on the floor. She immediately tucked herself into his neck, rubbing her face there while she sniffled. He found it adorable, the way she scented him.

“Okay,” she finally said, as though she was giving Shane permission. Shane took it like that, anyway.

“Thank you,” he said seriously, nuzzling into her hair. “I’ll talk to you as soon as I can.”

She hummed. “Toy?” Shane knew she was asking him to bring her a toy back, something he didn’t do every single time he came back from a longer trip, but enough times that Kiyomi always asked when she remembered.

“I’ll see what I can find,” he told her, though he was mentally already preparing to search for toy stores in Nashville.

She had grown quiet again, and Shane knew it was because she was falling back asleep. He carefully stood up with her, shifting when Kiyomi sagged further. He moved to her bedroom, carefully setting her down in her bed and kissing her forehead.

This was getting harder and harder to do each time. Getting a place in Montreal was a good first step, but he needed to figure out another childcare alternative that didn’t always involve his parents. He was grateful for their help, but he had always made sure that as Kiyomi’s dad he was making the sacrifices.

She was his responsibility, after all.

Nashville

"So Ilya, just following up on the claim you made earlier in the season about 50 goals. You currently have 28 and it's the middle of February, do you still think you're going to make that goal?"

They were in Nashville for the All Star Game, North America versus Europe. Since they were the first and second rookie picks, and probably also because of the intense rivalry the world had been pushing, they had been paired together for a press conference beforehand. Rozanov looked good sitting next to him. He always did, but Shane could appreciate the nice fitting suit he wore. He had to force himself to stare out at the reporters so he wouldn’t keep glancing in Rozanov’s direction.

Rozanov cleared his throat and leaned in to answer the first question directed toward him. What the reporters didn't see was how his foot shifted to just barely nudge against Shane's under the table. Shane kept his face neutral, but he felt just the tiniest spark from the touch.

"Yes."

Shane couldn't help but smile, the reporters all chuckling at Rozanov's dry and simple response.

"Same question for you Shane? You've made 31 goals so far, any speculation about how the rest of your season will go?"

"I think it's good to leave a little suspense."

"Alright, this question is for both of you, but Ilya first. Given the fact that Boston hasn't made the playoffs in several years now, and you've come in as the number one pick, how are you handling the amount of pressure from the fans and the hockey world in general? And do you take it personally at this point?"

There was a moment where it was completely quiet, and Shane glanced at Rozanov, noticing the subtle change in his demeanor, like he had gotten lost somewhere in the translation of the question.

"If Rozanov doesn't mind, I can go first," he said, nudging Rozanov's foot back and glancing at him. Rozanov nodded, just subtly, and Shane went ahead with his reply. When he finished, the reporters looked pleased enough and then the attention went right back to Rozanov.

He was more ready this time, leaning in to say, "Yes, what he said."

Shane didn’t ignore the swell of pride in his chest as their feet touched again.

Shane was still buzzing from the shot accuracy competition when he shuffled into his team's box. He had beaten Rozanov's record by a narrow margin and he was trying very hard not to feel smug about it. It wasn't working.

"Good job."

Shane didn't have to look to know who had spoken. He could pick that voice out blindfolded.

"Thanks," he replied, glancing in the direction of Rozanov. There went his focus. He couldn't smell him, but his body remembered, and that was enough to make his omega practically sing. It helped that Rozanov was giving him the attention he hadn't realized he was craving, looking at him expectantly.

"So, you have fun last night?" Rozanov asked, as though they had regular conversations like this all the time.

"Last night?" Shane's eyebrows furrowed in confusion.

"With your team? Get dinner, get drunk," Rozanov clarified.

"Oh, I didn't get in until this morning." Truth was Shane's flight hadn't even been till that morning so he could spend as much time as he could at home with Kiyomi.

Rozanov stuck his tongue out at him. "Boring."

"Why? Did you have fun with your team?" he asked, definitely not holding back the way he was smiling.

"Yeah, no boring Canadians or stupid Americans."

Shane scoffed, knowing that was a dig at him being a boring Canadian.

"I do think I will go to bed earlier tonight, though," Rozanov went on to say, standing up to leave his box area. He skated past Shane, but before he got far, he leaned in just a little closer and said, "1221."

Shane immediately realized he was referring to his hotel room number. He could feel the thrill of excitement from what he was insinuating, but at the same moment he knew what Rozanov had done was dangerous. Anyone who was listening closely could hear because they most definitely weren't alone.

And of course, right on time he heard Scott Hunter speak from beside him. "What did he want?" he asked, frowning at Rozanov's retreating figure.

"Ah nothing, just being Rozanov," Shane said. He could hardly tell him that Rozanov had just thrown out his room number and that Shane was definitely planning on showing up.

"Huh. He's an asshole. Lucky for me, I'm right next door to him in the hotel."

Shane turned his head away so Scott couldn't see the way he immediately paled. Right next door to Scott Hunter and Rozanov was inviting him over. He either didn't know, or he didn't care. Shane had a feeling that he just didn't care, and if he was being honest with himself, he knew he was going to be showing up there regardless.

Back in his own hotel room Shane made sure to call his parents and spend some time on the phone with them and Kiyomi. Her sweet voice pulled him out of his head for a bit, focusing on telling her about how he found a toy store nearby and would definitely be bringing her something. Of course that made her giddy, but soon she had to get to bed and Shane told her he'd talk to her tomorrow.

After he hung up, Shane's mind drifted right back to Rozanov. They needed to talk about this, whatever this was. Was it just hookups? Was that all Rozanov wanted? More pressingly, was that all *he* wanted? His body had been telling him what he really wanted for months, and he was running out of ways to ignore what it actually meant. It all came back to whether or not Rozanov felt the same way.

It made him uneasy, having honestly never pursued someone like this before.

But there he was, quickly making his way to 1221. He stopped at the door and knocked, glancing in the direction of the room next door, where he assumed Hunter was. The thought made him anxious, shoving his hands into the pockets of his hoodie and pulling the hood further down over his head. All it would take was one peek outside and Hunter would see him and know he was there for Rozanov.

Speaking of him, why hadn't he opened the door yet?

Shane was about to knock again when the door finally opened and he rushed to slip inside, shutting the door behind him and turning to look at Rozanov with a frown. He was dressed in sweats and a t-shirt, his hair slightly damp like he had just showered. He didn't say anything at first, just looking at him, but then the corner of his mouth curved up.

"You look like you are hiding."

"I am not hiding, you have me standing in the hallway like an idiot and Scott freaking Hunter is right next door," Shane said in a rush, his voice quiet as though Hunter could already hear him through the walls.

Rozanov didn't respond, but it was obvious he was very amused, chuckling.

Shane stared at him, upset, but then it hit him that he was alone with the person he had been thinking about nonstop for months. A different kind of rush went through him, his eyes looking him over before they settled on his lips.

"Fuck," he whispered, and then he was practically launching himself at Rozanov, their lips crashing together with an audible smack. Rozanov caught him like he had expected it, his own hands moving to cup Shane's face.

They kissed like they were making up for lost time, which Shane supposed they were. Four full months of just thoughts, holding onto memories and pure *want*. His body kicked into overdrive, his fingers slipping into Rozanov's hair to grip the strands, holding onto them like they were his one and only lifeline.

He didn't realize he was walking backwards until his legs hit the mattress, pulling back just long enough to grab the hem of Rozanov's shirt and tug at it. He got the picture and lifted his arms, letting him pull the shirt up and off, and then his hands were on Shane's shirt too. They were clumsy with it, and it probably would have been more efficient if they stopped kissing long enough, but that was not what they really wanted.

Once they were finally both shirtless, Shane felt Rozanov's hands still.

"Patch," he said quietly, looking slightly feral as he looked at Shane.

Shane's breath caught. Then he reached up to the side of his neck, watching as Rozanov did the same, both of them practically ripping away the patches at the same time.

It was different this time, the way Rozanov's scent fell over him. It had the same intensity, completely unfiltered, undisguised, and completely Rozanov, but the way he responded to it felt overwhelming. He made a sound he wasn't entirely proud of, his hands gripping Rozanov's shoulders as he leaned in to bury his face in Shane's neck.

"You smell so fucking good, Hollander," he heard Rozanov murmur, making Shane think that he was going through the same rollercoaster of emotions that Shane was. "I needed this."

Shane heard him, letting the words wash over him. They were heavy, words neither of them should have been admitting to, not without explaining what they were. But when Shane tried

to think of how to explain what he wanted, he couldn't come up with the words. He turned his face into Rozanov's hair and breathed him in, letting the pine settle into his lungs and just staying there.

His omega was absolutely losing its mind. Months of dealing with early heats, suppressants and patches, all doing their jobs, and now none of that was between them and Shane could feel it in every single nerve ending he had. And yet some small, stubborn part of his brain was still very aware of the room next door.

"You've been fucked before?" Rozanov asked, kissing a line up from Shane's neck back to his lips, his tongue sliding between them.

"Yeah," he answered quietly, but he must have sounded unsure because Rozanov pulled his head back to look down at him.

"But not by an alpha," he confirmed, his eyebrows raising. "You're scared?"

Shane huffed. "I'm not! I'm not scared. I do…I want you," he finally admitted, feeling the warmth spread from his face down his chest.

Rozanov pressed his hips down, right into Shane's still clothed crotch. Shane didn't try to hold back his moan. "I can *tell.*"

Shane wanted to, he really did, but he looked up at the wall, unable to think of anything but how Hunter could hear them. It was too risky. He wanted to let himself let go without worry. "I just don't want our first time to be in a hotel with Hunter right next door."

Rozanov groaned, letting his head fall onto Shane's shoulder. "Normally I would say forget him, but you are very loud."

"Shut up!"

"What? Is truth." He sighed, nudging his nose against Shane's as he stole another kiss. "So next time. We have game in two weeks. In Montreal."

Shane knew. He'd marked every game on his calendar, the ones against the Raiders had a special color. "So we can meet then?"

"Okay. At your place?"

That made Shane hesitate. In Montreal he usually had Kiyomi with him, so he couldn't exactly be arranging hookup dates with his daughter around.

"You do have a place? Are you homeless, Hollander?" Rozanov asked, taking his silence to mean something else.

"What? No, yes, of course I do. An apartment," Shane explained.

"Then it's settled. Two weeks." Rozanov went back to kissing down Shane's chest, reaching to undo his pants and tug them down, and Shane stopped thinking about logistics entirely.

—

Two orgasms later Shane was finally rolling out of the warm mess they'd made of the sheets, reaching for his clothes. He wanted to stay. That was the problem. He wanted to stay and he couldn't, and the wanting itself was its own kind of information he wasn't ready to deal with. What was worse was he could feel the same from Rozanov. He wasn’t saying it, but he could *feel* it, even smell it on him, but they just weren’t talking about it.

He was pulling his hoodie over his head when he heard himself say, "I know we talked about Montreal in two weeks, but—"

"Hollander." Rozanov was already up, moving around the bed toward him. "Give me your phone."

Shane frowned. "What?"

Rozanov held out his hand. "Give."

Shane handed it over mostly out of confusion, watching as Rozanov unlocked it and started typing. Shane leaned in slightly to see what he was doing.

A contact. Rozanov was adding himself as a contact.

Lily.

Shane felt something warm move through his chest. He looked up. "What's my name going to be?"

Lily: hey jane, see you in two weeks
xoxo lily

“Jane.”

Two weeks later couldn't come fast enough. Until Shane heard that the game was cancelled due to a storm.

He was unlacing his skates when his phone buzzed with the league notification that the game would be cancelled due to the severe weather warning. He stared at it for longer than he needed to, waiting for the relief he had been half expecting to feel.

It didn't come.

Just disappointment, sitting quiet and immediate in his chest. He had spent two weeks mentally preparing, quietly arranging things in his head. He had even asked his nanny to stay late that night so he could spend the time with Rozanov. All of that dissolved with that one notification.

He pulled out his phone, half expecting to see a message from Lily.

Jane: Storm got our game cancelled. Next time?

He stared at the message thread for a little too long, and then put the phone away, finishing up with his skates.

He was just putting his things away when one of his closest teammates Hayden Pike spoke to him. "Hey, you doing anything tonight?"

"No, why?" That was true now.

"Jackie's making dinner. That's my wife. She'd love it if you came over. Meet our kids?"

Shane thought about his apartment. His nanny left at five. He had no backup plan and no real reason to ask her to stay late anymore.

"Can I bring my sister?" he asked, speaking before he had really thought about what it meant to be asking such a thing. "She's staying with me right now."

It was the first time he had ever asked that. The first time he had even considered it. Kiyomi existed in a carefully separate part of his life, one with just his parents, his home in Ottawa, and now his home in Montreal. He had never voluntarily folded her into anything outside of that. But this was Hayden, and somewhere along the way Shane had apparently decided that meant something more.

Hayden didn't even seem to hesitate. "Obviously. Jackie's going to lose her mind, she loves kids. How old is she again?"

"Two. Almost three."

"Cute. Come over for six."

Shane was more nervous than Kiyomi it seemed, but that was also pretty normal given her personality. He got her dressed in her nicest clothes and managed to do her hair, brushing the thick hair back off of her face and pulling it into two even braids for once. He told her she'd be meeting some new people and she had insisted on bringing her stuffed rabbit, a little thing that she carried almost everywhere like a security blanket. Shane figured it wouldn't hurt for her to bring it.

She had been walking until they reached Hayden's door, deciding to look up at Shane and hold her arms up to be picked up, having an obvious change of heart.

"Hey man, glad you could make it," Hayden was saying as Shane settled Kiyomi against his hip, the girl resting her head on Shane's shoulder. She looked at Hayden warily, but didn't speak. Hayden smiled at her anyway. "Hi there."

"This is Kiyomi," Shane said. "She'll probably be a little shy *at first.*"

"Hi Kiyomi. I'm Hayden. I play hockey with your brother," he said, waving Shane inside as he spoke. Shane was well aware that Kiyomi didn't call him her brother, and could very well

immediately blow that by saying what he really was. He expected it, actually. Mentally prepared for it.

Inside, he toed off his shoes out of habit, shifting to put Kiyomi down, but she shook her head quickly, clinging to Shane's shirt.

"It's okay, bub," he said quietly to her. "Hayden has two kids, don't you?"

"Oh yeah, and they'd love to meet you."

Kiyomi was back to examining Hayden, eventually holding out her rabbit for his inspection, which was apparently her version of an introduction. It was better than nothing.

Hayden took it very seriously, examining the rabbit carefully. "This is a very good rabbit."

Kiyomi seemed satisfied. "Her name Wabi," she said matter of factly.

"Hmm, well, would Wabi like to join us for dinner as well?"

Kiyomi wiggled in Shane's arm and he took that as a sign to put her down finally, where she followed Shane's lead and crouched down to take off her shoes. Habits really died hard.

"Yes," she said, and then stood up and reached for Shane's hand, obviously ready to go further inside.

Shane felt something warm and slightly overwhelming settle in his chest. She was opening up. She was going to be okay.

—

Jackie was exactly what Shane expected from someone married to Hayden — warm, direct, and immediately at ease with the introduction of Kiyomi. She introduced them to their daughters, Emma and Jade, and Shane got to watch the three girls simultaneously perk up at the sight of each other.

Dinner was actually peaceful for the first time in recent memory, with Kiyomi so distracted that she didn't bother with him.

It happened somewhere between the main course and dessert. Kiyomi and the two girls were allowed to leave the table to play after they had eaten. Before Kiyomi left though, she tugged at Shane's sleeve for his attention.

"Wabi, dada," she said, and Shane reached to pull the rabbit over and held it out for her.

The table went quiet.

Shane looked up. Hayden and Jackie were both looking at him with the particular expression of people who had just had something click into place.

He took a breath, having prepared for this exact moment.

"She's mine," he said simply. "Not my sister. My daughter." Shane was surprisingly calm on the outside, but he knew on the inside he was losing it. What if he had misjudged Hayden, and by default Jackie? He knew that statement alone opened him up to a whole new set of questions.

Jackie's expression softened, and Hayden stayed quiet, still looking as though he were calculating something. And then finally he shrugged.

"Okay," he said, reaching over to fill Shane's water glass like nothing had happened. "You want more bread?"

Shane felt something loosen in his chest that he hadn't realized was tight.

"Yeah," he said. "Thanks."

Maybe the storm cancelling the game wasn't the worst thing that had ever happened to him after all.

Chapter End Notes

this chapter's soundtrack: me & u by tems

see y'all next time 😘

Chapter 9: 2011 - Part II

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Las Vegas in June was exactly as loud and bright as Shane knew it would be, which was to say it was overwhelming from the very beginning. He hated these types of events — the people who forgot about personal space, the same questions recycled endlessly. How was his season. How did he feel about the award. What did he think about Rozanov. More questions about Rozanov. He had his responses ready, polished and automatic, because that was how he survived these things. He prepared. He managed. And through it all he made sure to look like he was having a great time.

Ultimately this was part of who he was now, and he had made his peace with that.

His parents were with him, along with Kiyomi, who had been surprisingly well behaved considering the amount of stimuli. His mom was running interference the way she always did at these things, that particular alpha efficiency of hers working overtime to control the flow of people who wanted a piece of Shane. Only a select few actually got through to him. He had always appreciated how natural she was at that, and how she did it without ever making it obvious that's what she was doing.

He was Rookie of the Year. It held a certain weight to it, the title, especially considering he had beat Rozanov. He had worked hard for it, though, and so did Rozanov, but in the end it was Shane who secured the title. And as overwhelmed as he was, he couldn't be more proud of himself.

He was mid conversation with his parents and fellow ceremony goers who kept appearing out of nowhere, when he felt Kiyomi's hand slip out of his. He reached down automatically to take her hand again, but he found nothing.

He looked down for her, and when he didn't immediately see her, his eyes swept the crowd of people. She had wandered maybe fifteen feet away, drawn by something he couldn't identity, but she had stopped directly in front of someone he knew very well. Ilya Rozanov.

Shane watched, excusing himself from his parents and starting to walk towards them. Rozanov was already crouching down to her level, which meant he had noticed her first. He was looking at her with that steady calm attention he gave everything, and Kiyomi was looking right back at him, her head tilting like it did when she was curious.

"Hello there," he heard Rozanov saying just as Shane reached. His eyes flickered up briefly to Shane, his lips quirked up, before he looked back at Kiyomi. "Your dress is very pretty."

Kiyomi was wearing her first big girl dress, as Shane had called it. It was a pink tulle dress, the skirt layered and full enough that it swished when she walked. She had spent a considerable amount of time showing everyone how it looked when she spun around. Her

hair was pulled up into a bun, complete with a matching pink bow. Shane really couldn't believe he had an entire three year old.

That seemed like the right thing to say to Kiyomi, because she went right into spinning around again.

“Say thank you, Mimi,” Shane said then, and she glanced back at him, pleased he had joined them.

“Thank you,” she said dutifully.

Rozanov smiled, and Shane decided he loved that smile. “You are very welcome. What is your name? My name is Ilya.”

“Kiyomi,” she told him, and then scrunched up her face while she attempted to say Rozanov’s. “Ya...ya.”

“Close enough,” Rozanov laughed. “I play hockey with your…” He trailed off, looking at Shane.

“Brother,” Shane said softly, the lie far too easy, but he knew it was necessary.

Rozanov accepted this without reaction, looking back at Kiyomi. “He plays okay hockey, I guess,” he said, shrugging his shoulders. Was Rozanov teasing Shane to his daughter?

“Do you like hockey?”

“Maybe,” she replied, and now it was Shane’s turn to chuckle.

“She just learned that she can say maybe instead of yes or no, and it’s been a part of every conversation,” Shane told Rozanov who nodded, clearly amused.

“Maybe, huh? You are very honest,” he said.

“She goes to games occasionally. I think during the last one she lasted two periods before she fell asleep on my dad,” Shane felt the need to add, knowing his daughter very well.

Rozanov looked up at Shane as he spoke, his eyes moving between him and Kiyomi for a moment. Shane felt something shift in his chest, warm and unsteady, the kind of feeling he had no safe place to put. Rozanov was looking at Kiyomi with the same careful, genuinely curious attention that he had directed at Shane before, so seeing it turned on his daughter was something else entirely.

“Next time, you must stay awake for the whole game. Promise it is more fun when I play,” Rozanov said.

Kiyomi regarded him very seriously. “Okay,” she agreed, like she was making a formal commitment. As easy as that.

Shane watched his daughter look up at his alpha with those wide trusting eyes and felt something crack open quietly. Two of the most important people in his life, standing three feet apart, and only one of them knew it. He immediately felt crazy admitting that to himself, blinking rapidly when he realized his eyes were suddenly flooding with tears. Where did that even come from?

Rozanov stood up slowly, his eyes still on her for just a moment longer. Shane watched him take her in one last time, the chocolate brown eyes, the particular tilt of her head. Something moved across Rozanov's face, there and gone, but Shane didn't let himself think too hard about what that could mean. Not yet, anyway.

"She is great," Rozanov said quietly, breaking him from his thoughts. He waited a moment, and then continued, "She looks just like you."

Shane's heart stuttered. He looked at his daughter and then reached to take her hand when she reached for his. "Genetics are crazy, huh."

Rozanov nodded, something still moving behind his eyes. Then he seemed to decide against whatever it was.

"Crazy, yeah." He looked past Shane, noticing someone or something. "See you, Hollander." And then he was walking away. His mother chose that moment to step up next to him.

"Was that Rozanov?" she asked, as Kiyomi moved in to take her outstretched hand instead of his.

"Yeah, just. Saying hello." And ruining his life, further. No big deal.

Shane allowed himself to be sucked into the actual party after that. Kiyomi and his parents went back to their hotel and Shane was pulled into the clutches of his celebrating teammates.

"Rookie of the Year. Not bad, Hollander," Hunter said after he had appeared next to Shane as he was nursing a ginger ale.

"Thanks." Shane leaned over to clink his glass against Hunter's.

"Your boy is probably going to be insufferable about this for at least a year."

Shane's eyebrows shot up. "My boy? He's not—"

"You know, I don't mean *your boy*, I meant. You guys are always at each other's throats."

If only Hunter knew how true that was, and probably not in the way he pictured.

"Yeah, he's already insufferable," Shane said.

"What do you think about getting some shots with the guys? We're in Vegas, after all." Shane thought about it and then he was nodding.

"That sounds awesome."

And that was how he ended up at the bar taking shots of whatever Hunter had decided. They didn't taste good and they burned, but Shane found he liked the distraction from the thoughts that were almost constantly flying through his head. He felt himself get more loose, laughing, cracking jokes, and accepting congratulations from people he barely knew.

He was on his fourth shot when he realized he had been scanning the room without meaning to.

Where was Rozanov? After their run in earlier he hadn't seen the alpha for the rest of the night.

Shane finished off the shot and then said something to the teammate on his left about needing some air. He found the door to the roof without asking anyone where it was, breathing in the night air as he stumbled outside. Maybe he had a little more to drink than he realized.

Rozanov was there.

He was standing at the edge of the roof, his back to the door, looking out at the Las Vegas skyline. The lights spread out below them, bright and endless, and for a moment Shane just stood there watching him.

The door clicked shut behind him, muffling the noise from the party below.

"Are you hiding up here?" Shane asked.

Rozanov glanced back at him. Shane could see a trail of smoke, probably coming from a lit cigarette. "I'm not."

Shane walked over and stood next to him, quiet as he continued to look out at the city. The alcohol was sitting warm in his chest, making everything feel slightly closer than usual.

He could feel something off with Rozanov's energy, and he was confident that if he could scent him, he'd smell it too. It was completely different from the man who had crouched down to talk to Kiyomi a few hours ago. That version of him had been easy, open, and genuinely warm. This was the version Rozanov seemed to share with the world.

"Are you okay?" Shane asked.

"What are you even doing here, Hollander?"

"I just came out here to take a break from all of those people and —" He didn’t want to say that he was actively looking for the alpha.

"You're drunk," Rozanov said, a hint of a smile on his lips.

"I'm not! I was just looking and saw you weren't around, and —"

"And what? Congratulations, by the way." It didn't sound like Rozanov meant it.

There it really was. "You're mad."

"I am not.”

"It could've gone to either one of us."

"Yeah, well, it went to you," Rozanov told him, taking a drag of his cigarette.

Shane felt an anger rise up from within him, the alcohol making it worse. "So what. You're up here sulking? All you do is beat me. I win one stupid fucking thing and you couldn't even show your face down there!"

Rozanov mumbled something that Shane either couldn't hear or understand.

"What?" he asked.

"Not everything is about you, Hollander!" Rozanov yelled.

Shane actually leaned back in surprise, blinking a few times. He felt like there was something else, something that Rozanov didn't want to share, and it was frustrating knowing that he was just on the edge of whatever it was. It made Shane feel uneasy.

"So what is it then?"

Rozanov huffed, focusing on his cigarette for a long moment. "What the fuck do you even want, Hollander? Why are you really here?"

"I just came out to get some air, and see the view and —"

"Well, here is fucking view, Hollander!"

Shane swallowed against a lump that had suddenly developed in his throat, looking out at the city. Rozanov was right. What was he doing here? Why had he sought him out? It was obvious Rozanov wanted nothing to do with him.

"I go home in three days," he heard Rozanov say.

Shane glanced at him, taking in how tense he looked, his jaw clenched.

"Yeah? Sounds fun." He knew very little about Russia. Besides it being Rozanov's home.

Rozanov looked at him, something flashing across his face. Frustration? But not the kind Shane had expected. He shook his head and looked away again, looking out at the city like it personally offended him.

They were quiet again. "I guess I thought maybe…since we didn't get to…before." Shane didn't let himself finish that sentence, because looking at the way Rozanov was making it his business to look anywhere but Shane said more than any words.

The feeling went from his chest and further down into his stomach where it settled, making him feel sick. He needed to get out of there.

"Nevermind. I'm just. I'm gonna go," Shane murmured, and then finally pushed himself away from the railing, turning to head back to the door. Something stopped him at the last minute. He glanced back at Rozanov.

"I guess I'll see you next season?" he asked, some part of him still wanting the man's acknowledgement.

After a moment, Rozanov started to step over, his hand reaching to push him backwards. Shane stumbled with him until his back hit the wall, but before he could say anything, Rozanov was kissing him.

It was nothing like Toronto, or even Nashville. This was desperate in a way that caught Shane completely off guard, Rozanov's hand coming up to cup his jaw. Shane kissed back before he had truly decided to, his hand moving up to slide into Rozanov's hair, gripping it. The minute their tongues touched again, a different kind of fire was ignited in him, because this was what Shane wanted, what he had craved so deeply. But it was wrong. He didn't want it like this. Not here. Where literally anyone could walk in on them.

He turned his head, pressing his hands against Rozanov's chest to stop him.

"What are you doing? We're in public!" he gasped.

"No one can see —" He tried to kiss Shane again, but he shook his head and slipped away from the wall.

"It doesn't matter!" Shane wiped at his mouth, forcing himself to turn continue his walk back to the door.

"Hollander." Rozanov's voice was low behind him.

Shane ignored him, reaching the door and tugging it open.

"See you next season," Rozanov said.

Shane said nothing and let the door close behind him.

Chapter End Notes

this chapter's soundtrack: the less i know the better by tame impala

Chapter 10: 2011 - Part III (Ilya)

Chapter Notes

So...remember how I said this story would be completely in Shane's POV? I lied.

Everything that is spoken between Ilya and Svetlana is in Russian. Just so you're aware!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It was safe to say that Ilya hated Russia. Sure, it was where he was born, where he grew up, where he learned how to play hockey. But it was also where he existed in a place that was unforgiving, where he had a brother who treated him like shit and a father who he was never good enough for.

It was where he had last seen his mother. Those memories were fading day by day and that made him angry to know such a beautiful and thoughtful person like her was gone, and would eventually one day be forgotten by everyone else. Not by him, though. The necklace he wore was in her memory and Ilya would never forget her. He missed her so much.

Russia just didn't feel like home anymore. He couldn't live, he couldn't just *be*, not without the incessant weight of the world on his shoulders.

He had grown used to Boston and all of its stupid quirky things, from the places to the people, and even hockey felt different there. He loved his team and his teammates, he loved being able to wake up every day and do something he genuinely loved. Even when they lost games, Ilya knew it would be alright because they'd just push harder for the next one. He loved everything hockey had given him, the money, the fame…and Shane Hollander.

Hollander had been taking up a lot of his mind. From the moment he saw him back at the first IPC, walking over to him to introduce himself. Ilya barely remembered what the guy had even said, but he remembered how he *looked* — the little beanie, and the freckles.

God, those freckles.

Ilya wanted to count each individual one. They weren't just on his face either. He had managed to see that there were individual dots located in various parts of Hollander's body and he needed to do a more thorough investigation to find each and every one.

He knew the guy was into him. He figured it out from that first day, but while Ilya wasn't sure of his designation, he knew he wanted to find out. So he waited. And planned. The commercial was his idea because he needed to pursue Hollander in a way that wasn't directly related to their hockey games. The shower was also planned, because he knew if there was any moment to see how interested someone was in him, it would be then.

What he hadn’t expected was to find out the man was an omega. That singular detail threw Ilya for a loop, quite literally, because from that moment on he didn’t know how to act. Hollander smelled like nothing else and no one else that he had ever smelled before. The warm notes of vanilla were laced perfectly with the clean notes of cotton, and deeper under that was something sweet that Ilya knew he needed more of.

It was amazing that he hadn’t completely jumped him in that shower.

No, he could tell Hollander was a skittish thing. Like he wanted, but didn’t know how to ask. He had inexperience written all over him and Ilya knew he had to take a different approach with the omega. The hotel room was another test that Hollander passed with flying colors, and that was when Ilya knew something had shifted between them, something he hadn’t fully anticipated.

But again, he didn’t quite expect the night to go like it did. He’d been with other omegas before, he knew how they could operate. But Hollander was different. It took some guiding to get him to open up and let loose, the omega in him pushing past the carefully constructed wall he had obviously put around himself.

Ilya loved that he was the reason for it.

He’d called him beautiful and he meant every single word. He’d call him beautiful every single minute of *every single day* if he could, if only to see the way the words made Hollander blush, his freckles standing out just a little more.

He was sexy and he didn’t even know it. Ilya wanted to worship him. Eat him out until he was crying from the overstimulation, fuck him until they both couldn’t stand it. Hollander’s scent was something, but his taste was something else altogether. As much as that first night was a test run, Ilya knew he was just barely holding on by the end of it. If he hadn’t left the room when he did, he didn’t think he could ever leave. And that thought alone should have told him something.

There was a moment that night that had stayed with him. When he had reached to curl his hand around the back of Hollander’s neck and felt him go still and then soft beneath him, like something in him had just stopped. Surrendered. Ilya’s alpha had done that instinctively, without permission, and the fact that it had surprised even him said something he was only now beginning to sit with.

Alphas didn’t scruff casually. It meant something. His alpha had already decided something about Shane Hollander long before Ilya’s conscious mind had caught up.

Ilya thought about him a lot after that. He watched videos, interview after interview, disguising them with the idea that he was just researching how his rival played. He couldn’t get enough of Hollander and that was when he realized something was really happening. Something had changed.

And then there was Hollander's sister.

He'd seen her before on various occasions, either held in the man's arms or held by his parents. She was a cute thing, basically a miniature version of Hollander himself. But what really got Ilya wasn't just the uncanny resemblance — it was how Hollander was *with* her. The way he moved differently when she was around, softer and less guarded, like she was the one person he didn't have to manage himself for. Ilya wanted to be let into that. Whatever that version of Hollander was, the person who existed when the little girl was around. Ilya wanted access to it.

But there was something else too. Something quieter that he couldn't quite put his finger on. The way Hollander held and spoke to her wasn't how a brother acted towards their sibling. Sure, he could attribute it to Hollander's designation, but he knew it was more than that. It was very obvious that they were close, like a parent would be to a child.

He had to file it away because he didn't know what to do with the information yet. But it was still there.

He knew he was being harsh with Hollander on the roof that night, but he also knew he was fighting whatever this was that he had started to develop for the omega. He thought distance might put an end to the intensity. And then Hollander had looked at him, really *looked* at him, and that was that.

He had already realized that Hollander had a habit of not making eye contact, which in and of itself directly contradicted how confident he came across. Ilya thought it was shyness, so when he did manage to get direct eye contact, it drove him mad. That's why he ended the night the way he had. And yet, he still wanted *more.*

He dealt with his brother who had developed a habit of calling only when he needed money, and a father who only called to berate him or to ask him things that left Ilya wondering about his mental capacity. He played hockey like his life depended on it, went out with his teammates, fucked around with people who weren't who he actually wanted. None of them were like the freckled hockey player he really wanted in his bed.

Svetlana was the only other bright spot in his otherwise dim life.

"Do you think you could have closed that any harder?" she asked, watching as Ilya made his way further into his place. They were just returning from a night out, one of the few things Ilya still enjoyed in Russia. He had been feeling off all night — antsy, restless, more aggressive than he had any real reason to be. Running hot in a way that had nothing to do with the weather.

Every scent around him had been hitting wrong all evening, like his nose was looking for something specific and finding nothing but the wrong answer everywhere it turned. The bar had been suffocating, too many people, too many scents, all of them grating against something underneath his skin that he couldn't name and couldn't settle. He couldn't tell if he wanted to punch something or fuck someone. Or both. He had spent most of the night clenching his jaw and pretending everything was fine, getting short with people who

managed to get a little too close to him and Svetlana. Eventually they just decided to call it quits for the night.

Ilya glanced back at the front door that he had slammed closed and shrugged, already consumed by taking his shoes and jacket off. His shirt was untucked from his pants, his skin feeling very sensitive where the fabric touched it.

“I’m hungry,” he announced, making his way into the kitchen. He wasn’t actually that hungry. He just needed to move. Do something. Anything.

“We just ate, Ilyushka,” she said with a chuckle, following him into the kitchen.

He started pulling things out of the fridge, thinking about what he could assemble with whatever he found.

“And?” He opened a jar of pickles and pulled one out, crunching into it. It was cool enough that it felt good, the cold cutting through the heat that had been sitting under his skin all night. He sighed.

“You feeling alright?” she asked, stepping in to start to try and put something together for him.

“I feel great, Sveta,” he said, moving around her as she got to work. He finished the pickle and then slid in behind her, tucking his face into her beautiful red curls. She smelled good. She always smelled good, but tonight it was extra good, like he could just—

“Ahh,” he sighed, pulling his head out of her hair and burying it in her neck instead. That undercurrent he was feeling, that energy that was pulsing through him was suddenly feeling very familiar. He experienced ruts every few months, but he took suppressants to make sure they weren’t as intense. He didn’t remember taking his suppressant this month and something or *someone* may have triggered this. “I think I am going into a rut.”

That made Svetlana pause. She turned around and reached to rest the back of her hand against Ilya’s forehead. He could see the moment she agreed with him before she even spoke.

“You’re burning up.”

“Fuck.”

Svetlana was good to him. She always had been.

She helped him to the bedroom, sat him down on the edge of the bed and looked at him with that particular expression she got when she was assessing a situation. Ilya still felt like he had control of himself, but it was slipping faster than he expected. The rut was moving through him like a tide coming in, slow at first and then suddenly everywhere, the heat under his skin sharpening into something more focused, more demanding.

The urge to mate was overwhelming, consuming, but his alpha wasn't screaming to mate with just anyone. It knew exactly who it wanted and it wasn't letting Ilya forget it.

"Okay," she said, undoing the buttons on Ilya's shirt as she settled into his lap. She felt so good. "We do this."

"You don't have to—"

"Ilyushka." She gave him a look. "Shut up."

He shut up.

This wasn't new between them. They knew each other, knew how to move together, and Ilya let himself sink into the familiarity of it. She was warm and she smelled good and his hands knew exactly where to go. He was into it, genuinely, his body responding the way it always did with her, the rut making everything more urgent and more necessary.

It was good. It was fine. It was Svetlana and it was always good with Svetlana. He loved her so much.

And then she shifted beneath him and her scent hit him differently and his alpha just — flinched. Not wrong exactly. Just not right. Not the specific right that his body had apparently decided it needed, that particular warm vanilla and cotton that he could still recall with embarrassing precision years later.

He pressed his face into Svetlana's neck and his alpha screamed. His body was cooperative even when everything deeper in him was pointing somewhere else like a compass that had already made its decision.

It was at the peak of it that his mind slipped entirely. Freckles. The way an omega looked up at him from a hotel bed trying so hard to stay composed. His first orgasm tore out of him so abruptly and suddenly that he couldn't warn Svetlana, who just took it in stride, kissing along Ilya's jaw while he shook through it. It didn't satisfy the rut. If anything it made the feeling worse, but this was what he had.

He came back to himself slowly, Svetlana's hand moving through his hair.

They lay tangled together after, her head on his chest, the rut still simmering under his skin. Unsatisfied in a specific way that had nothing to do with Svetlana and everything to do with what his alpha had decided it actually wanted.

"Is it Jane?" she asked quietly into the dark.

Ilya went very still.

"I have seen you check your phone," she said, not unkindly. She was too observant for her own good sometimes. Ilya appreciated and hated it at the same time. "Many times."

He stared at the ceiling. "It's complicated."

“It is always complicated with you.” She tilted her head up to look at him. “Is Jane an omega?”

Ilya said nothing, which was answer enough.

Svetlana made a sound that was almost a laugh.

“Ilyushka.” She shook her head, her fingers still moving through his hair. “You are an idiot.”

“I know,” he said.

They lay there in the dark for a while longer, the rut running hot and unsatisfied under his skin. They’d probably go at it again in a while, but for now they rested. Ilya stared at the ceiling and thought about Shane Hollander, somewhere in Montreal right now, probably asleep, completely unaware that Ilya was lying in his bedroom in Russia wanting him badly enough that his body had staged a biological revolt.

It was, Ilya decided, a significant problem.

Chapter End Notes

chapter soundtrack: all i can take by justin bieber

Chapter 11: 2011 - 2012

Chapter Notes

This chapter is for you Kiyomi lovers out there. 🥰

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Summer 2011

Lily: still mad about vegas?

The text came through as Shane was meal-prepping and putting together a lunch for Kiyomi, the girl sitting at the kitchen table and working hard at coloring a picture.

Shane had been back for three weeks before he even let himself think about Las Vegas properly. Luckily he had been busy, Kiyomi's daycare would be starting in September and there was paperwork, orientation visits, and doctor visits that he had to logistically plan and prepare for.

So to see a text from Rozanov made him pause.

Jane: I'm not mad about anything.

He put the phone back down and then went back to making lunch. It buzzed again, almost immediately.

Lily: sure 😉

Shane stared at his phone until Kiyomi called for him, waving a broken crayon at him.

"You just have to peel the paper back, baby," he said, stepping around to show her how to expose more of the crayon. With her coloring again, Shane finished with her lunch, a ham and cheese sandwich with the crust cut off, and a side of plain cut cucumbers, setting it down in front of her.

"Peanut butter?" she asked, blinking at the food.

"That's not what you asked for earlier, Mimi."

"I want peanut butter," she said, reaching to nudge the plate away from her.

"This is what you can have now," Shane told her, nudging the plate closer again.

She looked at him, and Shane looked back, making sure she knew he was serious.

“I want peanut butter,” she repeated, and Shane forced himself to not grit his teeth.

“Okay, how about this?” He turned to get the peanut butter down from the cabinet, grabbing a spoon to take a dollop of it out and place it on the corner of her plate.

“You can dip your cucumbers,” he said.

She hesitated, and then picked up a cucumber and dragged it through the spread, bringing it to her mouth. After a couple of chews she nodded. “Thank you, dada.”

“You’re welcome, baby.” Shane leaned back against the counter to watch her eat, glancing at the phone.

Yeah, he was too busy to deal with Lily.

Fall 2011

So far Kiyomi had been very brave about the whole daycare thing. They had many conversations about what would happen, and had visited the school twice so far. She seemed to enjoy the idea of it and Shane took that as a good sign.

The day of, she ate her breakfast without complaint, let Shane do her hair without too much squirming, and held his hand all the way from the car to the front door of the daycare. Of course she was gripping Wabi with her free hand, but Shane was going to choose his battles when it came to this. He did want her comfortable. He had told himself it was going to be fine. She was ready. He was ready.

All that bravery, however, seemed to shrivel away the moment they reached the door.

Kiyomi went stiff and her grip tightened on Shane’s hand.

Shane immediately crouched down, quickly recognizing the look Kiyomi was giving the door. They had about two minutes before the breakdown.

“Hey,” he said softly. “Remember when we came to visit? You liked it.”

She shrugged and then shook her head, looking away from the door when her teacher, Miss Diane, came out to assess the situation. She smiled encouragingly at the pair.

“Look, Miss Diane is waiting for you. And there are those blocks you liked to play with.”

Kiyomi did not look convinced, her lip beginning to tremble, which was Shane’s undoing every single time.

“Mimi, baby.” He took her hands in his. “I will be right back here at twelve. Before your nap. You remember?”

She nodded, but then Shane saw the tears right before her face completely crumpled and she threw her arms around his neck. Shane felt his throat tighten, tears immediately welling up, but he focused on comforting her.

“I promise I’ll be back. And you’re going to have so much fun,” he said, rubbing her back while he looked up at her teacher. She nodded, quietly showing he was doing the right thing.

They stayed like that for a long moment, Shane hugging her while she sniffled and rubbed her face into his neck. Shane admitted he needed this as much as she did. Eventually he started to stand, shifting so Kiyomi would slowly start to let go of him. Thankfully instead of tightening her grip, she started to let go. He wiped at her cheeks and then nodded.

“You’re such a big girl. You got this.”

She sniffled again and then looked up at Miss Diane, who held a hand out for her to take. With one final squeeze to Shane’s hand she let go and reached for hers instead.

“We’ll see daddy later,” she said calmly, encouraging Kiyomi to wave as they started to walk inside.

Shane waved back, feeling like he was watching his literal heart walk away from him. When the door shut, he took a deep breath, turning away from the daycare and checking the time. Now that she had gone inside, he let himself feel the rush of anxiety at the change in their routine. He knew it was hard for him to deal with, so he could only imagine what was going on with Kiyomi.

He sighed, glancing back at the building and forcing himself to walk away. He needed to do something to pass the few hours before he came back to pick her up.

That was how he ended up running his usual trail, focusing completely on keeping his pace steady. He got a call from his mother while he ran, explaining how everything had gone with the drop off. So when he felt his phone buzz again a few minutes after getting off the phone with her, he assumed it was her again, having forgotten to tell him something.

Lily: what are you doing?

Shane’s brows furrowed at seeing the message from Rozanov instead, considering not even replying. But after a second he typed a quick reply.

Jane: I’m running.

Part of him wished he could share that he just dropped his daughter off for her first day of daycare and was trying not to lose his mind, but he obviously couldn’t.

Rozanov’s answer came moments later.

Lily: oh, to me? 😏

Shane rolled his eyes and shoved his phone back in his pocket. Luckily Rozanov wasn’t there to see the way his lips quirked up into a smile.

———

It was the day before his game against Boston but Shane couldn't think of anything else he'd rather be doing. They were at the local public ice rink, and he and Kiyomi had just stepped onto the ice. She had a death grip on the penguin shaped skating aid, but she looked determined, her tongue sticking out in concentration. She was moving as slow as a snail, but speed wasn't the point. Shane just wanted her to get used to the ice first.

Shane slowly skated next to her, one hand hovering over her in case she misstepped, but so far she actually wasn't doing that bad. Like she was meant for this, or something. He once again felt fiercely proud.

"You're doing so good, baby," he told her, and she grinned up at him and then immediately wobbled. Shane was there to steady her, smiling when she let out a giggle. God, he could tell she loved it and he'd have a hard time getting her to leave later.

They had made it maybe a third of the way around the rink when she slowed down before stopping completely. Shane glanced down, noticing she was looking at something across the ice. He followed her gaze and caught sight of someone stepping onto the ice. And not just any person, it was Rozanov. Shane didn't need to be next to him to tell.

Kiyomi pointed, like he hadn't seen and wasn't fully watching the man skating onto the ice.

"Yaya," she said confidently. Of course she remembered his name.

"Yeah," he managed to reply, stuck between reaching to turn Kiyomi before they could be seen and just staying put. Before he could decide, Rozanov looked up and their eyes met.

Well.

Shane saw him go still at first. And then he was moving, smiling as he skated towards them. It was too late to turn away now. He stood very still and tried to look like a person who was very fine with this, like his heart wasn't trying to beat its way out of his chest.

"Hollander," Rozanov said when he was a few feet away. He looked from Shane to Kiyomi, his smile softening further. "Kiyomi. Hello again."

Kiyomi tried to wave, but she quickly gripped the penguin when her skates moved. "Hi Yaya," she said, as Shane also reached to steady her. Rozanov didn't look bothered at all by his new name.

"I didn't expect to see you here," Shane said.

"Did not expect to see you either," he replied, and then looked around. "Your parents have you babysitting?"

"I've been meaning to take her ice skating," Shane explained, carefully dodging that question.

"Is this your first time?" Rozanov asked, talking to Kiyomi again.

She nodded, and then decided to start scooting forward again. Rozanov moved out of the way, moving onto the other side of her. He clasped his hands behind his back, but Shane noticed he stayed close.

“You trying to get some extra practice in before we beat you tomorrow?” Shane asked after a bit.

“Yes, actually, though you know very well that will be the other way around,” Rozanov said. “How was your summer?”

“Busy,” Shane said honestly, taking his attention off of Kiyomi for a moment to watch Rozanov. “How was yours?”

“Boring,” he replied, frowning, but then he looked at Shane, the look he was giving him mischievous. “Or should I say not boring enough.”

That’s when Shane realized he could smell Rozanov, the pine scent just barely there, tucked away under the scarf he had wrapped around his throat. That meant neither of them were wearing a scent patch, which made sense since they weren’t actually in a professional setting.

Shane swallowed. “What do you mean?”

“I mean, at least I was not around the most boring person to exist,” he said, smirking now. “Jane. Who is a horrible texter, by the way.”

“I’ve been busy,” Shane insisted again, but he knew he had been avoiding Rozanov. “Besides —”

He didn’t get to finish his sentence because Kiyomi chose that moment to push the aid away from her, shuffling forward completely on her own.

She made one step, then another, and then she was slipping.

He and Rozanov both reached for her at the same time before she could go down fully. She ended up caught between them, still mostly upright, her skates sliding in two different directions. Shane had one arm and Rozanov had the other, keeping her steady together.

Kiyomi thought this was very funny. Her giggles burst from her like a fountain, and Shane felt himself smiling as he looked at Rozanov. He was already looking at him with a huge grin, his other hand reaching for the aid. Shane didn’t think he’d seen Rozanov grin like that before, distracted for a moment.

“Maybe we aren’t ready to go without this yet, huh?” Rozanov asked as he tugged the penguin closer.

“Noooo, no penguin,” Kiyomi started to say between her giggles, her skates still sliding haphazardly on the ice. “Wanna do it alone!”

“Kiyomi, please,” Shane said, trying to sound stern but the moment was actually so ridiculous that he couldn’t keep a straight face. He grabbed the other end of the aid. “Hold

on.”

Kiyomi kept fighting it, but she actually seemed like she would fall and reached out for the aid to save herself.

“She gets her stubbornness from you?” Rozanov asked as she got adjusted with it again.

Shane glanced at Rozanov with a raised eyebrow, trying to make it seem like he had no idea what he could be talking about. “We are both stubborn, yes,” he eventually said.

Rozanov hummed, looking down at Kiyomi as she caught herself and started her slow pace again.

———

They continued to lazily skate around the rink. Shane didn't make a big deal of it, just allowing Rozanov to fall into their orbit naturally, skating alongside them at Kiyomi's pace which was approximately the speed of a very determined snail.

He and Shane talked, about the season, their teams, and the upcoming game, carefully avoiding anything about them although Shane could feel the undercurrent of it. He could see it in the way Rozanov looked at him, in the way he shifted his position to make sure he was giving Shane his full attention while also keeping a watchful eye on the toddler between them.

Shane didn't want to admit it, but he was enjoying every single minute of it. At some point Rozanov crouched down and started to coach Kiyomi on how her stance would help her remain steady.

"You stand like this," he said, standing directly in front of her, his hands on his hips.

Kiyomi copied him, hesitant, but carefully standing up straight and settling her hands on her hips. "This?"

"Yes! Perfect," Rozanov said, and she beamed, looking up at Shane for his approval too.

Shane had been watching, trying to figure out exactly how and when this ended up happening, and why he was loving it so much. He smiled when Kiyomi looked back at him. "Exactly like that, baby."

They had been out there for a while when Kiyomi started to slow down in a different way, her movements slowing down even further, and the grip on the penguin loosening slightly. Shane noticed it before she did.

"I think we're coming up on nap time," he said, glancing at his watch. Sure enough, it actually was.

"No nap," she immediately said, trying to grip the penguin more tightly.

"Yes nap," Shane insisted, already reaching to turn her towards the boards. Rozanov mirrored him, moving up on Kiyomi's other side.

Kiyomi still looked like she wanted to fight it, opening her mouth, but then she seemed to think about it. She was very clearly tired, but Shane knew she was also just having a good time.

"Come on, you'll take a nap and then we can go see Emma and Jade later? You can tell them about how much you've learned," Shane said once they reached the boards, helping her step up off the ice and onto the bench area. He took a look at her red face and then unwrapped the scarf he wore, carefully wrapping it around her neck. She immediately burrowed her face into it, sighing. Then he crouched down to start unlacing her skates, Kiyomi's hands resting on his shoulders.

"Cold?" Rozanov asked, appearing beside him.

"She was," Shane said, focusing on the laces. "I'm fine."

Rozanov looked at him for a moment, and then he unwrapped his own scarf and held it out. Shane realized a moment later what he was doing and looked at it before looking up at Rozanov.

"You said you are fine," he said, his expression not giving anything away. "So this is just in case."

Shane hesitated, but then he took it. He wrapped it around his neck, almost immediately getting a lungful of Rozanov's deep scent, the pine mixing with whatever cologne he wore and also the scent of just him. He didn't realize he had paused until Rozanov cleared his throat, his eyebrows raising.

"We should get going," Shane said in a rush after that, his cheeks reddening as he finished working on Kiyomi's skates and then sat down to take off his as well. He got Kiyomi's shoes on while the girl looked like she was about to fall asleep on herself, barely letting Shane change into his own shoes before she was trying to climb into his lap.

A short while later he stood up with her in his arms, letting the girl tuck herself in while his free hand held both of their skates. He noticed Rozanov was still watching, like he was waiting to see them off.

"Good luck tomorrow," Shane said, nodding in Rozanov's direction. "You're going to need it."

"Mm. So will you," he replied. They looked at each other for a moment that stretched just slightly too long.

"Yaya," Kiyomi said, waving a hand out for Rozanov. Shane stepped in closer, watching as Rozanov reached out and let Kiyomi grab his finger. "Goodbye, Kiyomi."

"Bye bye," she said, and then laid her head back against Shane's shoulder.

"Will I see her tomorrow?" Rozanov asked Shane.

"Maybe." He hesitated again, his eyes focusing on Rozanov's lips as they had done so many times before. "Have a good practice, Rozanov."

Rozanov smiled, and then turned to skate back onto the ice.

Shane didn't realize until they were back inside his car that he was still wearing Rozanov's scarf. He didn't take it off.

———

The game the next day was exactly what it needed to be. Shane stepped onto the ice and his brain did what it always did, clearing out, settling, and focusing on hockey and nothing else. Of course he was aware of Rozanov, but they didn't interact much more than glances here and there. It felt like yesterday didn't happen, but with that same thought, Shane knew it existed in a different place for them both. Just like they were different people on the ice, they were different people yesterday, just enjoying skating with a toddler.

Montreal ended up winning.

Shane said the right things in the post game interview, changed quickly, and then drove straight to Hayden and Jackie's to pick up Kiyomi. They had been developing another routine of having Jackie take care of her along with her own kids, and Shane really liked having someone else he could trust to help with her when he was at games. And it helped that Jackie understood. Plus, Kiyomi was having an even better time with the twins.

She was mostly asleep when Jackie brought her to the door, passing her over to him with ease.

"Good game," Jackie said quietly, smiling at him.

"Thanks." He shifted Kiyomi's weight, keeping his voice low so he wouldn't wake her up. "Thank you for keeping her."

"Anytime, Shane. You know that. Go get some rest."

He did know that. He was just getting used to knowing that he had a bigger circle than ever.

He got Kiyomi buckled into her car seat, glad she stayed asleep through the buckle, which was a small victory, and then moved around to sit in the driver's seat. He glanced at his phone just as it buzzed.

Lily: what's a lonely girl to do in montreal?

Shane looked at it. Then he looked at his daughter asleep in the back seat. He would've assumed Rozanov would be out partying with his teammates, trying to get over their loss.

Jane: Aren't you leaving soon?

Lily: details, jane. details.

Shane rolled his eyes, smiling as he started the car and drove off.

———

Winter 2012

Shane was in the airport on the way to Boston, his carry-on between his feet and Rozanov's scarf wrapped around his neck. He had taken to wearing it every chance he got, even though the man's scent was beginning to fade away. If he sniffed deeply enough he could still get the trace of it. His phone buzzed and he glanced at it.

Speaking of him.

Lily: want to come while you're in boston?

Shane read it twice. And then a third time. He knew English wasn't Rozanov's first language so sometimes things got a little lost in translation.

Jane: Did you use google translate?

Lily: nope.

Jane: What you wrote makes no sense?

Lily: oh yes it does. read it again.

Shane scrolled back up and read it again, blinking before it suddenly clicked. He rushed to tuck his phone away like anyone could see it, his face flushing.

Rozanov would text something like that. He was too flustered to respond, but he couldn't deny that he was turned on. In the middle of an airport. With his teammates around him.

He sighed.

———

Kiyomi turned four on a Thursday, but he planned on having her party the weekend before. Shane had planned it carefully the way he planned everything, each detail meticulously checked off of a list as he moved forward.

Cake? He got that from a local bakery and it was actually designed like how Kiyomi wanted, pink and with butterflies. Check.

Guests? His parents were driving down from Ottawa and of course Hayden, Jackie, and the twins would be there. He even invited some of Kiyomi's favorite classmates from her daycare. Check.

He thought, momentarily, to invite Rozanov, but that thought fizzled out as soon as it came to his mind. They were nowhere near that point yet.

His parents arrived the night before, his mom taking over the kitchen immediately and his dad getting claimed by Kiyomi who had apparently been waiting for Papa since approximately six in the morning. By the time everyone arrived, Shane's apartment was full in a way it had never been before, loud and warm, the twins pulling Kiyomi into some game they had clearly planned on the drive over there while the daycare kids followed along trying to keep up.

The daycare parents tried very hard to be casual about meeting him, but Shane noticed as soon as they came to the door. Sometimes he forgot that people could recognize him off of the ice.

At one point Shane stood in his kitchen doorway and watched all of it, a calm settling over him. She was happy, so that meant he was happy.

"She's going to be completely feral by bedtime," Hayden said, appearing next to him after a few minutes. They both watched as Kiyomi started her own dance circle, managing to gather all the kids so they'd stand around her while she showed off her best moves.

"She already is," Shane told him. "She woke up at *five thirty*, Hayden."

"Because it's her birthday?"

"Because it's her birthday."

Hayden nodded solemnly. "Godspeed."

"What's funny is she's going to expect me to do this with her on her actual birthday, too," Shane said. Kiyomi had switched places with one of the twins, clapping in encouragement. "We're just going to have a quiet dinner together."

"That's what you think," Hayden told him, nudging Shane before he walked off in search of food.

The cake came out after lunch, and after singing happy birthday, Kiyomi took a very long time deciding how to make her wish. She screwed her eyes shut and thought about it with her whole face, the room going quiet around her, and then she blew out all four of her candles in one breath. She looked very pleased with herself.

Shane wondered what she wished for. He helped cut the cake while his mom handed out plates, and Shane could only hope Kiyomi knew how deeply loved she was.

Later that night after the guests had trickled out and he managed to put an exhausted Kiyomi to bed, Shane sat on his couch in the quiet of his apartment. He scrolled through the photos on his phone from the day – Kiyomi with her cake, Kiyomi with the twins, Kiyomi wearing her birthday crown slightly sideways because she insisted she liked it that way.

He stopped on one. It was a selfie of him and her, with Kiyomi sitting on his lap, her cheek squished to his as they both smiled for the photo. She had frosting on her cheek and Shane remembered reaching to wipe it away right after he took the picture.

He opened Lily's messages and sent the picture before he could talk himself out of it.

Jane: She turns 4 on Thursday.

Shane didn't even get the chance to put his phone down before it buzzed with a response.

Lily: she is so beautiful.

Lily: you both are. tell her i said happy birthday.

Shane smiled, a warmth blossoming in his chest. He didn't know what was happening between them, but he was beginning to realize that it was okay to not know everything for once.

Jane: I will.

Chapter End Notes

i think i just realized how slow of a burn this really is, phew. we're almost there you guys, promise.

chapter soundtrack: stranger by doja cat

Chapter 12: 2012 - 2013

Chapter Notes

> OMG 1000 kudos! You guys are amazing. Never thought I'd reach this point after writing (and actually posting) my first fic after YEARS. I'm so excited that you guys love this little world as much as much as I do. That said, I no longer have a backlog of chapters to post, so I'll be writing chapter by chapter and posting as I'm done. Appreciate all the support and love in advance! ❤️❤️

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Spring 2012

Shane felt like shit. Was it because the Metros didn't make it to the playoffs? Probably. Was it also because he started his heat that morning? More than likely. At least he knew it was going to happen today and prepared by asking his parents to take Kiyomi for the day. Without her there he didn't have to worry about taking care of anyone's needs but his own.

Heats were one of those things Shane had to compartmentalize. How he dealt with them was very specific. His suppressants took off some of the edge, but he was left with a lot of the symptoms that he had to work through, and he felt like he had a system after years of dealing with them on his own.

He always showered first, and sometimes multiple times, both because the warm water helped with the restlessness and also helped clean off the sticky feeling that developed. Then it was what he wore, sometimes it was bad enough that he'd curl up completely naked on his bed, but when he could manage to wear clothes he'd pull on his favorite hoodie. It was old, blue, and shapeless from years of washing and wearing it, but it was the only thing he reached to wear during his heats.

The heat itself really wasn't unbearable. Or that's what he thought, his tolerance was probably higher than most. It was just the persistent warmth, a low level restlessness that made him uncomfortable, but not unable to function. And honestly the cramps were nothing like his period cramps, and those were nothing like the contractions he experienced when giving birth. So overall, he could manage.

To add to his misery, though, Shane decided to watch the playoffs.

His eyes immediately tracked Rozanov on the ice, moving with his typical ease that only he could manage. Shane found that he enjoyed watching Rozanov play because of that ease, like he was born to skate and be on the ice. Shane knew he was just as good, but watching Rozanov would always be different.

He told himself it was because of his technique and not because of whatever was brewing between them.

He happened to be looking at the text exchange between him and Lily when a new message came through.

Lily: playoffs are fun. how come you aren't here?

Shane couldn't help but grin.

Jane: Fuck you, "Lily."

Lily: 😘

Jane: I'll see you next year, we'll see about the playoffs then.

Lily: you promise? i still want that pussy…and yes, is proper grammar.

Shane literally felt himself clench, the warmth of his slick gushing out onto the pad he wore. How far gone was he that words were doing this to him? He blamed it completely on the heat, not the words. And definitely not who wrote the words.

He tried to think of what to reply with, but his mind was hazy again from the heat. He was imagining him now, Rozanov in his locker room, typing those words. Rozanov with him. saying those words.

He clenched again. He had been shifting restlessly on the couch for the last hour, at some point pushing a couch pillow between his thighs. It had helped with the pressure and the cramping, but now he was rolling his hips down against it, slowly and unconsciously, his eyes flickering over to his phone and then up at the TV where Rozanov had been playing. He rolled his hips harder, chasing the friction while his mind continued to supply the memory of Rozanov pressing him into the wall on more than one occasion.

"Fuck," he whispered, throwing his phone to the side and hurrying to push his sweatpants down.

Summer 2012

Summer came and went the way it always did now, fast and full of activity. Kiyomi somehow looked bigger every time Shane looked at her, and his life in Montreal truly felt like it had settled into a rhythm of sorts. He continued training, spent time with his parents, and Hayden, Jackie and their kids got closer to them.

Most interestingly, he and Rozanov continued texting. Not every single day, but enough that it became a normal part of his life in a way that he had just stopped questioning it. Sometimes it was about hockey. Sometimes it was nothing but Rozanov reporting things that had happened to him and Shane just so happened to be someone he wanted to tell. Shane found comfort and being that person more than he was comfortable admitting.

In August the Metros called him and told him that he'd be captain of the team. It wasn't framed as a question, but Shane graciously accepted the title.

This was what he wanted, had worked for this specifically, had shown up every single day for three years and given everything he had to give. He worked his ass off. Early morning trainings, having a daughter at home that he had to leave for days at a time, all while being an omega. Of course no one knew that, but it was a large part of his identity. And even if the team didn't know the full picture, Shane knew. He had earned this as exactly who he was.

He called his parents first, and after they praised him for his hard work, he only wanted to speak to one other person. Rozanov.

Jane: They made me captain.

The response came back in under a minute.

Lily: no shit? It took them long enough.

Lily: you alone?

He wasn't alone, but Kiyomi was napping.

Jane: Sure. Why?

He didn't see a response from Rozanov, but his phone started to ring. He stared at it for a long moment before he answered it, blinking as his screen took a few minutes to connect to Rozanov's video. He was smiling when the video image became clear, and Shane immediately felt his heart stuttering, sitting up on his couch. He couldn't tell where Rozanov was, but it looked like he was alone. He looked like he had recently gotten out of the shower, or just finished a workout, because his curls looked damp.

"Hey," he said lamely.

"Hey. I wanted to personally say congratulations," Rozanov said.

"Well. Thank you," Shane said. "I just found out today."

"You deserve it," Rozanov said.

"Thanks." Shane shifted on the couch, still not entirely sure what to do with himself while Rozanov looked directly at him like this.

"How does it feel?"

"It feels weird. A good weird? I don't know. Like I've been working toward something for so long that I didn't think about what it would actually feel like to get there," Shane tried to explain.

Rozanov nodded, something obviously warm in his expression. “Yes. I know the feeling.”

“You want it too.” It wasn’t a question.

“Obviously. Boston will give it to me eventually. They have no choice,” Rozanov said, shrugging.

Shane laughed despite himself. “Humble as always.”

“I am always very humble, I don’t know what you’re talking about.” Rozanov tilted his head, watching Shane for a moment. “You look different.”

Shane pushed a hand through his hair, immediately feeling self-conscious. He hadn’t exactly prepared to be on video. “I haven’t done anything different.”

“No. You look. Settled? Is that how you would use that word?” Rozanov asked. “Like something fits now.”

Shane didn’t know what to say to that, so he looked away briefly, which was when he heard the soft padding of feet down the hallway.

Kiyomi appeared in the doorway, her hair in a wild halo around her head. She kept pushing it back as she made her way to Shane, yawning and moving to snuggle against him. That was when she seemed to notice the phone, and after a few more blinks, she noticed who was on it.

“Yaya!” she exclaimed, sitting up excitedly. “Hi!” Shane reached to comb her hair back off of her face, spotting the hair tie that had clearly slipped loose and using it to redo her pony tail.

Rozanov’s expression did something similar to the one Shane had seen that day on the ice rink. “Hello, Kiyomi.”

“I learned to skate!” she announced immediately, like it was the most important information he needed to have. Shane had been taking her more consistently for lessons, actually reaching out to a professional teacher that could teach her properly. And yeah, she was getting pretty good.

“Of course you did. Are you going to play hockey like Shane?” he asked, his eyebrows raised curiously. He was normally very animated when speaking, but Shane could see how much more he exaggerated when speaking to her.

She looked a little confused by the mention of Shane’s actual name, but luckily she didn’t comment on it. “Maybe,” she said, shrugging. Shane wasn’t going to push anything onto her before she was truly ready for it or loved it. Shane still played hockey because he loved it.

“You know, I heard penguins are actually very good at hockey,” Rozanov went on to say.

Her eyebrows shot up. “Nooo, they don’t play hockey!” she exclaimed, starting to laugh at the absurdity of his words.

“Have you seen for yourself?” Rozanov asked, very seriously, but the smirk on his face said otherwise.

Kiyomi shook her head, but continued to giggle. Shane found the entire exchange ridiculous, which was right up Kiyomi’s alley.

“Can we skate together again?” she asked.

“I don’t know, can we?” Rozanov was directing the question to Shane.

“We can see when our schedules can match. Remember Ilya is also on a hockey team, Mimi,” Shane reminded her.

“I know.” She looked like she was thinking about something for a moment. “Are you somebody’s daddy?”

Shane felt his stomach drop slightly. She really did say whatever came to her mind. “Kiyomi,” he said, while Rozanov blinked.

“No, I’m not. Not yet,” he eventually replied, but he was looking at Shane as he answered. Shane couldn’t even begin to analyze what the look meant. “Why?”

She shrugged slightly, climbing fully into Shane’s lap and settling against his chest. “More friends,” she said, like it was the most obvious thing. She looked around for something, leaning over to pick up the TV remote when she spotted it on the couch cushion. With the TV on, her attention was completely taken away.

Shane assumed that meant she was done talking to Ilya. “Sorry,” Shane said, holding the phone closer to him. “I have no idea what she’s going to say sometimes.”

“Don’t apologize,” Rozanov said, looking very much amused. “She’s a smart little thing.”

That made Shane grin, nodding in agreement. “She really is.”

They were quiet for a moment, just watching each other.

“Congratulations, Hollander,” Rozanov said finally. “Honestly.”

“Thanks, Rozanov.” Shane found it was easier to meet his eyes through the screen. “Honestly.”

Rozanov held his gaze for a beat longer than necessary. “I will see you,” he said.

Kiyomi’s head popped up immediately, reaching for Shane’s arm to move the phone so she could see Rozanov and wave. “Bye Yaya!”

“Bye bye,” Rozanov said, smiling as he reached to end the call.

Shane sat quietly, letting himself sink into feelings he didn’t have a name for yet. After a moment he sighed, and then buried his face into Kiyomi’s hair, kissing the top of her head. “I

love you, baby," he murmured.

"I love you too, daddy," she replied, and then changed the channel.

Fall 2012

Shane and Hayden were in their hotel room after a road game, both of them on their phones in the comfortable silence that had become normal between them. Hayden was watching something on his, and Shane was watching yet another hockey highlights reel. It was still a little too early for bed, but Shane's eyes already felt heavy. He'd probably turn in early that night.

He saw a notification from Lily come through his phone and clicked it to pull up the thread.

Lily: 2886 beacon

Shane squinted at it.

Jane: What's that?

Lily: a place where you can get what you want.

Jane: What do I want?

Lily: [Photo of Ilya's dick]

Shane breathed in sharply and flipped the phone face down on the mattress. Rozanov just sent him a photo of his cock, out of nowhere, and Shane could not breathe.

"You good?" Hayden asked, and when Shane looked up he was watching him curiously.

"Fine," Shane replied, trying his hardest to keep the expression on his face completely neutral.

"You sure? You look like something happened and you made a noise."

"I didn't make a noise."

"You definitely made a noise."

"Hayden."

Hayden shrugged and looked back at his phone. "Okay."

Shane waited a full minute before picking his phone back up, angling it carefully away from Hayden's line of sight.

Jane: Are you serious right now??

Lily: what? you have seen before.

Jane: Not on my phone!

Lily: ehh, think of it as preview. of real thing. or reminder?

Jane: You're such an asshole.

Lily: 😉

Winter 2013

It was another snowy day in January right before the new season would be starting when Shane invited Hayden, Jackie and the twins over to his place for dinner. They had a couple of days in between games and Shane spent half the time working out, keeping Kiyomi entertained, and practicing on the ice.

They were halfway through dinner, the kids settled and actually eating along with them, when Jackie set her fork down and looked at Hayden first and then at Shane.

"We're expecting," she said.

Shane felt something warm move through him. That was why Jackie's scent had subtly changed. He had no real reason to mention it, since both Hayden and Jackie were betas so their sense of smell wasn't as strong as his or an alpha's. "Yeah?"

"Eight weeks." She was smiling and so was Hayden, even though he looked more proud than anything else. "We just found out."

"Congratulations! How are you feeling?" he asked Jackie.

"Tired. A little nauseous in the mornings. Nothing I can't handle."

"It's more than a little, she's absolutely miserable in the morning until she gets her tea," Hayden said.

Shane nodded, turning his fork over in his hand. "Do you think you knew right away? Like… something was different?"

Jackie glanced at him. "Pretty quickly, yeah. The nausea was hard to ignore."

Shane was quiet for a moment longer, glancing at Kiyomi next to him. He thought about being sixteen and being completely unaware that his body was doing something enormous while he just kept showing up to hockey practice. "When I was pregnant with Kiyomi," he started to say, his voice still quiet, but even, "I didn't know for a long time. I didn't recognize

what I was feeling as anything significant. Until the very end, when she was ready to be born."

Jackie and Hayden were still quiet, but Shane immediately knew he hadn't made a mistake with telling them.

"That must've been so hard," Jackie said finally, her voice quiet.

"It was. But look at the reward." Shane glanced at the little girl next to him.

"Yeah. That's the beauty of it all," she said,

"That explains a lot," Hayden finally said, and Shane didn't know what he meant. His face must've shown that, because Hayden continued, "I mean, you never spoke about her mom. And not many moms can just abandon their pups."

He was right about that. Shane couldn't imagine leaving Kiyomi or letting someone else entirely raise her. Even the thought made his heart ache. "That's true."

"Have you told anyone else?" Jackie asked.

Shane shook his head, looking at Hayden for a long moment. He seemed to immediately get it. "Your secret is safe with me, man. I have no business telling anyone anything," he said, and Shane could tell he meant it.

"Thank you for telling us, Shane," Jackie added, and Shane could literally feel something loosen in his chest that had been tight for a very, very long time.

"You won't think of me any differently?" He knew what the stigma was around omegas. And he knew it was unheard of to have an omega in a professional sport like hockey.

"Me? Hell no. You're still the Metros' bad ass captain. Your designation doesn't change that. In fact, it makes you even more of a bad ass."

"Hayden," Jackie said, glancing at the three kids who luckily did not seem to be tuned into their conversation.

"Oh, sorry, but. You know what I mean, right? You're good, Shane. I'll never think of you any differently."

"Thank you both. Seriously. Especially for not making it weird."

Hayden picked up his fork, ready to get back to eating. "I mean. It is a little weird."

"Hayden!" Jackie looked like she was ready to throw something at him to shut her husband up.

"What! I'm joking…mostly. I do have questions," Hayden said, but before he could ask them, Jackie cut him off with her own question.

“Do you think you’d want to give Kiyomi a sibling one day?”

That made Shane pause, because honestly, he hadn’t given it much thought. Of course when he was younger he had imagined himself with a family much like his own. He’d have a partner, and they’d have at least one child together.

And then that hockey camp happened, and well. Obviously Kiyomi wasn’t planned, but she was his greatest gift. Did that mean he had achieved his goal of having his family? There was still a part of him that knew he wanted more than this.

“Maybe one day. After retirement? It would be nice to actually…choose to do it,” Shane admitted.

Jackie smiled, nodding encouragingly. “I get it. And you’re already such a good dad, so. When it’s time, it’ll be time.”

“Just pace yourself, buddy, don’t end up like us,” Hayden added.

Shane laughed when Jackie finally threw her napkin at him.

Spring 2013

Kiyomi never forgot about the phone call with Rozanov during the summer. She brought it up periodically, and Shane wasn’t avoiding asking, necessarily, but he also wasn’t rushing to ask Rozanov. Even though they were still communicating on a regular basis, asking if he’d go ice skating with them felt like crossing another boundary that he hadn’t even realized was there.

That all said, he held out until March. He sent a text to Rozanov asking if he remembered, and next thing he knew Rozanov had shown up in Ottawa two days later. Shane knew he traveled on an off day for it, just for them, and that thought alone triggered that particular warmth that only ever bloomed because of Rozanov.

Shane spent two full hours watching Kiyomi skate back and forth on the ice while Rozanov skated around her, correcting her form and showing her some techniques. It was amazing to see how much progress she had made in a year, but it was also still amazing to see Rozanov in this setting. This was yet another reason he couldn’t think of Rozanov as a bad person. Cocky? Yes. Competitive as hell? Also yes. Even calling him an asshole had turned into a term of endearment between them, because they both knew Shane didn’t have a single ounce of malice behind it.

He again had a moment where he thought, what was this? He wanted to pull Rozanov aside and demand they speak about it, but of course they just didn’t. They kept orbiting each other, speaking without words and using actions to suffice. Like when Rozanov accepted the scarf he had given Shane the year prior, only to give him another that was once again soaked with the man’s scent. He accepted it without complaint, and that’s when he really knew.

Shane was fucked. Head over heels, so to speak. An absolute mess for Ilya Rozanov.

Kiyomi thanked Rozanov without Shane having to ask her to and Rozanov wished her an early happy birthday. Shane didn't realize Rozanov would remember.

Oh, Shane was *double fucked.*

On the ride home, Shane's phone buzzed with an incoming message. He waited until they were home to check it.

Lily: if boston wins, i get to fuck you next fall. deal?

Shane finally noticed that Rozanov was doing this on purpose. He didn't talk like this to him in person, not just because Kiyomi was around, but for some other reason. Like he knew both of them couldn't handle the conversation. Or at least Shane knew he couldn't.

Jane: What do I get if Montreal wins?

Lily: same thing 😘

Shane sighed, but mentally added yet another date to look forward to.

Chapter End Notes

chapter soundtrack: honey blonde by joe jonas

see you guys in the next one 🥰

Chapter 13: 2013

Chapter Notes

Finally.

That's all I've got. But oh! I am proud to say I have finally finished the Heated Rivalry book and have started The Long Game, so if you see bits and pieces from that canon, I'm sorry in advance, lol.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Fall 2013

Of course Montreal beat Boston. Shane had gone into it as tense as possible, only made worse by Rozanov sexting him before they even got onto the ice. He was horrible at sexting — he always said too much or too little, and never the right thing — and Rozanov definitely had to know that too. Didn't stop him from feeling flustered, turned on, upset, and anxious, all wrapped into one uncomfortable bundle that he had to fight through in order to play the damn game.

Shane said the right things in the post game interview, shook the right hands, and did everything that was expected of him as captain. Now his mind was actually somewhere else entirely. He'd said he'd text Rozanov after the game if he was lucky, but they both knew luck had nothing to do with it.

He was in the locker room, still in his gear, when he pulled out his phone and opened up Lily's message thread. He hovered over the keyboard for a long moment, still very upset that Rozanov had even decided to sext him before the game, but then…he still *wanted him.*

He hurriedly typed out his address and sent it. Not the apartment he lived in with Kiyomi, but this was his newest investment property that he had plans on renting out one day. As much as he was down for Rozanov he didn't think he was ready to accept him into his actual space.

Either way, it was quiet, and tucked away. Which was good for illicit hook-up sessions, he supposed.

It took him some time to get out of his gear, calling Jackie as he made his way to the parking lot. Kiyomi had a pre-planned sleepover with the twins, so she was well taken care of, and Shane had the night off, as Jackie had called it. If only she really knew what Shane had planned.

He had just gotten out of the shower when he saw his phone light up with the incoming message from Rozanov.

Lily: be there soon.

———

Shane was waiting by the entrance to his apartment when Rozanov texted that he was there. He pushed open the door and waved for Rozanov to come.

He had the nerve to look suspicious. “You will murder me?” he asked.

“Maybe.” Shane knew he looked pissed, but it was really that he was nervous. His brain had been running the same loop since the locker room, questioning why he was doing this, what it meant, and what would happen after. He needed Rozanov inside before anyone would see him.

“Get in here.”

He finally moved to stop inside and Shane grabbed him, pushing him against the wall. “What makes you think it’s okay to sext me before the game? What the fuck?” he asked as soon as his back hit the wall.

Rozanov’s eyebrows flew up. “You were turned on? For how long? Whole game?”

Shane groaned and turned to start to walk up the steps to his apartment. “Fuck off. That’s why we beat your ass.”

“Barely.”

They ran the rest of the way up the steps.

Inside the apartment, Shane toed his shoes off at the door, glancing back when Rozanov did the same. The apartment itself was obviously not very lived in, but it had the basics. In the silence Shane felt the nerves again, biting his lip as he watched Rozanov look around, taking everything in.

After a long moment he turned to give Shane his full attention, just watching him. Shane hadn’t put a scent patch back on after his shower, and a quick sniff to the air confirmed that Rozanov wasn’t wearing one either. The pine hit him immediately, softer than it would have been up close but already doing things to his omega that his brain was trying very hard to stay ahead of.

It was losing.

Rozanov stepped in close, reaching to rest his hand on the nape of Shane’s neck. When he gripped it, Shane felt muscles he didn’t know were tense go loose, his shoulders sagging and he would’ve stumbled forward if Rozanov’s warm and solid body wasn’t there, crowding in closer.

“Good?” he asked quietly.

Shane was nodding before the question fully registered, his brain briefly offline. He made himself come back to verbally answer. “Good,” he whispered. “Yeah.”

His eyes trailed up his chest, landing on the man’s lips before Rozanov was surging forward, their lips finally, *finally* connecting.

Shane’s hands immediately flew up to touch Rozanov wherever he could, letting go of everything he had been holding back. He could smell Rozanov everywhere, without the patch it consumed him, making him realize how starved he was for it before he could fully admit it. He pulled his lips back and pressed his face into Rozanov’s neck instead, right above his scent gland, breathing him in like he couldn’t get enough of it.

“Fuck,” Shane whispered, feeling his knees go weak again, but Rozanov was there, cupping his hands under Shane’s ass.

“Mm, I got you,” Rozanov murmured, lifting Shane and turning in the direction of where he assumed the bedroom was.

Inside it he carefully rested Shane on the bed, and Shane reached to shove off the mountain of pillows that were there, not caring where they fell.

“Clothes, off,” Shane insisted, needing to see Rozanov again. For once there was no response, and together they worked to get rid of their clothing, coming back together when they were naked.

Shane’s legs parted for Rozanov who settled down in between them, leaning up on his hands to look down at Shane. His eyes swept up and down his body, and Shane could almost feel the want flowing off of him in waves.

“Come on,” he mumbled, wiggling and rolling his hips so he could press his very hard cock against Rozanov’s.

That seemed to break Rozanov out of whatever trance he was in, leaning down to press one kiss to Shane’s chest, trailing the kisses up to his neck. He nuzzled into the skin there, breathing in.

“You still want?” he asked, kissing along Shane’s jaw to his lips.

Shane thought it was very obvious that he still wanted him. They’d been at this, teasing each other for far too long, stealing glances, and sharing looks. Shane couldn’t think of anything or anyone else he wanted more. It was scary to admit it, but it was true.

“I still want,” he murmured against Rozanov’s lips, his hand reaching to slide into his curls. “I want you to fuck me.”

Rozanov damn near growled, the sound rumbling low in his chest. He pressed his hips down into Shane’s in a way that made him gasp again, and then he was moving again, kissing down Shane’s chest.

He moved without rushing, his hands and lips touching Shane everywhere. His breath hitched when Rozanov paid special attention to his nipples, worrying the sensitive skin there for a moment before he continued down. Shane could feel himself sinking into it, letting the arousal take over every single bit of logical thoughts that always seemed to be crowding his mind.

Rozanov's scent was everywhere and Shane already felt drunk on it. Even with his legs pressed open like they were, Shane could feel the slick gathering, and it made him feel a twinge of embarrassment.

"You're thinking," Rozanov said suddenly against his stomach.

"I'm not," Shane immediately replied, the response alone showing that he *was* thinking. He leaned up to look down at Rozanov. He was gazing up at him, his hands smoothing up and down the inside of Shane's thighs. The movement gave him something to focus on, his body relaxing further.

"There you go," Rozanov murmured, and then he was pushing Shane's thighs up towards his chest.

"Rozanov…"

"Shh, I got you."

His mouth found Shane's cock first, his tongue dragging up the length of it and making Shane's hips jerk. He moved lower, his lips pressing to the inside of his thigh first, and then lower still, his mouth finding the soft cleft of Shane's entrance where the slick had already gathered.

"So wet already," he murmured, and Shane wasn't sure if he wanted to sink down into the bed or levitate from it, not getting to decide when Rozanov finally parted him with his tongue, licking slow and firm from his entrance up through the folds, collecting the slick that kept pouring from him.

"Ungh, god."

Rozanov was thorough in a way that felt like torture, his tongue moving with a deliberate precision that immediately left Shane shuddering. He kept his hands on Shane's thighs, pressing them down and making sure they stayed open, even when they tried to fall shut. Shane's slick kept coming and that would've been embarrassing if he had the time to think about it, but luckily he couldn't quite *think.*

"Rozanov," Shane was gasping, his back arching off of the bed. "I need–"

Rozanov just kept licking, but one of his hands released Shane's thigh to wrap around his cock instead, stroking him steadily. The dual sensation knocked the air of him instantly, his fingers unconsciously digging into the skin behind his own knees.

"Fuck, *fuck,* it's too much, I can't–"

“It’s not,” he heard Rozanov saying, his hand still moving even as he spoke. “You can take it.”

His mouth latched back on and just like that Shane could feel himself coming apart, crying out loudly enough that he swore the sound bounced off the walls of his apartment. His body convulsed with the waves, rocking up into Rozanov’s mouth. And he didn’t stop either, his tongue still pressing against Shane’s cock in a way that would’ve been overstimulating if he didn’t feel Rozanov’s hand moving down again, distracting him. He pressed two fingers inside of him while Shane still shook with the aftershocks, and Shane could hear himself crying out again, still oversensitive.

“Oh, Roz,” he moaned, stuck between twisting away and pressing down onto the fingers.

“It’s–fuck, I–” Rozanov pressed his fingers further inside and then curled them, pressing up into a spot that made him see stars.

He needed Rozanov inside of him *right now*.

“Wait, hold on,” Shane whined, and Rozanov immediately stopped, slipping his fingers out of him.

“You okay?” he asked, letting Shane’s leg go so he could unfold it while he twisted, reaching towards his side table.

“I’m good, just.” Shane reached the table and tugged open the drawer, pulling out a strip of condoms. Rozanov leaned over to see, smirking when he saw what he needed to get to so urgently.

“You think you have enough?”

“Shut up.” Shane was sure his face was completely red, despite having just come in the man’s mouth.

“I am not complaining, Hollander,” Rozanov said softly, and now he was smiling that smile he only saved for Shane. He took one of the condoms and leaned back onto his knees, rolling it onto his cock while Shane watched, seeing a little more clearly in the post-orgasm haze. Was he really about to do this?

“Okay?” he asked Shane, and he was nodding before he even realized it. It was true, though.

“Okay,” Shane said, leaning up to wrap a hand around the back of Rozanov’s neck and pull him down into a kiss.

He focused on their lips moving in tandem, one of his hands sliding into Rozanov’s hair while he clearly started to position himself. When he finally started to press inside of him, Shane’s breath caught. Rozanov continued to kiss him through it, moving slowly, but deliberately, like he knew to be careful.

Rozanov was big enough that it made Shane’s eyes sting with tears, but he forced himself to breathe, his hips automatically lifting to try and help with the pressure.

“Hollander,” Rozanov whispered, finally fully seated inside of Shane. He stayed like that for a few long moments, breathing in and out slowly like he was also trying to pace himself.

“Okay?” he eventually asked, pressing a kiss to Shane’s earlobe. Once, and then twice, making Shane involuntarily shudder.

“Move,” Shane said, his voice coming out wrecked. “Please move.”

Rozanov started to move, still slow, each thrust careful and measured in a way that Shane was sure would drive him mad. He could feel every inch of him, his body stretching to accommodate while his slick worked overtime to make the slide easier. He could hear Rozanov, he was murmuring something, but Shane couldn’t tell if it was English or Russian, not with the way his face tucked into his neck.

Shane’s hips started to roll up to meet him, and slowly Rozanov’s rhythm changed. He started to move with more urgency, pulling out till just the tip remained before slamming back inside. Shane jerked with it, his eyes rolling back while he gripped Rozanov’s shoulders.

“More,” Shane gasped, and Rozanov immediately gave it to him, the pace speeding up until Shane literally couldn’t think of anything besides how damn good Rozanov felt.

Shane could already feel the pressure of yet another orgasm building, his whole body winding tight, chasing it. He rolled his hips to move with Rozanov, moving on pure instinct.

“I’m close,” he whimpered, but before he could get any closer, Rozanov was pulling out and turning Shane over, adjusting him so he was on his knees. He pressed back inside and Shane moaned with it, his vision whiting out at the edges.

“Okay?” Rozanov asked, folding over Shane’s back.

“Fuck, yes, yes, okay,” Shane was gasping, and he could’ve sworn he heard Rozanov laughing as he leaned back up onto his knees. He was deeper like this, rougher, and Shane could barely focus enough to hold his upper body up.

He fell forward, and Rozanov tightened his grip on Shane’s hips, continuing to properly fuck into him. Shane rocked with them, punched out little moans leaving him with each thrust.

“I’m…I’m gonna,” Shane started to whine again, his fingers curling into the sheets.

“Fuck, Hollander,” Rozanov groaned, and then Shane was coming again, his body jerking and tightening around Rozanov.

He kept thrusting, but Shane could feel him shuddering, his rhythm faltering. He thrust twice more than he was stopping, still buried completely inside of Shane.

Shane could feel it, the way his cock spasmed, and for one ridiculous moment that he’d never admit to later, he wished there wasn’t a condom between them.

Rozanov fell forward on top of Shane, pressing him into the bed. He was heavy, but Shane didn’t feel crushed. It was a pleasant pressure, adding to all the other feelings that were

coursing through him, his omega completely settled in a way it only ever was when Rozanov was this close.

Eventually, though, everything started to come back into focus. He could feel himself pressed into the wet spot on the bed.

He shifted and Rozanov seemed to snap out of it, moving over and onto his side with Shane. He didn't pull out just yet, his hand smoothing down Shane's side to stop at his hip. "You kill me, Hollander. I am finished. Done."

Shane huffed out a laugh. "That good, huh?" he asked softly, but he couldn't deny he felt the same way. "Now the bed is all wet."

"Mm, who cares, shut up." He pressed a kiss to Shane's shoulder and then nuzzled into the side of his neck. Shane knew he was scenting him, and the thought alone set another pleasant tingle through his body.

"Worth the wait?" Rozanov asked.

Shane didn't have to think about it. "Yeah," he said softly. He twisted as much as he could, looking back at Rozanov. "Worth the wait."

Rozanov smirked, leaning in to kiss his lips. It was soft and gentle, definitely different from the other kisses they shared. Each kiss still felt like a small spark, zinging through his body and settling warm in his chest.

"We should shower," he murmured after a moment. Shane nodded in agreement and Rozanov carefully pulled himself out of Shane, reaching to carefully pull the condom off. Then he shuffled off the bed and Shane followed, cringing at the way his thighs felt slightly tacky from all of his slick.

———

In the shower they kept it simple, focusing on cleaning. Shane stood under the spray and let the heat work into his muscles while Rozanov stepped in and rubbed a soapy cloth over his back. Shane let him, belatedly realizing that while this wasn't the first time he took a shower with another person nearby, it was the first time after having sex. There was something significant about that. Something he didn't have a word for yet.

"You feel okay?" Rozanov asked him, and Shane assumed it was because of how tense his shoulders were. He tried to relax them, turning so he was facing Rozanov.

"I'm fine," he said, but he knew that was only partially true. He hesitated, forcing himself to glance up to catch Rozanov's gaze. "So. What happens now?"

"Now? We get dressed, I go back to my hotel," Rozanov replied, as casual as ever.

"No, you know what I mean," Shane said, frowning. He had to know. He had to feel this.

“I don’t. We have sex, this was good,” Rozanov said, finishing with washing the soap off of his skin and then reaching to turn off the water. Before stepping out, he reached for Shane, wrapping an arm around his waist and pulling him in close. “Right?”

Shane didn’t want this to just be sex. But then he didn’t quite know what he really wanted, and maybe that was the problem. The sex *was* good. He couldn’t deny that. Maybe that’s what he had to focus on for now. Maybe this would be easier than grasping at something that was barely there.

“Right.”

Rozanov hummed, pressing a light kiss to Shane’s lips before he shifted to step out of the shower. Shane stood for a moment longer before following him out.

———

Later, they were dressed and Shane led the way out of his apartment. He sat down on the bottom step while they waited for Rozanov’s cab, tilting his head back against the wall.

“Are you excited for the Olympics?” he asked.

“Yeah, sure.” Rozanov leaned back against the wall across from him.

“Must be nice that they’re in Russia. Your parents will get to be there?”

“My dad, probably. Maybe my brother, but who knows,” Rozanov said, and Shane got the feeling he didn’t really care. “What about your parents? And Kiyomi?”

“They wished they could come, but logistically, it just didn’t make sense,” Shane told him, shrugging slightly. He really wasn’t looking forward to being away from his daughter for more than a week. “Kiyomi will stay with them.”

“Kiyomi will stay with your parents,” Rozanov repeated, leaning forward as he continued to look at Shane.

Shane felt it the moment the words were repeated. The misstep. He shifted, his heart picking up immediately while his mind scrambled to find a way to explain it and finding nothing. “I mean.” He paused, staring at the blank wall next to Rozanov’s head. “She normally stays with me.”

Rozanov didn’t say anything, but his eyebrow raised, just slightly.

Shane knew he could trust Rozanov. As far as he knew he hadn’t told anyone about his designation, and Shane truly believed he wouldn’t. But this was his Kiyomi. The most important person in his life, the one person he had protected the most. He only ever shared her with people who had absolutely earned it. But when he thought about it, hadn’t Rozanov earned it?

He looked at Rozanov, his stomach twisting in fear.

“Because she’s my daughter,” Shane said, his voice coming out much quieter than he had intended. He kept his eyes on Rozanov’s face, watching for every flicker of reaction, his whole body tense.

Rozanov’s face softened, a small smile spreading across his lips. “I know.”

Shane blinked. “You know?”

“How could I not know? You do not refer to her as though she is just your sister,” Rozanov explained. “And it is not the first time you mentioned your parents, as though they are yours, and not also hers.” He reached out to brush the back of his knuckles against Shane’s cheek. “You also look exactly like her.”

Shane could only stare at him. He had spent years of managing this cover story, making sure every word and every reference he made was exactly right. The idea of someone just quietly figuring it out, without Shane having to say anything, was almost too much for him to sit with.

His eyes stung, but he quickly blinked away the feeling. Maybe it was different because he had never let anyone get as close to him like this.

“Is it that obvious?” Shane asked.

Rozanov nodded. “Very obvious. Don’t worry. It is cute. You are both cute.”

Shane looked away again, pressing his lips together in a way that helped ground him. He felt exposed now, and it was different from every other time that he’d been exposed around Rozanov. This was more than him just finding out about his designation. This was Rozanov having watched him and his interactions with Kiyomi, for long enough to see what was really happening. But he kept it to himself, instead waiting for Shane to be ready.

He couldn’t describe what that felt like, but he did know he’d never felt it before.

Rozanov seemed to understand that, because he didn’t push for more.

“Hope you are ready for the bronze medal,” Rozanov continued on to say after a long moment, smirking at Shane.

Shane laughed despite everything, the tension easing. “Oh, you fucking wish.”

“I guess we will see.” Rozanov crowded into Shane’s space again, nuzzling into the side of his neck, and Shane leaned in automatically to do the same. His nose pressed against Rozanov’s pulse point, where his scent was the strongest. He didn’t think he could ever get enough of the pine.

“Your cab is probably here,” Shane murmured.

Rozanov pulled back, only to press a kiss to Shane’s lips. “See you, Hollander.” He pressed another kiss to his lips and then he was finally standing up.

“Bye,” Shane said, watching as Rozanov gave him a small wave before he pushed open the door and left.

Shane stared at the closed door for a long moment before he sighed, and then turned to make his way back up the steps.

Chapter End Notes

chapter soundtrack: adorn by miguel

Chapter 14: 2014 - Part I (Ilya)

Chapter Notes

Ilya's back, baby.

A little bit of a shorter chapter, but I needed to get this out before we jump into the next bit. Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

February 2014
Sochi, Russia

Ilya normally didn't mind after game interviews, whether he won or lost, but this one was unbearable. He had just gotten his gear off before he was being directed to the room where the reporters had gathered. They threw questions out in a combination of Russian and English and Ilya, already flustered from the loss, struggled to keep track of who asked what, and in what language to answer in.

"This has been a crushing loss for Russia, what will be your next steps?" One reporter asked, in Russian, thankfully.

Ilya fought the urge to roll his eyes. "I will go back to America and continue the pursuit for the Stanley Cup. This loss was just that, a loss, but I am confident that I will be able to use this as a lesson rather than a barrier to achieving what I truly want."

That seemed to please them because they thanked him, wished him good luck, and that was it.

Everything was so cold in Russia. He was sure there were people who lived good lives here, raising their children, pursuing their careers, and whatever made people happy, but for Ilya it was just cold.

Bleak. Dark.

It had felt like this for years, especially after his mother died. Irina Rozanov was the light in his life. The reason he got into hockey and continued to play. She was the one who woke up early with him to teach him how to skate on the pond in their backyard, and then later at the local rink. She managed all of that while also managing the house as she was supposed to be doing as his father's omega.

Russia had a particular way of treating its omegas. Ilya had grown up understanding this the way he understood other facts about the world, quietly and through observation of his mother

in particular. She navigated spaces that weren't quite ever designed with her, with an ease that made Ilya feel how strong she was.

Female omegas were tolerated here, managed, and expected to present themselves in ways that made everyone around them comfortable. As long as they were useful and unobtrusive, they were seen as valuable in a home.

Male omegas were something else entirely. Something Russia didn't quite have the language for. All Ilya knew was that they were the absolute bottom of the barrel. They were shameful for having a designation that belonged to a woman, and therefore diminished any man who carried it. It didn't get any better as Ilya grew up. The latest he heard, male omegas had to be registered as soon as they presented or they could face being detained.

His mother had been an omega who did everything right and it still wasn't enough. His father wore her down, Ilya could see that now. She tried her best to hide it, to put on a smile when she was around him and his brother, but looking back on those fleeting memories, Ilya could see it. He could hear it too, when his father didn't bother with lowering his voice when berating her. He knew how harsh his father was with him, he could only imagine how much worse he was with his mother.

Ilya found her when he was twelve and he knew something had shifted in him that day. His hate for his father further blossomed, but additionally a quiet and specific hatred for Russia took root in his heart, because it had handed his father the world, but handed his mother nothing.

That all made him think of Hollander being here.

He was a male omega, unregistered, and therefore carrying a secret that could possibly end his career in Canada and definitely end his freedom in Russia. It didn't matter how long he was staying. If anyone got a word or a whiff of his scent, he could be taken.

Shane had texted him earlier, probably after he learned about the loss, but Ilya purposely ignored it. Maybe the safest thing he could do for Hollander was make him angry enough to stay away. Even when they went back to America, Ilya knew he was too complicated to insert himself even more into their lives. Whatever that was had to stop.

Ilya had watched his own mother disappear. He didn't want to think of Kiyomi being forced to watch the same thing happen to her father.

Ilya sighed and reached up to grip the pendant on his necklace. He just wanted to go home and be away from all of this.

—

"Hey."

Ilya didn't have to look to know it was Hollander. He was standing up in the stands, away from the rest of the crowd as he watched the figure skating event. Of course Hollander managed to find him.

“Not here,” he said, not even wanting to glance in Hollander’s direction. He told himself it was to stop himself from letting that beautiful face, with those gorgeous freckles lure him in closer.

“I just saw you up here and wanted to see how you’re doing,” Hollander said, instead of leaving like he had hoped.

Ilya finally did look at him, his frown deepening because, yes, he looked even prettier than he was the last time had seen him. Bundled up in his Canada jacket, his cheeks slightly pink from the chill of the rink. He wished he could lean in and bury his face in his neck, right at his pulse point where his sweet vanilla scent was the strongest. He knew it would ease whatever anxiety was stirring in his gut. Even if things were different, he could tell Hollander had a scent patch on, which was good. It meant no one else would smell what Ilya already knew.

“I’m fine. You can go,” Ilya said, looking back out on the ice.

“We haven’t–”

“We aren’t anything,” Ilya said, cutting him off before he could continue. “Please. Go.”

“Are you okay? You didn’t answer my text, so I was just –”

“No, I didn’t answer your boring text, Hollander,” Ilya said roughly, and he could immediately see the way his words hurt Hollander when he took a step back. It hurt him too, but it needed to be done. What Hollander didn’t know was how much it hurt him too. “Now will you go?”

“Fine. Fuck.” And then finally he left. Ilya watched him, physically feeling like a piece of him had been ripped off and was walking away. This was for the best. It had to be.

—

His childhood home felt smaller than he could remember. He had his own place in Moscow when he came back for the summers, but his father still liked to make him go to events with him. To show him off, he thought, the professional hockey player that practically carried the family now.

Grigori Rozanov was in the sitting room when Ilya forced himself to come downstairs, already dressed for the gala he didn’t want to attend.

“You played poorly,” his father said, his voice gruff once when he heard Ilya’s steps.

“I know, father,” Ilya said, “I will do better next time.”

“Next time? Latvia, Ilya. Do you not realize the amount of shame you have brought onto your home? To Russia.”

Ilya swallowed hard. “I know, father. I am ashamed.”

“Your play is sloppy, it is like you have let the American way of playing distort your true abilities,” he insisted, reaching for the bottle of vodka he had on the table in front of him. He poured some of the liquid into two glasses, nudging one in Ilya’s direction as he moved further into the sitting room.

Ilya picked up the glass, but didn’t drink yet, knowing he had to continue listening to his reprimand fully, without interruption.

“Somehow, the minister still wants to meet with you. Despite the loss,” his father grumbled, standing as he took a sip of his vodka. He stepped closer to Ilya and, Ilya, purely out of habit, straightened his stance.

“Who did this? Your mother?” he asked, reaching to fix the bowtie Ilya had on.

Ilya paused, staring at his father for a long moment. “No, Father. Mom is dead,” he explained, his voice quiet. “Do you remember?”

Grigori blinked a few times, looking lost at first, and then he visibly pulled himself together. Ilya had no love left for his father, but he disliked seeing how he was falling victim to this disease. “Of course, I know,” he said, fussing with Ilya’s bowtie until it was straight.

“Where is Polina?” Ilya asked. His father had remarried after his mother’s death, but to a beta woman who he couldn’t quite control as much as he could control his mother. She made it very clear what her stance was in Grigori’s life, and it wasn’t under his thumb.

“Moscow,” he answered, and then turned away, frowning at nothing.

Ilya knew he was having a hard time remembering what was happening. He could see it in the way he continued to blink, staring out at the sitting room.

“We should go. To meet the minister at the gala,” Ilya said, watching to see if his father would snap out of it.

He did, nodding and finishing off the vodka in his hand and then moving to retrieve his overcoat. Ilya remembered he had some in his own glass and swallowed it all in one gulp, letting the burn wake him up.

Time to put on his slightly more approachable mask.

—

Spring 2014

Back in Boston, Ilya threw himself back into hockey. He trained hard, pushed his team harder, and his teammates either respected him or feared him enough to keep up without too many complaints. They knew Ilya had a goal in mind, and by default so did they.

He didn’t text Hollander. He opened the message thread and stared at the last message Jane had sent. He put himself back in that moment at the Olympics when he tried his hardest to

push Hollander away. He hadn't sent any new messages after that and Ilya knew deserved the silence. It was the right thing. It was what he had wanted.

So why did it still sting?

A month passed before Ilya even noticed. He had added Kiyomi's birthday to his calendar, so on the 22nd of March, Ilya opened up the message thread again.

Lily: tell kiyomi i said happy birthday. i hope she is still skating.

Hollander didn't have to answer. Hell, maybe he even blocked Ilya, but on the off chance that he didn't, at least he could know that he was thinking about him and his daughter. He put his phone face down and didn't check it until forty-five minutes later, when he was at the rink for their practice.

Jane: She says thank you. She is still practicing. She's gotten really good.

Lily: not surprising with a father like you.

Hollander didn't respond. Ilya wasn't surprised. He put his phone away and got on the ice, trying not to dwell on it. He knew what he had done, and honestly, he was happy that Hollander hadn't immediately folded and let him back into his life.

The texts remained sporadic after that. They were nothing like before Sochi, when they used to text back and forth continuously and sometimes talk to each other on the phone. Hollander stuck to sending messages that were related to Kiyomi, like when she wanted Ilya to know she was going to try hockey for the first time. Ilya longed to video message them so he could hear from the girl herself, but he didn't want to overstep the boundaries Hollander was clearly trying to keep up. So, Ilya didn't initiate anything more, and Hollander followed suit.

Essentially, it was torture. A necessary torture. He had to keep telling himself that this was for the best. And the longer they went with this habit, the easier it became.

They made it all the way to the end of playoffs, and their final game would be for the Stanley Cup against San Francisco. The morning of the game, Ilya was actually anxious. He was confident that his team would come out on top, but he couldn't shake the nerves that swirled in the pit of his stomach.

Ilya knew one person that could help ease it. He opened Jane's message thread and sent a quick, random message. When Hollander actually answered, he spent a few minutes exchanging messages, slowly feeling some of the anxiety ease. He knew it was stupid, that he was supposed to be pushing Hollander away, not pulling him in, but Ilya didn't think he could help it.

—

The game was exactly what it needed to be. It was hard and fast and everything was on the line, the kind of hockey that Ilya had spent his entire life working towards. He was everywhere on the ice, and his team was right there with him, working their asses off until the

very last minute. When the final buzzer went off and Boston had officially won, Ilya felt the sound before he heard it. The crowd, his teammates, a particular roar of something enormous being confirmed.

Later when he stood on the ice with the cup above his head, his teammates crowded around him, Ilya felt like crying for the first time in a long time.

“Dlya tebya, mama!”

He wished she was there to see what he’d been able to achieve. In the next moment he wished for someone else, his heart stuttering when he realized it. He wondered if Hollander was watching. He had to be, Hollander was obsessed with hockey, there was no way he’d miss this game, regardless of who was playing.

He wanted to hear his voice, he wanted to share this moment with him, he wanted him to be…here. With him. Ilya knew he could have none of that. He didn’t deserve it.

So instead he kissed the cup and let his team pull him back into the celebration. It *almost* felt like enough.

Chapter End Notes

dlya tebya, mama - for you, mama

chapter soundtrack: what you need by tems

Chapter 15: 2014 - Part II

Chapter Notes

Enjoy, lovelies. ❤️

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Spring 2014
Montreal

Shane had a systematic routine that he stuck to when things got too loud in his head.

It wasn't something he ever had to fully explain to anyone, because it was for him and sometimes even articulating that to anyone else besides himself was difficult. Especially on the days when the feeling was worse. The days where everything was too loud and too overstimulating and his thoughts were cycling through the same loop without resolution. Sometimes it got so bad that it felt like his skin belonged to someone else, and if he didn't find a way to pull himself back he'd explode. Or something. It happened less as an adult, but he still worked to prevent it.

Today was one of those days. He woke up with his mind running, so Shane shifted into his routines of the day. He checked on Kiyomi first, and then went to start on breakfast, usually something plain like oatmeal and fruit for him, while Kiyomi got something more filling like pancakes and sausages. His clothes were also specific, the same blue shapeless hoodie that he wasn't ashamed to admit he had multiples of, and sweatpants that were long enough that his socked feet were covered.

The Metros hadn't progressed in the playoffs, so they had the day off and that was probably the trigger for Shane's thoughts. That was the only problem with his routine, they only helped the sensory aspect, not the loop part.

One loop was unfortunately the Rozanov loop as he started to call it. It was running for months now, especially since the Olympics, and Shane was tired of it. Sick, really. Rozanov had made what he wanted very clear that day, and Shane had to admit to himself that that was it. The words were said roughly and deliberately enough that Shane knew he had been serious. Like he had been saving up the chance to speak and say them to Shane.

But even after, Rozanov kept messaging him. Mostly about Kiyomi, the one person Shane really couldn't ignore. He was obviously still interested in being a part of her life, if he wasn't a part of his, and even though Shane had no idea how that would work, a small piece of him appreciated that. Kiyomi didn't understand what had happened between them, and she only saw Rozanov as a friend, so he didn't want to have to explain that he wouldn't be a part of their lives anymore.

He tried to keep it simple. Very surface level, and if Rozanov veered off, Shane would stop himself from responding. Because he knew underneath everything, he still wanted him. Craved him, even.

He knew it was partially biological, the omega in him missing the alpha that had pushed itself into his life, but Shane couldn't take the mixed signals. It made everything worse. It made him angry for letting himself fall into this kind of trap, with someone who clearly didn't want to care as much as he did.

He was stirring his oatmeal when he felt his phone vibrate, pulling it out to see the message.

Lily: grigoryevich

Jane: Pardon?

Lily: my middle name is grigoryevich

Jane: Okay?

Lily: today is random fact saturday.

Shane glanced up as he watched Kiyomi wander into the kitchen, clearly still half asleep. She had grown so much in the last year that she no longer needed help climbing into the bar stool in the kitchen, doing so with a wide yawn.

"Good morning, baby. Want pancakes?"

She nodded, all of her hair practically falling into her face. Shane wondered if she needed a haircut again.

"Morning," she said, pushing her hair back and smiling at Shane. "Look." She grinned and then pointed at her bottom row of teeth. "This one is shaky. Can I pull it out?"

Shane cringed a bit, shrugging as he put a pancake on a plate for her. The girl was fearless. He couldn't remember being like that at six, but then again, it was around that age he began his obsession with hockey. "Does it not hurt?" he asked.

"A little. Emma said the sooner you pull it out, the more money you get," Kiyomi said confidently.

"I have never heard of that," Shane said, placing two sausages on her plate before he walked around to place it in front of her.

"Syrup?"

When she nodded he went to the cabinet for the bottle, placing it next to her plate.

"I don't think you should pull it out until it's ready," he told her, reaching to comb his fingers through her thick hair a few times. She always fell asleep with it in a ponytail, but woke up without one. Every single time.

“Jade said it would bleed more,” Kiyomi said, opening the bottle and carefully pouring syrup on the pancake. “Can you braid it?”

Shane hummed in acknowledgment and immediately started on two messy braids that contained her hair for the most part. He could redo them later, with actual products, if she wanted.

“Thank you, daddy,” she said when he finished and Shane kissed the top of her head before returning to his oatmeal. And his phone.

Jane: Says who?

Lily: the internet?

Jane: …Okay.

Lily: what is your middle name?

Jane: I don’t have one.

Lily: really? What about kiyomi?

Jane: Her middle name is Hana.

Lily: kiyomi hana. that’s cute. kiyomi hana hollander.

Jane: I thought it sounded nice together.

Shane imagined Rozanov saying her name out loud, with his accent. The thought made him smile. Rozanov’s accent was always endearing to Shane.

“What’s so funny?” Kiyomi asked, and Shane looked up at her, shaking his head

“Nothing. Did you finish your homework?” Shane asked, dropping some strawberries into his oatmeal before he finally started to eat. Kiyomi started kindergarten earlier that year, and she was already excelling at it, shooting off French at him whenever she could.

“Yes, can you check it later?” She had forgone using her fork and was now using her fingers to pick up her sausage and dip it in syrup before she took a bite.

“Sure, baby.”

They focused on their breakfast until he heard a small yelp from Kiyomi, his eyes snapping up to see her holding a hand over her mouth. Shane grabbed some paper towel and was quickly over there, holding the paper in front of her mouth.

“Ow,” she mumbled, spitting a small bloody tooth into the paper towel. She cringed at it and then looked up at Shane with a bloody smile. “It was ready.”

“It definitely was.” Once he was sure she was okay, he reached for his phone. When she saw that he was going to take a picture, she made sure to grin widely, giving the phone a thumbs up.

Shane laughed, taking a few photos and then nudging her to help her come down from the chair. “Come, wash your mouth out.”

With everything cleaned, the tooth was secured in a small baggy. He’d have to ask Jackie how much money she actually left for her kids from the tooth fairy. “Feels funny,” Kiyomi announced when she sat back down to finish her breakfast.

“Give it some time,” he told her as he sent the photo to the group chat he shared with his parents. His finger hovered over Rozanov’s chat before he sighed, opening it up again.

Jane: [photo of Kiyomi with a bloody mouth] Lost her first tooth.

Lily: oh! make sure she gives it to the tooth mouse. 🐭

Jane: The tooth mouse?

Lily: does it not have same name in canada?

Jane: I have no idea what you’re talking about.

Lily: you throw tooth in mouse hole and then the mouse will bring you a little present. something to do with giving the mouse your baby teeth and getting real ones in return. was tradition when i was little.

Jane: We don’t have any mouse holes. She’s going to put it under her pillow for the tooth fairy.

Lily: same idea, no? are you tooth fairy?

Jane: Yes, I’ll just give her some money.

Lily: we will celebrate her lost tooth next time.

Shane swallowed hard, putting his phone down. Next time? He was doing it again. Rozanov was veering off and Shane was following, like he had no freaking backbone.

“Are we going to watch hockey today?” Kiyomi asked, finishing off her pancake. She seemed to already have gotten used to being one tooth less.

“If you want to. We were going to go to Hayden and Jackie’s to watch,” Shane explained, getting up to grab another pancake to put on her plate. He also went to the fridge to get her a glass of milk.

“It’s the big game, right?”

Shane nodded, passing both the glass and the plate back to her. “Will Yaya be playing?”

Shane's stomach dropped slightly, but he nodded, regardless. "Yes, it'll be his team against San Francisco for the Stanley Cup."

Kiyomi nodded quickly, she had folded her final pancake into a burrito of sorts, dipping it into syrup. "Then I want to watch!"

Of course she wanted to watch. His six year old daughter was developing a steady love of hockey and Shane was not mad about it. Maybe a little grumpy about its connection to Ilya Rozanov, but it was neither here nor there. "Then we will watch. Finish up so you can get ready."

She stuffed the rest of the pancake in her mouth and then she was running off towards her bedroom.

—

Later, Shane and Kiyomi made their way over to Hayden and Jackie's where the rest of the Metros were, crowding into the living room around the TV. Nobody blinked at Shane's younger sister being there, they had all met Kiyomi enough times by now, just collectively agreeing without saying it out loud to watch their language around her. Their team was beat up anyway, their goalie in a boot, their main defenseman in a sling, and even Hayden himself moving around slightly too carefully.

From the very first period, it was obvious the Raiders were unstoppable. Shane had known this before the game even started, had known it all season if he was being honest with himself. If only because he had been paying close attention to Boston's games more than was strictly necessary. Rozanov was playing like his life depended on it, a kind of specific intensity that Shane couldn't deny that he was entranced by for years.

"I can't believe they're about to win the cup," Hayden said, sighing from where he sat next to Shane, Kiyomi curled into Shane's other side with her eyes tracking the game seriously.

Shane said nothing. He just watched.

The clock ran out and Boston won, 3-1.

He felt Kiyomi jerk with happiness beside him and Shane pulled her closer automatically while his teammates dispersed around them, some heading to the kitchen, some pulling out their phones, the particular deflation of a group of people who had obviously been hoping for a different outcome. No one was outwardly angry, though. It had been a good game and everyone knew that.

Shane kept his eyes on the screen.

The celebration was already in full swing, helmets and gloves scattered across the ice and players grabbing each other. Eventually the cup was brought out and given to Rozanov, and Shane watched him lift it above his head, feeling something crack open in his chest when they zoomed in on him.

It was probably the clearest picture he'd seen of Rozanov in months. His face was completely open, undone, with an expression that Shane had only seen in private. He looked like everything he had worked for had just been confirmed in one moment.

Shane felt his eyes burn.

His lips were trembling slightly and he pressed them together hard, blinking. Beside him Kiyomi had gone very still in a way that showed him her attention had shifted from the screen to him. Like she could feel the shift in his energy.

Rozanov deserved this. Especially after the disaster of the Olympics, he needed the validation that he was a damn good hockey player. Shane knew he was genuinely, and embarrassingly, proud of him. That was the truth.

Shane wanted to text him. He wanted to pull his phone out and say something real for once, something that acknowledged what Rozanov had just done and what it meant, something that sounded like what Shane actually felt instead of the random stuff they had been texting about.

He didn't do anything, though.

He sat on Hayden's couch with Kiyomi pressed against his side and watched Rozanov kiss the Cup, wishing for something that he knew he couldn't have.

—

May 2014

Their texts remained sporadic in the following months. Shane let himself indulge, only pulling back when Rozanov tried to take things to another level. Which meant their messages were very PG. It almost felt like they hadn't had some of the most mind blowing sex Shane had ever had. Almost. Because nothing would ever take back those particular memories.

He mentioned Kiyomi's actual first hockey practice the way he mentioned most things these days, casually and very surface level. It wasn't a request for Rozanov to come, and he definitely didn't tell Kiyomi that he knew.

And yet.

On the day of the practice, Shane was standing at the boards, watching Kiyomi amongst the group of equally awkward looking kids. Her gear made her look bulky, but Shane knew everything was properly fitted because he had spent an embarrassing amount of time at the equipment store making sure. Over her pads she had insisted on wearing a kids version of his actual jersey, complete with the number 24 and their name on the back. A long braid stuck out the back of her helmet to complete the whole outfit, glad he had managed to pull the thick hair all together into a single braid.

The coach had just finished with introductions and was explaining how the day was going to go when Shane felt a presence at his side, just a little too close to not be someone he knew.

When he turned, he saw Rozanov standing next to him, in a jacket and jeans, his hair tucked into a hat. A pair of sunglasses completed the seemingly incognito look. Shane was dressed similarly, but he had a hat and hoodie combination that seemed to be doing well at hiding him in plain sight. So far.

“You actually came,” Shane said.

“You did mention it,” Rozanov said simply, looking out at the ice. “Did you think I wouldn’t?”

Shane’s honest answer was no, he hadn’t thought Rozanov would actually come. The last time he had seen the man in person was back in Sochi, when he pushed him away, only to start messaging him again later on.

“She doesn’t know you’re here,” Shane said instead, following Rozanov’s gaze to where his daughter was listening intently to the coach.

“I know.” Rozanov shifted, and Shane could smell the faint scent of cigarettes, along with his usual scent. His nose scrunched up slightly, he didn’t like that Rozanov still smoked. “We can keep it that way if you want.”

“No, even if I wanted that, she’ll want to know. Besides, it’ll be a matter of time before she discovers you,” Shane insisted, watching as the group started their first activity.

They were asked to line up on one side of the rink and skate across it to the other side, which the kids were eager to do. Shane only had eyes for Kiyomi, though, watching as she hesitantly skated to her spot, waiting for the go ahead before she pushed herself off.

“Wow,” he heard Rozanov murmur, and Shane smiled, his heart swelling with pride. She was one of the few kids that were ahead, reaching the other side with a high five to the coach. It was only then that she looked over towards Shane, and he could see the exact moment when she recognized who was standing next to him.

Her eyes lit up and Shane could see how her entire body shook, obviously wanting to skate over to them. Instead she mouthed Rozanov’s name and waved frantically.

Rozanov waved back, actually grinning back at Kiyomi. Shane stared at the grin until Rozanov’s eyes flicked back to his, making him look away quickly.

“See, she’s really happy to see you,” he said in a rush, hoping Rozanov couldn’t see how his cheeks surely reddened.

“I am glad I came,” Rozanov said, shifting so he was standing closer to Shane, but playing it off as wanting to see Kiyomi better. “Did I tell you I started playing hockey around this age too?”

Shane shook his head. “You didn’t. I started when I was about 4.” He glanced at Rozanov. “My dad played at his university, and my mom is obsessed with hockey. So it was only bound to happen.”

Rozanov hummed, looking out at the ice. They had started stick handling drills, the coach in front of the group as he showed them how to use the stick and skate at the same time. Kiyomi looked unsteady, but she had that same look of determination on her face.

“Hockey is life for you,” Rozanov said after a few more minutes of silence between them.

“Well, yeah. And her.” Shane nodded in the direction of his daughter.

Rozanov nodded as well, a small smile on his lips. Shane’s eyes flickered up from his lips to the man’s eyes, realizing he was waiting for eye contact.

“I am sorry, Hollander.”

That caught Shane off guard, his brow furrowing. “For what?”

“For being an asshole.”

“That isn’t anything brand new,” Shane mumbled, but something told him that Rozanov was trying to say more. So he decided to press him. “What else?”

“For Sochi. For being…” He paused, seeming to be searching for the right word. “Difficult,” he finished, and Shane gritted his teeth together.

What was this really? Did he just want to get back into Shane’s pants?

“Difficult,” Shane repeated. “That’s one word for it.”

Rozanov didn’t add anything else, and Shane didn’t push further. For now he’d let the apology sit where it was between them. He wasn’t sure if he was ready to accept it.

And then Kiyomi fell.

It wasn’t a bad fall— the kids had been falling regularly all practice so far. Kiyomi had fallen on her bottom, her stick clattering, but in the next moment she was up again. She didn’t even look over at Shane and he felt proud and also sad that his baby was really growing up. Right in front of him.

“She’s tough,” Rozanov murmured, shifting so he could nudge into Shane gently. “Like you.”

Shane smiled wryly. “I know.”

The rest of the practice was more of the same, Kiyomi and the kids working on their different skills while Shane and Rozanov watched. She did skate over during a break and talked Rozanov’s head off while Shane smiled and tried to get her to drink water.

Rozanov crouched down to her level like he always did, giving her his full attention like she was the most important person in the rink. He was always so good with her. Shane truly enjoyed watching them interact, and even though Shane couldn’t name what that meant for him and Rozanov, at least he knew he made the right decision in terms of Kiyomi.

—

June 2014
Las Vegas

Shane was irritated.

He had been since Ottawa, if he was being honest. He had dropped Kiyomi off at his parents the night before, so he could catch an early flight to Las Vegas the next day. Now he was standing backstage at the Major League Hockey Awards in a dress shirt that had a tag that was driving him insane.

He reached back and scratched at it for the fourth time in ten minutes.

Rozanov's apology was still sitting somewhere unresolved in his chest. Part of him wanted to just accept it for what it was and move on. He knew he wanted whatever attention Rozanov was willing to give him. But he still hated that he refused to acknowledge what had happened. Saying he was being difficult felt like a cop-out, like he didn't want to admit that there was something else going on and that's why he pushed Shane away like he did.

And the worst part was that Shane had just let it sit there like that. He had an opening, Rozanov was obviously trying to get him to say something by apologizing in the first place, but he didn't take it. He didn't say what he actually wanted to say, and didn't ask Rozanov what he really wanted. All he was left with was a vague apology from a man who clearly wanted to be a part of his life and no idea what to do with either of those things.

So whose fault was that, really.

Now he was being forced to present an award with him. He had to put on a smile and pretend things were normal between them, or at least as normal as the media wanted it to be. They were supposed to be rivals, so he supposed any leftover animosity he showed wasn't all that far off.

He scratched at his collar again, pulling the shirt away from the front of his body. He was sweating too, and even though it was darker backstage, he could see the bright lights past the curtains in front of him. He tried to breathe through the discomfort, checking the time as he started to pace back and forth.

Rozanov was nowhere to be found. Typical.

Shane was *so* irritated.

Right when he thought he'd have to go find someone to let them know that Rozanov was not here, the man himself stepped into the space behind him.

"Where the fuck were you? We're on like 5 seconds," Shane immediately said, his annoyance clear in his voice.

"25 seconds," Rozanov replied with a shrug as he adjusted his suit jacket.

“Still.” Shane used the sleeve of his jacket to carefully pat at his forehead and cheeks, hoping he didn’t look as damp as he really felt.

“What were you so busy doing?”

Rozanov didn’t answer, choosing instead to walk towards stage as the announcer started their introduction.

—

They went on, presented the award, both awkward as they read from the teleprompter in front of them. The crowd found Rozanov endearing of course, and that only fueled this anger that was developing, seemingly out of nowhere. Shane’s skin felt like it was on fire under the stage lights, the heat and the noise combining in a way that was overstimulating. Shane managed to hold it together, smiling for the selfie Rozanov instructed them to do, and then shifting to open the envelope and say that winner’s name.

The moment they came off the stage Shane was moving, pushing past the production staff and moving out into the much cooler hallway. He could breathe out there, hunching over, but it was still too out in the open.

Instead he found a bathroom at the end of the hallway and pushed through the door, bracing his hands on the sink. He turned on the cold tap and pressed his wrists under it, sighing at the rush of relief, before he looked at himself in the mirror. His face was flushed and damp, and he was unconsciously taking quick shallow breaths.

Shane shifted and suddenly it hit him like a freight truck. This wasn’t just him being overstimulated by some stage lights and nerves.

His heat was starting.

He barely had the time to come to terms with that when the door to the bathroom opened and Rozanov stepped inside, immediately catching his eyes in the mirror.

Shane glared, but didn’t say anything, watching as Rozanov leaned against the wall and just…smiled at him.

“Well…”

It was like a cord had snapped.

“Well, what? What the fuck do you want from me, Rozanov?”

Rozanov’s smile didn’t waver. He stayed propped against the wall, watching Shane with a patience that made Shane want to rip his hair out. Or rush towards him.

“You pushed me away before,” Shane continued, his voice coming out sharper than he intended, the heat under his skin making everything worse. “But then you still wanted to talk to me because of Kiyomi, but then it isn’t only about Kiyomi, is it? You’re talking to me, you’re trying to get to know *me*.”

“Hollander-”

“No.” Shane turned to face him fully. “I’m serious. What do you actually want from me? Because I can’t keep doing this. Whatever this is.”

Rozanov pushed off the wall slowly and started to walk towards Shane, reaching to grip his chin and tilt his head up once he was close enough.

Shane’s mouth opened to say something, but whatever it was died on his lips once Rozanov’s cool fingers dug lightly into the skin of his cheeks. That felt *good.* His eyes drifted, moving over Rozanov’s features before they stopped on his lips, as usual.

“I was going to ask you to suck my dick,” Rozanov said.

“Oh, fuck you,” Shane said, trying to pull his head back, but Rozanov’s grip tightened on his chin and Shane could feel his eyes stinging as he looked up into Rozanov’s eyes. He was watching him, carefully, his head tilting slightly.

“Hollander.” His voice had changed. Deeper, more focused. The edge of amusement was gone and was replaced by something else. “Are you going into heat?”

Shane’s breath caught.

He wanted to say no. He wanted to say it was just from the stage lights and nerves. He didn’t want to say that he wanted to scratch his skin off and that he was just barely beginning to feel slick gathering in between his legs. He had a patch on, but Shane was sure Rozanov could smell him anyway, just enough. And he could see it, too, the dazed look on Shane’s face that he had no way of hiding.

There was nowhere to go and Shane felt his eyes welling up. He pressed his lips together hard.

“Hollander,” Rozanov said again, softer this time. His grip on Shane’s chin shifted, his palm cupping Shane’s cheek instead. Shane closed his eyes and leaned into it.

“We will go back to the show,” Rozanov murmured a moment later, and Shane just listened, letting Rozanov’s voice settle over him like a warm cloud. “And then we’ll probably have to go to the boring party after. And then after I’ll take care of this. Of you. How’s that sound? You would like that?”

Shane was nodding before he could think.

“Say it, Hollander. Tell me.”

“*Yes*. Please,” Shane whispered, opening his eyes. He had never shared a heat with someone else. He didn’t know what to expect, and he didn’t know what it meant to share it. And he certainly never thought he’d be considering it with Rozanov.

“Fuck,” he heard Rozanov say, and then he was closing the distance between them.

The kiss was slow at first, gentle, like Rozanov wanted to be careful with him. But then Shane's mouth fell open, his hand reaching up to grip Rozanov's lapel, and the stillness broke. He made a low sound against Shane's mouth as he licked inside, turning to press Shane back into the edge of the sink.

Shane could feel himself sinking into it, his heat flaring up under his skin while his omega responded to Rozanov's alpha in a way that made keeping up impossible. All he knew was that he was finally getting what he wanted.

When Rozanov pulled back, Shane's lips felt wet, and he was gasping for air. He felt Rozanov pat his cheek before he stepped back. Shane's hand fell to his side, trembling slightly.

"Good luck tonight," he said, somehow cutting through the haze in Shane's mind. He watched Shane for another moment, and then he was leaving the bathroom.

Shane turned to look at himself in the mirror, wiping at his mouth and his eyes. He felt worse than he did earlier, if that was possible. And now he was realizing that Rozanov had wished him good luck for the MVP award they were both nominated for.

He couldn't care less about that now.

Chapter End Notes

chapter soundtrack: risk it all by bruno mars

(sorry, not sorry.)

Chapter 16: 2014 - Part III

Chapter Notes

> Hello my friends! Is it safe to say this is officially diverging from canon? I'll still be using it as my base model, so to speak, but these babies are on their own journey now.
>
> Enjoy ❤️‍🔥

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The rest of the evening felt like a blur of time for Shane. Somehow he made it back to his seat for the rest of the ceremony, his face now a controlled mask to cover what was really happening. His skin felt like it belonged to someone else, he was so oversensitive, and the fever had really set in, causing him to start to sweat through his shirt.

In short, he was miserable. The party was worse. There were more people, which meant more noise, and even though the lights dimmer, he still felt overstimulated. He still made his rounds, speaking to those who reached out to him, and smiling as though he weren't actively melting on the inside. He practically ripped his phone out of his pocket when he felt it vibrate.

Lily: penthouse 1

A quick glance across the room told him that Rozanov was still there, but he seemed to be heading out. Shane waited for a beat, and then a few more minutes after that before he excused himself from his current conversation. He focused on breathing the entire elevator ride up, but his heart was still beating wildly out of his chest by the time he reached Rozanov's penthouse and knocked.

The door opened almost immediately and Shane slipped inside, taking a moment to take in just how large the room was before his attention was on Rozanov fully. He hadn't changed yet, but his jacket and tie were off, his shirt open at the collar. He was close enough that Shane could reach out to touch him, but he didn't, not yet.

"Congratulations," he murmured, his eyes trailing up Rozanov's chest to his face. Being this close to Rozanov again was making him tremble, just slightly, feeling himself lean forward as though he were magnetized.

"Thank you, Hollander," he replied, his eyes looking over Shane as though he were cataloging something. "How bad is it?"

Shane licked his lips and swallowed, realizing how dry his throat felt, despite the ginger ale he had been nursing during the party. "It's getting worse," he admitted, closing his eyes when another wave crashed through him.

When he opened them again, Rozanov's nose had flared and he had stepped closer, reaching to cup Shane's chin much like he had done in the bathroom.

"Rozanov, I'm…" Shane blinked, realizing he couldn't come up with the words he wanted to express. "I'm…I've never."

He was scared. That's what he wanted to say, he'd been with Rozanov before, he had never wanted another person as badly as he wanted him, but this was a whole different level of vulnerability and want that Shane had never allowed himself to experience before. Not with anyone else. To share a heat with him was a serious thing.

"I know." Rozanov's voice was low, but steady.

Shane blinked up at him, searching his eyes. Were they always that blue? They were so blue they reminded Shane of an ocean, deep and shifting, the kind of blue that changed depending on how the light hit them. Shane had spent years trying to decide what color they actually were and still hadn't quite managed to figure it out.

He could feel Rozanov patting his cheek, bringing him back into the moment.

"Take off your clothes." The words took longer than usual to reach his ears, but as soon as he heard them he was reaching to shakily take off his tie first.

"You really are out of it," Rozanov murmured as Shane worked on his shirt, finally peeling the offensive material away from his skin and starting on his pants. When he was left in just his underwear, the clothes folded neatly and laid in a nearby chair, Shane stood still, looking at Rozanov like he was waiting for further instructions.

"Come," Rozanov said then, holding out his hand. Shane took it without thinking, letting Rozanov lead him into the bedroom. His thoughts were moving slowly, his body was still hot, and he could smell Rozanov with each deep breath he took, letting himself sink a little further under with it.

Rozanov sat on the edge of the bed and pulled Shane with him, sinking down so he was awkwardly straddling his legs. The movement jostled the fabric against his crotch, making him aware of how sticky he felt.

"Still with me?" Rozanov asked, his hands settling on Shane's hips.

"Yeah," he breathed out, letting himself sink further in Rozanov's lap so he could roll his hips down, watching when Rozanov took in a sharp breath. His hands tightened on Shane's hips immediately, fingers digging in.

Then his eyes moved to Shane's neck. Without a word he reached up, slow enough that Shane could stop him if he wanted to, and peeled the scent patch away from Shane's skin.

Shane had forgotten about it being there, but as soon as it was gone the difference was immediate. His own scent poured out unchecked between them, and he watched Rozanov'

jaw go tight, his eyes darkening and something shifting underneath the surface of him that Shane couldn't immediately name.

He unconsciously leaned in, tucking into Rozanov's neck where his scent was the strongest. He smelled different. The same pine, still undeniably *him*, but deeper now, something burning at the edges of it.

Shane breathed it in and felt his whole body clench with want, his hips rolling down again before he could think about it, beginning to feel the edge of desperation behind his movements.

Then he felt it, his slick soaking through his underwear, warm as it started to trail down the inside of his thigh.

"Rozanov," he gasped, gripping at the man's shoulders. "I need, I can't–"

"I know." Rozanov's voice had dropped, and he was shifting Shane, turning to deposit him on the bed. He stepped back to unbutton his shirt, his eyes on Shane. "Touch yourself. Let me see you."

Shane whined, he didn't want to just touch himself, he wanted the alpha in front of him, but then his hands were moving anyway. His fingers hooked into the waistband of his underwear and he lifted his hips to push them down, the fabric peeling away from his skin with an obscene amount of resistance, soaked through completely. He kicked them off and spread his legs wide, moving his hands down to the mess.

His entire body jerked the moment his hand touched his cock, rocking up into the circle of his own fist. But he needed more, he was aching for it, the fingers of his other hand moving down lower, sinking deep inside of himself with a long moan.

"Look at you," Rozanov's voice floated somewhere above him. "So fucking beautiful. Let me see all of it." His voice had gone rough, his accent thicker, but it had the same affect on Shane.

"This is what you do when you are alone? What do you think of?"

Shane moaned in reply, words were getting harder to come up with, his mind felt like it was fracturing as he tried to ride his own fingers, hearing and feeling the slick gushing around his fingers. He continued moving like that, his body stuttering towards an orgasm that would hopefully help quench the heat that continued to roll through him.

He didn't hear or feel Rozanov for a long moment, but when he opened his eyes he could see him, fully naked as he moved to kneel onto the bed.

"Tell me, Hollander."

Shane stared, his eyes blurry from tears and want.

"You…I think of you," he finally said, and then he was shuddering through his first orgasm, his back arching off the bed.

But it wasn't enough.

He whimpered, because he could smell his alpha but why wasn't he inside of him?

"Shh, shh. I got you." Shane felt hands sliding up his thighs, pushing his legs up and back until his knees were next to his face, folded nearly in half and completely open and exposed.

Rozanov pressed in, and Shane's mouth dropped with a soundless cry. He'd done this before, but nothing compared to how it felt in this moment, in the midst of his actual heat. His body opened for Rozanov, his slick making the initial thrust so smooth that he was all the way inside almost immediately.

They groaned together.

But then he felt Rozanov stop, going still as though he was waiting for something. Shane can hear himself whine, trying to roll his hips to encourage movement. He forced his eyes open, his gaze hazy and unfocused.

"Please, please, I need you," his voice barely sounded like his own. "Fuck me, move, please __"

Rozanov leaned down, silencing Shane with a kiss that stole what little breath he had left. He barely had the strength to lean up into it, not when Rozanov finally started to really fuck him, hard enough that he could feel the way he shifted up on the bed.

"Fucking take it," Rozanov growled into his mouth, and Shane did, his knees over the man's shoulders. He couldn't think, there was nothing there, just fullness and impossible friction, and his slick and Rozanov fucking him through it all.

Alpha, his alpha, feels so good, don't want it to stop–

Rozanov licked into his mouth once more and then he was kneeling up, his hand still digging into the skin behind Shane's knees, hard enough to bruise. His thrusts continued, and Shane was just barely hanging on, tumbling towards another orgasm.

"Look at me," Rozanov said, and Shane heard him, but he couldn't respond, his head lolling to the side.

"Hollander. *Malysh."*

Shane whined, peeking open his eyes, but then one of Rozanov's hands reached to cup his face, squeezing his cheeks as he turned his head for Shane.

"Look at you, so fucked out." His thumb pressed into Shane's mouth and his lips closed around it, sucking as Rozanov groaned above him. "Gonna come for me?"

And just like that, Shane broke, his orgasm hitting him with a devastating cry. He rocked with it, his body clamping down while his cock spurted untouched between them, the heat rolling through him in waves that he could only chase.

Too much, perfect, don't stop, please.

Rozanov ground into him as he shook, dragging it out, making him feel very single aftershock. That was when Shane started to feel something new, just at the edge where Rozanov was still moving inside of him. A fullness that hadn't been there before, building slowly and catching slightly on the pull back. Shane could hear himself whimpering with it, a fresh gush of slick spilling from him. *What was that?*

"Shh, it's okay, you're okay," Rozanov was saying, sounding completely wrecked as his rhythm started to stutter. The stretch was becoming more intense, overwhelming him, but then Rozanov was leaning in again, kissing softly at Shane's lips.

"Almost…*malysh*, almost." Some part of him knew Rozanov was referring to what was happening, to the fact that his knot was growing. "Breathe."

Shane took a deep breath, and the knot pressed harder, but he opened for it, like his body was made for it, for *him.*

"You're so good," Rozanov whispered, his forehead dropping to Shane's just as the knot pressed inside fully, but then didn't pull back out. Couldn't, at that point. He could feel Rozanov coming, could feel his cock jerking inside him. "So good…fuck."

Shane whined again, softer, and Rozanov nodded, shifting so Shane could unfold his legs from where they had been pressed into his chest. They fell open loosely, wrapping around Rozanov's waist instead. The change in position settled the knot differently, and Shane made another broken sound, his hands reaching to grip Rozanov's shoulders.

"*Takoy khoroshiy omega*," Rozanov murmured, pressing his forehead against Shane's as he reached to brush away the tears that Shane didn't know were leaking steadily from his eyes.

After a few long moments, both of them just breathing, Rozanov started to move, gentle as he turned Shane on the bed. He maneuvered him until Shane's back was against Rozanov's chest, and his arm was moving over Shane's waist so he could pull him in closer. Shane sank back into him, and Rozanov tucked his face into Shane's neck, breathing him in.

Shane felt like he was floating, the height of his heat still there, but farther away now that he was knotted. Slowly, but gradually, his thoughts were coming back, like he was emerging from being in very deep water. His body started to register things it hadn't before, the ache in his thighs, the wetness, the way he was stretched around Rozanov.

He shifted, his breath catching slightly, blinking rapidly as something began to rise in him.

"Here," Rozanov said quietly, lifting his wrist up to Shane's nose. Shane went still again, mewling as he nudged into the skin that covered Rozanov's pulse point, his more concentrated scent filling his lungs and making everything go quiet again.

They laid like that for a while longer, Rozanov intermittently kissing the skin of Shane's neck while they waited for his knot to soften. Shane could feel himself resurfacing again, but it was better this time, easier for him to accept it.

He could feel Rozanov's hand moving down on his chest, and then onto his stomach, petting the skin there. It took a second, but then his thoughts suddenly came crashing back into him.

"Did you?" His voice came out rough, probably because they were the first words he had managed to say in what felt like a long time. He swallowed to wet his dry throat. "Did you use a–"

"Yes," Rozanov answered immediately, pressing another kiss into Shane's neck to settle him. Shane hadn't even registered when he stepped away to get the condom. "Not ready to put a pup in you. Yet."

Shane shivered, but nodded, his hand settling on top of Rozanov's to lace their fingers together.

Yet. Shane couldn't help but focus on that word. But he didn't add anything else, his brain still coming back online in pieces and he didn't have the full capacity for that conversation just yet.

The knot had softened enough that when Rozanov shifted his hips experimentally, Shane's breath caught all over again. He could feel his body responding again, still oversensitive, and still very much in his heat. He pushed back against Rozanov before he could stop himself.

"Mm, needy," Rozanov murmured, and Shane nodded, because yes, *he was*. He clenched around him, sending an intense spark up his spine.

Rozanov continued to rock, fully hard again, and Shane let his eyes roll back.

The second time it was different. Rozanov's arm stayed wrapped around him, and the pace wasn't as brutal, but just deep enough to make Shane moan.

Shane could feel his heat, the fever still making him sweat, but it was much more manageable now. The desperate edge just dialed down enough that he could feel everything instead of being overwhelmed.

"Did you mean it?" Shane asked, suddenly.

"Mean what?"

"What you said…about putting a pup in me."

Rozanov didn't respond immediately, but his hips did stutter, like just hearing the words did something to him.

"*God,* Hollander." He was thrusting a little harder, his grip tightening on Shane's hip.

"I'd want you to," Shane said, the words spilling out of him like he had no filter left, every thought he had rushing out of him.

"I want you to breed me." He pressed back into Rozanov's next thrust.

Logically, he knew that wasn't possible, not with the barrier between them. But it didn't stop him from thinking. From saying it, too.

"Do it, fuck me full, Roz. Want it."

Rozanov made a sound that wasn't quite a word in any language and his arm tightened around Shane completely, his hips snapping forward harder, the slow rhythm gone.

"You can't say things like that," Rozanov gritted out against Shane's neck.

"I know. I don't care." Rozanov groaned and pressed his face into Shane's neck as he shook apart.

Shane followed him soon after.

—

They didn't stop after that.

Shane's heat ran its course the way it always did, in waves that crested, pulled back, and then crested again. Rozanov was right there with him for all of it. At some point he pulled out of Shane so he could change condoms, get Shane water, and clean him up a little. They didn't talk much more than sexually charged words, stuff that Shane knew he'd be embarrassed about later, but in the moment he loved.

Eventually Shane had nothing left to give and his body, finally, finally went quiet. He didn't know what time it was when he fell asleep, pressed against Rozanov's side, but he felt warm, content, and absolutely exhausted.

—

He woke up to the smell of cigarette smoke. He wrinkled his nose, and smoothed his hand over the bed next to him, realizing it was empty, the sheets cool. He shifted and lifted his head, blinking around to see Rozanov standing by the open window, a cigarette between his fingers and his back to the bed. He only had on his shorts, so Shane's eyes lingered, moving from his well muscled back to his gorgeous ass.

As Shane watched him, Rozanov turned to look back at him, smiling. "You're up," he said, lifting the cigarette to take another deep drag.

"What time is it?" Shane asked, turning over and stretching his arms above his head, groaning. God, he was *sore*.

"A little after 8," Rozanov replied, stepping over and sitting down next to him on the bed. He reached to run his fingers through Shane's hair a few times with his free hand. "You slept like a baby."

Shane could feel himself blushing. "Couldn't help it," he murmured, his eyes wanting to fall shut again. He groaned suddenly, blinking up at Rozanov. "I have a flight."

“Mm, me too.”

Shane forced himself to sit up, moving so he was sitting against the headboard. He knew he needed to get himself dressed so he could leave, but he really didn’t want to get up yet.

“To where?”

“Boston. And then Russia,” Rozanov told him, lifting the cigarette to his lips.

“Do you have to?” Shane asked.

“Have to what?”

“Go back to Russia,” Shane said, not sure why he was asking, but he wanted to know. Maybe he’d stay around in Boston for longer.

“Yes,” he replied, watching Shane with a look that looked all too familiar. Like he wanted to say something, but didn’t know how to. Shane didn’t know how to either. “It is home, Hollander.”

Shane nodded, chewing on his lip for a long moment. “You didn’t seem happy there, is all.”

Rozanov raised an eyebrow, taking one last drag of his cigarette before he leaned over to stub it out on the ashtray next to the bed. “You are not wrong,” he said, and then turned to face Shane, reaching to cup his cheek. “I’ll be back, *malysh*. Don’t miss me too much.”

“You wish,” Shane murmured, but he was smiling, just a bit. “I have to go.” Rozanov nodded, but then he was leaning in to kiss him, his fingers moving up to comb through Shane’s hair again.

Shane leaned into him, kissing back slowly, his hand finding the side of Rozanov’s face. He wanted to sink back into the bed with him, but his flight. Kiyomi. She was expecting him back in Ottawa today. “I have to go,” he mumbled again, pulling his lips back.

Rozanov stood then, stretching his arms above his head. “Me too,” he said, then stepped around to find his clothes. Shane got up and found his folded clothes in the bedroom, like Rozanov had brought them in for him.

He hesitated, looking around until he found his very gross, still slightly damp underwear.

“Here,” Rozanov dropped an obviously clean pair of his own shorts on the bed, noticing the scrunched up look on his face. Shane smiled in thanks and slipped them on before he got dressed fully again, the borrowed shorts fitting well enough.

Later, he paused at the door, looking back at Rozanov who was adjusting his own shirt. He wanted to say something, but there was too much to say, that he *still* didn’t have words for.

“Safe flight,” he said finally.

“You too, Hollander.” Rozanov met his eyes from across the room. “I will text you.”

Shane nodded, and then left. He made it all the way to the elevator before he let himself feel any of it, the heat they shared, the warmth of the morning. He stood in the elevator and let it all wash over him, staring at the closing doors in a bit of a daze.

Did he know what this was? What could it be? No. But Shane wasn't upset. He felt better than he felt in a long time, and he was going to hold onto that feeling for as long as he could.

He pressed the button for the lobby.

Chapter End Notes

russian words/phrases used:

malysh - baby
takoy khoroshiy omega - such a good omega

chapter soundtrack: burning by tems

come say hi to me on my brand new tumblr @atemonai
see ya'll next time 😘

Chapter 17: 2014 - Part IV

Chapter Notes

Hi my lovelies! Sorry for the long wait!

Enjoy.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

On the plane ride home, Shane slept. This was particularly unusual for him because he liked being awake and aware on flights, especially when he traveled alone. To fall asleep meant he was feeling settled enough, his mind quiet. He knew it had to be from his heat tapering off. It was like his body still needed more time to regenerate.

When he woke up he had another hour of the flight left. He took stock of himself the way he felt, noticing the fever and the oversensitivity had all but dissipated. His muscles were still sore, that wasn't surprising, but other than that Shane relatively felt back to normal.

What still wasn't normal was the fact that his heat normally lasted two to three days, minimum, and if his calculations were correct, he'd been in this heat for maybe 24 hours. The only major difference this time was the fact that he'd shared it with someone. And not just anyone, he had been with Rozanov, the one and only alpha Shane had ever been with. It was obvious his omega had gotten exactly what it wanted.

So why did he feel like something was still missing?

The heat may have been over, but something was lingering. His thoughts kept drifting, slow, and cottony at the edges, similar to how he felt the night before when everything was just warmth, Rozanov's scent, and his voice.

He'd never wanted to just be near someone like this. To just feel their presence, to soak them in, to let them soak him in.

Shane knew this wasn't biological anymore. Before he was quick to blame it on his omega, on the physicality of it all. That part had never been complicated, but now he knew this was different. This was all wanting him around, wanting to talk to him, wanting to show him more about his life. He wanted to text him stupid things, like pictures, articles, and whatever else came to his mind. He wanted to see Kiyomi's face light up when he came around, and he wanted to see the way he smiled at her.

That wasn't just his omega talking.

He landed in Toronto and drove the rest of the way to Ottawa with the windows down, hoping the summer air would do something to clear his head. It didn't quite work, but it

didn’t stop Shane from trying.

Back home, Shane had just gotten his suitcase out of the car when he heard the front door fly open. He looked up in time to see Kiyomi running towards him, her arms already reaching.

“Daddy!”

She launched herself at him and Shane stooped right in time to catch her, his sore muscles protesting, but that was nothing compared to the feeling of holding her again. She wrapped herself around him like she belonged there, taking a moment to breathe him in before she launched into every single detail he had missed while he was gone.

“Papa let me stay up past 9, and Nana taught me three new Japanese words,” she was rambling as Shane grabbed the handle of his suitcase, maneuvering her so he could start towards the door.

“Oh yeah?”

His mom was standing by the door, smiling as they made their way in. She took his suitcase, and Shane moved further inside, toeing off his shoes.

“You look tired,” his mom said after shutting the door behind them. Shane looked back at her. Yuna was watching him curiously, the same kind of look she gave him when she was clocking something different about him. He’d spent his entire life getting used to that look.

“Long trip,” Shane said, his eyes moving away from her gaze. He was never good at keeping secrets from his mother, and she knew that. But this part of him was something Shane wasn’t ready to share. Not yet. And definitely not so soon after he had just figured it out himself.

“You’ll get MVP next year,” she said, as Kiyomi finally hopped down from his arms, grabbing his hand instead. “Rozanov has to know he’s on borrowed time.”

Shane nodded, hoping his face remained as neutral as possible when she mentioned his name.

“Daddy, let me show you!” Shane let himself be tugged in the direction of Kiyomi’s room.

—

Lily: kiyomi would like this airport. There is a very large fish tank.

Jane: She does like the aquarium. Her favorite fish is the clownfish.

Lily: there are funny fish?

Jane: 😂 No, not literally, I mean. You know Finding Nemo? The movie?

Lily: Is that about the fish that gets lost? it is called в поисках немо or v poiskakh nemo in russia.

Jane: Yeah, she loves that movie.

Lily: we should watch it then.

Jane: Together?

Lily: sure.

Lily: together. 😊

—

July 2014

Jackie needed a break.

At least that's how Hayden put it when he called Shane early that morning, saying that Jackie needed a break and he decided to take the kids to a play place. Shane was asking if he and Kiyomi could join them before Hayden could even ask because he also needed a break. Trying to keep an active six year old entertained was certainly not for the weak, especially with there being a small break between her hockey practices.

They met there at eleven, the play place not particularly crowded, but still loud with the yells and shrieks of kids' laughter. Kiyomi, Emma, and Jade could barely wait to sign in, practically throwing their shoes off before they ran off into the madness, Kiyomi leading them.

"I know this is supposed to be a break for Jackie, but it's a break for me too," he told Hayden as they found a place to sit and settle down while they played. Arthur, Hayden's one year old son, squirmed in Hayden's lap, turning to look at Shane.

"I get it. Let me get a coffee. You want a ginger ale?" Hayden asked, and then lifted Arthur, passing him over to Shane without even asking.

"If they have it," Shane said, accepting the baby in his lap. He smiled at him, letting the boy bounce a few times. Having Arthur reminded him of his time spent with Kiyomi as a baby, which was triggering something else inside of him. He did want more kids, but the real question was when would he even have the time to? And with who?

Who was he kidding? Shane knew who he wanted them with.

Hayden returned at that moment, placing an open can of ginger ale in Shane's outstretched hand. Shane smiled in thanks and took a sip, shifting Arthur in arm.

"So," Hayden started to say, his eyebrows raising when Shane looked at him again. "How's Lily?"

Shane didn't answer, not immediately, his brows furrowing at him.

Hayden shrugged, completely unbothered. "I've seen her name on your phone. Quite a few times now. Are you seeing her?"

Shane looked back at the play structure, his eyes scanning for Kiyomi's braids as he thought of what to say. "She's a friend. Someone I know," he finally replied.

"A friend. Someone you know," Hayden repeated, humming as Emma dashed past them, at full speed, Jade close behind her. "Is it more than just someone you know?"

Shane swallowed, glancing at Hayden. "Maybe."

Of course Shane was thinking about the last time he saw Ilya, in Vegas. His heat had made those memories hazy, but they were still there. He remembered how good he felt, and he definitely remembered the feelings he had after. He wondered what Hayden would really think if he knew who Lily really was. He knew Hayden thought Rozanov was an asshole, in fact most of the team thought that. They assumed he thought the same, and he hadn't really gone out of his way to deny it. Rozanov was his rival, he was supposed to be wanting to beat him, not fuck him.

"I think maybe is good," Hayden said, cutting into Shane's thoughts. "As long as she's treating you well. I'm happy for you. You need someone besides us, and Kiyomi."

Shane adjusted Arthur in his lap again, setting the can down so he could smooth a hand over the bit of hair on the baby's head.

"How did you know when Jackie was…your person?" Shane asked, suddenly.

"Uh. Well. It's a feeling, for sure," Hayden started to explain, leaning forward with his elbows on his knees, turning the coffee cup in his hands. He was quiet, like he was actually thinking rather than just coming out with the easiest answer. "It's like…you know when you come home from a really long road trip? Like when we have those far away games? And you walk through your front door finally, and everything just settles when you see her? Like your body goes, okay, we're here now. We can relax."

Shane looked at him and nodded. He could get that.

"It was like that," Hayden continued. "Only it was every single time I saw her. Something just eased. Like I could breathe properly because I knew she was there." He shrugged after a second, a sheepish smile spreading across his lips. That was probably the most emotional he had seen and heard Hayden be. He knew he loved Jackie, but having him try to explain it was different.

"Does that make sense?"

"Oh yeah," Shane said quietly, looking down at Arthur. He had been unconsciously rocking him, so now he looked just on the verge of falling asleep, his small fist curled in Shane's shirt. "It makes a lot of sense."

“I also knew because I just couldn’t stop thinking about her,” Hayden added. “Like she was always in my mind. There’s a reason we have three kids…about to be four.”

Shane’s eyebrows shot up and Hayden snickered. “Okay, not yet, but. You know. Can’t keep my hands off of her.”

Now that sounded familiar.

“Does that sound familiar?” Hayden asked, and Shane looked up at him, slightly startled, because he had just been thinking exactly that. Did he say the words out loud?

“Maybe,” Shane said, which wasn’t a denial and they both knew it.

Hayden’s smile widened. “Yeah, I thought so. Think we’ll get to meet her soon? She can come over for dinner.”

“Now you’re pushing it,” Shane said, shaking his head, but smiling anyway.

Hayden laughed. “Whenever you’re ready, man.”

—

Jane: Hey. How’s your summer?

Lily: boring. How is yours?

Jane: Busy. It’s always busy with Kiyomi.

Lily: i bet. Can’t wait to see her on the ice again.

Jane: When you come back she’ll be in a hockey camp, and then she’ll be trying out for the actual league.

Lily: no shit? she’s so good. iskorka.

Jane: What does that mean?

Lily: little spark. she is a little spitfire.

Jane: I like that, actually.

Jane: Do you have a nickname for me?

Lily: i might. why?

Jane: I want to know what you'd call me. I remember back in Vegas you called me something with… an M?

Lily: malysh. that means baby.

Jane: Ohhh.

Lily: wish i could see you blushing.

Jane: I'm not blushing!

Lily: you are. it is okay, i like it. i only want you to blush for me.

Jane: Shut up.

Lily: 😘

—

August 2014

Summer passed the way most of his summers did, quickly, and full of busy days that bled into each other. Shane trained —he was fully aware that he had a season to prepare for— and Kiyomi did too, as weird as that sounded. But the best part was seeing how her face lit up at the mention of going to the rink. It reminded Shane of himself, when he first developed his own obsession with hockey.

He and Rozanov continued to text. Shane didn't realize when it happened, but soon they were messaging everyday, and it was easy. Warm, something changing without either of them talking or making a specific decision about it.

In late August, his phone buzzed.

Lily: back in boston. when can i see you?

Jane: I'm taking Kiyomi to hockey camp on Monday. Want to come see her?

Lily: oh, definitely.

Shane liked to think he rarely got nervous. Sure there were the moments right before he hit the ice, when he and his team are in the locker room right after he has pumped them up with the pre-game speech. He could feel the edge of the nerves then. But once he was on the ice and he was back in his element, that melted away.

He felt like that today. Kiyomi was flying across the ice, her edges clean and confident in a way that made Shane's chest swell every time he watched her. And she loved it, he could see it in the way she grinned, in the way she obviously listened intently when a coach gave her some advice. The other kids loved her too. It was only the first day and he see how they flocked around her, like she was the center of attention. He loved that for her.

But Shane kept glancing around him, aware that Rozanov said he'd be coming.

That was obviously the real source of his nerves, if he was being honest with himself. Kiyomi was fine, she would be fine, so Shane knew he was hyperfixating on when Rozanov would walk into the rink. He'd been focused on that ever since he knew he was coming, turning it over in his head the way he did with things like this. He'd been texting Rozanov daily, but he

knew actually seeing him for the first time in months would trigger something he wasn't sure if he was ready to feel.

Shane heard the rink door open. He gave it five full seconds before he turned around to look, not wanting to make it seem like he'd been staring at the entrance the entire time. It was Rozanov, and they immediately made eye contact, the man's lips twitching up into a smile. He looked the same, if anything his hair was a little longer, but still just as attractive as he had been in June.

He dropped into the seat next to Shane without ceremony.

"Hey," Shane said, casually glancing at him like he hadn't been waiting all day for his presence.

"Hey." When Shane looked at him again, Rozanov's eyes were on the ice, obviously trying to find Kiyomi. His eyebrows shot up when he did. "She is fast."

"She's been working hard," Shane said proudly.

Rozanov nodded, his shoulder settling warm against Shane's. Shane definitely felt a thrill at the touch. "I imagine this is what you looked like, at her age," he said, nudging Shane lightly.

"I keep thinking the same. She's a little better at making friends, though," Shane admitted. "I was very quiet then."

"You still are."

Shane shrugged, watching as each of the kids skated up to the goal to try and take a shot. On Kiyomi's turn, she skated up and with no hesitation hit the puck directly into the net.

"*Iskorka*," Rozanov murmured, almost to himself.

Shane grinned, nudging his knee against Rozanov's. "She's going to make the league," he said, confidently.

"Obviously."

They watched the rest of the practice in a comfortable silence, exchanging comments here and there, and keeping some form of contact whether it was through their shoulders or their knees.

Later, when the practice was finished, he and Rozanov moved down to meet Kiyomi as she left the rink, purposely positioning themselves so she wouldn't immediately see their additional guest.

"Did you see me make that goal?" she asked excitedly as she shuffled towards Shane, grinning as he leaned down to help take off her helmet.

“I did! In fact, I saw every single goal you made,” he said, pushing back her sweaty hair. “You’re amazing, Mimi.”

Kiyomi practically wiggled in excitement, her hands moving to Shane’s shoulders as he moved down further to start undoing the lacings on her skates. “And then I–” She paused, looking over Shane’s shoulder, and he could tell the exact moment she spotted Rozanov. “Yaya! You’re here!”

He heard Rozanov chuckle. “Where else would I be?”

Shane barely got one skate off before Kiyomi was moving in his direction, grinning as she launched herself in his direction.

Rozanov seemed to be prepared because he stooped and caught her, lifting her up despite the fact that she was still in full gear and considerably heavier.

“Did you see my shot?” she asked, no, *demanded.*

Rozanov settled her against his hip, and nodded, seriously. “I saw every shot,” he said. “You were obviously the best one out there.”

She seemed to consider this. Then nodded. “I know,” she said, clearly satisfied. She turned back to look at Shane. “I’m starving.”

“You’re always starving,” Shane said, stepping in close to finish pulling off her skates. Rozanov shifted her to help, like it was the most natural thing.

“It’s because I work very hard,” she said, wiggling her toes once they were free from the skates. “Will you come get food with us?”

“Mm, could I?” Rozanov asked, raising his eyebrows at Shane.

Shane pretended to think about it, but really he had already made his mind up. Looking at the two of them like this, he felt something settle in him so completely, and so specifically, that he had to blink to stop himself from tearing up. He didn’t want this to end just yet.

“You could. You should,” he said finally, beginning to walk to an area where Kiyomi could change out of her gear fully. “We can get takeout?”

“Shane Hollander eats takeout?”

“We eat Chinese food all the time!” Kiyomi insisted, laughing.

Rozanov snorted and Shane rolled his eyes, smiling despite himself. He reached to take her from Rozanov’s arms. “Come on, you.”

—

Shane helped her out of her gear and into actual clothes in the family bathroom, Kiyomi talking the entire time about every drill, every coach, and every kid, as if Shane wasn’t there

the entire time. Shane listened, responding when he needed to, but really his mind was on the alpha waiting for them outside. Part of him had assumed he'd leave, so when they came outside and didn't immediately spot him, Shane felt his heart sink a little.

"There he is," Kiyomi said, pointing in the direction of where Rozanov had apparently been accosted by a group of excited kids and their parents. They already got their excitement out with Shane earlier that day, so naturally Rozanov would be next. Such was the reality of being two of the most recognizable faces in the MLH. There was no such thing as quietly watching a children's hockey practice. Someone always noticed eventually.

Rozanov looked up then, catching Shane's eye. Shane nodded towards the exit and Rozanov gave a slight nod back, seeming to wrap up his interaction with the group.

Shane then steered Kiyomi towards the exit before anyone else could clock who she was standing next to, and furthermore, start to put two and two together.

---

r/hockey

Rozanov spotted at kids hockey camp in Montreal 👀 [photo]

Posted by u/raidersforever04

435 comments

u/puckbunny99: what is he doing in Montreal in the offseason

u/hockeyheadcanons: probably training, Boston isn't far

u/notabotreallyswear: or visiting someone 👀

u/raidersforever04: he's just standing there talking to some kids calm down

---

The parking structure was quieter than the rink, with most of the other parents already gone by the time Shane got Kiyomi buckled into her booster seat. He could tell by how quiet he was that the high energy of the day was catching up to her.

"When we get home, can we watch a movie?" she asked, her head lolling slightly against the headrest.

"Which movie, bug?" Shane asked, adjusting the seatbelt across her.

"Finding Nemo? You said Yaya never saw it?"

"Never saw what?" Shane damn near jumped out of his skin at the sound of Rozanov's voice, throwing an exasperated look over his shoulder. When did he even get there?

"She was saying you've never seen Finding Nemo," he explained, and Kiyomi nodded, her eyes slipping shut.

“We should watch…”

Shane eyed her for a long moment. “And…she’s out.” He reached to adjust her head and then stepped back to close the door. He straightened up and turned around, facing Rozanov alone for the first time since he showed up earlier.

“She okay?” Rozanov asked, nodding towards the car.

“Yeah, she’s fine. Always crashes after a big day like that,” he explained, grabbing Kiyomi’s gear bag still at his feet and stepping around to the back of his car, opening the trunk.

He threw the bag into the back, and was just closing the trunk when Rozanov was there, crowding into him. Shane instinctively took the few steps back into the space between his car and the concrete column beside it, conveniently out of the sight line of anyone passing the entrance.

Rozanov followed him, his hand coming up to cup Shane’s jaw, his thumb caressing the skin there. This close Shane could finally scent him, the pine cutting through the concrete and the exhaust of the parking structure. Shane could see the look in his eyes, it was one he had seen many times before, and Shane could feel the thrill of what was going to happen right before it did.

The kiss was soft at first, brief, but everything Shane needed. He hummed against Rozanov’s lips, his hand reaching up to grip the lapel of the jacket the alpha wore.

“Hi,” Rozanov said then, like he hadn’t been with him for almost two hours already.

Shane laughed softly, his fingers flexing against the man’s jacket. “Hi. Been waiting to do that?”

“Oh yes. Been waiting to do a lot,” Rozanov said, nudging his nose against Shane’s before he slotted their lips together again. This time the kiss was deeper, his tongue swiping at Shane’s lips for entrance that he very willingly gave him. He sucked on Rozanov’s tongue, a sound escaping him before he could stop it. That pulled him back into himself, gently pressing his hands against Rozanov’s chest.

“Not here,” Shane murmured, and Rozanov pouted, he actually *pouted*, and Shane wanted to kiss him all over.

“I mean it. Anyone could see,” Shane insisted, even though he was aware that they were backed into a corner. “And Kiyomi is alone in there. Come on…let’s get food.”

Rozanov sighed, but nodded, pressing one more kiss against Shane’s lips before he stepped away to move around his car, getting into the passenger side.

---

r/hockey

anyone else see Hollander at a hockey camp today? my cousin's kid goes there

Posted by u/metrosfan_montreal

203 comments

u/leafsloser: was he alone

u/metrosfan_montreal: had a little girl with him. his sister I think?

u/devils_advocate_42: that kid is literally always with him lol where are his parents??

u/quietobserver_99: almost like she's his kid and not his sister but okay.

u/leafsloser: WAIT. Wasn't there a post earlier about Rozanov being spotted at a hockey camp in Montreal today.

u/metrosfan_montreal: .....

u/puckbunny99: HELLO???

u/hockeyheadcanons: we're bugging. we're definitely bugging. they're rivals they would never.

u/notabotreallyswear: sure jan

In the car, Shane ordered the food, glancing at Rozanov as he spoke in French to the person on the phone. He was eyeing Shane weirdly, his head tilted curiously.

“That was hot,” Rozanov said after he hung up.

Shane knew he was blushing. “General Tso’s is so greasy,” he said instead of acknowledging the comment, finally pulling out of the parking lot.

“Not my fault you like being boring,” Rozanov replied, referring to Shane’s very simple beef and broccoli order.

“It’s reliable,” Shane said, but still he smiled.

—

Shane was unlocking the door to his place, a half-asleep Kiyomi tucked into his side and Rozanov behind him holding Kiyomi’s gear bag, when he realized that he’d never actually had Rozanov at his place. His real place, that was. It was a little too late for him to back out now, though.

“It’s a little messy,” Shane said, shuffling inside and setting down Kiyomi, who yawned and stretched her arms up before she automatically started to toe her shoes off.

“Messy is fine, Hollander,” Rozanov said from behind him, shutting the door and following suit, stepping out of his shoes before he moved further inside. Shane could see him looking

around, taking in his shared living space, with Kiyomi's and his shoes lined messily along the entranceway, and her drawings stuck to the fridge next to a calendar of the upcoming Metros' season.

"Come see my room," Kiyomi said, suddenly very awake again as she reached for Rozanov's hand, tugging him further inside.

"It's fine," Shane said when Rozanov glanced at him, and that was all Kiyomi needed before she continued to tug him in the direction of her room.

"Daddy got me a new—" but she was already pulling him through the door before she finished her sentence, her voice carrying from inside and she launched into a full tour of her room. Shane could hear Rozanov responding and asking questions, sounding genuinely interested in whatever she was rambling about.

While they disappeared, Shane rushed to clean up the living area, which meant just picking up toys Kiyomi had left out and randomly fluffing the pillows on the couch. Halfway through that tidying up, the doorbell rang and Shane went to collect their food,

By the time Rozanov and Kiyomi had come back out, Shane was spreading the food out on the dining table, containers open, chopsticks and forks laid out.

Kiyomi climbed into her seat next to Shane and Rozanov sat down on his other side, eyeing the spread.

"Yours," Shane said, pushing the container towards Rozanov before he leaned over to put some lo mein onto Kiyomi's plate.

"Can I have some of yours?" Rozanov asked.

"I thought it was boring," Shane replied, sitting back and opening his container.

"It is. But I want some."

Kiyomi was eating, but she was definitely looking in between them, her eyes moving like she was watching a tennis match. "You should try the lo mein, too," she added enthusiastically.

Shane chuckled, but he did push his container over to Rozanov, who grinned and dug into it.

—

They ate, and at some point Shane suddenly realized how awfully *domestic* this was. Shane had never invited anyone over who wasn't family or close friends, and there he was, doing this without a second thought. And it felt so natural, too. Kiyomi just settled into the routine, like she'd known Rozanov her whole life. Like he'd known Rozanov for *his* entire life.

Later, they settled onto the couch with bowls of ice cream that Kiyomi had gotten him to give into — vanilla for Shane, chocolate for Kiyomi, and a mixture of both for Rozanov. Kiyomi claimed the spot in between them, her eyes fixed on the TV as Shane pulled up the movie she had insisted on watching.

“My favorite character is Crush,” Kiyomi said around the spoon in her mouth, and Rozanov nodded in understanding, even though Shane was sure he didn’t know who she was really talking about.

The rest of the movie played out the way most movies did with Kiyomi, with her consistent commentary in the first half, and almost complete silence in the second half, when the storyline started to get a little more serious. Or at least as serious a kids movie could get. By the time Nemo found his way back to his dad she had abandoned her empty ice cream bowl on the coffee table and had curled into Shane’s side, a blanket pulled up to her chin.

She made it to the credits. Barely.

Shane sat with her for a few minutes after, glancing at Rozanov who was watching quietly with a small smile on his lips. When he was sure that she was fully asleep, he carefully shifted her, slipping his arms under her and then standing up to carry her into her room. She didn’t stir. She rarely did once she was fully out. She had always been a heavy sleeper, even as a baby.

He tucked her in, turned off her lamp, quietly stepping out of her room and shutting the door behind him.

Back in the living room, Shane stood by the entrance for a second, watching Rozanov on his couch. In his house. His arm was spread out along the back of it, and he looked completely at ease, his eyes finding Shane’s immediately.

They stared at each other.

“Come here,” Rozanov finally said, quiet, but the demand was still there. Shane could feel the want in his eyes, the pull of it making his stomach flip.

“What for?” Shane asked quietly, trying to stop the twitch in his lip.

“Because I said so. Now get over here, Hollander.”

Shane contemplated dragging it out further, but there was really no point. He crossed the living room in two big steps and slid into Rozanov’s lap, straddling him. Rozanov’s hand settled on his hips and he pulled him in even closer.

“I missed this,” Shane mumbled, his eyes moving up from Rozanov’s chest, to his lips, to his nose, and then finally his eyes.

“I missed *you*,” Rozanov replied, his hand moving up to slide into Shane’s hair as he finally crashed their lips together.

The kiss started slowly, Rozanov’s hand still in his hair, and Shane let himself sink into it the way he had been wanting to since earlier that day. His hands found Rozanov’s shoulders, his chest, the open collar of his shirt.

“You’re too dressed,” Shane said against his mouth, which made Rozanov laugh, still low and quiet because they both knew they weren’t completely alone.

“Bold of you,” Rozanov murmured, and Shane leaned in to tuck his face into Rozanov’s neck while he rolled his hips down, feeling the way he breathed in sharply. Rozanov’s scent was just as he remembered, all pine and that deeper smokey scent that Shane had only just begun to pick out during his heat. He moaned as it flooded his senses, his hips rocking more insistently.

“*Malysh*,” Rozanov whispered, turning his head to kiss along Shane’s neck, nuzzling into his scent gland.

“Want you,” Shane started to whine, gasping when Rozanov started to roll his hips up to meet Shane’s rhythm.

“Mm, you got me, you do.” Rozanov smoothed his hands up and down Shane’s sides before they moved in between them, working at the buttons and zippers.

They continued to move quietly, mindful of the small sleeping person just down the hall, but eventually they did get there, skin against skin.

Shane wrapped his fingers around both of them, stroking even while he grew wet further down, soaking into the material of his shorts.

“Just taking what you want,” Rozanov murmured, his hands settling on Shane’s hips, digging into the bit of exposed skin there. “Gonna make me fucking come?”

Shane didn’t answer, his forehead dropping to Rozanov’s, both of them breathing in the same air while his hand moved steadily between them. It didn’t take very long, not with how keyed up Shane was. He came first, quiet, letting Rozanov swallow the moan that slipped past his lips. Rozanov followed moments after, his body shuddering through it.

They stayed like that afterward, neither of them immediately moving, their lips still lazily moving against each other.

“I cannot keep doing this,” Rozanov mumbled, his voice so quiet that Shane almost hadn’t heard him at first.

“What?” Shane leaned back, blinking a few times to clear the haze of his post-orgasm.

“I cannot keep doing this.” Rozanov’s eyes were closed, but as he finished the repeat of his sentence, he opened them, fixing Shane with a look that made his stomach drop and his heart begin to beat so hard it actually hurt.

Was this the beginning of his own nightmare?

What did he mean?

Chapter End Notes

i'm sorry. please forgive me?

chapter soundtrack: golden by harry styles

Chapter 18: 2014 - Part V

Chapter Notes

> I've read/giggled/screeched over every single one of your comments. I want to reply to you all, but I've quickly gotten overwhelmed, so I will just give one big collective THANK YOU here! 🥰
>
> So I couldn't wait another day to post this!
>
> Enjoy my friends~

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"I cannot keep doing this."

What did he mean?

Shane's brain started running before Rozanov could say anything else.

He could feel it happening, the way his thoughts fragmented and multiplied simultaneously, every single worst case scenario presenting itself at once in full color detail. Rozanov was done. He'd used him, played with his emotions, made him think this was more than what it was. He kept showing up for him, for Kiyomi, and Shane had just let it all happen. He had just barely admitted to himself that he felt something real for this man and now —

His hands were shaking.

He became aware of this distantly, the tremor moving up through his arms. His breathing went shallow and too fast, and his vision started to narrow at the edges. He needed to get up, he needed to get off of Rozanov's lap and get as far away as possible from him, and this conversation, before he fell apart completely. Right there, on his couch.

He started to scramble backwards.

Rozanov's hands tightened on his hips, holding him in place. "Wait. Hollander."

"Let go," Shane said, twisting and reaching to try and push away his hands. He was shaking too badly to make much progress. "Rozanov. Let go of me!"

"Hollander, let me—"

"Don't. Don't you fucking dare." Shane's eyes were burning, tears prickling behind them that he absolutely refused to let fall. "Don't, just. You can't say something like that and then not…not."

He couldn't breathe, his hand flying to his chest. The shaking had gotten worse, spreading all the way up his arms. "I just. I don't know what you mean. I need you to just—" He couldn't get his thoughts out, the words kept shuddering out of him, but they were coming out completely wrong.

"Fuck you," he said finally, because that was the only thing that came out clean enough. "Seriously, fuck you, Rozanov."

"I am not leaving," Rozanov said in a rush, his thumbs rubbing over where he was still holding Shane's hips. "Do you hear me? I am not."

"So what are you doing? What are you *saying*?" Shane cried, his hand flying to his mouth in a way to muffle the sound.

"I am saying I cannot keep pretending I do not like you as much as I really do," Rozanov said in a rush, his accent thicker as he tried to force the words out. His eyes were wide, and Shane could see how his jaw was working, like he was trying to find the right words. "I cannot just come here, and do these things, and then leave you. On the ice is one thing, I get that, I get what we are supposed to be. But here. When it is just us. I do not want to pretend anymore."

Shane stared at him. He blinked and a tear slipped from his eye, but Rozanov reached to thumb it away. He looked scared, Shane realized. Like actually scared, and all Shane could do is stare at him.

"You are so beautiful. Even like this. Sometimes I look at you and I can't tell if I want to squeeze you or climb into your skin. Just. Live under there. Be with you always."

"Always?" Shane's voice cracked, but he didn't care.

"Always. I want to trace every single one of those freckles. Like the, what do they call those groups of stars? In the sky?"

"Constellations?"

"*Da*. Those. That is what I thought of when I first saw you. Those constellations on your cheeks. They are so distracting," Rozanov mumbled, his thumb moving over the tiny dots that marred Shane's cheeks. "Makes me want to keep kissing you. Them."

Shane sniffled, and more tears spilled from his eyes. Rozanov continued to wipe them away, but didn't say anything else for a long moment, which meant the both of them were quiet. He could feel himself coming back slowly, the longer he allowed himself to just breathe. The shaking dulled to a slight tremor, and started to become more aware of the small things in the moment. Rozanov's hands on his hips, the quiet of his home. The fact that he was still in the man's lap and stopped trying to fight to get up.

The panic burned through everything and left him feeling raw and open, but alive, and so aware of what was really happening between them.

“I am sorry I made you cry,” Rozanov eventually said, his voice soft. He looked down, hunching forward slightly. “I am also…I understand if. If is not what you want. I get that, too.”

That seemed to break Shane out of his stupor.

“No…no.” He reached to grip Rozanov’s chin, tilting his head upwards, trying to look into his eyes. “Why would you…why would I not?”

Rozanov shrugged, but he kept Shane’s gaze.

“I realized something after my heat. After spending the night with you. There’s no one I want more than you. No one I *need* more.” The words were just spilling out of him now. “And I know this won’t be easy, but it’s what I want. It’s what you want?”

Rozanov nodded, just slightly. “I tried to avoid it before. Like I thought I could just let this be a sex thing. I have done that enough. But I cannot. My alpha…it wants you. I want you.”

Shane could feel himself melting, second by second, heartbeat by heartbeat. The adrenaline from the moments before this slowly bleeding out of him. His other hand moved up to cup the other side of Rozanov’s cheek, just holding his face there.

“Ilya,” Shane murmured, his eyes widening as the name left him. Like he shocked himself.

“Shane.”

Shane folded into him completely then, his head moving to rest on Rozanov’s — on Ilya’s — shoulder. He stayed like that, his fingers smoothing over Ilya’s chest and staying there, feeling his heart beating underneath his hand.

Ilya’s hand tucked further under him, adjusting his weight, and settling him more securely in his lap. Then he tucked his face into Shane’s hair, pressing absentminded kisses into the strands.

Shane breathed him in like this, unsure if anyone had ever just held him like this. Probably never. He couldn’t quite count his time spent as a pup in his mother’s arms. This was different, allowing himself to exist like this. With Ilya.

Shane wasn’t sure how long they stayed like that, not talking, not moving much, just existing with each other while Kiyomi slept down the hall, completely unaware of the shift that had happened between them.

“This is terrifying,” Shane said eventually, into Ilya’s neck.

“Yes,” Ilya agreed, his hand moving slowly up and down Shane’s back. “Completely.”

“What do we do now?” Shane asked, his fingers moving up to trace along Ilya’s necklace. He touched the pendant, tracing the cross and picking it up between his fingers.

“I mean. I wouldn’t mind fucking you,” Ilya murmured into his hair, and Shane snorted softly, shifting a little in his lap. He wouldn’t mind that either. In fact, he expected it. But for once he didn’t feel the need to rush.

“I mean besides that.”

Ilya hummed, curling Shane closer to him. “Training starts soon,” he said.

“I know. Kiyomi goes back to school, too. Things are going to be hectic again,” Shane said.

“I don’t know how you do it.”

“Neither do I. But it gets done.”

“I will come to Montreal whenever I can,” Ilya said then. “In between training, whatever.”

“I can come to Boston, too,” Shane said, knowing he’d have to figure out a little more of the logistics, but he’d do it. For this.

“I know it’s harder for you with Kiyomi. It’s okay, I don’t want to disturb your routines,” Ilya insisted. “I don’t mind coming to see you.”

Shane nodded, settling back against Ilya’s chest. He knew there were more things they had to talk about, but they’d get to all of that in due time. Now he just wanted this. The calm, the quiet. That was another remarkable thing about being held by him. His brain, which typically was always running through something, had actually gone quiet, something that Shane had noticed it doing only with Ilya. He didn’t have to think about anything, not with the way Ilya’s hand started to move up and down his back again.

He didn’t notice it at first.

It started somewhere in his chest, a low vibrating warmth that might have been mistaken for his own heartbeat if it hadn’t been rhythmic in a different way. He was distantly aware of it, like he was aware of how he was slipping towards fully falling asleep.

Ilya’s hand stilled on his back.

“Shane.”

“Mm.”

“Are you purring?”

Shane’s eyes opened. He became aware of it all at once, the sound, low and continuous, coming from his own chest and vibrating faintly against Ilya’s shirt. He had been *purring.* He was currently purring. He cleared his throat, attempting to stop it, but Shane could still feel and hear it, faintly.

“No,” he answered, pressing his face into Ilya’s neck, like that could both hide him and stop the action. It did neither.

Ilya's chest shook with quiet laughter.

"You definitely are," he said, but his hand resumed its path up and down Shane's back, his other hand reaching for the couch's blanket. He tugged it over them, and Shane's purring got considerably louder for a moment. "It is the best thing I have ever heard."

"I hate you," Shane mumbled, without an ounce of fire behind it.

"No you don't," Ilya said, pressing his lips to the top of Shane's head. "You are purring for me."

Shane knew he had a point. "Shh." He could feel Ilya's chest shake again, but he did go quiet.

—

Shane must've fallen asleep after that, because then the next thing he felt was Ilya moving, nudging him awake. The blanket had been pulled off of him, his skin chilly in the still air of his living room.

"Bathroom," Ilya whispered into Shane's ear, and he nodded, shifting to unfold himself from on top of Ilya. He absentmindedly took the man's hand and led him towards his bathroom, nudging him into it, and then stood there in the hallway realizing what he had done without even thinking about it.

Instead of continuing to stand there, he moved further down the hallway to check on Kiyomi. She was exactly as he had left her, deeply asleep, her blanket kicked halfway off. At least she was still on the bed. There were days where Shane would find her in different positions on the floor, still completely knocked out.

With her okay, Shane shut the door and made his way back to the bathroom, where he heard the sink running. He nudged the door and stepped inside, smiling at Ilya through the mirror when they made eye contact.

"I have an extra toothbrush," he said, opening the cabinet under his sink and pulling out the packaged toothbrush, setting it on the sink for Ilya.

"Thank you," he replied, reaching to open the package, and then side by side, they brushed their teeth. When they were done, Shane automatically started the rest of his nighttime skincare routine, aware that Ilya watched him the entire time.

"There are many steps," he murmured, leaning forward onto his elbows as he watched Shane wash his face and then use his various serums and lotions.

"You think this is natural?" Shane asked, rubbing the final cream into his skin.

"I thought it was. I have been bamboozled."

Shane laughed. "That's a new word."

“Felt like the right time to use it,” Ilya said with a smirk. He leaned in, brushing his fingers on Shane’s smooth skin. “You will help me with that? One day?”

“Mm, sure.” Shane didn’t stop himself from leaning in to give him a quick peck on his lips. “Come on, bed.”

Shane’s bedroom was probably exactly what anyone would expect from him. It was simple and uncluttered, not much in terms of decoration besides a couple of framed abstract pieces of art. His dresser was clear except for various framed photos, mostly of him Kiyomi and himself. The only piece of furniture that looked even a little messy was his sidetable, where there were a couple of well-read books, a pair of glasses, his phone charger and watch.

“Wasn’t expecting company,” Shane murmured as he pulled his clothes off finally, folding the jeans and the shirt and placing them on top of his hamper. When he turned back to face Ilya he was already there, moving in close and reaching to tilt Shane’s head up to press a soft kiss to his lips.

“Why are you always trying to impress me?” Ilya murmured, and Shane realized Ilya had also taken off what he wore and was now down to his plain black shorts, “When will you learn that I like you. Just. As. You. Are.” He punctuated each of the last four words with a kiss. He nudged Shane back further, and when his knees hit the edge of the bed Shane sat down, looking up at Ilya.

“Not trying to impress you…just like being prepared,” Shane insisted.

“Some things you cannot prepare for, Hollander,” Ilya said, nudging Shane back and moving to crawl onto the bed over him. “Some things just happen. On what you would call, uh. A whim?”

Shane smiled up at him. “What are some other things that can happen on a whim?”

“Oh, lots of things. You can meet someone and immediately tell them they can’t smoke here-“

“I don’t like you smoking.”

Ilya rolled his eyes, “I hardly smoke anymore.” He was fully over Shane, settling his weight on top of the omega who shifted so his entire body was on the bed. “You can meet them in a gym and try to beat them at a race.”

“Neither of us won that! We both stopped at the same time!” Shane insisted, wiggling under Ilya’s surprisingly comfortable weight.

“Meh. There’s also how you met me on a rooftop,” Ilya murmured, beginning to press kisses all over Shane’s face. His forehead, his cheeks, his chin. “Just on a whim.”

“Maybe it was fate.” It sure felt like it. Shane couldn’t think of why he had done any of that stuff, he just knew he did them, and here they were, today.

Ilya leaned up so he could look Shane in the eyes properly. Shane saw the way his eyes moved back and forth, like he was analyzing something. Him.

“Maybe.” He pressed a final kiss to Shane’s lips and then moved off of him, reaching to pull back the covers before he settled back down. Shane lifted himself up so he could slip underneath it, feeling Ilya follow, the warmth of the duvet covering them both.

Ilya maneuvered Shane so his back was against his chest, and Shane just let it happen, smiling into the dark as he settled. It reminded him of his heat, when Shane was actually out of his mind and said the most ridiculous things about wanting his pups and being bred. The crazy part was he still wanted it, so he couldn’t completely blame it on the hormones.

“Do you think we would’ve found each other, even if I didn’t say hello that day?”

“Obviously.” Ilya’s voice already sounded sleepy from where he had tucked his face into Shane’s neck. He wrapped his arm around Shane’s waist and pulled him in even closer, like two puzzle pieces coming together, until there was no space between them. Unconsciously Shane reached for his arm, moving his wrist up to his nose so he could sniff the skin there.

“What if we met earlier? Like before rookie season,” Shane murmured quietly, his eyes shut as he felt sleep slowly beginning to pull him under.

Ilya didn’t immediately answer, but just when Shane was sure he was asleep, he spoke, “Shane?”

“Yeah?”

“Ya nashol by tebya v kazhdoy zhizni.” Shane let the words wash over him, sighing because while he obviously had no idea what they meant, it only mattered that Ilya was the one saying them.

Before he could ask what it meant, Ilya was already speaking again, the next words spoken directly against the skin of his neck.

“I would find you in every life. Now sleep, *malysh.*”

And Shane did.

—

The next morning, Shane woke up to movement. It was subtle, the bed and duvet over him shifting before he felt the warmth of a body against his chest. A little body. When he peeked open his eyes Kiyomi was mostly settled, her face pressed into his chest.

Shane reached to comb his fingers through her hair, trying to look down and properly see her, but she was so well tucked that he’d have to move back and he didn’t want to disturb Ilya. The alpha was still wrapped around his back, his arm draped over Shane’s waist.

Essentially Shane was trapped.

It wasn't unusual for Kiyomi to climb into his bed when she woke up, but what was very unusual was for there to be someone else in the bed with him. For all of her life Shane had never been with anyone, and that meant he'd never had anyone else in his bed. He wondered if Kiyomi saw Ilya, or if she was still in that in-between sleep stage where she noticed very little about life around her.

Ilya cleared his throat and Shane breathed in, holding it for a long moment. When he heard nothing but the soft exhale of Ilya's breath he sighed and let his body relax again.

This was something. His daughter curled into his front and his Ilya pressed along his back. It made him feel warm. Fuzzy. Like something he'd been waiting for for a very long time was finally happening.

"Mm, your heart is beating fast." Ilya's voice was rough from sleep, so quiet that Shane could barely hear him. Ilya shifted the hand he had around Shane's waist and then went still. Shane assumed he felt Kiyomi's presence.

Shane could feel him untuck his face and saw the blond curls as Ilya leaned over his shoulder. "When did she get here?" he asked in a whisper.

"Maybe five minutes ago?"

"Did she say anything?"

"Not yet."

Ilya hummed, pressing a kiss to Shane's clothed shoulder. "Should I leave?"

"No," Shane answered almost immediately, shaking his head. Kiyomi was still properly asleep, Shane figured they had maybe another ten minutes before she started to wake up again.

"I mean. I don't want you to."

"Then I won't. She will probably want to know why her daddy is sleeping with Yaya," Ilya said, pressing another kiss against Shane's neck. "So maybe we should decide on that."

Shane knew Ilya was right. He just didn't know what to say. "I don't know what to say," he said, actually at a loss for words. For once. But he didn't feel scared, or nervous, even. Shane knew Kiyomi enjoyed Ilya's presence. He just didn't know how she'd take his presence *here*, in their home, and in his bed.

Shane wished he could get his phone, but what could he google? *'My daughter crawled into bed with my alpha and I, what do I do?'*

It turned out he didn't need google. After just about ten minutes of being in limbo Kiyomi started to stir again, waking up just like Shane had thought. He felt Ilya grip the edge of his hip lightly, like he was preparing. Or saying good luck.

Kiyomi leaned back, squinting at Shane as she slowly came back online.

“Morning bug,” Shane said softly, smiling at her.

“Morning daddy,” Kiyomi said, and then yawned, stretching her limbs out suddenly. Her arms went high above her head and her legs followed the same trajectory, knocking into Shane’s.

Shane watched her, wanting to see the exact moment she clocked Ilya.

It didn’t take long. She paused her movements and then squinted again, craning her neck to look over Shane’s shoulder.

Shane held his breath. He knew Kiyomi was probably staring at Ilya, but he couldn’t tell how the interaction was going, besides Ilya shifting his arm to lift it and wave.

“Good morning,” Ilya said.

“Hi.” She sounded shy, which was not her usual response to Ilya.

She pulled her head back and looked up at Shane. Shane looked over her face, taking in every change, subtle or not. He even sniffed for a change in her scent. So far he couldn’t tell if anything specific was wrong, other than the way she looked curious.

“Yaya stayed here with you?” she asked finally.

“Yes,” Shane replied, “Is that okay?”

Kiyomi seemed to really contemplate this. Shane liked to watch her in these moments too, his daughter was probably one of the most contemplative kids he ever met. Not that he knew many kids. But still.

Eventually she nodded and then smiled, leaning in to nuzzle into his shirt again. “It’s okay.”

Shane let out a breath he hadn’t realized he was holding. He could’ve sworn he felt Ilya do the same.

“As long as you’re happy, daddy,” she added, and this was a prime example of kids soaking up the things you said like a sponge. Shane could remember every single time he told Kiyomi that as long as she was happy, he was happy.

“Can we have pancakes? Yaya, do you like pancakes?” Kiyomi was moving right along.

Ilya leaned up, probably a little too quickly, but he wasn’t sleeping anyway. “I love pancakes. Sometimes I put blueberries in the ones I make. Do you like?”

When Kiyomi leaned back this time she was grinning, sitting up so she could see him properly. “Daddy puts different fruits sometimes, but I like blueberries the bestest.”

Shane didn’t even have the heart to correct her, too busy swallowing hard past the lump that had developed in his throat. “We can make blueberry pancakes today,” he said, his hand

moving to her hair again, tucking the strands behind her ears. “Want to get up and get ready?”

“Ah huh.” She moved her face up to Shane’s neck first, nuzzling into the skin there for a long moment before she pulled back and moved to slide out of the bed, turning to leave his room.

“Brush your teeth and wash your face,” Shane called out after her, “I’m going to check!” She nodded and then she was gone.

Shane listened to the soft padding of Kiyomi’s feet down the hallway for a moment before he turned over to face Ilya, who was already looking at him. His hair was a mess, the curls going in every direction, and there was a small crease from the pillow running along his cheek. Shane had never seen him like this before. He wanted to see him like this everyday.

He was absolutely beautiful.

“Sleep okay?” Shane asked, reaching up to cup his Ilya’s cheek.

“*Da*. Best sleep I have had in a long time,” Ilya said, rubbing his cheek against Shane’s hand. “Did you? Until our little guest.”

“Yes, and that could’ve been worse,” Shane said, just glad they were both clothed and not in any kind of truly precarious position. “I guess I’ll have to talk to her about knocking. And boundaries.”

“Mm. I wish you luck. Let me know if I can help in any way.”

“I mean, your presence is the reason I’ll need to have that talk,” Shane said, his lips quirking up into a small smile.

“You are…welcome?”

Shane laughed and then leaned in. Ilya met him halfway, their lips coming together soft and easy, without any real urgency behind it. Ilya’s hand reached to cup the back of Shane’s neck, holding him in place as he leaned in to deepen the kiss, forcing a moan to bubble up from his chest.

Before it could go any farther, Shane pulled back reluctantly, his hand pressing lightly against Ilya’s chest. “We need to brush our teeth,” he said, a little breathlessly.

Ilya blinked at him. Then he dropped his forehead onto Shane’s shoulder with a small groan. “You are so boring, Hollander.”

“And proud too,” Shane said, finally beginning to move to get out of the bed. Ilya grumbled, but followed.

—

The rest of the morning was probably one of the most bizarre and surreal experiences of Shane’s life so far.

In the kitchen Ilya mostly took over, following Shane's instructions about where certain ingredients were, but taking care of the actual cooking of the pancakes. In the meantime Kiyomi spoke about everything that came to her mind that morning while Shane carefully braided her hair.. She covered everything from what her hockey coaches told her yesterday to what she wanted to do before the summer was over. Shane was tasked with adding the notes to his phone so he wouldn't forget, as she called it.

"And then we should go swimming," she said finally, right as Ilya turned around to place the stack of pancakes on the table in front of her and Shane.

"*Priyatnogo appetita!*"

"What does that mean?" Kiyomi immediately asked, as Shane leaned over to start stacking the pancakes on her plate.

"Sounds like bon appétit?" Shane asked.

Ilya nodded, sitting down next to Shane. "Yes, that's exactly what it means. I should teach you both Russian," he said, reaching to stack a few of the pancakes onto Shane's plate instead of his own. Shane watched with a small smile.

"We can teach you French," Kiyomi said around her first mouthful. "Daddy knows more than me. But I'm getting better. My teacher says so."

"Your teacher is right," Shane said, finally pulling his own plate closer. He glanced at Ilya, who was now serving himself last, wondering if he was even aware of what he had just done. He decided not to mention it, tucking the action away for now.

"Then it is a deal," Ilya said, picking up his fork. "You teach me French, I teach you Russian."

"Okay, but you have to actually practice! Daddy never practices his Japanese," Kiyomi said very seriously.

"Hey, I practice!"

Kiyomi gave him a look that was so much like Yuna Hollander that Shane actually didn't feel the need to continue that argument. She won.

"First lesson, your nickname is *Iskorka*. That means little spark," Ilya continued on to say.

"Iss-kor-ka," Kiyomi said very slowly.

They ate like that, Kiyomi carrying most of the conversation, but Ilya followed right along with her, easily keeping up with her subject changes. Shane watched more than he ate, too distracted by the pair of them, and by the sheer awareness of the fact that Ilya had somehow inserted himself into their lives that he belonged there.

Bizarre and surreal, he had thought. But also, it was exactly right.

Shane Hollander Has A Secret And We Think We've Figured It Out

The Montreal Metros captain has been hiding something in plain sight for years. We've done the digging.

BY CONTRIBUTORS | DEADSPIN | JANUARY 2015

Shane Hollander, is by most accounts, a very private person. The Montreal Metros captain doesn't do much in the way of personal interviews, keeps his social media sparse (we aren't counting those posts about his meal plans), and has exactly one personality trait as far as the hockey world is concerned: being really, really good at hockey.

But for the past five years, coincidentally since he has been drafted to MLH, there has been one consistent presence in Hollander's orbit that the internet has never quite been able to explain. A little girl. Dark hair. Always either in his arms or holding his hand. She shows up at games, at draft events, at award ceremonies. She was just this summer at a hockey camp in Montreal, which is actually what prompted a reader to finally write in and give us the details.

The official story, insofar as there even is one, because Hollander has never directly addressed it – is that she's his younger sister.

We aren't buying it.

Here's what we found.

THE TIMELINE

Thanks to our anonymous reader, we have been able to compile a series of photos that date back to when Hollander first entered the league. Now we will be the first to admit that it took some real sleuthing to pinpoint the presence of the blurry toddler in some of Hollander's candid photos, but once she is pointed out, it becomes difficult to not notice her in every subsequent photo.

[IMAGE: 2009 MLH Draft, Montreal. A blurred figure* of a small child, approximately 12-18 months old, being held by an older man identified as David Hollander, Shane's father. Shane Hollander is visible nearby in his Metros jersey, looking in their direction.]

Caption: Day one. She's barely a year old and she's already at the draft. Just a normal family outing, sure.

**Note: Every photo of her will be blurred in order to protect her privacy. We are curious, but not monsters here at Deadspin.*

[IMAGE: 2010 International Prospect Cup, Ottawa. Shane Hollander at the edge of the ice post-game, still in full gear. A toddler, face blurred, is reaching for him with both arms

outstretched.]

Caption: The way he catches her before she even finishes reaching. That's not a reflex you develop with a sibling. That's a parent.

[IMAGE: 2011 MLH Awards, Las Vegas. Shane Hollander crouched down to the eye level of a small girl in a pink tulle dress, face blurred. His hand is on her shoulder. His expression is focused in a way that is completely different from his media face.]

Caption: That's not a brother checking on his little sister in a loud room. That's a parent reading their kid's signals.

THE RESEMBLANCE

As we have stated in a previous note, we have blurred her face in every image used in this piece because she is a child and her privacy matters, full stop. But anyone who has followed Hollander's career and seen these photos knows what we're talking about. This is not just a family resemblance. This is a *him* resemblance. They have the same eyes, the same bone structure. She doesn't look like a Hollander. She looks like Shane Hollander specifically, made small.

[IMAGE: 2012, outside a Montreal arena. Shane Hollander in street clothes, the girl on his hip, both of them looking in the same direction. Faces blurred.]

Caption: We're not saying anything. We're just saying look at them.

THE DETAILS

It's safe to say we've been in the business of watching athletes long enough to know hockey parents and their kids. Safe to say it extends to knowing how siblings react towards each other as well. Watch any video of Hollander with this girl. He doesn't ruffle her hair and move on. There are multiple videos and photos of him picking her up, in full gear. Whenever she reaches, he's there before she can even finish the motion.

It has been adorable to capture, honestly.

He also – and we cannot stress this enough – has never once referred to her as his sister on the record. Not once. In five years. The assumption has come entirely from outside sources and he has never corrected it, but he has also never confirmed it.

[IMAGE: August 2014, Montreal. A hockey camp. Shane Hollander in the stands, a girl in full hockey gear visible on the ice below, face blurred. He is leaning forward, elbows on knees, watching her with an expression that can only be described as completely gone for this kid.]

Caption: Most recent sighting. She's in gear now. He looks like a proud parent at their kid's first recital. Because we think he is.

SO WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Honestly? It doesn’t. Shane Hollander’s personal life is his own. If he has a daughter, that’s his business. If he has been quietly raising a kid since he was a teenager while simultaneously becoming one of the best hockey players in the league, well, that’s actually kind of extraordinary. Kudos to him.

The little girl, whoever she is to him, clearly adores him. And watching him with her across five years of photos and footage, it’s obvious the feeling is entirely mutual.

Make of that what you will.

Deadspin reached out to the Montreal Metros organization for comment. We did not receive a response by the time of publication.

Chapter End Notes

that wasn't so bad, was it?

chapter soundtrack: best part - daniel caesar ft. H.E.R.

Chapter 19: 2015 - 2016

Chapter Notes

> Hello my lovelies! I feel like I've been skipping around the years, but I also feel like if I let myself ramble in certain years we'd never get to the end of this story, lol. I think we're more than halfway there, though!
>
> Enjoy 😊

See the end of the chapter for more notes

January 2015

Shane wanted to throw up the minute he read the headline.

Like actually, lean over the bench he was sitting on during practice and barf where he was sitting. He bent over to do so, while his mind spiraled. He hadn't even gotten the full gist of the article, at first thinking that it would be addressing his designation. Or even worse than that, someone had finally noticed his and Ilya's interactions off the ice with each other.

It was somehow worse than that.

Kiyomi didn't ask for any of this. She was never meant to be in any kind of spotlight. Shane knew, in retrospect, that naturally she'd end up in front of cameras, but he never expected this kind of detail. The photos? The speculation? Everything is blurred and carefully spoken about, so Shane didn't think he needed to immediately worry about privacy concerns, but regardless it was a lot to take in. He never wanted to address her to the public, but Shane knew he had to be real about it. She was getting older, more vocal, it was only a matter of time before someone heard them talking and then people would definitely know.

"I've got your back, Shane," Hayden said from beside him, reaching to pat Shane on the back. Shane's stomach rolled again as he fought the urge to cringe away, knowing Hayden's intentions were in the right place, but he really wanted none of it. He wanted a solution, he wanted to fix this, he wanted to keep his daughter safe.

Later, his mom skyped him.

"I mean, Shane, this is an opportunity here. I know we never intended to have Kiyomi be in the spotlight with you, and she still doesn't have to be," she was saying, waving her hand as she spoke.

It was more than just a wave of a hand. Shane knew that if he confirmed this, more questions would come up. Questions about her other parent. Who were they, where were they, was Shane really doing this alone?

“What if they want to know more? About her other parent?”

“That isn’t any of their business. Look, ironically, the article made it very clear that they value your privacy.”

Shane rolled his eyes. The entire point of the article made it obvious that they cared very little about his actual privacy.

“So why can’t we just ignore it? I don’t understand why they need to know anything at all.” He absolutely hated this.

“Because Shane.” Shane can hear the change in her voice. It got like this when she had to explain things multiple times to Shane, so he’d get it. “I don’t want someone to get so curious that they bombard you after a game. If Kiyomi happens to be there with you, what if someone, God forbid, tries to question her? We can’t control the public, but we can reframe things. You address it, and then put your foot down, make it obvious that you will not tolerate any further attempts into your private life, and it ends there.”

Shane took off his glasses and rubbed at his eyes. He could feel a headache coming on, the type that he knew would ache for hours. Then he saw his phone light up and saw that it was a message from Ilya. He would’ve preferred talking to him.

“This could actually be a good thing, Shane. I know you won’t want to think of this yet, but maybe down the line we could think about kids centered sponsorships—”

“Nothing with Kiyomi,” he interrupted. “Unless. Unless she wants to. One day?” Shane knew Kiyomi was different from him. She was slowly growing into her own person, with her own opinions and personality. That was part of why he didn’t hide Kiyomi, she deserved to live her life. Shane barely had a childhood of his own, between hockey, and then raising her. He wanted her to have the chance, at least.

“Of course, sweetheart.” She clearly hesitated, looking down at her phone for a moment. Shane could tell she probably had an entire list of sponsors that would be willing to work with them. Thankfully she didn’t bring it up again. “It’s something to think about further down the line, though. This could work itself out for us. For you both.”

Shane sighed, but nodded. He knew she was right. Nipping this in the bud was truly the only option that put Shane in front of things.

“So conference?”

—

Lily: you okay?

Jane: Okay as I can be.

Lily: the world can be very nosy. but i can tell there is no malicious intent with it. people love you.

Jane: I just never wanted her to be put out there, you know? I wanted to protect her. But I wasn't going to hide her.

Lily: you have done the best you can. that girl is happy. besides, have you ever thought of how much of a role model you are?

Jane: What do you mean?

Lily: you cannot possibly be the only person who has taken on such a deep responsibility while also trying to pursue your life dreams.

Jane: I didn't mean to get pregnant when I did.

Lily: that's not what i mean. i mean, yes, it happened, but you didn't drop everything and give up, did you?

Jane: No, I couldn't.

Lily: right. what if there's someone out there dealing with the same thing? you made it. you're happy.

Jane: I guess I didn't think of it that way.

Lily: right, why would shane hollander think of himself as anything more than record breaking hockey player?

Jane: Gonna win the cup this year, too.

Lily: see? hockey is life. but you are more than hockey. you are good father.

Jane: I can't wait to see you again. I miss you.

Lily: soon, malysh. i miss you too.

—

The press conference was clearly organized by the Metros PR team in conjunction with his mother. It was a small group of reporters, and only a few photographers, because everything needed to be shared after this was all said and done. He and his mother worked through exactly what Shane was going to say, and Shane practiced it by himself, staring hard at himself in the mirror. He knew how to shut down and give people what they wanted. They would be getting his media polished version, but they would also get the no nonsense version of Shane that did not play games.

Shane sat down behind the table just like the one he had sat down behind many times before. His mother was off to the side along with his PR agent, all ready for this press conference.

He looked out at the crowd of reporters, not really making eye contact, but still showing how serious of a matter this was.

“I’ll keep this brief. There’s been some recent speculation about my personal life that I’d like to address directly and then put it to rest. The little girl you have seen with me over the years is my daughter. I’ve worked very hard to keep her out of the spotlight and that isn’t going to change. I will say that she has made me a better person and a better player, and I’m not ashamed of that. I’m proud of it. That said, anything further about her is not up for discussion. That means that I expect that our privacy will continue to be respected going forward.”

The reporters looked pleased. The cameras flashed a few times.

His PR agent raised his hand. “Questions?”

It was a fake out, they had already spoken to the reporters and there was only one question that had been cleared to be asked. Shane had denied everything else.

Like promised, only one reporter raised their hand to ask the question, “Do you think she will be following in your footsteps?”

Even though Shane knew the question before it was asked, he still smiled, just a little.

“Ultimately it will be up to her. But she’s my kid. So she’s good.” The reporters laughed, and the cameras flashed once more.

“That’s all for today. Thank you for your time.” He nodded and stood up, walking away from the desk and towards his mother who rested her hands on his shoulders.

She was just a little shorter than him now, but Shane would always regard her as his first alpha. Her energy towards him always affected him more than he wanted to admit. Now he was staring, waiting for her reaction to the conference.

“Good. You did good,” she said, patting the fabric of his suit and then automatically reached to lightly grasp the back of Shane’s neck. The tension leaked from him immediately, and he nodded, smiling at her gratefully.

“Thanks, mom.”

—

Three weeks later, and life continued on. The world seemed to take well to his announcement, which was exactly what Shane had hoped for, and what Yuna had promised. His teammates accepted the news without much fanfare, most of them now assuming that Kiyomi was the real reason Shane hardly went out with them after games and was, in their words, a bit of a prude. They weren’t wrong, but they also weren’t entirely right. Shane knew who he was and what he liked. He appreciated the sentiment either way.

Kiyomi, of course, had no idea what changed. She was too busy making the Montreal Angels girls youth hockey team to care about anything else. Shane watched her first practice and made it to every game he could, noticing that there was a bit of a change at first in her notoriety, but Shane knew it was because of how good of a player she was, and not just

because of her father. He could see it already, this could really be the beginning of something that could go as far as she wanted to take it.

With the press conference behind him, Shane got to refocus on his first true love. Hockey. And more specifically, the games against Boston.

He and Ilya spoke everyday, without fail, but nothing replicated what happened when they were actually in the same building. The energy between them on the ice had always been charged, but now it carried something else underneath it, something that Shane was increasingly aware of and very certain no one else could truly identify. Sexual tension and rivalry tension looked almost identical from the outside, it seemed.

—

“Harder,” Shane breathed into the pillow, his grip tightening on the fabric as Ilya immediately obliged, his hands finding Shane’s hips and pulling him back into the next thrust.

Montreal had beaten Boston. It was close, as most of their games were, the score tight until the final minutes. Ilya had checked him hard into the boards in the second period and Shane had felt in his teeth, the particular violence of it that was somehow also completely personal.

Shane turned to shove back, his eyes locking with Ilya’s, but before things could get any more heated the referees got in between them, much to the chagrin of the crowd. Neither of them had actually said a word, but they didn’t have to. Not with the way they looked at each other.

Now Ilya’s mouth was pressed into the back of his neck, breathing hard, his hips finding a rhythm that made Shane’s eyes roll back. Shane was slick and open, and had probably been since that second period, which he was never going to tell anyone, not even Ilya.

Especially not Ilya, who would be insufferable about it.

“I wish I could have fucked you right there,” Ilya said, his hand pressing down into Shane’s shoulder as his hips kept up with the same rough thrusts, “You would have liked that, right? You would bend over for me?”

“No, fuck you,” Shane gasped, but his stomach did twist at the idea.

Ilya laughed, low and quiet, and then snapped his hips forward in a way that made Shane cry out, his back arching.

“Ilya,” Shane whimpered, and Ilya reached around him, wrapping a hand around Shane’s cock. His entire body jerked with it, caught between pushing back onto Ilya and thrusting into his fist.

“That’s what I would do. Right there, on the ice,” Ilya started to say, stroking Shane perfectly in time with the thrusts. Shane was sure he would combust. Just disintegrate, be there one minute, and gone the next. “Show everyone who you really belong to.”

Shane couldn't respond, and that seemed to spur Ilya on, his grip tightening around Shane's cock. It bordered on almost painful, but Shane still tried to roll his hips down into his fist, too far gone to care.

"Who do you belong to, *Shanya*? Tell me."

"You," Shane whined in the next moment, without any hesitation. He wanted to come so badly, he'd probably say anything, but then he knew it meant these words. "You, Ilya, you… please, I want to come."

"I know, sweetheart," Ilya said, his hips still moving in that same devastating rhythm. He didn't speed up, if anything, he actually slowed down, his strokes long and deliberate, like he was trying to pull Shane apart piece by piece. "You're being so good for me."

"Ilya, please."

"Shh," he whispered, leaning over Shane's body so he could press a kiss into the back of his neck. "I've got you."

Shane's entire body was wound so tight he felt like he might shake apart, feeling oversensitive and wrung out. He tried to roll his hips forward again, into Ilya's fist, but the grip loosened immediately, denying him the friction he really wanted.

"Don't, I'm taking care of you," Ilya murmured.

"You're evil," Shane groaned.

"Mm." He sounded entirely too pleased with himself. Shane was thinking he was strong enough to push back and flip them. He could get Ilya onto his back and Shane could ride him as hard and as fast as he really wanted to. But Shane loved this. He loved how Ilya could drive him wild, pull him apart and then put him back together.

Ilya's thumb swiped over the head of Shane's cock, slow and deliberate, and Shane shuddered, pulled out of his thoughts. "Tell me again, omega."

"Yours. I'm yours," Shane gritted out, beyond caring about what he looked or sounded like. "Ilya, please."

"Please what?"

"Please let me..,please, alpha." Shane's voice cracked. He could hear Ilya groan, his thrusts stuttering.

Ilya didn't say anything else, but Shane could feel when he finally decided to stop teasing him, his grip tightening again while his hips started snapping forward hard again. The pace turned punishing, his fist moving in time with every thrust, and Shane didn't hold back the cries that erupted from him.

"Come on, let me hear you," Ilya said, his voice rough. "Come for me, *malysh*."

His orgasm hit him like a wall, his whole body locking up before he shook through the waves. Ilya worked him through every single aftershock, his hips still moving, and Shane could feel when he came, his hips going still.

Ilya pressed a kiss to Shane's shoulder, breathing him in and then letting it out in a deep long exhale.

They stayed like that for a while longer, until Ilya was pulling out, reaching to get rid of the condom.

"Would you really let me?" Ilya asked, after he had rolled back over to crowd into Shane's side again.

"Let you what?" Shane asked sleepily.

"Fuck you on the ice?"

Shane laughed, turning over so he could face him. "If you wanted. I'd let you."

"You would just let me? Or would you want it too?" Ilya asked, reaching to pull the blanket up and over them. Shane knew they'd have to get up to shower properly in a bit, but for now this was nice.

"I'd want to, too," Shane clarified. "I'd let you fuck me anywhere, honestly."

"Mm. Good." Ilya pressed a kiss to Shane's nose and then to his lips.

Eventually Shane forced them to get up, unable to handle the sticky feeling on him and on the bed. They were quiet, moving together with the domesticity that they had only gotten better with over time. Back in the bed, they snuggled in close, the blanket tugged up around them again.

"How's Kiyomi?" Ilya asked, his hand moving slowly up and down Shane's arm.

Shane smiled before he could stop himself. "She's good. Scored a goal in her last game."

"Did she? I am not surprised."

"She's really good, Ilya. Like, actually good. And not just because she's mine," Shane insisted, unable to keep the pride out of his voice.

"I mean, it helps. Her daddy is also very good. Almost as good as me, even," Ilya said, and then had the audacity to gasp in shock when Shane hit him lightly in the chest.

"I'll send you the video," Shane said, and Ilya nodded, tugging Shane closer to his body. Shane hadn't realized how well he slept with someone until Ilya was there.

"She will be better than both of us one day," Ilya murmured.

"Probably," Shane agreed, resting his cheek on Ilya's chest. "Hopefully."

—

June 2015

Montreal went on to win the Cup on a Tuesday night in June, and Shane stood on the ice with it above his head, feeling like he couldn't breathe. This was what he had dreamed about since he was a kid, from when he first learned how to skate a frozen backyard rink in Ottawa. He had worked for it through every early morning practice, every away game, he'd played through suppressed heats and periods that made his body feel like it was turning in on itself. He'd earned this. Shane knew that completely and without question.

The first two people he thought when the buzzer sounded weren't his teammates. Not his coach, not the fans, and not even his parents immediately came to his mind.

He thought of Kiyomi, who was somewhere in the stands with his parents, probably losing her mind. And he thought of Ilya, who he knew was watching from wherever he was. Probably Boston, which was too far most days, but Shane knew he wouldn't miss this for the world.

Later, when the chaos had quieted enough for Shane to find his phone, there were a few messages already waiting for him. His parents had taken Kiyomi back to their hotel, so there was a message about how they'd made it there and she was asleep already. He ignored the other messages and opened his thread with Ilya.

Lily: congratulations, captain. you deserve it.

Shane stared at it for a long moment, smiling as his heart started to beat fast. He'd heard the word millions of times it felt like, but none of that compared to reading Ilya say them.

Jane: Thank you. I wish you were here.

Lily: me too. i sent a delivery to your place. when will you be home?

Jane: A delivery of what? You didn't have to send me anything.

Lily: it's a surprise, shane. tell me when you will be home?

Jane: Probably in another couple of hours. Decided to go out the team.

Lily: oh, really? shane hollander goes out to party?

Jane: Shut up. Sometimes! I feel like winning the cup is a good time.

Lily: true. i'll make sure your delivery is there when you get home.

Jane: Thank you…in advance?

Lily: of course, malysh.

—

It was a well known fact that Shane did not drink much. His teammates figured this out and had long since stopped trying to get him to keep up with them at the bar when he actually did go out with them. Shane would normally get one drink at most, and nurse it for the entire night before he left. Tonight was obviously different.

“To our captain!” Hayden said, raising his glass, and everyone cheered their glasses flying up into the air. Shane followed along, raising his back, and then he actually drank it all in one go. The team cheered again. Someone immediately refilled his glass.

That was probably where things started to go sideways.

By the third drink Shane was warm and loose in a way that he wasn’t used to, the noise of the bar for once not as overwhelming as it normally was. Even his teammates' voices blended into something that just felt like celebration, rather than grating on his nerves. He started to laugh at things that he normally didn’t find all that funny. He said yes when someone suggested shots, cringing when he actually followed through and threw back said shots.

People drank these things for fun?

“You good?” Hayden asked at some point, nudging into Shane’s side.

Shane looked at him, his eyes wide. “Of course. We won the Cup, Hayd.”

Hayden nodded. “We sure did, buddy. You want some water?”

“Mm, no,” Shane said, and then he smacked his lips together, realizing he felt a little dry. “Actually, yes.”

Hayden laughed and then pushed away from the table to get a glass. Shane watched him go and then leaned back in his chair, looking up at the ceiling of the bar. It was spinning, just slightly, and it felt like if he tried to walk the floor would do the same. Water was a good idea.

He pulled out his phone.

Jane: did you know i won the cup tonight?

Lily: you know, i did hear about this, yes.

Jane: its very big. the cup. i didnt realize how big

Lily: are you drunk, shane?

Jane: idk. mayb a lil. i had a few drinks

Lily: just a few?

Jane: hayd keeps refillig my glass, i think he’s trying to kill me

Lily: 😂 go drink some water, malysh

Jane: im drinking water dont worry

Jane: actually no thats a lie hayden is getting it

Jane: are you proud of me?

Lily: for getting the water? yes, you need it.

Jane: no no no, tjhe cup. getting the cup

Lily: so proud. the proudest.

Hayden came back and Shane accepted the glass of water, downing half of it in one go. Or at least what's what he attempted, some of it spilling on his chest.

"I think it's time for bed, buddy," he said to Shane, pulling out his phone to get a rideshare for Shane.

"Mm, yeah, that's a good idea," Shane mumbled, setting his phone down so he could squint down at his messages.

Jane: i'm going home soon. now, i think

Lily: good, pike is getting you a taxi?

Jane: yes i miss you

Lily: i miss you too, shane. tell me when you are home?

Jane: ok ok ok

Hayden nudged him and Shane started to get up, gripping the bench to steady himself before he started to follow Hayden to the door. His teammates cheered for him again, someone clapped him over the shoulder, and then he was outside. The air was good, making him blink as he breathed it in.

"Okay, cab is almost here. You good to go alone?" Hayden was watching him with narrowed eyes.

"I'm good," Shane said, and he stood up straighter to show he meant it. His brain was still spinning, but the fresh air was really doing something good. "Thank you for getting me a cab."

Hayden nodded. "Of course, man. Thank you for coming out with us! I hope you had fun."

Shane grinned, and meant it completely. "Yeah. I really did."

Hayden smiled back, seeming satisfied, and then the cab was pulling up. Shane got in, collapsing in the backseat with a long exhale. He watched the city move past the windows for a bit before he pulled his phone back out.

Jane: in the cab, going home now

Lily: good. I'll arrange for your delivery to be there soon.

Jane: what is it ilya?

Lily: you will see 😘

Shane huffed, pocketing his phone and letting his head fall back against the seat. The night was still warm in his chest, chasing away any negative thoughts before they could even form and leaving him floating in the best place. Or maybe that was because of the alcohol.

He made it back to his apartment and had barely finished toeing off his shoes when his phone started buzzing again.

Lily: home?

Jane: yes! where is my delivery?

Shane had expected a physical package to be at his door, so when nothing was there, he was confused. In the next moment he heard a knock on his door, and that made even less sense, suddenly. Who delivered things at this time of night? Shane still moved over to the door, glancing through the peephole. All he could make out was a dark cap pulled low.

Shane hesitated—this was definitely how horror movies began, right?— before he unlocked the door and opened it.

Ilya was standing in the hallway, a large bouquet of flowers in his hand.

Shane just stared at him. His brain felt like he was buffering, looking over the man, who looked like his Ilya, and grinned like him too. But here? With him? Wasn't he in Boston?

"Surprise," Ilya said, breaking the moment.

Shane laughed, the sound bursting from him before he could stop it. Then he reached out and grabbed Ilya by the front of his jacket and pulled him inside.

"You're insane. Are you actually here? Seriously?" Shane asked, as Ilya shut the door behind him with his foot.

"Mm, in the flesh." Ilya held out the bouquet, and Shane immediately took them, looking over them in awe.

"You flew here to bring me flowers?" he asked.

"I flew here for you," Ilya corrected, reaching to brush his knuckles over Shane's cheek. "The flowers were just me being polite. Kiyomi mentioned once that she likes lilies."

Shane made some kind of noise, one he'd deny later, gripping Ilya's jacket to pull him into a kiss, and when they broke apart he was already reaching up to knock the cap off of his head,

annoyed that it got in the way of their kiss. Nevermind the flowers that were definitely pressed against their chests.

“Get this off,” he huffed, before he kissed him again. He could feel Ilya laughing.

—

Much later, Shane fell asleep on the couch with his head in Ilya’s lap, Ilya’s fingers scratching lightly against his scalp. The flowers were in the biggest jar Shane had, since he realized he didn’t actually own a vase. Even as drunk as he was, it was probably the best ending to one of the best nights of his life.

—

January 2016

“Shane? Shane Hollander?”

Shane slowed down, his bag shifting on his shoulder as he turned towards the voice. He was just leaving practice, planning on heading straight to Jackie’s to pick up Kiyomi so he could take her to her own practice. It was quiet outside, most of his teammates either gone or still inside, the January air cold enough that his breath came out in small clouds. He assumed he’d be facing a fan. That did happen sometimes, especially when there was someone who was determined enough to figure out the Metros’ practice schedule.

Who he saw was not a fan.

The guy was maybe thirty or so feet away, hands shoved into his jacket pockets and looking like he had been standing there for long enough that his cheeks had gone red from the cold. Shane didn’t recognize any features of someone he knew immediately, but then it all suddenly clicked. Maybe it was the way he was standing, or maybe it was the line of his jaw as he clenched and unclenched it. He knew exactly who he was standing in front of.

Tyler Brooks. Kiyomi’s father.

He hadn’t seen him in person since they were sixteen at that hockey camp. He’d grown into his looks, his dark blonde hair was longer, but his eyes were the same bright blue Shane remembered. He could see what he had seen in him back then, and he could also, with a quiet jolt, see Kiyomi in the line of his face.

“Tyler,” he said, his grip tightening on the strap of his bag as he turned to fully face him. His voice came out steadier than he actually felt.

Tyler let out a breath, like hearing his name was a relief. “Hey, yeah. Hi. I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to just show up like this.”

“How’d you find me?” Shane asked, glad they were alone. Hopefully it would stay that way.

“It’s not all that hard to find you,” Tyler admitted, with a bit of a smile. “You’re kind of hard to miss these days.”

Shane said nothing. Tyler had to go out of his way to make sure he found Shane and he had a feeling he knew why. Shane waited to hear it.

Tyler's smile faded, glancing down at his shoes for a long moment before he looked back up at Shane. "Is she mine?"

Shane had expected the question the moment he recognized who was standing in front of him. He looked at Tyler for a long moment, taking in how obviously nervous he was.

"Listen, I have somewhere to be right now," Shane said carefully. Not necessarily dodging the question, but he needed time to think and process this. Plus, this non-answer was probably just as good as an actual confirmation.

"Can I have your number? We can talk another time?"

Tyler nodded, something visibly easing in his shoulders. "Thank you for not just walking away," he said, pulling out his phone.

"I wouldn't do that," Shane said simply. He meant it. Whatever decision he had made at sixteen, he had never closed the door entirely. Not really. A part of him always knew this day would come.

"I'll be in town for a few more days. Maybe we could meet for coffee?"

With their numbers exchanged, they stood for a few minutes across from each other, quiet again.

"I'll text you," Shane said finally, remembering that he really did need to leave. Tyler nodded and waved, turning to walk in the opposite direction while Shane turned the other way.

—

The cafe Shane chose was a small one, and at that time of day it wasn't very crowded. No one seemed to recognize him, which was immediately a good sign. He was able to order a coffee and secure a table well before when he told Tyler to be there, using the time alone to work through his nerves.

He had just taken his first sip of coffee when he spotted the man, sitting up straighter when they made eye contact.

"You were here early," Tyler said after he joined him, having picked up his own drink before settling down across from Shane.

"Better early than on time," Shane said and then inwardly cringed, because wasn't Tyler right on time? "Weird habit from my mom."

Tyler chuckled, not seeming bothered at all. In fact he looked a lot less nervous than he did a few days ago, which had to say something. "Fair," he said, holding up his mug with both hands and resting his elbows on the table. He looked across at Shane. "So…"

“She is yours,” Shane blurted out before he could say anything else. It was the first time he had confirmed it to anyone outside of his parents.

Tyler looked a little taken aback, blinking and then taking a slow sip of his drink. “Okay,” he said, nodding and then leaning back. “Okay.”

“I didn’t know I was pregnant,” Shane continued, digging his thumb into a small groove in the table. He couldn’t look at Tyler directly just yet. “Not until she was ready to be born. I didn’t mean to not tell you, I just. I didn’t really know you and she was just here. And mine.”

“I get that, really,” Tyler said, and when Shane did look at him he thought he didn’t look upset. Or sound upset, really. “I probably wouldn’t have believed you then.”

“I barely knew it was possible,” Shane added.

“Right.” Tyler took a moment, turning his mug in his hands. “Even though we knew it was possible with my husband, we were still pretty shocked the first time.”

Shane looked up at him properly for the first time since Tyler sat down. “Your husband?”

“Yeah. We have two pups. A boy and a girl,” Tyler explained, smiling.

“Does he know? About me? About Kiyomi?” Shane asked.

“He knows I’m here. In fact, he was the one who encouraged me to come talk to you. And, uh, Kiyomi? That’s her name?” Tyler asked, his eyebrows raising curiously.

“Oh. Uh, yeah, sorry, I didn’t say that. Her name is Kiyomi Hana.”

“That’s cute.”

Shane nodded in agreement and then after a moment of hesitation, pulled his phone out. He scrolled through his photos, finding a recent one he had taken of her before her last hockey practice. She was in her full gear, her helmet tucked under her arm, her long dark hair in a single braid she had started preferring. She was grinning in the picture, showing off her newly missing front tooth. Not from hockey, just from being a 7 year old. But she liked to tell people it was because of hockey, for whatever reason.

He turned the phone around and slid it across the table for Tyler to see. Tyler looked down at it, quiet as he took her in. “She looks just like you,” he said finally, looking at Shane again.

“Everyone says that,” Shane replied.

“No, I mean.” Tyler paused, shaking his head slightly. “She really does. But I can see–” He stopped again, pointing at his own face, and Shane understood what he was insinuating. It was subtle, but it was there. The longer he looked at Tyler, the more he could see Kiyomi's features. It was interesting to be able to see where some of the quirks she obviously had came from.

Tyler pushed the phone back in Shane’s direction. “Does she know about me?” he asked.

“No,” Shane said, pocketing his phone again. “Not yet.”

Tyler nodded slowly. “Do you think she ever will?”

“That’ll be her choice,” Shane admitted. “I always said that when she’s older, and she wants to know, I won’t stand in the way of that. But it’s not my decision to make for her right now.”

They were quiet again, and Shane busied himself with sipping at his rapidly cooling coffee.

“I want to be clear about something,” Tyler said a moment later. “I’m not interested in lawyering up and demanding visitation or paternity rights or whatever else. You have your own life, and I have mine. I didn’t come here to threaten you or make your life harder. I’m not going to the media. Everything, and I mean *everything*—” Tyler paused to emphasize the last word. “—We’ve spoken about will remain private.That’s not who I am, and that’s not why I’m here. You’ve built something with her. Something great. I’m glad she has you as her dad. I’m not going to blow that up.”

Shane exhaled slowly, something loosening in his chest that he hadn’t fully realized was wound tight.

“One thing, though? If you wanted, maybe you could update me on how things are for her? Periodically? We live in Edmonton.”

Shane nodded. “I can do that. And if she ever wants to know about you, I’ll reach out.”

“That’s all I’d want,” Tyler said, smiling at him now. “Thank you, Shane. Thank you for meeting with me.”

“Of course. Thank you for…”

Getting me pregnant? Not being insane?

“This. Thank you for this.”

They finished their drinks in a quiet that wasn’t exactly uncomfortable, which felt like its own kind of miracle given everything. Shane learned more about Tyler’s husband and their kids, Kiyomi’s half-siblings. That was a thought Shane had to carefully fold up and put away for another time. He wasn’t ready to sit with it yet.

When they finally stood to leave, Tyler held his hand out and Shane shook it, which felt so formal, but also right for two people who had just navigated something this enormous together.

Outside they parted ways, and Shane immediately pulled out his phone, opening his message thread with Ilya.

Jane: You free tonight?

Lily: always free for you. what’s wrong?

Jane: Nothing, I just want to hear your voice.

—

Chapter End Notes

in case you're curious about who i fully picture as kiyomi at this point: kiyomi, the hockey superstar~

see y'all next time!!

chapter soundtrack: landslide by fleetwood mac

Chapter 20: 2016

Chapter Notes

Hello my lovelies! Sorry about the wait, I took a tiny bit of a break. But I'm back!!

Enjoy~

See the end of the chapter for more notes

June 2016

—

r/hockey

Shane Hollander just won back to back cups at 25. Can we talk about how insane that really is??

Posted by **u/metrosfan_montreal**

1.2k comments

u/puckbunny99: the man is actually built different. two cups. TWO.

u/hockeyheadcanons: and he's TWENTY FIVE. most guys don't even get the chance to sniff it at 24.

u/notabotreallyswear: the freckles are doing a lot of heavy lifting too let's be honest

u/metrosfan_montreal: can we keep it hockey related please

u/notabotreallyswear: this IS hockey related. he plays hockey. i am watching him play hockey.

u/leafsloser: okay but can we also appreciate that he's been doing this while raising a kid? like quietly just. being a dad and winning cups.

u/quietobserver_99: that press conference last year gets me every time. "she's my kid. so she's good." i think about it constantly

u/puckbunny99: single dad. two cups. captain. TWENTY FIVE. he's not real

u/hockeyheadcanons: and rozanov still hasn't won a second one. the rivalry lives on

u/raidersforever04: don't remind me

u/devils_advocate_42: hollander really said let me build a dynasty while also raising a child. no notes.

u/metrosfan_montreal: no notes indeed 🏆🏆

—

“Did you hear Rose Landry is here?” Hayden asked, sliding into the booth across from him.

They were at a team organized celebration for their Stanley Cup win, very different from last year, but just as overwhelming. Shane was tucked into a corner booth, nursing a ginger ale instead of alcohol, his tie loosened and his jacket shrugged off while he watched his teammates enjoy themselves. He was happy. Quiet, but genuinely happy. He just also happened to be the kind of person who expressed that by sitting in a booth rather than standing on a table.

“What? Seriously?” he asked, looking up from his drink. “Right now?”

“Yup! Over there somewhere.” Hayden nodded vaguely into the crowd. “Apparently she’s filming something in Montreal. Someone in the organization invited her.”

Shane straightened slightly, scanning the room curiously. *The* Rose Landry. He’d seen more than a few of her movies, including one of her more recent action ones. She was a good actress, Shane enjoyed her work.

“Stop looking so starstruck,” Hayden laughed, snapping his fingers in front of Shane’s face.

“I’m not!”

“You absolutely are. It’s okay. She’s fucking hot,” Hayden said, waggling his eyebrows as he took a swig of the beer he had.

“I’m telling Jackie. For the swear and for what you said,” Shane said, shaking his head.

“Ugh, I can’t have any fun! But seriously. You should find her. Talk to her,” Hayden insisted. “You know you’re pretty popular yourself.”

Shane scrunched up his face, but his cheeks did redden at the thought of Rose thinking about him. “She probably has no idea who I am.”

“Ehh. She came to a hockey event. It’s safe to say she knows the captain of the winning team,” Hayden said, shifting to get up. “I’m not saying jump on her, I’m saying…go say hello.” He patted Shane on the shoulder before he left again, letting himself be swallowed into the crowd.

Shane knew Hayden’s intentions were in the right place, but he was very much uninterested. In fact, the only person he had any real interest in talking to tonight was currently in Boston, which may have only been two hours away, but it felt like two hundred.

A basket of fries dropped onto his table before a person, a young woman, slipped into the spot where Hayden had occupied. It was none other than Rose Landry herself.

“Here, have some,” she said, nudging the basket in his direction. “If I keep eating them, I won’t fit into my wardrobe and that’s going to piss more than a few people off.” Even as she spoke she grabbed a couple of the fries to shove them in her mouth.

“You’re Rose Landry,” Shane said flatly.

“Every single day,” Rose replied, her eyebrows raising as she nodded towards the fries again. “You’re not seriously going to leave me hanging, are you?”

Shane smiled and reached for a fry finally. They actually were good. “I’m Shane. Shane Hollander.”

“I know who you are, silly,” Rose chuckled, stealing another fry. “What I’m really wondering is why you’re sitting in a booth by yourself. Taking a break?”

“Yeah. It’s a lot sometimes.”

“I know. You managed to find the best spot, too. Sometimes you just need to recharge, you know?” She said it like she meant it, like she had her own version of a corner booth at every event she’d ever been to.

Shane nodded, really liking the way she worded that. He could already tell Rose had a certain charm to her, and it wasn’t just an act she put on. “I’m a big fan of yours, actually,” he said, taking a sip of his drink.

“Would it be weird to say I’m a big fan of yours too?” she asked, “Because I am. I may or may not have been looking for you all night.” She didn’t look ashamed at all to admit that. “I grew up in Detroit with three older brothers, all completely insufferable about hockey. Uh. No offense.”

“None taken,” Shane laughed.

She grinned, stealing another fry as she continued, “I cried when you won the first one last year. My brothers called me immediately.”

“Really?”

“Yeah, dead serious. They were devastated obviously, you know, Detroit fan loyalty and all that. They kept saying stuff like, we hate this, but we respect it.” She laughed again, shaking her head. “My oldest brother said watching you play is like watching someone who actually understands what point of the game. Coming from him, that's basically a marriage proposal, so there’s that.”

“Wow, well. Tell him I’m flattered,” Shane told her, his brows raised.

“I absolutely will not. This is my moment with the great Shane Hollander. But seriously, though, two cups at, what. 25 years old? What does that actually feel like?”

Shane shrugged, realizing he had answered the question probably what felt like a dozen times that night already. He had the press ready answer, but he didn't feel like saying that to her.

"Feels like this is where I'm supposed to be," he said after a moment of thought. "Like it's one thing to win games, to move through the playoffs and all that. But it's an entirely different thing to know you captained the team that managed to pull it together enough to be on top, not once, but twice. It's a fucking rush."

Shane wasn't sure Rose's grin could get any wider. "That's what I'm talking about. Love that."

They talked for longer than Shane expected. Rose was easy like that, she moved between topics and carried the conversation, but also gave Shane thinking time before she responded accordingly. It made him feel comfortable and he found himself sharing more than he normally did. They spoke about his childhood in Ottawa, when he first knew hockey was his thing, and how it felt growing up knowing that was his plan.

He noticed she didn't ask any specific questions about Kiyomi, though she must have known about her. Shane didn't go out of his way to mention any extra details about her either, not yet. Rose spoke about her own life and path, too, with the early auditions, her first real acting gig, and how her brothers reacted to their little sister being in movies.

At some point Shane caught a whiff of her scent under the perfume she wore, the smell of jasmine and honey. Subtle, but very much there. It didn't smell quite as strong and heavy as Ilya's scent or even his mother's. There was something softer and warmer about it, and therefore familiar in a way that Shane recognized without having to say anything. He was curious, but not enough to question her about it, respecting her privacy just as much as he knew the need for his own.

Eventually the fries were long gone and their drinks had been refilled more than once. Shane realized with genuine surprise that he had lost track of time entirely, noticing with a glance that the event itself had thinned out around them, his teammates filtering out in ones and twos while he and Rose just kept talking.

"I think we outlasted everyone," Rose said, looking around with an amused smile.

Shane looked around as well, his eyes catching Hayden near the exit. The guy happened to look at him at the same time, waggling his brows annoyingly. This probably looked like a lot more than it actually was. Shane rolled his eyes, but couldn't help but smile back.

"Walk out together?" Rose asked, already reaching for her jacket. "I have a car coming."

"Sure," Shane said, leaving some cash on the table and shrugging his own jacket back on.

Outside, the night air was warm, and the street was actually quiet despite the event just barely ending. "Give me your number," Rose said to him, handing Shane her phone. He typed in his phone number, and then called himself so he'd have hers as well.

"Now I have yours too."

“Sweet,” she said, just as Shane caught a flash out of the corner of his eye. Then another. Neither of them really reacted, both obviously used to slight invasion of privacy.

“It was nice to meet the great Shane Hollander,” she was saying, reaching to briefly touch Shane’s arm. “I’ll text you? Get you out more. Comfortably, of course.”

“Sure.” Shane meant it more than the word let on. His life, from the outside, probably looked very full. He had a decent hockey career, a daughter, and was the captain of one of the best teams in the league. It *was* full. But full and actually lived were two different things. He had grown up fast and somewhere between Kiyomi and the draft and everything that followed, the parts of life that had nothing to do with hockey or parenting had quietly slipped away from him. He hadn’t really noticed it until just now.

Though, that wasn’t entirely true. There was one part of his life that felt completely and overwhelmingly alive still. Had probably felt like that for years now. He just couldn’t openly merge that part of his life with the rest of it. Not yet, anyway.

The photographer got at least three more shots before a car pulled up next to them and Rose slipped inside of it, waving at Shane through the window as it pulled away.

Shane stood on the sidewalk for a moment, watching the car before he pulled his phone out, saving Rose’s number. There was also a message waiting for him from Ilya.

Lily: how was the party?

Jane: Fun, actually. Why are you still awake?

Lily: it’s 10 pm, hollander. not that late. besides, i wanted to hear from you before going to sleep.

Shane smiled at his phone and started walking in the direction of the parking lot.

Jane: You’re sweet.

Lily: you should call me and say that to my face. well. through the phone.

Jane: Oh, now I see your real intentions here. I’ll call you in a sec.

—

Shane always said his summers were busy, so it was no real surprise when June moved into July with a flurry of activities that kept Shane on his toes. The hardest part, as it always was, was Ilya going back to Russia.

Shane could officially say he hated it now, out loud, to Ilya’s face — or at least through the phone screen, which was close enough.

Ilya seemed to share the sentiment, but maintained that he couldn’t get out of it, not yet, and Shane learned not to push for more than that as much as he wanted to latch onto the alpha

and never let go. He had a feeling there was something else Ilya wasn't ready to share, and Shane just had to trust that when he was ready, he would.

In the meantime, Ilya still made his presence known across the distance. A good morning text was always waiting for Shane when he woke up. Video notes became a regular thing because of timezone differences. Video calls ran longer than either of them ever planned because they never wanted to hang up. Kiyomi even got to talk to Ilya then too, and Shane got another view of how their relationship was also blossoming in the cutest way.

So while the distance was real, so was everything else.

His friendship with Rose also continued to develop as the summer stretched on. Rose meant it when she said she'd pull him out more often, and Shane found it easy to actually let her. It started with coffee meet ups whenever they were both available, finding spots that were quiet enough that neither of them would be immediately recognized. That became dinner, and at some point Shane stopped overthinking it and just brought Kiyomi along, because that was his life and Rose was going to have to understand that or she wasn't going to fit into it. Of course they got along well.

"My dad won't let me see your newest movie," Kiyomi was saying as they settled into the booth at the restaurant. "He says it's too violent."

"I'm going to have to agree with him on this, kiddo," Rose said, sliding a kid's menu over to her. "Maybe when you're a little older."

"A lot older," Shane added, opening his menu to look at it. Even though he knew what he normally got here, he'd still peruse.

"Right, listen to your dad," Rose said, but it was obvious she was still amused. Kiyomi, on the other hand, was not. She was pouting, but Shane could tell she wasn't really upset because she was still opening the small packet of crayons that came with her menu, ready to complete the puzzles and other activities set out for her.

"You both are no fun." She started coloring.

Shane looked over at Rose. "I think I like being not fun, Rose. What about you?"

"Oh, yeah. Love it. The least amount of fun, the better."

Kiyomi actually rolled her eyes—something Shane could confidently say he had no idea where she learned that from— but still started on her activity sheet, letting it distract her.

"You want chicken tenders, bug?" Shane asked.

"Yes please!"

Rose was smiling, watching the two of them."You know, I saw the press conference," she said after a moment. "So I knew about her, but seeing you two in person is something else."

"What do you mean?"

“The two of you. You’re such a dad,” she said simply, like it was the most obvious thing. “It’s really lovely, Shane.”

Shane looked at Kiyomi, who was now deeply focused on a maze on her activity sheet, her tongue poking out slightly in concentration. He realized that Rose was probably the first person outside of his parents, Hayden, Jackie, and Ilya who had actually seen this. The real version of him. The one that had nothing to do with hockey.

He was grateful for it in a way he couldn’t quite explain. Years ago he couldn’t picture letting himself experience this, and especially couldn’t imagine letting anyone get close enough to Kiyomi to see them like this.

Things had really changed. He had changed. And for once he didn’t mind.

—

[TRANSCRIPT: eTalk, October 2016]

HOST 1 (DANA): So we have to talk about some recent new couple news that have been gaining some traction.

HOST 2 (MARCUS): You wouldn’t happen to be talking about Shane Hollander and Rose Landry would you?

DANA: Have you seen the photos?

MARCUS: Uh, yeah! Who hasn’t?

[IMAGE: Shane Hollander and Rose Landry leaving a Cup celebration together in June, both mid conversation, relaxed.]

[IMAGE: The two of them outside a coffee shop in July, both in baseball caps pulled low.]

[IMAGE: A charity event in September, Rose laughing at something Shane said, his expression caught completely off guard.]

MARCUS: They’ve been spotted together no less than five times in the past few months**.**

DANA: Neither of their teams have confirmed a romance, but you’ve gotta admit, there’s some chemistry there.

MARCUS: I see it. It’s interesting — both Shane and Rose are known to keep their private lives exactly that. Private. So we’re left with these photos and a ton of speculation.

DANA: I’ll take it! Let’s say they’re open to interpretation?

MARCUS: That’s really all we can say! Coming up after the break—

—

October 2016

It was Shane's first time visiting Ilya's place in Boston, as it was also the first time meeting up before an actual game. Risky, but also exhilarating in a way that made Shane's skin tingle and his stomach quiver as he dressed for his outing. He told Hayden he'd be back later, just to be polite, and Hayden insisted that he wasn't going to wait up and to take his time with Lily. Part of him wanted to just confess that he was really going to meet up with Ilya Rozanov, but dropping a bombshell like that would probably give Hayden an aneurysm and they definitely needed him for the game.

So the secret continued.

At Ilya's place he waited, ringing the doorbell and taking the moment to look around the front area of his property.

Ilya was shirtless when he answered the door, looking freshly showered just as devastatingly hot as he always did.

"Hey," Shane murmured, stepping inside and automatically toeing off his shoes."This place is really nice. Did you get it built for you? How's the neighborhood?"

Ilya was smiling, the same smile he had when he was fascinated by Shane or annoyed, sometimes Shane really couldn't tell. "Mr. Real Estate coming out again," he said, following Shane in as he continued to look around.

"Oh, shut up. Can you blame me? It's really—" Shane didn't quite get the chance to finish his sentence as Ilya swooped in, pressing his lips to Shane's.

Just like that every thought slipped from Shane's mind, fully and entirely focused on Ilya and those lips. He didn't even realize he was being backed into a counter until his butt nudged into it, breathing in when Ilya cupped under him and picked him up fully, settling him onto the counter. He stepped in between Shane's open legs while they continued to kiss, his legs automatically locking around Ilya's hips.

"Oh," he sighed, reaching to drape his arms around Ilya's neck. "You aren't wasting any time."

"Nope," Ilya agreed, kissing down Shane's jaw to his neck, where he buried his face, breathing in his scent for a long moment. He started to kiss him there, his teeth grazing the skin. "Missed this too damn much, fuck."

Shane threaded his fingers into Ilya's hair, holding him there as he shuddered, trying to pull him in closer. "Need you," he said, tugging on Ilya's hair. When he pulled back, Shane stole another kiss, combing his fingers through Ilya's curls. He liked when they were messy. "You gonna fuck me on the counter?"

"I could," Ilya said with a smirk, but then he was shifting, tugging Shane with him. "But my bed is softer."

“I’d hope.” Ilya laughed, leaning in to press their lips together again while he also turned Shane to start their way to his bedroom. Their stumbling was awkward, Shane allowing Ilya to guide them, but he didn’t know where they were going and he also didn’t want to pull away long enough to see.

When they finally did reach the bedroom, they fell into the bed together, a tangle of limbs and laughter that very quickly dissolved into something more focused.

Shane was the first to be undressed, somehow fully dressed one moment and then laying nude with just his socks the next, Ilya between his legs, pressing kisses down his chest.

Shane watched him, not resisting the urge to push his fingers into Ilya’s hair once again.

“I want to feel you,” he said suddenly, watching as Ilya looked up, his teeth sinking into the skin of Shane’s stomach.

“Oh, you will.”

“I mean tomorrow. When we beat you,” Shane clarified, and then he had the unique opportunity to see Ilya’s eyes darken. It was like watching a flower bloom, the way the look physically spread across his features.

“*Hollander*.”

Shane only smiled in return, his brows raising playfully. “Or can you not handle that, Rozanov?”

Ilya growled, and Shane barely had time to laugh before Ilya was fully on him again, his amusement melting into something else entirely.

—

Shane was still catching his breath when Ilya slipped out of the bed without a word, slipping into the adjacent room. He heard the faucet running, and then Ilya was back, settling onto the edge of the mattress as he used the warm cloth to clean Shane off. He caught Ilya’s gaze, a swirl of arousal curling through his stomach.

“Come here,” Shane murmured, smiling when Ilya did as he was told, throwing the cloth on his side table before he climbed back into the bed, pulling Shane against his chest. Shane tucked himself in, inhaling and then exhaling slowly, letting Ilya’s unfiltered scent wash over him.

Something was off. It was subtle, just barely tinging Ilya’s usual pine scent with something lemony and sour. He sniffed towards Ilya’s neck, kissing the skin there as Ilya’s arm tightened around him.

“You’re thinking,” he said curiously, leaning up to look down at Ilya.

“I’m always thinking,” Ilya replied, his brows raising.

“You know what I mean. What is it?”

Ilya’s lips pursed, and Shane could actually see the way Ilya’s cheeks started to redden. “It’s nothing.”

“It’s not nothing. Something is obviously bothering you, Ilya,” Shane said, reaching to stroke a thumb over his cheek. “Tell me?”

Ilya didn’t speak for another long moment. “When were you going to tell me about Rose Landry?”

Shane’s brows flew up. That was not what he was expecting. “Tell you what about her?”

“I don’t know.” Ilya’s jaw tightened slightly. “The press seems to know more than me.”

Shane stared at him for a long moment, working through what he was actually hearing. Then, slowly, the corner of his mouth started to twitch up into a small smile. “Are you jealous?”

“I’m not jealous,” Ilya said immediately, which was obviously the most jealous answer he could have given.

“You’re jealous of Rose Landry!” Shane poked him in the chest. “Admit it.”

“She seems very happy. That’s all I’m saying!”

“Ilya.” Shane was having a very hard time keeping his lips pressed together so he wouldn’t grin. “She’s my friend.”

“Yes, your friend who you have been photographed with many times now,” Ilya said, vaguely gesturing at nothing. “Your friend who you’ve eaten dinner with, gotten coffee with—”

“Ilya.”

“—gone to events with—”

“Ilya.”

“All while I’m in Russia—”

“Ilya!” Shane grabbed Ilya’s face with both of his hands, turning it towards him. Ilya finally stopped talking, his jaw still set and his cheeks distinctly pink. This was new, Shane never really thought about how those kinds of stories would affect anyone else. He knew they were just speculations and rumors, all of which weren’t true at all. He didn’t realize he’d need to make sure Ilya knew that too. “She is my friend. That’s it. That’s all she is, and all she will ever be.”

Ilya held his gaze, his lips actually moving into what Shane could only call a pout. It was adorable. “You are sure?”

“I’m sure.” Shane leaned in to kiss the pout. “So very sure. Also, I’m literally in your bed right now.”

Ilya’s expression shifted, something loosening in it. “You are. With me.”

Shane nodded, and then shifted so he was straddling Ilya’s hips. “So you have nothing to worry about.”

“I still don’t like it,” Ilya said, reaching to lightly grip Shane’s hips. “The way they’re all ogling over what’s mine.”

A very obvious shiver went through Shane. “I get it. But I promise, it’s just rumors. I’m yours.”

Ilya looked pleased, his thumbs stroking over Shane’s skin. “She is still very pretty,” he added a moment later.

“Oh my God!” Shane laughed, the sound bursting out of him. “Ilya!”

“I’m just saying—”

“I don’t know if you can tell, but I’m an omega that is very much in love with an insufferable alpha whose name happens to be Ilya Rozanov,” Shane said, the words tumbling out of him before he had the chance to stop them. “Rose Landry doesn’t stand a chance.”

He felt Ilya go very still beneath him, his grip tightening slightly. “Very much in love?”

It hit Shane then what he had said. His stomach clenched. “Uh. Um.” He swallowed, his gaze shifting away from Ilya’s.

He felt silly, suddenly, admitting something like that. What if it was too soon? What if Ilya didn’t feel the same way? They’d been doing this, whatever this was, for years now, but he could’ve been assuming they were on the same page when they definitely weren’t.

“Shane?” Ilya was sitting up, reaching to cup Shane’s cheek, tapping it lightly. It pulled him out of his head and back into the moment. “Shane…”

Shane’s eyes moved up slowly, his eyes lingering on Ilya’s lips. His heart was beating too fast and he could feel it, like his entire body was trembling with the beats. What if he had misread this entirely? What if saying the words out loud changed something? He opened his mouth, suddenly needing to take everything back before Ilya could reject him.“I mean. It’s not–”

“I am very much in love with you, too.”

Shane’s eyes flew up to Ilya’s. “Yeah?”

Ilya was smiling the smile Shane had always assumed he saved for him. The one where his mouth curled up just enough that the skin around his eyes crinkled. It was moments like these that made Shane feel the most, before they even verbally shared it. He’d been collecting the actions, the little moments like those, for years now.

“*Da. Ya tebya lyublyu*.”

“What’s that mean?”

Ilya’s hand reached to curl around the back of Shane’s neck, his fingers finding the sensitive skin there and gripping it gently. The effect was immediate as always, something in Shane’s entire body just letting go, his shoulders dropping, his breathing slowly, and every bit of tension he’d been unconsciously carrying dissolving like it had never been there at all.

Ilya pulled him into a kiss that was slow and certain, very much like he was making a statement. Shane felt it all the way down to his toes.

“I love you, my Shane,” Ilya murmured, resting his forehead against his. “I love you so much.”

Shane sighed, nudging his nose against Ilya’s. “That does feel good to hear.”

“I’ll tell you again and again,” Ilya said, still rubbing slow circles against the back of Shane’s neck, each pass sending a warm rush through him that started from his scalp and moved all the way down his spine.

“Feel free to.”

Shane smiled and leaned in to tuck his face into Ilya’s neck, curling up a little more when Ilya started to lay back, wrapping an arm around Shane’s middle to keep him there.

“Hey,” he murmured after a while, just as he was beginning to feel Ilya’s breathing slowing down, signaling he was falling asleep.

“Mm?”

“I’m still going to beat you tomorrow.”

Ilya’s chest shook with quiet laughter, but he was also nodding. “Bring it on, *malysh*.”

—

Chapter End Notes

hehe, it has been fun totally flipping the timeline of when and how things happen for these two. and i have a few more changes up my sleeves. hope you're enjoying it as much as i am.

see y'all next time!

chapter soundtrack: fooled around and fell in love by elvin bishop

Chapter 21: 2016 - 2017

Chapter Notes

> HEY! You'll never guess where I am while posting this, but just know I am on my phone, lol. Please excuse any mistakes you may see, I'll do another read through once I'm back on a computer. I was just too excited to not get it posted now!
>
> Enjoy my lovelies ❤️

See the end of the chapter for more notes

November 2016

Kiyomi was eight years old the first time Shane witnessed her dropping her gloves on the ice.

Hockey was an intense sport, everyone who played or watched it knew that. The energy in a game could build and build to a point where there was nowhere to go, and it was even worse when you added in competitiveness between the teams.

Shane had never been much of a fighter himself, in fact he could count on one hand the amount of times he had actually dropped his gloves and went after another player. He knew how to keep a lid on those emotions, how to defer the energy into his gameplay instead. He usually had his most intense wins when he did that. But it was an unspoken rule that if you had to fight, you threw your gloves down and went for it.

He just hadn't expected to see his kid doing it so soon.

A girl from the other team had gone hard into the Angels' goalie, too hard, and way too late on the play. The goalie went down, the whistle blew, and Shane and all of the parents around him leaned forward in their seats. He caught Kiyomi as she turned around, obviously assessing the situation before she was throwing her gloves down, the universal sign that something was about to go down.

She was already halfway to the girl when Shane stood up, his eyes widening.

"Oh shit," he said to no one in particular. "Ohhh shit!"

The other girl barely had time to react before Kiyomi had her by the jersey, pulling her close and then shoving her away. It wasn't an actual fight or even long one for that matter with the referees quickly getting in and separating them. Kiyomi moved back without any resistance, but Shane could tell even from where he stood that she was still vibrating with unexpended energy, clearly looking like she had way more to say.

“I’d do the same,” a mom said from next to him. “The kid was definitely in the wrong there.”

“Always protect your goalie,” another dad chimed in.

The penalty was immediate. Game misconduct. Kiyomi was escorted off the ice and into the penalty box where she sat down roughly. Shane knew she’d be alright and sat back down, ready to watch the rest of the game. He knew he probably should’ve felt upset with the idea that his daughter was starting fights, but instead he felt nothing but proud. That was his girl.

Later, Shane was waiting for her outside of the locker room when she finally emerged, out of her gear with her hair half out of its braid as usual.

She looked up at him and Shane could immediately tell she wasn’t finished with what had happened. “She went into the goalie late, dad, way after the whistle!”

“I saw,” he said, reaching to take her gear bag from her. “It was pretty messed up.”

“Right. So I had to do something!”

“Dropping gloves should be your last option, bug,” Shane said, pulling the bag onto his shoulder as they started to walk in the direction of the parking lot.

“I know, I just…I didn’t think, I guess.” She sighed and Shane reached to wrap an arm around her shoulders, pulling her close. She turned to stick her face in his side, very obviously trying to scent him. She was pouting when she pulled back, looking up at him with wide eyes. “Are you mad?”

“Me? No, of course not,” Shane told her, honestly. “Probably would’ve done the same at your age. Probably actually did do the same. You just have to learn when’s the best time for that.”

Kiyomi looked visibly relieved, reaching to wrap an arm around his middle as they continued to walk. “I wanna be like you,” she said after a moment.

“I think you already are,” he replied, pressing a kiss into her hair. “You just haven’t realized it yet.”

—

January 2017

“You see the problem is, *Iskorka*,” Ilya was saying to Kiyomi, holding out his stick as he spoke. “Is that your dad has a weak backhand.”

They were on the ice in Montreal, just the three of them, the rink quiet after Kiyomi’s practice had wrapped up and the last of her teammates had filtered out. Shane had planned it that way on purpose, using his status to make sure they’d have the ice to themselves for a little longer. Moments like this had quickly become one of his favorite things without him fully realizing it, just the three of them moving around in the same space with no one watching or making judgements.

“Hey!” Shane called out, pushing off the boards and gliding back towards them, his own stick in his hand. “My backhand isn’t weak.”

Ilya smirked and shrugged, skating a lazy backwards circle around Shane once he reached them. “Okay, maybe not weak, but it is not as good as mine.”

Shane couldn’t quite deny that, which was probably the most annoying part. Just last week they had been on the same ice in Tampa for the All Star Game, teammates for the first time in their careers. They’d moved together like they had been working on the same team for years, finding each other’s rhythm almost as soon as they stepped onto the ice. Ilya was constantly where Shane needed him to be and vice versa, cutting across the ice and catching each and every one of the passes they sent to each other.

At one point Shane scored and Ilya skated right up to him, pressing a quick kiss to his cheek, like it was the most natural thing in the world. And it was at that moment. No one would blink an eye at Ilya’s show of affection, able to play it off as two teammates that were caught up in having a good game.

Shane knew what it actually was. He had been thinking about it ever since. Not just the kiss, but the feeling underneath it, being on the same side, not having to hide what they were to each other quite so carefully. He wanted more of that feeling. He wanted to not have to continue to hide what they were to each other quite so carefully. Shane was a private person, there was no doubt about that, but with Ilya he knew he’d scream from the rooftops what this man meant to him if he was given the chance.

“Daddy, you should show him,” Kiyomi said very seriously, skating past Shane with one leg up like she was figure skating despite the heavy gear she had on. “Like you showed me?”

“Hmm.” Shane turned the puck over on his stick, glancing at Ilya, who was still smirking at him, looking pleased with himself. “Maybe I should?”

That was all the warning he gave Ilya before he set the puck down and hit it in the same moment, charging down the ice with it.

He moved fast, weight shifting low, pushing off each stride with an efficiency that showed he could probably do this in his sleep. The puck stayed close to his stick as he entered the offside, turning just slightly enough so he could make the shot. He didn’t wind up, he didn’t announce that he was going to do it, he just snapped his wrist and set the puck sailing backhand into the top corner of the net.

Shane watched it for a moment, enjoying the sound of it hitting the post before he turned around, his blades cutting into the ice as he stopped, sending a small spray of white across the surface.

Ilya was watching intently, now fully still, his stick resting across his shoulders. It was obvious he was trying to keep his face neutral, but Shane could see the way he was itching to grin. Kiyomi, on the other hand, was losing her mind entirely. She was pumping her fist in the air as she jumped triumphantly, her braid bouncing wildly behind her.

“Yes!! That was so good!”

“It wasn’t so bad,” Ilya said as Shane skated back towards them, his brows raised.

“Not so bad?”

Ilya’s mouth curved, his eyes catching Shane’s gaze and staying there. “Yeah, okay. Very good. Second best in the league, even.”

Shane laughed, finally reaching Ilya and reaching to shove his shoulder lightly. Ilya reached to catch his hand, inadvertently tugging Shane closer, making his breath catch. They were close enough he could catch the faintest hint of Ilya through his scent patch and that was more than enough to spark the familiar want in his chest.

God, he wanted to kiss that smirk right off of his face. And the way Ilya looked back at him showed he was thinking the same or something similar.

“Let me try now?” Kiyomi asked, completely unaware of whatever moment may have been unraveling between her dad and his alpha.

Shane cleared his throat and it was Ilya’s turn to chuckle, squeezing Shane’s wrist before he could move away.

“Yes, let’s see what you’ve got, Kiyomi,” Ilya said, looking over to give the girl his full attention.

Kiyomi set down a new puck, using her stick to slide it back and forth on the ice directly in front of her for a long moment.

“Watching me?”

Neither Shane nor Ilya had the chance to answer before she was skating forward, pulling her stick back and turning so she could do the backhand. The puck went wide. Not by much, but enough that it was noticeable. Kiyomi frowned at it, glancing back at the two men.

“Again,” Ilya said simply, squeezing Shane’s wrist gently once more before he let go of it so he could skate over to her. He crouched down slightly so he was closer to her level, reaching to adjust her grip on her stick. “You are dropping your shoulder. Keep it up. Like this.” He reached with his other hand to gently adjust her shoulder, smiling as she easily moved with his adjustments.

“Good. Now try again.”

Ilya dropped another puck while Kiyomi reset her stance, obviously trying to follow what Ilya had said. When she swung this time, the puck hit the post. She whipped around immediately, her eyes wide as she looked at Shane.

“Did you see that?!”

“Of course I did,” Shane said, his smile wide as he clapped his hands together. Ilya caught his eye over Kiyomi’s head for a moment, grinning. “Good job, bug!”

Ilya straightened up, nodding and looking every single bit of pleased with himself. “Not bad, not bad at all.”

Kiyomi pointed her stick back at Ilya. “Better than your backhand?”

Ilya laughed. “Ask me again in about ten years.”

Kiyomi absolutely beamed.

Later, when Kiyomi had skated off towards the boards to get her water bottle, Shane crossed the ice to where Ilya stood.

“You know, I don’t know what’s sexier,” Shane said conversationally. “Watching you in a game, or watching you get along so well with my kid.”

Ilya laughed, immediately reaching to tug Shane a little closer. “I would hope I am always sexy to you.”

“Oh, you are.”

“Please, keep saying more,” Ilya murmured, and then he was leaning down to press their lips together, humming softly. Shane reached to grip Ilya’s hoodie, forgetting where they were for just a moment.

“Bleh.”

When they broke apart, Kiyomi was already watching them from the boards, her water bottle in hand. She was sticking her tongue out dramatically, her face scrunched up in a way that was very much like Shane himself. She didn’t keep the face for much longer, though, laughing and then turning to skate onto the ice again.

“Come on, we don’t have much longer!”

Shane watched her, unconsciously leaning against Ilya for the moment. “She knows.”

“Something tells me she has known for a long time, moya lyubov.”

—

One week later - Early February 2017

Shane didn’t normally shower before games, but there he was, his forehead pressed into the tiles while the water ran down his back.

He had broken his own unspoken rule. The meeting with Ilya before the game had been on a whim and completely against the routine and careful separations he kept between his two lives. But it happened anyway, the way things with Ilya always seemed to happen.

But it was fun. And they had a good time, not only ending up getting tangled in Ilya's sheets, but also talking. And then not talking. It helped ease some of the pre-game nerves he typically felt. Something about being with Ilya settled something in him, even on days like this when they were about to play against each other.

That said, he felt a bit strange. Not bad, exactly, just off. Warm in a way that the shower wasn't fixing, a low restlessness under his skin that he couldn't quite locate or name. It was easy to attribute it to constantly running, traveling back and forth all while trying to keep up with his own personal obligations. That was his life with the relentless pace of his schedule.

He turned the water off and stood in the steam for a long moment, taking a few deep breaths. He was ready for this. He pressed the heels of his hands to his eyes, rolled his shoulders and then he left, drying off and getting dressed. He applied a new fresh patch, checking it twice out of habit, just before the rest of the team burst into the locker room, bringing in all of the noise of the pre-game rituals with them.

He felt ready. More than ready.

—

The game started the way most games against Boston did, loud, fast, and intense as the teams pushed to score. Shane acknowledged Ilya with a nod, one that was returned, but other than that Shane didn't feel the need to seek out the alpha, focusing fully on the game.

Shane fell into his usual rhythm quickly, practically skating circles around Boston and cheering when the Metros scored their first goal. That was a great start.

They were tied going into the third, and a quick check of the time told him they'd have four minutes left before they'd be forced into overtime if neither of them scored.

Shane cut across the neutral zone with the puck, his head down for just a fraction of a second.

He somehow managed to see Ilya right before he felt his presence as he hit him clean into the boards, his shoulder knocking painfully into the plexiglass as the breath left his body.

It was a legal check, solid and well timed, actually. A type of hit Ilya was known for, and Shane was glad he never held them back, despite what they were to each other. Regardless, Shane had taken harder hits, and after a second to recover he was pushing back off the boards, looking for the puck.

Or at least that was what he tried to do. Once he was upright again, something hit him. Not pain from the check, that was dull and practically nonexistent at that point. It was something else. Something internal that sent a wave of heat rolling through him suddenly and unmistakably. His vision blurred slightly at the edges while he sucked in air, his skin going from warm to suddenly scorching.

Oh shit. Shit, shit, shit.

He knew exactly what this was.

Ilya was nearby, he could feel him, probably clocking the extra second Shane was taking to recover. Shane didn't look at him, instead finding the puck and getting back into the play. He could count on both hands the amount of times he had played through a heat, forced to work harder to push past the discomfort. He'd been doing it his whole career, honestly, so four more minutes of this was nothing.

Montreal ended up winning 3-2. Shane scored the final goal, his teammates swooping in with cheers and Shane let himself grin, despite very quickly feeling like he was burning from the inside out.

After, he let his body move on autopilot. He was caught up in an interview soon after stepping off the ice, unable to get out of it. In the locker room he changed out of his gear, but decided not to shower, not sure he could trust it with how volatile he already felt.

"You good?" Hayden asked from where he sat, watching as Shane jerkily stuffed his things back into his bag.

"Me? Uh, yeah, of course," Shane said, trying to stop the way his hands trembled. He knew Hayden couldn't smell him, not as strongly as an alpha could, but he was still wary about being in the locker room with the rest of his teammates. "Just tired. I'm gonna head back."

Hayden didn't look like he believed Shane, but he nodded regardless. "Okay, man. Get some rest. I'm probably going to get drinks with the boys. Good job tonight!"

Shane grinned, nodding and standing up finally with his gear. He pulled his phone out as he made his way out of the locker room.

Jane: I need to come over.

Lily: i know. when did it hit you?

Jane: I'm not sure exactly…wait, how did you know?

Lily: i have seen you in your heat. you get a look in your eyes.

Jane: It's that obvious??

Lily: to me it is. come on.

Shane didn't need to be told twice. By the time his cab pulled up to Ilya's place, he was fully sweating, his skin oversensitive where the fabric clung to his skin, a very obvious tremble going through him as he got out of the car. The night air hit him and he groaned in relief, except it didn't actually help, not like he knew Ilya would. As if the alpha could feel his presence, the door opened just as he reached it, their eyes connecting.

Ilya was obviously freshly showered, his curls still damp and pushed back from his face in a way that made Shane want to run his fingers through them to mess them up again. The warm and clean scent of him hit Shane like a wall, before either of them even spoke, and Shane could feel his knees buckle slightly.

"*Malysh*," Ilya said quietly, reaching to pull Shane past the threshold. Shane stumbled with the shift, but Ilya caught him, pulling him flush to his chest. "You never fail to amaze me."

Shane threw his bag to the ground, damn near melting against Ilya as he sought out his scent, pressing his face into the man's neck. He was shaking now, and with Ilya's scent all around him it got worse, squeezing his legs together just as he felt the first leak of his slick.

"Fuck, *please*." Shane didn't even know what he needed first. Their clothes were in the way. But he needed Ilya's hands on him, so he didn't want him to pull away to get rid of them. He needed everything all at once but he couldn't decide what he wanted first.

"You played through your heat like this," Ilya said, the awe obvious in his voice. If only he knew how many times Shane had actually been forced to do just that.

"It's not so bad," Shane murmured into Ilya's neck, very much lying. Suppressants helped with the worst of it, but since being with Ilya he had no idea what they were doing to really help anymore. Like his body knew what it needed and would do anything to get it, regardless of what he did.

He pulled back, just enough to look at Ilya, his alpha, properly. His eyes were probably doing exactly what Ilya spoke about, sure the haze of his heat was completely clouding everything.

Ilya looked back at him, like he was also assessing the situation, his head tilting like he was waiting for Shane to make his move.

That was all it took.

Shane gave him no warning as he jumped, fully launching himself at Ilya, his arms locking around his neck.

Ilya caught him without question, hands cupping under Shane immediately while his legs wrapped around his waist. 200 pounds of solid muscle and Ilya held him like it was nothing, barely even taking a step back.

"Need you," Shane whined into Ilya's neck, his hips rocking into his body. "Please. Need your knot."

Ilya's fingers tightened around his thighs, hiking Shane up higher as he finally turned to move them out of his entrance way. He moved into the bedroom, where he carefully dropped Shane onto the bed, climbing up in between his legs.

"I've got you," Ilya said, his voice deeper as he worked to pull off Shane's clothing, the compression wear absolutely soaked with his sweat and now his slick.

There was something about the way that Ilya moved that clued him into realizing that something else was shifting between them, this time especially in Ilya. His movements, while they were urgent, were also careful, like he was peeling open a precious gift. And Shane wasn't so far gone that he couldn't see the way Ilya's hands shook, and when he finally

looked back up at Shane, he saw the way his eyes looked blown out, a flush that couldn't be completely blamed on arousal blooming across his cheeks.

"Ilya," he whispered, shifting to sit up and climb into the man's lap, completely ignoring the fact that he was still clothed. "Are you…"

He'd only heard about alphas and their ruts, but he'd obviously never actually seen an alpha in the midst of one in this context. He knew it was dependent on the alpha, with some getting super aggressive, while others grew protective and needy. But looking at Ilya now, he could recognize where he had seen this before.

His mother, during her ruts, had never been frightening. She became quieter, more deliberate in her movements, and hyperattuned to everyone around her. As a kid living in her home, he was checked on multiple times a day, fussed over, but she always knew to pull back when Shane became overwhelmed. Or his father was there, urging her back with soft words and touches. He'd learned to read the signs and as he got older, learned what they meant and how he needed to respond.

Ilya looked exactly like that right now.

"Mm, yeah, I think so," Ilya said, breathing in as Shane unconsciously started to rock his hips down. "My rut."

The confirmation settled something new in Shane, more than aware that while he had shared a heat with Ilya before, it was never like this. Never with Ilya's rut meeting him halfway, both of them pulled under at the same time. His hands moved to Ilya's face, tilting it up and catching the way Ilya's eyes were wide and a little watery, like he was barely holding on by a thread.

"Okay," Shane said softly, his own need and want still there, but he had another necessity layered on top of that. To take care of Ilya. He finally pressed their lips together, hearing and feeling the way Ilya groaned and tightened his arms around Shane's waist. "Okay. I've got you too."

"Oh, Shane. My Shane," Ilya whispered. Then they were both moving, quiet as they shifted to pull at Ilya's sweatpants, releasing his cock and with another shift, Shane leaned up just enough to feel him pressing against his entrance, his breath catching. He sank down slowly, taking him inch by inch and feeling every bit of the stretch as he pressed down onto him.

Ilya groaned, his head dropping forward onto Shane's shoulder while Shane took the moment to adjust, his fingers pushing into Ilya's curls.

"Fuck, you feel perfect," he whined softly, tugging at Ilya's curls to pull the man's head back so he could crash their lips together as he started to rock with more of a purpose.

There was something nagging him, a thought right at the edge of his mind, but then Ilya's cock pressed into the spot that made his mind go completely and utterly blank.

"You're so…so deep…"

"*Blyat*…Shane, god," Ilya gritted out, his hands moving so he could properly grip Shane's hips, digging hard into the skin.

Shane rolled his hips again, realizing just how powerful he felt like this. It wasn't a feeling he was normally able to associate with his heats, usually a slave to every whim of his own body. But like this, right now, Ilya was coming apart beneath and Shane was the reason for it.

He set a rhythm, slow, but deep rolls that made him tremble, his cock slapping up against his stomach. He started to move faster, chasing an angle that made his breath stutter. Ilya's head dropped back and Shane went with it, mouthing at his throat, his jaw, anywhere he could reach.

"You feel—"

"I know," Ilya managed to say, bending his knees to get better leverage.

"Ugh, no, you don't." Shane dropped down harder, moaning loudly.

Ilya laughed, broken and breathless, even as he shifted his hips so he could help settle them both into a punishing rhythm that left them both gasping. The sounds in the room were obscene, slick and skin, the headboard hitting the wall, and both of them, completely undone.

Shane could feel Ilya's knot beginning to swell, catching on his entrance with every lift of his hips. He chased the feeling greedily, dropping down harder each time, wanting exactly that from him. He arched his back, reaching back to rest his hands on Ilya's thighs. "Ilya, alpha…"

"Yeah, come on. Flip over," Ilya murmured.

"No—" All Shane understood was that he'd have to be separated and he didn't want that.

"Shane." Ilya's grip tightened as he sat up properly, wrapping his arms around Shane's waist.

"Let me." Then he was flipping them in one smooth movement, settling between Shane's thighs and driving back inside of him before he could even whine about being gone. The change in the angle was devastating, his thrusts deeper and harder now that Ilya's full body weight was behind them.

"You're mine," Ilya said against Shane's neck, his teeth grazing the skin there. "You understand that?"

"Yes," Shane gasped. "Yes!"

"Say it."

"Yours. I'm yours, Ilya, please." Shane wasn't even sure what he was begging for, his thighs wrapping around Ilya's waist. Every thrust was pushing him further up the bed until Ilya had to tug him down, holding him still while he fucked him.

The knot pressed harder, more insistently, until with one final thrust it popped fully inside of Shane and then went still, locking them together. The stretch was enormous, lightning shooting up his spine. He came with the feeling, his back arching off the bed. “Fuck!”

Ilya followed him with a low groan, his hips stuttering before they went still.

They stayed knotted together, both of them breathing hard while Ilya eventually started to shift his weight so Shane wasn’t being crushed beneath him, rolling them onto their sides so they were facing each other, their foreheads touching. One hand came up to cup the back of Shane’s neck, his thumb moving in slow circles against the sensitive skin there while Shane sighed, the heat calmed for the moment. The thought that there was something he was forgetting also drifted before it could fully form.

“I love you,” Shane said softly, his top leg hooking over Ilya’s hip instinctively, wanting to stay as close as possible to Ilya while also managing the knot.

“Mm, I love you too,” Ilya replied quietly, pressing a kiss to Shane’s forehead. “You okay?”

“Yeah, what about you?”

“I am good, better than good,” Ilya insisted, nuzzling along Shane’s cheek now.

Shane tucked his face into Ilya’s neck, breathing in his scent and letting himself sink into the exhaustion of the moment. He could feel himself drifting in and out, not quite asleep, but not all that present either. Ilya drifted with him, unable to move until his knot went down fully.

“Still with me?” Ilya murmured a while later, when the knot finally softened enough that they could separate. He didn’t move, though, only grinding himself deeper into Shane.

“Mm.”

It was a phone buzzing that jerked Shane out of the moment, his eyes blinking open.

“Ignore it,” Ilya sleepily said, and Shane was perfectly fine with that, slipping his eyes shut again.

Until he heard the phone buzzing again.

“You should probably answer.”

Ilya sighed, finally completely separating from Shane so he could lean over him and grab his phone off his sidetable.

“Fuck, it’s my brother.” He sat back with the phone in his hand, sitting against the headboard as he ignored the call, only for another to immediately come through.

“What is it?” Ilya said, finally bringing the phone to his ear. He switched to Russian soon after that, his brows furrowing as he listened.

Shane watched him, reaching to smooth a hand over Ilya's thigh. Whatever his brother was saying was clearly upsetting him. Shane could hear it in the shift of his tone even if he couldn't understand the words, watching Ilya's expression close off as he got off of the bed and moved out of the room.

When he came back a short while later, he looked defeated, sitting down on the bed. He threw the phone to the side.

"Is everything okay?" Shane asked, concerned now as he sat up fully.

"My father," Ilya said, frowning as he spoke. "He is dead."

Shane sat up. He knew Ilya's father was sick, dealing with dementia, but he didn't realize he was that far gone. "Oh, Ilya. I'm so sorry."

"It is fine."

Shane was sure there was more to this, thinking that if he had learned that his own father had died, he'd be distraught. Ilya just looked like he'd expected it, and that it was just another inconvenience to be dealt with.

Ilya picked up his phone again and then started to rapidly scroll through things, typing out messages. "I will have to go back."

Shane nodded, because that made sense, but it didn't mean he liked it. "Back to Russia."

"Yes." Ilya looked up at him, and Shane could tell he was upset with the decision. "Maybe a week. Max."

"Could I–" Shane couldn't quite finish that sentence. Was he going to ask if he could come? That had to be the heat talking, because he truly had no idea how that would even begin to work.

"What?" Ilya asked, reaching to cup Shane's cheek.

"Nothing. I just. I'll miss you."

"I will miss you too, *malysh*. I will call you."

It turned out if there was anything that could put a damper on this night, it was this exact moment.

They still managed to get one more round in, their movements slower than before now that they were aware Ilya would be leaving. After, they showered together, and while Shane felt better in his skin, the heat was still there, simmering, but not gone. Shane knew he could use another full night with Ilya, and by the looks of it, Ilya could too.

"When's your flight?" Shane asked, watching Ilya move around the room, dropping things into his suitcase with the efficiency of someone who traveled constantly.

“Four hours.”

Shane sighed. He had pulled on one of Ilya’s hoodies and a pair of sweatpants, both fitting him well and absolutely soaked through with his scent. That alone was helping more than he realized, keeping the heat manageable and keeping him grounded, giving his omega something to hold onto while he watched Ilya pack to leave.

He padded into the adjacent bathroom and carefully gathered Ilya’s toiletries, bringing them back and tucking them into the suitcase amongst everything else.

He didn’t realize Ilya had stopped to watch him until he looked back and found him looking, watching Shane with a look that he knew fairly well.

“You look good in my things,” Ilya murmured finally.

“Good. They’re mine now,” Shane told him.

Ilya’s mouth curved, moving forward and pulling Shane in close by the front of the hoodie, pressing a long kiss to his lips and then his cheeks, and then finally his forehead.

Shane closed his eyes and let himself stay there, his hands fisted in the back of Ilya’s shirt, memorizing him in this moment.

—

The next day Shane was back in Montreal and Ilya was in Russia, too far away in every sense that mattered.

He still showed up to practice bright and early, working past the heat that still ran warm under his skin. In the locker room, someone mentioned that Rozanov hadn’t followed the team to their next game and Shane had to pretend to be surprised, like he literally wasn’t there when Ilya got the phone call.

Later he was slouched on the couch in Ilya’s hoodie, watching Kiyomi work through her homework at the kitchen table. He needed to probably get up to work on dinner, but the amount of effort that was going to take wasn’t sounding so appealing. His phone started buzzing with an incoming call, and he pulled it out, expecting to see that it was Ilya.

It was Rose instead.

“Hey,” he answered, “What’s up?”

“Are you home? Because I’m on the way. With takeout,” Rose replied, and Shane smiled, looking around his place. It was clean enough, and even though he didn’t feel the greatest, he knew he wouldn’t mind Rose’s company.

“I have to say. Your timing is impeccable.”

“That’s what I’m here for. See you in five!”

Rose arrived in exactly five minutes, just like she said. She came in with two bags of takeout and a bottle of wine that Shane knew he'd take maybe two sips from. She immediately toed off her shoes at the door without having to be asked, leaning over to kiss Shane on the cheek.

"Thank you," Shane said to her, helping her with the bags and moving towards the kitchen. "You're a lifesaver, truly."

Rose laughed, obviously pleased with herself.

"Hi Kiyomi!" she said once she spotted the girl. Kiyomi's head immediately shot up from her homework, already starting to slide off of her seat. "Rose!"

"Finish the last two questions first," Shane said before she could get very far, and she immediately went to sit back down, hearing Shane's no nonsense tone. It didn't stop her from making a face, though, as she picked her pencil back up.

With the bags set on the kitchen counter, Rose started to take boxes out, glancing at Shane sideways as he started pulling out plates and silverware.

"You look tired," she said.

"I am," he admitted, surprising himself with how honest he was being. Normally he was quick to deflect, say he was fine, and then move on. Today he just didn't have the energy for it. "I'm exhausted."

"Mm, well good thing I thought to bring food then," she said, starting to open the containers of Thai food. The smell hit him the moment the lids came off, lemongrass and chili, and his stomach turned just slightly. Not bad, exactly, just too much. He assumed it was hunger and helped Rose set the table.

They ate after Kiyomi was finished with her homework, the girl using the time to talk Rose's ears off about hockey practice, her last game, and something that had happened at school that Shane had already heard about twice. He watched Rose listen with genuine interest and thought, not for the first time, that he had somehow managed to produce the most extroverted person alive.

Eventually dinner wrapped up, the dishes were cleared, Kiyomi bathed and was put to bed. Then it was just the two of them on the couch, the bottle of wine Rose had brought on the table in front of them.

"Don't normally drink," Shane said, but he still held out a glass for Rose to pour some of the drink.

"I know, but. Looks like this was another good decision," Rose said, pouring herself a glass before she settled back into the couch cushions and taking a sip.

Shane followed, pleasantly surprised by the taste. He took another sip before setting the glass down.

Rose curled her feet underneath her, and Shane reached to turn on the TV, settling on a cooking show neither of them were really watching. It was comfortable, and Shane let himself relax, the wine slowly spreading a different kind of warmth through him.

“Hey, can I ask you something?” Rose asked during a commercial break.

“Hmm?” He glanced at her, taking another long sip of the wine.

“You don’t have to answer if you don’t want to. I’m just curious.”

Shane turned to look at her fully, his brows raising. He had no idea what she could’ve possibly wanted to know. “Rose. Just ask.”

“You’re…not an alpha, are you?”

That made Shane hesitate.

“I just mean. Your energy. It’s different,” she continued, swirling her glass slightly. “I know a lot of hockey players are alphas. But you don’t give me that vibe.”

“I’m not,” he said carefully, waiting for her next words. Because he could already tell she wasn’t finished.

“And you aren’t a beta either?”

Now that made Shane go completely still, the question landing completely differently than the first one, even if they were both about the same topic. Shane felt the flush in his cheeks deepen, his grip tightening slightly on his wine glass.

There were a handful of people who knew about his actual designation, not including the doctors he went to. Hearing Rose basically insinuate she knew it, and so precisely, was not something he had been prepared for.

“I…uh.” He stopped, blinking hard. “What?”

“I’m an omega,” Rose said simply, like she wanted to offer up some information so he wouldn’t be alone. “I don’t flaunt it, but I also don’t have to hide it. Not like you?”

That was probably why Shane felt so connected to her. And it explained her scent, the hints of it that he did get. Even in his hesitation, he could tell Rose wasn’t just trying to pull the information from him so she could share it. She was genuinely curious, and maybe looking to deepen their connection.

“I…” He knew he could trust her. “I’m also one. An omega.”

Rose only nodded, grinning. “Knew it. I know my people,” she said.

Shane let out a breath he hadn’t realized he was holding. “Is it obvious?”

“To me? A little. Definitely not to anyone else. At least, my brothers have never mentioned anything about your designation. You’re very good at hiding it.”

Shane looked down at his glass. That was the thing, wasn’t it. He had spent his entire career being very good at hiding it. His livelihood depended on it.

“I just don’t get how you manage,” Rose said, finishing off her glass. “I have a week off for my heat. It’s written into every contract. You…you don’t have that, do you?”

Shane shook his head. He couldn’t imagine being allowed to sit out from games at a time like that. “I don’t. I just. I play through them,” he admitted. “Like this last one.”

“Last one? Are you still?” Rose asked, furrowing her eyebrows.

“Tapering off of it.”

“Shit, Shane. If there was ever a doubt that you were a badass…this proves it,” she said, her eyes wide.

Shane smiled wryly. “You get used to it? I’m obviously on suppressants."

“I heard those only take the edge off, though. And long term use isn’t the greatest.”

Shane shrugged, but he knew she was right. At almost every visit he had to start taking higher doses and his doctor already started to tell him that it might start to affect him negatively in the future.

“It’s what I’ve got.”

“I get it,” Rose said, nodding. “Wait, so, that’s why you don’t let the dating rumors get to you? You knew we’d never have a chance?”

“Did you think we did?”

Rose laughed, shaking her head. “I’m not sure I could like you like that!”

Shane smiled, leaning back in the couch as he finished off his wine. “Also…I sort of have someone.”

Rose’s eyebrows shot up. “Sort of?” She leaned over to refill her glass and then Shane’s. “What do you mean? Like a heat partner?”

“No, like a. Partner-partner? It isn’t just during heats.”

Rose practically squealed. “Holy shit! An alpha?” She looked like she was vibrating with energy all of a sudden, and Shane could feel it too, wondering if it was the wine.

He nodded and she squealed again. “Lucky! Wait, where are they?” She looked around his living room, like the alpha would suddenly appear.

“He had to leave. There was a death in the family.” He reached to take his refilled glass, sipping again.

That made Rose frown. “Well that sucks. At least he was here for the beginning of it?”

Shane didn’t need to tell her that it was probably him who triggered in the first place, nodding as well. “Yeah, that’s the good part.”

They were quiet for a bit, drinking wine and watching whatever was on the TV.

“What about you? You don’t have anyone?” Shane eventually asked.

“Eh, I’ve had heat partners. But nothing serious. It’s harder, traveling as much as I do. I mean, you get it.”

Shane nodded, but there was a part of him that knew if he was given the chance to settle in one place, with Ilya, he’d take it. “So I’m still on the lookout. Let me know if you have any eligible people.”

Shane chuckled, but still nodded. “Sure, Rose.”

They lapsed back into a comfortable silence, the cooking show transitioning into some kind of home renovation show that was interesting enough to steal his attention. He finished the second glass of wine and let it settle in him, alongside the thought that he’d shared another piece of his life with someone he could really trust.

At some point he stopped tracking what was on the TV, his eyes closing for longer with each blink.

When he woke up it was past midnight, the TV still murmuring quietly in the background. He had a blanket draped over him, and when he glanced at the other end of the couch, he saw Rose asleep, curled up into the arm of the chair. He watched her for a moment, reaching to tug the other end of the blanket over her body. With her covered, he settled back, snuggling into his hoodie.

He could still smell Ilya in it.

Chapter End Notes

👀 see you in the next chapter!

chapter soundtrack: so into you by tamia

Chapter 22: 2017 - Part I (Ilya)

Chapter Notes

> HELLO! So I've realized I absolutely suck at replying to comments, but know that I read and giggle over every single one of them. Thank you guys so much. I'm posting this a little earlier than normal because it's done and, again, I'm too excited not to share.
>
> We get Ilya's POV again in this chapter. Please assume he's speaking Russian for all the scenes that happen back in Russia.
>
> Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It was raining when his plane landed in Moscow. Ilya thought that was perfect, it matched the dreary feeling that had taken over his body the minute he got the news. His father's death weighed heavily on him, but Ilya knew it wasn't in the way that most were affected by the death of their father. His father had been unwell enough that this was inevitable, had been inevitable for a long time. The dementia had been stealing pieces of him for years, leaving behind someone who looked like Grigori Rozanov, but increasingly wasn't.

Ilya had been grieving him in small increments for so long that his actual death felt less like a loss and more than a door closing on something that had already ended.

What felt the worst was that he never loved his father the way a son was supposed to love their father. Grigori was never kind to him, he insulted Ilya, pushed him to his limits and then past them, and he knew it was borderline abusive. If not fully abusive, at times. Ilya feared him, resented him, and then eventually pitied him. Now standing in the arrival hall of the airport with his bag over one shoulder and the rain streaking down the windows, he let himself feel the exhaustion of now and for the rest of the week.

He missed Shane already. The only true bright spot in his life. He felt like a terrible alpha, leaving Shane like that, when he knew the omega's heat wasn't completely done. He knew Shane worked through them, but Ilya hated that he couldn't be there for him. Hated that he couldn't take care of him. He couldn't wait to get back.

His phone buzzed, and one glance told him it was his brother.

"Ilya, where are you?" Alexei asked, as soon as Ilya picked up.

"I just landed," Ilya replied, starting to move through the terminal. Svetlana said she would be there to pick him up. "Where are you?"

“At the house. We need to discuss some things,” he said, and Ilya sighed, because there were only a few things that Alexei ever felt the need to discuss with him. “Father had some debts that need to be settled.”

And there it was. Money. It was all Alexei ever asked for. Ilya had already planned the funeral, everything was being paid by him, and there was still more he wanted. Forget his father’s debts, this was all about him.

“We’ll talk about it when I get there,” Ilya said, keeping his voice even.

“The amounts are—”

“When I get there, Alexei.”

He hung up before his brother could say anything else, finally making his way out of terminal. The rain fell in sheets, and of course Ilya had no kind of umbrella. He was just about to pull his phone back out to call Svetlana when he saw her pull up to the curb, the window opening.

“Ilyushka,” she called out, waving him over with a smile.

Ilya couldn’t help but smile back, pulling his hat further down before he sprinted to her car, getting in as quickly as possible.

“You look terrible,” Svetlana said, pulling away from the curb.

“Thank you, Sveta,” Ilya replied wryly. “I missed you too.”

—

The funeral itself was exactly what Ilya expected it to be. There were people he remembered from his childhood, and quite a few people he had no memory of. Ilya kept up his mask of indifference, accepting condolences when they were given to him, but for the most part keeping to himself. Alexei had already spoken to him about their father’s so-called debts, just at the edge of flat out demanding the money be placed into his account. He was sick of this, truly.

Svetlana stayed close throughout. She was good at that, knowing when to talk and when to simply be present, which was exactly what Ilya needed.

He called Shane whenever he could. The calls were short, considering their timezone differences, but they happened and Ilya found himself needing them more than he expected. Just the sound of Shane’s voice anchored him, enough to remind him that there was somewhere else he actually belonged.

Alexei waited until after the funeral to corner him about money again.

“I’ve been here, you haven’t. Someone has to pay those debts—”

“Those debts you speak of have been paid,” Ilya told him. “I paid for everything.”

Alexei's expression flickered, like he hadn't quite expected that. "There are other expenses. My family, your niece, we need more money."

"I am not giving you more money to fuel your drug habit," Ilya said honestly, because that's what it really boiled down to. He'd been sending money for years, and yet he was still demanding more. Constantly. "I paid for our father's care, every single month. I sent you money to help. What more do you possibly need?"

"There are bills, Ilya, I have a wife, a kid, you don't know anything about taking care of a family!" Alexei said, his voice raising.

Ilya thought about Shane and Kiyomi, thinking of how he'd feel if he were in Alexei's shoes. Only he wouldn't be, because he was responsible with the money he made. He took care of what and who mattered in his life.

"I've sent you more than enough for everything. Where does it really go? I've seen the bills, Alexei, nothing is adding up!"

Alexei said nothing, his brows furrowed.

"You have a family," Ilya continued. "A daughter who deserves better than whatever you're doing with that money. I give you more, you'll just spend it on whatever and then just ask me for more."

"You don't know anything about my life—"

"I know enough!"

The door opened and Ilya could see Svetlana step into the room, obviously hearing their voices. Alexei glanced at her, his lips curling at the sight of a new target. "Oh, good. Here comes your whore to save you."

Ilya moved so fast he shocked himself, gripping the lapel of Alexei's jacket and shoving him back into the wall. "Don't you ever talk about her like that!" he yelled, his hand clenching into a fist before he drew it back.

"Ilya." Svetlana was close, touching his shoulder gently. "Stop. It isn't worth it. He isn't worth it."

He held himself there, breathing hard, watching how Alexei actually looked frightened. After another moment he let go of his jacket and stepped back.

"I will set up an account for my niece. She will have access to it when she turns 18. That's all." He stepped back further, adjusting his own jacket. "Don't call me, don't text me. If and when you need something, go find it elsewhere. I'm done. We're done."

Alexei didn't respond, but it didn't matter, Ilya was completely serious. He straightened up, running a hand through his hair, before he turned to leave the room without another word.

"You okay?" Svetlana asked, reaching to smooth her hand over his shoulder.

“No. I don’t want to be here,” Ilya told her.

“I know.” She put her arm through his, turning towards the door with him. “Come on, let’s go.”

—

Ilya called Shane later that day, having stepped out of his apartment to get some fresh air. He’d spent the rest of the day packing and settling things because he had meant it when he said he wouldn’t be coming back to Russia. Not if he could help it.

Shane answered on the third ring, just as Ilya reached an underpass, which muffled most of the city noise and shielded Ilya from the wind.

“Hey.” His voice was warm and immediate, and Ilya closed his eyes at the sound of it. Ilya never thought hearing a voice alone would make him feel like this.

“You okay?” Shane asked, when Ilya didn’t immediately reply.

“No, not really,” Ilya answered finally, honest.

“What happened? How was your family?”

“Honestly, ” Ilya started to say, “My brother is scared, I think. And terrible because of it. It is just a mess.”

“I’m sorry it’s been so hard,” Shane said.

“I just hate that I have to feel this. That I haven’t been here. That I didn’t want to be here anyway,” Ilya mumbled, running a hand through his hair as he sighed in frustration. “I just. English is hard right now.”

Ilya can hear Shane return his sigh, obviously using that beautiful brain of his to come up with a solution. “Why don’t you say whatever you need to say in Russian? I won’t understand you. But I’ll listen. Would that help?”

“Maybe. Yes. You’re so smart, Hollander.”

“I wish I were smart enough to already know Russian.”

That made Ilya’s lips quirk up into a smile. “You would learn it so quickly. You and Kiyomi.”

“You’ll have to teach us one day? More than just your little offhand lessons?” Shane asked. “Now come on. Talk to me, Ilya.”

“I hate being here. I can’t think of a time that I ever wanted to be here, especially after my mother was taken away from me. My family doesn’t truly give a shit about me, not unless I am giving them money. In fact, that’s probably all I ever am to them, an ATM with an endless supply,” Ilya started to tell him, slipping into his mother tongue as he leaned back against the graffiti covered wall behind him.

“I pay for everything, I paid for this funeral, but it never feels like it’s enough. Everything I’ve worked for, I’ve done it all myself. I put in the work *myself.* And they just want more. More, more, more.”

Ilya wished he could see Shane’s face as he spoke. He knew he was listening, hearing Shane’s quiet breaths in between his own words. If he was there Shane would probably be hugging him close, his head tucked into Ilya’s neck, or resting on Ilya’s chest. He ached for that feeling again.

“I truly think that everyone hates me. Like they hate my existence. Especially my brother. I hate that he was here taking care of my father because I couldn’t. It actually kills me. And still I paid for everything, but it won’t ever be enough. Maybe it is jealousy? I don’t know. All I know is now I have no one. Well, no. Svetlana is here, and I love her. I don’t know where I would have been or what would have happened if she wasn’t here with me. But regardless of that, I don’t love her as much as I love you. And the thing is, I have no idea when it happened. When you suddenly became the most important person in my life. It’s like I blinked and that was it. I want nothing but the best for you and Kiyomi. I want to be the alpha who can do that for you both. Forever.”

Ilya went quiet then, listening to Shane’s soft breaths. Admitting something like that was a huge deal. He knew they were more than just fuck buddies, they had both decided and agreed on that a long time ago. But admitting that you wanted to be with someone, for life, to *mate* them, to *marry* them. Ilya had never done that before either.

“I did understand some words,” Shane murmured, bringing Ilya out of his head. “You said Kiyomi. And you said I love you.”

“See, this is why you’re smart and will catch on so quickly,” Ilya told him, speaking in English again.

“I just memorized those words in particular. I like when you say them to me.”

“I did say I would tell you over and over.” A siren in the distance caught Ilya’s attention for a moment, his eyes flickering towards the open passageway.

“I wish you were here,” Shane sighed, and for the first time in a long time Ilya swore he felt tears welling up. He blinked rapidly to make them go away. “Come back to me soon?”

“I will*, moya lyubov*. Soon.”

—

March 2017

As soon as he stepped back into Boston, Ilya felt lighter. The week away had been heavy, with its revelations and conclusions. Now that he was back home he was allowed to focus on the things he truly loved.

Hockey and Shane Hollander.

Speaking of Shane, the first game Ilya would be playing was against Montreal. He barely contained his excitement at the realization, knowing that he was supposed to still be grieving his father's passing.

Being back on the ice was really what Ilya needed. His teammates had all given him their condolences, obviously unsure of how to interact with an Ilya that was supposed to be grieving. He appreciated the thought, but it was exhausting. He wanted to be treated normally.

"Come on, fuckers," he yelled before they could leave the locker room, knocking his stick against the nearest one. "We have a game to win!"

On the ice it was easy to lose himself when he prepared for games, focused during their warmup. He was mid-drill when the Metros stepped onto the ice and his attention moved towards them without his explicit permission.

He found Shane almost immediately.

He stared until Shane looked over at him, and he could see the exact moment Shane clocked him, taking note of the way his eyes warmed before he could stop them. After a moment, he skated over to Ilya.

"I'll see you later?" Shane asked once he was close enough to Ilya. He messed with his stick instead of looking directly at Ilya, and Ilya knew enough to know that was on purpose, just so this conversation didn't look like more than what it was. "You remember my building code?"

Ilya nodded, sneaking a long glance at Shane. He looked tired, not in the way that was obvious to anyone else, but Ilya had spent years learning about this particular face. His cheeks were flushed, but when he caught Shane's eyes, for just a moment, Ilya didn't think he was approaching a heat again. He wanted to ask if he was alright, but Ilya was aware of where they were.

"I remember," Ilya answered instead, and Shane smiled a little, making Ilya's heart skip a beat, before he skated off again.

The game started with a face off, one that he'd done so many times with Shane. This time it was different, because instead of staring at a spot adjacent to Ilya's eyes, Shane looked directly at him. Their eyes met, and Shane smiled, a real smile, and Ilya couldn't help but smile back.

Then the puck dropped and the game began.

Shane was fast, snatching it and skating away. Ilya followed, grinning now, watching Shane's usual footwork as he made his way towards the goal. Shane glanced back at him, just for a moment, and Ilya caught the distracted look in his eyes.

Because of that, Ilya saw Marleau before Shane did. His teammate swooped in, slamming into Shane with a force that threw Shane off of his skates and practically threw him across the ice. He slid to a stop and then stayed still, laid out on the ice.

Ilya didn't know what to do with himself after that.

He moved automatically, skating toward Shane while his teammates went for Marleau. Shane was still sprawled out on the ice, eyes closed, and Ilya swore his heart had stopped. He couldn't make sense of anything around him, registering only distantly that he was being physically pushed back as the medics came in.

"Is he okay?" His words were lost in the shuffle. His eyes never left Shane's face.

"Just tell me if he's okay!"

The medics were loading him onto the stretcher when Shane moved, and Ilya's heart started again. He was speaking, but Ilya wasn't close enough to hear anything. He tried to move closer and was blocked a second time, but by then Shane was being taken off the ice entirely.

Ilya barely got his mind back into the game after that. Somehow he played. Somehow they won. He floated on autopilot, his mind constantly replaying the moment Shane got hit and went down. At some point Marleau had apologized, and Ilya brushed him off. He hadn't done anything wrong, this was a part of the game. After he made it back to the hotel, waiting for the others to sleep before he called his coach to get more info on where Shane had been taken.

He didn't sleep much.

The next morning he was at the hospital the moment visiting hours opened, stopping outside Shane's door long enough to look through the glass at his prone figure.

Shane was alone, thankfully, so when Ilya pushed open the door and slipped inside it was quiet except for the soft beeping of the monitor beside his bed.

"Shane," he whispered, taking in his omega's face, bruised but peaceful in sleep. Without thinking, he stepped closer, reaching to brush his knuckles over the freckles he loved so much. "Shane."

He watched Shane's eyes start to move behind their lids before they blinked open, his gaze hazy as he looked up at him. Ilya smiled, catching the exact moment recognition settled in.

"Ilya," Shane said softly, his hand reaching toward him. His other arm was held against his chest by a brace. "You came."

"Of course I did." Ilya let Shane grip his fingers when they made contact, instinctively careful of the IV line taped to the back of Shane's hand. He swallowed against the lump that had developed in his throat without his permission.

"You scared me."

"I'm sorry," Shane said, and Ilya rolled his eyes, sliding his fingers between Shane's to grip his hand more firmly.

"You have nothing to apologize for. It wasn't your fault. Marleau feels terrible."

Shane looked like he wanted to shrug, then stopped himself, wincing. “It’s fine. Happens to everyone eventually, right?”

“Sure. What did they say?”

“Broken clavicle and a bad concussion. So I’m out for the playoffs.” Shane frowned, then cleared his throat, his eyes searching the space around him. Ilya caught the movement and reached for the cup and pitcher on the bedside table, pouring water and holding the straw up to Shane’s lips.

Shane took a few long pulls and sighed. “Thank you,” he said, squeezing Ilya’s hand. Then he looked around again, seeming to reorient himself. “What time is it?”

“Just after nine. I came as soon as I could.” Ilya reached to brush his fingers over Shane’s cheek again, watching his eyes slip shut. “You should keep resting. I won’t stay long.”

“No, I want you here.” Shane’s eyes flew back open. Ilya didn’t think he would ever get enough of those eyes, especially when they were fixed entirely on him like this. “Please.”

Ilya nodded. His flight wasn’t until later in the day anyway. He pulled his chair closer to the bed and sat down.

“Marleau kind of messed up my plans,” Shane said as Ilya settled, reaching for his hand again. “Was looking forward to spending the night with you.”

“We’ll make more time. It’s fine.” Shane pouted, and Ilya understood why. They were always on borrowed time. This had been their last scheduled game together, and now with this injury, Ilya would have to make the effort to travel. There was no question about whether or not he’d do it. He would. He had done it before and he would do it again.

He leaned in, pressing Shane’s fingers to his lips. “You know I’m not going anywhere, *moya lyubov*.”

“I know. I just.” Shane hesitated, his teeth catching his bottom lip. Ilya immediately wanted to kiss the line away. Instead he pressed another kiss to Shane’s fingers and then shifted, nuzzling into the skin of his wrist, getting his first real access to Shane’s unfiltered scent since arriving. He let himself sink into it, the familiar warm vanilla, sharpened at the edges by pain, and then something else underneath it all. Something new. Faint, barely there, sitting just at the edge of what he could detect. He couldn’t name it.

“I miss you,” Shane said quietly. “And I just—” He stopped. His heart rate on the monitor climbed, moving from a steady eighty one beats up toward a hundred. His breathing shifted, coming faster, and Ilya pulled back immediately, his free hand moving to cup Shane’s cheek.

“Shane? Shane, breathe. You’re okay.”

“Ilya, I—”

The door opened.

They both looked.

Shane's mother, father, and Kiyomi filed into the room, the door clicking shut behind them. It was Yuna who spoke first, her eyes going straight to Ilya and narrowing.

"Rozanov."

Of course Ilya had seen Shane's parents in passing, but that was nothing like meeting in this kind of setting. Yuna Hollander was intimidating, from the way she held herself to the way her scent flared out to show she meant business. David was a little more subtle with his presence, looking thoroughly confused but not saying anything. Kiyomi looked like she was barely holding herself together, making only the briefest eye contact with Ilya before she was crossing to the other side of Shane's bed.

"Daddy?" Her voice was small. She looked like she was about to cry, and it physically hurt Ilya to see her like that.

Shane released Ilya's hand to reach for her, pulling her as close as he could manage with one arm. His eyes were wet. "Mimi, baby, I'm okay."

Kiyomi whined and then simply climbed into the bed. Yuna moved quickly to adjust her so she wasn't pressing against Shane's injured side. Kiyomi settled with her face tucked into Shane's neck.

Ilya stood, moving his chair back to give them room.

"I was just checking to make sure he was okay," he said, stepping back. Yuna nodded, moving into the space he had vacated. David looked at him with something that wasn't quite confusion anymore.

"That's nice of you, Rozanov," David said. "I'm sure he appreciates it."

"My teammate feels terrible about the hit. It was the least I could do." He stopped himself from adding anything else.

David nodded. Nothing more was said. Ilya glanced at Shane, at Kiyomi curled against him, and decided this was the right moment to leave. He felt the edges of where he didn't belong here, in this room, with this family. He wanted to stay. He wanted to be part of what was happening on that bed. But he didn't want to overstep a boundary that Shane's parents being there obviously set in place. There were just things they didn't know yet, and Ilya knew his place.

"Get well soon, Hollander," he said, turning toward the door.

"Rozanov." Shane's voice stopped him. "Ilya. Wait."

Ilya looked back over his shoulder. Shane was looking directly at him with that expression he knew well — the one that meant a decision had just been made and there was no taking it back. He'd memorized that look after many of their shared face-offs.

“I love you.”

Ilya heard the words clearly. He understood them. He still needed a moment to confirm to himself that he hadn’t imagined them. It wasn’t the first time Shane had said them, but it was the first time he said them in front of his parents. He immediately knew what Shane was attempting to do.

Yuna’s frown deepened from where she stood, looking between Ilya and Shane, like she was expecting either of them to suddenly say they were joking. The only person in the room who didn’t look surprised was Kiyomi, who had lifted her head from Shane’s pillow and was watching Ilya with patient, knowing eyes.

“I love you too,” Ilya said finally, his lips pulling into a small smile despite everything. His Shane was something else entirely. He’d do anything for this omega.

“Rest. I’ll call you later.”

Shane nodded. Kiyomi lifted her head further, looking considerably better than she had sixty seconds ago.

“I’ll text you when daddy’s available,” she said matter of factly. Yuna made a noise, but Ilya purposely didn’t look at her, not wanting to laugh at the startled expression she must’ve been wearing.

“Thank you, *Iskorka*. I’ll talk to you soon,” Ilya said, starting to walk back towards the door. His eyes were on Shane still, so he saw the way he smiled, lifting his good hand in a small wave.

“Bye, Ilya.”

Ilya turned and walked out, pulling the door shut behind him.

He stood in the hallway for a moment, listening to the quiet on the other side.

Oh, to be a fly on the wall for what was surely about to happen in that room.

Chapter End Notes

chapter soundtrack: my universe by coldplay and bts

see ya'll in the next chapter!!! sooooon.

Chapter 23: 2017 - Part II

Chapter Notes

> Hello my lovelies! You guys should be very happy that I'm obsessed with this story as much as I am, lol. I loved reading all of your theories.
>
> Enjoy! ❤️

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"What's going on, Shane?"

Shane had a few blissful moments of silence before his mother spoke up, clearly unable to help herself.

He didn't regret expressing his love for Ilya like that, but there was a part of him that wished Ilya had stayed, just so he wasn't facing this alone. Then again, maybe this was better. He could ease his parents into this new reality before Ilya was standing in front of them again. Whether they liked it or not.

"Why did you just tell Ilya Rozanov you loved him? And Kiyomi knows him?" His mother moved in close, pressing the back of her hand to Shane's forehead like she was testing for a fever. Like she thought he was delusional.

"Because I do, mom. And yes, she's actually known him for a long time," Shane said, shaking her hand away and then immediately wincing when the movement sent a spike of pain through his head. He knew he started this with his admission, but he was still very much injured and every small thing was making itself known quickly and efficiently.

"But you hate him, you've always hated him," she insisted, looking back at his dad.

"You have to admit, this is quite sudden, Shane," his dad added, stepping closer. "Could you give us more context?"

"I didn't always hate him." Shane squinted at his parents, the light in the room getting to his eyes. "That's what everyone thought. Or thinks, I guess. We just started seeing each other more—" He was very aware of Kiyomi, still curled against his chest. "...Intimately?"

His mother's eyebrows furrowed. She moved to sit down in the chair that Ilya had just vacated, like she couldn't keep herself on her feet. For once she looked at a loss for words.

"For how long, Shane?" his dad asked. "Since when?"

"Since…uh. Rookie season?"

“Rookie season!” That woke his mother up again, her eyes wide when Shane looked at her. “Are you serious, Shane? That’s almost nine years.”

Shane winced again, but nodded, his uninjured arm moving to smooth down Kiyomi’s back. He hadn’t realized that he’d first met Ilya when Kiyomi was about 8 months old.

“And, what, you’ve been in love with each other since then?” his mother pressed.

“What? No, mom, we were just…” he trailed off, unsure of how to explain what exactly they were. “It wasn’t immediate.”

“So you were lovers?” She said the word like she was testing it. Shane once again winced. He decided he hated that word.

“I don’t like that word. We just spent a lot of time together. And then it became more. And now I love him.” It felt even better saying the words again.

His mother opened her mouth and then closed it again, which was rare enough that Shane noted it even through the fog of his increasing pain.

His dad seemed to notice then that Shane was struggling, reaching over to put his hand on Shane’s uninjured shoulder. “You’re in pain.”

“Yeah, a bit.” He didn’t want to mention the nausea on top of wanting to close his eyes and not open them for a long while.

A knock at the door saved him. Both a nurse and a doctor came in, the doctor introducing himself as Dr. Crenshaw. Shane didn’t recognize him from the night before, but that made sense, shifts changed. He had Shane’s medical chart in his hands, opening it to glance through the notes.

The nurse took his vitals after his mother gently dislodged Kiyomi from his side, the girl reluctantly moving to stand with his grandparents. She checked the IV line in his hand and then Shane let himself be prodded — blood pressure cuff, temperature, oxygen, and then a careful check of his brace. Then Dr. Crenshaw stepped in with the penlight.

The light hit his eyes and Shane flinched hard, trying to turn away.

“I know,” the doctor said, obviously sympathetic. “Try your best to hold still.” He moved the light back and forth, checking both of his eyes, and then held up a finger for Shane to track. Shane did it because he knew the drill, having done concussion protocols more times than he could count. This time it felt different, though. Everything felt louder and brighter, and very obviously hurt.

“Name and date?” Dr. Crenshaw asked.

“Shane Hollander. March 10th.”

“It’s the 11th, daddy,” Kiyomi chimed in, from where she stood with his parents.

“Right, that’s still close enough,” the doctor said, smiling at Kiyomi. He looked back at Shane. “Nausea? Dizziness?”

Shane swallowed carefully. “Yeah. Both.”

“Expected. You’re still heavily concussed, but it is improving from last night.” Dr. Crenshaw stepped back, glancing at Shane’s chart again. “We’ll give you something to help with the pain. You were also quite dehydrated, which likely contributed to what happened on the ice."

Shane didn’t have anything to add there, he knew he had been feeling off before the game, and now he knew why.

“There’s one more thing,” Dr. Crenshaw continued, looking up from Shane’s chart. “I know the attending physician must have spoken to you about this last night, but given that your family is here with you now, we should discuss it again. Given your designation, we ran a full blood panel when you came in. Standard procedure for male omegas following significant trauma. Your hormone levels came back significantly elevated. One test returned positive for pregnancy.”

Shane had almost convinced himself that the conversation last night had been a dream. A concussion induced hallucination of some sort. Hearing it again, actually, hearing it *confirmed* again, hit him in the chest and knocked the air out of him in the same way that Marleau’s hit had.

He immediately felt sixteen years old again. He felt the same drop in his stomach, the same roaring in his ears. The same sense that his body had gone ahead and done something he hadn’t been prepared for. This time it was different, he was older, he did know that there was a part of him that wanted children with Ilya. They’d spoken about it, even in the haze of his heat, but he knew they both wanted it. He just hadn’t wanted it yet. Not like this, when he was at the height of his hockey career. Honestly, they were both at the height of their careers.

But there he was again, in a hospital room hearing the news while his parents, and his daughter, stood nearby.

“What?” His mother’s voice cut through the silence of the moment. “*Shane*.”

Shane still didn’t speak. He couldn’t, not while he was working very hard on breathing in and out at a normal rate.

Dr. Crenshaw looked in between them very carefully. “It’s still very early. Early enough that it was only detectable through your bloodwork at this stage. Does the timeline make sense to you?”

Did the timeline make sense? Shane knew he was basically asking when he had unprotected sex. His mind immediately went to February, when his heat was triggered during that game and he went to Ilya’s apartment right after. Neither of them were in the right state of mind to think clearly about what they were doing. He remembered feeling the warmth that spread through him, but even then it didn’t exactly trigger any specific thoughts about what they had forgotten to do.

He squeezed his eyes shut, as though that would stop the specific memories of that night.

“Yeah,” he managed to say. “Yes. It makes sense.”

“You still have options at this stage,” the doctor said. “I’m not here to tell you what to decide. But I’d recommend seeing an OB as soon as you’re discharged to get the full picture.”

“Okay,” Shane said quietly. His eyes were burning with unshed tears now, tilting his head back so they wouldn’t fall.

The nurse reappeared at his side, handing him a small cup with two pills. “These will help with the pain. They’re a slightly lower dose given your situation.”

Shane took them without arguing, washing them down with more water. His hands shook as he placed the cup back down.

Dr. Crenshaw and the nurse made their exit in the next moment, the door clicking shut behind them. The room settled into the type of quiet that happened right before something big was going to happen.

Shane’s stomach was churning, the water and medication mixing unpleasantly with everything else. He continued to stare at the ceiling, his brain starting to loop around the same thoughts.

Ilya. The baby. Ilya. The baby. His parents. Kiyomi. The baby.

“Is it his?” her voice quieter than it was earlier, all of the sharpness gone. “Rozanov’s?”

“Yes,” Shane replied immediately, looking at her. “And I’d like it if you called him Ilya. That’s his name.”

She visibly breathed in and held a hand up to press her fingers into the crease between her eyebrows while she exhaled slowly

“Is he an alpha or beta?” His dad asked, obviously careful with each word. “Can you trust him with this, Shane? Because this is serious. This can and will change everything.”

“An alpha. I’d trust him with my life,” Shane told him. And he meant every word. “And Kiyomi’s.”

Speaking of her, he looked around to see his daughter, who was uncharacteristically quiet herself. She caught his gaze and moved back to the bed.

“You’re gonna have a baby?” she asked, always straight to the point.

“Maybe,” Shane said carefully, reaching to take her hand. Hearing her say it was somehow worse than hearing the doctor say he was pregnant. Or even his parents. If there was anyone he wanted to make sure was alright with this, it was her.

Kiyomi seemed to be processing the information, quiet again as she got back into the bed, settling against his side.

“I have to check and make sure everything is okay first.”

“And Yaya is the other daddy?”

Shane nodded, pressing his lips together as he waited for her to give her final thoughts.

“So I will have a brother? Or a sister?”

“Kiyomi, baby, I don’t know for sure yet. But maybe, yes.” She looked up at him, and Shane looked down at her, their eyes meeting once again. And then she was nodding, settling her head on Shane’s chest.

“I hope it’s a girl. My French teacher told us last week that she’s going to have a baby,” she started to say, and Shane immediately felt the tension of the moment ease out of him. That was a good sign, at least. “She said she’ll tell us when she knows what the baby is.”

Shane closed his eyes and let her continue to talk, letting her voice and weight against his body soothe him. The medication seemed to finally be kicking in, taking the sharpest edge of the pain away.

When she finished talking and the room was quiet again, his mother spoke again.

“Okay,” she said, and Shane blinked open his eyes to look at her warily. He knew that tone of voice anywhere. He knew his mother. Yuna Hollander was probably already running calculations and writing speeches. There were brands she probably wanted to reach out to, to make this all official. She called it getting ahead of things, but Shane knew it was always things he just didn’t want to begin thinking about.

“Do you have any thoughts about what you’d like to do?”

“No,” he sighed, looking back up at the ceiling. “I do want to feel better. I have to talk to Ilya. Let him know.”

“He doesn’t know yet?”

“No, I didn't get the chance earlier,” Shane admitted.

“Is this something he wants?”

“Yes? I mean.” He paused, his fingers picking at the edge of the blanket over his lap. “We haven't spoken extensively about having kids.”

“Maybe that’s something you should have spoken about *before* the act, Shane.”

Shane looked at her. “You’re upset.”

She immediately shook her head. “I’m not upset, Shane. You’re my baby. My only son. We’ve always wanted this for you, to find someone you love. To have more grandchildren for us.” She reached to take his hand in hers. “I just wish you felt comfortable enough to tell us who he was sooner. Nine years is a long time. And then when we do find out, it’s combined with the fact that you’re pregnant again.” She squeezed his hand. “You have to admit that’s a lot to take in.”

“I know,” he murmured, the tears that he had willed away earlier coming right back. This time he couldn’t stop them, letting them slip from his eyes. He couldn’t look at her right now. “I keep feeling like. Like I’m constantly disappointing you.”

“Oh, Shane.” She stood up, reaching to cup his cheek.

“Shane. Look at me.” She waited until Shane actually looked at her, his eyes shining with tears.

“I’m never disappointed in you. This is a reality, life does happen. We deal with it. But I’m never disappointed in you, sweetheart.” She used her thumb to wipe away his tears. “Never ever. I just want to make sure you have the best possible life. That’s my job.”

“We’re on your side, kid,” his dad said. “And if Rozanov—” He paused to correct himself. “—Ilya is also going to be there, then we’ll have to accept that. We’ll figure it out, bub.”

That felt so good to hear. From both of them. But then there was this extra complication, conceived in a moment neither of them planned for.

“I’m scared,” he admitted, more tears falling from his eyes. He felt Kiyomi shift before he felt her wiping at the wetness, using the sleeve of her shirt. That only made him cry harder, holding her closer. “I’m so scared.”

“Of what, Shane?” his mother asked, his fingers combing gently through Shane’s hair.

“This. Be-being pregnant. Having a b-baby,” he struggled to say. They both knew how traumatic Kiyomi’s labor and delivery was. It had been nine years ago, but Shane remembered the pain like it was yesterday. “And what if Ilya r-really doesn’t w-want this? What if he isn’t ready?”

“We’ll have to cross that bridge when we get there,” his dad insisted. “Remember what we always tell you when it starts to get to be too much? One day at a time, bub. That’s all you can do.”

Shane nodded, knowing he was right. But he was still terrified. He wished Ilya were here. He wanted to hear his voice, he wanted to know he’d be okay. That this would be okay.

He continued to cry and they let him. His mother’s hand moved through his hair, slow and steady, then down to the back of his neck where she rubbed gentle circles that sent waves of calm through him. Eventually the tears tapered off on their own and he fell asleep like that, Kiyomi’s warm weight against his side.

When he woke up again, the room was still quiet and the light through the window had shifted. Kiyomi was still there, curled into his side and deeply asleep. He could hear movement and blinked his eyes open to find a nurse at his bedside, adjusting his IV line.

“Oh, I’m sorry, didn’t mean to wake you,” she said, noticing him immediately. “Breakfast came while you slept.”

He glanced at the table. A tray had actually appeared at some point, the food covered. He also noticed that his parents were gone, but given the fact that Kiyomi was still here, he assumed they hadn’t gone far.

Shane tried to sit up, one hand moving to adjust Kiyomi. He really felt worn out, the kind of tired that had sunk into his bones and made him feel heavy. Everything felt harder to do.

The nurse seemed to realize what he was trying to do, reaching to adjust the pillows behind his head and using the bed remote to raise him up slightly. The change in position helped him more than he expected.

“Yeah, thank you. This helped.” Kiyomi didn’t seem to notice the change in positioning, still very asleep.

“No problem. Is she your daughter?” she asked.

“Yes, she is,” he said, still finding it odd to admit that to people, despite a lot of people knowing now.

“She’s beautiful.” Shane smiled, glancing down at the dark head of hair next to him. She also wasn’t planned. But Shane knew he couldn’t possibly imagine his life without her at this point.

“She really is,” Shane agreed.

“You should try to eat something,” the nurse said next, pushing the tray closer to his bed so he wouldn’t have to reach far. “I can bring more pain medication with your next check in. Head still bothering you?”

“A little. But it’s manageable."

She nodded, apparently satisfied, and then left him alone in the room. Shane sighed, tugging the tray closer and lifting the lid of the food to get a look at what he was given. Toast, scrambled eggs, and a few sausages. A pack of apples on the side. He’d save those for Kiyomi when she woke up.

His phone was next to the tray, and he reached for that before he started to eat. He had tons of notifications, mainly from the team, Hayden, and even Rose. He sent quick updates to each of them, keeping it brief. The last notification was from Ilya, and he smiled, opening the thread.

Lily: i need you to know that i am thinking about you and i hope everything went alright with your parents. that was so brave of you, shane.

Jane: I just didn't feel like hiding you from them anymore. You deserve more than that.

Shane didn't have to wait all that long before the next message came through.

Lily: you're awake? can you talk?

Jane: Yes.

His phone buzzed with a facetime request a moment later. Shane accepted it, and Ilya's face filled the screen. He was outside somewhere, the sky grey and overcast behind him. Shane could hear the wind.

"Hi," Shane said. smiling again. "How are you?"

"Hi." Ilya's eyes moved over Shane's face, like he was taking stock of what he could see. "I should be asking you that, *malysh*." He brought a cigarette up to his lips, and Shane immediately frowned at the sight of it. "But I am okay. Worried."

"You said you stopped," Shane said, pouting at Ilya now.

"I said I was barely smoking. This is just one."

"Ilya."

"*Shane*." They stared at each other for a long moment. "You are hurt and this is what you focus on? You didn't tell me how you are feeling."

Shane could almost feel himself smiling despite himself. "I'm always going to focus on that, smoking is bad for you," he insisted, setting his phone against the closed food container so he wouldn't have to keep holding his phone up. Like this, Ilya could see Kiyomi asleep against him. "But. I'm alright. Everything still kinda hurts, but I've been managing. I miss you."

"I miss you too. Very much." Ilya's expression softened further when he noticed Kiyomi. "She's still there with you. What about your parents?"

"I'm not sure where they've gone, but yeah. You know she's a heavy sleeper."

Ilya nodded, taking a drag of the cigarette. "So how did it go with your parents?"

Shane shrugged one shoulder. "I mean. As well as it could have gone. It's going to take some getting used to."

"Can't blame them," Ilya said, stubbing out what was left of his cigarette. "Not every day you find out your son is in love with their most hated rival."

"They don't hate you."

Ilya raised an eyebrow.

“I mean it. They’re just following what everyone has said about us. About this rivalry. They’ll come around,” Shane insisted. “They’ll need time.”

“Mm. You look tired.”

“I am,” Shane admitted, but he was sure Ilya was picking up on something else. Something very important. News that would change both of their lives forever. He just didn’t want to share it over a facetime call. He wanted to see Ilya, in person.

“When can I see you again?”

“You’ll be going back to Montreal?” Ilya asked. Shane hadn’t thought about it. If he knew his mother well enough, though, she’d insist he stayed with them in Ottawa while he recovered. Either that or his parents would stay with him in Montreal. He just wanted time alone with Ilya.

He had an idea.

“I’m not sure yet, actually…but. Hey, I have a question.” Shane shifted slightly against the pillows, glancing down when Kiyomi shifted, but didn’t come out of her sleep just yet. “Instead of going back to Russia, will you come to my cottage this summer?”

“Your cottage?” Ilya’s eyebrows rose. “You have a cottage?”

“Yeah, it’s private. No one knows about it except for the family.” Now that he had the idea, he couldn’t stop. It would be perfect for them. “It’s just. It’s really nice there. And quiet. And it could be just us. At least for a week or two. Kiyomi can stay with my parents.”

Ilya looked hesitant, but Shane could tell he was actually thinking about it.

“What do you think?”

“I think it’s not a bad idea,” Ilya finally said. “I would like to see you before the summer, too.”

“Yeah, of course, before then too. But that would be nice, though, right?” Shane was smiling, the pain forgotten for the moment.

“It would be. I want to.” Ilya was smiling too, the smile he only ever saved for Shane.

“Okay, good. I love you,” Shane said.

“I love you too,” Ilya replied, just as the door opened to his room. Shane glanced over to see his parents coming back in, his dad carrying two coffees.

“Hey,” Shane said to them, nodding towards his phone. “I’m talking to Ilya.”

Shane glanced at his phone to see Ilya straighten up, like he was doing something he shouldn’t have been doing. It made him snort softly.

“Can we say hello?” his dad asked, surprising Shane, but he immediately nodded. Ilya hadn’t said anything, but when Shane looked at him again, he nodded, just a bit, showing him he was okay with the impromptu meeting.

“Yeah, here.” Shane turned his phone around so Ilya could see his parents. They were still by the door, standing side by side, both wearing expressions of uncertainty that they were masking with awkward smiles.

“Hello, Mr. and Mrs. Hollander,” Ilya said, his voice loud in the silence. “I love your son very much.”

His mother blinked, and his dad’s smile widened further.

“David,” his dad said, waving with his free hand. He nudged his mom when she didn’t immediately speak.

“You can still call me Mrs. Hollander.” She saw when Shane immediately winced, and seemed to rush to correct herself. “I mean, until we meet in person again. We have a lot to discuss, of course.”

“We do?” Ilya sounded confused.

Shane turned the phone back around quickly, holding the phone close again. “Yeah, um. We can have dinner or something?”

Ilya’s eyes were narrowed, but he nodded. “Sure. Let me know when. Can you go rest now, *malysh*? And eat something?”

Shane nodded, glad he managed to smooth over that moment. “I will. Call me when you’re home?”

“I will. Miss you, *ya tebya lyublyu.*”

Shane visibly blushed, but nodded again. “I love you too,” he said softly.

“Since rookie season,” he heard his mother say to his dad after he ended the call.

“Nine years,” his dad replied.

—

Getting discharged from the hospital was a longer process than Shane anticipated. The doctor did come back in to check on him, deeming him well enough to leave after he checked on his concussion. He told them there was improvement, but still insisted that he’d have to rest and do very light activity. The same was said for his clavicle, and Shane learned he’d need to be in the brace for at least four to six weeks. Which already sounded like he’d be absolutely bored. Especially without hockey.

After there was paperwork to sign, forms with instructions, and a follow up appointment was made for him.

Finally Dr. Crenshaw reminded him to make the OB appointment. Shane had nodded stiffly, once again reminded of the third diagnosis that he'd be leaving this hospital with.

He still felt unsettled about the idea of it. There was a part of him that loved it, completely, the idea of having a piece of Ilya inside of him, of giving birth to someone that they had created, *together*. That part of him knew Ilya would be overjoyed. That they'd figure out everything, that Shane wouldn't be forced to navigate all of this alone.

And then there was the other part of him that was still absolutely terrified. He had no idea what he was doing. He didn't know how to be pregnant. He didn't know how to have a baby. Kiyomi was unplanned, and she was more than fine now, but there was no denying that she was an unknown entity that he'd been thrown into as a teen. The memories of her birth still stirred up something inside him that Shane had purposely stored far, far away in his mind.

"We'll stay with you at your place," his mother was saying, after Shane was settled in their car in the backseat with Kiyomi. "Just while you recover. I've ordered groceries and I'll start on something to eat once we're back. I've already updated your team and written a statement for you on your behalf. I'll read it to you later."

Shane nodded, looking at Kiyomi at the same time she looked at him. They shared a look that made him grin.

"That's your Nana," he quietly said to her, and she giggled, nodding in agreement.

Back at his apartment, Shane managed to take a shower before he was forced to settle on his couch. Kiyomi brought him pillows and a bigger blanket, tucking him in before she hovered nearby.

"I think I'm alright now, bug," Shane said, reaching to squeeze her hand gently. "Thank you."

Kiyomi didn't look all that convinced, but she still settled on the floor next to the couch, turning on the TV.

"Tell me if you need anything, daddy," she announced, very clearly designating herself as yet another member of his care team.

After that, Shane finally rested. He spoke to Ilya again to tell him that he was home. Then he spoke with Rose and Hayden, both of them promising to come visit him over the next few weeks. He kind of wished he could talk to Rose about this newest development, but he also knew that the only person he really wanted to talk to about this was Ilya.

"I made you an OB appointment," his mother said, much later, after they had eaten the dinner she cooked. Now she settled on the edge of the coffee table in front of him, pushing her glasses up into her hair. "Next Thursday at two."

"Mom, I was going to—" Shane knew he actually had no real plans to call the doctor.

"I know. But you weren't going to do it today. And probably not tomorrow either. So, I just got it out of the way for you."

He sighed, but ultimately knew she was right. He tended to avoid things he didn't want to deal with. "Okay. Thanks."

She watched him for a long moment, reaching to brush her fingers against his cheek. "I just need to make sure you're okay, Shane. You and the baby."

He swallowed hard at the mention of the pregnancy. He still didn't feel all that different. Tired, sure, and very achy, but that was likely because of his injuries. He knew how it had happened, but he just didn't believe that it was true. Not fully. Not yet, anyway.

"What if I decide to…" He trailed off, the actual words too heavy for him to say out loud. "...Not?"

She looked thoughtful, taking a moment to understand what Shane was really trying to say. "That's not up to me. But it is a decision that I hope you don't take lightly," she said finally, obviously being careful with her words. "And also talk to Ilya about it. But first, go to the appointment. We'll take it from there."

Shane watched her get up and leave before he shifted so he could lay back on the couch again, his eyes trailing back up to the ceiling. He liked having control over things. Over his schedule, his body, his routines. It was how he maintained himself. He didn't like surprises. He didn't do unknown variables.

And yet, here he was. He pressed a hand flat against his stomach, just for a moment.

He didn't have control over this part, though.

Chapter End Notes

i wanna squeeeeze shane 🥺

see ya'll in the next one!

chapter soundtrack: breathe (2 am) by anna nalick

Chapter 24: 2017 - Part III

Chapter Notes

> Hiii friends! Had a lot of fun writing this chapter, so much so I had to actually stop so I wouldn't keep going on and on, lol.
>
> Hope you guys enjoy~

See the end of the chapter for more notes

r/hockey

Shane Hollander out indefinitely following last night's game against Boston — megathread

Posted by u/metrosfan_montreal

1.3k comments

For those who missed it, Hollander took a hit from Marleau in the first period of last night's game and did not return. The Metros have since confirmed he suffered a broken clavicle and a concussion. No timeline has been given for a return. Discuss.

u/beefyserenity8: broken clavicle AND a concussion? that's brutal. dude is made of glass apparently

u/metrosfan_montreal: Uh, he's never been made of glass. This is literally the first serious injury of his career. Show some respect.

u/leafsloser: serious question though, what does montreal do without him? their whole offensive system runs through hollander

u/puckhead99: they're cooked lol. without hollander they're a good team. with him they're a great team. big difference come playoffs

u/rozanov_watcher: Can we talk about the fact that Rozanov literally stopped skating when it happened? Just stood there. Guy looked like he'd seen a ghost!

u/mlh_nightowl: rivals or not you don't want to see anyone go down like that

u/rozanov_watcher: No but like. He STOPPED. In the middle of a play. Rozanov doesn't stop for anything. Make it make sense

u/puckhead99: they hate each other bro it's not that deep

u/rozanov_watcher: Do they though??? Because I've been tracking their interactions for two years and I'm not so sure anymore…

u/metrosfan_montreal: Oh no not this again.

u/rozanov_watcher: I'm just saying what I see

u/leafsloser: anyway. get well soon hollander. montreal without him in the playoffs is going to be painful to watch

u/captain24fan: He's going to come back stronger. He always does. That's what Shane Hollander does.

u/mlh_nightowl: ^ this. Guy has been defying expectations his whole career. A broken clavicle isn't stopping him for long

u/metrosfan_montreal: Prayers up for captain 24 🙏

—

The doctor's office was quiet when they arrived, which Shane appreciated. It had already been over a week since the game and his injury, and he was still slowly recovering. His concussion had all but resolved itself, leaving behind just occasional headaches, and his clavicle had reduced to a dull ache that Shane managed with pain medication.

None of that compared to the anxiety that had been tearing at his stomach in the days leading up to this appointment, though.

A nurse didn't call his name, instead stepping over to their area to get their attention. Shane wouldn't be surprised if his mother was the one who insisted on that level of privacy, knowing that if anyone in the waiting room heard or realized who he really was, it could be a whole thing.

The nurse led them back through a door and down a short hallway to a room. There was a table with the typical paper covering that crinkled when he sat on it, a monitor on a cart beside it, and a poster on the wall about prenatal nutrition that Shane fixed his eyes on immediately.

The nurse took his vitals, asked a few questions about what he knew about his last heat and period, and then instructed Shane to undress and put on a paper gown she provided.

"I'll be outside," his mom announced, moving to step out after the nurse. "Call me if you need me."

It was a little awkward working with one arm, but Shane figured it out, sitting back down on the table when the gown was fully on. He took the moment to look down at his stomach, still flat and well muscled, and tried to connect what he was seeing to what he had been told was happening inside of it. He couldn't quite do it.

A knock on the door pulled him out of his thoughts. He reached to clasp the gown closed as it opened.

“Hello Shane, I’m Dr. Bouchard.” She walked inside and reached to shake his hand, then his mother’s as she had followed the doctor inside. She then sat down with his file, and Shane noticed she didn’t outwardly show that she recognized him in any way. Either she didn’t follow hockey or she was professional enough to know not to show it. Either way, Shane was grateful.

“So,” she said, opening his file and glancing over it. “First things first. How are you feeling?”

Shane awkwardly nodded towards his brace. “Alright. Recovering.”

Dr. Bouchard glanced at his brace. “Right, yes. Are you feeling any other symptoms? Anything new since your stay in the hospital?”

“No. Nothing new.”

She nodded and set the file aside. “Okay, well. Let’s see where we are at.” She rolled her chair over to the monitor set up next to the table, reaching for a pair of gloves.

“So at this stage, an abdominal ultrasound won’t give us much to work with. The embryo is still very small. So I will have to do a transvaginal ultrasound.” Shane looked as she pointed at the equipment, including a stick type of instrument that he assumed now would be going inside of him. “It will give us a clearer picture and we should be able to detect the heartbeat. Do you have any questions?”

Shane shook his head and then Dr. Bouchard began the procedure. It wasn’t painful, but it was uncomfortable, tensing up almost as soon as she began. He kept his eyes on the ceiling, unconsciously counting the tiles as the minutes went by.

And then he heard the sound. It was small and fast, a flickering of something very tiny working very hard.

“There we are,” Dr. Bouchard said quietly. “That’s a strong heartbeat.”

Shane’s head snapped towards the monitor, his eyes wide as he tried to take in what was on the monitor. The doctor had turned it towards him while she recorded some measurements, humming quietly to herself. Shane couldn’t recognize anything immediately, not really, the screen was just dark with flashes of grey. But the more he stared, the more he could make out the shape of what was there.

“That’s the baby?” he asked, referring to a very small grey blob.

“Oh, yes.” She pointed and then Shane could actually see a fluttering, inside of the image. “And that is their heart.”

“Ohh, Shane,” his mother murmured from beside him, the awe obvious in her voice.

Shane could only stare, his breath taken away. That was his baby. He'd known, obviously, been told twice now—three times if he counted the at-home pregnancy test he also took—but none of that compared to actually seeing this. And it was a different feeling than the one he felt with Kiyomi. Then he was scared, in pain, the unknown bearing down on him. Now he could focus, his eyes dragging over every single detail. Half him and half Ilya, growing inside of him.

"You're measuring at about six weeks, almost seven," the doctor said, doing a few more clicks "Very normal."

She printed out some photos for Shane, and then the procedure was done. She left the room while he got dressed, directing him to move into her office next door.

"Alright, so everything is looking good." Dr. Bouchard settled into her chair across from them. "Before you leave, I'll need a urine sample and another blood draw. Also, your suppressants. If you haven't already, I need you to stop taking those immediately. They aren't safe for you to continue during the pregnancy, especially this early when development is most critical. It should be alright if you have been taking them, but starting today, no more.

Shane had been taking suppressants since he was sixteen, put on them a few months after Kiyomi was born. They were woven into his daily routine.

"What about scent patches?" he asked. He knew he wouldn't be returning to hockey for this season, but he couldn't completely control who else he'd be around.

"You can continue using those. They're topical and don't carry the same risks." She paused for a moment. "But I want you to understand that as the pregnancy progresses your natural scent will strengthen regardless. The patches will still help, but they'll have to work harder over time."

Shane tried to absorb that. "So eventually—"

"Eventually people may notice something is different," she said simply. "That's a conversation worth having sooner rather than later, with whoever you think needs to know."

Shane nodded. His circle would just have to stay as small as it already was. He wouldn't be able to be around his team at all, not in person, anyway.

"Your first pregnancy was a cryptic one. I can't say for sure how this one will progress, but we did catch it early enough that regardless of how you show, we'll know what is happening."

Shane was quiet for another moment. "What if I don't want to continue it?"

Dr. Bouchard nodded, still completely neutral. "Termination is still an option, and you do have time to consider it. There are a few ways of completing that procedure if that's what you wish to do."

Shane shook his head immediately, "No, I just. I just wanted to know."

She nodded. “Just know that sooner rather than later is always better, if that changes.”

With no further questions, the appointment was over. He was directed to another room for the urine and blood samples, and with those done it was just paperwork. His next appointment would be in four weeks.

In the car again, Shane ran his thumb carefully along the edge of the sonogram photos. It still felt unreal, even after the appointment, but holding the photos felt like actual proof that this was happening.

He wished Ilya was there. He still couldn’t quite picture his reaction. He didn’t *think* he’d be upset, but he couldn’t quite picture him being ecstatic either.

“Are you okay?” his mother asked, pulling him from his thoughts.

“I’m fine. Just thinking,”

She glanced at him briefly. “About?”

“Ilya. How to tell him,” Shane admitted, his eyes on the pictures again.

“What do you think he’ll say?”

Shane's first thought was to say he didn’t know, but then he thought about him and Kiyomi. From when they first met, to their first time on the ice together. Even the last time they were on the ice, where they practiced Kiyomi’s backhand. He could feel himself smiling. “He’s good with Kiyomi.”

“She did seem very used to him.”

“They’ve had some time on the ice together. He’s seen her play, too,” Shane said, tilting his head back against the seat, a small smile still on his face.

“Then I don’t think you’ll be all that surprised,” she told him. “How are you feeling?”

“A little weird, actually,” Shane said. “My stomach.”

“Ah.” She reached over to pat his hand. “I’ll make you some miso soup. My mom made that for me when I was pregnant with you. Every single day.”

—

It turned out that his stomach was just barely warning him of what was about to occur.

By the end of his second week at home his recovery had settled into a pattern. The nausea, his newest and least welcome development, had not.

It was unpredictable, sometimes hitting him early in the morning and then leaving him alone for the rest of the day, only to return out of nowhere in the evening with no warning or apparent trigger. It sat on top of everything else like an extra weight, layered over the dull

ache of his clavicle and the occasional headache that reminded him he was still recovering from a concussion. Some mornings someone found him on the bathroom floor, forehead pressed against the cool porcelain of his toilet. Some mornings he didn't make it that far.

He was, in short, a mess.

Kiyomi immediately noticed, because she noticed everything. She didn't say anything directly— she just appeared with a glass of water when he made his way back to the couch, or tucked herself against his side without being asked. There was something about her scent that settled him, and she seemed to figure that out quickly, staying nearby any chance she got.

"I'm fine, bug," he told her one morning, after she found him on the bathroom floor.

"You don't look fine," she said matter-of-factly, crouching down next to him. "Is the baby doing this?"

"I think so, yes," Shane mumbled, breathing carefully through another wave of nausea. This sucked. "I'll be okay."

She didn't say anything more, instead quietly sitting down on the floor beside him.

—

Ilya's facetime requests were always immediately answered, regardless of the state Shane was in.

When he answered he was in his usual spot on the couch, glasses low on the bridge of his nose with the hood of his hoodie draped over his head. In the camera he didn't look as bad as he felt, so he could only hope Ilya didn't immediately notice anything was off.

"Hi," Ilya said with a grin, obviously settling back on his hotel room bed. His team had won, so Shane wasn't at all surprised by his demeanor. The playoffs would be starting in the next few weeks, too.

"Hey, you," Shane responded, his fingers itching to run through Ilya's damp curls. "You look happy."

"Because I am, but fuck." His lips moved into a pout. "I miss your pussy."

Shane felt his stomach twist with something that wasn't nausea for once."*Ilya*. You can't say stuff like that."

"Why not? Where is Kiyomi?"

"Her bedroom."

"Right, so." Ilya's lips curved. "I can say how much I want I want to fuck my omega."

Shane was aware that his cheeks were going red. And worse, he could tell Ilya was noticing, his smirk widening.

“But first, tell me how you are feeling?”

“Like shit.” The truth tumbled out of him. He pointed vaguely in the direction of his shoulder. “Still hurts.”

Ilya nodded sympathetically. “And your head?”

“Better.”

“Mm. That’s good, at least.”

“I watched you play tonight,” Shane said, shifting against his pillows. “Two assists and a goal. Boston may have a chance.”

“Oh, high praise from MLH’s golden boy,” Ilya said, looking pleased.

“Shut up, you’re a fucking awesome player and you know it. It’s even better when your team is on the same page as you.” He shifted again, but this time it was too much and his stomach turned a little, working with the few crackers and soup he’d forced himself to eat earlier. He breathed through the sudden wave, his eyes closing for a long moment.

“You okay?"

When Shane’s eyes opened again he could see how concerned Ilya was. He didn’t like lying to him, but he really didn’t want Ilya to find out about the pregnancy this way. Not with playoffs lingering in the distance. “I’m fine. Sometimes it just aches.”

“I’ll be with you soon, *moya lyubov*.”

“I know.” He tugged the edge of the hoodie over his nose for a second. “It still smells like you.”

“Where do you think I got this from?” Ilya tugged the white shirt he wore up, angling the phone in a way that showed off his bare stomach.

Oh, he was playing *dirty*.

“When did you steal that?”

“Don’t worry about it.” Ilya’s hand was now messing with the edge of the sweatpants now. “You want to see what else I have?”

Shane’s teeth dug into his lip, sinking a little further in the couch. “Yeah,” he murmured, sure he was taking his body on its own rollercoaster. Sick one moment, turned on the next. He was here for it, though. “Lemme see.”

Ilya shoved at his pants and Shane let his head fall back, his glasses sliding further down his nose. He didn't bother trying to fix them.

"Go to your bedroom," Ilya said.

Shane was already moving.

—

April 2017

In retrospect, maybe planning a last minute birthday gathering while Shane felt horrible wasn't his finest decision. But watching Kiyomi literally vibrate with excitement when he told her their plans, her entire face lighting up, made it all worth it. Her actual ninth birthday had already passed, but between the injury and everything that followed they hadn't been able to do anything that was just for her. This was how he was making it up.

She helped decorate that morning, much to Shane's chagrin, flying around their apartment with his mom and dad trailing after her. Purple and gold colored balloons were placed everywhere, giving the place a very royal look as Shane watched, hoping he'd be able to conserve some energy in order to be more active later in the day. Plus, he'd only actually thrown up once that morning, so maybe that was another good sign.

Hayden and Jackie arrived first, Arthur on Jackie's hip while Emma and Jade pushed past their parents the moment the door opened to get to Kiyomi. They acted like they hadn't seen each other in years, which was literally not true, and then the three of them disappeared into her bedroom to do whatever pre-teens did.

"Looking good," Hayden said, pulling Shane into a careful hug.

Shane grinned. He knew that sarcastic tone that Hayden pulled out when he was trying to be funny, but also serious. Shane knew he didn't look terrible, though— athleisure, backwards cap, the sling the only thing giving away that he was still injured.

"Why thank you. I feel great." Arthur leaned towards him, his fingers reaching for his face and Shane actually leaned down, smiling when he patted at his cheek.

"How are you actually feeling?" Jackie asked, her eyes moving over him in a way that showed she wasn't as convinced.

"I'm fine. Promise." He nudged them both in the direction of the living room. "Go sit down. Lunch in a bit."

His parents had taken over the kitchen fully, something Shane had stopped fighting them about soon after he got home. His mother was cooking up a storm while his dad was working on a cake that Shane had been explicitly told not to look at, so he didn't.

Rose arrived a little later with her arms full of presents for Kiyomi and a bottle of something that turned out to be sparkling juice.

“It’s a kids party, after all,” she announced, leaning in to gently hug and kiss Shane’s cheek. She lingered close for a bit, obviously looking him over like she was paying attention to something.

“...You look better than you did a couple of weeks ago,” she said, carefully.

Shane laughed. “You can just say I look like shit. I won’t be offended.”

Her eyes went wide. “I would never!” But she was smiling, her eyes still moving over him. But if she had noticed something, she didn’t comment on it, moving further into the apartment.

—

The rest of the birthday was pretty lowkey, but Kiyomi enjoyed herself and that’s what mattered. Eventually they settled down for lunch and then cake was right after, Shane’s dad coming out with a purple frosted cake that Kiyomi immediately declared was perfect before she’d even tasted it.

“Don’t forget to make your wish, bug,” he said when all nine of her candles were lit and they were just about to sing her happy birthday.

After the candles were blown out and the cake was being cut, Kiyomi leaned over to Arthur in his high chair and very carefully swiped a small dot of frosting onto the tip of his nose. Arthur went cross-eyed trying to look at it, which made Kiyomi dissolve into giggles, which then set off Emma and Jade. The toddler had just enough time to look offended before Kiyomi was reaching with a napkin to carefully wipe away the mess, gentle and careful in a way that she always was with little kids. Shane suddenly realized how good she’d be with a baby.

If that’s what he decided to do.

Presents came after, Kiyomi working through the pile one by one. Shane had gotten her a new stick, since her old one was getting too small, and new gloves to match. She grinned and thanked him, rushing over to hug and kiss his cheeks.

He wanted to say Ilya helped pick them out, remembering the late night messages they sent back and forth while they contemplated brands, Ilya with strong opinions as usual.

Hayden and Jackie’s gift was a camera, small, sturdy, and actually perfect for a nine year old. Hayden had warned Shane of the purchase before they made it, and Shane had no idea why, not until he saw Kiyomi immediately opening the box and pulling the camera out. She turned it over a few times in her hands with wide eyes before she lifted the camera and pointed it at Shane.

The flash went off before Shane had a moment to think of smiling.

“Kiyomi!” He didn’t want to think of how insane he looked in the photo.

She was already pointing it at her next victim, giggling as several more flashes went off. That's what Hayden was warning him of.

Rose's gifts made her gasp and jump up — a small jewelry making kit and tickets to a figure skating show that was coming to Montreal in the spring. Kiyomi hugged her so hard Rose laughed, and within minutes the jewelry kit was open on the coffee table with Emma and Jade joining her to crowd around it.

Shane watched, smiling until something hit him.

It took him a second to place it. His mother had started another batch of karaage in the kitchen, and the hot oil smell was now drifting through his apartment, stronger than it had been before now that the oil was used. Now it had his stomach turning with quick and merciless efficiency. He breathed through his nose once, twice, and then quietly stood up.

"Be right back," he said to no one in particular, turning to very quickly walk out of the room.

When he came out of the bathroom, Rose was there, leaning against the wall, her arms loosely crossed like she was waiting on him.

"So," she said, looking him over.

Shane looked at her, not quite sure what she wanted.

"You smell different," she started to say, and that was when Shane knew exactly what she was getting at.

"How so?" he asked, deciding to play dumb.

"I don't know. I know your scent, it's like…warmer now, almost." She sniffed the air and Shane just watched, actually curious about all of this. He wasn't around other omegas enough, used to betas and alphas and their varying ways of scenting him.

"I'm not going to say anything," Rose continued, as though she figured it out. "I just want to make sure you're okay."

Shane leaned back against the wall beside her, glancing in the direction of his living room when he heard Kiyomi's laugh, loud and clear above everything else.

"I'm okay," he said, like he hadn't just thrown up his mother's home cooking. "It's just a lot right now."

"Are you pregnant?"

Rose was terribly good at seeing right through him, it seemed. "I am."

Rose's eyebrows shot up, her entire body jerking as though she was trying to contain her real reaction. "Shane! How far along are you?"

"Almost eight weeks? It's still very new. And making me feel like absolute shit."

Rose nodded sympathetically. “That’s gotta really suck. And you’re hurt too.”

Shane unconsciously rolled his shoulder. “It does.”

“Does he know?”

Shane glanced at her because he knew she was talking about Ilya, the alpha she hadn’t even met yet.

“Not yet.”

Rose nodded slowly. “Okay.” She pushed herself off the wall and nodded again. “Well. You’ll be alright. It’s going to suck for a while, but. It’ll be okay.”

Shane knew the logical thing was to believe her, but it was hard right now, in this moment. He nodded regardless. “Yeah…I know.”

She bumped her shoulder gently against his good arm as she turned to walk back towards the living room. “Come on. Your kid is definitely already making you something that hopefully isn’t hideous with that jewelry kit.”

Kiyomi looked up immediately when he reappeared, holding up a half finished bracelet. She had started an alternating pattern of blue and white beads. “For you,” she said, proudly, as Shane sat down on the couch again.

“What’s your favorite color, Rose?”

“Green,” Rose replied, settling down next to Shane.

Kiyomi nodded, leaning over the selection of colored beads for a second. “Give me ten minutes!”

—

It felt surreal watching Boston at the playoffs from his couch.

Shane had never missed a playoff series in his career, not since his rookie year, and being forced to sit at home watching while it happened was its own kind of awful. Regardless, he was happy Ilya’s team made it to the second round. He just wished he could’ve been there, at least in the same city.

Kiyomi was tucked against his side, a bowl of popcorn between them, as they watched the game. Boston was playing against New York, and for once Scott Hunter’s team was giving it all they had.

“I think Yaya’s ribs are hurt,” she said suddenly, pointing at the screen where Ilya had just taken a hit against the boards.

“What makes you say that?” Shane asked, his eyes narrowing as he watched the alpha skate away from the boards.

“He’s not turning on his left side.” She shoved another handful of popcorn into her mouth as she nodded towards the screen. “Watch. He keeps protecting it.”

Shane leaned forward slightly. Sure enough, Ilya was moving just barely off from his usual stride, something just slightly different than the way he normally carried himself. It wasn’t all that noticeable unless you knew exactly what you were looking for.

Shane frowned, knowing it was normal to play through injuries during the playoffs, but that didn’t mean he liked it.

The rest of the game was intense, making Shane’s stomach hurt for reasons that had nothing to do with the pregnancy. By the third period Boston was down by one with two minutes left, and Shane could see how hard Ilya was trying to drag his team back into it through sheer will.

In the end they just ran out of time.

As the Admirals spilled onto the ice to celebrate their victory, Shane felt something tight in his chest, upset for Ilya, but also relieved that it was over.

“He played really well,” Kiyomi said from beside him, breaking the silence.

“He did,” Shane agreed, and then reached to comb his fingers through her hair, smiling when she wriggled happily. He glanced at the time. “You should get ready for bed.”

She nodded, picking up the bowl to take it into the kitchen. “Tell Yaya I said he did good,” she said as she came out of the kitchen, like she knew that Shane was waiting for her to go to bed before he called Ilya. And truth be told, he was. “And that I said hi!”

“Okay. Goodnight, bug. I’ll check on you in a bit.”

“Goodnight, daddy, love you.” She waved and then went into her bedroom.

Shane reached for his phone, lowering the volume on the TV just as Hunter himself came on for the post-game interview.

Jane: That was a good game. Kiyomi told me to tell you that and to also tell you hi.

Lily: tell her i said she’s too kind. unlike some people.

Jane: What?? I said it was a good game!

Lily: you said it like it was a funeral.

Jane: Boston lost.

Lily: thank you, shane, i forgot i was there.

Shane snorted, rolling his eyes.

Jane: How are your ribs?

Lily: they hurt. how did you know?

Jane: Would you believe Kiyomi noticed it before me?

Lily: actually yes. she is terrifyingly smart. clearly gets it from her mother's side.

Jane: Excuse me?

Lily: 😇

Shane vaguely heard the shower running, adjusting his glasses before he reached to dig his fingers into the meat of his chest below his shoulder, massaging the sore muscle there.

Jane: So…

Lily: i'm looking at flights, shane. i can be with you by tomorrow.

Shane grinned so hard it hurt his face.

Jane: You're thinking very highly of yourself, Mr. Rozanov.

Lily: am i wrong?

Jane: No.

Lily: thought so. go to sleep, *malysh*. i'll text you when i land.

—

Shane didn't hear the door. He'd fallen asleep on the couch at some point in the early afternoon, a blanket pulled up to his chin and a book he'd tried to read laid open on his chest. Not all that rare of a sight. He wasn't sure how long he'd actually been asleep when something shifted in the apartment. A presence. A warmth. Then a scent. He blinked awake slowly.

Ilya was crouched in front of him, dressed in sweatpants and his Raiders sweatshirt, his bag still over his shoulder. He smiled when Shane's eyes found him, shrugging the bag off so it hit the floor with a heavy thunk.

Shane stared at him, continuing to slowly blink. He wasn't entirely sure he wasn't dreaming, but the longer he looked, the more real Ilya became. The tiredness around his eyes, the way he was holding himself weird because of his ribs. There was no way Shane was dreaming.

"Hi," Ilya said quietly.

"Hi," Shane said.

And then Shane was sitting up, Ilya moving with him as they leaned into each other at the same time. Shane's face ended up buried in Ilya's neck while Ilya's nose pressed into Shane's hair. They both breathed in at the same time, and Shane could feel the vibration of Ilya's hum against his scalp.

"You do look better," Ilya said when they pulled back, his eyes moving over Shane's features like he was trying to catalog every single change. His hand came up to cup Shane's jaw, his thumb moving over his cheek. He knew his bruises had all but faded, but replacing them were the bags under his eyes, emphasized by the paleness of his skin. "Mostly."

"Low bar," Shane murmured, turning to kiss Ilya's thumb.

"A little." He was still staring at Shane, definitely looking like he was trying to figure something out. "How are you feeling?"

"Better now," Shane admitted, his lips parting when Ilya's thumb started to press in, slow and deliberate. He tasted the salt on his skin and underneath it, something that was unmistakably Ilya.

Ilya's lips curved and he finally stopped crouching, moving to sit on the couch and pulling Shane into his lap in one easy motion, still mindful of his arm in the sling.

Shane let himself be arranged, settling with his side against Ilya's chest.

"You smell different. Stronger? I can't describe it."

Shane felt like he'd been waiting for this moment for weeks. This was exactly why he hadn't wanted to tell him over the phone. Like this he could see every single change in Ilya's features, as small as they were, sure he'd be unable to stop himself from reacting. Whether it was good or bad.

"Shane," Ilya said, when Shane didn't immediately answer. "What is it?"

Shane looked down at their hands. He'd run through this moment so many times in his head, rehearsing how he'd tell Ilya. How they'd be sitting. How he'd pull out the sonogram photos and show him. He'd imagined it going well. He'd imagined it going badly. He'd cycled through every reaction and now that it was actually time to say something, he realized he'd never quite been able to land on the reaction that was the most likely to happen.

Now looking at Ilya, every single word he'd rehearsed dissolved. Every single scenario, gone. Just like that.

"I'm pregnant."

The words landed softly in the quiet of his apartment. Shane watched Ilya's face closely, the slight part of his lips, the stillness that very obviously went through him. He saw when his eyes dipped down briefly to Shane's stomach before coming back up.

"You're—" Ilya stopped, visibly swallowing. "How far along?"

“Eleven weeks. Almost twelve.” Shane kept his eyes on him. “It happened in—”

“—February. Before the game,” Ilya finished. His eyes were wider now, like he had just finished making his calculations.

“Eleven weeks,” he mumbled, almost to himself. “You’ve known since—”

“The hospital. That’s when I found out. I wanted to tell you, but. My parents came in, and I wasn’t really, *really,* sure, not until later when the doctor confirmed it again.” He paused, the nerves making his stomach feel like it was turning again, still unsure of what exactly Ilya was thinking. “I’m sorry I waited, I wanted to tell you in person, not over the phone.”

Ilya nodded slowly, quiet now, but not looking away from Shane’s face. His eyes had gone glassy, just barely, and Shane watched him blink against it once, and then again.

“Are you okay?” Ilya finally asked, his thumb smoothing over Shane’s hand. “With…with this?”

Shane considered that for a long moment.

“I’m scared,” he quietly admitted. “I’ve never done this before, I don’t know what to expect. And I’ve been feeling *so* sick. And tired.” He paused to take a breath, letting it out in a small shudder. “I know it’s not something we’ve spoken much about, like. Not seriously. And I know this won’t be easy. Not one bit. For me. For us. But I keep thinking that they’re a *part of you*.”

Shane’s eyes trailed back up to Ilya’s, holding his gaze, feeling his lip tremble slightly. “And I can’t think of anything I want more than to have this baby be the physical representation of my love for you. But if you don’t want to, if it’s too much—”

“Shane.” Ilya reached to grip his chin lightly, tilting his chin up and then pressing their foreheads together. “You’re not going to do this alone. I promise you that. And you having my child is a dream come true. If you’re ready, I’m ready.”

“Yeah?”

Ilya sniffled, and Shane realized quite suddenly that there were tears collecting at the corner of Ilya’s eyes. “Hell yeah.”

Even through the tears, the sudden mischievous look in Ilya’s eyes made Shane laugh softly.

“You gonna have my baby, Hollander?”

“I’m going to try, Rozanov. If it doesn’t kill me first.”

Ilya grinned. Then he was leaning in to close the rest of the distance between them, his mouth slotting over Shane’s in a kiss he hadn’t realized he’d been waiting for.

“I’m going to be a father,” he said quietly, when he pulled back. “Holy shit. I’m going to be a father!”

Shane could feel his throat tighten. “Yeah. You are. You’re so good with Kiyomi already. I know this kid is going to be so loved.”

“I love you so fucking much, Shane.”

“I love you too, Ilya.”

For the first time since he found out he was pregnant, Shane let himself sink into the feeling.

He’d been dealing with it, quietly managing the nausea, the exhaustion that seemed to take over his life, and the weight of carrying a secret that had felt too big and fragile to set down anywhere. He was so focused on getting through each day, and now he could do that with no hesitation. Without the voice in the back of his mind saying that he could end this part early.

Now he was sure. He was going to see this through to the end.

“Let me show you something,” Shane said, unfolding his legs and slipping out of Ilya’s lap. He grabbed the man’s hand and led him back to his bedroom, where he crouched down beside the nightstand and opened the small drawer. The photos of his first sonogram were there, folded once, the edges slightly worn from the amount of times he’d taken them out.

“This was when I was seven weeks along,” he said quietly, holding the pictures out.

Ilya took them, his thumb swiping over the greyscale image, his eyes moving rapidly over every detail.

“That little grey blob…that’s them.” Shane pointed.

Ilya’s eyes focused on the spot, his lips curved into a little smile. “Our little grey blob is beautiful.”

“You want to come with me to the next appointment?”

“Yes. Of course.”

Shane leaned in to peck him on the lips. “Good. Soon.”

—

Dinner with Shane’s parents was scheduled later in the week. Shane knew they could only dodge it for so long because as soon as his mother knew Boston was out of the playoffs and Ilya was in Montreal, the invitation was inevitable. Ilya spent most of the day leading up to it moving around the apartment with a restless energy that Shane recognized as nerves, which in term made Shane more nervous than he already was.

He knew his mother was a hard nut to crack on a good day. Combine that with the fact that he was her only son, her omega son, and Ilya was an alpha who had basically claimed him and gotten him pregnant— it would be like getting into Fort Knox.

They showed up in the afternoon, greetings exchanged before his dad announced he'd be making pasta. One of the few things Shane could still tolerate these days, which he was quietly grateful for.

Ilya was recruited to help peel and chop garlic, and actually looked relieved to have something to do with his hands rather than stand around awkwardly.

Shane, his mother, and Kiyomi decided to relax on the couch while they took care of the food. His mom leaned in closer to get a good look at Shane, her lips pursing.

"How's your stomach been?"

"Alright. I'm not sure why they call it morning sickness when it happens at every part of the day," Shane admitted, frowning. "Some days I basically live in the bathroom."

She hummed, reaching to brush the back of her hand over his forehead. "Maybe something to bring up during the next appointment. There's normal and then there's excessive."

Truth be told, Shane was already planning on mentioning it.

"I could still come—"

"No, mom," Shane interrupted. "Ilya and I should do this on our own. We deserve that much."

They both looked in the direction of the kitchen, where Ilya was talking to his dad while they worked around each other. Shane couldn't quite make out what the conversation was about, but it seemed civil enough, if the way Ilya's shoulders had finally dropped from where they'd been sitting all afternoon said anything.

When she looked back at Shane he expected to hear more about it, to put up more of a fight at being excluded. Instead she looked like she was conceding. "Alright, sweetheart. My little boy, growing up."

She reached to pinch his cheek and Kiyomi giggled from where she was next to Shane, previously engrossed in a book, but obviously still listening.

"Mom, I'm 25," he whined, shaking off her hand before immediately doing the same thing to Kiyomi, grinning when she pulled a face.

"Just saying." The small smile on his mother's lips showed she was teasing. "I still remember when you were about two years old and we were still having trouble getting you to stop sucking your thumb."

Shane groaned.

"Daddy sucked his thumb?" Kiyomi was leaning over Shane, her book forgotten entirely. "How did you get him to stop?"

"We tried everything. Hot sauce, nail polish, one of those weird thumb guards."

Shane had no memory of any of it, but he knew pictures existed because he'd seen them.

"Did anything actually work?" The voice came from the direction of the kitchen, and the three of them looked to see Ilya, standing there with a smirk on his face.

"Well, I remember we told him that when he turns five, he'll be a big boy, so thumb sucking had to go," his mom explained. "Sure enough, his fifth birthday rolled around and that was that."

"Someone called me a baby on the ice," Shane added, rolling his eyes at the memory.

"Shane hated that," his dad said, appearing behind Ilya's shoulder. "The kid who called him that didn't like it either when he got shoved."

Shane grinned despite himself.

"Right, anyway. After the thumb it was pencils, bottle caps, his shirts, hoodies. If he could chew on it, he would," his mother continued.

"Oh yeah?" Ilya was clearly enjoying himself, watching Shane's barely concealed reactions. Kiyomi too, judging by the giggling. He raised an eyebrow specifically at Shane, waiting to catch his eye. "He still does that."

"Alright, that's enough!" Shane announced then, standing up. He was probably as red as he felt. "Dinner?"

"Ready," his dad said, and everyone moved to the table.

At the table Shane and Ilya sat next to each other, across from his parents. Kiyomi sat to the left of Shane, ironically at the head of the table. Shane was suddenly very aware of the fact that he'd never done this before.

His leg bounced automatically, nerves spreading through him until Ilya reached to rest a hand on Shane's thigh, making him go still. He looked down at the hand, and then looked up at Ilya who was watching him. They shared a small smile.

"So Ilya," his dad started, as they began to eat. "I have to admit, you've always been known as such a ladies man. I can't say I've ever pictured you settling down like this."

He wasn't wrong. Ilya's early years in the MLH had been well documented.

"That is true, but I can honestly say I have only been in love with one person. I can't imagine being with anyone else." He looked at Shane as he spoke, and Shane could feel his chest tighten at the open declaration.

"Same here."

Ilya squeezed his thigh.

They settled into eating for a bit, the sound of cutlery filling the quiet. Kiyomi asked for more bread and it was passed over to her, the entire dinner feeling almost normal. Shane tried to focus on that, not wanting to think too hard about the nausea that was slowly beginning to creep back in. He pushed his pasta around his plate, taking small bites, willing his stomach to cooperate.

“Do any of your teammates know yet?” his mom asked. “About the two of you?”

“No,” Shane immediately replied, shaking his head as he took another bite of pasta.

“And what about your pregnancy? The baby? Will you tell them?”

Shane put his fork down. “No.” He could feel what she was gearing up to say and tried his best to brace for it. “And I’d like to keep it that way for now.”

“Shane—”

“I know what you’re going to say,” he said, before she could continue. “And I know you just want me to have a plan in action. But you have to understand it’s bigger than just telling people about us. That’s just one part of it. The moment anyone finds out about Ilya and I, they’re going to find out what I am. Everyone will know.”

Not to demean him, but Ilya’s status as an alpha would be a footnote. Shane being an omega in the MLH would be the headline, and he couldn’t see it ever being a good thing. The amount of backlash he would get would probably be outrageous.

“There was that one player, Robinson? He was on your high school’s team,” his mother still said.

“Yeah, and what happened to him, mom?” Maybe she didn’t remember, but he did. He remembered the insults, the slurs, and the way the sport had quietly pushed him out until there was no room left for him. The MLH just wasn’t ready for omegas in professional hockey. There were very few professional sports that were ready for them. It sucked, but it was a truth that Shane knew well. “He didn’t make it anywhere after that. I just want to play hockey.”

“Things were different then, Shane. You have a reputation now. Two cups. You could do it differently, on your own terms. ”

“I’m not ready.” He said it firmly, crossing his free arm over his chest without him meaning to, like he was trying to hold himself together. “I’m not ready, and that’s the end of it.”

The table was quiet.

“So you’re going to hide this? Hide each other, until what. You both retire?” his dad asked.

Shane glanced at Ilya, who gave him a small nod. “For now, yes. That’s what we have to do.”

His mother sighed, shaking her head. “Shane, no, that’s…that’s so sad.”

“It’s what we have to do,” he said again, quieter this time. He focused on Ilya’s hand on his thigh for the moment, closing his eyes.

“And the baby?” his dad asked.

“I won’t go back next season. I’ll be home, and then we’ll figure out childcare from there. One thing at a time.” He hadn’t realized he was shaking slightly until Ilya’s arm came around his shoulders, drawing him just a little closer without making it a thing.

“I’ll be free agent next season,” Ilya said, taking over smoothly. “I am thinking of moving to another team. Somewhere closer to Montreal.”

He and Ilya had this exact conversation the night before. They were lying in bed when Ilya was the one to bring it up, waiting for Shane to shake off his sleepiness before he went into details about his thoughts. Since he was going to be a free agent he could find another team to sign a contract with, and through some research he chose Ottawa.

Shane knew the Ottawa Centaurs stats were abysmal, to say the least, but they could use a player like Ilya. An experienced center could pick them up and actually bring them somewhere. And Ottawa was close. A little over two hours away, Ilya could travel just like Shane did in the beginning when Kiyomi was younger.

They could do this. It could work.

Shane’s mother’s brows flew up. “You’d leave Boston for Shane?”

“I’d do anything for Shane,” Ilya said simply.

“Aww.”

Everyone looked at Kiyomi, who had her chin in both hands and was watching them, obviously completely unbothered by the fact that she’d inserted herself into the middle of a very adult conversation.

“You’re also part of the reason,” Ilya told her, leaning forward slightly so he could see her. “You are a part of the package.”

Shane didn’t think he could love this man any harder.

“You’d move to Montreal?” Kiyomi asked.

“Ottawa, more than likely. I heard their team could use a center to spruce things up a bit. Cause a little chaos. What do you think?”

Kiyomi looked like she was actually considering it, humming softly. “It could work,” she said finally.

Shane pressed his lips together. He shifted back in his seat and then forward again, resting his forehead on the table in front of him. He closed his eyes and tried to focus on breathing.

He wasn’t sure what exactly tipped him over. The nausea had been building quietly through the whole meal, but he’d been managing through sheer willpower. But it wasn’t just that. It was Ilya saying he’d do anything for him, it was how he made sure Kiyomi felt included. It was Kiyomi putting her own opinions out there, saying this could work, and it was just too much for him to handle at once. Too much warmth, too much reality colliding in a way that his body didn’t know how to process.

He needed a moment.

He felt Ilya’s hand on the back of his neck, his thumb pressing in slow circles that almost immediately made the tension in his shoulders dissipate as he exhaled.

“Shane? You okay?” Ilya asked quietly, leaning in closer. “Is it your stomach?”

“Partially. But I’m fine,” Shane mumbled, into the table. “Just give me a second.”

Shane swallowed the excess amount of saliva that had been building up, one hand pressed against his stomach. When the wave finally passed, he lifted his head, blinking a few times.

“Okay?” Ilya was still close, gently brushing a knuckle over Shane’s check before he leaned in to give him a small kiss.

Shane nodded. “Okay.”

When he looked back at his parents, his dad was smiling and his mom actually was as well. A small one. Like she was seeing something she hadn’t quite expected to see.

“Okay. You’re good, Ilya,” she said simply. “You’re good.”

And Shane knew she was saying far more than that. From his mother, those two words were everything.

Chapter End Notes

🥹 guess they're doing this, huh?

see you guys in the next chapter!

chapter soundtrack: holding on to me by john splithoff

Chapter 25: 2017 - Part IV (Ilya)

Chapter Notes

> Hello my lovelies! Here's almost 6,000 words of Ilya loving on Shane, lol. He's such a sap and I love it 😍 Also give me your thoughts on some of my omegaverse building? It's subtle but I've been enjoying moving thoughts/morals, etc all around.
>
> Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

May 2017

Not moving forward in the playoffs was a blow to Ilya's ego, but being here, in Montreal with Shane, had already made up for it. This was the first time either of them had time to just exist, without the heavy blanket of hockey and the world around it weighing him down. There were a lot of things they'd have to figure out, but they would. In their own time. Together.

That morning Ilya woke up slowly, each part of his body slowly coming back online as he came to awareness. It was nice, being able to wake up on his own terms, without any particular place to be. No practice or flight to catch. But the more aware he became, the more he became aware of what he was missing. Shane's warmth against his side.

He opened his eyes, looking across the bed.

Shane was there, sitting on the edge of the bed and slightly hunched forward, one hand on his knee. The morning light was coming through the curtains and cutting across in a low angle, highlighting how still he actually was. Even so, Ilya could see the way he was taking in very calculated breaths that barely made a sound.

Since becoming obsessed with Shane Hollander, he'd learned his many versions of stillness.

There was the type that was more of a focused one, he'd seen that often on the ice, before or after, when he was clearly thinking through something. There was the tired stillness, where he'd obviously overworked himself and was running on fumes.

And then there was this stillness. Careful, but deliberate, like he was concentrating very hard on keeping himself together. Ilya was very well versed in what this type of stillness meant, having watched it develop in real time over the past week.

Ilya slid across the bed and gently rested his hand on Shane's back, not wanting to startle him.

Shane only exhaled slowly, like he'd been holding his breath for a little while. He didn't startle, thankfully, instead leaning towards Ilya, just barely.

"How long have you been up?" Ilya asked quietly, his voice still rough from sleep.

"Not sure. The sun wasn't up when I first got up," Shane murmured. "I just don't want to move."

Ilya only nodded, immediately understanding. His hand began to move in a circle over his back, movements slow, but hopefully helpful. "You don't have to."

"Kiyomi needs to get up soon for school. I didn't get to make her lunch." His words tapered off into a small whine, and Ilya could feel the way he shifted, like he was fighting to stay still.

"*Shanya*. I'll take care of it. All of it."

Shane whined again, like he wanted to say something else, but his hand flew to his mouth instead.

This was all a first for Ilya. He'd never been around a pregnant person, let alone someone he loved as much as he loved Shane. He knew sickness was normal, especially in the beginning, but knowing it was normal didn't make it easier to watch. He felt helpless at times, only there to rub at Shane's back or bring him crackers and water in hopes that he'd keep them down.

They'd gone to Shane's appointment together two days ago. For some reason he'd been scared, unsure of what to expect at the appointment, but as soon as Dr. Bouchard turned that screen towards him, the fear disappeared. He could see the image, not the most descriptive at 12 weeks, but he could also hear the heartbeat. It was loud and strong. Completely real. Completely theirs.

He couldn't trust his voice after that. He looked at Shane, who had already experienced all of this, and was now watching Ilya. His eyes had gone glassy, but the tears didn't fall. He just smiled, the kind that reached his eyes, and made Ilya's heart stutter in his chest. He wanted to bottle the feeling that bloomed, just so he had the chance to feel it again and again.

The rest of the appointment had been less warm.

Shane mentioned the sickness, how he'd gotten to a point where he could barely keep anything down. Food, water, anything and everything was expelled almost as soon as he swallowed it.

He'd lost weight, too, enough that Bouchard was visibly concerned. She explained that the level of nausea and vomiting he was experiencing could lead to serious dehydration and malnutrition, neither of which would be good for him or the baby. She ordered more bloodwork before they left.

Yesterday the call came with what she suspected.

Hyperemesis Gravidarum. Ilya had to look it up the moment Shane had put the phone down, not trusting himself to pronounce it and he didn't want to ask Shane to say it again. Not with the way his expression had gone flat in the way that showed he was processing the news just as much as Ilya was.

What he found wasn't the most reassuring. It wasn't a typical morning sickness, one that had nausea combined with occasional vomiting and was easier to manage. This was an actual condition that didn't follow a set pattern, but the symptoms were the same. Vomiting that was severe enough that the body couldn't absorb nutrients or stay hydrated. It was managed with IV treatments and medicine, but sometimes it became so severe that patients had to be hospitalized.

Ilya hated this for Shane. He told him he felt responsible, which he knew was irrational, but he couldn't help it. Shane had just looked at him and reached to smooth the crease that had appeared between his eyebrows. "Well. You obviously are," he had said, somehow managing to make it sound like a joke.

Regardless, Ilya still made it his business to make sure Shane was as comfortable as possible.

Yuna called to tell them she'd arranged a private nurse. Someone who would come to the apartment and start IV treatments and give him medicine. Shane had protested at first, not wanting anyone else involved, but his mom assured him she'd gone through the proper channels. These were nurses who worked with high profile patients. Privacy was their biggest priority. They would be signing NDAs.

So that was the day ahead of them. Now, Ilya had to take care of his love.

"Shh, I've got you," Ilya whispered, sitting up properly in the bed. He looped an arm around Shane's waist to pull him into his side, while his other hand reached rest over the hand Shane had in front of his mouth.

"Do you think you can make it to the bathroom?"

Shane nodded. He shifted and then he was shaking his head, his entire body jerking in a way that Ilya was all too familiar with. Ilya moved fast, reaching for one of the emesis bags Dr. Bouchard had sent them home with. He'd managed to get it up to Shane's mouth just as he started retching, his other hand starting up the gentle circles on his back.

There wasn't much in his stomach to bring up. That was the part that scared Ilya the most.

"Okay," Ilya said quietly when Shane was done. He moved the bag away, tied it off, and then reached for tissues. He used one to gently wipe at Shane's mouth, then used the other to dab at the light sheen of sweat on his forehead.

Shane had gone still again, eyes closed, his head dropping onto Ilya's shoulder.

"Feel a little better?" He threw the bag and tissue away, picking up the water tumbler that was always perched on the side table.

“Yeah.” He licked his lips, and Ilya was already pressing the straw of the tumbler against them. Shane parted his lips and drank, slow and careful as he swallowed the mouthfuls.

“Good boy.” Ilya set the tumbler back down. “You should go back to sleep. I will take care of Kiyomi and everything else.”

Shane looked like he was already half way there, but he nodded. Ilya shifted out of the way, standing up and letting Shane lay back down. He reached for his pillow, smushing his face into it while Ilya moved his legs onto the bed. Then he tugged the blanket up and over him, leaning down to press a kiss into his hair.

“Wuv you.” Shane’s words were muffled and barely audible, but Ilya heard him.

“Love you too,” he replied, moving to quietly slip out of the room.

—

“Rise and shine!”

Kiyomi’s room was exactly what Ilya would have expected from a nine year old raised by Shane Hollander. It was tidy, mostly, her desk clear, her bookshelf organized, and her hockey gear stacked neatly by the closet. There were still signs of actual childhood scattered about, though. A shirt next to the hamper instead of inside of it. Shoes in the middle of the floor instead of put away. She had a small corkboard with a Montreal Metros pennant and the Montreal Angels schedule right next to it, certain events circled in a red pen.

The room had color everywhere and that certainly wasn’t Shane’s influence. Purple and teal bedding, a string of multicolored lights along the ceiling. She even had a shelf of various stuffed animals, ranging from a rabbit that had seen better days to a huge teddy bear that barely stayed upright.

The girl herself was entirely invisible under her covers, only a fan of dark hair spread across the pillow giving her away.

“Kiyomi.” Ilya stepped over a pair of sneakers and crossed to the window, pulling the curtains open and flooding the room with morning light. “*Iskorka*.”

That finally earned him a grumble from the lump on the bed. She turned over, one eye appearing above the edge of the covers. She looked at him, seeming to assess the situation, and then pulled the blanket back over head.

“Too early,” she mumbled.

Ilya sat down on the edge of her bed. “I know, but. You must go to school.”

“Daddy always lets me have five more minutes.”

Something told Ilya she wasn’t being that truthful.

“Well. I am not your daddy.”

She paused for a moment, pulling the covers down to peek out again. “Okay. So ten more minutes?”

Ilya’s lip twitched, but he managed to not crack a smile. “How about ten more seconds?”

She groaned and then the blanket went back up, and only then did Ilya allow himself to smile.

“Ten, nine, eight—”

Another groan.

“—Seven, six, five, fo—”

“Alright, alright!” The blanket came back down, revealing her full face. Pillow creased and deeply unimpressed. She looked so much like Shane in that moment.

“Fine. I’ll get up.” She pouted, but actually started to sit up, her hair falling in front of her face. She stretched, very cat-like in her movements, and yawned.

“You are like a very sleepy kitten.” That made her smile, just a little. Ilya felt proud of himself.

He reached to part the curtain of hair, poking her gently on her cheek. “What do you want for breakfast? Eggs? Toast?” He kept poking, switching sides when she tried to dodge him. “*Syrniki*? *Borscht*? *Pelmeni*?”

“I have no idea what those are!” She was laughing by then, and Ilya moved his hands down to her sides, finger finding spots that made her shriek and kick her legs against the mattress. He gave it a few seconds before he leaned back, satisfied. The girl was very much awake now.

“You will have to find out, hmm?” He stood, watching her laughs taper off.

“Is daddy okay?” she asked after a bit, pushing the blankets off and moving to get up.

“He’s okay. Just resting.”

Kiyomi nodded. Then she stepped close and wrapped her arms around Ilya’s middle, squeezing him. “I’m glad you’re here, Yaya.”

Ilya bent forward slightly to hug the girl back. “Me too.”

—

The nurse arrived at ten, which gave Ilya enough time to get Kiyomi off to school and Shane moved to the couch with a blanket and a fresh emesis bag within reach.

The nurse’s name was Isabelle. She introduced herself, set her things down, and then immediately got to work without making a big production of it. If she recognized either of

them she gave no indication, which Ilya appreciated more than he could say. And he was sure Shane did as well.

Shane was upright, which was already an improvement from this morning. Ilya had managed to get some tea and a few bites of toast into him before she arrived, and so far it had stayed down. He knew from experience that could change in a moment, but he was taking it.

“I’m going to place a midline today,” Isabelle explained, sitting down across from Shane and opening her bag. “It goes in your upper arm and stays there, so that we don’t have to keep finding new access points every time I come.”

Shane nodded, already shrugging one arm out of his hoodie— Ilya’s hoodie, as it happened, which Shane had been living in for days now.

“Showering is okay with the line?” Ilya asked from where he stood, watching the entire process closely.

“Yes, I’ll leave you some waterproof dressings. But also no baths or going swimming. Anything where the site is submerged in water for a long time. Otherwise you’re fine.”

The placement itself took about ten minutes. Ilya moved closer without thinking, his fingers finding their way into Shane’s hair when Shane closed his eyes and tipped his head back. He could feel the way Shane exhaled, just the slightest release of tension, and kept going, his fingers moving through pure muscle memory.

He really hoped this worked for him. He hated that Shane was miserable and that there was very little he could do.

“All done,” Isabelle said, doing the final checks to make sure the line was secure before she moved back. “You did great.”

Shane looked down at his arm, carefully flexing it. “It didn’t hurt that much.”

She connected the IV line after that, explaining that it had electrolytes, vitamins, and a medication that should help with the nausea within the hour. Ilya listened closely, mentally cataloging everything she said while Shane seemed to focus on breathing, his head tipped back against the cushion. Ilya kept running his fingers through his hair.

“I’ll stay while the bag runs,” she said, settling into the armchair across from them. “Just for the first visit, to make sure you’re tolerating the medication well. After this I can be in and out more quickly.”

Both he and Shane nodded, and Ilya could already see that Shane seemed less tense.

Isabelle checked Shane’s blood pressure twice over the next hour and made some notes, asking Shane how he was feeling periodically. Shane answered each time with a word or two, his eyes half closed, but Ilya could see the tight set of his shoulders had loosened slightly. He wasn’t sure if it was because of the medication or if it was just the knowledge that he’d be able to get some relief finally. Either way, he’d take it.

When the bag was done she disconnected everything efficiently, flushed the line, and capped the midline.

“I’ll be back tomorrow,” she said as she packed everything up. “Same time. Try your best to stay hydrated. I hope this gives you some relief.”

“Thank you,” Shane said quietly.

She nodded and then she let herself out.

The apartment was quiet again as Ilya settled down next to Shane, who had carefully pushed his arm back into the hoodie. He moved in closer when Ilya sat down, turning to tuck his face into the crook of Ilya’s neck, breathing him in for a long moment.

“Thank you,” he murmured, kissing the skin lightly before he pulled back so he could look at Ilya properly.

“For what, *malysh*?”

“For this morning. For everything. Sorry you have to—”

Ilya silenced him with a finger to his lips, shaking his head. “Nope. First, you do not have to thank me. Second, you definitely do not have anything to apologize for. I just want you to feel better. I hope this helps.”

“I know.” Shane smiled, and Ilya couldn’t help but lean in, pecking him softly on the lips. Shane kissed him back, once, and then twice. “I’m just very happy you’re here with me.”

“Can’t imagine being anywhere else, *moya lyubov*.”

—

A Few Weeks Later

It was a quiet evening, Ilya moving around the kitchen cleaning up after dinner while Shane showered and Kiyomi was tucked in her room, finishing a school project. Ilya heard the shower turn off and then nothing else for a little while, which didn’t concern him much. Shane moved a little slower these days, even with the daily treatments having started to make a difference.

“Ilya?”

“Hmm?” Ilya immediately started to move towards the bedroom.

He found Shane standing shirtless in front of the mirror, turned slightly to the side, staring at his own reflection. Ilya slowed as he stepped through the doorway, his eyes trailing down Shane’s back as he approached.Shane noticed him in the mirror as Ilya stepped up behind him, his gaze snapping up briefly before dropping back down to his stomach.

Ilya looked too.

The change was subtle. Shane's abs were still there but they looked softer, and just below his navel there was a slight fullness. A gentle curve that curved a little more when Shane turned further to the side. It wasn't something anyone else would notice. But Shane knew his own body and was clearly able to see the changes in it as soon as they happened.

"Can you see it?" Shane asked quietly, smoothing a hand over the curve.

Ilya stepped closer, reaching to rest his hand over Shane's. "Yes," he said. "Just barely."

"I didn't have this before with Kiyomi," Shane murmured, his head tilting just slightly as he continued to look. "Or maybe I did, but I just didn't know to look for it."

Shane had told him about Kiyomi's discovery and birth. He thought of him at sixteen, confused and in pain, and then having a daughter at the end of it all. That wouldn't be happening this time, not while Ilya was here.

"I like it," Ilya said.

Shane made a face, leaning back into him. "It feels weird. Like it's hard. But soft." He was gently pressing down into the skin as he spoke.

"That's our baby. Our little blob." Ilya pressed his lips to Shane's shoulder. "We did that."

Shane hummed, like he was thinking about it, his eyes still on the mirror. After a moment he moved his hand, but reached to keep Ilya's there so he could feel the bump for himself.

Shane was right, there was a softness to it, but it was also very firm. Ilya stroked a thumb over the curve. When his eyes moved back up, Shane was watching him, their eyes finding each other.

Ilya knew that look.

Shane turned, and Ilya tilted his head to meet him halfway for the kiss, his arm sliding around Shane's waist to keep him close. He could feel the curve of the bump pressing into his own stomach, subtle, but definitely there, but then Shane's tongue slid along his and tasted like the mint of the toothpaste they used. Ilya stopped thinking about anything else entirely, chasing the taste for more.

—

Later that night, Ilya had Shane laid back against the pillows, hips turned slightly to the side to keep the pressure off his shoulder, the warm glow of the lamp the only light in the room.

They had taken their time. Ilya's hands moved carefully over the expanse of Shane's skin while he breathed in his scent, so much stronger and sweeter in his current state. His scent was literally everywhere, and Ilya was so addicted to it, wishing he could actually bathe in it. He pressed his nose into Shane's hair, against the crook of his neck, into the skin of his chest. He almost felt drunk on it.

Had it always been like this? Had Shane always been this addictive and Ilya just didn't let himself sink into it?

He felt stupid. Undeniably stupid. That was the honest truth of it. He'd wasted years of being careful, tiptoeing around the feelings that had almost immediately sparked. He'd found reasons to tell himself why Shane wouldn't want him, why he'd be better with someone else. He regretted not giving into this sooner, just so he could have had Shane like this for longer, in every way that counted.

Shane had his hand in Ilya's hair, his fingers curled into his curls, pulling at the strands just enough to keep Ilya anchored to him. His dark eyes were half lidded, his body turned back so he could watch Ilya's face as Ilya moved inside him, slow and deep. His lips were parted. Ilya stared at them, in actual awe.

"How did we let this happen?" Shane asked quietly.

Ilya wasn't entirely sure what part he meant. There was the pregnancy, their love, and the time they spent stumbling around each other without addressing it out loud. He probably meant all of it.

"We were stupid," Ilya murmured, pressing a kiss into the meat of Shane's chest. "And irresponsible." He nipped gently at the skin, his tongue soothing the spot after. "And I should have done this years ago."

Shane's fingers tightened in his hair.

"But this is real?" Shane asked. "Us. We are real?"

Ilya didn't understand why this was a question. He knew the answer and he was sure Shane did as well. But he also knew Shane needed to hear it out loud, he needed to hear it confirmed directly. He was done leaving things open for interpretation.

Ilya tilted his head up, continuing to press a slow line of kisses everywhere he could reach.

"This is the most real thing I have ever had," he answered finally. "You are the most real thing."

He felt Shane's exhale, whatever leftover tension in his body leaking out completely. It felt like Shane was melting against him, his hips rolling as he tried to press himself back onto Ilya.

"God, I love you so much." Barely above a whisper. But he might as well have shouted it, the way the words hit Ilya straight in the chest. "You're mine."

Shane reached with his free hand to cup Ilya's face, his thumb smoothing over his lips before he pressed it into his mouth. Ilya immediately sucked, his eyes closing, moaning when he felt Shane tighten around his cock at the same time.

His hand moved down the length of Shane's body, palm curling briefly over the barely there curve of his stomach before he moved to grip Shane's thigh, then his knee, using that for

leverage as he started to fuck into him harder.

Shane's head fell back against the pillows, his hand dropping from Ilya's face to grip his shoulder, his groan low.

Ilya stared at him, pleasure so intense it felt like too much and not enough all at once, like he could spend the rest of his life right here, like this, and it still wouldn't be enough.

Ilya didn't think he would ever get enough of his Shane.

"I'm yours."

—

June 2017

"To be honest, I didn't think you'd ever leave the Raiders," Marleau said on the other end of the line. "Not this soon anyway."

Ilya had the phone tucked between his ear and his shoulder as he pushed a cart slowly down the cereal aisle of a grocery near Shane's apartment. Kiyomi walked ahead of him, looking over the list Shane had written before they left. They had made it through most of it, but now they were on the hunt for cereal. The sugary kind that he was sure Shane would hate, but he and Kiyomi would love.

"Things change," Ilya replied, hunching forward slightly as he maneuvered past a family in the aisle. He was dressed inconspicuously enough, with a cap and a pair of sunglasses, but he knew it would only take one long look for someone to place him.

"Ottawa, though." Marleau was saying it like he was still turning it over in his mind. "I mean. *Ottawa*."

"I know, I know. But they have potential, Marly. Young team that I can guide to greatness."

"*But they have potential*," Marleau repeated, mimicking his accent badly. Ilya could hear the smile in his voice. "Sure. That's exactly why."

Kiyomi appeared at his elbow, holding up two boxes of cereal — one fruity, one some kind of peanut butter puff. She raised her thumb and then turned it down in question.

Ilya raised his thumb back. She pointed at each box in turn and then Ilya held up two fingers.

She grinned and dropped boxes into the cart, skipping away before Ilya could change his mind.

"Is this about that girl in Montreal?" Marleau asked. "The one you've been talking to for years?"

Ilya was quiet for a long moment. "I have no idea what you are talking about."

“Roz, come on. Every time we play Montreal, you disappear after the game. Either that, or you’re grinning at your phone like an idiot.” A pause. “I saw her name. Jane, or something?”

Ilya said nothing, but his eyes narrowed. He knew to trust Marleau, but being called out about a relationship he had thought was private was a lot.

He stayed quiet.

“Roz. Rozanov. Hey. Hey! I’m teasing you, man,” Marleau laughed. “So that means it’s serious? I mean, hell, it should be.”

“It’s serious,” Ilya finally replied, watching as Kiyomi crouched down to look at something on the lower shelf, her braid flopping over one of her shoulders. He had helped with her hair this morning and was quietly pleased with how it had turned out. Shane had even given him a thumbs up. “Serious enough that I’d like to keep it private.”

“Man, don’t worry about me. But seriously.” The teasing had left Marleau’s voice entirely. “You deserve it. Genuinely. We’re gonna miss you though. It won’t be the same without you.”

“Yeah, of course not. You’ll probably never win another cup.”

Marleau laughed. “Fuck off!”

Ilya grinned.

“Tell her she’s lucky,” Marleau added, a moment later.

Ilya had reached where Kiyomi was now, his eyebrows raising as she held out another box — a healthy bran type, clearly disgusting, and clearly intended for Shane. He made a face that made Kiyomi giggle, but then he also raised a thumb.

“I’ll pass that along, Marly,” he said.

—

“I told you it was Scott Hunter’s year,” Yuna said, pointing at the screen as she settled back into her seat.

They were an interesting group— Shane’s parents, Kiyomi, Shane, and himself all crowded in the living room while watching the Stanley Cup finals. The Admirals had made it all the way, which still stung a little if Ilya was being honest with himself. But just one glance around the room reminded him of what he had gotten instead of the chance at the cup.

Shane was stretched out next to him, his feet in Ilya’s lap, his arm finally free from the sling for the first time in weeks. He kept testing his shoulder, like he was expecting it to still hurt, rolling it subtly every now and then. He had also finally been feeling better, the daily medication and IV treatments helping, and Ilya had the pleasure of seeing the color return to Shane’s cheeks. And at 18 weeks pregnant, the small curve to his stomach was getting larger, too, day by day. It was something that Ilya loved to point out, much to Shane’s dismay. Ilya

could see it from the way he sat, just barely outlined by the Metros crewneck shirt he wore. He wanted to touch it.

“When did you say it was Hunter’s year?” Shane asked, opening the jar of his current food obsession— Ilya wasn’t *allowed* to call it a craving— a jar of kimchi. He ate it straight from the jar, sometimes with his fingers, but today he used a pair of chopsticks.

Ilya also wasn’t allowed to point out that this was the second jar this week that he was making his way through.

“I said it to your father in February,” she answered, looking at David.

Shane’s father nodded from the armchair. “She did.”

Shane looked at Ilya. “Well. They did manage to beat you guys.”

“Ouch, this hurts,” Ilya dramatically gasped, holding a hand up to his heart. Shane shifted his foot to shove it into Ilya’s thigh, smiling when Ilya gasped again.

“Get over it.”

The game itself was good. The kind of game you’d expect an actual final to be like, where it was intense enough that everyone kept leaning forward as they watched. Ilya enjoyed himself, but he found his attention kept getting stolen by watching Shane.

How he used his chopsticks to point at the screen when he had something to say. How he narrated the game, mostly to himself, and the rest of them just nodded along, fully used to his antics. How at some point he started stacking kimchi on top of potato chips, crunching into the makeshift snack and wiggling happily. Subtly. Just enough that Ilya could notice it. He’d caught Ilya staring at one point and wordlessly held out one of the stacks for him to try, and Ilya leaned over to pull it into his mouth, licking at his fingertip. It actually wasn’t that bad.

Ilya watched when Shane would lean forward when they were doing a face off, like he was imagining himself there on the ice, his eyes narrowed. The light of the TV was bright on his face, the smattering of freckles looking just like the constellations Ilya always compared them to.

Shane’s free hand would occasionally brush against the swell of his stomach, not even consciously, like he had gotten used to the bump being another part of him.

Ilya still wanted to touch it.

He was more than pleased when Shane answered his prayers and moved so he was tucked against Ilya’s side, his head against his chest. This way Ilya could move his hand to Shane’s hip, and then further, where it rested just faintly against his stomach.

“He was totally offside,” Shane grumbled, still completely entranced by the game. Kiyomi had joined them on the couch, and was now stretched out, resting her head in Shane’s lap. Ilya could reach to pet her hair, so he did, absently brushing it away from her forehead.

“I didn’t see that,” she said, and Ilya had nothing to add because he still wasn’t fully paying attention. He was suddenly very aware that some of the most important people in his life were stacked against him.

Eventually the game came to a dramatic end, time running out for the other team while the Admirals held on. Ilya felt the familiar ache of another season watching the cup in someone else’s hands. He could only imagine what it felt like for Shane, who was probably grappling with the feeling of not only not being there, but also knowing he wouldn’t be back next season. He also knew at some point he would be the one leaving Shane, when he joined the Centaurs.

That wouldn’t be for a long time, though.

“Good for Hunter,” Yuna was saying, and Shane was nodding, still curled against Ilya. Kiyomi was quiet, and a glance told Ilya Kiyomi had fallen asleep, her weight settled fully into Shane’s lap. On the screen the team was celebrating, Hunter eventually getting the cup and skating it around the rink while his teammates followed. Then the partners started flooding from out the tunnels, making their way carefully across the ice to find their respective players, and the cameras caught all of it. Stolen kisses, helmets knocked sideways, bodies pulled close together.

Ilya looked down at Shane just as Shane looked up at him, the corner of his mouth lifted.

Ilya wanted that. He wanted to pull Shane onto the ice after a game and kiss him until neither of them could breathe, even with the threat of every single camera in the building pointing at them. He didn’t want to care, and he didn’t want Shane to feel like he had to care. He wondered if Shane was thinking the same thing. They leaned in at the same time, their lips touching softly. Maybe he was.

“Oh, I didn’t know he had a partner,” David said, and when Ilya looked back at the screen they saw Hunter mid-kiss with a young man that had joined him on the ice. Ilya had suspicions that Hunter was an alpha, but a person’s designation wasn’t something you could ever be certain of without being told directly. Same with the man in his arms.

Something about the way the man held himself, broad in the shoulders, his arms wrapping around Hunter instead of letting himself be wrapped just screamed *alpha* to Ilya. He could be anywhere on the spectrum, but Ilya wondered if the crowd would be just as loud if his partner was also an alpha. The world was still weird about same-designation relationships, the same way they were weird about omegas in professional sports.

“I can’t wait to do that with you,” Ilya said after the broadcast came to an end, his voice quiet enough that only Shane could hear him.

Yuna had gotten up to tidy, securely closing the kimchi jar and bringing it into the kitchen. David rose from the armchair, and crossed to the couch, carefully lifting Kiyomi from Shane’s lap. The girl stirred slightly, but didn’t wake up, resting her head on her grandfather’s shoulder as he carried her to her room.

“We can’t,” Shane said softly once they were alone, in a way that made Ilya's heart ache with how disappointed he sounded.

“One day.” Ilya brushed his thumb over Shane’s lips, noticing they were a deeper shade of red, and just a bit more plump. Probably from the kimchi.

Shane looked at him for a long moment. Then he nodded. “One day.”

Chapter End Notes

feels a little bit like i’m doing all the fluff before the storm comes in. that said i think this part of their story may be coming to an end 🫣 but don’t worry, i’m fully planning on continuing it in a second part~

see you guys in the next (and what might be the last) chapter! 😳

chapter soundtrack: angel baby by troye sivan (because shane is ilya’s baby)

Chapter 26: 2017 - Part V

Chapter Notes

> I'll admit it felt very bittersweet writing out this chapter, but I was also really happy! This has been my first fic and it's really been therapeutic to write it out over these few months. This has been a fun journey, so I just wanted to thank you guys for ALLLL of your kudos and comments, it all meant so much to me. 🥹 They were the main reason why I kept going! That and of course how much I love these dudes and this world.
>
> Without further ado, here's the final chapter of Offside! Enjoy ❤️

See the end of the chapter for more notes

July 2017 - The Cottage

Coach,

I am writing this to inform you that I will be unable to return to the Metros this coming season due to personal reasons. I have not taken this decision lightly, and I am aware of

Shane stopped and leaned back in his seat, his glasses sliding down the bridge of his nose. This sounded like he was quitting. Which he was not doing, not now or ever. He just needed time to, well. Be pregnant. Have a baby. It still felt weird admitting that, even with this being a part of his life for months now.

Coach,

I am writing this to inform you that I will be unable to return to the Metros this coming season due to being pregnant. Ilya Rozanov is the father. Oh, and I am an omega.

Shane snorted, staring at the words before he reached for the delete button, pressing down on it harshly. He didn't need to be accidentally sending that message out.

He rubbed at his eyes, adjusted his glasses, and then started again, slower this time.

Coach,

I wanted to give you an update ahead of next season. After speaking with the specialists I've been working with, it looks like my shoulder is going to need surgery. There's some kind of lingering instability that didn't clearly show up until recently. I don't have a specific timeline yet, but realistically I think I'll need to be out for a while. I know this isn't the news anyone wants, at least it definitely isn't what I want, so I'm sorry to be the one delivering it. I'll keep you posted as I know more.

—Shane

He read the message over twice, chewing on his lip thoughtfully before he leaned in closer and pressed send, before he could talk himself out of it.

None of what he said was technically untrue. He *had* been seeing a specialist as his clavicle healed and the latest results said that while the bone had healed, there was still instability in the surrounding soft tissues that could cause problems in the future if he stressed it. So the best decision would be to have surgery and then physical therapy afterward.

Being a professional athlete meant having to take time off wasn't that odd. It was very realistic, albeit annoying, that something like this could happen and have to be dealt with. Obviously the only difference with this particular situation was that he was using it as a cover story for what was really happening.

The thing that was happening was currently poking into his desk. He was officially 21 weeks pregnant. Or five months if anyone bothered to ask, though nobody who mattered enough was around to ask him anything these days. The bump was no longer a subtle curve that he could hide in his largest hoodies, it was its own entity, taking up space and changing his body in ways he had never experienced before.

Shane never thought of himself as the type of person who boasted about having physical representations of his workouts, but he did mourn the loss of his abs. The skin was still hard, in fact he was still muscled, his arms, legs, thighs. It was just his stomach that had gone all plump, like he was bloated. Permanently.

He was still staring at the bump when his phone started buzzing, expecting to see Ilya who had gone to the grocery earlier that morning when Shane mumbled something about wanting greek yogurt, but instead it was Tony Marchetti, the general manager of the Metros. He jumped up and answered it while heading over to the dock, where the reception was a little better and they could talk without the call dropping.

"Hollander!" Marchetti's voice came through, always a little too loud for Shane's liking. "Got your email. Desjardins is on the line as well, hope that's alright."

"Hey, Shane," Coach Desjardins said, his voice quieter, but just as steady. "How are you feeling?"

"Yeah, I'm alright. All things considered." Shane stepped onto the dock, the wood warm under his bare feet. "Just been a lot, this year." That was probably the biggest understatement he had ever made.

"No kidding, man." That was Marchetti again. "Look, thanks for the email, we were hoping for better news, but what matters most is that you're healthy and good to play. Dr. Fontaine is confident in the timeline?"

Fontaine was the specialist he had been working with, the one who had been keeping an eye on his injury and then eventually suggested the surgery. He'd been in contact with Dr. Whitlock, the team's doctor.

“That’s what he said,” Shane said, looking out at the lake as his free hand rested on the swell of his stomach. “Shoulder surgery and then PT. He didn’t want to give me a hard date, but he was pretty clear that it won’t be a quick turnaround. Especially with the concussion history.”

“Makes sense,” Desjardins said. “You’ve been through a lot this year. Body needs what it needs.”

“Honestly, I’m trying to get ahead of it,” Shane added. “The last thing I want to do is rush back into playing and make things worse.”

“Right, right. No, that’s smart. Take the time you need.” Shane could hear some papers shuffling around, either from Desjardins or Marchetti’s line. “We’ll put something official out. Keep it simple. Surgery, recovery, no specifics. You can let us know when you’ve got more to share.”

Shane nodded, feeling that one specific weight lifting off of his shoulders. “Thanks, both of you. I appreciate it.”

“Hey,” his coach said. “For what it’s worth, it hasn’t been the same without you, and it won’t be the same until you’re back. Get better, alright? I’ll let the team know what’s going on.”

“Yeah, I will. Thanks.” The phone call ended soon after that, and shane stood there for a moment, staring out at the water. His phone buzzed again before he’d even turned to head back up.

Marchetti: One more thing! Whitlock looked over what Dr. Fontaine sent last week, and said everything checks out on our end. No need to come in, just wanted you to know we’re all on the same page.

Marchetti: Take care of yourself, Shane.

Shane had assumed that much. Doctors talking to doctors, forms being exchanged, images of sensitive information shared between offices. Even Dr. Bouchard was part of it now, in her own way, not exactly corresponding with Whitlock or Fontaine directly, but aware of it all. Just another name on the growing list of people who knew exactly what was going on with Shane’s body and why. Shane felt like he was just existing in the gaps between all of it, relying fully on privacy laws to protect him from anything major being leaked.

Shane: Thanks again. Will do.

“Shane? There you are.”

He glanced back at the cottage to see Ilya, smiling at him near the glass doors. He was beautiful, as always, the week they’d spent at the cottage so far looking good on him. His skin took well to the sun, and the curls had already taken on more of a golden hue. Shane couldn’t always control himself when he was around him.

Shane made his way back to him, smiling when Ilya wrapped an arm around his waist and pulled him in closer as soon as he could. “I got your yogurt. And a few more things.”

“You’re a lifesaver.” Shane leaned into him, tipping his head back for the kiss he was expecting. The kiss that Ilya gave him easily, slow and perfect, and right where they were. Like all their other kisses had been since they got there. There was nowhere else they needed to be, and there was no worry of being caught by anyone else. It was a feeling Shane had finally let himself get used to, even though he was half-convinced it would slip away if he focused too closely on it.

“Who was on the phone?” Ilya asked, pulling back just enough to look at Shane properly. His hand had found its way to the mall of Shane’s back, slipping under the thin material of his shirt.

“Marchetti. And Desjardins,” Shane answered. He had told Ilya he would be emailing them. “It’s done. They’re going to put out a statement—surgery, recovery, no real timeline. Nobody’s asking questions.”

Ilya studied him for a moment, his eyes searching Shane’s. “And? How do you feel?”

Shane considered it. Honestly, he’d expected to feel worse. Guiltier, maybe, because he knew he was leading them on in something that wasn’t the total truth. There was that little part of him that knew this could lead to worse repercussions if he was caught, but he kept focusing on the fact that this was solid. They’d have to be careful, but they’d always been careful. It could work.

So really, he felt relief. Relief where dread had been sitting for a long time.

“Good,” he said, surprising himself with how true it felt. “I feel good. I’m glad I got it out of the way.”

Ilya smiled at that, the kind that crinkled the corners of his eyes, and pressed a kiss to Shane’s forehead before pulling back. “Good. Now come, breakfast before you get angry with me. I got the bread you like, too.”

“I do not get angry with you,” Shane immediately insisted, but let Ilya pull him fully inside of the cottage.

“Oh, I’m sorry. You pout at me. It's very cute.” Ilya glanced back at him. “Like you are doing now.”

Shane dug his thumb nail into Ilya’s hand, grinning when Ilya stuck his tongue out at Shane.

—

Breakfast was good. Shane cut up some of the berries Ilya had gotten and they ate them over the greek yogurt with honey, paired with toast that was smeared lightly with butter for Shane and absolutely dripping with it for Ilya.

Ilya drank coffee that Shane couldn’t have anymore, not because of the caffeine, but because he couldn’t stand the smell of it. For some reason the taste of it on Ilya’s lips didn’t bother him, so to deal with the smell they ate outside, the lake glittering under the morning sun.

“Morning, baby.” Shane set his phone down between them after accepting Kiyomi’s facetime request, smiling at his daughter's face on the screen. Ilya waved and she waved back, grinning.

“What’re you doing today?”

“Nana’s taking me shopping!” Kiyomi said, practically bouncing where she sat. “She said I’m growing out of all of my clothes and I need a wardrobe refresh.”

His mother wasn’t wrong—Kiyomi had grown at least a few centimeters since last summer, just enough that her pants had started riding up at the ankle.

“That sounds fun,” Ilya said, sliding his third slice of toast onto Shane's plate before Shane even had the chance to reach for it. Shane smiled at him, picking it up to take a bite. “Make sure you get many colors. Make your daddy proud.”

Shane rolled his eyes, hand coming up to cover his mouth as he chewed. “Get whatever you want, baby. Tell mom I’ll send her some money.”

“You won’t send me anything.” His mother’s voice came from somewhere off-screen before she leaned into the frame behind Kiyomi, waving. “This is on me, Shane. How are you feeling, by the way?”

“Mm, good.” He took another bite of the toast.

“He’s eating everything in sight,” Ilya added. “Like he was never sick!”

“Oh, shut up. I’m just hungry.” Shane swallowed, shooting Ilya a look. “Besides, I still get sick sometimes. Just not as much.” Mostly when he caught a smell that was off, the nausea hitting fast and sharp, and then gone almost as quickly as it came.

“As long as it isn’t as bad as it was.” His mother nodded, satisfied, before stepping back out of frame to continue doing whatever she was doing.

“When can I see you guys?” Kiyomi asked as she slipped on the bracelets she had gotten into wearing on a daily basis.

“We’re going to come back for dinner, probably in a few days?” Shane glanced at Ilya who nodded in agreement.

“Good! I miss you. And the baby. Can I see?”

Shane sighed dramatically, like it was such a hard task, but he was already standing up before she could ask twice, lifting the hem of his shirt. Kiyomi immediately started cooing at his belly, and Shane laughed, turning a little towards Ilya when he reached over to rest his hand right at the top of the bump, like he couldn’t help it either.

“You think she hears me?” Kiyomi asked.

“We still don’t know what we’re having, Kiyomi. But yeah, they can probably hear you.” At least Shane liked to think the baby was used to all of their voices by now.

“They are the size of a mango now,” Ilya added, because of course he read all about the progression of his pregnancy online and liked sharing the facts he’d learned. Last week the baby was the size of a banana. “Our little mango.”

Before it was their little blob. And then their little banana.

They talked for a few more minutes, Kiyomi letting them know she was probably going to ask for new sneakers too, but she just didn’t know what color. His mother reappeared briefly to remind her they needed to leave soon. Soon after that Kiyomi blew them both a kiss and then the call ended, the porch going quiet except for the lake and the birds. Shane set the phone down and leaned back in his seat, stretching out a bit. The sun felt good against his skin, good enough that he let his head fall back and let it soak in for a long moment. “So what’s the plan for today?”

“No plan. That is the plan,” Ilya said from beside him. “I thought that was the point of the cottage.”

“You’re right. You want to go swimming?”

“Yeah.” Ilya was already standing, stretching his arms over his head. “Let’s go.”

—

It took them longer than it probably should have to get down to the water, mostly because Shane had to search to find a pair of shorts that didn’t feel like he was squeezing into something two sizes too small. Most of his own swim trunks wouldn’t fit over his ass anymore, much to his chagrin, so now all he had were Ilya’s. They were a little bigger, but with the drawstring cinched as tight as it would go, they’d have to do.

“You look good,” Ilya said when Shane finally emerged, like he knew what Shane had been struggling with.

“I look like I stole your clothes.”

“You did steal my clothes. You always do.” Ilya grinned, taking Shane’s hand and turning to lead them outside. Shane grabbed a bottle of sunscreen along the way. “I don’t mind, *malysh*.”

At the dock, Shane paused to dip his toes in first, the water cold enough that he made a face and watched Ilya wade in without any hesitation.

“Coward,” Ilya called back, already waist-deep, grinning back at him.

“I’m being smart.”

“Smart people miss out on lake.”

Shane weighed his options for a second, then took a step back, his eyes narrowing on the lake before he jumped.

The cold hit him like a slap, and Shane came up sputtering, his hair plastered to his forehead. Ilya was there to help steady him, his arm sliding around Shane's shoulders.

"See?" Ilya said, sounding entirely too pleased with himself. "Not so bad.

"You're lying. This is freezing!"

"You get used to it." Ilya pulled him closer, one arm looping loosely around his waist, his hand settling on Shane's stomach. He rested his chin on Shane's shoulder. "Better?"

"Maybe." Shane leaned back into Ilya's chest, already adjusting as the initial shock faded into something more bearable. It helped that Ilya was warm everywhere they touched. "Still a little cold."

"Mm, I will keep you warm." Ilya pressed a kiss into his shoulder, and then to his neck. "Keep you and the baby warm."

"Oh, will you—" The splash of water caught Shane completely off guard, the water hitting him right in the face. He sputtered again, turning and immediately retaliated with both hands, sending a wave of water in Ilya's direction. Ilya laughed, ducking most of it, and the two of them dissolved into something that was less swimming and more just splashing each other, both of their competitive streaks flaring.

At some point Ilya caught his wrists, forcing Shane still as they both panted.

"You're ridiculous," Shane said breathlessly, treading water as he let Ilya pull him in close again.

"You love it."

"Unfortunately."

They stayed in the water until their fingers started to go wrinkly, and when kissing Shane's lips didn't take away the cold chill that had crept into them. They hauled themselves out of the water and back onto the deck, drying each other off before Shane grabbed the sunscreen to slather it on Ilya's shoulders. Ilya returned the favor and then they laid out, drying off in the sun.

The rest of the afternoon passed easily. Shane insisted on cooking them burgers on the grill, making a few too many when he followed a recipe that he usually made when there were more of them. Lunch was eaten outside, and then there was a long stretch of doing absolutely nothing that turned into them dozing off together in the hammock, their legs tangled together.

Shane woke up later with a crick in his neck, the urge to pee making him wiggle and wake up Ilya, who immediately said his arm was numb. They were forced to carefully extract themselves so the hammock wouldn't throw them off, stumbling back into the cottage.

Later that night, the air had cooled considerably. Shane got the fire pit going and settled down close to it, pulling Ilya in beside him. After a while Ilya shifted, lying down so his head rested in Shane's lap, the curve of Shane's bump pressing lightly against the back of his head. Shane's fingers found their way into his curls almost immediately, scratching lightly as his scalp.

"Tell me something about you," Shane said, staring at the fire.

"Something like what?"

"I don't know. I feel like I don't know enough." Shane curled a strand of Ilya's hair around his finger, thinking. "Like I know you play hockey. You're from Russia. You have a brother. I want to know more."

Ilya hummed. "I have a niece. I want to keep supporting her."

"Even though you and your brother aren't speaking?"

"Even then." A pause. "I care about her. That has nothing to do with him." That was very Ilya. His loyalty showed in everything he did.

Shane felt Ilya shift, his hand moving up to his shoulder, like he was trying to hug himself. Shane smoothed his other hand down Ilya's side, moving it down and then back up again. "I'm sorry. About all of it. Your family."

Ilya was quiet for a moment, and Shane didn't push, his fingers continuing to move through his hair.

"I miss my mother," Ilya said finally, quietly.

"What was she like?"

"She was—" Ilya stopped, and Shane could feel him take in a deep breath before he let it out slowly. "Good. She was a good person. Beautiful, and funny. And kind. An omega. But she didn't let her designation define who she was. Like you."

Shane waited, feeling as though Ilya wanted to continue.

"My father was very traditional. Always said omegas had their place in the home, that their only purpose was to serve their alpha and raise children. He was so hard on her, and she was so sad. I knew it, even as a boy."

Shane knew that world. The one Ilya's father believed in wasn't so far off, there were plenty of families who still believed in the same values, despite the way society had changed. He'd spent his entire career quietly pushing back against the edges of it. The thought of Ilya's mother living inside of it with no way out made his chest ache.

"She died when I was 12. An accident. She accidentally swallowed a whole bottle of pills." He said it so simply, like he was just stating a fact. "I was the one who found her."

Shane's hands went still, his heart feeling like it was cracking open. He couldn't begin to imagine. "Oh. Ilya."

Ilya sniffled, but continued. "I promised myself I would never be like my father. I would never treat anyone the way he treated her, especially when it was obvious she needed help."

Shane nodded even though Ilya couldn't see him, his fingers starting to move through Ilya's hair again, slow and steady.

"You don't," Shane said finally. "In case you were wondering. You're nothing like him."

Ilya didn't immediately respond.

"I mean it. I've watched you with Kiyomi, from the very beginning. I've experienced who you are with me. You're so careful. Thoughtful. Even when you were pretending not to be."

Ilya exhaled roughly, the huff sounding like a laugh. "I wasn't always careful. Or thoughtful."

"No, but who does anything perfectly the first time? Besides my backhand." Shane smiled and Ilya's shoulders shook with a barely contained chuckle. "The point is, you're trying. You've changed."

He felt Ilya nod and then they were both quiet, their eyes on the fire. The light was softer as it died down, the air still cool around them, with the sound of birds loud in the distance. Ilya reached up and found Shane's free hand where it rested against his shoulder, lacing their fingers together and holding on.

"She would have loved you," Ilya said eventually. "Like I love you."

Shane blinked at the sudden tears that welled up, using both of his hands so he could tug Ilya up to hug him properly. "I would have loved her too. I love you."

They stayed by the fire until it burned down to its embers, wrapped around each other until it was too cold and they sleepily stood up to move inside.

—

Shane woke up the next morning to Ilya's voice, quiet but close enough to hear. At first Shane thought he was on the phone, but then he felt the warmth of his hand curved around his bare stomach, and when he opened his eyes he found Ilya had shifted down on the bed, his face level with his bump and close enough that he could feel his breath warming the skin. Shane could only see the mop of his curls as Ilya continued his one-sided conversation, completely in Russian, like he had been talking for a good while now.

"*Dobroye utro, malen'kiy,* Good morning, little one." Ilya was saying softly. "*Ya snova zdes'. Kak ty segodnya*? I'm here again. How are you today?"

Shane really wished he could understand what he was saying.

“Tvoy papa vso yeshcho spit.” Your papa is still sleeping. Ilya’s thumb stroked gently at the skin and Shane had to try hard to keep himself still. *“My s toboy pogovorim, poka on otdykhayet. YA khochu, chtoby ty koye-chto znal. Tebya ochen' lyubyat. Ochen' sil'no.”* We'll talk while he rests. I want you to know something. You are very loved. Very much.

Shane closed his eyes as Ilya continued to talk. He couldn’t pick out any specific words, but he didn’t need to. The tone of his voice and the gentle strokes to his skin were enough. Shane let it wash over him, just existing inside of it.

“Ty budesh' govorit' po-russki. I po-angliyski. I, navernoye, po-frantsuzski. Eto mnogo yazykov, no ty ved' u nas umnitsa... O, slyshish', lyubimyy? Papa murlychet.” You will speak Russian. And English. And probably French. That's a lot of languages, but you're clever... Oh, do you hear that, my love? Papa is purring.

When Shane opened his eyes again, it was to Ilya kissing a line up his belly, to his chest, and then his cheek.

“You’re awake,” Ilya murmured in between the kisses.

Shane exhaled, the purr accompanying it without his permission. As soon as he realized what he was doing, he tried to stop it, immediately hearing Ilya make a soft disapproving sound against his skin.

“Noo,” Ilya said quietly. “I love your purrs, *malysh*. Don’t stop.”

“It’s so loud,” Shane mumbled, even as he gave up trying to fight it, sliding his arm around Ilya as the man settled back down with his head on Shane’s chest.

“But I love them. It means you’re happy. Content.”

That was true. It was more true than Shane could really put into words. He was happy in a way that he still wasn’t fully used to, having spent so much of his life hiding one thing or another. Here he could just bask in this feeling, with the person he loved most feeling the same.

“What were you saying?” Shane asked, his fingers sinking into Ilya’s curls.

“How much I love them. How they’re going to speak so many languages,” Ilya told him, one hand still rubbing over his bump.

Shane exhaled another purr, not holding it back this time. He could feel Ilya smiling. “Do you want a boy or a girl?”

“Healthy. I want a healthy baby. Doesn’t matter if they are a boy or a girl. What about you?”

“Same.” Shane’s hand came to rest on top of Ilya’s on his stomach. “Healthy is what I want.”

They fell quiet, Shane’s purrs just quiet enough that he could feel himself drifting back to sleep again.

They were quiet until—“I have to pee.”

Ilya laughed, already shifting to help Shane up.

—

The rest of the day passed like most of their days were spent at the cottage, slow and easy, with no real plans beyond whatever truly felt good in the moment. They spent most of it outside, drifting between playing random games and swimming in the lake, breaking only to eat or to literally climb onto each other, right where they were.

Shane was amazed at how attached they’d become to each other, like neither of them could stand being too far from the other for too long. He started to realize at some point that he was always reaching for Ilya without realizing it, either with a hand on his arm, his knee, or sinking his fingers into Ilya’s curls. Ilya was just as bad, always finding some excuse to touch him and pull Shane close.

It reminded him a little bit of the way Kiyomi had been as a baby, clinging to him whenever she could. He’d loved it then, even when it exhausted him, and he loved that she was the same way now, even at almost 10 years old.

Shane loved it more than he could describe, especially as someone who had grown up an only child, and had become a father at 16 before he’d even figured out what he needed. He’d thought Kiyomi had been that missing piece, and she had been, in her own way, but now he had someone not only reaching for him, but someone he could reach for too.

He didn’t think he would ever feel this kind of peace.

Later they were heading back to the cottage, both damp from another dip in the lake, their shirts long gone. Ilya had his hands on Shane’s hips, slowing Shane down while his lips found the back of his neck.

“Mm, can’t wait till we’re back inside?” Shane asked, already tipping his head back as his eyes closed.

“Nope.” Ilya moved his kisses along Shane’s neck, nuzzling into the skin before he paused, lifting his head, his hand tightening around Shane’s hip.

At first Shane didn’t realize why Ilya had stopped. He waited a beat, then another, before he opened his eyes, intending on glancing back at Ilya, but he didn’t get that far, because instead he met the gaze of Hayden. He’d obviously let himself in through the front door, like he’d done in the past, but usually he would call to warn him. That’s when Shane realized he’d left his phone inside.

Shane felt his stomach drop.

Even from here he could see the wheels turning in Hayden’s mind. He could see the way his gaze dropped from Shane’s eyes, went to Ilya, and then dropped lower, to Shane’s stomach.

He hadn't told Hayden or Jackie about the pregnancy, not because he hadn't wanted to, but because there had never been the right moment. Between recovering from his injuries, and then right after that getting sick enough that he could barely function, he just hadn't found the time.

And then there was the fact that he was in Ilya Rozanov's arms.

"Shit," he mumbled, his brain kickstarting when he saw Jackie appear at Hayden's shoulder. He pulled away from Ilya, shuffling towards the door with quick steps.

"Hey," he said as he stepped inside, smiling sheepishly at the pair of them.

"Shane, what the fuck is going on?" Hayden's voice came out louder than Shane would have liked, his eyes moving between him and Ilya, who had followed him inside and was now standing next to him. He didn't have to look to feel the tension oozing from him. "Why the fuck is *he* here? And you— are you pregnant? And what, Rozanov is the father?"

Shane knew his rapid fire questions were Hayden's way of processing what was happening, but that still didn't make the situation any easier.

He decided to address one thing at a time. "Yes, he is. I would have told you, I just—"

"Are you serious right now?"

Shane frowned, his brows furrowing. "Does it look like I'm joking, Hayden?"

Hayden's mouth opened and closed. "But like. How long has this even been going on for? You've been completely fucking MIA for months, and now I show up, looking to check up on you, and you're just—" He gestured at Shane's stomach, and then at Ilya, like he couldn't quite decide which was more offensive. Probably Ilya. "What the hell, Shane."

"Hayden," Jackie said, reaching to put a hand on his arm.

"No, I'm sorry, I just." Hayden turned back to Shane. "Him? Really? You couldn't have picked literally anyone else? You had to pick the fucking asshole from our rival team?"

That was when Ilya, who had been uncharacteristically quiet, said pleasantly, but definitely sarcastically, "Good to see you too, Pike."

"Oh, fuck you, nobody's talking to you."

Shane glanced at Ilya as he clearly bristled, his hand immediately reaching out to rest on Ilya's arm.

"Hayden, stop." Shane's voice came out steadier than he thought it would, especially with the way his mind had started to go fuzzy at the edges, the way it did when there was too much noise and too many things happening at once.

"No! This is crazy, this is actually crazy! You've been lying to me for how long exactly?" Hayden didn't exactly wait for an answer, his voice steadily getting louder. "Months? And I

had to drive up here to find out you're— what, you're having Rozanov's baby? This is Rozanov, Shane. *Rozanov*." He pressed two fingers to head, like he was trying to show how *off* Shane was for this decision, and honestly, in that moment Shane was already feeling like he was starting to fall behind, like he was processing everything a half a second late. "This is the guy we've spent years going against, the guy who has always been such an asshole—"

"That was never true! You all wanted to believe—"

"Oh, come on, Shane, it was obvious. And now what's going on? You're just together? Having a baby? I've been your best friend for *years*, Shane, you couldn't tell me? I've kept your secret, I haven't and won't tell anyone about Kiyomi. But I have to find out about this like *this*—"

Shane didn't think he could feel any worse. "Hayden, I—"

"And you seriously chose *him*." Hayden's attention swung back to Ilya. "Do you have any idea what you're getting him into? His career, his contract, Kiyomi—"

"I would stop there," Ilya said, his voice very quiet, which was somehow worse than if he'd raised it. Shane knew neither Hayden or Jackie could scent the change in the air, but Shane certainly could, immediately able to key into the fact that Ilya was not pleased.

"Or else what?" Hayden's brows raised. "Huh? Or what?"

"Hayden, what the actual fuck is wrong with you?" The words tumbled out of Shane, just barely managing to break through the fuzz of his mind. "You've come to *my* house, saying you're checking up on me, and now you're doing this?"

"No, Shane, I'm just saying, don't you know his reputation? You don't think you deserve better than—"

"I said stop, Pike." Ilya had stepped closer, but Shane was between them. "You do not get to speak about what you think Shane deserves. Not to me, not to him. Not ever."

Hayden opened his mouth to respond, but Jackie was already moving. "Okay," she said, her eyes flickering between his and Shane's gaze. "That's enough. Let's go outside."

"Jackie—"

"Hayden. Outside. Now." She obviously left no room for argument. After a long moment Hayden sighed, turning away to start to walk outside. Jackie followed, a hand between his shoulder blades like she was keeping him on track.

The door slid shut behind them, and the cottage went quiet again.

Shane stayed where he was, breathing in short shallow gasps as he slumped, his head hanging. He could feel Ilya move closer, his hand smoothing over the small of his back. He tried to focus on that touch, and not the way his hands had started to tremble at his sides.

The noise of the previous moments was still reverberating in his mind. Hayden's voice, too loud, words too fast, the hurt obviously behind them. Shane had a hard time sorting them, so his brain was doing what it always did in situations like this: shut down.

He was still physically there, but mentally he'd already stepped back behind a glass, where everything was muffled and at a distance. He could feel himself breathing, or at least trying to, with how tight his chest felt. Underneath that his stomach had started to turn.

And then there was the feeling that he'd disappointed someone he loved.

"Hey," Ilya murmured, stepping around him and ducking his head slightly to catch Shane's eyes. "It's alright. I've got you."

Was it though? Shane wasn't entirely sure that was true. Of course he hadn't planned for this yet. Hayden's reaction was exactly what he'd been afraid of, not the anger exactly, but the obvious hurt underneath it. The betrayal. He knew logically that he didn't technically owe Hayden a timeline, but that didn't make any of this easier. Hayden was one of his closest friends, probably closer to a brother than anything else. He hadn't meant to make him feel that way. He hadn't meant to wait this long.

"Come here." Ilya didn't wait for Shane to respond, pulling him into his chest and carefully wrapping his arms around him.

Shane let himself be held, his forehead dropping onto Ilya's shoulder. He tried to breathe more slowly, unconsciously matching the deep breaths Ilya had started to take while his hand moved in slow steady circles over Shane's back.

"I didn't want him to find out like that," Shane said finally, his voice quiet.

"I know."

"He's hurt."

"Probably." Ilya pressed a kiss to Shane's temple. "But he will have to get over it." His arms tightened around Shane for a moment, and Shane appreciated the warmth and the tightness, like Ilya was holding him together so he wouldn't fly apart. "But right now you don't have to focus on that. Right now just breathe." He took another deep breath that Shane immediately copied.

When Shane didn't feel like he'd fall over, or worse, throw up, he felt Ilya guiding him toward the couch. He let Ilya sit him down, accepting the light kiss to his lips before Ilya pulled back. "I'll be right back."

Shane looked up at him, frowning at the thought of being alone, and Ilya, like he could read his mind, just shook his head, reaching to brush a thumb over Shane's cheek. "I'm just going to get you a shirt."

"Okay." Shane nodded, and then Ilya disappeared into the next room.

While he sat here, Shane reached for the phone he had forgotten in the room earlier, noticing that he had missed quite a few calls from both Hayden and his mother. He imagined Hayden had gone to his parents' place first, maybe looking for him, before he continued on to the cottage. His parents obviously hadn't told them about Ilya or his current state. That reaction alone told it all. He'd just missed the warning calls from his parents. And Hayden for that matter.

Ilya came back into the room with a shirt on, carrying one of his own hoodies for Shane.

"Thought you would like this better," Ilya said, smiling when Shane automatically lifted his arms so he could slide it down and onto him. Of course he liked this better. The scent in the fabric helped calm him further, and it didn't cling to him like a shirt would, instead settling over him and his belly like a warm loose blanket.

"It's perfect," Shane told him as Ilya sat down next to him, immediately pulling Shane against his side. Shane went without any kind of fight, his eyes falling shut.

—

"Uh, hey, Shane."

Shane blinked open his eyes, unsure of how long it had been since he'd closed them. It was enough time that his breathing had slowed and that tight feeling in his chest had loosened enough that it was more manageable. Ilya had a hand in his hair, his fingers lightly combing through the strands.

Hayden and Jackie stood in front of them, Hayden with his hands shoved in his pockets and looking more than a little ashamed.

"Can we sit down?" Hayden asked, his voice much lower than before.

Shane studied them for a long moment, shifting to sit up as he nodded, keeping his thigh pressed alongside Ilya's.

Both Hayden and Jackie sat down in the armchair across from them.

"I'm Jackie, by the way," she said, looking at Ilya. "His wife."

Ilya nodded. "Ilya Rozanov. His boyfriend." Shane ducked his head to hide the way he was sure his cheeks reddened, still getting used to being called that. "And alpha."

Hayden didn't stop the face he made at his last comment, but he didn't speak. They were all quiet for a bit.

"I'm sorry," Hayden said finally, his voice rough with the words that had clearly been sitting in his chest for a long time. "I know I came in hot, and I just. It was a lot. I'm sorry, Shane."

Shane nodded, just looking at Hayden. "I really didn't mean for you to find out this way, Hayden. You know I would have told you."

“But you didn’t. Probably because of…well.” Hayden gestured vaguely in the direction of the door, clearly referring to the way he had just reacted. “You really surprised me.”

“How far along are you, Shane?” Jackie asked then.

“A little over five months,” Shane told her, unconsciously resting a hand on the bump of his stomach.

“And how long has…this. You both. Been together?” Hayden asked. He seemed to have to force the words out one at a time.

“For a while.” He knew this all started since their rookie season, but he didn’t think Hayden could handle that knowing even that.

Something seemed to suddenly occur to Hayden. “Wait, is Kiyomi—”

“No,” Shane immediately said, though there was a growing part of him that considered Ilya to be more of a father to her than her other actual biological father. “But he has known her. Since she was much younger.”

“Holy shit, man.” Hayden sat back in the chair with a huff. “Do any of the other teammates know? I mean. I think I know the answer, but.”

“No one else knows, Hayden. No one but you.” Rose didn’t even know about Ilya, not yet.

“They were all pissed when they found out you’d be out next season. That’s what got me worried, I hadn’t heard from you, and then we’re hearing from coach that you won’t be back due to the injury or whatever. Turns out it’s just…” He trailed off, his eyes moving down to where Shane’s bump was, just barely visible under the hoodie. “I mean, I knew you carried Kiyomi, but it doesn’t really prepare you to see that. All of that.”

“Well, thanks.” If he didn’t already feel like a beached whale, now he definitely did. He frowned, leaning more into Ilya when he squeezed his shoulder.

“Wait, no, I didn’t mean it like that!” Hayden must have taken the way Shane reacted as him putting his foot in his mouth, *again.* “It’s just not something I pictured before. You’re very pregnant!”

“I knew you were dumb from before, but this is a whole different level, Pike,” Ilya said, in a way that Shane knew he was being sarcastic, but he also knew Hayden wouldn’t take it like that.

“Shut up, and you’re still an asshole,” Hayden said, without missing a beat.

“Hayden, come on,” Jackie said.

“No, it’s fine.” Ilya’s mouth curved slightly. “He’s not wrong. I will be an asshole who defends his omega. That is fine with me.”

“I wasn’t *that* insulted,” Shane said.

“He says you look very pregnant like it’s a bad thing and then looks confused when you respond like that,” Ilya said, raising an eyebrow at Shane. “Well, I am insulted on your behalf.”

Shane opened his mouth to tell him that he didn’t need to be defended like that, but then he closed it, because maybe he did.

And maybe he liked it, too.

Hayden looked like he was trying not to react too suddenly to what was being said, and Jackie was very obviously hiding a smile behind her hand.

“I just meant—” Hayden started again, his words directed at Shane. “I meant that this is a lot to take in. You look—” He seemed to pause to choose his next words more carefully this time. “You look good, Shane. You look healthy. That’s what I meant.”

Shane blinked, and then shrugged, just slightly. “Better.”

Hayden exhaled. “I really am sorry. For everything. For coming in like that, for the things I said. For making you feel like you couldn’t tell me.”

“I really wanted to tell you, Hayden,” Shane insisted. “I was going to. I guess I just needed more time. I’m sorry I made *you* feel like that.”

“I think this way was better,” Ilya said, and Jackie nodded in agreement. “Ripped the plaster off.”

Shane supposed he had a good point. He didn’t think there would ever be a “good time”. Which was a whole issue he knew he’d have to face with the public. One day. But not today. “Maybe, yeah. I think you may have to wait till I actually respond before walking in again, though.”

Hayden winced, but nodded, seeming to realize what else he could have actually walked in on.

There was a natural silence in the conversation then, one that wasn’t completely tacky with tension or gloom finally.

“So,” Hayden started to say, sitting forward in the seat. “What happens next? With hockey?”

“Well, you know I won’t be back for the season. There is going to be a statement going out about how it’s related to the shoulder injury,” Shane explained.

“And then after that? You’ll be back, right?”

Shane nodded immediately. Did Hayden think he’d just drop hockey in exchange for being a house dad? Shane shuddered at the thought. He’d be a father *and* a hockey player. “I’m not retiring, Hayd. I’ll be back.”

Hayden seemed to relax a little more. “What about the baby?”

“We’re going to figure it out,” Shane said, glancing at Ilya. Shane had done a version of this with Kiyomi already. It was different then, he was younger, and still very much a rookie, but he also had the support of his parents. This time he’d have them, Ilya, and also a better idea of what to expect.

“I can help too, of course. You know your kids will always be welcome at our place,” Jackie added.

Shane smiled in thanks. “That would be great, Jackie. Especially when we’re back in Montreal. For now, my parents are in Ottawa. Ilya will be too.”

“You? Ottawa?” Hayden asked, looking at Ilya. “Seriously?”

“I will be signing with the Centaurs this summer, yes.”

“So you’re going to leave Boston for…Ottawa.”

Ilya nodded. “I am.”

“For Shane?”

Ilya looked at Shane, clearly exasperated by the slow way Hayden was connecting all of this. “*Blyat*, yes, Pike. For Shane.”

Hayden, on the other hand, seemed to be having another realization, an actual range of emotions flashing over his face.

“Alright,” he said finally. He looked at Ilya, and his voice came out gruff, but Shane could tell it was genuine. “You better take care of him. All of them.”

“This was never a question,” Ilya said simply and Shane’s chest felt warm with how intensely in love he was with this man.

The conversation was lighter after that, which was very much needed after the hectic mess of earlier. Shane could tell Hayden was trying to be civil, his chirps kept to a minimum, and Ilya only responding when he felt like it, which wasn’t often.

Overall it was good enough. Shane could take that.

Eventually they stood up to leave and Shane and Ilya walked them to the front door. Jackie pulled Shane into a hug first, reminding Shane to call or text if he had any specific pregnancy questions, before Hayden moved in for his own hug, holding on for a beat longer than he normally would.

“Call first next time,” Shane said, when Hayden pulled back.

Hayden snorted, patting Shane on the shoulder. “Well, next time answer your phone.”

Shane smiled. “Fair enough.”

The door clicked shut behind them, and then it was just the two of them again, the sound of Hayden and Jackie getting into their car in the distance. Shane had just barely turned towards Ilya when he was being pulled in close, one hand cupping his face before he was kissing him, slow and deep. Shane felt his heart rate kick up immediately, his hands finding and gripping Ilya's waist.

"What was that for?" Shane asked breathlessly, when they finally pulled apart.

"Do I need a reason?" Ilya asked softly, brushing his nose against Shane's. "But I did want to say, you are very brave, Shane Hollander."

Shane smiled, his eyes flickering up to meet Ilya's earnest gaze. "I didn't have much of a choice there."

"Regardless. Doing all of this. Being a father, the best hockey player, being pregnant. You are so brave and I will tell you everyday until you believe it."

Shane still wasn't used to this kind of praise. Ilya was good at it, he found every possible moment to do it, smiling when he could make Shane blush and fumble what he was saying or doing. To have someone care so deeply about him made his heart feel like it was skipping a beat, his stomach fluttering enough that it felt like real butterflies were in there.

He blinked when the feeling lingered, quickly realizing that something was actually happening in that moment.

He'd been feeling this kind of fluttering for a little while now, a quick message to his doctor telling him that he was probably experiencing something called quickening, which was just the baby moving. Shane got to feel it, but it was still so early on that Ilya couldn't, not yet. He wanted him to feel it too.

Shane grabbed Ilya's hand and placed it on his belly, trying to stand still.

"What is it?" Ilya asked, his brows raised curiously as he waited for whatever Shane was showing him.

"Just wait."

They stood like that for a few more moments, until Shane could feel the fluttering again, his eyes wide as he looked at Ilya for confirmation that he could feel it too. "Do you feel that?"

Shane couldn't tell at first, but then Ilya made a sound Shane had rarely heard from him, his hand pressing more insistently against his bump.

"Oh, yes. I felt that. That's our baby?" Ilya sounded like he was in awe, his hand moving over the curve of Shane's stomach. "That's the baby moving?"

"Yeah. Remember I told you I've been feeling it for a little bit?"

Ilya nodded quickly, his other hand reaching to tug up the hoodie so he could put his hand on Shane's bare warm skin. It was another few moments before there was a small flurry of

activity, and Shane had the pleasure of seeing the actual delight bloom across Ilya's features. This was who he really was, without any performance or deflection. Just Ilya, completely undone by their child.

"Oh, hello baby," Ilya said softly, head tilted down so he was speaking to Shane's stomach, like he had been earlier that morning. "I feel you. I'm here. I'll always be here."

Shane swallowed past the growing lump in his throat. "You're such a sap."

"And you aren't?" Ilya kept one hand where it was while the other curled around the back of Shane's neck, pulling him into another soft kiss. "I love being a sap." He pressed another kiss to his corner of his mouth, his cheek, and then Shane's temple. "Almost as much as I love you."

"I love you too, Ilya. Can you say it again in Russian?" Shane asked.

Their baby was still fluttering between them as Ilya started to use his thumb to stroke the skin lightly.

"*Ya tebya lyubyu*."

Shane closed his eyes, leaning in to rest his head against Ilya's shoulder. Outside, the light had gone gold and low through the windows, the day winding itself down around them. Shane couldn't think of anywhere else he'd rather be.

This was where he belonged.

Hollander to undergo shoulder surgery, out for 2017-18 season

An update on the Metros captain

MLH.com | August 2017

The Montreal Metros announced Friday that captain Shane Hollander will undergo shoulder surgery and is expected to miss the entirety of the 2017-18 season.

General manager Tony Marchetti confirmed that while the clavicle fracture Hollander sustained in March has healed, imaging revealed instability in the surrounding joint that requires surgical correction. Recovery and rehabilitation following the procedure are expected to keep him off the ice for the duration of the season, with a return to play timeline to be determined.

"Shane has been the heart of this organization since day one," Marchetti said. "We fully support his decision to address this the right way. Playing through this type of injury is the kind of thing that gets worse if it isn't addressed. We want him healthy long term, that's what matters most to us."

Hollander, 26, had 31 goals and 54 assists in 61 games before his injury. The Metros ask that his privacy be respected during his recovery.

r/hockey

Anyone else find it weird that Rozanov left Boston for Ottawa??

Posted by u/puckhead99

[Image: Ilya Rozanov holding up a Centaurs jersey]

Like genuinely what is the reasoning here? Boston was a contender. They won a Stanley Cup! Ottawa is a rebuild at best. Something isn't adding up here.

363 comments

u/hockeyheadcanons: maybe he just wanted a change of scenery? some guys do that, you know

u/puckhead99: At 26?? In his prime? To OTTAWA?

u/leafsloser: there's a girl involved. has to be.

u/hockeyheadcanons: lmaoooo probably!

u/rozanov_watcher: lord, i see what you do for others! i'm waiting patiently 🙏

u/raidersforever04: i feel for the raiders, but wherever he goes, he's gonna be a boss. the centaurs don't know how good they're about to get it.

---

r/hockey

sooo my friend works at a grocery store in ottawa and says she served shane hollander today

Posted by u/metrosfan_montreal

she recognized him immediately! says he had a cap pulled low and was with a little girl. she didn't say anything specific to him, because it looked like he didn't want to be recognized. she did say he looked, and i'm gonna quote her directly here, "really different. not in a bad way, just different. i don't know how to explain it. he was really nice, though. and soooo sweet with the little girl when she tried to add three boxes of cereal to his cart at the last minute."

no photo, obvs, because she wasn't going to do that to him. just wanted to share because she was surprised to see hollander in ottawa.

156 comments

u/quietobserver_99: recovering from surgery maybe? ya'll know he's originally from there, right? his parents probably still live there.

u/captain24fan: The kid was probably his daughter, he’s been open about her in the past.

u/leafsloser: imma need more info about this looking different? what does that even mean?

u/metrosfan_montreal: man, i don’t know! that's what she told me!

u/puckbunny99: he’s probably been eating well and not training as hard during recovery. muscles look different when you aren’t in season

u/rozanov_watcher: interesting. INTERESTING. Because someone in my DMs just told me they also spotted Rozanov in a grocery in Ottawa today too. Now I know he probably lives there now, we all know about the move to the Centaurs, that’s not the interesting part. The interesting part is that the store they spotted him at? Same one your friend works at!!!

u/leafsloser: WAIT

u/puckbunny99: this is probably nothing they live in the same city now

u/rozanov_watcher: Probably! Almost certainly! But I’ve been saying something has been brewing between them for years and I feel like I can't just drop the coincidence just yet. Something is happening. We just don't know what yet.

FIN

Chapter End Notes

and that's it! 100k+ words later, and we're done with their first chapter of their lives together. i hope you enjoyed the ride as much as i have. i'll be reading through and doing edits here and there (maybe working in that translation code i tried for this chapter) but otherwise this part is done.

please subscribe to me (not just this fic) so you don't miss when i post the next story (haven't started it yet, but will soooon, promise!!)

chapter soundtrack: by your side by sade (would you guys want a full soundtrack playlist? lemme know!)

End Notes

come say hi to me on tumblr @atemonai

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!