Command me to be well

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Command me to be well

by k1kaaaaaa

Summary

This boy would kill him. This gorgeous, precious and kinky boy will be his downfall, and Ilya will not even resist.

“Yes *moya lyubov*. My little slut, only mine. No one else can have you, no one else is allowed to even look at you, yes? Only me.”

“Yes, God. Only ever you.” Shane whined, throwing an arm over his face.

“No no no, none of that now.” Ilya firmly pulled his arm away from his face, before pulling both of them up above his head, holding them there with one hand, “You cannot say such *filth*, and then get shy on me Hollander.”

OR

The Hollanov BDSM Mafia AU fic that my depraved brain has come up with.

Chapter 1

Chapter Notes

Me a couple of weeks ago: “What if… mafia”

Sooooo, here we go.

Tags will update as we go. I unfortunately do not have a planned posting schedule, as full-time jobs and adulthood are hard, but this fic does consume my every waking thought so it WILL be done.

Formatting notes:
- Italics in dialogue are Russian. I am NOT playing around with translating.

Shane was running late.

His shift technically didn't start for another 45 minutes, and it only takes him 20 to walk to the bar, but he likes to stop by the corner coffee shop on his way there, and be at work approximately 20 minutes before he has to, in order to settle into his customer-service voice.

Which means, he'll have to compromise on some part of his routine.

He likes his routines. He hates compromises.

So. He's running late, and he hates it.

He puts on his shoes, grabs his keys and bag, and runs out the door, making sure it's locked before going down the steep stairs of his building. On the floor beneath him, trash bags are piling outside a neighbour's door, making the whole stairwell stink. Well- stink more than usual.

At least the Cody's moved out, he thinks to himself, almost shivering at the memory of his now ex-neighbours. A married couple that seemed perfectly nice and chill when they first moved in, had turned into an episode of *CSI* really quickly. They threw huge parties that rattled Shane's windows, inviting so many people that they would occupy the stairwell next to Shane's door. He had heard, and *seen* more of those strangers, that he ever wanted to. When the Cody's didn't party, they screamed, threw glasses, bottles, and God knows what else at each other, unless someone - usually not Shane - called the cops. The 6 months of living next to them had aged Shane *years,* and he hadn't even noticed that he had forgotten what silence was like, until they were gone, and he could hear his thoughts again.

His parents, especially his mother, were always pestering him about finding a nicer apartment. But this one was in a great location, within walking distance of both uni, the bar, and his favorite gym. And while the neighbourhood was shady at best, and downright terrifying at worst, Shane had grown attached to his little slice of life.

And he hated change.

The thought of not only looking for a new apartment, but spending time viewing options, weighing pros and cons, recalculating his budget *and* his route to work and school, which meant no routines? Which meant *chaos?* Yea, Shane wasn't signing up for that anytime soon.

Then he'd rather walk past days-old trash bags every time he was leaving, and be way too involved in his loud neighbours' private life. It's not like he spent a lot of time at home, mostly only when he needed to sleep, or he had a rare day off. But even with those, he'd usually plan something with his friends, or visit his parents - so he really didn't care enough to move.

He excited the building into the crisp February air. Even though the sun was out, it didn't do much to warm him, the Montreal weather cruel even this close to spring. He wrapped his scarf tighter around his neck, pulling it up to bury his face in it, and put his hands in his pockets.

Despite the cold, he had to admit that it was beautiful outside. After months and months of snow, blizzards and slippery ice everywhere, it almost felt like he himself was defrosting again, ready for a new season. The rays of sunlight on his face almost made him want to stop, and just take it in - but he was already behind his schedule, and didn't want to compromise his mood any more. He

would already be more grumpy, having to settle for the coffee machine at the bar, which he was fully convinced only *he* cleaned on a regular basis.

He walked into the bar, *Désir,* and schooled his expression into casual indifference.

“Shane! Good to see you man.” Hayden Pike yelled from the other side of the room, busy drying tables.

“Hi Hayd. You just saw me yesterday.”

“Damn Hollander, do all casual niceties just fly over your head?”

Shane laughed slightly, rolling his eyes at his friend, before walking into the staff room to put down his coat. Him and Hayden were studying together at university, and had clicked immediately during Intro Week, Shane quick to complain about struggling to find a job, and not wanting to live off his parents’ money while in Montreal. Hayden had just gotten a bartender spot at *Désir,* and somehow managed to convince the owner to hire not one, but *two* young students, who had no idea how to make drinks. How he succeeded was beyond Shane, but he couldn’t complain.

Now, three years later, they had the routine down to a tee. It wasn’t exactly Shane’s favorite setting, the amount of people he interacted with on the daily slightly terrifying, but it was predictable in a way that he loved.

It took a couple of months, but now he could mix any drink from memory. He was fast, efficient, *and* if the clients looked like they would be into it, he could also make it look flashy. It was, unfortunately, in his job description. *Désir* was fancy enough, that sometimes they got guests that just radiated wealth and importance - those were Shane’s least favorite. They looked at him like a servant, and demanded a “top shelf experience”, watching his every move like hawks.

He preferred the simplicity of just mixing drinks, without having to put on a show. It was almost like a science in itself, perfecting which ingredients went together, and which didn’t. Shane could spend hours just testing, trying and playing around with different alcohols and mixers, poor Hayden forced to taste his concoctions regularly - not that he was complaining.

However, Thomas, the owner, had been clear. Whatever the clients want, the clients get. So if they want a show, or to feel like he’s there for their every whim? Then that’s what they get. Even if it sometimes means lingering touches, compliments and looking at Shane in a way that made his skin crawl.

He walked back out to the main room with a coffee in hand, immediately steering towards the bar, ready for his opening routines. Loosing himself in it like always. Preparing the bottles, the glasses, the ice cubes. Tasks that Hayden hated, calling them boring, and if he was feeling particularly feisty “the bane of his existence”. But to Shane, they were calming, and an almost necessary part of his shifts at this point.

“Are we ready?” Hayden’s voice cut through his thoughts, and Shane looked up at him before taking stock of the bar around him.

“Yes, just finished up.” He reached into the fridge, pulling out a non-alcoholic beer for Hayden, and a ginger ale for himself. “Cheers.”

“Cheers man. Even though non-alcoholic beer should be considered a crime.”

“You could at least pretend that you don’t drink on the job.”

“Now, where’s the fun in that?”

Ilya was having a really shitty day.

The kind of day, where you already count down to when it’s over by the time breakfast rolls around. And it had been *hours* since breakfast.

The meeting room felt stuffy, and Ilya had been methodically unbuttoning his dress shirt for the past five hours. He had no appropriate buttons left to open, and he still felt clammy.

Someone was talking about trade routes between Montreal and Boston, but Ilya couldn’t be bothered to properly listen. He had already said what he wanted to say, he would leave the technicalities to the people that got paid to solve them.

He looked around the room, and assessed his inner circle. Six men that he was sure would die for him. They had been through hell together, building the organisation in Montreal up from nothing after leaving Russia.

And Ilya was so proud of them all. Every one of these men had proven that they would follow Ilya anywhere, and in this business? That was basically a love declaration.

The newest addition to their little band of misfits, was Cliff Marleau - the only member that didn’t speak Russian in any capacity besides butchering curse words when he wanted to piss Ilya off. He had been a part of the *Bratva* for over a year, after Ilya met him on one of their reconnaissance operations in Boston. They had hit it off immediately, before Marleau knew who Ilya was. Bonding over decent vodka and pretty women, they spent a whole evening talking, while Ilya was waiting for his target.

Marleau told him that they probably shouldn’t be friends, that he was bad company because he owed the wrong people money, and didn’t want to drag Ilya down with him. Ilya still smiled at the memory, the genuine care from Marleau towards a stranger he had just met, never failed to move him, and amuse him, given the circumstances.

Little did they know, they had a common enemy. At the end of the night, Ilya had killed his Target, a pathetic excuse of a man who was stirring up trouble in Boston, threatening Ilya’s operation from afar. He had followed him into a backroom of the club, with his men stationed outside, and made it quick and clean. Only to be greeted by Marleau entering through a secret side door, visibly startled, and significantly more terrified then earlier.

“I- I was supposed to keep watch.”

“Keep watch? For this piece of shit? Is this the man you owe money?”

"Yes."

"Well, your debt is dead. How do you feel about Montreal?"

And the rest was history. Ilya had taken Marleau under his wing, and the man had proven, time and time again, that it was the right choice. Despite the power imbalance between them, Marleau was the only one of Ilya's men, that he genuinely considered a friend. Their banter and relationship hadn't been affected at all by Marleau joining the *Bratva.* If anything, he was the one who gave Ilya the most shit on a daily basis, and questioned his decisions the most. Ilya wouldn't have it any other way.

Right on cue, Marleau leaned towards Ilya, resting his arm on his chair. "So, there's this place I've been thinking about trying out. Pretty high end with good security, and even better drinks. And they'll have that top shelf vodka you like."

Ilya smirked, "Sounds like a plan. If we make it out of this meeting today."

"You planned the meeting."

"Did I? Then I need to un-plan it."

Ilya rose up abruptly, scraping his chair across the wooden floors. The whole room went silent, everyone staring up at him, awaiting. He walked over to the balcony door, and slid it open, before reaching for his cigarettes. He stood in the door-opening, and when he managed to light it, he looked around the room. No one had moved.

"Something….urgent has come up," he drawled, while taking a much needed drag. "Marleau and I will be leaving. I trust you have this under control, and will reach me, if anything urgent requires my attention?"

"*Da, Rozanov."* Sergei confirmed from his seat closest to him. "*Go have fun."*

Ilya smirked, taking another long drag of his cigarette, before flicking it out through the balcony. "*You know me so well.* Marley, let's go." Pushing off the wall, he stalked towards the chair where he had thrown his jacket earlier, grabbing it on his way out. He didn't look back to see if Marleau was following. He knew he was.

They rode the elevator down from the penthouse meeting-room in silence. Once they made it out of the building, the sun was barely visible on the horizon, the cold Montreal air a blessing on Ilya's overheated skin.

"So, Marley, where are we going tonight?"

"*Désir.* A bit downtown, but supposedly very nice. Very Instagram-worthy, and you know what that means." Marleau winked as their car pulled up, before opening the door for Ilya.

"Horny bastard." Ilya rolled his eyes at him, before getting in.

Marleau leaned over the open door with a glint in his eyes that Ilya absolutely *loved* before a night out. It meant trouble. "I learned from the best, Rozanov. Now let's go get laid." He smacked the door shut before walking around and getting in on the other side.

He barely managed to close the door, before he was reaching for the champagne resting in a bucket between them, uncorking it and pouring two flutes. Ilya took one out of his hand, and lifted it. “Cheers Marley, let’s get fucked up, yes?”

“Fuck yes, let’s get fucked up Rozy.” Marleau giggled as they clinked their glasses, and practically downed their contents, Ilya already reaching for the bottle to refill them.

Shane had reached the part of his shift where he’s running fully on autopilot. It’s busy - nicely so. When music is pumping, and the queue to the bar is long, he can excuse not chatting too long with every customer.

Hayden is mostly on the floor tonight, carrying out orders for the people who feel too important to get up from their seats to talk to Shane. Some nights, when Hayden’s social battery is dead, or he’s hungover for some reason, they’ll switch so he can get a break behind the bar. But usually, they split up like this. Hayden passes by the bar and salutes Shane, who salutes him right back, before turning to his next customer.

Hours pass, and around midnight, the place gets *loud*. The guests have all hit the level of inebriation that screams trouble, and more and more of them have filtered to the dance floor, where a sensual beat and heavy bass rocks through them. A quick glance reveals that several people are making out and grinding against each other, lost in the music. Shane looks away when a customer at the bar grabs his arm to get his attention.

God, he hates when people touch him while he works. Getting a drink *cannot* be that urgent.

When he turns, his eyes meet a blonde girl, looking completely wasted, that is, for some reason, still holding onto his arm. He gently pries it out of her touch, before making her a drink that he’s sure she’ll regret ordering in the morning. Serves her right.

With her gone however, there is a certain lull in the business, giving Shane his first deep breath of the evening. He cleans up the bar a bit, preparing what he can for the next wave that will inevitably come, while scanning the room. This - people watching, might be his favorite part.

His eyes fall on two men sitting in one of the VIP booths placed on a plateau. He can only make out the one facing his way, his features dark and scruffy, looking like he’s having the time of his life. His companion sits with his back facing Shane, giving him a perfect view of - admittedly very pretty - golden curls. They must be the high-end clients Hayden mentioned earlier, who had ordered all of the most expensive drinks on their menu. Shane hated those types - obnoxious entitled assholes.

Just as he finished that thought, Hayden came barreling behind the bar, immediately squatting so he couldn’t be seen. “Shane, my best friend, the best thing in my life.”

“No, Hayd. Whatever the question is. No.”

“Shane, please. My feet are killing me, I think I’ve hit at least a marathon by just running back and forth in here today. And now? Those rich pricks in the VIP booth want our “*most expensive vodka”.”* The last part said in the worst Russian accent Shane had ever heard, making him snicker at his friends’ antics.

“And you want me to do what, exactly?”

“Just take the vodka off the top shelf, and bring it to them. Please, man. I’ll watch over your drinks kingdom, and move nothing out of place unless absolutely necessary. Just go, and flash your cute little smile at them. They *hate* me. Maybe they’ll hate you less.”

Shane sighs deeply, but doesn’t fight Hayden on it, already knowing that he’ll do it. Hayden has truly been running back and forth, and while manning the bar isn’t *easy*, if his friend needs a break, Shane can suck up to some rich people.

“All right, wish me luck.”

“I love you, man.”

“Ew, save that for Jackie, please.” Shane grins while putting the *outrageously expensive* bottle of vodka on a tray alongside two glasses. He makes one final prayer to his patience, and sets off in the direction of the two men he had spotted just before.

The dark haired guy sees him approach, and smiles at him, which momentarily throws Shane off, not that he lets it show. He arrives at their table, and opens his mouth to greet them as he glances to his right at the man with the blond curls, and- and he forgets his fucking name.

Forgets that he’s at work, that he’s supposed to be serving these clients the drinks they ordered, supposed to smile and be polite, and give them a good experience. He stands there, with the tray in his hands, mouth still open, gaping.

The guy in front of him is *gorgeous.* Actually, Shane is not even sure that the term ‘gorgeous’ does him justice. The curls are even more beautiful up close, the sides neatly slicked back while the top looks so curly and soft, that Shane gets the insane urge to run his hands through it. He refrains but….barely. And while his hair truly is so very pretty, it’s his eyes that really draw Shane in. Icy blue, looking right at him with a look of mild curiosity and something else Shane can’t place. The eye-contact locks him in, and for a moment they just stare at each other.

Suddenly a cough breaks through whatever bubble they had found themselves in, and Shane jumps in place, almost dropping the tray in embarrassment. He looks to his left, catching they eye of the dark haired man, who is looking between them with a very amused smile.

Shane looks back at the curly haired *adonis,* avoiding his eyes, as to not get lost in them again. But that leads his attention to other places. The man’s mouth is slightly open in the most adorable pout, not at all matching his otherwise very intimidating presence. Shane swallows hard, heat creeping up his neck before he can stop it. Trailing his eyes down, he finds more skin than he had expected, the man’s black dress shirt unbuttoned to the point of indecency - not that Shane is complaining. It gives him a perfect view of the man’s chest, and the golden crucifix resting in the dip between his collarbones, catching the bar lights.

Shane looks up again, finding the man now looking at him with a smirk on his face. He shakes himself internally, and tries to put on a smile. “Hi.”

Hi? HI? Shane scolds himself. *You’ve been gaping at him like a fish while he patiently waits for his drink, and kindly doesn’t comment on the fact that you’re acting like a weirdo, and the best you can do is ‘Hi’?*

“Hello.” The man says, in a Russian accent that sounds so much hotter than whatever imitation Hayden had attempted.

“You- you ordered vodka.” Shane stutters, busying his hands with putting the bottle and glasses on the table, pouring them both a shot, and quickly gathering the other empty glasses on his tray. “I’m really sorry for the wait.”

The dark haired man opens his mouth, as if to answer him, but is interrupted by the other, “It’s no trouble. I don’t mind waiting when the service looks like….this.” The last word is punctuated by the man looking Shane up and down. It makes him squirm, but also makes him want to stand up straighter. He looks away blushingly, fiddling with the tray in his hands.

“If you need anything else, I’ll- I’ll be at the bar.” he manages to stammer, and before he can turn away the man is speaking again.

“Anything?” The man winks, before lifting the glass of vodka and taking a sip. If Shane was feeling more delusional, he’d say it almost looked… seductive.

“Knock it off, Rozanov. Let the man get back to work.” The other guy rolls his eyes before smiling at Shane. “Thank you for the drink.”

Shane nods at him, before turning to the other guy - *Rozanov*, as if wanting to say something, but no words come out. Instead he ducks his head, and walks away as fast as is socially acceptable, without making it seem like he’s running away.

He doesn’t look back, even when he feels his skin prickle in awareness, convinced that Rozanov has turned around, looking at him walk away. And if Shane sways his hips a bit more than necessary? Well, only he’ll ever know.

“Frankly, that was embarrassing.” Marleau says right as Ilya turns back around, after watching the gorgeous bartender walk away, swaying his hips as if Ilya wouldn’t notice.

“Rude. He didn’t do anything. You got your vodka, the fuck are you complaining for?” Ilya snapped, and immediately watched Marleau’s face light up with a grin.

“I meant embarrassing for *you* Rozy, but good to know you’re already whipped.”

“Whipped? What does that mean?”

“That you don’t even know the guy’s name, and he already has you wrapped around his finger. You look like you’d get on your knees if he asked, and you don’t even know if he likes men.”

“You saw him, yes? I know you are straight Marley, which is already a real waste, but I did not also think you were blind. He, of course, likes men. And getting on my knees for him does not sound so bad.”

“You don’t get on your knees for anyone.”

“Exceptions can be made,” Ilya sighed dreamily, running his index finger over the rim of his glass, before grabbing the bottle to pour himself more vodka.

“You want to fuck him, don’t you?”

Ilya hummed, already imagining those beautiful freckles underneath his fingertips. The bartender was truly so *pretty*, the freckles making his face look so innocent it made Ilya want to squish his cheeks. He looked so *proper* with his fully buttoned white dress shirt, and suspenders. But the way the shirt hugged his chest, and the way the fabric pulled around his arms was anything but proper.

It was *indecent*.

Ilya’s mouth had watered when he first saw him stop before their table, his eyes scrambling to take him in, heart leaping in delight when he noticed the beautiful boy stammering through his words, looking at Ilya from underneath his eyelashes.

He wanted to grab him by those suspenders and absolutely ruin him.

When he walked away, Ilya couldn’t resist turning around and following him with his eyes all the way back to the bar. God, he looked delicious, and Ilya was a starved man.

“Rozy, he is not your type of man.” Marleau’s voice broke through Ilya’s fantasy, making him scowl at his friend.

“What the hell is that supposed to mean? Why would he not be my type?”

“He is not, and do not take this the wrong way, nearly slutty enough for you. You pull girls that are already practically undressed at clubs, and look like they want to eat you alive. Your men, while rarer, are always cocky and kinky twinks. He-“ Marleau points in the direction of the bar with a smirk on his face, “is a normal guy. A stuttering, shy and boring dude. Don’t do this to him.”

Ilya rolled his eyes, before downing the contents of his glass. “I don’t know what you’re talking about.” Ilya winked, before getting up, patting Marleau on his shoulder and leaving in the direction of the bartender, pulling him in like a beacon.

He stepped around people dancing and tumbling through the bar, while reaching up to try and tame his hair. He could see him from afar, shaking some drink at the bar. The movement of his arms almost stopped Ilya in his track, momentarily frying his brain. He wanted to bite them. Preferably while buried deep in the gorgeous ass he only just managed to sneak a peak of before.

Patience, Ilya.

He approached the bar, and slid into a stool right in front of the bartender, who was currently facing away from him, bent over the ice-cube container. Ilya felt as if Christmas had come early, and he

wasn't even Christian. Then, the bartender stood up and turned around, freezing in his tracks when he spotted Ilya. He did it so fast, that Ilya didn't manage to look up in time, betraying just *where* his eyes had been feasting. He winked at the bartender, before leaning his head on his hand. "I think you forgot something, back a our table."

The bartender stood up straighter. "Oh, I-, I'm so sorry Sir, what are you missing?"

Adorable.

"Your number."

A myriad of emotions crossed the bartender's face, before settling on a look Ilya could only call *feisty*, making his heart beat faster in excitement. The guy scoffed, rolling his eyes at Ilya before going back to making the drink someone else had ordered, turning away from him without a second glance.

Ilya couldn't help the genuine smile forming on his face at the realisation that this guy would make him work for it. And God, Ilya would work. When the guy passed him again, Ilya cleared his throat and smiled at him. He didn't even slow down, rolling his eyes again before talking to the girl on the stool next to Ilya, who ordered a vodka redbull. Ilya waited patiently until he had served her the frankly disgusting drink - given the cheap vodka he had put it in, Ilya couldn't imagine it tasted like anything other than hand disinfectant - and then he cleared his throat again. "Can I order a drink?"

"I find it somehow hard to believe, that you have already managed to drink the whole bottle of your outrageously expensive vodka." The guy shot back, before standing in front of Ilya, leaning both arms on the counter. Ilya drooled a little, before remembering that he was on a mission.

"Ah, and what if I have?"

"Then I'm both impressed with the fact that you're still standing, and worried for your health."

"I can work with impressed." Ilya said softly, pitching his voice as low as he could while still being audible over the music. "Want me to impress you some more?" Ilya let the hand not currently supporting his head trail across the counter, before his pinkie reached the bartender's hand, gently making contact. He kept his eyes trained on the guy's face, trying to gauge his reaction, and almost giggled in joy when he noticed the blush spreading across his cheeks, making his freckles pop.

But before he could enjoy it more, the guy abruptly pulled his hands back, his eyes having gone cold. He scoffed, before walking away from Ilya yet again, focusing on another customer, shoulders tense and like he was doing everything he could to not glance over at Ilya.

It gave Ilya plenty of time to just…admire him. He truly was gorgeous. His body toned, features soft and hair so floppy that it fell into his eyes, making Ilya wish he was close enough to gently brush it away. Anything to look into those eyes again.

The club around him disappeared, Ilya's attention solely on this guy whose name he still didn't know. And fuck, did he want to know. Ilya wasn't a patient man, used to getting what he wanted. But for this guy? For this guy he would sit here on a barstool, and *wait.*

Shane's movements were clumsy, uncoordinated and too violent. He almost broke two glasses making two separate drinks, and almost dropped a *very* expensive bottle of champagne on the floor. All because of *Rozanov.* The mysterious, cocky, asshole of a man, currently sitting somewhere behind him (two stools to the right from Shane, not that he was paying attention), just *looking.*

Since Shane had walked away the last time, Rozanov hadn't made any moves to talk to him again. But he didn't leave. He sat there, at Shane's bar, looking at him. God, he didn't even have a drink, because Shane had made fun of him instead of serving him. Thomas would kill him. But there was simply no way that Shane would walk over there again, and ask Rozanov any version of "what can I do for you?" without melting to the floor in embarrassment.

So ignoring him it was. Even if it got him fired.

Plus, he hated men like him. Entitled, used to getting what they wanted. *Who* they wanted. Rozanov probably didn't even really want Shane. Him and his friend had most likely laughed their asses of at Shane's stuttering, and thought it would be hilarious to see him embarrass himself some more. In his anger, Shane could almost pretend it didn't hurt. Could almost pretend that he hadn't been absolutely mesmerised by Rozanov's looks, and caught in his easy charm. He mentally berated himself for momentarily falling for it when Rozanov had approached him at the bar. For wishing that it was genuine.

It wasn't often that Shane felt attraction. Or, well, he felt *attraction* well enough. But as soon as the initial flirting moved into more serious "let's do something about this" territory, his interest would fizzle out. Whether it be because the guy would say something that rubbed him the wrong way, or because, once Shane indicated that he was interested, most guys stopped putting in effort. As if he couldn't change his mind.

This wasn't helped by the fact that most guys assumed, with his physique, that he wanted to throw *them* around. And don't get Shane wrong, topping wasn't….horrible. But it certainly didn't do it for him the same way, as when someone truly pulled him apart at the seams.

Not that *that* had ever really happened. But no one could judge him for daydreaming.

Therefore, Shane had long ago resigned himself to mediocre sex - or just the lack of it. But every now and then, he would feel a spark of potential when talking to a guy. When a guy would flirt and look at Shane like he wanted to eat him alive, and not the other way around.

And Rozanov had *a lot* of potential.

Just Shane's luck, that he was just toying with him for entertainment.

Shane busied himself for the next couple of hours, almost succeeding in ignoring Rozanov's presence at the bar. For every hour that he didn't leave, Shane's world got tilted more and more off-kilter. He felt irritation bubbling up every time he caught sight of him sitting there, so casually, watching Shane work.

But the irritation had an undertone to it, that had his heart beating a little faster, and if he looked in a mirror, he was sure he would be red in the face. Fuck, he hoped the bar lights were making that

less visible. He could feel eyes on him no matter what he did, and it fueled him in a way that he would find absolutely horrifying tomorrow. But now? No matter the drink, and no matter the customer, he was putting in *the work.* Shaking drinks with flourish, winking at all customers, and moving with a careless grace every time he had to reach for more ice. And if he flexed his pecs every time he reached for a glass from the rack above the bar? Well, sue him.

Hayden burst out laughing every time their eyes caught, shaking his head, but Shane couldn't care less. Something inside him had stirred, no matter how hard he had been trying to repress it. Rozanov might be a dick toying with him, but that didn't mean Shane couldn't show him what he would be missing. All while not looking at him at all. Good. Amazing even. Well done Shane.

Slowly, and predictably, the night started to end. People filtered out, only either the very drunk guests remaining, or the too sober ones who were responsible for getting them home. Shane could begin to close down the bar, busying himself with his routines while feeling the hairs at the back of his neck rising from the knowledge that Rozanov *still* hadn't left.

At some point, his dark haired friend approached him with a girl on his arm, and they exchanged a quick conversation, before leaving Rozanov where he was.

Fuck.

Why wouldn't he leave? Why would he spend his whole evening sitting there, looking at Shane? A thought crossed his mind briefly, that perhaps this should…worry him. Or at least, make him uncomfortable. It was basically stalking, right? He should tell him to fuck off, and if he wouldn't, call the cops. But-

But he didn't want to.

Instead, he found himself turning towards him for the first time in hours. And found him already staring right at him, with a cocked head and a smirk. "Hi again, gorgeous."

"I-" Shane stammered, before regaining his voice. "Don't you have better places to be?" He snapped, holding Rozanov's eye contact, despite dying to look away.

"Nope." Ilya answered before biting his lower lip slightly, still smirking that *infuriating* smirk, that Shane wanted to wipe off his face. "You still owe me a drink, yes? I have been a very patient customer."

Shane snorted before he could help himself, and saw Rozanov's face almost…light up? He must be really tired if his eyes were playing tricks on him. He was about to open his mouth to say something - not that he had any idea what to say, but Rozanov beat him to it.

"But, since it is now-" he looked down at his fancy watch, the movement drawing Shane's attention to his big hands, making him gulp, "4 am, and you have already closed your bar down, how about we take that drink somewhere else? Somewhere where your attention won't be constantly stolen by everyone else?"

Shane didn't dare tell him, that his attention had been on him ever since he had sat down at the bar. That would be crazy, even if it was true. And also the complete opposite of what Shane was trying to achieve - or, the opposite of what he told himself he *should* achieve. Rozanov should walk away from here tonight with a *failure.*

Even if all Shane's instincts were screaming at him to let Rozanov *succeed.* That it would be worth it.

Hayden came to his rescue, albeit with his puppy eyes on, and Shane felt dread fill him, already knowing what his friend was after. "Buddy, Thomas left hours ago, and there is barely anyone left. I already cleaned the empty tables, can you please close by yourself today? Jackie told me I could come over before she gets up for work, and-"

Shane held up a hand, stopping the monologue he knew was about to come out of his friend. "I don't want to hear about what you and Jackie will get up to when she gets up for work, Hayd. Just go, have fun." Hayden practically bounced on his feet with a huge grin, before sprinting off towards the staff room. "I'll owe you one!"

"*Another* one!" Shane yelled back, laughing as his friend practically ran out of the bar. Only once the door had shut, did Shane realise exactly what situation he had put himself in. He slowly turned around, and faced Rozanov again. Rozanov, who suddenly did not look flirty or smug. He almost looked…angry.

"He just left you here? Alone?" Was not what Shane had expected to come out of his mouth, and he found himself momentarily stunned.

"W- What?"

"It is 4 am on a Saturday, in the heart of Montreal. And your… colleague? just left you here all by yourself?"

"Hayden is a friend. And it goes both ways. He has a girlfriend he likes to see. Not that I know why I'm explaining it to you." Shane laughed, trying to stop himself from babbling to a stranger.

"Hmmm" Ilya hummed, before seemingly letting it go. "I do feel slightly offended."

Shane looked at him in confusion. "What the fuck do you have to be offended about?"

Ilya sighed deeply, before putting both arms on the counter, and leaning his head down to rest on his hands. It almost looked…dramatic. "I have been sitting here for *hours,* trying to get the attention of this beautiful bartender, and despite my very best efforts, I learn the name of his *asshole* friend first. It is a true crime. I will need… compensation."

Shane couldn't help the blush that rose to his cheeks, or the way his stomach swooped at the blatant flirting. "Oh yea? What kind of compensation?" *Well done Shane, so much for shutting him down.*

"You can start by telling me your name, *Da*? So I can stop referring to you as 'hot bartender' in my head."

"Hmmm I don't know, I like 'hot bartender', I think."

Rozanov's eyes lit up in delight, but before he could say anything, the door burst open, and Hayden ran in, going straight for the staff room before running back out. "Forgot my phone, see you tomorrow Shane! Goodnight!"

When Shane looked back at Ilya, he laughed at the huge grin splitting his face. "So…*Shane*- "

“Fuck off, Rozanov.” Shane laughed, before realising that the stranger hadn’t introduced himself either. That maybe ‘Rozanov’ was a friendly nickname only reserved for the dark haired friend, and Shane had just made a complete fool of himself.

Meanwhile, Rozanov had frozen, staring at Shane with a hard look on his face, that Shane hadn’t seen before. It made him immediately want to apologise, anything to smooth out the furrow between his brows. Anything to bring back the flirting, and the smiles, even if they would end up ruining him. “I- God that’s so embarrassing, I’m sorry. I heard your… friend… call you that earlier, and I don’t know why my brain just brought it up, when you *obviously* haven’t introduced yourself either, and-, *fuck- "*

“Shane.”

Shane looked up, not even realising he had closed his eyes.

“It’s good to know I’m not the only one who was paying attention.” Rozanov smirked, his face holding no trace of the previous coldness. “Rozanov is my last name.”

“Oh. That’s-, that’s nice. It’s a, ah, a nice name, sounds… good.” *Shut up Shane. Right now.*

Ilya laughed. “It is. It would sound even better if you moaned it, don’t you think?”

Shane’s brain melted away, and he was convinced it would never come back. Rozanov had killed him. Fried all of his braincells, made him lose all of his words. He just stood there, gaping at this random stranger, wondering if he was real, or if Shane had managed to conjure him from a fantasy, and he was, in reality, just talking to thin air.

“Hah, I-, that’s- yes.” *Had he just said yes? Oh fuck he had just said yes.*

“Yes? I knew you would agree.” Rozanov lifted his head from his hands, and looked Shane up and down. “How much longer until you can close the bar?”

Shane looked around, grateful for the reprieve from Rozanov’s intense eyes. And he realised that they were alone, even the bouncer at the door had gone home. Most of the tables where clean - Hayden hadn’t lied, the bar where was ready to go, so he would only need maybe fifteen minutes. Not that he was about to tell Rozanov that. He hadn’t fully made up his mind yet, as to whether he would allow this to lead anywhere, but he certainly wasn’t about to make it easy for him.

“Probably an hour. There’s still a lot to be done.” He said, with a defiant arch of his eyebrow, almost daring Rozanov to admit he was bluffing, and leave.

But Rozanov only took a look around the bar, before getting up, and walking towards Shane with slow steps, giving him plenty of time to stop him, or back away.

Shane didn’t.

He stood frozen, taking in Rozanov’s body as it got closer, getting excited when he realised that although they were almost the same height, Rozanov had a couple of centimeters on him. And he was *big.* Shane wasn’t a small man, but being approached like this, like a predator circling it’s prey, he almost felt….tiny. And he loved it.

Once Rozanov was within reach, his hand rose up and brushed across Shane's cheeks, before pulling his hair back from his forehead, and landing on the back of his neck, squeezing lightly. "Is this okay?"

Fuck, Shane wasn't sure he knew any words in that moment. He nodded hastily, but Rozanov still didn't move. "Words, Shane."

And fuck, if that didn't make Shane's knees wobble. "It's- it's okay."

With permission, Rozanov leaned in, and gently brushed their lips together. And Shane realised that he was well and truly fucked. Rozanov's grip on the back of his head tightened, and Shane couldn't help the gasp that escaped him. Rozanov took that as his opportunity, and slid his tongue into Shane's mouth, immediately deepening the kiss.

Shane never wanted it to stop. Nothing existed outside of them right now, and he never wanted to leave. He grabbed at Rozanov's arm, moaning at the feeling of the muscle underneath his fingertips. Rozanov's other hand slid up Shane's abdomen before pulling on his suspenders, before Rozanov broke the kiss, both of them panting heavily. "I have wanted to pull at these every time you passed me tonight." Rozanov gently fiddled with the suspenders, before snapping one against Shane, making him gasp. "Every time you walked away, ignoring me, I wanted to pull you back. But I have been so very patient, yes?"

"Yes" Shane found himself gasping, the words tumbling out before he could stop them.

"And now it is you turn to be patient*, solnyshko*."

Shane tried to chase after Ilya's mouth, but was stopped by a hand on his chest. Rozanov pulled up his watch, and fiddled with it for a moment, before looking back at Shane. "There. Now you should get back to work."

"Wh- what?"

"You said an hour, yes? So much work to do. I will wait patiently, over here." Ilya said with a smirk, sitting down in a booth right next to the bar.

Shane could not believe this was happening. His mind was split between feeling outraged and offended, and so *so* very turned on. Meanwhile Rozanov had relaxed back in the booth, typing something on his phone, not sparing Shane a glance. *Just like I had done to him for the whole evening.*

Fuck, this was hot.

Shane forced his legs to move, trying to remember the closing routines. He moved as slow as possible, acutely aware of his lie in terms of how long this would take. Even if he did it all while crawling slowly across the bar - which Rozanov might even like - there was no way in hell it would take an hour.

True enough, after 30 minutes, Shane had scrubbed the entire place clean, and did most of the prepping he normally did before opening. After pretending to do work for another five minutes, his cock so hard in his pants it was borderline painful, he walked towards Ilya, who still looked completely engrossed in his phone.

Shane cleared his throat, the irony *not* lost on him.

Ilya looked up, and arched an eyebrow, before glancing at this watch. “You still have 23 minutes left.”

“Well, I was faster than expected. It’s done now.” He lied, hoping Rozanov wouldn’t force him to admit that he had lied. And kinda hoping that he *would.* God, Shane needed his brain checked.

Ilya sat up in the booth, but made no move to get up. Instead he reached out and grabbed at Shane’s suspenders pulling him closer until his mouth touched his stomach, making it flutter again. *Fuck,* he was so turned on, and he couldn’t look away from Rozanov.

“Such lies coming out of that pretty mouth, Shane. Maybe we should put it to better use, *da?*” He pulled down more firmly, and Shane fell to his knees, hitting the floor so hard it briefly made him wince.

“Yes, so much prettier down here. We talked about this, yes? How I deserve a reward? Will you give me a reward, Shane?” He said it so sweetly it almost didn’t fit the position they had found themselves in. But Shane took it for the check-in that it was. Even now, already on his knees, Rozanov was giving him an out. A way of saying *no*. The gesture felt both warming, and made Shane so turned on, he could swear his vision was getting blurry. The bar really was on the floor, if a guy asking for consent was doing it for him this much.

He found himself nodding, before Rozanov arched his eyebrow again, and he realised he needed to speak. And he wanted to answer, to say yes, but when he opened his mouth only a whine came out. *How embarrassing.* Before he could dwell in his mortification, he heard a groan, and realised it had come from Rozanov.

Rozanov, who was looking at Shane with a look he couldn’t decipher, but his pupils were dilated and his mouth parted. Shane decided then and there, that he wanted to see more of that look. He leaned forward on his knees, and nuzzled at Rozanov’s inner thigh, before mouthing at the hard cock he could feel through his slacks, his mouth watering. *At least pretend to not be so fucking hungry for it Shane, fuck.*

He ignored his inner voice, and instead looked up at Rozanov’s face, while letting his tongue fall out and run along the bulge.

Rozanov’s face pinched together, and a soft “fuck” escaped him. One of his hands found its way into Shane’s hair, while the other made quick work of opening his own pants, and pulling his cock out.

Fuck, he was big. Shane needed it in his mouth *immediately.*

The hand in his hair slid forwards to cup his cheek, before Rozanov ran his thumb over his lower lip, opening it gently. Shane automatically sucked the digit in, running his tongue over it before gently nipping at it with his teeth.

“Fuck, Shane, that’s-“ Rozanov cut himself off, pulling Shane’s mouth open again before guiding his cock inside. “Fuck, fuck, fuck, *solnyshko,* that’s so good.”

Shane’s cock twitched in his pants at the praise, and he tried to take more of Rozanov into his mouth. When he felt him hit the back of his throat, he ran his tongue underneath it, before forcing it

even further down and swallowing around him. Above him, Rozanov's hand had gone back to his head, desperately clutching at his hair, the grip painful in a way that only spurred Shane on.

"Shane, *fuck,* I'm gonna-"

Shane took the cock to the hilt, and reached a hand up to fondle Rozanov's balls as much as he could reach through his pants, and soon felt him tensing underneath him, the cock jerking spurts of come down his throat. Shane swallowed it all, lapping at the cock until it started softening in his mouth.

He pulled off and sat back on his haunches, panting heavily.

Rozanov looked *ruined.* He kept glancing between Shane's eyes, mouth, and his own now soft cock, like his brain couldn't quite compute what had just happened. Shane smiled at him, and Rozanov leaned over to caress at his face again. Shane nuzzled into it, letting his eyes flutter closed.

"So good for me, Shane."

"Thank you." *Why the fuck did you just thank him for sucking* his *cock.*

*"*And so polite too. You almost couldn't guess how mean you were being earlier. Playing hard to get, ignoring me. When all you really wanted was to be put on your knees, isn't that true?"

Shane wasn't sure if Rozanov expected him to answer, so he just nodded.

"Such a shame too. You could have gotten everything you wanted, but now you will have to show me, that you can also be patient."

With that, Rozanov patted Shane's cheek, before getting up and tucking himself back into his dress pants. He stepped around Shane, and started heading towards the door.

"Rozanov, wh- what? Where are you going?"

"Home. I'll come back tomorrow. Maybe you'll be better behaved by then, and not so mean to me. When all I do is try to be nice to you." He reached the door, hesitating slightly, his shoulders suddenly tenser than before.

"And Shane?" He turned his head so their eyes met again, Shane yet again unable to look away. "My name is Ilya. See you tomorrow sweetheart." He walked out, the door closing after him.

Shane remained on his knees, on the floor of his workplace, hard as a rock, wondering what the fuck he had just gotten himself into.

Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

He found himself squirming in the seat, as much as it would allow, while openly staring at Ilya's arm, stretched towards the steering wheel.

He wondered what Ilya would say, if Shane leaned over right now and took a bite. *You're deranged*, his brain supplied.

Ilya glanced over at him, and something on his face must have betrayed him, because Ilya switched his left hand to the steering wheel, while the right went to-

Fuck.

The second it touched his inner thigh, Shane whimpered, closing his eyes and letting his head fall back against the seat.

"Open your eyes, Shane."

Shane's eyes snapped open, the command clear, even in Ilya's gentle, and lightly amused, voice.

"You need to guide me. I do not know where you live. Can you do that for me?"

Chapter Notes

Hiiii again.
I feared this wouldn't be ready before Easter, but the cottage we're in was screaming Hollanov at me, so here we go.

If anyone's interested, I made moodboards!! They might contain some teasers for what is to come hehe, so if you want to be fully surprised, don't look. ;)
Ilya: https://pin.it/1WQdqneZV
Shane: https://pin.it/2L8aq7uuN

Any typos are my own, I might catch them when rereading again later.

And as a reminder:
- Italics in dialogue: Russian

Ilya wakes up far too early, given how late he had gone to bed.

He had left *Désir* around 5 am, and opted for walking home, with strict instructions for his driver to remain, and trail Shane to wherever he lived. Leaving him on the bar floor had been an impulse decision, born from the rogue idea that Shane might *like* it. Ilya certainly did. But he was not about to leave him without making sure he got home safe.

On his walk, he called Sergei, ignoring the man's snappiness at being woken up that early.

"*I need you to wipe the cameras at Désir from around midnight to now."*

"Good morning to you too, Rozanov. What have you done now?" The exasperated voice of his third in command making Ilya smirk. He could almost hear the eyeroll.

"*None of your business. Have the cameras wiped. And if I find out anyone watched them before doing it, it will be the last thing they'll ever see. That includes you."*

*"Hide your claws, I'll have it done. Will I see you at the meeting later, or will another thing '*come up*'?"*

"I'll be there. But I have… evening plans."

"Anyone I need to run a background check on, just in case?"

Ilya scrunched his nose, weighing his options. "*No."* And then he hung up without saying goodbye. He didn't feel like explaining to Sergei, that he didn't want the background check to influence his… perception of Shane Hollander so far. That he wanted to discover him little by little, prying it out of him while he resisted. And he will resist so beautifully, Ilya just *knows.*

Leaving him like he had, had been exhilarating in the moment. Shane acting like he didn't want it had been the cherry on top, and Ilya had always found pleasure in coaxing people to admit their desires. But he had never met anyone so… genuine about it. Every order that Shane obeyed seemed to catch him off guard, like he didn't quite understand why he was following them in the first place. But doing it *anyway,* like-, like it was *instinct.*

It was completely rewiring Ilya's brain, pulling him in, desperate for more.

Now, laying in bed thinking about it, an inch of doubt creeped in, that he had gone too far. Shane seemed very receptive to praise and commands, but they had *just* met, and Ilya had left him on his knees at his *workplace.* God, he hoped he hadn't crossed some invisible line. He normally prided himself on good communication, especially in bed, but yesterday had caught him off guard and he'd acted…. impulsively. He just hoped it wouldn't come back to bite him.

The whole day went by in a blur of meetings and Marleau shooting him amused looks across the table. He couldn't even blame him, he was absolutely useless, mind constantly wandering to gorgeous brown eyes and freckles. He went home early, taking time to style his hair and pick out an outfit. He reached for a shirt he hadn't worn in ages, a thin button-up that didn't leave much to the imagination, the fabric practically see-through, and smirked. And prayed that it would be enough.

Ilya walked into *Désir* around ten pm. Way too early for when Shane would get off, but Ilya didn't mind watching him work. Looking at the bar, he spotted a dark-haired girl currently making drinks. He looked around, but didn't immediately catch sight of Shane. He frowned, before sitting down at

the same booth as yesterday. His mind immediately recalling the shape of Shane on his knees, making his cock twitch in interest. *Not now. A little patience, Ilya.*

He sat there for an hour, without catching a single glimpse of Shane. Maybe he's sick? *Or maybe he's avoiding you, idiot.* Eventually his impatience got the better of him, and he bit the bullet, walking up to the bar, approaching the dark-haired girl currently pouring someone a beer.

"Hi, I'm looking for Shane?" He put on his nicest smile, and saw the girl blush slightly before she passed the beer to the the guy next to him.

"Sorry love, he isn't working today."

"But- " Ilya frowned. "We agreed to meet here today. Do you know if something came up?"

"You got him to agree to come here on his day off? What on earth did you offer him?" She laughed, before seeming to realise what she had said. "Not that I am disclosing private information about an employee's schedule to a stranger. Please don't be a stalker."

Ilya laughed lightly. *If only she knew.* "Not a stalker, I promise. Can I order a vodka? I'll wait for him."

"Sure thing."

Ilya grabbed the drink once she had poured it, and went back to the booth. He kept glancing at the door, fidgeting with his rings, emptying the glass of vodka faster than expected. He almost went up to buy another, but he didn't particularly want to be drunk today. If Shane was even coming, that is. *If you had done that background check, you would have known he wasn't working today.* But it wouldn't have changed anything, if he was being honest with himself. He still would have shown up here, hoping that Shane would do the same.

Unless of course, Shane had let him believe he was working today, so he'd show up here for nothing. Maybe he had no intention of coming, because Ilya had been too much. And now he sat there like an idiot.

Ilya didn't do this. He didn't wait around for pretty boys, or girls, to *maybe* show up. He made them come to *him*. So why was he wasting his Saturday night, sitting alone at a bar, waiting for Shane Hollander?

What made him special?

Everything, his brain supplied unhelpfully.

But despite his curiousness and pull towards Shane, Ilya could take a hint. He slowly got up, as if giving himself the opportunity to change his mind, before turning around and walking towards the door. But he didn't get far, before almost walking into someone.

No, not just someone.

Shane.

Shane, who was standing in front of Ilya, face red from the cold air outside, his hair adorably ruffled, looking either very windswept, or as if he had been running his hands through it. He wore a light blue linen shirt, buttoned up all the way - Ilya knew, because it was peaking out from where

he was bundled up in his winter coat. He looked at Ilya with wide eyes, mouth open as if wanting to say something, but not being able to find the words.

So, Ilya did it for him.

“You lied to me.” *Way to go, Ilya.*

“Oh? Did I? At what point during yesterday did you stop and ask, ‘btw Shane, do you work tomorrow, so we can meet up again?’ or even ‘do you have plans tomorrow?’. You might have a hard time recalling it, because It. Didn’t. Happen.” Shane sounded out of breath, his previous lack of words clearly making way for the anger he had been harbouring. Ilya couldn’t look away. He was beautiful this worked up.

“I-“ Ilya started, but Shane cut him off.

“And on top of that, you didn’t even specify *when*. What kind of an asshole does all *that,* and then leaves with a ‘see you tomorrow’? Was I supposed to spend the whole day just waiting around for you to show up, deigning me with your presence and attention? How fucking full of yourself are you?” He was panting now, and Ilya reacted instinctively.

He lifted a hand up, and gently grabbed the side of Shane’s face, running his thumb over his freckles. “And did you?”

“Did I *what*?” Shane snapped.

“Did you sit around the whole day, thinking about me? Thinking about yesterday? Thinking about all of the things we could do today?” he trailed his hand down to the side of Shane’s neck, and squeezed lightly. Shane’s eyes fluttered, but he didn’t answer. Ilya leaned in, so his mouth was right by Shane’s ear. “Because I did. I’ve been thinking about how pretty you were on your knees. How perfect your mouth felt around my cock. How badly I need to feel it again.”

Shane shuddered, his arm jumping up to grab at Ilya’s. But not to pull his hand away. He almost pulled him *closer*. Ilya's breath caught, but he needed an answer. “What do you want, Shane?”

Shane’s eyes snapped up to meet his. “I-“ He trailed off.

“Whatever you want. You were so good for me, sucked me so good last night baby, I couldn’t think about anything else. And you’re here, you showed up, because you deserve more, don’t you?” Ilya ran his thumb over Shane’s lips, his mind flashing back to yesterday, and if the look in Shane’s eyes was anything to go by, his mind was also replaying their encounter.

“Yes.” Shane whispered, the sound barely audible over the music, but Ilya heard him loud and clear.

“That’s good, *solnyshko*. You deserve something nice. And can you tell me what that should be? What you want?”

Shane looked around the bar, before trailing his eyes back to Ilya. He reached up, hands fisting Ilya’s jacket. “You.”

Ilya froze. He had expected many different responses, ranging from ‘fuck you’ to ‘fuck me’, but the sincerity and innocence of Shane’s request took his breath away. God, he wanted to ruin him.

“And how do you want me? Right here, on the bar floor, again? Or should we take this somewhere more private?”

Shane snorted, and it was music to Ilya’s ears. “I think we’ve defiled my job enough.”

Ilya smiled. “Well. Before this gorgeous bartender almost walked into me, I was leaving. Maybe you would like to come with me? I have a car here, I can take us wherever you want.”

Shane’s mouth quirked up, fingers still fidgeting with the buttons on Ilya’s jacket. “My place?” he said, sounding unsure for the first time tonight. Almost as if he feared Ilya would deny him, if he actually showed interest.

“Lead the way.”

My place? MY place? Shane berated himself as him and Ilya exited the bar, Ilya immediately guiding him towards the parking lot. *This man looks like he just came off a Vogue photoshoot. He ordered a $1.000 bottle of vodka yesterday, and then didn’t even drink it. And you just invited him into your 25 m^2 shithole of an apartment.* Shane wanted to die. Maybe he could still change his mind? Run away? Never talk to him again?

To make matters worse, they had finally reached Ilya’s car. Although calling it a *car,* did not do it justice.

“Ilya, you’ve got to be joking.”

The man stopped in his tracks, and looked at Shane with a confused look. “What is wrong?”

“What is-, what is *wrong*? Ilya that is not a car you can actually drive around Montreal, are you out of your mind? That belongs in like, a Ferrari museum or something.”

Shane didn’t know enough about cars, but the little horse was unmistakable. The sports car was matte black, and so low that Shane wondered how he was even supposed to get into it. It looked gorgeous, and definitely *not* something that Ilya could park in his neighborhood.

“Ilya, if you park that by my apartment, it will be either destroyed or *gone* by the time you leave again, you cannot drive that.”

Ilya smirked, understanding dawning in his eyes. Shane would like to pick at Ilya’s brain, to know what exactly Ilya had just *understood.* “Shane. The car will be fine.”

“No, it won’t be. Let’s just walk, it is not that far. I will not spend the night worrying about your stupid car.”

Ilya pulled Shane in closer, grabbing his face with both hands. “Shane.”

Shane wanted to listen, but the feeling of his face being cradled by Ilya's rings was momentarily distracting him. He forced himself to look Ilya in the eyes, arching an eyebrow to make him continue.

"Do not call the car stupid, she does not deserve it."

Shane snorted, which in turn made Ilya smile, before his eyes took on that determined edge, that Shane has already learned meant *trouble.*

"Shane, let me make you a deal. We will get into this car now, because she is too pretty to stay here all by herself, and we will go to your house. If, by the time we make it to your bed, you are still capable of even *thinking* about the car, I will do whatever you want." Ilya pushed his index finger into Shane's mouth, and he immediately sucked it further in, before moaning loudly at the feeling of Ilya's ring breaching his lips. "But I promise you Shane, you will not care about this car once your front door closes behind us. And I keep my promises baby."

Shane couldn't breathe. He realised that Ilya was right. He already cared a little less about the car, and a lot more about getting more of Ilya's fingers in him. Preferably *now.* Therefore, he couldn't quite help the whine that escaped him when Ilya pulled the finger *out* of his mouth, too turned on to be embarrassed about the sound.

"Shhh *solnyshko,* you'll get everything you want. But let's go home first, yes?" Ilya guided him to the passenger side, opening the door, which apparently opened *up* and not *out,* before holding his hand as Shane manoeuvred himself into the seat. He had to admit, that he suddenly felt a bit like a racing driver, which wasn't the worst feeling to have.

Ilya walked around the front, before sliding into the seat next to him, much more gracefully than Shane. And if Shane had felt a bit like a racing driver, Ilya certainly looked the part. He effortlessly pulled the car out on the street, and revved the engine in a way Shane knew was meant to impress him. If he could focus on anything else than Ilya, that is. He found himself squirming in the seat, as much as it would allow, while openly staring at Ilya's arm, stretched towards the steering wheel.

He wondered what Ilya would say, if Shane leaned over right now and took a bite. *You're deranged,* his brain supplied.

Ilya glanced over at him, and something on his face must have betrayed him, because Ilya switched his left hand to the steering wheel, while the right went to-

Fuck.

The second it touched his inner thigh, Shane whimpered, closing his eyes and letting his head fall back against the seat.

"Open your eyes, Shane."

Shane's eyes snapped open, the command clear, even in Ilya's gentle, and lightly amused, voice.

"You need to guide me. I do not know where you live. Can you do that for me?" He punctuated the question by lifting his pinkie, which made the softest contact with Shane's *very much not soft* cock, making him try to arch his hips up. But between the limited range of motion in the car, the seatbelt across his chest, and Ilya immediately removing his finger, it didn't give him much relief.

Ilya tsk'ed at him, before squeezing his thigh in a firm grip. "Directions, Shane."

"L-, *fuck*, left here."

"You're doing so well for me, not much longer now, yes? You wanted to walk, so it must not be far." The light in front of them turned red, but instead of Ilya slowing the car down gently, he took a quick glance in his rearview mirror, before slamming the brakes, making Shane slide slightly forward. He was about to yell at Ilya, but before his mouth could form the words, he felt a squeezing pressure against his cock. He moaned, wondering how he hadn't noticed Ilya moving his arm, before realising, that he *hadn't.* He had simply moved Shane into his touch with the force of the break.

This was, quite possibly, the hottest thing that has ever happened to him. He looked over at Ilya with heavy lidded eyes, but Ilya was looking at the road, focused as if he wasn't currently driving Shane crazy with a hand on his cock. "Ilya, *fuck,* please."

"Soon, sweetheart. Eyes on the road, so you can tell me where to go."

"R- right here, and then you can park wherever, just-, *ah fuck,* just hurry, please." At that, Ilya squeezed his cock harder, before letting go, leaving Shane aching with the lack of touch. He barely bit down the whine threatening to escape him. *Pull yourself together, you are not going to come from a little touch like a virgin.*

Ilya parked the car right in front of Shane's building, and jumped out, going around the front to Shane's side. Shane took the moment to draw a deep breath - he was not going to freak out now. He was so close to finally getting what he didn't know could exist yesterday, but that he now craved with his whole being. Ilya opened his door, and helped him out with a hungry look, eyes glancing down at what Shane knew was a very obvious bulge in his pants.

If you asked Shane, he couldn't tell you how they had made it to his apartment. He didn't remember how he got his keys out. And he certainly didn't remember what car Ilya had driven, or that he was for some reason supposed to be worried about it. Why would he worry about anything, when Ilya had pushed him up against his front door the second it clicked shut, with a thigh between his legs, the pressure both *too much* and *not enough*, while he sucked kisses into his neck.

"So fucking hot, Shane." He felt more than heard Ilya's groan against his shoulder, and something in him snapped. He needed more. He needed to feel Ilya everywhere, the layers of clothing between them unbearable. He grabbed at Ilya's jacket, urging the man to take it off, so he could get his hands on him. Ilya complied immediately, pulling his jacket off slowly, and Shane-

Shane must have hit his head somehow on the way here. Or he was dreaming. Yep, dreaming was the most viable option. Because there was *no* way, that Ilya was standing in front of him, dressed like *that.* The shirt - if it could even qualify as a shirt - had a deep cut, the fabric meeting by Ilya's navel. And it was so thin, that it didn't leave anything to the imagination. Shane could track every mole on Ilya's *very muscular* chest and frankly *huge* arms. But the expanses of skin were not what took his breath away.

Right there in front of him, glinting silver, where two nipple piercings.

Ilya's chest was covered by the shirt, but they were unmistakably there. The moan that left Shane at the realisation was obscene, and he immediately raised both hands to let his thumbs run over them. "Fuck, Ilya, that's-, fuck that's so hot."

“Do you like them?”

“Do I- *‘Do I like them’,* he asks. Jesus fuck.”

He grabbed the right one between his index finger and thumb, and pulled slightly. Ilya let out a hiss, but didn’t pull away, and Shane was entranced.

“It feels good.” Ilya murmured, running his thumbs over Shane’s hips, pulling him slightly closer. “If you want to play with them, you can. It makes me feel *very* good.”

“Yeah?” Shane breathed, before instinctively lowering his mouth to the other nipple, and gently pulling the piercing in between his teeth. Above him, Ilya’s breath stuttered, and one of his hands went up to Shane’s hair, grabbing hard enough to make him moan. Ilya must have misinterpreted his moan as a sound of pain, because he immediately let go and gently caressed his head.

Shane didn’t know how to tell him, that he could have pulled *harder.* That he could grab his hair, and put him exactly where he wanted him. And Shane might even *thank him.* The realisation ran a shiver through Shane. *What the fuck is wrong with you?*

In the end, he didn’t have to say anything. His face must have betrayed him, because *something* passed over Ilya’s face, and the hand slowly tightened its grip, before pulling his head back, forcing him to arch his neck.

Fuck, Shane was in heaven. And Ilya looked like a God who would answer all of his prayers.

“Oh you like that, *solnyshko*? You want me to pull your hair a bit?” Ilya’s voice was soft, but the words made Shane panic momentarily. He couldn’t admit it. What if Ilya realised that Shane wanted much more than just for Ilya to pull his hair *a bit*? What if he found it as crazy as Shane himself did? What if he left?

“Hey, Shane, look at me.” Shane’s eyes snapped up to meet Ilya’s. “I won’t do anything you won’t ask me for. So you have to use your words, sweetheart.” He punctuated the words by running his knuckles over Shane’s face, before grabbing his chin, making sure he couldn’t look away. The ring on his index finger was lightly grazing under his chin, and Shane couldn’t *think.*

But Ilya was being so nice, so *gentle,* so maybe… maybe Shane could try to be a little honest. Just a little.

“I-“ the words got caught in his throat, and he cleared it.

“What do you want sweetheart? Do you want me to be a little rough?”

“I- I wouldn’t mind.” Shane whispered, embarrassment painting his cheeks maroon.

“Oh? But what if I wanted to be nice?”

“W- what?”

Ilya smiled, running his thumb over Shane’s lips. “I can be rough. I would love to be rough with you. I think you would take it beautifully. But you were so good for me yesterday, and so *very* patient in the car earlier. You deserve something good. Can I take care of you, baby?”

Shane moaned, before slapping a hand over his mouth and hiding his face in the crook of Ilya's neck, absolutely mortified. Why did he even find that hot? He usually hated when people were gentle with him, expecting him to do all the work, to make all of the decisions. That's exactly where all of his one-night stands fell short. So why was Ilya different?

*"*You-, I-, but- "

"Can you take off your clothes for me, and get on the bed?"

Shane gasped, face flushed, looking at Ilya. It somehow didn't feel right. Something was missing. He furrowed his brows and tilted his head. A flash of recognition came over Ilya's face, before he grabbed Shane's face with both hands.

"Shane. Take off your clothes, and *get on the bed.*"

His limbs moved before his brain registered the order. Because that's what it was - *an order.* And the switch inside Shane's brain, the one that he had buried deep, and never, ever, touched… flipped. His hand flew up to his shirt, desperately trying to will the buttons to work, but he only made it three buttons down before frustration made his movements fumbled.

"Do you like this shirt, sweetheart?" Ilya asked, running a finger up the remaining buttons.

"I-, what? It's-, it's a nice shirt?"

"Yes, and you look gorgeous in it. Dressed up for me so prettily. But right now, I'm desperate to see it on the floor."

With that, Ilya roughly grabbed the two sides of the shirt, and *pulled,* ripping the buttons apart, and ripping Shane's sanity apart with it. He didn't even react to Ilya destroying one of his favorite shirts, before he was reaching to remove his own pants, trying to speed the process along. All caution had gone out the window. He stepped back slightly to shimmer his pants and underwear down and stepping out of it, before backing away from Ilya until the back of his knees hit the bed. He let himself gently fall back, sitting on the edge, looking at Ilya expectantly.

And Ilya didn't waste any time. He pulled his shirt off, before quickly getting rid of his pants and underwear too. And as he stood there in front of him, naked, with his rings and nipple piercings glittering in the low light, Shane's mouth watered. He almost whined to urge Ilya to come closer, but luckily, he didn't have to.

Ilya took slow steps, and stood in between Shane's legs, forcing him to look up. *God, I'd look up at him anytime.* Shane reached up to pull at the nipple piercings, finally having unrestricted access now that the shirt was gone. Ilya's pupils dilated, and he rested both hands on Shane's shoulders, running his thumbs over his clavicle and up his throat. "So pretty for me, *malysh."*

*"*What does that mean?" Shane asked, while kissing along Ilya's ribs, before licking down his happy trail.

"Maybe if you're good, I'll tell you later."

"I'll be good." *What the fuck is wrong with you? Have some fucking dignity, Shane.*

Something flashed across Ilya's face, but he quickly schooled his expression as he ran one hand to the back of Shane's head, the other one grabbing his hard cock in hand, and running the tip across his lips. Shane immediately letting his tongue fall out, coaxing a low groan out of Ilya. "I know you will be. Now, suck my cock, Shane."

And Shane did. He let his tongue run on the underside of Ilya's cock, before leaving small kitten licks around the tip. Then, without warning, he sucked the tip into his mouth, before immediately taking it as deep as it could go. The weight of it in his mouth was *amazing,* and Shane let himself briefly entertain the idea of how happy he would be, if he could feel it *always.*

He relaxed his throat, and pulled Ilya even deeper, until his nose hit his pubes. He breathed in, the smell of *Ilya* so prominent here, it made his eyes roll back. He pulled back a bit to draw a proper breath, before setting a punishing rhythm. He switched between bobbing his head up and down, pulling Ilya in to the back of his throat, and lapping at the sides with his tongue. He pulled one of Ilya's balls into his mouth and sucked, gently scraping his teeth over it as he let it fall out of his mouth again

"Fuck, Shane." Ilya sounded wrecked, and it made pleasure zip down Shane's back. *I did that. I made him feel like that.*

Ilya's hand grabbed Shane's hair *hard,* and pulled him off his cock.

"Fuck, *malysh,* you're a fucking *vision* right now. So fucked out for me, and I haven't even touched you yet. You could come like this, *da?* Just sucking my cock like a good boy?"

Shane moaned, and tried to hide his face by lowering his head to Ilya's hip, but the grip in his hair didn't let him, forcing him to look up at Ilya with his cheeks flushed and mouth still open, still ready for Ilya's cock.

"I asked you a question, but I'll let it go because you look so pretty, *da?* Now lay back on the bed for me."

Shane hesitated, eyes flickering briefly to Ilya's cock with a furrow in his brows, before he did what he had been asked. Maybe Ilya would let him suck his cock some more, later. He crawled up the bed until his head rested on his pillows, and let his legs fall open, seeing the way Ilya's eyes darted down, and the way his cock jerked at the view.

Shane didn't have to wait long.

Ilya crawled up the bed, until his arms were bracketing Shane's head. He leaned in to kiss him gently, before immediately coaxing his mouth open with his tongue. Being kissed by Ilya Rozanov, was not something Shane could even describe with words. It felt like Ilya knew all of his buttons, and pushed them all at the same time, sending never ending waves of pleasure through Shane's system, frying his brain. Shane loved it. He never wanted it to stop.

He whined when Ilya pulled back from the kiss to look at him.

"Shh, *malysh,* I will give you what you want, yes? But first, you will do something for me."

"Fuck, Ilya, whatever you want."

"I want you to tell me exactly how you came last night."

Shane froze. “W- what?”

“Yesterday? You remember yesterday, yes?” Ilya wiggled his eyebrows, making Shane snort and roll his eyes.

“I remember yesterday.”

“Good. Then I want you to tell me, how you made yourself come, *solnyshko*.”

“I- I didn’t.” Shane stammered, trying to look anywhere else.

Ilya stilled. “What?”

“After you left, I-, I didn’t come.”

“Well not at the bar no, but then when you went home, Shane? Tell me about that, yes? Did you lay here, in this bed, like we’re doing right now?”

Shane’s blush intensified, which shouldn’t even be possible, given how red in the face he was.

“I didn’t come last night at all.” He wouldn’t meet Ilya’s eyes, looking to the side at the window. The silence that followed made his mortification rise. *Why the fuck would you admit that?*

Ringed fingers snaked up the side of his face, forcing him to face Ilya again. He braced for disgust, confusion, or even disinterest, but Ilya’s face looked almost *feral.* “Why not?”

“W-what?”

“Why didn’t you come yesterday?”

“Because-, well- , because I just didn’t!” Shane said defensively.

“Shane Hollander, you are a terrible liar. Did I not make you horny enough yesterday? Was your cock not hard when I left you?”

“I- It was.”

“Then why, and do not lie to me again, did you not come?”

Shane’s thoughts were racing. He felt backed into a corner, and his knee-jerk reaction was to lie, and say he just hadn’t felt like it after making it home. But the truth was simmering right under his skin, vibrating and wanting to come out. “I-”

Ilya raised one eyebrow at him, and Shane squeezed his eyes shut before muttering, “Y- you told me to be patient.”

Ilya’s eyes widened, and his mouth fell slightly open. He looked absolutely *shocked,* before a slight blush coloured his cheeks, and his eyes sharpened. “Oh *solnyshko."* he murmured, followed by more Russian Shane couldn't iunderstand, looking almost reverent as he ran a hand down Shane’s side, before scraping his nails down Shane’s pubic bone, and to the inside of his thighs. Shane tried to let his legs fall further open, inviting Ilya to keep exploring, as he moaned and arched his back, trying to press into Ilya’s touch.

He reached a hand underneath his pillow, pulling out a brand-new bottle of lube and a condom that he had stashed there earlier *just in case.* Ilya smirked as Shane passed him the items. “So well prepared - you had it all planned out, yes?”

“No.” Shane shook his head.

“No? So, it was not the plan to bring me here, so I could fuck you into the mattress? What is the unopened bottle of lube and condom doing here, then? Is it just ready for whoever? Do you have men lined up outside, coming in whenever you want?”

Ilya was teasing, but his words were stirring the fire inside Shane. He wanted to defend himself, to tell Ilya that he wasn’t that adventurous. That he would probably find him pretty boring, if he got to know him. But why break the little perfect bubble they had found themselves in, and ruin whatever image Ilya had of Shane in his head? “Ilya, please fuck me.”

Ilya moaned, before moving to remove his rings, but Shane’s hand stopped him immediately, words flying out before he could keep them in. “Leave them on.”

“Shane, *fuck*, I need to prep you.”

“Prep me with the rings on, fuck*, please*. I want to feel them inside me.”

“Fuck, fuck, *fuck, malysh.”* Ilya squeezed his inner thigh, before opening the lube with his teeth, and squirting some onto his hand, reaching down to slowly run a finger between Shane’s cheeks. *Fuck,* that felt so good already. It had been so long since Shane had done this with someone else, and he was getting desperate.

The first press of a finger against his rim sent a shiver up his spine, making him arch into the touch, but Ilya pressed down on his stomach, keeping him pinned and unable to move. “Shh, be a good boy and take what I give you.”

Shane moaned, desperately trying not to move, trying to be *good.* He wanted to plead at Ilya to keep going, to give him more, to go *faster.* But he didn’t, instinctively knowing that Ilya would just slow down, and make him wait for longer.

Luckily, it seemed that Ilya was also running out of patience. One finger quickly became two, and then the third one was gently pushing in. “Is this okay?” Ilya’s voice was raspy with restraint, and it only made Shane hornier.

“Yes, Ilya, more please.”

“I will give you more, I promise.” He pumped the three fingers in and out, the feeling of the cold rings catching on Shane’s rim every time making him insane. Suddenly, without warning, Ilya curled them up, grazing that spot inside of Shane that made him see stars.

“Ilya, that’s enough, I’m ready, *please.”*

“Okay *malysh,* okay.” Ilya gently pulled his fingers out, making Shane whimper, before reaching for the condom and extra lube to coat his cock. Before Shane could complain about the emptiness, he could feel the glorious blunt pressure against his rim, and all thoughts flew out of his head.

Ilya pushed the tip in, before he halted. “You okay?” His voice sounded strained, as if it was taking everything of him to hold back. But Shane didn’t want him to hold back.

“I’m not gonna break, are you going to just lay there, or will you fuck me?”

Something flashed in Ilya’s eyes, before he pressed in to the hilt in one firm push.

Shane’s eyes rolled back, and he couldn’t hold back the moan that ripped out of him. “Fuck, *yes,* oh my god, fuck.”

Ilya set a punishing pace, lifting one of Shane’s legs over his shoulder, trying to get *deeper*. Shane felt like he could feel him in his throat. He never wanted him to leave.

Suddenly, he felt the world tilting, before his knees hit the mattress underneath him. *Fuck.* Ilya had just *flipped him.* Effortlessly. Barely slipping out of him in the process. Shane couldn’t think, but luckily, he didn’t have to. Ilya’s hand ran up his spine, before pressing down between his shoulder blades, forcing him down face-first into the mattress. This way, it felt like Ilya was impossibly deep, and Shane could feel that this would be over embarrassingly fast.

Ilya leaned over him, plastering his chest to Shane back, and Shane shivered feeling the two metal bars in Ilya’s nipples against his back. “Is it okay like this? Does it feel good?” Ilya rumbled, before biting at Shane’s earlobe. The words way too gentle for how hard he was pounding into him.

“Yea, I’m-, fuck-, I’m so good Ilya, I won’t fucking last long.”

“Oh? Are you going to come, *malysh*? Are you going to come just on my cock, and milk me dry? I do not even have to touch you, do I?” He punctuated the words by reaching in front of Shane, and scraping his nails through his neatly trimmed pubic hair, teasing a touch to his cock that never came.

And it didn’t need to.

The possibility of it, combined with the way Ilya was hitting his prostate dead on, as well as the way Shane felt completely *pinned*, was enough to push him over the edge in a violent orgasm that shook his whole body. His vision blacked out, and he barely registered Ilya muttering in Russian above him, before stilling inside him.

For a couple of seconds, all that could be heard were their heavy pants. Eventually Ilya placed a small kiss on his shoulder. “I have to pull out, *da?*”

Shane nodded, and barely braced himself before Ilya pulled back and the feeling of *emptiness* came over him. He must have made a sound, because Ilya started to run soothing hands up and down his back. “Shh *malysh*, I will get something to clean you up, yes?”

Ilya got up and left in the direction of the bathroom, quickly coming back with a wet towel, the condom gone, and started to clean him up. The gentleness of it almost made Shane emotional, especially when he took the time to very gently clean the lube from between his thighs, and manoeuvring him to lay on his side away from the wet patch underneath him.

He pulled the duvet with Shane’s come off the bed, before laying down next to him on his back.

Maybe it was too intimate, and maybe Shane would regret it in the morning, but he scooted closer and rested his head against Ilya's shoulder, running a hand across his chest, briefly stopping to fiddle with the piercings.

"You really like them."

Shane wasn't sure if it was a question or a statement, but he nodded. "They suit you. Make you look even hotter."

"Oh, even hotter? I can work with that." Ilya pulled an arm underneath Shane, pulling him in closer against his chest, running a hand through his hair. They stayed like this for a while, but eventually Ilya leaned down so he could look Shane in the eye.

"I have to go. Can I borrow your bathroom real quick?"

"Yes, of course."

Ilya went into the bathroom, and Shane sat up in bed looking around his apartment. His clothes were strewn across the floor, making his fingers itch. He glanced at the half-open bathroom door. Maybe he could make it before Ilya came out. He got up, and put on a fresh pair of boxers, before bending down to pick his clothes off the floor.

The shirt wasn't salvageable, but he was still in the middle of straightening out his pants when Ilya came out fully dressed, hair wet. It made the curls at the back of his neck look adorable. He looked at Shane with a curious expression.

"You are folding your clothes?"

"Yes, I hate how wrinkled everything gets if you just leave it. And I'd normally do it immediately, but-" he snapped his mouth shut.

"But… what? Why didn't you?"

"Because-, um, because it's fucking weird to stop just to fold clothes."

Ilya looked at him with a contemplating look, before walking towards him. His face was unreadable, and Shane couldn't figure out if he had done something wrong. But Ilya only let the palm of his hand caress Shane's cheek. It was quickly becoming one of Shane's favorite feelings.

"Next time, you fold your clothes, yes?"

"N- next time?"

"*Da.*"

Shane stared at him with wide eyes. "But- but why?"

"Why you will fold your clothes, or why there will be a next time?"

"Both, I guess."

Ilya's smile softened before whispering, "Next time, you will fold your clothes Shane Hollander, because I do not share. And I will not have even one percent of your attention be on anything else,

then how good I make you feel. You deserve to relax fully, *da?*" Ilya kissed down the column of his throat, as if he was trying to kiss the words into Shane's delicate skin. "And there will be a next time, *solnyshko*, because if you think that I am done with you, you are being very silly."

Ilya bit gently at his ear, before leaning in to leave a slow kiss on his lips. Shane's legs felt like cotton, but by some miracle, they were still holding him up. He kissed back with equal passion, running his hands through Ilya's soft hair.

When they separated, Shane could swear that they both hesitated, almost as if neither of them wanted the night to end. Eventually, Ilya took a step back, but not before caressing Shane's cheek again.

"Are you free tomorrow? For dinner?"

"I could do an early dinner, but I have classes the next day, so I can't stay long."

"Perfect, I'll pick you up." He left one final kiss on Shane's cheek, before reaching to open the front door. "Sweet dreams, Shane."

"Good night, Ilya."

Ilya left Shane's apartment with a heavy heart. On one side, he had wanted to stay and never leave. But he knew he had to. Shane was gorgeous, and funny, and so *so* hot, it made Ilya crazy. But he was also innocent, and good, and didn't deserve the ugliness that came with Ilya's life.

His natural *obedience* left Ilya with whiplash after whiplash. He had never experienced anything like it. Ilya had been with many people, but he had never before met someone so naturally submissive and eager to please. It had gone to Ilya's head.

Shane, not coming yesterday because Ilya had told him to be patient.

Shane, eagerly agreeing to be good for Ilya.

Shane, looking *disappointed* that he couldn't keep sucking Ilya's cock.

It was too much, and not enough. Ilya had been telling himself before showing up at the club today, that he just needed to get him out of his system. But then he invited him over to his house tomorrow, like an idiot.

Fuck, Marley had been right.

Ilya was whipped. And thoroughly and utterly *fucked*.

Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

> But this Ilya? He didn’t know this Ilya. There were no shy smiles, no flirty smirks, no… nothing, really. Just a perfectly curated mask of indifference. Even his eyes didn’t betray his emotions, it was like looking at a statue.

Chapter Notes

> Weeelcome back.
>
> This chapter was so fun to write, and such a pain to edit, but it's finally HERE. And it's long af.
>
> Have fun! *giggles maniacally*

See the end of the chapter for more notes

When Shane wakes, he's not fully convinced if last night was real.

If it wasn't for the still slightly rumpled sheets, and the soreness in his body, he probably would have convinced himself it was a figment of his imagination. But no, Ilya had been here. He had stood in Shane's tiny apartment, and proceeded to completely take him apart.

Shane hadn't known that sex could be this good. All his previous encounters were laced with awkwardness, lack of coordination and limbs fumbling together towards a peak that left him feeling unsatisfied. Nothing about last night was *unsatisfying*. Actually, Shane wasn't sure if he could actually walk.

But he had to. He had some reading to do, as well as a gym session before his dinner plans with Ilya. He had to keep busy, as to not overthink the fact that they were now going to see each other three days in a row. And that he, once again, didn't have any indication of *when* exactly, Ilya intended to pick him up.

He headed to the gym first, loving the feeling of pushing his body to its limits. On the way out, he scheduled his next pilates class with the lady at the desk, before going home, grabbing some food on the way. Normally, he'd only make a green smoothie or a protein shake, but he felt like treating himself, so he grabbed a pain au chocolate from the bakery downstairs. He deserved a very nice breakfast, with the amount of reading he had to get through today.

The day flew by, and in the breaks between his reading, he had gotten ready, just in case Ilya decided to show up earlier than expected. He had spent an hour staring at his closet, willing it to spit out something wearable. He had briefly entertained the idea of a suit, but quickly discarded it, realising how stupid he would look in Ilya's living room - wherever he lived. He settled on a slightly loose-fitted black turtleneck, that was only tight around his arms, and a pair of jeans. Hopefully he hadn't completely missed the vibe.

He was just taking notes to the last chapter, when there was a firm knock on his door. If you asked him later, Shane would claim that he had calmly gotten up, and walked to the front door in a measured pace. In reality, he had thrown his book across the table, and reached the door in record time, barely taking a second to straighten his hair. He opened it, and his breath caught.

Fuck, Ilya looked good.

He had opted for a similar vibe to Shane, with dress pants and a very soft-looking dark blue sweater. He still looked so… put-together, that Shane was mesmerised.

"Hi."

Ilya didn't answer immediately, his eyes locked onto Shane's face in a look of mild shock.

"Do I-, do I have something on my face?" He went to run his hand across it, but Ilya answered before he could.

"You wear glasses."

Oh.

“Yes, only for reading.” Shane laughed, before taking them off, and backing into the apartment to put them on the table.

“I didn’t ask for you to take them off,” Ilya said, walking in behind him. Shane turned around, clocking the hungry look on Ilya’s face, eyes flickering between his face and the glasses on the table. “You should keep them on.”

“I can’t, they’re only for reading. I can’t see that well with them normally,” he rushed to explain, before raising an eyebrow at Ilya. “Are the glasses doing it for you?”

“You are doing it for me, Shane Hollander. Especially when you open the door looking like a sexy librarian.”

“Ew, please don’t. I interact with too many librarians *daily,* to have that image in my head,” Shane quipped back, ignoring the initial compliment. He might just combust if he acknowledged it, and he didn’t want to give Ilya the satisfaction of having disarmed him that easily. *Not yet.*

Ilya just hummed, before leaning against the wall. “Are you ready to go, or do you have more sexy reading to do? Can I watch?”

“Pervert. Yes, I’m ready.”

As they walked down the stairs of the building, one of Shane’s neighbours was coming home, bags clinking with what Shane knew to be bottles and bottles of alcohol. Harry, the older man who lived a few doors down from Shane, was constantly drunk. Shane wasn’t sure he had ever seen him sober. But he usually avoided him - he wasn’t pleasant even on his best day, and taking in the stench following him, this wasn’t a good day at all.

He had one bottle of what looked to be rum in his right hand, taking swigs as he walked up the stairs, right towards them. Just as he passed them, he swung the bottle, but Shane was ready. His hand flew up to grab Harry’s arm and redirect it away from them, but to his surprise, Ilya was already there, his grip firm around Harry’s wrist.

“What. Are. You. Doing?” His voice was cold, and his face furious. Harry mumbled something inaudible, before turning away from them, but Ilya still had a hold of his arm.

“Ilya, come on, let him go.” Shane nudged him, and Ilya’s eyes flickered to him, before letting go. “Have a nice day, Harry,” Shane called back over his shoulder, as they continued walking down.

“What was that? Who was he? Why did he try to hit you with a bottle?” Ilya inquired, and Shane laughed.

“That’s just Harry. He swings at anyone, anytime. Don’t take it too seriously.”

Ilya furrowed his brows, his eyes flickering back up the stairs, before seemingly letting it go. As they walked out of the building, Shane spotted a gorgeous dark blue Ferrari parked right by the door. Ilya sped up and passed him, before reaching for the passenger door and holding it open for Shane. Shane, who had frozen a couple of meters away from it. “Are you insane?”

“For holding the door open for you? You wound me, Shane Hollander.”

“No, you asshole. This is not the car you drove yesterday.”

“No, it is not. I guess you did not lie about not needing the glasses then. Are you getting in, or are you gonna stand there all day?”

Shane smiled, eyes flickering from the car to Ilya’s sweater, “Did-, did you match your outfit to the car?”

“No.” Ilya huffed, suddenly very interested in the door he was still holding open.

“Ilya.”

Shane could swear Ilya’s ears were tinged slightly pink, before he rolled his eyes and looked at Shane, gesturing towards the seat. “Get in, Hollander.”

Shane giggled, endeared by Ilya’s embarrassment, before getting in the car. The drive was very uneventful compared to yesterday, and Shane was desperately trying not to recall how Ilya’s hand had felt against his inner thigh, how he had been teasing him. He was desperately trying to not get hard - and he was failing.

Meanwhile, Ilya was a perfect gentleman, keeping his hands to himself. It was almost… disappointing, but Shane mentally berated himself. *How about you survive 10 minutes in a car without getting groped, like a normal person?*

Ilya drove them a little out of town, towards what was clearly a *very nice* part of Montreal. That, along with the *two different Ferrari’s,* should have prepared Shane, but when they pulled into the driveway, his jaw still dropped. The huge house was practically only made of ceiling-tall windows and dark wood. Big trees grew all around it, making it feel very cozy and private. “What the fuck do you even do?” Shane asked, looking at Ilya, who only smirked before getting out of the car and opening the door for Shane.

They walked to the front door, Ilya stepping in front of Shane to open it. He put in a code next to the door, making it click open. And if Shane thought it looked cool from the outside, on the inside it was *fancy.* Very modern, and yet with a touch of character that made it feel lived in. Shane’s stomach tugged unpleasantly. He normally didn’t waste his time comparing himself to others, but having had Ilya in his *tiny* apartment just yesterday, he couldn’t help the feeling of embarrassment from crawling up his spine.

He didn’t even notice that he had stopped in the middle of the living room, until Ilya came from behind and grabbed his neck lightly. “You are overthinking.”

Shane flipped around. “No, I’m not.”

“Oh? So, you just normally freeze in the middle of rooms, with a lovely blush on your cheeks?” He ran a finger over Shane’s nose, and under his eyes.

“I-”

“How about I make some tea? Then you can spiral some more in peace, and we talk about it after, *da*?” With that, Ilya left towards the kitchen, leaving Shane alone. He couldn’t help but huff out a laugh, slightly disturbed by how easily Ilya was reading him. But at the same time, it felt… like a relief. Not having to put his thoughts into words immediately, not having to explain his feelings. He sat down on the couch, and took in the view through the windows, watching the trees rock gently in the wind.

He was so lost in thought, that he he didn't notice time passing, until suddenly Ilya was setting down mugs, and sitting down next to him. He grabbed the mugs, passing one to Shane, before leaning back sideways so he was facing him, pulling his legs up underneath him, and leaning his arm on the back of the couch, resting his head on it. He didn't say anything, clearly waiting for Shane to be ready.

Shane gently blew his tea, before taking a sip and looking at Ilya. "It's a very nice house."

"Yes. I like it too."

"It's-, it's very big. And modern. And *expensive.*"

"Yes. Is that a problem?"

Shane shook his head. "No, not a problem. Just-, different."

"Different from what?"

"From *me.*" Shane whispered, looking down at his tea. He should have just kept his mouth shut. This wasn't a relationship, where their money would matter. They have had *two* hookups so far, and Shane was spiralling as if Ilya had fucking proposed. He needed to get a grip.

Ilya didn't comment, just hummed, and took a sip of his tea. "You are studying?"

Shane looked up. Ilya looked relaxed, with a small smile on his face. Almost as if he was trying to divert the conversation. Shane's shoulders lost some of the tension, grateful that Ilya hadn't insisted on digging, "Yes, kinesiology, with a minor in psychology."

"Kine- what?"

"Oh." Shane faltered. "I'm sorry, kinesiology is like… studying exercise, and how the body works. How to make it push harder, and how to make it relax. It's everything from how to gain muscle fastest, to how to rehabilitate after injuries."

"And why psychology, then? That is… different."

Shane tried to gauge whether Ilya was just being polite, but he looked genuinely interested, so he continued. "I-, I don't know, to be honest. It felt… right, to get around the whole body. The brain is such a big part of it, and it felt so complex and challenging."

"You like a challenge."

It wasn't a question, more like Ilya stating what he had observed. He kept looking at Shane like he was studying him, but not like he was a problem to be solved. More like… a very interesting puzzle.

"Yea, I do." Shane smiled softly.

Ilya nodded, like Shane had just confirmed something he already knew, "Is that why you like *Désir* as well? Because it's a challenge?"

"It is." Shane laughed, "But in a completely different way. The drinks are fun, and I love to experiment with tastes and colours... But it's a lot of obnoxious people."

“Obnoxious?”

“Annoying. People who come in, and think I owe them everything, just because they pay for it. Flirting, *touching*, thinking that they can do anything, just because they throw money at an overpriced drink.”

Ilya furrowed his brows, biting his lower lip in what almost looked like a nervous gesture, before clearing his throat, “Did I-”, he paused, not looking at Shane.

“Did you what?”

“Did I make you feel like that? Like you *had* to-” Ilya broke off, looking up to meet Shane’s eyes, who immediately understood where Ilya’s thoughts were going.

“*Fuck,* no, Ilya, not at all. You-, it was not the same at all, okay? You just sat there for *hours,* waiting for me to even talk to you and-”

“*Da,* I sat there for hours watching you work, not taking no for an answer.”

“I didn’t say no, Ilya.” Shane reached for Ilya’s hand, running his pinkie over his wrist. “When customers are being difficult, or too much, Hayden and I usually switch around. We have a whole system. When he saw us talking, he checked in multiple times, but it wasn’t necessary. Do you know why?”

“Why?”

“Because I was interested,” Shane blushed, making Ilya smile slightly. “Because I hoped you would stay. Because I was going crazy looking at your curls and your rings, listening to your accent, not believing that you were really interested.”

“What? I was interested from the beginning, yes?”

“I-, I guess I thought you were joking.”

Ilya scoffed, looking offended. “Joking? You did not believe me?”

Shane’s blush intensified, his hand reaching back to scratch at the back of his neck. “I thought maybe you had lost a bet, or you and your friend thought it was funny to try and flirt with the bartender… I don’t know.”

Ilya’s hand ran op Shane’s arm, before settling on the back of his neck, squeezing slightly. “Shane,” He murmured, leaning down slightly to catch his eye. “You are much more than just a bartender, yes? You are fun and pretty-”

“Pretty?”

“Yes, very pretty. The prettiest.” Ilya’s lips brushed against Shane’s cheek, and Shane felt like the touch was *burning.* “Marley actually made fun of *me,* because I was so… so blown away by you.”

Shane gaped at him. Every time he thought that he couldn’t blush more, Ilya somehow made it worse. He hated it. *No, you don’t,* his brain supplied, and Shane was suddenly desperate to change the subject. “What about you?”

Ilya looked confused. “What about me?”

“What do you do? We’ve been yapping about me for a bit now, and looking around, your life seems more exiting.”

“Exiting is one word for it,” Ilya laughed. “I work in trade.”

“Trade?”

“Yes. Trade of products between Canada and Russia, mostly. Recently slightly branching out to America. Very… boring, but pays well.”

“How did you get into it?” Shane relaxed back into the cushions, slightly more at ease now that they weren’t talking about him.

Ilya looked out the window, observing the trees. “Family business. My father-, he did the same. It was… easy to, what is the phrase, ‘follow in his footsteps’?”

Shane nodded. “Do you go back to Russia often then? For work?”

“No.” The answer came quick, and Shane suddenly felt like he had crossed some invisible line without noticing. *Great. Now we have both been uncomfortable. Could this go any worse?* He reached out to run a finger along the inside of Ilya’s arm, trying to soothe the tension. Ilya’s eyes snapped to his, before softening quickly.

“Are you hungry? I made lasagna, and a salad? Is that good enough for Mr. Body Perfectionist?”

Shane barked a laugh, “Asshole. Lasagna sounds good. Do I need to do anything?” He moved to get up form the couch, but Ilya stopped him.

“Just sit there and look pretty. I will be right back.”

Shane blushed, *again,* but stayed put. Ilya returned quickly, with steaming plates of food, and they ate in companionable silence. Ilya occasionally asked more questions, about Shane’s job, apartment, school. It was… *nice.* So nice in fact, that Shane couldn’t remember the last time a date had been this good. This easy. It made him giddy.

When they finished eating, Shane insisted on helping Ilya clean up, and they worked smoothly together in the kitchen. When it was done, Shane found himself glancing at the clock. They had spent the whole afternoon just… *talking,* and now it was getting late. So late, that if Shane didn’t go home soon, he would hate himself in the morning. He still had to catch an uber home, which would take a while, but he kept stealing wistful glances at Ilya. Fuck, he really didn’t want to leave. What if Ilya had been expecting this to end in sex again? And Shane just showed up, ate his food, and would now what? Leave? What if-

“You are overthinking again.” Ilya’s voice broke him out of his brain, their eyes meeting over the kitchen island. “What’s wrong?”

“I’m sorry. I have early classes tomorrow, and I know we just *talked* for hours, and that’s probably not what you were expecting, but I should really go home if I don’t want to be a zombie tomorrow, but next time I promise-, I mean-, *fuck,* if there even is a next time, then we-”

“*Shane*.”

Shane hadn't even noticed Ilya walking around the island, but suddenly he was standing right in front of him, grabbing his face in his hands. *Fuck, those rings.*

*"*Shane, I know you have early classes. You told me this, yes?"

Oh.

He had.

But he hadn't expected Ilya to remember such a small detail. He had expected him to have a one-track mind, that would immediately get disappointed if Shane didn't… *put out.*

Ilya didn't wait for an answer, just kept talking. "I would never, *ever,* expect you to do anything you did not want to. You coming here, and having dinner with me, does not mean you owe me anything, do you understand? I did not invite you for dinner, as an excuse for sex. Then I would have just invited you for sex." Ilya winked before continuing, "I invited you for dinner, because I wanted to know you more. And now I do. I had a good time, and I will never force you to anything, if you did not want to, *da*?"

Shane nodded, trying to hide his face, but Ilya's grip was firm.

"But-", Shane paused. "I do want to. It's just late, and the drive will take a while, and I really, really *should* go."

Ilya's smile brightened up his whole face. "Ah, but for this I have a solution, Shane Hollander. I can either drive you home now, so you can get your beauty sleep, even if you do not need it. We will say goodnight, and it will have been a very nice evening, yes? Or-" Ilya's right hand started trailing down the column of his neck, resting on his shoulder, squeezing. "Or you can stay here, and I can drive you to your classes tomorrow morning. We can go out and have early breakfast, go by your apartment for your things, and I can drive you to the university."

Shane's breath hitched at the idea of staying and spending the night with Ilya. Ilya's face didn't betray his thoughts. He was trying to give Shane space to make the decision he truly wanted. Shane smiled at him, before leaning in to brush their lips together. "Such a gentleman. And if I stay? What will we do with all this time then?"

Ilya smirked, kissing Shane again, before biting his lower lip, making him whimper. "Oh, do you have ideas, Shane? Something you want?"

Shane's mind was racing, but not with ideas. He didn't want to *ask* for what he wanted. He wanted Ilya to *take.* He nodded, hoping Ilya would read between the lines.

"Are you going to tell me what you want?" Ilya murmured, kissing the corner of Shane's mouth.

Shane shook his head. The glint in Ilya's eyes was unmistakeable. "Mhmm, I know what you want. You want me to decide? You want me to make you feel good, to take you apart and put you back together? Do you want to be good for me, Shane?"

"*Fuck."* Shane whined, trying to lean further into Ilya's touch, but Ilya paused him gently.

"Shane. I will do whatever you want, yes? I will make you feel so good, *solnyshko,* but I need your words. Can you do that for me?"

“Yes, *fuck,* Ilya, please.”

“Good boy.” Shane jolted, feeling as if his whole body was on fire. “Oh, you like that, don’t you? That’s good. But you have to promise me, that if I do something you do not like, you will stop me, *da?*”

“Yes Ilya, I promise.”

“Do you know the traffic light system?”

Fuck, this man was going to be the death of him. Shane knew the traffic light system from bad porn and too many embarrassing google searches that he would never admit to. He had always hoped to one day have good enough sex – and maybe even *rough* enough sex, that he would need to use it. But the more he dated, the more it became a distant fantasy, sexual encounters always leaving him unsatisfied and in need of ‘more, more, more’.

“Yes, I do.”

Ilya raised an eyebrow at him, and Shane rolled his eyes, even though he was still smiling. “Red for stop, yellow for wait, and green for continue.” He leaned in to pull Ilya’s bottom lip between his teeth, before sinking down to his knees right there in the kitchen. “Please.”

“Greedy. You’re lucky I love when you’re greedy.” Ilya pushed his thumb into Shane’s mouth, “Suck.”

Shane started sucking immediately, his brain already running slower.

“Stop.”

He froze with the thumb on his tongue, jaw going slack. He looked up at Ilya, and the look in his eyes made Shane’s breath hitch. Ilya looked like he wanted to eat him alive. He pulled his finger out, and to Shane’s confusion, started walking away. He walked over to the armchair in the corner of the room, and sat down, looking at Shane.

Shane didn’t dare move.

“Come here.”

He moved to get up, but Ilya *tsk’ed*, freezing him in his movement. Ilya ran a hand up his own inner thigh, resting it on his crotch, eyes never leaving Shane. “I didn’t say you could get up.”

A shiver ran up Shane’s spine, and before he could get even consider getting embarrassed at the idea of *crawling,* his body was already moving. He went down on all fours, and slowly crawled towards Ilya, making sure to arch his back in the process. He looked up through his eyelashes, noticing how Ilya’s hand had tightened on his crotch, his mouth slightly open, looking mesmerised.

When he reached him, he stayed on his hands and knees, not daring to disobey. Ilya’s eyes glinted, before he reached out to grab a fistful of Shane’s hair, pulling him towards him. Shane stumbled, and fell face-first into Ilya’s crotch, feeling his hard cock through the dress pants. He nuzzled into it, desperate to feel the weight on his tongue again. Instead, he leaned back a bit so he could look up at Ilya.

“Can I-”

“Can you what?”

“You know what I mean.” Shane started mouthing at Ilya’s cock through the pants, all while never looking away.

“Hmm, *da,* maybe I do. But if you want something, you will have to say it.”

He couldn’t ask for it. That would be-, it would be so *embarrassing*, but at the same time, he knew that if he asked for it, Ilya would give it to him. So why resist? *Because it’s not fucking normal, Shane.*

Ilya hummed, pressing Shane’s face further into his cock, his hips jutting up slightly to meet the movement, seeking friction. “Are you worrying your pretty little head again, or are you going to tell me what you want, *solnyshko*?”

Shane took a deep breath, not looking at Ilya. “I want to suck your cock.”

“Oh? And is that how good boys ask for what they want?”

Shane’s breath caught, “N-, no. Please, *fuck,* can I please suck your cock?”

“Good boy.” Ilya made quick work of his belt, pulling his cock out, and guiding it into Shane’s mouth immediately. But he barely managed to get a rhythm going, before Ilya was pulling him off again.

“Get up and strip for me, Shane.”

Shane shot up, *very* ungracefully, and tried to get rid of his clothes as quickly as possible. He took off his sweater, and hesitated. Ilya tilted his head, looking at Shane, as if waiting for what he would do. Shane took a step towards the other armchair in the room, and folded the sweater neatly. He then took of his pants, and folded them on top, along with his underwear. Only then, did he face back towards Ilya, who was looking at him with a surprisingly… *soft* smile on his face. Shane stood back between Ilya’s legs, and waited.

“Such a good fucking boy,” Ilya murmured, caressing Shane’s hipbones. And then, before Shane could react, Ilya got up from the armchair, and in one smooth movement lifted Shane up underneath his thighs, Shane instinctively locking his legs around his waist.

Fuck, Shane loved being manhandled. He couldn’t help but groan, his hips tilting slightly, trying to get some friction on his cock against Ilya’s stomach, smearing precome on his sweater. Ilya walked them through the house, until they reached a bedroom with a massive bed. Shan loosened his ankles, ready to be put down, but suddenly the world tilted, and his back hit the bed. *Fuck,* did Ilya just *throw him*? And true enough, Ilya was still standing at the foot of the bed, caressing Shane’s legs with a hungry look on his face, murmuring in Russian.

Shane wanted to say something, anything, but his brain wouldn’t form any words. Instead, it was Ilya that spoke, “You are beautiful, Shane Hollander.”

Fuck.

Ilya took of his clothes, before cocking his eyebrow at Shane, “Do I need to fold my clothes too, or is it okay if they get wrinkled on the floor?”

Shane couldn't help but laugh, shaking his head at Ilya, "You can throw them out the window for all I care, if it will make you come here faster."

"Oh, I will come there, don't worry." Ilya winked, clearly very proud of his innuendo. Shane couldn't help the wave of fondness that washed over him. Ilya threw his clothes on the floor next to the bed, and started crawling onto it, leaving kisses on Shane's ankles, his calves, giving extra attention to the inside of his thighs, leaving small bites that made Shane melt into the mattress.

Shane expected him to kiss all the way up, but once again, Ilya surprised him. He ran his hands up underneath Shane's knees, and pushed them up to his chest. Shane moaned, feeling exposed, before grabbing his knees to pull them up further, trying to show off more. *Whore.*

Ilya groaned appreciatively, before leaning in, and running his tongue from Shane's rim to the back of his balls. "*Fuck,* what are you-"

"You know what to say, if you want me to stop." Ilya murmured, before pulling one of Shane's balls into his mouth, sucking on it and making Shane whine.

"Fuck, Ilya, never stop, *fuck,* please."

"So nice for me, *malysh."* Ilya licked over his rim again, "You just needed someone to play with your hole, and then you are so *polite,* yes?" Shane felt Ilya's tongue press harder against him, before it slipped right in. The moan Shane let out was obscene, accompanied by a deep groan, that he realised must have come from Ilya. He pulled his tongue out, before leaning back so he could look at Shane.

Fuck, he looked gorgeous down there between his legs.

"Thank you, *solnyshko."*

Oh. He had said that out loud. He blushed, and threw an arm over his face, making Ilya giggle. "So nice and needy for me, yes? Do not be embarrassed sweetheart, your hole wants me just as much as you do. It is sucking me in, so, *so* greedy. Still loose from last night, I could almost slide right in, yes?"

Oh fuck.

"Ilya, Ilya, Ilya, *fuck,* p- please fuck me."

"Oh? But twenty minutes ago, you wanted to leave? You wanted to take an uber, and go home and sleep, didn't you, *malysh*?" Ilya reached up, and pushed his fingers into Shane's mouth, stopping his answer, "Make these wet for me, yes?"

Shane sucked on the fingers, lathering his spit on and moaning unabashedly when he felt Ilya's tongue probing inside him again. When Ilya deemed his fingers wet enough, he pulled them out, and Shane didn't quite manage to hold in a whimper. "Shh sweetheart, it's okay, I'll give you what you need, but you need to be patient for me, yes?"

"I- *ah,* I've been patient."

"Have you? Then you can be a bit more patient, *da?*" With that, Ilya got up, and walked over to the bedside table, pulling out a condom and lube. Shane followed his movements, still holding his

knees up, ready for Ilya. But he didn't feel any embarrassment anymore. All he felt was *need.*

In a moment of bravery and impulsivity, he rolled over on his stomach, and arched his back, leaning his head on his folded arms. He spread his legs as far as they would go, tightening his muscles in an attempt to make his hole flutter. Behind him, a string of Russian curses sounded in rapid succession. *Well, I guess that worked.*

He felt Ilya's hand on one cheek, the other probing at his hole with a slick finger. Shane moaned, and tried to push back against the finger, but Ilya held his hip in a firm grip. "Stay still. Take what I give you, yes?"

"Yes" Shane would say anything, do anything, just to make Ilya go deeper. Just to feel his cock inside him again. Luckily, it was as if Ilya read his mind. He didn't waste any time, one finger quickly becoming two, and three, and before Shane could complain properly, he heard the sound of the condom wrapper, and Ilya slicking himself up with additional lube.

"Ready for me?"

"Fuck yes, *please.*"

With permission, Ilya pushed inside him in one firm thrust. Shanes couldn't decide whether to push back and get *more,* or pull away from the intensity of it. But Ilya didn't give him a choice. A hand came down on the back of Shane's neck, grabbing firmly, Ilya using it as leverage to push into him at a brutal pace. Shane didn't know where he ended, and Ilya began. All he knew were constant waves of pleasure, coming in unpredictable bursts, Ilya constantly switching the rhythm.

Faster than he had expected, Shane felt the first telltale signs of his orgasm approaching, but even with the repeated abuse of his prostate, it still felt *just* out of reach. "Ilya, *fuck,* I- I want more, please."

"More? Is my cock not enough? Does my little *slut* need more?"

Shane froze, his limbs tensing as his orgasm caught him completely off guard. Immediately, he felt Ilya tense behind him, his thrust stuttering to a stop. The grip on his neck didn't soften, but Ilya's other hand started caressing his back. Shane didn't know what to say. *How fucking humiliating. He calls you a slut, and you come untouched?*

"Fuck, Shane, did you just come? Holy fuck, sweetheart."

Ilya didn't sound like he was mocking Shane. If anything, he sounded *feral.* But then, Shane felt him move to pull out, and he reacted immediately, hand shooting back to grab at Ilya's hip, making him stay.

"Don't."

"Are you okay? Shane, was that too much?" Ilya sounded concerned, but also like he was using all of his willpower to hold back. Shane could still feel his hard cock inside him, and he couldn't help but squeeze around it, the overstimulation glorious.

"Green." He whispered, squeezing again to get his point across.

He couldn't see Ilya's face, but he could feel his cock jerking inside him, and the moan he let out. "Fuck, *malysh,* are you sure?"

"Fuck me, please."

Ilya pulled out, and quickly rolled Shane around, before pushing back in. The whiplash and pull on his rim made Shane whimper, but his legs quickly locked around Ilya's waist, not wanting him to leave. Ilya started moving again, but the pace was soft and slow, as if he was afraid to hurt Shane. And Shane wasn't fucking having it.

He reached up, and grabbed at Ilya's chin with his hand, pulling his face down to meet his. "What are you doing?"

Ilya looked puzzled. "I am… fucking you, yes?"

"Are you?" Shane raised an eyebrow, "You could have fooled me. I said green, didn't I? Or are you getting tired?"

Ilya's eyes flashed, and one of his hands reached up to grab at Shane's peck, while he set an absolute brutal pace. Shane was jostled up and down the bed, hanging on for dear life. But he had never felt better.

"You, Shane Hollander, are such a brat. Wanting for more while you're already whining on my cock? Such an adorable little *slut*." Shane whined, trying to meet Ilya's thrusts, but it was impossible. All he could do, was lay there and take what Ilya gave him. Ilya kept playing with his nipple while he pushed into him, and Shane could feel that low pressure at the back of his spine again.

"Fuck, Ilya, I'm close."

"Then come with me Shane. Let me feel you milk my cock dry, like the slut you are." With that, Shane was *gone.* The second orgasm punched out of him, and he felt himself squeezing impossibly around Ilya, as his thrusts stuttered, and halted as he pushed inside one final time.

They lay there, catching their breath, Ilya's face in the crook of Shane's neck, placing gentle kisses wherever he could reach. Shane's hand pushed into Ilya's hair, running his finger through his hair, playing with the soft curls.

Shane let himself bask in this moment, and found himself wishing, that him and Ilya were more. More than just-, well, more than whatever they were. Here, in Ilya's arms, he felt perfect.

Eventually, Ilya pulled out gently, disposing of the condom on the way to the bathroom, coming back with a warm, damp cloth. He cleaned Shane up gently, before positioning them so they were spooning. "When do you have to be at uni?" he whispered, tracing patterns on Shane's stomach.

"My lecture starts at 10, but I don't have my computer. My apartment is on the way though, so if it's not too big a trouble-"

"Stop." Shane snapped his mouth shut. "We will go get your things tomorrow, and then I'm taking you out for breakfast. Whatever you want, *da?*"

"Whatever I want? You spoil me."

“Hmm yes, I do not mind. You deserve to be spoiled.”

Shane blushed, but felt sleep start to creep in. “You’re not what I expected, Rozanov.” he muttered while shaking his head at Ilya. It’s the last thing he remembers, before his eyes slip shut, and sleep takes him.

‘You’re not what I expected, Rozanov.’ Not what he expected? What did he expect Ilya to be like? How can Ilya make sure to live up to his expectations, to *exceed* them, if he does not know?

The words haunted Ilya throughout the night, the voices in his head reminding him of all the lies he would need to keep telling Shane, in order to keep him. If only Shane knew who Ilya really was, he would run for the hills, and never look back. Ilya should end it, while it was still new, while he could still limit the *hurt.*

Eventually, despite the myriads of thoughts spinning in his head, the warm weight of Shane against his side, breathing evenly, lulled him to sleep.

Ilya hasn’t sleep better for *years.*

He woke up feeling warm and comfortable, a feeling so rare to him it momentarily took his breath away. Shane was lying next to him, having turned in his sleep, his face oddly peaceful without the almost permanent furrow between his brows. He’s gorgeous, and Ilya feels a pang in his chest. He really should let him go.

He carefully climbed out of bed, and went to take a shower. When he reemerged, a towel around his waist, Shane was sitting up against the headboard, scrolling his phone. “Good morning.”

Shane looked up, a shy smile on his face as his eyes scanned over Ilya’s chest, so obviously stopping at his nipples that it made Ilya want to flex his pecs, like a show-dog. “Good morning.”

“The shower is all yours, if you want it. I put out a towel for you.”

“Thank you.” Shane got up, and leaned in to kiss the corner of Ilya’s mouth when he passed him, his eyes widening slightly when he pulled back. Almost like the action had been impulsive. God, he was adorable. Ilya smiled softly, and went to put on clothes, before walking to the living room. He checked his phone, and saw several missed calls from Marley. *Fuck.* He hit call, bracing for the worst.

“Where the fuck have you been Roz, I almost sent out a search party.”

“A search party? For me? When I am at my house? I told you I would have company.”

“Yes.” Marley sighed, “But you always pick up your damn phone, Roz. You had me worried.”

Ilya rolled his eyes, even though Marley couldn't see, "Yes, but I just did not look at it. I thought you all could keep everything from burning down for one day, was I wrong?"

"You? Did not look at your phone?" Marley laughed, "Is the boring bartender really that good?"

"Fuck off, Marley" Ilya suddenly found himself feeling very defensive of Shane. Normally, him and Marley didn't have many secrets, sharing experiences, exploits and jokes, no matter who they managed to pick up. But Ilya felt possessive.

"Oh? That serious, huh? So serious, that you will not tell me about it? God, that guy walks you like a dog."

"Did you have anything important to say? I do not have time for yapping," Ilya snapped.

"Just wanted you to know that Svetlana called yesterday. She will call you too. Just a heads up."

"Okay. Bye."

"Yea yea, love you too Roz, bye."

Just as Marley hung up, Shane came out of the bedroom, clad in his clothes from yesterday. He stopped in the doorway, looking unsure. Ilya wanted to see the carelessness from last night, wanted Shane to be comfortable with him, always. *What a silly thing to want, when he will never be yours.* He shook the thought away, "Ready to go?"

"Yeah."

Ilya grabbed the keys to the Ferrari they had taken yesterday, and helped Shane into the passenger seat, before pulling out onto the road. His hand found Shane's thigh, almost immediately, squeezing gently. Not to start anything, just because-, well… just because he could.

While you still can.

They chatted about nothing and everything, the ride to Shane's apartment spent laughing and joking, Ilya's hand not once leaving Shane's thigh. At one point, Shane's hand moved over to rest on top of it, and Ilya's heart soared. This gorgeous boy was making him excited in a way Ilya could never remember being. Like a schoolboy with a crush.

Fuck.

He had a crush.

He sneaked a glance over at Shane, whose head was leaned back against the seat, a small smile on his face as his fingers traced patterns on Ilya's hand.

He *liked* this boy. This awkward, sweet, and sexy boy. What a horrible and terrifying realisation. It wasn't fucking fair. Shane had waltzed into his life unexpectedly, and shook Ilya to his very core. Making him want things, that he had long ago told himself he didn't deserve.

They pulled up in front of Shane's apartment, and Ilya went out to open the door. Shane stepped out, and put a hand on Ilya's chest, just as Ilya made to follow him inside, "You are staying here."

"What, why?"

“Because you will distract me,” Shane smiled, and leaned up to place a quick kiss on Ilya’s lips, “I will be quick.” With that, he turned around and walked into the building, leaving Ilya on the curb. He leaned back against the car, looking around. The neighborhood was shady as fuck. It wasn’t the worst part of Montreal, but it certainly wasn’t *safe*. Ilya had done his own fair share of shady dealings around here, before he realised that the big money usually sat in the pockets of rich men in penthouses. So, he became one.

He wanted to bundle Shane up in a blanket, and get him the fuck out of here. Away from people who might want to hurt him just for fun, and away from neighbours who swung bottles at his head regularly enough for him to be prepared to brace for it. Ilya had still been quicker, but years in his line of work would do that to anyone.

The thought of breaking things of with Shane and leaving him here all alone was killing him, making his skin prickle. But he had to. Drunk neighbours had *nothing* on the kind of danger Shane could be in, if the wrong people started to associate him with Ilya.

Montreal was Ilya’s through and through, he had made sure of that. He had people everywhere, who would not hesitate to protect Shane, if they knew he mattered. But the more people know, the more of a weakness Shane becomes. The bigger the target on his back, from people who want to see Ilya dead.

Before he could spiral too deep into his thoughts, Shane exited the building again, and *fuck,* he looked good. He had changed into darker jeans, and a button up with a sweater over it. His school bag was hanging from his shoulder, bouncing against him as he made his way towards Ilya. *I could watch him walk toward me forever.*

When Shane got close enough, Ilya couldn’t help but joke, “You know, this is not helping my librarian fantasy.”

Shane rolled his eyes, before accepting Ilya’s help to get into the car. “You’re deranged.”

“You like me deranged.”

Shane looked up, his eyes shining, “Yea, I really do.”

Ilya closed the door, and walked around before Shane can catch the stupid grin forming on his face.

When Ilya settled in, he looked at Shane questioningly, “Where to? I have ideas, but I have a feeling we have different, how do you say, breakfast standards?”

Shane laughed as he rolled his eyes, “I am not a health freak, you know. I’m just a bit particular about what I put into my body. Sometimes I indulge though.”

“So did my cock meet the particular requirements, or was that you indulging?”

“*Ilya*,” Shane blushed, and Ilya couldn’t look away. The blush made his gorgeous freckles pop even more, and Ilya was *gone*. Making Shane blush was quickly becoming his most favorite and self-indulging past-time.

Ilya laughed, and steered the car back onto the street, heading for the university. He had a café in mind, and hoped Shane would like it. It overlooked the water, and was very small and cozy. Ilya knew the owner, as he had been coming there for years.

The ride wasn't long, and Shane smiled when Ilya led him inside the café. "Oh, that looks so nice."

"It is. I usually get their greasiest breakfast, but I know they experiment a lot with different breakfast bowls with like, oatmeal and other bird food."

"Bird food, huh?"

"Yes." Ilya nudged him with his shoulder, leading him towards his favorite table.

The server, Bryan, came and took their orders almost immediately, and the food was served shortly after. Shane laughed softly, "That was so fast."

"Yes, they have great service." Ilya answered, nodding at Bryan while Shane was engrossed in his breakfast bowl.

They ate in comfortable silence, both gazing out the window. The serenity of the moment was broken by Ilya's phone ringing. He knew who it was, before he had even fished it out of his pocket.

"*Svetlana."*

"Ohhhh, he lives! And here I thought you were dead in a ditch somewhere."

"You will not get rid of me that easily, Sveta."

He heard her laugh in the background, before she answered, *"That's good, because I need you here."*

"What?"

"A warehouse burned down last night. With your product in it."

Ilya cursed, careful to not let his face betray too much, Shane glancing at him out of the corner of his eye. *"An accident? Or on purpose?"*

"That kind of thing never happens on accident, Ilyusha, you know that. It's been a while since you've shown your face here. Maybe some people have forgotten."

Ilya closed his eyes, mentally running through his calendar for the next couple of days. He could squeeze in a trip to Boston if he left tonight, but he'd have to be back tomorrow evening at the latest. That wasn't much time, but it needed to be done. *"Set up whatever meetings you need for tomorrow. I'll be there; I'll fly in tonight."*

"Good. See you then."

"Goodbye, Sveta."

He put the phone away, and looked at Shane, who was almost done with his breakfast. "I'm sorry. That was work. I-, I am needed, in Boston."

"Boston? You're leaving?" Ilya must be imagining the disappointed note in Shane's voice.

"Only for one day. I'll leave tonight, and be back tomorrow evening." *It will be good,* his brain supplied, *you need to distance yourself from him. Otherwise, you will never let him go.*

“Oh. Okay.” Now Ilya was almost sure, that Shane sounded disappointed. Maybe he wasn’t the only one, who never wanted their encounters to end? That was a wild and dangerous thought. *Even more reason to end it* now. *Otherwise, you will not only hurt yourself, but Shane as well.*

Ilya opened his mouth, with the intention to somehow let Shane down gently. Something in line of ‘We’ve had fun, good luck in life’, but less obnoxious.

But his mouth betrayed him.

“Would you like to come with me to Boston?” *What the fuck, Ilya. What the actual fuck.*

Shane’s eyes widened, and for a second he didn’t answer. Ilya immediately started to backtrack, “If you have classes, or work, it’s fine, it was just a stupid idea anyway. I will be in meetings for the whole day tomorrow anyway, so you would probably be bored, and then I’ll-”

“Ilya.” Ilya looked up, and found Shane smiling at him gently. “I have nothing planned tomorrow. My next class is Wednesday, and I don’t work until Thursday. I’d love to go, if you want me to.”

“Really?”

“Really.”

“Oh.” Ilya smiled, taking the final sip of his coffee, “Sounds good. I will pick you up at 7, is that okay?”

“Perfect. Then I can squeeze in a workout after the classes today, and still have time to pack.” Shane smiled, before looking around the café, “Can I use the bathroom really quick, before we go?”

Ilya nodded, pointing a finger towards the back of the room. As soon as Shane was gone, Bryan came back to clear their plates. Ilya took a minute to text Marley.

- Have the jet ready today at 7:30

- Yes sir ;)

When Shane came out, Ilya got up, and they both put on their jackets. “Oh, wait.” Shane exclaimed, “Let me pay for this, please?”

He looked so earnest, Ilya wanted to squeeze his cheeks.

“Already settled. It was my idea, so my treat.” Shane didn’t have to know that Ilya hadn’t paid for anything in this café for years. He looked like he wanted to fight Ilya on it, but eventually even he could see, that it would be futile.

They walked out to the car, and the drive to the university was short. Shorter than Ilya wanted it to be, enjoying every moment spent with Shane.

Shane hesitated as they pulled up, before leaning over and kissing Ilya. And it wasn’t a gentle kiss. He licked into his mouth immediately, making Ilya groan, and grab at his neck. The kiss was *filthy*, and so unexpected that Ilya didn’t know what to do with himself. As quick as it came, Shane pulled back, and opened the door *himself,* exiting the car. He leaned back in, before winking at Ilya, “See you tonight.”

Shane closed the door, leaving Ilya absolutely flabbergasted, panting heavily.

What a fucking brat.

Ilya was smiling to himself like an idiot, the whole way back to his house.

Shane had been overthinking for the whole day, but sooner rather than later, him and Ilya were climbing the steps of a private jet. Inside, the man that had accompanied Ilya to *Désir* that first night, was sitting with headphones on. He took them off when he spotted them, and rose to greet them.

Ilya nodded at them both, “Shane, Marleau. Marleau, Shane.”

Marleau shook Shane’s hand, “Good to finally meet you properly. Ilya’s been real happy since you two started… hanging out.”

“Shut the fuck up Marley.” Ilya laughed from where he had sat down on a couch, and Shane sat down next to him, Marleau taking the spot on the other side of the aisle, winking at Ilya.

Shane suddenly felt a wave of possessiveness. Why did Ilya’s colleague need to *wink* at him? That wasn’t very professional if they worked together a lot. Before he could spiral too much, Marleau broke the silence again, “I’m gonna take a power nap, wake me in Boston please.”

He pulled his big headphones back on, and rested his head against the window. Ilya leaned in towards Shane, “He falls asleep like a baby, in two minutes he will be dead to the world.”

True enough, even before take-off, Marleau’s breathing had evened out, Ilya watching him with amusement. And Shane wanted him to stop. Wanted him to look at *him*.

He leaned his head on Ilya’s shoulder, hearing him hum at the contact. They stayed like that for a while, enjoying the silence. But it wasn’t enough. His eyes flickered briefly to the cabin door, “Do you have a crew?”

“Not usually no. Only the pilot. Why?”

“Hmm no reason,” He followed his words with running his fingertips along Ilya’s thigh, feeling the muscle tense.

“Shane.”

The warning in his voice only spurred Shane on, his fingers running all the way up to gently touch Ilya’s cock through his pants, hearing Ilya’s breath hitch.

“*Shane.* We are not alone.”

Exactly. Maybe Marleau will wake up, and see how good I can make you feel.

He spared a quick glance at Marleau, who still looked asleep. He hummed, and let his head slide off Ilya's shoulder towards his lap, "Then you better keep quiet." Ilya's hand ran up his spine, and grabbed a fistful of his hair, but he didn't pull him away. If anything, he pulled him *closer.* Shane mouthed at his cock through the pants, before getting impatient and making quick work of pulling it out. He wasted no time, swallowing it to the hilt immediately.

Above him, Ilya was silent, but his body was twitching and his breathing was heavy. Shane didn't give him a moment of reprieve. He wanted Ilya to fall apart, and to do that, he could not be nice. Or gentle. Or sweet.

He alternated between taking him deep into his throat, loving the feeling of it slightly restricting his airways, and suckling on the tip with small kitten licks. Before long, Ilya's twitching got more prominent, the hand in Shane's hair so tight, he was afraid that *he* wouldn't be able to stay quiet.

He reached to fondle Ilya's balls, the movement restricted due to their position. He squeezed them slightly while he swallowed around him.

"Fuck, Shane, *Fuck fuck fuck-"* Ilya pulled Shane even deeper onto his cock, holding him there as Shane felt hot spurts of come land in his throat. He choked slightly, but didn't pull off, swallowing all that Ilya gave him.

When Ilya's grip loosened, Shane slowly pulled off, leaving a kiss on Ilya's softening tip, before tucking him back into his pants. He leaned back on the couch, smiling at Ilya who looked *ruined.*

He reached up to run a finger over the corner of Shane's mouth, picking up a dribble of come that had escaped, pushing it into Shane's mouth. He sucked the digit in immediately, cleaning it thoroughly with his tongue, before biting down, making Ilya hiss.

"You are such a brat."

Shane just hummed, letting his eyes fall closed. He heard the sound of the zipper, Ilya making himself look presentable again. And just in time. Above them, the comm clicked, and the pilot's voice rang, "Landing in ten minutes."

Ilya's eyes flickered to the bulge in Shane's pants, but Shane waved him off, "I'm good. This was all I wanted."

Something complicated passed over Ilya's face, his pupils dilating looking at Shane. He opened his mouth to say something, but was interrupted by movement on his right. Marleau had awoken again, and was pulling his headphones down, "That was fast."

"It's not like there's very far between Montreal and Boston, Marley. I know you are not *that* shit at geography."

Marleau flipped him off, throwing a wink Shane's way.

A car was waiting for them when they landed, driving them to the centre. Shane looked at Ilya, "What business do you have in Boston, anyway?"

Ilya glanced at Marleau, before looking back out the window, “Just a lot of annoying business meetings with annoying people.”

Shane hummed, but before he could ask more questions, they had arrived. They entered a very tall hotel building, and Ilya nodded at the receptionist at the desk. They headed straight for the elevator, but were stopped by someone calling Ilya’s name.

A group of men and a woman were standing in the corner, talking to each other in what Shane was pretty sure to be very rapid Russian. Ilya immediately let go of Shane’s hand, and walked over to them, Shane hesitantly following behind him, trying not to miss the warmth of Ilya’s palm. Ilya nodded at the men, but the woman came toward him and engulfed him in a hug, giving him a kiss on the cheek.

They exchanged a couple of sentences that Shane had no way of understanding, before the woman caught sight of him, raising both eyebrows, looking between him and Ilya.

“Oh Ilyusha, and who do we have here? You did not say you were bringing someone.” She said in English, before letting go of Ilya and walking over to Shane, holding her hand out for him to shake. “I’m Svetlana.”

“Hi, I’m Shane.”

“And who are you, Shane?”

Just as Shane was about to answer, Ilya jumped in. “He’s an… acquaintance, leave him alone.”

Acquaintance? Shane hadn’t even thought about what Ilya would introduce him as, if anyone asked, but somehow acquaintance… stung. *It’s not like you’re anything more, just because he invited you along. Do not kid yourself, Shane.*

The woman looked at him quizzically, before turning back to Ilya and continuing the conversation in Russian, glancing at him every now and then. She was gorgeous, and clearly very familiar with Ilya.

What on earth was Shane even doing here? He couldn’t compete with *that*.

Some of the other men had chimed into the conversation, and Shane found himself watching Ilya instead. He didn’t claim to know him fully, after only so few days, but he felt like he had started to get a good picture of his personality, his sense of humour, his mannerisms.

But this Ilya? He didn’t know this Ilya. There were no shy smiles, no flirty smirks, no… nothing, really. Just a perfectly curated mask of indifference. Even his eyes didn’t betray his emotions, it was like looking at a statue.

The men said more in Russian, not being subtle in their glances at him. Shane fidgeted, not sure what to do with himself. Normally, he didn’t mind not taking part in a conversation, enjoying observing much more than the constant chatter. But now, when the conversation was so *obviously* about him, he couldn’t help but get irritated.

Maybe he should just go? Leave Ilya to it? But Ilya had said they would go up to the room together, so storming off alone now, would only make a scene. And he didn’t want to interrupt Ilya’s

conversation to tell him he was going up. So, he kept standing there, fiddling with the hem of his shirt, listening to the cadence of Ilya's voice.

It sounded like a completely different person. When Ilya spoke to Shane it was soft. He never interrupted, and always looked like whatever Shane was saying was the most interesting thing he had ever heard. Like he wanted to hear him talk *more.*

The Ilya speaking to these men? His tone was cutting, and even if Shane couldn't understand the words, he could hear how they rarely finished a sentence before Ilya was speaking again. How they always halted, letting him speak. He could see how they looked down, almost afraid to meet his eyes.

Whoever Ilya was to these men, he was *important.*

Eventually, his and Ilya's eyes met, and Shane could swear his gaze softened slightly. He started walking towards Shane, clearly finishing the conversation. He passed him, walking towards the elevator, and Shane smiled at Svetlana, to not be impolite, before trudging after Ilya. God, he felt stupid. Like a dog following him around. But he didn't know what to make of Ilya, when he was this cold.

He didn't want the tone he had just used towards the men, to ever be directed at him.

The second they entered the elevator, Ilya grabbed his hand and pulled him closer, kissing the top of his head, before running a hand down his spine. Shane instinctively leaned in, Ilya's touch comforting despite the whiplash. He almost asked, almost prodded at why exactly Ilya had acted like that. Almost asked about who the people where. But something stopped him. A sudden deep conviction, that if he asked, Ilya would shut down again. Would maybe look at him, like he had looked at *them.* Like they were nothing.

He didn't look at her *like that.*

Shane almost physically shook his head, to get rid of the thought. He had no reason or any fucking right to get jealous. *Again.* Him and Ilya weren't anything. They didn't even know each other a week ago.

So then, why did Shane feel so… possessive? Why did he want to chain Ilya to his bed, and never let him leave, never let Marleau, Svetlana or anyone else look at him ever again. Or even better - let Ilya tie *him* to the bed.

He got so lost in his little fantasy, that he didn't even properly register Ilya guiding him out of the elevator, and into the hotel room.

Or well…

The fucking *penthouse suite.*

Shane gaped like a fish, the luxurious and spacious interior so far away from the hotel rooms he had visited in his life. This-, this was bigger than like… 3 of his apartments put together.

"I'll let you explore it all later, *solnyshko.* For now, I have plans for you."

Shane shivered, moaning softly when Ilya bit his earlobe. "Yes."

“Yes?” Ilya chuckled, “You do not even know what my plans are, and yet you agree?”

“I trust you.” And fuck, Shane found that he really meant it. Despite this being so new. Despite his common sense screaming at him that his wasn’t normal. That the intensity of it all would come back and bite him. That he should be careful.

But here, in Ilya’s arms, he didn’t feel like being careful. He felt *safe,* and like he could finally just let go, and *be.* Ilya kept nipping at his earlobe and down his neck, his arms tightening around Shane at his admission. Shane placed a hand over Ilya’s, and subconsciously fiddled with the rings on his fingers.

“You shouldn’t trust me, Shane Hollander.”

The sentence should have sounded like a warning, the low intonation of Ilya’s voice rumbling against Shane’s neck. But instead, it felt like a promise.

“Oh, are you dangerous mr. Rozanov? Should I be scared?”

“Yes.”

Shane squeezed the one of Ilya’s hands that he was still holding, and slid it down his stomach to his hard cock. “I am so *very* scared, can’t you feel it?” he breathed, before leaning his head back against Ilya’s shoulder, resting more of his weight on him.

The sound that escaped Ilya was somewhere between a groan and a whimper, his hand instinctively tightening around Shane’s cock, making him gasp.

“You will be the death of me.”

With that, Ilya took a step back, steadying Shane’s hip when he swayed on his feet, and walked around him until they were face to face. He grabbed Shane’s hand, and started pulling him backwards into the ensuite.

The sight that greeted them made Shane giggle.

The absolutely *huge* bathtub was filled with steaming water and bubbles, smelling almost herby. Bath-salts, probably. Shane already felt more relaxed, and they hadn’t even entered the tub yet. “When did you even have time to plan this? We’ve only just arrived?”

Ilya smiled, and started to peel Shane’s clothes off him, “The hotel staff was very helpful. I wanted us to… relax, after our trip.”

Shane’s smile softened, the gesture so nice he didn’t quite know what to say. When Ilya managed to peel of his shirt, he stepped back, and folded it neatly on the counter, before coming back for Shane’s pants, giving them the same treatment. Shane broke out of his reverie, and reciprocated the gesture, starting to undress Ilya as well.

Soon, they were both naked, and Ilya guided him to the bathtub. Shane sank in, immediately feeling his muscles loosen, Ilya sliding in behind him, so Shane could rest against his chest.

For a while, they just laid there, enjoying the bath. Ilya’s fingers were gently caressing up and down Shane’s arm, before eventually venturing closer to where Shane wanted them. Ilya ran them across his abs, making the muscles tense.

“So very pretty. So *strong*. And yet such putty in my hands, yes?”

Shane nodded, trying to shift his hips to get some friction on his cock, to no avail. Ilya’s hand went up to play with his nipple, squeezing and scratching around it, making him hiss. Eventually, Ilya took pity on him, and with no warning grabbed his cock in a firm grip, stroking him hard and fast.

“Fuck Ilya, just like that, please. Oh- don’t stop.”

“Tell me when you’re close.”

A blush of embarrassment covered Shane’s cheeks, when he immediately realised that he was already quite close. A couple of more strokes, and his leg muscles started to spasm, and he mumbled, “Close now, fuck, please.”

Immediately, Ilya’s hand disappeared, and a choked-off breath escaped Shane, before he whined in disappointment. Ilya was murmuring in Russian, back to caressing his abs. But Shane needed him *lower.*

Slowly, Ilya’s hand travelled back to his cock, this time much gentler, the strokes almost barely there, enough to tease and to rile him up, but not enough to get him anywhere. Or at least, that’s what Shane thought. But the teasing strokes were accompanied by Ilya’s other hand leaving scratches on his hips, and his teeth biting gently at his shoulder, and to Shane’s amazement, his orgasm was approaching.

He considered not saying anything, Ilya technically hadn’t specified that Shane had to warn him again. But deep down he *knew*, that that was what Ilya wanted. And he wanted to be *good.*

“Ilya, shit, I-, *oh,* close, *fuck*.”

Again, Ilya let go, and this time Shane let out a pathetic whine, “You fucking asshole.”

“You know your safeword mr. Hollander. But I have a feeling you do not want to use it just yet, *da*? Because you like this, don’t you? You like me playing with you, on my terms.”

Shane just whined again, and one of Ilya’s hands shot up to grab at his chin, forcing his head at an awkward angle, “I asked you a question.”

“Yes.”

“Yes, what?”

Shane bit his lip before whispering, “I like you playing with me. I like you doing what you want, stopping when you want to. Like-, like I’m just yours to do with whatever you want.”

Ilya’s pupils dilated, his lips parting slightly, looking like he wanted to *eat him.*

“Good boy. Doing exactly what he’s told. You deserve a reward, yes?”

Shane eyes glistened when Ilya grabbed him again, “Y-yes please, *oh fuck*.”

Ilya’s pace was relentless, his other hand reaching down to fondle Shane’s balls, and before long, he was close again. “Ilya, please, *fuck,* can I come?”

“So polite for me, *malysh.”* The tone was condescending which, to Shane’s horror, only made his cock twitch again. He whined, trying to bury his face in Ilya’s neck. Ilya left kisses on the parts of Shane’s face that he could reach, before leaning in to whisper, “Come for me. *Now.”*

And it was over.

Just like that, with a simple command, Shane’s orgasm tore out of him. Ilya stroked him through it, before he collapsed against his chest, breathing heavily. “Fuck, that was hot.”

Ilya hummed, kissing the side of Shane’s face. “Yes, it was. Let’s get you out of here before the water gets cold.”

Shane frowned, looking up at Ilya, “But what about you?”

“This was about you, *solnyshko*. You already made me come so very hard on the plane, I had to repay the favour.”

Shane blushed at the reminder of his actions on the plane. He really did hope that Marleau had been asleep. Otherwise, he wasn’t sure he could ever look the man in the eye again. No matter how much he had wanted to stake his claim and prove a point.

Ilya guided him out of the bath, and dried him with an insanely fluffy towel, before leading him to bed, laying them both down under the covers. He ran a finger over Shane’s cheekbones with a soft smile on his face, before his expression sobered up a bit.

“Tomorrow, I have meetings for the whole day. You can-, you can do whatever you want obviously, but maybe you would want to stay here? Breakfast and lunch are delivered as room service, so you wouldn’t have to leave. You can take another bath. If you need anything, just tell me, and I will make it happen. Books, playstation, whatever you want, yes?”

Shane got a weird feeling, that Ilya didn’t quite *want* him to leave the penthouse. His knee-jerk reaction was to push back, because that was weird as hell, but he had to admit, that a chill day in this oasis of a hotel room didn’t sound so bad. He found himself nodding, “Yeah, sure. When will you be back?”

“No later than 5pm, maybe. And depending on when you wake up, I might already be gone.”

“Busy man.”

Ilya smiled and rolled his eyes, “You have no idea.”

Shane leaned in to kiss him, his eyelids feeling heavy. He tried to stifle a yawn, but didn’t quite manage, making Ilya laugh, “Oh, I am that boring, yes? That you are falling asleep?”

“Shut up, you wore me out.”

“Good.” Ilya placed a kiss to his hair before murmuring, “Sleep well, *solnyshko.* I will see you tomorrow.”

It was the last thing Shane heard before sleep took him.

Shane woke up alone.

The bed next to him was cold, and the sun was high in the sky. He looked at his phone, eyes widening at the time.

11 am.

Shane Hollander had not slept past 8 am for *years*. He huffed a laugh before running a hand over his face. There are a lot of things that Shane was currently doing, that would give past-him a heart attack. Like spontaneously taking a daytrip to Boston with a guy he met not even a week ago.

The memories of the past few days felt like a fever dream, like a carefully curated fantasy that Shane would wake up from any moment now.

And he didn't want to wake up.

Instead, he spent the day genuinely relaxing for the first time since starting university. He ordered way too much breakfast, binged a shitty series on Netflix, before ordering way too much lunch. He took a bath, tried to really pamper himself. Making sure he looked *good.*

When Ilya was done with meetings, Shane wanted to take him out. Nothing as extravagant as this penthouse, but he had found a small restaurant not far from there, that he really thought they would both enjoy.

Around 4pm Shane started to feel the boredom catch up to him. He was dressed and ready, slowly reading through a random book he had found in the small book nook in the penthouse. He considered texting Ilya, to ask for when he would be back, but realised with a start that he didn't even have his number. They had never exchanged them. Shane giggled manically to himself. This whole thing was fucking insane.

Eventually, after what felt like an eternity, the door clicked open and Ilya walked in. Shane had gotten up, but before he could meet Ilya in the middle, he noticed the look on his face.

He tried to read his expression, but there *wasn't* one. It was a perfectly blank canvas, with even his eyes seeming more dull than usual.

"Hi," he tried anyway.

Ilya looked up at him, and Shane wanted to crawl into his brain and read his thoughts, because he was getting absolutely *nothing* from Ilya's face, and it was freaking him out. He tried again, "I found a really cool restaurant, if you wanted to grab something to eat?"

"I'm tired," Ilya whispered, and Shane's smile faltered slightly.

"Oh. Yes. Of course, you had a long day, you can obviously relax, and we can just go later, whenever you'll get hungry."

Ilya looked at him, but it almost felt like he was seeing through him, “I’m not going out today.”

Shane’s smile fell.

Oh.

Okay, not the end of the world. They could figure something else out. It didn’t matter that Shane had researched, hoping to finally treat Ilya. It didn’t matter that Ilya hadn’t even glanced at him long enough to notice that Shane had styled his hair. Not that Shane had done it *for* Ilya, but-

Ah, who was he kidding. He had obviously done it for Ilya, wanting to get a reaction out of the man. And he was getting one. It was just not at all what he had expected. He was at a loss, scratching his brain for what to do. How do you comfort someone, when you don’t know what’s wrong? When you’re pretty sure that they do not particularly *like* being comforted?

Shane sat back on the couch in the middle of the room, and looked at Ilya, who still had not moved. Suddenly, his eyes locked on Shane’s and he stalked towards him. Leaning over him, Ilya pulled his head back, kissing him.

It almost felt like he way trying to eat him, his tongue prodding at his mouth, the grip in his hair tightening to the point of uncomfortable pain. Shane couldn’t shake the felling, that this was *wrong*. When Ilya reached for the buttons of his shirt, he grabbed his wrist and pulled it away, looking up to catch Ilya’s eye.

“Ilya, what’s wrong?”

Ilya huffed, his eyes glinting with anger, “Nothing is wrong. Can I not want to fuck, now? Is that illegal?”

Shane felt a pang in his heart. He used all of his willpower to keep his voice steady, “I’m not in the mood. What the fuck is up with you?”

Ilya rolled his eyes, “Fine. Then you should start packing. We’re leaving in 10 minutes.” With that, he went to the bathroom, locking the door after him.

What the fuck was going on?

Shane packed quickly, not having brought many belongings in the first place. Ilya came out of the bathroom, and did the same, before heading for the door, not even looking back to see if Shane followed.

Shane did. Albeit hesitantly, still not sure how to act around this version of Ilya. This stranger.

They drove to the plane in silence, and when they boarded Shane noticed that they were alone.

“Where is Marleau?” he asked, trying to extend an olive branch of communication. But somehow, he spectacularly failed, because Ilya’s face shuddered even *more,* and he looked away.

“Not here,” came the curt reply, Ilya still not looking his way.

“Oh. Okay.”

In an act of bravery, Shane extended his hand, gently grabbing Ilya's. Maybe he had just truly had a terrible day at work. But the longer he held his hand without Ilya as much as *acknowledging* it, the more pathetic he felt, for not having let go yet. For not accepting that Ilya wasn't interested.

He could feel tears of frustration in his eyes, and he let go of Ilya's hand, looking towards the window. Hoping that Ilya wouldn't choose this exact time to acknowledge him, he didn't want him to see his tears.

The rest of the plane ride was spent in silence, the contrast so big to their trip yesterday, that Shane honestly didn't even know what to do with himself. He closed his eyes, and pretended to sleep.

If Ilya wasn't going to talk to him, he was not about to make a pathetic and needy fool of himself, trying to get his attention.

When they landed, Ilya still grabbed both of their bags, and led Shane out of the plane. And there, on the tarmac, was Marleau. Leaning against a car, waiting for them.

Shane looked at Ilya, and was baffled by the sudden change of demeanour in the man. His face was split in a huge grin, eyes almost twinkling. He dropped their bags, and reached Marleau in three steps, pulling him into a firm hug, one hand in his hair.

And Shane just stood there, next to them.

Oh.

Understanding flooded him, and he had never felt more stupid.

What am I even doing here?

Finally, after what felt like an eternity to Shane, Ilya let go of Marleau, patting his cheek before turning to look at one of the other men on the tarmac, exchanging words in rapid Russian, Ilya suddenly pointing towards Shane.

"What?" Shane couldn't stop himself from asking, so fucking tired of not understanding what was going on around him.

Ilya looked at him, before nodding towards the man next to the black Audi, "Sergei will take you home."

Shane blanched, looking at Ilya with furrowed brows, "Sergei will take me home? Not you?" *God, you sound fucking pathetic. Have some fucking dignity.*

*"*Yes, I have work. Sorry. Goodbye, Shane." With that, Ilya got into the other car, Marleau following behind him. They drove away quickly, leaving Shane wondering whether that had been their last goodbye.

A week passed. Shane got back into his routine, albeit reluctantly. He couldn't believe that he had been so stupid. Falling for the first guy who showed him just a little of the attention he wanted, only to crash and burn the second he caught feelings.

Shane had spent the first two days like a zombie, going between classes, the gym and *Désir* on autopilot. Replaying the past days in his head, wondering where it had all gone wrong.

Ilya had invited Shane.

Ilya had *wanted* him there, otherwise inviting someone is pretty fucking stupid.

But then, it had been like a switch had flipped, and Ilya had come back from his meetings a completely different person. Not even looking at Shane properly. And Shane had been so, *so* lost.

He had resigned himself to allowing Ilya an off day, not knowing what had happened at work to result in such a reaction. But then Marleau had been waiting for them at the tarmac, and suddenly, Ilya was *back.* All sunshine and smiles. But none of it directed at *Shane.* All of it directed at fucking *Marleau.*

So, Shane had gathered whatever was left of his dignity, and his heart, and he'd gone home.

Hayden had tried; God bless him. Tried talking to him, noticing Shane's more than sour mood. But Shane didn't want to talk about it. He just wanted to move on. To forget golden curls and piercing blue eyes.

Or well, he didn't.

But if they wanted to forget *him,* there was nothing he could do.

He had thrown himself into work, which is where he also currently found himself, mixing drinks. The night was peaceful.

Until he felt a prickling at the back of his neck. It wasn't the first time, he had been subconsciously waiting for Ilya to show up for days, but to no avail. He had told himself that he had given up, that Ilya wasn't coming. That he would have to move one. But he couldn't shake the hopeful feeling every time the door opened.

He turned around, ready for disappointment, and froze in his track. His eyes met icy blue ones, wide and looking right at him from across the counter.

"Hi."

“What can I do for you?” Ilya was met with the most customer service version of Shane Hollander he had ever encountered.

Ilya hesitated, fiddling with the rings on his fingers, “Can we talk?”

“I’m so sorry mr. Rozanov, but I have my hands full with other clients today, and their experience depends on the level of my service. And I do love to serve. So, if you’ll excuse me.” He tried tiptoeing around him, clearly heading for the staff room.

“Shane.” Ilya grabbed his arm, stopping him in his tracks. “Please. Let’s talk.”

“If you need a conversation partner, you should find Marleau. I’m sure he’d love to… *talk.*”

“Shane, *sweetheart*, please.”

Shane looked at him, fire still blazing in his eyes, but a fraction softer. “Not here,” he eventually said, looking around the bar. “I get off at two today, we can talk at my place.”

“I can wait for you here, and drive you home-”

“No, Ilya.” Shane’s tone was hard and final. “I will finish my shift, and then I will go home. I am perfectly capable of doing that myself, as you well know. If you want to talk, I will see you there.” With that, he turned around and left.

Ilya kept standing there, feeling very lost and unsure. He had made a mistake. And now he didn’t know how to fix it. He left *Désir,* not wanting to anger Shane more, and walked around the city mindlessly, deep in thoughts. He had tried to do the right thing, had tried to talk himself into letting Shane go. But he had ended up being pulled back time and time again, never getting enough, always wanting more.

Inviting Shane to Boston had been impulsive and stupid, a desperate idea born from not wanting to leave him for even a second. And then Boston had been… a fucking shitshow. Ilya didn’t even remember making it back to the hotel, or the plane ride home.

But Shane had seen a glimpse of Ilya, the *real* him, and now he was distant, and cold. *What the fuck did you expect?*

Did they even talk on the way home? He couldn’t remember. Fuck, he was such an asshole. He had wanted to reach out after, but he hadn’t known what to say, and the cleanup after Boston had taken longer than anticipated. And now it had been a week…

Ilya wasn’t even sure if Shane would look at him. *Really* look at him.

Maybe this was Ilya’s chance to break it off. Or… Shane’s chance to get away. To find something better. If Shane was angry at him, maybe he wouldn’t miss him. Maybe if Shane hated him, it would hurt him less. Ilya would be dying, but he’d survived worse.

But then, Ilya didn’t want to survive Shane Hollander. He wanted slow mornings in bed, and late nights on the couch. He wanted café dates, and walks through the city. He wanted Shane’s hand in his, always, so he could pull him in for a kiss whenever he wanted. He wanted Shane underneath him, drunk on pleasure, putting his fate in Ilya’s hands with no hesitation, knowing Ilya would tear him apart, and put him back together, just like he *needed.*

But could he have it? Did he even deserve it? If it came to it, could Ilya even be honest? What kind of truth could he offer Shane, that wouldn't ruin everything? Shane had obviously been jealous about Marley, and Ilya wasn't sure how to reassure him without lying. Without making it worse.

He couldn't tell him about the *Bratva.* But what else could he do? How else could he explain Boston?

Suddenly Ilya found himself in front of Shane's apartment building, way too early. Shane would still be at work. Ilya still sat down on the bench next to the door, and waited.

He lost track of time at some point, sitting there waiting for him. Eventually, the sound of footsteps closing in, before halting close to him, broke him out of his thoughts, making him look up.

Shane stood in front of him, bundled up in his hat and scarf, much more dressed for the cold Montreal night than Ilya, "Fuck, Ilya, are you insane? It's freezing out here."

"I-" Ilya doesn't get a word out, before Shane interrupts him.

"Get inside before you catch a fucking cold," Shane moves past him, opening the door and entering the building, expecting Ilya to follow. And he does.

The walk up the stairs is silent, and so is the moment before Shane manages to open his door, letting them both inside the small and cozy apartment. Shane doesn't move to take his shoes or jacket off. He just stands there, looking at Ilya. Waiting.

"Shane, Marley is a coworker, and a friend. Nothing more."

"It's not about fucking Marleau."

"It isn't?" Now Ilya is even more confused.

"No-, or well-, it's not *only* about him, okay? I'm not some fucking crazy jealous psychopath. But I have tried so hard to get to know you, and every time I feel like I might scratch the surface, you pull up this wall. And with him, it's just not there. And I get that, fuck, I really do. You've known him longer, and he's obviously important to you, but God, Ilya, he looks at you like you hung the moon." The last part is said with a sad tilt to Shane's voice, like he'd already given up.

"And I can be patient Ilya, really, but-" He shook his head, voice rising, "But I don't think you really *want* me to patient. I don't think you really *want* to let me in. Why would you, when you're already surrounded by all of these wonderful people. And I don't-, I don't fit in."

"Shane, Marley and I-, it's nothing. I mean it."

"I will not be what you settle for, Ilya. I will not be your second choice, your afterthought, someone you call when you're lonely."

Ilya's chest felt too tight, like the air had been pulled out of the room. He knew where this was going – he'd known since Shane started talking, and still, he has no idea how to stop it.

Because there isn't a version of this that doesn't hurt him.

"Ilya," Shane said quietly, and that was worse than the shouting, "I need you to be honest with me."

Don't ask me. Please, don't make me lie to you.

"Can you look me in the eye and say that you and Marleau never-, never did anything?" Shane looks at him defiantly, but the sliver of hope in his voice is unmistakeable. Like maybe, just maybe, Ilya will come out and say 'Ew, me and Marley? Never.'

But Ilya realises with horror, that there is no good way out of this conversation. He can either lie, and risk Shane finding out later which might be… catastrophic. Or he can tell him the truth, and-

No. He can't tell him the truth. Not the *full* truth. He can't explain his relationship to Marleau, or what happened in Boston. Not without exposing the *Bratva,* not without giving Shane information that people would kill him for. It's too much of a risk.

He takes a deep breath, willing his voice to not shake, "Shane-"

Shane's face falls, and tears immediately start gathering on his lashes. He tries to blink them away, but one manages to fall down his cheek, and Ilya's heart fucking *breaks.*

*"*That's what I fucking thought" the venom in Shane's voice makes Ilya want to cry too, because there is no world in which anyone else could ever compete with Shane Hollander.

"It was- it was a long time ago. And it was never just- never just us. We'd pick up girls, and go home with them, but Shane, *sweetheart,* it meant nothing. Marley is straight."

Shane scoffed, and Ilya felt panic creep in at the possibility of Shane not believing him. He gulped, before taking a step towards Shane, desperately trying to somehow bridge this gap between them, but Shane takes a step back.

"Not too straight to have a threesome with you. Or was it a foursome?" He sounds furious, but also like he's a second away from breaking down, and Ilya's frozen, his head filled with a feeling of *wrong wrong wrong,* but unable to do anything. And Shane is only getting started, "How stupid of me, really. To think that someone like you would ever look at someone like me and see more than just… a warm mouth."

"No, Shane, *no.* Sweetheart you are-, you are so special."

"Special? Is that why you introduced me as your 'acquaintance', to Svetlana? You really have a way with words Rozanov, because I can assure you, I have never felt less *special,* and more like a whore on your arm, than in Boston. You think you can fly me around in your private jet, and I'll just be at your every beck and call?" Shane is panting now, and is clearly not done.

"You brought me to Boston, put me in a hotel room and then spent *hours* at a meeting that you wouldn't tell me anything about. Only to come back mad, and when I suggested we go out, you claimed tiredness, but then wanted to fuck. So, was it just the possibility of being seen out in public with me that exhausted you, or did you really just expect me to wait around with my legs spread for whenever you deigned me with your presence?"

Shane's voice trailed off, the rest said in almost a whisper, "I have never felt more… *dirty*, than I did yesterday. You barely looked at me the whole way home, but had no problem hugging Marleau after getting off the plane. So, what did I do wrong? God, tell me what I did, because I'm so fucking *lost."*

“You-, You’ve done nothing wrong. I-” Ilya stammers, English escaping him in this moment where he needs it the most. “I’m sorry.”

“You’re-, You’re sorry?” Shane barks a laugh that sounds so hollow, it pulls at Ilya’s heartstrings. “All of that, and you’re *sorry*? I don’t want an apology Rozanov, I want an explanation.”

Ilya looks at Shane, at this boy who deserves all the best in the world, and can already feel him slipping away. Not because Ilya couldn’t try and fight for him. But because he shouldn’t. Because Ilya isn’t the best in the world. He will only take this sweet, caring and *perfect* boy, and he’ll twist him into something ugly and broken, and he will despise Ilya for it. And then he’ll leave. Everyone does.

So, he takes his own heart in his hands, the heart that’s been hanging on by threads during this whole conversation, and he rips it in half.

He forces his face into a mask of indifference, and looks Shane in the eyes.

“Well?” Shane pushes, “Can you give me one? Can you tell me why you ignored me in Boston? Why you invited me, only to be a fucking asshole?”

I’d give you everything you asked for and more.

“No.”

Please forgive me.

Shane’s face shutters momentarily, before he pulls himself together, and looks at him with a look so full of hate, that Ilya doesn’t think he’ll ever forget it. It will haunt him until the end of his days, alongside all his other mistakes and regrets.

“Fuck you, Rozanov. I really thought you were…. never mind,” Shane whispers, before he turns around and reaches for the door.

“Where are you going? This is your house.”

“Not that it’s any of your business, but I’m going to Hayden’s. Let yourself out.” He momentarily paused with his hand on the handle, as if waiting for Ilya to stop him. To take it back. To give him what he’s so desperately asking for, and let them be happy.

Ilya doesn’t stop him.

The click of the door closing sounds final, in a way that rattles Ilya’s bones. He slides down the nearest wall, in the middle of Shane’s apartment, and for the first time in years, he lets himself cry.

Chapter End Notes

Ilya: "Wow he's amazing, and beautiful, and I want slow walks on the beach and café dates"
heart eyes

Also Ilya: *Ignores Shane and makes him feel like shit*

He's like the "Overthinking final boss" in this, and I hate him for it like just taaaaaaaalk. But I wonder what happened in Boston, that made him act like that heh.

Bonus note:

Shane whenever someone looks at Ilya; *wHy Do tHeY nEeD to Be dOinG alL thAt"

Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

He was breathing heavily now, and Rose had grabbed his hand again. “And what did he say?”

Shane laughed, but it was hollow, “Nothing. He said nothing. Well, he said he was sorry, and then let me walk out. And here we are.”

“Fuck, Shane, I’m so sorry. That’s really terrible.”

Shane let himself feel hurt for a moment. He had tried so hard not to, wanting to be above crying over a casual fuck-buddy. But he had to admit, that even though it had been new and fragile, it had not been casual *for him*, not since Ilya left him on his knees in the middle of *Désir*, and told him to be good.

Chapter Notes

Sorry for being this slow updating this, my bf and I just got a puppy last week, so life has been **chaos**.

Enjoy <3

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Shane stayed at Hayden's for over a week.

He refused to go near his apartment, which was a ridiculous fear, as he was pretty fucking sure that Ilya would rather be at his own huge house, than Shane's tiny shithole. But that was almost worse. Shane didn't fear going back, and seeing Ilya. He feared the thought of going back home, and Ilya *not* being there. To see his apartment exactly as he had left it, with no trace of Ilya ever having been there in the first place.

He spent the first night crying himself to sleep on Hayden's couch. He hadn't said a word, just showed up at his door and absolutely *froze.* Words wouldn't make it past his throat, his tongue heavy in his mouth, unable to speak. Jackie had been terrified, and had kept asking if he needed an ambulance, but Hayden had taken one look at him and known. Known that something had happened, and Shane was still processing. He had calmed his girlfriend, and led Shane to the couch, before leaving him with a 'say the word and I'll be here when you need me' look.

Shane had never appreciated him more.

He laid awake for most of the night, pondering what he had done wrong. He really thought him and Ilya had something… good. Something special. To him at least, it had felt special, like nothing he had ever experienced. Sex was one thing, the way they understood each other with so few words, Ilya almost instinctively knowing which buttons to push in order to destroy Shane in the best way. But they had also had such *fun,* their sense of humour aligning and making every second they had spent together exiting. Shane spent almost the same number of seconds wondering how the hell he was going to keep someone like Ilya interested for longer.

As it turned out, he couldn't.

He had given it his all. Had tried to show the best version of himself, while still staying true to who he was, and he had been under the impression that at least some part of Ilya had *liked* him. Not as much as Shane had liked Ilya, but that was to be expected. Shane had been enjoying their time together, but he wasn't stupid. He knew that someone like Ilya could have whoever he wanted, so he tried to enjoy it while it lasted.

But *fuck,* if he hadn't hoped that it would last longer.

There was a moment, in those devastating minutes in Shane's apartment, where he could swear it looked like Ilya had wanted him. But it hadn't been enough to open up. Not enough to *stay.* And really, Shane couldn't blame him, he knew he couldn't compete with someone like Marleau. Someone with such easy confidence, and *history,* someone privy to Ilya as a person in a way that Shane could only dream of.

On day two, he borrowed some of Hayden's clothes, and ignored the looks exchanged between the couple at his obvious denial to go home. At dinner they opened a bottle of wine, and Shane, who normally didn't drink much, got tipsy and told them everything about Ilya. About how they met, how sweet he was, how much fun they had together - he left out the details of their bedroom activities, Hayden already scrunching his nose at the word "kissing".

And then he told them about Boston, the spontaneity of it, how it felt… nice, for someone to want him enough to do all that. And then about how Boston had crashed and burned, and Shane was left with a whiplash he still hadn't made any sense of.

They had been livid, both raging left and right about how much of an asshole Ilya was, and even though Shane was inclined to agree, he couldn't muster any anger or resentment towards him. He mostly just felt… sad. And lonely. And like something potentially mind-blowing had been taken away from him before he could fully understand it and it *hurt.*

The three of them had gotten quite drunk that night, and when they woke up the next day, no one mentioned Ilya. Jackie went back to her place, and Hayden offered to go to Shane's apartment to get some of his things - an offer Shane accepted immediately.

They fell into a routine, usually walking to uni together. Shane would then go to the gym, while Hayden usually spent some alone time with Jackie. She was over more often than not, and Shane didn't comment on the fact that Hayden hadn't been to her place once since Shane arrived. He appreciated his friend and how caring he was, but after a week he started feeling like an intruder in their relationship, and he desperately needed to *get out.*

The salvation came in the form of Rose - a friend he had made during his first month at university, when he had gotten lost on the way to his classes, and accidentally barged into the theatre part of the building. They had clicked immediately, and Shane sometimes found himself mourning the easiness of his life, if he had just been straight. But alas, that didn't quite work out, and now they usually met up for dinner and drinks - Rose always trying to make him go clubbing, and Shane always refusing. At this point, it was routine. A routine that Shane adored.

He ran into her on Friday, and one look at his face was apparently enough for her to initiate plans, "We're going out tonight. No excuses."

"Rose…" he sighed, mostly looking forward to crawling back onto Hayden's couch and never leaving.

"No, Shane. Whatever is making you look like a sad puppy, it's nothing some good wine can't fix. Please, it's been ages since we've hung out, if not for your sake, then let's do it for mine?"

"That's emotional manipulation and you know it," Shane couldn't help the laugh that escaped him. His first genuine one in days. Eventually, they agreed to meet up later, before going their separate ways.

When Shane arrived at the restaurant, he immediately spotted Rose at one of the more tucked away booths, and sat down, noticing the wine already poured into his glass. He took a generous sip.

"Hi stranger," Rose smiled.

"You've just seen me a couple of hours ago."

"Did I?" She furrowed her brows, "I could have sworn that was a ghost of my best friend, and not actually him."

Shane rolled his eyes. He had debated the whole way here, how much he wanted to tell Rose. Not because he couldn't trust her, he definitely could. But because he was so *tired* of revisiting it. So tired of constantly missing Ilya.

But while telling Hayden and Jackie had been nice in a 'get it off his chest' way, he knew Rose could maybe… help. When he came to Montreal, convinced he was straight, Rose had been the one to show him, or well… he had shown *her,* that he certainly wasn't. Nowadays, they never spoke

about the absolute failure of a relationship they had tried. Now, Rose would always try to set him up with her theatre friends, which did have a stereotypically high number of gay men. But none of it had ever clicked. Shane had gone on dates, and found himself repeatedly thinking 'maybe I'm not gay *enough'.* Maybe he was too boring for all these flamboyant and confident men.

But on the other hand, the few of them that had actually made it into the bedroom, had left Shane feeling… bored. Like sex was this rehearsed play that everyone knew all the dialogue and cues for, while Shane was stuck with improvising.

With Ilya, he didn't have to improvise. He didn't even have to think. Ilya had put him exactly where he wanted him, and made it feel so *good.*

Stop fucking thinking about him, why are you so intent on hurting yourself? He doesn't fucking want you.

Shane blinked quickly, looking up at Rose, who was studying him with a sad look on her face.

"Who is he?"

Shane furrowed his brows, taking a deep breath, "Who is who?"

Rose lifted an eyebrow, and reached out to lay her hand on his arm across the table. "Shane Hollander, I have known you for years. I have seen you laugh, cry, and judge people for standing too close to you in a queue. I have seen you politely smile at men *and* women flirting with you, and I have even seen you flirt back on very few occasions. But even when you flirted, or even dated, I have never seen this look on your face."

"What look?"

"Like you just got your dream puppy, and then someone took it away. So, who is he, and why are you sad about him? Do I have to kill someone?"

Shane couldn't help but chuckle at the threat. "I don't think you could take him in a fight, unfortunately."

"Oh?" Rose's eyes sparkled, "So he's fit? Tell me everything."

Shane smiled, taking a sip of his wine, before drawing in a deep breath, letting the memories of Ilya that he'd tried to repress wash over him. "God, Rose, he's *so* fit. I can't even explain how absolutely fucking gorgeous he is. He has these intense blue eyes, and his hair is blonde and curly, and he's carved like a fucking greek God. And he's so sweet too, has this annoyingly effective way of flirting that just pulled me in immediately, and he just *got* me, you know? And I-, yeah… it was good."

The smile on Rose's face fell slightly, "Was?"

"Yes, was." Shane looked down at his lap, fiddling with a non-existent thread on his pants.

"Why? What happened?"

Shane looked back up at his friend, trying to find the words. "Honestly?" Shane ran a hand through his hair, "I have no fucking clue. We were good. Casual, yes, but it was also very early stages. But very intense… sometimes it almost felt like none of us wanted the other to ever leave. And I know

how crazy it sounds, and that you should always take a step back and evaluate, but *fuck,* he was like everything i had ever wanted. And then he suddenly had to go to Boston for work, and he asked me to come, and I did, and-"

"Wait, pause. He asked you to come to Boston on a whim, and you *went*? What does he even do for work?"

"I don't know."

"What was he doing in Boston?"

"Meetings? I don't know. Don't look at me like that, I know how it looks." Rose's face had taken on a look that was almost pitying. And Shane wasn't stupid. He was fully aware that he had let himself get pulled into Ilya Rozanov's orbit way too easily, and then proceeded to throw caution and standards out the window. But that didn't make the aftermath hurt any less. "I'm not saying it was smart, or that there weren't red flags. But-, Rose I have never felt like this before in my life. I would have never forgiven myself, if I hadn't given it a shot."

Rose nodded, taking another sip of her wine before replying, "I know. I'm not judging you. If anything, I'm proud that you left your little shell, and let yourself be pulled into the moment for ones. I'm just really sad that it didn't work out. What happened in Boston?"

Shane took a deep breath, "It started out well. The suite was nice, and we had fun. Then he left for his meetings, and when he came back, he was… different. Wouldn't look at me, wouldn't answer any questions. He was snappy, and kind of mean, and I was so fucking confused." Shane could feel the telltale sign of tears gathering in his eyes, and he angrily swiped them away with his hand. "We came back to Montreal, and he just threw himself into the arms of one of his colleagues, and suddenly he was back to his shiny self. They got into a car together, and he left me on the fucking tarmac like I was just a suitcase he could get shipped to its destination. And then there was radio silence for a week. Suddenly, he showed up at *Désir,* and wanted to talk, and God, I almost told him to go fuck himself. But he was there, and I kept telling myself that maybe something bad had happened in Boston, and he couldn't explain it at the time. So, we talked. I laid it all out, how I felt about him flirting with his friend - which I then found out he had apparently also slept with - how shitty he had made me feel in Boston. And I demanded an explanation."

He was breathing heavily now, and Rose had grabbed his hand again. "And what did he say?"

Shane laughed, but it was hollow, "Nothing. He said nothing. Well, he said he was sorry, and then let me walk out. And here we are."

"Fuck, Shane, I'm so sorry. That's really terrible."

Shane let himself feel hurt for a moment. He had tried so hard not to, wanting to be above crying over a casual fuck-buddy. But he had to admit, that even though it had been new and fragile, it had not been casual *for him,* not since Ilya left him on his knees in the middle of *Désir,* and told him to be good.

"Yeah. It really fucking sucks to be honest. I really-, I really liked him."

"And if he came back today? And had all the best excuses ready? Would you-," Rose let her eyes wander over the bar, before returning to Shane, "Would you take him back? Give it another chance?"

Shane's initial reaction was to immediately say 'fuck no'. To convince Rose that he had more dignity than that, and that Ilya Rozanov was a closed chapter, that he wouldn't re-read even if the story had been good. Because sometimes, you have to let good things end.

All of that sounded logical, and exactly like what he *should* be saying. But he couldn't get the words out. Because how could he convince Rose, if he wasn't even sure himself. If Ilya walked into this bar right now, what would Shane do?

Rose didn't say anything, looking contemplative and unsure at his silence. Shane couldn't blame her, he didn't exactly date a lot, and when he did, it rarely ever turned serious enough for him to feel any sort of way about them, after it was over. This was unprecedented. Rose's voice eventually cut through the silence, "We're going out."

Shane looked at her, raising both eyebrows in shock, "What?"

"You heard me, Hollander. No boy on this earth deserves you if he's going to treat you like that. We're finding you someone better. We're hitting the club."

Shane wanted to argue, he really did. Picking up meaningless one-night stands wasn't a pastime he particularly enjoyed, but he found himself nodding instead. He had a hard time believing he could find anyone even remotely as good as Ilya. But maybe, just maybe, he could find someone who would help him forget blue eyes and blonde locks for just a night. Someone who could make him feel *wanted.*

They finished the wine, and walked from the bar to Rose's favorite club. It looked exactly the same as the last time Shane had been there. The music was loud, the lights were bright, and it was decently packed despite it being quite early.

They ordered a couple of drinks, and sat at the bar scanning their surroundings. Shane barely resisted when Rose eventually pulled him to the dance floor, and they spent a while just having fun dancing in the silliest ways. Slowly, Shane felt himself let loose a little, his shoulders losing some of the tension they had been carrying.

And it was almost as if the universe knew why they were there, because before long, a guy started dancing closer and closer to them, his eyes on Shane. The guy was objectively quite handsome, with dark curly hair that just about brushed his cheekbones, and blue eyes that looked almost grey in the club lights. The guy was bold, sliding in behind Shane and grabbing at his hips, pulling them flush together. Shane moved to the rhythm as best as he could, leaning his head back to rest at the stranger's shoulder. He closed his eyes and focused on the feeling of the stranger's fingers slipping under his shirt, his breath ghosting his neck. He felt a simmer of want when the stranger tightened the grip on his hip with one hand, the other sneaking up to grab at his chin, tilting it so their lips met. The stranger kissed him softly, and Shane let himself just *feel.* But then they drew back for breath, and Shane opened his eyes, the illusion shattering.

The hair was too dark, the eyes not blue enough. The kiss had been sweet, but he didn't feel the burning in his veins, the desperation for *more.* The stranger's grip at his hips too gentle, not holding Shane back, but almost inviting him to leave.

And he did.

He murmured an apology, extracting himself and heading for the restroom. He threw water on his face, feeling it mix with the tears of frustration that were gathering again. How dare Ilya have such

an influence on him. How dare he waltz into his life only to immediately leave again, with no concern for what it would do to Shane. How dare he *ruin* him like this, and not be here to pick up the pieces.

He slid down the nearest wall and cried.

Rose found him eventually, but Shane didn't know how long time had passed. She caressed his hair, and spoke soothingly. He didn't listen at first, but eventually her voice made it past the fog in his head. "Come on babe, let's get you home. We'll grab a taxi; it's only five minutes from here."

Suddenly, Shane felt cold dread wash over him, "No."

Rose froze and stopped petting his hair, "What's wrong with home? I don't think we should stay here anymore, Shane. I really though it might help, but clearly-"

"Can I just stay at yours?" He managed to rasp out.

Rose looked surprised, but luckily didn't ask any further questions, "Sure thing. You know my couch is always there. Come on, let's go."

The trip home was a blur, and before long he was laying in Rose's living room. Another night, another couch. *How long are you going to keep this up for? How long will you let him keep you from your home?*

In that moment, Shane decided that he was done. Done letting Ilya hurt him. He would embrace the hurt, pick the pieces of his heart up, and put himself back together.

With the resolution fresh in his mind, Shane snuggled further into the pillow, and let sleep take him.

The next day, him and Rose had a late brunch, where they resolutely did *not* speak about last night. Eventually, she had to leave for her afternoon classes, so they got ready and left together.

Shane went by Hayden's, and packed all of his stuff, putting his friend's living room back to how it was before Shane had decided to invade it. The original plan had been to go past his apartment on the way to work to drop off his things, but when he noticed a clean work shirt in his bag, he instead detoured to his favourite coffee shop. He was *not* procrastinating going home. He was just… making the most time-effective choice, *and* getting himself caffeine. Win-win. *You're not fooling anyone, not even yourself.*

Hayden's excitement was clear during their shift, as if Shane deciding to go home was this great event that needed to be celebrated. And while it should have been annoying, it did somehow help to uplift Shane's mood. Ever since Boston, Shane hadn't been in the right mindset to really entertain the clients at *Désir,* and Hayden had been picking up a lot of his slack. So today, he tried to get back into it.

It wasn't that busy, which gave him plenty of time to talk to everyone. About halfway through his shift, he realised that he was actually enjoying himself. The feeling made his steps lighter, and his smile more genuine. Hayden noticed immediately, winking at him when he passed the bar.

Shane laughed at him, before turning to the two guys who had approached the counter, "What can I do for you guys?"

"Two vodkas please. No ice."

Russian.

Shane hated how quickly he placed the accent, and how quickly his mood had soured. But he kept the smile on his face - he couldn't hate the entire country of Russia because of one man. "Coming right up."

The guys were big, and Shane could see the edges of tattoos poking out from under their suits. They kept stealing glances at Shane while he poured the vodka, one of the guys smiling warmly at him. Shane found himself smiling back, noting how incredibly blue his eyes were. Almost like- *No.*

He pushed the glasses towards them, and they immediately grabbed them, both taking a sip. One of them turned around to scan the room, but the guy with the blue eyes kept his attention on Shane. He was about to turn away, feeling slightly awkward, when the guy spoke up.

"You are quite pretty."

Shane blushed, caught off guard at the sudden compliment, "Oh-, hah-, thank you?"

"I can see what Ilya sees in you."

Shane froze, feeling as if someone had poured a bucket of ice-cold water over him. "You know Ilya?"

"*Da,* we are very close. He spoke… a lot, about you. You are Shane, yes?"

"Yes," Shane answered hesitantly, feeling off kilter in the conversation. "But Ilya and I aren't that close, just… acquaintances." The word tasted bitter on his tongue, "I don't know what he's told you."

"Just that you are… pretty. And you are. I am Alexei," The stranger held out his hand, and Shane shook it. Why on earth was Ilya walking around talking about *Shane?*

Alexei took one last sip of his vodka, and put down the glass, his friend doing the same. "Thank you for drink, Shane. See you." With that, the men turned around, and left the bar again, leaving Shane staring after them, trying to make sense of the weird interaction.

For the rest of the shift, his mood was stilted, his mind working overdrive. He was stuck between curiosity, at Ilya praising him to other people. Calling him *pretty.* He couldn't help but blush slightly at the implication, before immediately being overtaken by anger. Why would Ilya walk around talking *about* Shane, instead of *with* Shane.

Maybe that was just all he was… 'pretty'. A pretty face that did what Ilya had wanted, but not more than that. Not suited for more. Not *wanted* for more.

Shane had been called ‘pretty’ many times growing up, and the connotation was never positive. It was always a joke about his slightly more delicate features, or his freckles, or later… his sexuality. It was never positive, and he had grown to hate the word.

But when Ilya had called him pretty, instead of hate he felt… well, he actually just genuinely felt *pretty.* Ilya had said it like he meant it, and not like it was some insult. Like he genuinely found Shane worth looking at. It had made him feel confident, and *wanted.*

Now in the aftermath, it left a sour taste in his mouth.

Before realising, time had passed, and he was closing the door to *Désir* behind him, about to start walking home. He froze in his tracks when he saw a figure leaning against the wall.

And not just any figure.

Ilya.

Suddenly Shane’s heart was pounding. He couldn’t figure out if he wanted to punch him, or turn away and ignore him. *Or kiss him. You could kiss him. Don’t you remember how good it feels?*

He shook his head, willing his brain to not betray him. He had given Ilya a chance to explain himself. Explain why he insisted on hurting Shane. And Ilya had chosen to keep hurting him instead. Shane had spent days trying to convince himself that he was better off without him. That he didn’t need that kind of… mess in his life.

But the problem was… that he really *did* need it. Everything that made Ilya who he was, was just so… *intoxicating.* Shane had never felt like this before, never had another person capture him like this. He hated it. He loved it. And there was nothing he could about it, because Ilya had chosen for him. And he hadn’t chosen *Shane.*

And why would he?

But why was he then standing here, in front of *Désir*? He was facing the other way, and obviously hadn’t noticed Shane yet. But Shane would recognise those golden locks anywhere, them having haunted his dreams for days.

He decided to take them both out of their misery, mustering up all of his inner calmness. “What the fuck are you doing here?” *Well done, Shane, so calm and collected.*

Ilya jumped away from the wall, and spun on his heel to face Shane. His face was almost… panicked. His curls were unruly, looking like he had been running his hands through them. He took a step toward Shane, before stopping, looking down at his feet as if he hadn’t allowed them to carry him closer to Shane.

“I-” He faltered, looking anywhere else but at Shane. He looked very surprised to see him, given that he had been standing outside his workplace.

“I think we said everything that needed to be said, Ilya.” Shane sighed, letting some of the hurt seep into his words, “I can’t-, I can’t do this back and forth, I’m sorry. I don’t know why you’re here, but-”

“Sorry.” Ilya whispered, “It’s just been a really shitty day, and I ended up here without, how do you say, without my own permission?”

“Involuntarily.”

“*Da.* I wanted to see you, but I was not-” Ilya looked up to meet Shane’s eyes, “I was not going to talk to you. I had not noticed what time it was, got lost in my thoughts.”

Shane felt a wave of helpless anger and frustration wash over him, “So what, you were just going to stand outside my work? How the fuck am I supposed to react to that, Ilya? That you would rather do *that,* than have an actual fucking conversation with me?”

“No, Shane, I-”

But Shane wasn’t about to let him finish, “How many times have you done this? Just watched me, without me knowing?” Suddenly, a thought occurred to Shane, “Oh, did you send your fucking assistants or whatever, to keep an eye on me? Fuck, what the *fuck* is going on?”

Ilya furrowed his brows, “What ‘assistants’, what are you talking about?”

“The fucking Russian guys that were at the club today? The ones who somehow knew my name, and that I knew you? Did you also tell them to flirt with me? Because they did…” Shane’s heart was pounding, knowing exactly what he wanted to say next, “To be honest, one of them almost sounded like you. And contrary to *you,* he actually managed to make me feel *wanted*.”

Before he could blink, Ilya had stepped forward, grabbed the front of his jacket, and pushed him against the wall, punching the air out of Shane’s lungs. He looked *feral,* but almost… *too feral*, for what Shane had wanted to achieve. He had just wanted to make Ilya jealous, painting his encounter with the Russians as more than it was. But Ilya’s reaction made him ponder, if he had gone too far.

“Shane, the men at the club, what did they look like?” Ilya’s question caught him off guard, surely, he knew what his friends looked like?

“What the fuck are you talking about?”

“Shane.” Ilya’s voice left no room for argument, “What. Did. They. Look. Like.”

He swallowed, hating his body for the wave of pleasure it emitted at the casual display of dominance. But he wasn’t about to fold that quickly. He rolled his eyes, and huffed, “If you think you can push me around a bit, and I’ll do whatever you say, then you’re really fucking wrong, Rozanov.”

Suddenly, the hands on him were gone, Ilya having taken a step back, looking down at his own hands as if he hadn’t noticed that he had been holding Shane. “*Fuck.* Sorry.”

“Yeah, you say that a lot,” Shane couldn’t help but murmur.

“Shane. You have every right to hate me. But please-, I need to know what these men looked like.”

The urgency in his tone had Shane on alert. He scanned Ilya’s face, trying to gauge his thoughts, with no luck. Despite his initial pushback, he sighed before looking away, “One of them was not very tall, with short red hair, and the other was about your height, brown hair, beard, and blue eyes. They didn’t speak much English.”

Ilya ran a hand through his hair, leaving it there grasping at his own curls, “Blue eyes?”

“Yes, kind of like yours. Ilya, why are you asking me all these questions, what’s going on?”

“Did they introduce themselves? With names?”

“What-”

“*Shane*. Please.” Their eyes met, and the look in Ilya’s eyes had him answering again.

“Only the one with brown hair. He said his name was Alexei, and that he knew you very well, and-, Ilya?”

A gut-wrenching sound had made it out of Ilya’s throat at Shane’s answer, the hand in his curls tightening. Shane fought the urge to reach out and grab Ilya’s hand to stop him from hurting himself. Ilya was breathing heavily, looking around them frantically, as if he expected someone to appear.

Shane looked around, but they were completely alone on the deserted street.

He had started to seriously freak out. “Ilya. You’re scaring me,” he whispered, hoping to get through whatever state Ilya had worked himself into.

But Ilya just looked at Shane, with a look so panicked, that it did nothing to calm his nerves. “Shane. *Sweetheart*. I know I have no right to ask this of you.” Ilya took a deep breath, taking a step closer to him, “I need you to do me a favour. A big one. And you’re not going to like it, and it will not make any sense, but I promise-, God I fucking *promise* you, that I will explain everything later, *da?*”

Shane didn’t say anything, waiting for Ilya to continue, his stomach in knots.

“I need you to call an uber, and go to my place, yes? And I need you to stay there, until I come get you. And I know that I have done nothing to earn your trust, and I fucking hate myself for it, but *please*.”

Shane couldn’t stop the laugh that escaped him, “Are you fucking crazy? Ilya, you can’t just show up, acting as if something is seriously wrong, and then ask me to go to your fucking house. What the fuck?”

“I know this sounds crazy,” Ilya let out a string of Russian curses, before switching back to English, “But Shane, it is not a joke. It is not me, trying to make you come to my house. Please.”

Shane debated with himself internally. On one hand, Ilya’s request made no fucking sense, and every alarm bell was going off in his head, screaming at him to have just an *ounce* of survival instinct.

But this was Ilya.

Ilya who, despite breaking his fucking heart, had never actually *hurt* him. And he’d had so many chances. He had, in all of their encounters, always cared for Shane, and made him feel *safe.*

Shane took a deep breath, already berating himself for the choice he had made. For yet again being naïve. But he couldn’t help it. Some part of him, that he had no control over, looked at Ilya and still

cared. Looked at him, and still believed that he wouldn't hurt him. That he could be *trusted.*

"Fine, okay. But we're going to fucking talk about this, Rozanov. *All of it.* Whatever the hell it is that has got you acting like this, okay?"

Ilya's shoulders relaxed, and he looked so *relieved.* "Whatever you want Shane, thank you. I will come home as fast I can, I promise. And then we'll… talk about everything." He swallowed, looking straight into Shane's eyes, "No more secrets."

Shane nodded, fishing his phone out to order the uber, "No more secrets."

Mentally, he wondered if he had just sat himself up for even more heartbreak.

But looking at Ilya?

He didn't care.

Chapter End Notes

Hehehe did you think we would be resolving this already? Nope.

Will the boys FINALLY talk? Who knowssssss

Thank you for reading <3

Come yap if you want: My Twitter

Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

> “Who the fuck did this to you?”
>
> “Shane-”
>
> “No, Ilya. Who the fuck did this?”

Chapter Notes

> Me two days ago: "I have a feeling this next chapter is going to take ages to write"
>
> Also me, tipsy on wine, writing it all in one sitting last night: "*Oh*"

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Letting Shane leave with the uber might be the hardest thing Ilya has ever done.

He knew that, in theory, his house was where Shane would be safest, but it didn't stop all of his instincts from screaming at him to follow him, to make sure he's safe, to *protect.*

Fucking *Alexei*.

Ilya had spent the past two weeks chasing his own tail, trying to figure out who had been behind the shitshow in Boston, with no luck. Him and Marleau had spent hours going over all potential enemies, rivals and *idiots* that knew Ilya, and might want him gone. The list was *very* long, but at the end, they had to give up, and Ilya was beyond fucking frustrated.

He kept telling himself that if he could just find out who wanted him dead, and who would go to such great lengths to achieve it, then Shane would be safe. Then maybe… just *maybe,* Ilya could crawl back and beg for his forgiveness.

The little voice inside his head argued that no one in his life was ever truly *safe,* and Ilya knew that it was true. But he'd also do everything, and try anything, for just one more chance with Shane Hollander.

The last two weeks had been the longest of his life. He was constantly missing Shane, replaying their last conversation with bile rising in his throat, at his own fucking audacity. He had wanted to keep him safe, to protect him from Ilya's world, but in the end, Ilya himself had hurt him the most. He could see it in his eyes before he left *his own apartment,* because he couldn't stand to keep giving himself to Ilya, only to get nothing in return.

And all of that pain and suffering had been for fucking *nothing,* because Alexei was here.

In Montreal.

And not in Moscow, where he should be. Where Ilya left him to rot, with no plan of ever returning.

But ghosts always find a way to come back and haunt you. And Ilya's past was nothing but ghosts.

When Shane had uttered Alexei's name, it was like the puzzle pieces all aligned themselves, only to form the most horrifying picture that Ilya never would have expected. *And what a fool you are, to not have expected this. To not plan for Alexei getting enough of sitting nicely in Moscow, while you flourish here.*

Ilya closed his eyes, and allowed himself a moment of silent frustration, before pulling out his phone to call Marleau, who picked up after one ring. "Hey, Roz."

Ilya opened his mouth, but no sound came out.

"Rozy? Don't freak me out, man."

"Alexei." Ilya managed to whisper across the line, before fishing into his jacket pocket for his cigarettes, "Goddamn fucking *Alexei*."

He heard the sharp inhale from Marleau, whose turn it now was to have no response.

Ilya didn't open up to people a lot. Never spoke about his childhood, about his parents, or his brother. Never spoke about how he came to live the life he was. To anyone.

Besides Marleau.

Marleau, who had somehow disarmed all of Ilya's defences, and never looked at him differently for any of the things Ilya had told him. Marleau knew exactly what relationship Ilya had with his brother, and how fucking *not good* it was, that he had somehow made his way to Canada.

"Damn, boss. The *one* time I would wish for a plane crash."

Ilya snorted despite himself, but quickly sobered, "He spoke to Shane."

"What?! Shane? Where?" Marleau's voice now full of urgency, with no trace of the earlier banter.

"He apparently came into *Désir*, and he wasn't alone. Spoke to Shane about… about me. I found out by fucking *accident* Marley," Ilya's voice cracked, "If I hadn't stumbled to this stupid bar in-, *involuntarily,* I never would have spoken to Shane, and I wouldn't have fucking known. Alexei is waltzing around *my city,* and I didn't fucking know."

"Roz, *fuck,* breathe, okay? We will figure this out, I promise. No one crosses us, and gets to fucking live. So, get your gorgeous ass to the office, so we can plan. Now that we've finally got a target. The faster you are, the faster you can go back to the cute bartender, the love of your life."

"*Marley*."

"I know, I know, you are a scary Russian who has no feelings. So, stop spiralling, and get here in one piece. I'll gather everyone."

With that, Marleau hung up, and Ilya was once again alone with his own thoughts. He felt a wave of fondness for his friend, who had somehow managed to calm him down with just a few words. Marleau had taken the full brunt of Ilya's mood after Boston, and even more after last week, where Shane had lef-, *no.* Where Ilya had *let* Shane leave. Because he was a coward.

He had spent God knows how long crying on the floor of Shane's apartment, frustrated with himself for tainting the precious thing that had been growing between them. For taking the little flower, and stomping all over it before it had a chance to bloom. He had just wanted to protect him. *What good job you did of that, huh?*

Eventually, after hours of radio silence, Marleau had tracked his phone, and brought him back home. He stayed the night, and many of the following nights, on his couch, casting worried looks at Ilya, like he didn't quite know what to do.

They didn't talk about it at first.

But then, two days ago, they had been tracking a lead when they drove past a club downtown. And leaving it, was *Shane.* Ilya's breath had caught in his throat, and he fought back all of his instincts that urged him to *go to him.*

But Shane hadn't been alone.

He was leaving the club hugging a gorgeous redhead, the pair so close it almost looked like they were leaning on each other. Ilya couldn't make out their faces, before the car had driven past.

Maybe that was for the best.

He didn't think he would survive seeing Shane smile at someone else. See him look at someone else with *want*, that Ilya selfishly wanted to keep for himself. Or even worse, see him look… in love. With someone that wasn't *Ilya*.

You should be happy, yes? This is exactly what you wanted. For Shane to move on from you, and be happy without your bullshit.

Then why did it feel like his heart was breaking?

Marleau had tried to talk to him about it, the knowing look he shot Ilya speaking volumes. But Ilya had just grabbed the bottle of vodka they kept in the car, and taken a big swig.

The lead had turned out to be another dead end. And now, they knew why.

Fucking Alexei.

When Ilya finally made his way into the office, he felt the somber quiet engulf him. Everyone was there, and yet it was completely silent. No jokes, no banter, no talk. Like a calm before the storm.

Ilya took a deep breath, and let his eyes wander over his men. He knew that every single one of them hated Alexei almost as much as him. They all knew him, after all. The only one who hadn't had the displeasure yet, was Marleau.

But Marleau knew more than most of his men, about how Alexei was behind the scenes. The business he engaged in, how he treated his family. How he would like nothing more than Ilya's head on a stick, back in Moscow.

Sergei cleared his throat, looking at Ilya intently, "*We know where he is. A warehouse south of here."*

Ilya felt the hairs on his arms rising, "*Then what are we waiting for? Let's fucking end this, and be free of him once and for all. No one comes into* our *territory and threatens* our *city, and walks away."* His voice rose, and he held the eye contact of everyone in the room, "*We go in, and we fucking destroy everything. I do not care if we have to kill every one of his accomplices by hand, or if we burn the fucking warehouse to the ground. We are the* only *ones making it out of there alive, am I making myself fucking clear?"*

"*Yes sir,"* came a chorus of agreement from everyone.

And it was as if that had been what they had all been waiting for. They rolled out of the building with lethal precision, their formation tight, everyone ready. Cars were already waiting for them, but Ilya waited until everyone else had left.

Marleau came over, and clasped a hand on his shoulder, “Whatever you just said, great motivational speech boss. You should start a podcast.”

“Fuck you.”

“No thank you. I don’t fuck with taken men,” Marleau winked, before following the others out, Ilya right on his heels.

The ride was quiet. Ilya checked his gun and hidden knives three times, seeing Marleau do the same out of the corner of his eye. When the cars stopped, Ilya grabbed his arm, stopping him from exiting. Marleau arched his eyebrow, gun in hand.

“Be fucking careful Marley. This is not a regular gig. This is not just some idiot who owes us money, that we can wipe the floor with in two seconds, *da*? Alexei is… unpredictable.”

Marleau’s eyes softened momentarily, “Careful Roz, I’ll get emotional. You can be all sappy after.”

They exited the car, and walked slowly around the corner, before sneaking towards the warehouse. Ilya could just about make out the figures of his men in the dark, all positioned around the building, ready for his signal.

It was so quiet.

Too quiet, his brain supplied. He held his hand up, telling everyone else to hold, before sneaking closer, gun ready in his hand. Something was wrong, and he couldn’t put his finger on it. If Alexei and his men were here, and *not* expecting them, there would be signs of life. A car, a voice carrying in the wind, light in one of the windows. But for all intents and purposes, this warehouse looked deserted.

The main door was ajar, but the inside was bathed in darkness. Walking towards it would be a rookie move, and Ilya wasn’t a rookie. Wherever Alexei was, it wasn’t here. *Fuck,* he should have asked Sergei how they had gotten the intel. Should have stopped, and analysed how the fuck they had managed to locate him so quickly, when he had been walking incognito in Montreal for God knows how long.

With that realisation, his heart started beating faster. What the hell had he done, bringing all of his men here, on basically *no* information. He glanced back, and saw Marleau crouching behind a trashcan. *His wounds had only just healed. Are you going to let him get hurt again? Maybe this time, he won’t make it.*

He shook his head, and focused on his surroundings. He lifted his hand to signal for everyone to retreat back to the car, but movement caught his eye. Not close to him, but on the nearest roof.

Fuck.

He launched himself towards the nearest wall, and heard the telltale sound of a bullet wheezing past his head. The time for subtlety and stealth had passed.

“*Retreat*!” he yelled, hoping his men would know better than to disobey him right now. Down here, around the warehouse with very limited cover, they were like sitting ducks for the shooters on the roof. Suddenly, more gunshots rang out, and Ilya noticed people around the perimeter, closing in.

Fuck, we're surrounded. You're such a fucking idiot, Ilya.

"Marley!" he yelled, trying to locate his second in command, "get some of the others, and try to break through. Once you do, retreat back to the office. Do not make me repeat it, we are fucking retreating!"

"Copy!" came a grunt somewhere to his left, Marleau clearly fighting someone, but before Ilya managed to spot him, his eyes caught on a figure standing under a streetlight, casually leaning against it.

Alexei.

Suddenly, nothing else mattered. His men would be fine, they were trained for this, but Ilya? Ilya would only be fine once Alexei was *gone.* He aimed his gun and fired, but he was too far away to aim. Alexei didn't even fucking flinch, like he had expected Ilya to miss.

Ilya tried to get closer, while avoiding the chaos of bullets around him. Eventually, he had enough clean space that he started running towards him, his eyes seeing red. When he got close enough, Alexei turned around, and disappeared into the darkness behind him.

But Ilya didn't stop. He kept running. Away from his men, away from the streetlights, chasing his brother. While running, he pulled a knife out of his belt, ready for anything.

And immediately thanked God that he had.

Someone barged into him from the side, knocking him off his feet. Immediately they were on top of him, throwing punch after punch at his stomach and face, splitting his lip. Ilya swung the arm with the knife, and felt resistance against the blade, followed by liquid running down his hand. The person above him stilled, and fell on top of him, Ilya immediately throwing them off. He took one look, concluded it wasn't Alexei, and got up, looking frantically around him. "*Come out you fucking coward!"* he screamed, aiming his gun at different spots where Alexei might emerge.

Suddenly, a gunshot rang out, and Ilya felt a staggering pain in his abdomen, that took his breath away. He knelt on the ground under the force of it, resting one hand on the pavement. *Fuck.*

"*Always so driven by* feelings, *Ilya. It is your biggest weakness, and it will be your downfall."* Ilya couldn't locate where the voice was coming from, unable to focus on anything but the pain, "*See you around, little brother. Or not. Depending on how quick you can patch that up. Don't worry. I'll take care of* Shane *for you."*

The footsteps retreated, and Ilya wanted to chase after him, to make him swallow his words. But he knew that right now, he would be no match for Alexei. And he couldn't die here. He needed to-

Fuck.

Shane.

Shane, who was waiting for him. At his house, because Ilya had *promised*, that he would come. That he would come and explain everything.

No more secrets.

But how could he, when he hadn't done what he had set out to do. Alexei had walked away, and Ilya's men were scattered. How could he go home to Shane with a fucking *gunshot wound*, and expect him to *not* run for the hills.

You can do it, because you made a promise. And you can't keep being a coward, Ilya.

He got up from the cold ground on shaky legs, clutching his stomach. The bullet hadn't gone deep, Ilya could feel, and it would be fairly easy to take out. But he needed to make it home. He pulled out his phone, which was luckily undamaged, and called his driver.

"*Fuck, boss, where the fuck are you?"*

"Two blocks north of the warehouse. Pick me up."

"On my way."

Ilya groaned in relief when he slid into the backseat of the car, and leaned back, his driver glancing nervously at him. "*Do we need to patch you up, sir? Everyone else is almost at the office."*

"They all made it out?" Ilya asked, ignoring the first question.

"*Yes sir, no casualties. Some injuries, but as far as I know, nothing that won't heal."*

Ilya let out a breath he didn't realise he had been holding, taking out his phone to shoot Marleau a text.

- Good job. I'm going home.

- U ok?

- Yes. What a day. There's a dead guy at my location. Send cleanup.

- Yes sir

The lie felt slightly heavy on his tongue, but it was necessary. He knew Marleau would drop everything, and insist he saw the medic, but Ilya knew he would be fine. He looked worse than he felt. And he really needed to see Shane. He glanced up towards the driver, "Take me home."

They drove in silence, eventually pulling up to Ilya's house, where the lights were on. *Maybe he hasn't left.*

Ilya bid goodbye to his driver, before stalking slowly towards the house. He was exhausted, and could feel his energy fading. *Fuck,* he really needed to get that bullet out.

He opened the door, and braced himself. Maybe Shane had left, or fallen asleep. God, it would be good if he was asleep. Then Ilya could fix this mess, and talk to him when he wasn't actively bleeding out. He didn't have to wonder for long, Shane appearing in the doorway immediately. He had a tentative smile on his face, like he couldn't quite believe that Ilya was actually there.

The smile fell immediately when he laid eyes on Ilya. He could see him note the split lip, the other bruises that were probably visible, before his gaze fell to where he was clutching his abdomen. His eyes darkened into a look Ilya had never seen before.

“Who the fuck did this to you?”

“Shane-”

“No, Ilya. Who the fuck did this?”

The feral glint in his eyes made Ilya gulp. “My brother,” he said, reaching a hand up to lean against the wall. “Alexei.”

Shane’s eyes widened. “A- Alexei? From the bar? That’s your brother? But why would he-”

“Shane, I will tell you everything, like I promised, *da*? But I need to take the bullet out first.”

“Bullet?!” Shane exclaimed, taking two steps closer to Ilya, his arms stretching out like he wanted to touch him, “You were *shot*?”

“Yes.”

“Is it deep?”

Ilya bit his lip to not make the joke. *Now is not the fucking time, Ilya.* “No. I can take it out myself.”

Shane rolled his eyes, “Like hell you can. Come on.” He stepped forward, and put one of Ilya’s arms over his shoulder, reaching his own around Ilya’s waist to steady him, careful to steer clear of the wound. Ilya let himself be manhandled, simply because he hadn’t been prepared for it. He had expected Shane to already be out the door at the word “shot”, not helping him to his couch.

Ilya fell down into the leather cushions, feeling relief when his ab muscles relaxed, no longer straining to keep him upright.

“Can I?” Shane asked, motioning towards his shirt.

“*Da.*”

Shane rolled the shirt up, making Ilya hiss as the material pulled away from the wound. As he had guessed, it wasn’t deep, but it still looked nasty. “I have things for it. In the bathroom, under the sink. First-aid kit, yes?”

Shane nodded, and went to get it. He came back wearing latex gloves, carrying the kit. Ilya furrowed his brows, “What are you doing?”

Shane rolled his eyes at him, “You’re twitching, did you notice? Your adrenaline is crashing, and your hands are shaking. You’ll only make it worse.”

Ilya could only stare at him dumbly. He was starting to think that maybe he had passed out in the alley, and was dreaming this whole interaction up. “What-, what do I do then?”

“You can hold your shirt up,” Shane smiled, before winking at him, “and sit there and look pretty.”

Ilya was gaping, he knew, but there was nothing he could do about it. If he had been in a bit less pain, he is certain his cock would have twitched in his pants. Shane smirked, as if he knew this, but then focused on the wound, all traces of humour gone from his features.

He grabbed the tweezers, and kneeled between Ilya's legs, eye-level with the wound. "*Fuck*," Ilya couldn't help but mutter.

"Tell me if I'm doing something wrong, or if it hurts too much." Shane levelled him with a look that dared him to try and disobey, so Ilya nodded quickly. One of his hands went up to keep the shirt up, while the other balled into a fist at his side. It wasn't the first, and probably not the last time, that he had been shot, so he was prepared for the pain.

Shane was achingly gentle, and laser focused. Ilya would have expected him to get squeamish - he certainly was, the first time he came face to face with this amount of blood, but Shane's face betrayed nothing. He put a hand around the wound, and gently pushed the tweezers in, efficiently grabbing the bullet and pulling it out.

Ilya gasped, letting his head fall back against the cushions.

"Shh, Ilya, are you with me? I'm sorry."

"No, no, it's okay. That was very good." He almost laughed at the look of delight that crossed Shane's face at the praise, but managed to school his features. It would not be polite to laugh at the man who had just pulled a bullet out of him, and was still holding tweezers.

Ilya couldn't help but think that Shane looked… *hot.*

God, you're deranged.

Shane dropped the bullet on the table, and dried the blood off his own hands and around Ilya's abdomen with the towel he had brought from the bathroom. "So. Stitches?"

"Can you do stitches?" The wonders would never cease.

"Yes, Ilya, I can do stitches. I haven't done many, but I know the theory. We get to watch a lot of procedures as part of uni."

Ah. That explains the lack of aversion to blood.

"Many gunshot wounds in that repertoire?"

"Wow, 'repertoire', huh? Such eloquence from someone who's bleeding all over his couch."

"Do not mock me, Hollander, I am wounded." Ilya giggled, before his face contorted in pain, sobering Shane up.

"How about we make a deal? While I stitch you up, you will tell me why the fuck your brother would shoot you."

Ilya raised his eyebrow, but Shane wasn't looking at his face, instead busy preparing stuff from the first-aid kit. At Ilya's lack of response, he kept talking, "We might as well start somewhere, as I have a feeling this will just be the beginning. You brought me here to talk. So, talk."

Shane's tone left no room for argument, but Ilya found that he didn't particularly *want* to argue. He had every intention of telling Shane everything, the words were just lodged in his throat. He wasn't used to sharing this aspect of his life with anyone not already in it, and never anyone who mattered as much as Shane. He didn't want to fuck it up.

He cleared his throat, “Alexei and I-, it is complicated. I got the life he really wanted, leaving him stuck in Moscow. When I was younger, I used to send money back home. Anything I would earn that I did not need to survive, went back to Russia. But he just kept asking for more, while snorting it all. So, I stopped.” Ilya winced at the first feel of a needle, but tried to relax his body, to make it easier for Shane.

“And then?” Shane gently prompted, not looking up.

“He got angry. Threatened me, called me names. But I did not respond. So, he stopped.”

“Did you hope he had moved on?”

Ilya laughed, immediately regretting it, “Fuck no. He would never. But I thought it did not matter, as long as I was here, and he was in Moscow. But now-”

“Now he is here.” Shane said gently, before glancing up at Ilya, “He didn’t actually-, I mean-, ugh, I just wanted to say, that he didn’t actually flirt with me, at the club. He called me pretty, yes, and said he knew what you saw in me, but the rest-, I made it up. I wanted to make you jealous.”

Ilya felt a warmth course through him, and a pang of fondness for the man in front of him, “Shane, I am just happy he did not hurt you.”

“Would he? Hurt me?”

“Yes.” Ilya sighed, “To hurt me, he would do anything.”

“Then why didn’t he? He just left.”

Ilya squeezed his fist harder, “Because it was a warning. To me. That he knew who you were, and where to find you.” His voice trailed off into a whisper, as he was flooded by shame. “I am so fucking sorry Shane. I tried so hard to not drag you into this, but-”

“Drag me into what?” Shane interrupted, “because you and I both know that this is bigger than just your brother being a petty psychopath.”

Ilya closed his eyes, but opened them at the sound of scissors. Shane was done. The stitches looked neat, despite the blood surrounding them. “Thank you.”

Shane sat back on his haunches, putting the tools away and taking of his gloves, “Don’t thank me. Talk to me.”

Here goes nothing.

“I am in the *Bratva.* Russian mafia. I lead the operations in Canada, and most of the East Coast. I came here after my father died, years ago, and Alexei had to stay. He was responsible for Moscow.”

Shane just stared at him, “The mafia?”

“Yes.”

“Russian mafia?”

“*Da.*”

Shane's face took on a contemplating look, his tongue poking out to wet his lips, "That makes sense."

Ilya was shocked, "W- what? What do you mean '*that makes sense*'?!"

"Ilya, we are the same age. And yet you drive a new Ferrari every week, live in a mansion, and have people working for you that are afraid to look you in the eye. Plus, you did just waltz in here with a *gunshot wound,* in case you have forgotten." Shane shook his head at him, as if *Ilya* was the one currently acting weird, "I hadn't spent much time thinking about what you did for work, and only realised how weird that was once my friends started asking about you, and I didn't know much."

The last sentence is said with a sad tilt to it, that Ilya immediately wanted to erase. But Shane wasn't done, "I know that you being in the mafia is absolutely fucking crazy. And maybe, later, I will freak out about it. But right now? It doesn't mean anything, and it doesn't change anything."

"Shane, I wanted to tell you."

"I know you did. And I understand why you felt like you couldn't. But God, Ilya, if a part of me still doesn't fucking hate you. Not for being in the mafia. But for being a fucking *asshole."*

Ilya flinched, the words cutting him deep.

Shane took a shaky breath, before looking Ilya in the eye, "Did you know, that I still haven't been back home, since you were there?"

Ilya gasped softly, "What?"

"I couldn't fucking stand the idea, of going home and you not being there. After everything you did and said- or well, *didn't* say, that's how much power you had over me. And you didn't even *care.*" Shane's voice broke, and he could see tears forming in his eyes, that Shane angrily wiped away before standing up.

Ilya panicked, "Where are you going?"

"To get a new towel, we need to get the blood off you, and there's no way you're capable of showering tonight." With that, Shane left, and Ilya heard the click of the bathroom lock behind him. If Shane needed a minute, Ilya would give it to him. As many as he wanted, if it only meant that he would come back out.

He felt tears sting in his own eyes. How could he have been so stupid? What he and Shane had, had been intense and all-consuming, and that came with a responsibility. *Ilya's* responsibility, to make sure that Shane was okay. Instead, he had treated him like he meant nothing, ghosted him for a week, and then refused to tell him anything that could have made him feel better.

He let a tear fall, and wiped it away immediately when he heard the bathroom door open. This wasn't about him. He had hurt Shane, and he would do his best to *fix it.*

Shane took one look at him, and noticed the tears. "*Ilya*."

"Don't. Please. I have not earned your pity, or your care. You have already done more than I deserve."

Shane kneeled silently in front of him, bringing the warm and damp towel up to Ilya's abdomen, gently cleaning up the blood. He then moved on to his hands, which Ilya had not even noticed were flaky with dried blood. "Not yours, I assume?" Shane nodded towards the blood on his hands, as he gently cradled them while wiping it away.

"No."

"Are they dead?"

"Yes."

"Hmm."

When he was done, Shane got up and took the dirty towels and first-aid kit with him, leaving Ilya with just the bullet on his sofa table. He came back, and sat next to him on the couch, Ilya immediately missing the view of him on his knees. *Control yourself.*

Shane took a deep breath, and fiddled with a non-existent thread on the couch. Ilya braced himself for the question he knew was coming.

"Why?"

Ilya knew what he meant, but he was a coward, "Why what?"

"Why did you-," Shane ran a hand over his face, "What did I do wrong?"

Ilya's eyes snapped to his, "What? Shane, you have done nothing wrong."

Shane chuckled, but it sounded so sad, Ilya wished he had never heard it, "I get the mafia part, and the secrecy. But Boston-, you made me feel like I was fucking worthless, Ilya. You didn't have to tell me all about the *Bratva,* but it would have been fucking nice if you had talked at all. You barged into the hotel room, and-"

"And what?" Ilya felt cold dread wash over him. He had tried to recall that day many times in the past two weeks, but it was like it was behind a fog, completely impossible for him to recall. "Shane, what did I do?"

"You didn't *do* anything." Shane whispered, "You just-, well you just came onto me pretty strong, but I could see something was wrong, so I said *no,* and then you just-, you just didn't speak to me. You told me to pack my things, and drove us to the jet. Dodged every conversation I tried to have."

Ilya was going to cry. This gentle, gorgeous boy had given himself to Ilya fully, time and time again, trusting him to take care of him. And Ilya had taken all of it, and thrown it back in his face. He wanted to throw up, but he needed to at least try to set the record straight.

"I will never be able to apologise to you enough, Shane. Boston was-, I know it is no excuse, but I do not remember any of what you just said. I do not remember how we got back to Montreal. Fuck, I do not even remember how I got back to the hotel. I am so fucking sorry, that I ended up taking it out on you. You did not deserve it. You deserved for the trip to be nice getaway, where we got to know each other better. Like that first night."

Shane smiled at him gently, although his eyes were still sad. So, Ilya continued.

“The truth is, that I should not have brought you at all. It was me selfishly not wanting to be away from you, but bringing you into the middle of danger was so fucking stupid of me, and I am sorry.”

“Why was Boston dangerous?” Shane asked softly, as if unsure about whether he was allowed to interrupt.

“I-, we-, the *Bratva,* deals drugs. Many kinds. We ship them from Spain, Netherlands, sometimes England. Originally, they come from Russia. In Boston, there was a warehouse, with my product. Someone blew it up. Or well… *Alexei* blew it up.” Ilya laughed hollowly, “I had to go, and find out who had done it. Because maybe, the people in Boston had forgotten who was in charge.”

“That’s kinda hot.” Shane clasped a hand over his own mouth, his cheeks reddening quickly, “Ignore that. Shut up. Continue.”

Ilya smiled, feeling the lightest he had felt for *weeks.* Ever since he had last held Shane in his arms. He let Shane’s comment slide, even though it filled him with giddiness.

He would need it, as the rest of his story wasn’t particularly ‘giddy’.

“We got two leads in Boston, from one of the people working for me. Marleau and I had to split up, which already should have been a warning. He went first while I went over some paperwork with the informant. Suddenly, someone else barged in, and attacked me.”

Shane gasped, but Ilya continued to reassure him, “Nothing happened. They were two and I was alone, yes, but they were also overly enthusiastic idiots. They are dead now.”

Shane’s eyes darkened.

“I realised it was a trap, but by then, it was already too late. I rushed to the warehouse where Marley had gone, only to see it up in flames. He didn’t-,” Ilya paused, trying to stay calm, “He didn’t answer his phone, and the last location I had on him was *inside* the warehouse. I had everyone look for him, but no one could find him anywhere. I thought-, I really thought he had died, because of my stupidity.”

Shane reached over, and squeezed his hand, the gesture surprisingly gentle given the circumstances.

“The next thing I remember, we are getting of the jet in Montreal, and he was just *there.* On the tarmac. Looking a little like he got run over by a car, but fuck, he was *alive.* I had just spent hours mourning him, and suddenly he was standing in front of me.”

“Oh.” Shane gasped softly, a soft look of understanding crossing his features.

Ilya squeezed his hand back, and held the eye-contact, “I know we fought about Marleau. And I am truly sorry. But he is my second in command, and has taken a bullet for me more than once. He is a friend. A dear one, but a friend. But I could not begin to explain that to you, without telling you *why.* You did not deserve half-truths, and that day in your apartment, that was the best I could give.”

“How did he survive it?” Shane asked, not commenting on Ilya’s apology.

“He had caught on to the trap before me. He had gone alone, and there was only one man waiting for him. Marley got some bruised ribs, but quickly killed the man, and left his phone there so the

tracker would show him inside. He figured they were tracking him, and he was probably right. Then he went dark, and took a car to Montreal to avoid being spotted."

Shane hummed, obviously processing the story, but not letting go of Ilya's hand.

"Shane. I know this doesn't excuse anything. But you deserved the truth."

"Yeah Ilya, I did. Two weeks ago." Shane snapped, but Ilya saw him take a deep breath, calming himself. "I get it, and that's the worst part."

"What?" Ilya was confused.

"I get why you lied. I understand why things happened the way they did, that you were trying, in some weird way, to protect me. It doesn't really change anything, or erase how fucking heartbroken I was over you, but thank you for telling me."

Fuck.

It sounded final.

It sounded like a goodbye.

Ilya reached out a hand to caress Shane's cheek, and his heart soared when Shane nuzzled into it. "Shane," he whispered, not knowing what he even wanted to say, only knowing he needed to prolong this, so Shane didn't *leave.*

In the end, his heart spoke for him, "Fuck, I missed you so much."

Shane's eyes widened, and he looked at Ilya completely frozen. Ilya worried that he had said too much, that he had pushed his luck, but Shane's pupils suddenly dilated, and he leaned in towards Ilya.

Is he going to kiss me? God, please let him kiss me.

When their lips met, everything else faded away. Ilya couldn't feel any pain, just the gentle press of Shane's slightly chapped lips against his own.

The kiss started sweet, but quickly turned hungry, Ilya licking into Shane's mouth as if it was his last meal. Shane whimpered into the kiss, and Ilya was done for, reaching up to bury his hand into his hair, grabbing slightly to give himself access to Shane's neck.

"What do you want, Shane?" Ilya said, while nipping at his jaw. Shane moaned, but didn't answer, leaving Ilya guessing. He would like nothing more than to worship Shane tonight, showing him exactly how much he cared, but he knew that he couldn't risk pulling his stitches.

He let his breath ghost across Shane's ear, before whispering, "Do you want to get on your knees for me?"

"Do you want to get on your knees for me?"

Shane froze, reality crashing into him. God, he would love nothing more than to get on his knees, back between Ilya's legs, where he had been so comfortable earlier despite the morbid circumstances.

But he couldn't.

He leaned back putting torturous space between them. "Wait. No, no, *no*. I can't do this. My heart can't take this. I-"

"Shane, breathe."

"No. You can't just-, You said you didn't want me. *You* said that. And then you let me leave." Shane panted. "And now you show up here, tell me you're in the fucking mafia, and demand that I what? Forgive you and get on my knees because you *ask nicely*? I know you used to call me a slut when we fucked Rozanov, but I didn't think you actually *meant it.*"

Ilya froze.

Shane waited for a quip, a snarky comment, a joke about how Shane was, in fact, a slut, but nothing came. Ilya didn't move a muscle. The only sign of life were his eyes, where - to Shane's horror - tears were gathering.

"Ilya?"

"You-" Ilya whispered, and then caught himself, as if the words wouldn't make it past his throat. "I didn't say that."

"What?"

"I didn't say that. That- That I didn't want you." Ilya's shaking hand reached up to Shane's cheek, and for a second, Shane almost moved away. But the urge to feel Ilya's touch overwhelmed him, and he found himself leaning into it instead.

"I want you so much it's killing me." Ilya looked pained, like every word was being pulled out of him against his will. "But I-, I can't. The life I lead. The choices I make. It's-, It's not good. And you deserve good. You deserve *perfect,* and-"

"But I don't want perfect, I want *you!"* Shane spat out, suddenly overcome by anger.

"Want?" Ilya looked puzzled, like he always did when English eluded him.

"What?"

"You-, you said *"want"*. Not-" Ilya took a deep breath, his fingers still absentmindedly caressing Shane's cheek, "Not *"wanted",* in past tense."

This time, Shane froze. He tried to look away, but Ilya grabbed his chin, and forced him to face him. The coldness of the rings on his fingers momentarily frying his brain.

“I-” Shane stammered, not sure how to continue.

Ilya just looked at him assessingly, his eyes bloodshot and wide, looking frantically at Shane’s face.

Shane took a deep breath and tried to gather his thoughts. “I wanted you. When you walked into my bar for the first time, and ordered disgustingly expensive vodka, in your obscene shirt with jewellery worth more than my rent. I wanted you when you spoke to everyone else like they owed you an answer, but to me like I was precious, like-, like every time I spoke to you was a gift. I wanted you when you showed me-, when you took your time with me, even though we had just met, and you showed me how amazing sex could feel. I wanted *you* even when it didn’t feel like you wanted *me,* and when you let me leave-, even when you let me go, and it fucking killed me, I wanted you. I wanted you earlier tonight when you showed up at the door battered and bruised, talking about the fucking mafia, drugs, guns and-, and I-, and even now, when I should hate you, be afraid, push you away, and never speak to you again-, even now I want you.”

During his rant, Ilya’s grip on his chin had loosened, and eventually, his hand had dropped in tact with Shane gesticulating more vividly. When he stopped, and realised the comforting weight of Ilya’s grip was gone, he almost wanted to ask him to put it back. *Control yourself, Shane.*

Instead, he took a deep breath, and waited. Letting Ilya digest it in his own time. He had said, what he wanted to say. If Ilya still didn’t-, still didn’t want him, then Shane would let it go. It would kill him, but he couldn’t force Ilya to be with him.

“Shane-” Ilya cut himself off, squeezing his eyes shut before looking back up and meeting Shane’s eyes. “*Sweetheart*.”

Shane’s breath hitched.

Suddenly, Ilya was moving, getting up from the couch, ignoring Shane’s protest that he’d tear his stitches. To Shane’s amazement, Ilya got down on his knees before him.

“Shane. I beg you. Please just-, just give me one more chance. One more chance to show you how much you mean to me, because it really is *so much.* No more secrets, no more lies. Just-, just *us.*”

The tears in his eyes were dismantling all of Shane’s defences, and he wanted nothing more than to give in.

So, he did.

“Yeah, baby, okay.” The pet name slipped out involuntarily, but judging by the way Ilya’s breath caught and his pupils dilated, he didn’t mind. “But you have to do one thing for me, okay? Just one thing.”

“Whatever you want Shane, *solnyshko,* please.”

Shane felt himself blush at the pet name. God, he had missed it so much. He looked down at Ilya, so eager at his feet, waiting for Shane to tell him what to do. *This must be how Ilya feels all the time.*

He schooled his features into a stern look, “Whatever I want? Let me tell you what I want.” He paused for dramatic effect, trying not to laugh, “I want you to *get up from your fucking knees Ilya Rozanov, and lay back so you don’t pull the fucking stitches.* I am not sewing you back together a second time.*”*

Ilya moved immediately, Shane assisting him as to minimise the pull on his abs. He was just about to lay down on the couch, when Shane stopped him with a hand on his thigh.

Fuck, he could really get used to Ilya towering over him.

“You’d be more comfortable in bed, don’t you think?”

Ilya blushed, a hand finding its way into Shane’s hair, “*Da, solnyshko.*”

They made their way into the bedroom, Shane helping Ilya strip out of his clothes and get under the covers, before immediately joining him.

They lay there, face to face, the sunrise slowly making itself known on the horizon, bathing the room in an orange light. Shane thought to himself, that Ilya looked stunning, and leaned in to kiss him. Ilya responded immediately, moaning into the kiss.

Shane ran one hand over Ilya’s pecs, fiddling with the nipple piercing that he had missed dearly. Ilya whined, a mix of pleasure and pain that had Shane slightly on alert, pulling his hand back “Ah, no strenuous activities for you, Mr. Rozanov. You are not allowed to clench your abs like that.”

“But you are so pretty, Shane, and I can feel how hard you are against my hip. Such a shame, that I cannot help you.”

Shane smiled a wicked smile, before getting up to his knees at Ilya’s side, “Oh but you can help, baby.”

Ilya gulped, tracing at Shane’s thigh with his fingertips. “What can I do?”

“The same thing you were so good at doing earlier.” Shane grabbed his own cock in his hand, and started teasing the tip, spreading his precome around, “You just sit there and look pretty.”

“*Fuck,* Shane.” Ilya whined, eyes firmly fixed on where Shane was playing with himself. Shane wanted to draw it out, put on a show. But he had been on edge for hours, the image of *mafia boss Ilya Rozanov* really doing it for him, and he could already feel that he wouldn’t last.

He stroked himself slowly at first, but his pace quickened when he caught Ilya’s eye, and saw the desire burning there. His eyes raked over Ilya’s jaw, the split lip that he wanted to fucking *bite,* and the nipple piercing he needed in his mouth like *yesterday.*

A few more strokes, and he was coming all over Ilya’s chest, painting him white with his come. He looked *stunning.* Ilya himself was panting deeply, looking between his own chest and Shane, like he couldn’t quite believe what had just happened.

“I will clean you up, give me one second.”

“Fuck, Shane, that was so hot. There should be wipes in the bedside table.”

“Who said anything about wipes?” Shane whispered, before leaning down and licking his own come off of Ilya.

“Oh fuck, fuck, fuck, *fuck.* You cannot do this to me, fuck.”

Shane paused, and leaned up while licking his lips, making sure the come was visible on his tongue, “You need to lay still, and relax. You are not allowed to come today.”

“*Solnyshko,* I am trying. But you are so sexy, I cannot help it.”

Shane leaned back down and gathered the rest of his come into his mouth, before coming up and kissing Ilya, letting him taste it. “Try harder, baby,” Shane cooed, before dropping down next to him, giggling softly to himself.

Ilya was taking deep breaths, clearly trying to calm himself down. Eventually, he looked over at Shane with a look of pure adoration on his face. “You, Shane Hollander, are a menace. I am never letting you go.”

Shane gasped, feeling the whirlwind of the day’s emotions catching up to him. “Never?”

“Never, *malysh.* Now let’s sleep. We will talk more tomorrow.” He glanced at the sunrays on the ceiling. “Or well, later today.”

Shane giggled, before snuggling into Ilya. The last thing he thought, was that he had never felt more comfortable.

Chapter End Notes

Shane: "Is it deep?"

Ilya's inner monologue: "He's talking about the bullet, don't you DARE make a sex joke"

Hope that wasn't horrible <33333

Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

> “You, Shane Hollander, are not needy. You are perfect. There is nothing I enjoy more, then when you let yourself just *feel*. When you are not overthinking in that gorgeous little head of yours.” Shane leaned in to place a gentle kiss in the corner of Shane’s mouth before continuing, “I do not want anyone else. Even if you lined up all of the hottest people in the world, I would not care, because I am absolutely obsessed with you.” That was an understatement, Ilya thought. There were so many things he wanted to say, feelings that were weaving their way around his heart, but now was not the time.

Chapter Notes

> Hehe

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Ilya woke up after what felt like five minutes, but in reality had probably been a couple of hours. His abdomen hurt, and he cursed himself for not taking any painkillers before going to bed. But he had been… distracted. Glancing to the side, he caught side of a mop of dark hair, Shane's face snuggled into his shoulder. His whole body was turned towards Ilya, with one hand laying right next to his hip, fingertips brushing against it.

Almost as if he had reached for him in his sleep, but hadn't wanted to disturb him. A wave of fondness coursed through Ilya, not for the first time since last night.

This was no longer just him being 'whipped'. This was not a crush.

He was *in love*.

And that was absolutely fucking terrifying.

He knew he always felt everything so fiercely, Alexei's words from last night ringing annoyingly in his head, '*Always so driven by feelings*, *Ilya. It is your biggest weakness, and it will be your downfall.'*

He didn't want to scare Shane away, this thing between them so tender and careful, so volatile, because of him. He would do his best to be *steady,* to be the man that Shane deserved. Or at least… try.

He got pulled out of his head by a soft snore, followed by Shane's body tensing and his eyes flickering open. Their eyes met, and Ilya was not sure what kind of look he had on his face, but Shane smiled at him softly, licking his lips, "Hi."

"Good morning, *solnyshko.*"

Shane's smile widened, and he lifted a hand to rest against Ilya's chest, "What does that mean?"

"What?"

"The word. In Russian? You have called me that before, but I don't know what it means. It thought it was something… sex-related, at first, but-"

"But what?" Ilya's heart beat faster, and he wondered if Shane could feel it.

"But you say it too… *softly.* So I think you are actually being a sap, but hiding it." Shane's eyes were sparkling with mirth. Fuck, Ilya was so fucking in love with this boy.

"It means… it means sunshine." He whispered, burying his face into Shane's hair, desperately avoiding his eyes, "Because you light up every room. And not just because you are gorgeous, which you are, yes? But because you are so *sweet*. I do not deserve you."

Shane didn't say anything at first, but eventually Ilya felt a gentle hand under his chin, guiding him up. He wanted to resist, every cell in his body fighting against showing vulnerability, but he could never say no to Shane. The sight that greeted him took his breath away. Shane was crying.

And not just tears gathering on his lashes, but tear tracks down his cheeks. He looked beautiful.

"What-, Shane?"

“I’m sorry,” Shane sniffled, smiling though his tears, “I just-, *fuck*, I do not know what to say. You are fucking amazing, Ilya. And I do not know what *I* did to deserve *you*. I didn’t-, I didn’t think I’d get to have you. I know I am not-” he trailed off, and Ilya’s brain was having a hard time following why on earth Shane made it sound as if he didn’t deserve Ilya.

“You are not what?”

Shane took a deep breath, furrowing his brows in concentration, “Ilya, you are so hot. And you are surrounded by amazing people, and you could literally have *anyone* you wanted. I know that you’re a fucking mafia boss, but you are so *gentle,* and sweet, and caring. You deserve the world. I fear that-” he momentarily trailed off, before continuing, “I fear that one day, once the novelty of it wears off, you’ll wake up and realise that I’m really just… boring. And that you could be having hot sex with other people, who are less complicated. Less *needy*.”

Ilya’s heart *broke*, and he did not hesitate to slowly roll them over, until he was leaning over Shane, bracing on his forearms, mindful of not pulling his stomach, “Shane. I need you to listen to me, *da*? Actually listen to me.”

“Ilya, you’ll tear your fucking stitches!”

“Shane, I am fine like this, yes? It does not hurt. What hurts right now, is you saying these things about yourself, that are not fucking true, so lay back and *listen to me*.”

Shane nodded reluctantly, eyes constantly flickering to Ilya’s stomach, like he didn’t quite believe him.

“You, Shane Hollander, are not *needy.* You are perfect. There is nothing I enjoy more, then when you let yourself just *feel.* When you are not overthinking in that gorgeous little head of yours.” Shane leaned in to place a gentle kiss in the corner of Shane’s mouth before continuing, “I do not want anyone else. Even if you lined up all of the hottest people in the world, I would not care, because I am absolutely *obsessed* with you.” That was an understatement, Ilya thought. There were so many things he wanted to say, feelings that were weaving their way around his heart, but now was not the time.

A new tear fell down Shane’s cheek, but this time he didn’t reach up to cover it up. He just looked at Ilya, with a look of such adoration it took Ilya’s breath away. But there was one more thing, that he needed to say. “Yesterday, you said you did not expect me to actually *mean* that you were a slut. Do not think I did not hear that.” Shane immediately blushed, and tried to look away, “Shane. You have to know, that when I said that, I meant it in the best way, *yes*? Not as an-, what is the word, not as an *insult*. I would never insult how good you are for me. How floaty you get. Because I love y-*it.”*

Good job, Rozanov.

Shane looked up, clearly too overwhelmed by emotions to have noticed his slip-up. “I know it was a-, a heat of the moment thing, Ilya. But I am genuinely so fucking easy for you, it’s embarrassing.”

“Oh, and you think this is a problem? Oh no, a gorgeous man wants me to fuck him all the time, how will I survive?”

“*Ilya.”*

"Shane."

The tension broke, and they both giggled, before meeting for a languid and soft kiss. Ilya leaned back to look at him, and couldn't believe he was lucky enough to have been blessed with Shane Hollander. Shane, unhappy about the distance, pushed a hand into his hair and pulled him back down, crashing their mouths together with more force.

Mine, Ilya's brain supplied, and he smiled into the kiss, before pulling back, his cock twitching at the sight of Shane chasing his mouth. He lifted one hand and ran a finger over Shane's lips, before pushing two inside his mouth.

Shane whined, and immediately started sucking on them, running his tongue around them in a way that went straight to Ilya's cock, "So good, *malysh.* So *greedy."* He pulled his fingers out, and slowly got up from the bed, to Shane's dismay.

"Shh, I'll be right back sweetheart, I have something for you."

Shane furrowed his brows, "What? For me?"

"Yes." Ilya walked over to the dresser on the other side of the room, fingers trembling. He couldn't figure out if this was a good or *terrible* idea, but he was committed now. Committed to trying to prove to Shane, that he was not about to do this halfway. He reached into one of the drawers, and pulled out a little jewellery bag, taking it with him back to the bed, where Shane had sat up and was looking at him quizzically.

Ilya wordlessly passed him the little bag, suddenly feeling very shy. Shane took it gently, examining the bag before loosening the binding, and looking into it, letting out a small gasp, "What is this?"

Ilya wiped his hands on his thighs, reaching up to scratch the back of his head, "A bracelet."

"I can see that it's a fucking bracelet Ilya, why are you giving it to me?" Shane took the bracelet out, cradling it gently in the palm of his hand. It was a quite simple-looking silver chain, that glinted in the sunlight. At the clasp, two small blue jewels rested, elevating the bracelet in a way that made one unable to *not* look at it. Ilya had walked past a jewellery store the day before Boston, and stopped in his tracks when he spotted the bracelet in the window, and he couldn't help but buy it.

"I bought it… for you."

Shane looked up at him, eyes widening before looking back at the bracelet, "What? When? You did not know I would come here yesterday?"

"The day before Boston," Ilya blushed. "It reminded me of you. Delicate and pretty, but… but stronger than it looks," he finished quietly. "Like it might snap if you're careless, but it won't. Not easily."

Shane stilled, the sharp edge in his expression softening into something more uncertain. He ran a finger over the bracelet, the blue stones catching the light again, less like decoration now, and more like *intention.* "You think that about me?" he whispered wetly.

“I *know* that about you. And I-”Ilya stilled, reaching over to grasp Shane’s hand in his, “I wanted to give you something that showed that I see it. See *you.* And you are perfect.”

“The stones on it match your eyes.” Shane sniffled, and Ilya’s heart skipped a beat.

“I did not-, It is not why I bought it.” He sounded flustered even to his own ears, “but it is fitting, no?”

“Yeah,” Shane smiled. “Put it on me?”

“Of course, *solnyshko*.” Ilya reached over, and grabbed the clasp in his hands, closing it around Shane’s wrist and running his finger along it before pulling back. He didn’t miss the way Shane’s breath caught. When he looked up at him, his own breath hitched at the look on his face. His eyes were glossy, partially from the tears, but partially from… *pleasure*. He looked like he did when Ilya had edged him in Boston, completely at Ilya’s mercy.

It was an intoxicating feeling, that Ilya couldn’t get enough of.

“Shane?” He whispered, grabbing his hand and running his thumb over the bracelet. Shane only let out a whimper, before he fell slightly forward, nuzzling his face into the crook of Ilya’s neck. “Shane, sweetheart, how do you feel?”

Shane drew in a couple of breaths against Ilya’s neck, before he whispered, “Yours.”

“What?”

“I feel… I feel *yours.”*

Fuck, Ilya was going to die. “Oh, you are so far down already, aren’t you sweetheart? So good for me.”

“Please, Ilya.”

“Whatever you want, *malysh.* You’re all mine, *da?*”

“*Da.”* Shane repeated, and Ilya almost fainted at the sound of even such a simple word in his mother-tongue on Shane’s lips.

He leaned in and grabbed Shane’s jaw, peppering small kisses alongside it, “*Bohze moy,* you will be the death of me… *ya-,”* Ilya’s breath caught in his throat, “*Ya tebya lyublyu.”* he whispered, needing the words off his chest, even if it was unfair. Even if Shane deserved to hear them, in a language he understood.

He reached a hand underneath the blanket that had been covering Shane from the waist down, and slipped his hand into his underwear. “Fuck, you are already leaking for me.”

Shane just whined into his neck, thrusting his hips slightly into his hand, chasing friction. It was an awkward angle, with both of them sitting on the bed, but there was no way in hell that Ilya would be moving Shane right now. So, he kept stroking him teasingly, never quite applying enough pressure to make him come, but enough to keep him dancing on the edge of pleasure and desperation, the whines in his ear the best sounds he had ever heard.

“So gorgeous, so sexy. And all *mine.”*

Just as Ilya was about to lay Shane down on the bed, and put him out of his misery, he felt Shane grab his bicep in a bruising grip, as his whole body shook.

Surely not.

No way.

But the wetness on his hand was unmistakable, and the shiver that chased down Ilya's spine at the realisation made him gasp. *Fuck,* Shane had just come. From barely anything. From a few teasing strokes, and Ilya calling him *his.*

Ilya would never recover from this.

He guided Shane to lay on his back, and gently lowered himself next to him, pulling the blanket over them. Shane was looking at him, but his eyes were barely focused, like he was floating somewhere between reality and something softer, something untethered, where the edges of everything blurred and only Ilya stayed sharp.

Ilya reached over to the bedside table next to him, and grabbed a couple of wipes to clean his hand. He had a feeling Shane would *not* appreciate Ilya drying his come on the sheets. Meanwhile, Shane's eyes had slipped close.

"Hey," Ilya murmured, brushing his thumb lightly along his cheek, trying to ground him in the moment. "Come back to me, *solnyshko*."

Slowly, with gentle touches and coaxing words, Shane's eyes regained their focus. Ilya kept his own movements and words soft, not wanting to startle this gentle quiet. But Shane did it for him, suddenly widening his eyes, his breathing shaky, looking frantically at Ilya and his surrounding, as if he couldn't quite pinpoint where he was. "What-, what just happened?"

"You got a bit floaty, *sweetheart*. Was very hot."

Shane's face turned beet red, "Fuck, that's so embarrassing, I'm so sorry."

"No." Ilya's voice was firm but low, stopping Shane in what was undoubtedly a building panic attack. "You were so good. And it felt good, yes?"

"Yes." Shane admitted, albeit reluctantly. "But-"

"No buts." Ilya punctuated this by smacking one of Shane's butt cheeks, "Well, not beside this one."

"You got me a really nice present. And I did not even thank you." Shane whined petulantly.

Ilya couldn't help but bark a laugh in Shane's face, earning him a hard look. "Shane. Sweetheart. *Solnyshko.* If you think, that you going into subspace because of me putting a bracelet on you, was not the absolute best 'thank you' I could have ever gotten, then you are being very silly."

Shane blushed, swatting lightly at Ilya's chest, "Do not call it… *that."*

"Oh? What do you want me to call it then?"

"Nothing. I don't want you to call it anything. It's… *weird*."

“Do you think it is weird that I enjoy pushing you around, and making you do what I want? That I get off on it?” Ilya asked, enjoying how Shane somehow managed to get even redder in the face.

“No, obviously not, that’s just what you like, and it’s really fucking hot.”

Ilya said nothing, just raised an eyebrow at Shane, and waited for his brain to catch up. When it did, Shane momentarily squeezed his eyes shut, before looking away, “Oh.”

“Yes, ‘Oh’. You enjoying sex with me, and liking a gift i bought for you, is not hardship for me, Hollander. But if I ever do something that you do not like, or if the feeling gets… too much. You know your safeword.”

“Yes, I do.”

Ilya hummed, and kissed Shane again, just because he *could.*

“Oh, but you did not-” Shane trailed off, glancing down at Ilya’s crotch. God help him to survive this sex demon, that couldn’t even say the word “come” out loud.

“Oh sweetheart, do not worry about me. Was very hot, watching you come so easily for me. So hot, that I did not even need to touch myself.”

Shane’s eyes widened at the implication, “You-, you’ve already?”

“Yes, Shane. I already came. In my pants, like a teenager. Because you were so fucking hot.”

Shane let out a whine, before slowly rising to his knees, and pulling the blanket off Ilya. He gently traced the skin around the stitches, before hooking his thumbs into his underwear, pulling it down to expose Ilya’s soft cock, covered in its own spend.

“Shane” Ilya said warningly, not quite knowing where this would go. “What’s going on in that freaky head of yours?”

Shane’s eyes snapped up to his momentarily, but fell down to his cock again before long. “Well-,” he paused, licking his lips, “The least I can do is help you clean up, right?”

And then he leaned down, and started licking Ilya clean, devouring him as if he was a last meal. And Ilya could do nothing but hang along for the ride, cursing softly under his breath. His cock twitched valiantly, and Ilya shared the sentiment, “Fuck, fuck, fuck, Shane, you are so deranged, God I fucking love it. My little freak, holy shit.”

Shane just hummed, and didn’t stop before every drop of Ilya’s come was gone. He leaned back on his haunches, smiling wickedly. *He will kill me one day,* Ilya thought. *But what a way to go.*

Eventually, they made it out of the bedroom, Ilya going straight for painkillers while Shane took a shower. He then helped Ilya into one, which was a very awkward and ego-bruising experience, as Ilya couldn't even reach his arms up to wash his hair properly. But that meant Shane had to do it for him and that had been surprisingly… soft, in a way that Ilya wasn't used to.

They got dressed, Shane borrowing some of Ilya's clothes, as he had come here straight from work the night before. They were sitting at the kitchen island, sipping coffee, when Shane spoke up, "What are your plans today? Rest, I hope?"

Ilya sighed, "God, I wish. But after last night, the *Bratva* needs to regroup. I have to go and see my men, and make sure that everyone is alright. And then try to figure out how the fuck we were ambushed like that."

Shane hummed, sipping his coffee. "I-" he paused, voice slightly tense, which immediately had Ilya on alert. *'I' what? I don't want you? I'm gonna leave? I never want to see you again?*

"I'm working tonight." *Great Ilya, at least you didn't overthink it, or anything.*

Shane looked unsure, so Ilya let him collect his thoughts.

"If I go to work like normal. Can I like… have your number, in case Alexei shows up again?" Shane fiddled with the cup, "Because I guess he knows where I work, and I'm not particularly scared or anything, but if you'll be looking for him, then maybe I could tell you if he came to *Désir*, but it's also totally fine if you don't-, like, need my help or anything, it was just a thought."

Ilya let him rant, the smile on his face growing bigger with every fumbled word, "Shane."

Shane looked up at him, but didn't say anything, looking a bit like a deer caught in headlights, to Ilya's great amusement.

"Shane Hollander, if you wanted my number, you could have just asked." He said in the sultriest tone he could muster, stalking towards Shane, who was now blushing furiously.

"No-, I mean-, that's not *why*-"

"Oh, so you do not want my number?" Ilya pouted, "And here I thought we really were building something special."

"Ilya." Shane laughed exasperatedly, rolling his eyes at Ilya's antics, before fishing his phone out of his pocket and handing it to Ilya, "Come on then."

Ilya took it, and put his number in, never losing his cocky smile. He gave Shane his phone back and reached the hand up behind his neck, grabbing him softly, Shane's eyes fluttering. "But, just so that we are clear. If you think, that after yesterday, I would let you go to work without protection, then you are very, *very* wrong."

Shane's eyes snapped open, a look of surprise crossing his face. "What?"

"Shane. You will, of course, have people there to look out for you. Normally, I would just go with you by myself, but today I might not be much of a defence. So, I'll bring Marley along."

"Marleau, huh?" Shane sighed, his face betraying his mood, even while he fights for nonchalance.

“Yes, sweetheart. I will bring Marley, because I trust him the most, and I think you would actually like him.”

Shane rolled his eyes. “I doubt it. But sure, we have to meet again eventually.”

“Oh, you’re meeting again before tonight. Get dressed, we’re leaving in ten minutes.”

“What? Where are we going?” Shane looked caught off guard, and Ilya forced himself to slow down, and made a mental note to make an effort to include Shane in the planning, going forward. He was so used to planning in his head, and barking out orders. But Shane liked structure, control and *planned* spontaneity.

“Sorry. I told you I had to go to the office, to talk to everyone. I figured you might want to join me? Meet everyone properly?” Then suddenly, he realised what exactly he was asking, and immediately backtracked, “You do not have to. I know that *knowing* about the *Bratva* is not the same as *wanting* to know about it. You obviously do not have to come. Forget I asked.”

He moved to get away, but Shane caught his wrist gently, and Ilya halted. Shane hadn’t even pulled, or grabbed him particularly hard, but if there was any part of Shane that wanted Ilya to stay, he would.

“Ilya. I know this isn’t… normal. And that technically, I should be more wary, or even afraid. Maybe I should tell you that I don’t want anything to do with it. But I-, I want to know *you.* And the mafia, it’s a part of your life in such a non-negotiable way, that it cannot be separated. So, if you want to bring me along, then I’m going.”

He made it sound so fucking simple, and Ilya was getting emotional. He never had anyone, who he could share his whole life with. He’d had flings and open relationships where he kept lying about his job. Most people hadn’t cared enough to ask actual questions, as long as he put his card out to pay for everything. Not for the first time, it hit him how different Shane was. How… genuine, in everything he did. So naturally *good* and *nice*, the very opposite of everything Ilya had grown used to in his life.

And the part of him that craved it, that hadn’t felt truly… cared for, since his mother had-

That part of him couldn’t get enough.

“Okay,” he said instead, trying to downplay how much he wanted Shane to join him, but his face must have betrayed him, because Shane looked at him knowingly, before leaning in and placing a kiss on his cheek.

“Okay.” He repeated after him, releasing his wrist, “Let me finish my coffee, and then we can go.”

Shane nonchalance about coming to the office faded slightly when they stepped out of the car outside the building. Not enough for him to regret telling Ilya 'Yes', but enough that he had to take a couple of deep breaths to steady himself.

He was stuck between wanting to make a good first impression, and afraid of making a *too good* one. These men were Ilya's family, but they were also part of the fucking mafia. And Shane was just… *Shane.* A mediocre uni student who somehow stumbled his way into this.

A part of him was convinced, that they would laugh him out of the building.

But Ilya just grabbed his hand, and led him through the foyer and into the elevator. The office at the top floor was spacious, and screamed luxury. But for anyone stumbling in, it didn't reveal its true purpose. Shane kept glancing around, expecting… well, he didn't know what he was expecting. Guns? Blood? Torture chambers?

He almost laughed out loud, a small smile escaping him instead, making Ilya arch his brow at him, but Shane just waved him off. He'd tell him later.

He had a feeling Ilya would find it funny too.

They entered a meeting room full of people, that immediately quieted down. Shane loosened his grip on Ilya's hand, expecting him to let go, just like he had in Boston. But Ilya only tightened his hold, letting his thumb run over the clasp of Shane's bracelet, closing the door behind them with his other hand. They stood there in silence, Shane hesitantly letting his eyes roam over everyone. He recognised Sergei, the guy who had driven him home from the tarmac after Boston, but everyone else were all either looking at Ilya, or at the floor. The only one who was looking at *him*, was Marleau, and he smiled at Shane when their eyes caught.

Shane found himself struggling between the polite urge to smile back, and rolling his eyes.

He ended up doing neither, because Ilya spoke up. "This is Shane. He is under our protection. If anyone has an issue, no you do not."

A guy in the far corner looked at him, and mumbled something in Russian, Shane immediately looking at Ilya for a translation, but Ilya's hard gaze was fixed on the man. "Tell me, Ivan, does Shane look Russian to you?"

The guy paled slightly, before shaking his head. "No, boss."

"Then why don't you make jokes about him, in a language he understands? That way he can also hear how bad they are. Would be embarrassing for you, if he ended up thinking that you were funny."

"I did not mean any offence, Sir. Just a joke about how-" Ivan stopped, glancing at Shane, "How you have never brought anyone home that looked like such a… nice boy."

Shane couldn't help but snicker, "Devastating accusation. I'll try to recover." He then glanced around the room, something a little reckless sparking to life, "Do you all take turns, or was that your best shot? Because you're kind of underselling the whole 'terrifying criminal organisation' thing."

Next to him, Ilya barked a laugh, which was echoed around the room, the loudest applause coming from Marleau. Ivan's eyes sparked with humour, and Shane breathed an internal sigh of relief. He had been afraid of pushing too much, or crossing some invisible line that would embarrass Ilya. But when he looked at the man next to him, he was looking at him with a look of almost… pride.

"Personally, I think this is unfair." Marleau yelled from his spot across the room, "Ya'll never give a shit about me not understanding when you make fun of me in Russian."

Shane couldn't help but smile, "Oh, so it's a pattern? Very inclusive."

"Finally, someone with sense," Marleau shot back.

"Low bar," Shane said lightly, earning another ripple of laughter. Marleau nodded his head at him, and Shane found himself returning the gesture. Marleau had made this meeting much easier for him, and he was not too petty to appreciate it.

Sergei kept looking assessingly at Ilya, before saying in broken English, "You are hurt. Where?"

"I am fine." Everyone's attention snapped to the two men.

"*Rozanov."*

Ilya sighed, glancing at Shane, "I was… shot."

Immediately, the room erupted into rapid Russian, before Ilya lifted a hand, silencing it instantly.

Marleau broke the silence, "You did not come to see a medic yesterday. How are you standing?"

"Shane patched me up." Ilya said calmly, in a tone that left no room for questioning. "And he did it well."

Someone muttered something in Russian, quieter this time. Less mocking, more impressed. Shane caught none of it, but he felt the shift anyway.

"What?" he asked under his breath, glancing at Ilya.

Ilya's mouth curved faintly. "They are deciding you are useful."

Shane blinked. "Great. That's comforting."

The rest of the meeting passed uneventfully. Eventually, Shane sat down in the corner next to Marleau, and let the guys debrief in the language they were used to.

"How does it work, with you not speaking Russian?" He asked Marleau, trying to start a low conversation without disturbing the meeting.

Marleau smiled conspiratorially, leaning in to whisper in his ear, "That's the trick with these meetings. If it's something I *need* to know, they will loop me in. But if they're just repeating information, or running over what happened last night - things I already know, then I get to zone out in blissful ignorance. Sometimes I even nap, but that is risky if Roz is in a mood. He likes attention too much to be ignored."

Shane almost laughed, holding a hand over his mouth to contain it. He looked up at Ilya, sitting at the head of the table, listening to his men talking, sometimes interjecting with calm words, as if steering the direction of the conversation. He radiated such authority, that Shane couldn't help the way he found himself blushing and squirming in his seat. As if drawn in, Ilya's eyes flickered to him, and the cold mask slipped slightly, his eyes sparkling with joy. He winked at Shane, and returned his focus to the conversation.

"You're good for him." Marleau's voice snapped him back to reality. "He's always been very… serious. He lets loose occasionally, but sometimes he gets so caught up in the *Bratva,* that he forgets to *live."*

"Is that why he has you? To help him remember?"

Marleau looked at him assessingly, before shaking his head. "No. I've been trying to help him find that person, though. I did not expect it to be this shy bartender, but he really seems to work. *They* really seem to work."

Shane smiled and ducked his head. "I'm sorry."

"What on earth are you sorry for?" Marleau looked genuinely puzzled.

"For not liking you at first." Shane admitted, running a hand over his face in embarrassment.

Marleau laughed loudly, which earned him some disapproving rolls of eyes from the other men in the room, even Ilya shooting them a quizzical look. But Marleau just waved them off, before turning his attention back to Shane, grinning wide. "I love that. And honestly, I get it, but God, you have absolutely nothing to worry about. I don't do bad sequels."

Shane glanced at him. "That sounds like you're saying sleeping with him was a mistake."

Marleau's eyes flicked to him, quick and sharp, then softened into something more playful. "Careful. I did not say that."

"Mm," Shane hummed. "But you didn't *not* say it."

Marleau smiled like he was enjoying this too much. "You are doing that thing where you pretend you are not doing that thing."

Shane blinked. "What thing?"

"The thing, where you are deciding if you are allowed to be bothered," Marleau said, voice light. "It is quite transparent."

"I'm not bothered," Shane replied immediately.

"Of course not," Marleau agreed, far too quickly.

Shane exhaled through his nose. "You're really enjoying this."

"I am," Marleau admitted without hesitation. "It is rare, that I get to watch someone mentally lose a fight, I am not even participating in."

"I'm not losing anything."

“Mm,” Marleau said again, softer this time, but still teasing. “You are just… evaluating the competition.”

“I’m not competing,” Shane said flatly.

“That is good,” Marleau replied. “Because you would be terrible at it.”

Shane stared at him. Marleau held his gaze, utterly unbothered. Then added, with a faint smile: “You would overthink the rules.”

That finally got Shane, making him bark a real laugh this time. “*Wow*. Okay.”

Marleau leaned back, pleased with himself. “See? Already improving. No jealousy, only mild offence.”

“I’m not offended,” Shane muttered, but there was less edge in it now.

“Good,” Marleau said warmly.

Shane exhaled again, shoulders easing a fraction. “Okay. So just to be clear,” he said, tone turning lighter again, but still threaded with something careful, “You’re not… interested anymore.”

There it was, the real question, that Shane had both been dying to ask, and simultaneously didn’t want to hear the answer to.

Marleau didn’t miss it, but he didn’t even hesitate, just gave a small shrug. “Fuck no, that is over and done. Besides, you look like you would take that personally, and I like my life.”

Shane rolled his eyes, but the tension in his shoulders had loosened, just slightly. “I’m not jealous,” he said, more to himself than Marleau.

“Of course not,” Marleau nodded solemnly anyway. “You are just… assessing my intentions.”

Shane snorted. “Exactly.”

“And I am passing,” Marleau added.

Shane looked at him for a second, then finally let out a disbelieving laugh under his breath. “Yeah. You’re passing.”

Marleau’s smile softened a fraction, like that was all he’d been aiming for.

Eventually, Shane had to go to work, and him, Ilya and Marleau left the office, and took a car to *Désir*. They walked in together, which immediately made Shane realise, that there was a major part

of this equation, that he had forgotten about.

Hayden.

Hayden, who came out of the staff room, already yapping at Shane about prep, before looking up and freezing in his tracks. “Oh. Hi. Who did you bring along, Shane?”

Shane froze, realising that there was no way this conversation would go particularly well. “Ah, hey Hayd. This is Marleau,” he pointed to his right, not missing the way Ilya shot him a look at not being introduced first, “And this is-, this is Ilya.”

“Ilya?”

“Yes.”

“*Ilya* Ilya.”

“Yes.”

Hayden looked from Shane, to Ilya, to Marleau, before turning to speak directly to Ilya. “And what the fuck do you think you’re doing here?”

Ilya blanched, looking confusedly from Shane to Hayden, trying to read the tension, but how could he, when Shane hadn’t looped him in properly. When he had *forgotten* about Hayden, and about the fact that Hayden very much knew about Ilya. And not only good things.

“I-, I am just coming with Shane to work. To entertain.”

“Oh, I believe you have *entertained* quite enough.”

“Hayden.” Shane’s voice cut through. “That’s enough. I invited him. He’s here because I want him to be.”

Hayden scoffed, rolling his eyes at him, “Oh so now he suddenly does what you want? For how long, before he leaves again?”

Shane felt Ilya tense next to him, and reached down to clasp their hands together. He was about to interject, and defend Ilya, but he spoke up before he could. “I am not leaving.”

“Yeah, sorry if I don’t believe you, pal.”

“Luckily for both of us, you are not the one who has to believe me,” Ilya said coldly, before letting go of Shane’s hand, to guide him and Marleau into a booth. Before they go, Ilya leaned in and placed a kiss on Shane’s cheek, making the skin there tingle for *more*.

The look on his face must have been absolutely *smitten,* because Hayden scoffed at him, and once Ilya and Marleau were out of reach, said, “You have no backbone man. He hurt you so badly.”

“I know.” Shane sighed. “But-, but we talked, and I’ve decided to give it another chance. Maybe that makes me stupid, or naïve, or *both*. But fuck, Hayd, I have to try. He’s-, he’s perfect.”

Hayden sighed, running a hand trough his hair. “I will be here for you no matter what. I just don’t want to see you fall apart on my couch again over the same jerk, who doesn’t deserve you.”

“I know. Thank you. Trust me on this?”

“Yeah, whatever.”

They went about their routines, and the mood was pretty much back to normal by the time they opened the doors. Shane still saw Hayden send Ilya death glares every time he passed him, but decided not to intervene.

If this was going to work, they would have to figure it out eventually.

Shane found himself glancing at the bracelet adorning his wrist for the entire shift. He couldn’t look away. In the club lights, it looked *ethereal*, and with the blue gemstones it felt like having Ilya with him. Although Ilya was actually *there,* Shane tried not to look or talk to him, as much as he wanted to. He knew he would get distracted, and didn’t want to test Hayden’s patience.

But eventually, Hayden came up to the bar. “Your boy ordered a vodka. Will you please serve it to him, so I will not get fired for spilling expensive alcohol on a customer?”

Shane snorted, but grabbed two glasses and the bottle of vodka, making his way to where he knew Ilya and Marleau were sitting. But when he came closer, he saw that Marleau was gone.

“He is dancing.” Ilya nodded towards the dance floor with a glint in his eye, where Marleau was dancing with *two* girls, kissing one of them while the other was kissing his neck.

“Damn.” Shane said eloquently, before turning his attention back to Ilya, who snickered at him.

“What?”

Ilya shook his head. “Nothing, Shane, it’s just-, you are *so gay* sweetheart.”

“Hey! I could be bisexual.” Shane pouted.

“Mhmm,” Ilya hummed. “You could be. But then you would look at that scene with more enthusiasm than that of someone watching a penguin documentary.”

“Penguin documentaries are very interesting! Did you know that gay penguins will find a rock and pretend that it’s an egg, and then be confused when it doesn’t crack? Or they’ll steal some straight couples’ egg, and pretend it’s theirs!”

Ilya was looking at him like a kid if Christmas came early. “Oh, you are adorable.”

Shane stopped, unsure whether that was supposed to be a compliment. Ilya, as if sensing his hesitation, hooked an arm around his waist and pulled him into his lap.

“Ilya, your stitches!”

“Shh, *malysh*.” He buried his nose in Shane’s neck, and breathed in, “I want to hear more about gay penguins.”

“No, you don’t.” Shane rolled his eyes, but Ilya looked serious.

“Shane. Please tell me all about gay penguins. And gay lions, or whatever the next interesting animal is.”

Shane narrowed his eyes, but didn't detect any mockery in Ilya's voice. Just… fondness, maybe? Instead of overthinking it anymore, he leaned in and kissed him. And Ilya immediately deepened the kiss, pushing his tongue into Shane's mouth like wanted to *eat* him. Shane found himself sucking on it, and biting at where Ilya's split lip was still healing. He accidentally bit too hard, and Ilya whimpered, before a little bead of blood gathered on it.

"Fuck, I'm sorry." He quickly apologised, eyes never leaving the wound.

Ilya huffed, "No you're not, you freak."

Shane wanted to immediately deny - it's not like he had bitten Ilya *on purpose.* But he was distracted by the little drop of blood threatening to run down Ilya's chin, so instead he leaned in and licked at it.

When his tongue made contact with the wound he whined, the sound accompanied by the moan that seemed to have been punched out of Ilya. Shane pulled back, and looked into Ilya's eyes, his pupils dilated. They were both breathing heavily, and Shane was at once hit with the realisation of *where they were.*

He looked around frantically, but Ilya put a hand on his chest to calm him down. "No one was looking." He ran a hand over Shane's stomach, snapping his suspenders against it. "Now be a good boy, and go back to work. Otherwise, I will bend you over this table right now, and show everyone in this club who you belong to."

Shane whined pathetically, a mix of outrage and *want* battling for dominance inside him, his common sense eventually winning. He reluctantly disentangled himself from Ilya, and tried to sneakily adjust himself in his pants, to Ilya's great amusement.

He shot him a mean look, before walking back towards the bar to release Hayden.

"Dude, I never want to witness that, ever again. I will need to bleach my eyes."

"Fuck off."

Ilya had to count to ten, then count to ten *again,* in order to will his erection to go down. Shane Hollander would be the death of him, in the best way possible.

He had wanted nothing more than to take him right here where everyone could see. He had a feeling Shane would even enjoy it, in a different setting. But that was a thought for another time.

He drank some vodka, and checked his emails while the club buzzed around him, occasionally shooting flirty winks in Shane's direction, and severely *less* flirty winks in Hayden's direction.

God, he couldn't even blame the man for hating him. That's not why he didn't like him. He liked that Shane had someone in his corner who cared about his well being, who was ready to defend him.

But what grated his nerves, was that he had the audacity to stand there and question Shane's decision. As if Shane couldn't think for himself.

He looked up in the direction of the bar, and what he saw didn't help his mood.

There was curly-haired man with tattoos and piercings currently chatting up Shane. He had a new drink in front of him, which meant he had already been served. *So why was Shane still talking to him?*

He emptied his vodka glass, and stalked towards the bar, casually seating himself next to the man, Shane catching his appearance out of the corner of his eye.

The man was talking. "It's just that, a pretty thing like you is wasted behind the bar. You should be out there," he gestured towards the dance floor.

"Oh, I don't dance much." *Don't dance much? That's you're answer? Not 'fuck off'?* Ilya tried to reign his jealousy in, not breaking into the conversation just yet.

"Oh, but we don't *really* have to dance. Just… *move* to the beat. I could guide you, if you want." The man winked, and Ilya's blood was boiling. He looked at Shane, and their eyes met briefly, before Shane turned back towards the stranger with what Ilya could swear was *amusement*.

"I don't think I'd be a very good student."

"Then maybe let's skip the dance floor. I meant it when I said you were gorgeous." *He had said* what*?*

"Thank you." *'Thank you'?? Why the fuck are you thanking him?*

Ilya couldn't take anymore, and cleared his throat, both men turning to face him. "A drink, please?" he directed at Shane, seeing the other guy roll his eyes.

"We were in the middle of something."

Ilya scoffed. "The only thing you were in the middle of, was *leaving*."

The guy looked like he was about to fight him on it, but Ilya levelled him with the coldest stare he could muster, and the guy just huffed before taking his drink and walking away. Ilya turned to Shane, who was leaning against the bar with an annoyingly smug look on his face.

"Are you scaring my customers away, Mr. Rozanov?"

"If you have suddenly opened a brothel, then yes."

Shane rolled his eyes, and leaned in so he could speak lower, "Flirting with people is quite literally written into my contract, you know? 'Whatever makes the guests happy' bla, bla, bla."

"And am I not a guest? You flirting with that guy did not make *me* happy."

“You’re lucky jealousy looks good on you, and that I liked it.”

Ilya almost growled. “When does your shift end?”

“Soon. Hayden is closing tonight. Why, Mr. Rozanov, do we have plans?”

Ilya didn’t deign him with a response, merely looked him up and down, noticing Shane starting to squirm under the attention. “I will be outside. Do not make me wait.”

Shane gulped, and nodded, before his attention was grabbed by a new customer.

One he handled significantly more *distanced.*

Shane had never been happier that he usually let Hayden leave work whenever he wanted, when he had plans with Jackie. It meant that, even though he didn’t like Ilya, Hayden had no arguments to *not* let him leave early.

Shane waited a respectable amount of time though, so he did not seem like a desperate dog chasing after Ilya, wagging its tail.

He waited a whole, torturous*, five minutes.*

Not desperate at all.

When he stepped outside, he saw Ilya stand on the curb, leaning against a black Audi with tinted windows - just like the one that had brought them here. He wordlessly opened the door for Shane, who slipped in, adrenaline pumping in his veins. He noticed that the divider between them and the driver was closed.

Ilya closed the door, before walking around the car and entering from the other side. The car immediately drove off, and for a few seconds, no one said anything.

Shane fiddled with them hem of his jeans, slowly getting more and more nervous. He had just wanted to mess around a bit, after seeing the hungry look in Ilya’s eyes at the man flirting with him. It had made him feel wanted, and the feeling had gone to his head, making him *bold*.

He risked a glance at Ilya, who was looking out the window, not sparing Shane a glance. Fuck, maybe he should apologise? But he had only flirted as a joke, and at the time, it had seemed like Ilya found it at least *a little* fun. But maybe he had miscalculated.

“I’m sorry.”

Ilya scoffed, “Oh, now he has manners.”

“I always have manners.”

“Mhmm.” Ilya finally turned his head. His eyes dragged over him, unimpressed. “You just forget them when you want attention.”

Heat rushed up Shane’s neck. “That’s not-”

“Oh? Is that not what you wanted? You think I did not see you, whoring yourself out? Waiting for me to look at you?”

“Well, you did look.” Shane smirked slightly, even though his heart was hammering in his chest in anticipation.

“I was watching you make a fool of yourself,” Ilya said, dismissively. Then, after a beat, his voice dipped just slightly, something darker threading through it, “And deciding how much of it I was going to tolerate.”

Shane’s breath hitched, the conversation finally taking the turn he had been craving, the reason why he even let that man, who he didn’t know the name of, to ever think he had a chance. He was just about to retort, when Ilya continued, “Do you think I enjoy watching people think, that they can have what is *mine*?”

Fuck.

Shane’s brain scrambled, all thoughts leaving him immediately, the urge to be good, to *belong*, overwhelming. He opened his mouth to answer the question, when Ilya reached over and threaded a hand through his hair, “No. Enough.”

The hand in his hair tightened to the point of pain, “You wanted attention, *malysh*? Now be good, and take it properly.” With that, Ilya pulled Shane’s face into his crotch by his hair, Shane whining at being manhandled, not even resisting the pull. He automatically nuzzled into it, feeling Ilya’s hard cock through his pants.

His mouth watered, and he let spit drip down to cover Ilya’s slacks, hearing his sharp intake of breath above him. He kept licking and sucking, trying to cover Ilya’s cock with his mouth through the pants, but it wasn’t *enough.* He whined, looking up at Ilya with pleading eyes.

“Oh, my poor little boy, do you need more?”

Shane nodded, and Ilya *tsk’ed.* “Oh, but have you *earned* more?”

Shane froze. He hadn’t. He had teased, and joked, and made Ilya jealous. His intention was for Ilya to push him around, and make him take his cock - he hadn’t calculated with a risk of that cock being *denied* to him. “I can be good, please, I’m sorry. I just wanted to make you jealous, *please* let me make it up to you.” He punctuated the words by licking a thick stripe along Ilya’s cock, nuzzling his nose into the belt of his slacks and biting it softly, before looking up at Ilya with the most pleading eyes he could muster, while keeping the belt between his teeth.

“*Fuck,*” followed by a string of Russian curses, was his only warning before Ilya lifted him slightly, opening his pants and pulling his cock out, immediately pushing Shane back down. He sucked on the base, inhaling Ilya’s sent.

Fuck, he could come just from this. Just from the sent of Ilya surrounding him, covering him like a blanket he wanted to cuddle underneath forever. He licked a stripe up, and sucked the head into his mouth, scraping his teeth lightly along it, making Ilya hiss and buck his hips.

The hand in his hair tightened again, and forced him down until his nose was buried in Ilya's pubes. The sensation of his throat finally being *full,* along with the sent of Ilya, and the tingle of pain in his scalp was *mind-blowing,* and Shane worried he genuinely *would* come, just from this.

He balled his hand into a fist, digging his nails into his palm as hard as he could, trying to delay his orgasm, while swallowing around Ilya's cock, trying to speed up his. If Ilya came first, maybe he would let Shane come.

But if Shane came first… *no,* that wasn't an option. He wanted, *needed,* to be good.

Luckily, Ilya bucked his hips a couple of times, before spilling down his throat, "Fuck, fuck, *Shane,* you feel so good."

Shane hummed, the vibrations only further stimulating Ilya through the aftershocks, before the man gently pulled him off, using his thumb to wipe the corner of Shane's mouth. Just as Shane was about to open it, and beg for Ilya to let him come, he felt the car stop, and the driver knocked twice on the divider.

"We are home. Come on." Ilya said casually, tucking himself back in and exiting the car, leaving Shane startled, and *achingly* hard. He somehow managed to stumble out, and by the time he did, Ilya had already gone inside, the front door of his house left open.

Shane stumbled after him, feeling slightly like he was doing a walk of shame, but instead of shame, he just felt *need.* The house was quiet and dark when he entered, low light coming only from the bedroom. Shane followed the light like a moth to the flame.

When he entered, he found Ilya standing at the foot of the bed, in only his underwear. "Strip."

Shane immediately obeyed, folding his clothes on the nearest chair before stepping towards Ilya, unsure of how to proceed. But he didn't have to wait long. "Kneel on the bed, facing me."

The position brought him at eye level with Ilya's collarbone, which looked very biteable, but he refrained. His eyes fell briefly to the stitches on his abdomen, and he was about to ask Ilya if he was sure he wasn't in pain, when a hand came under his chin, and lifted him up to face Ilya.

"Do you remember your safeword, *malysh*?"

Shane nodded, "Red for stop, yellow for pause, and green for continue."

"Good boy."

Shane shivered at the praise, feeling a blush cover his cheeks. Ilya's lip curved into an almost condescending smile, before he continued, "You were very bad today, teasing me, and whoring yourself out for other men, *da?* Saying so many stupid things, as if you are not *mine.* So maybe, you should not be allowed to speak, until you have earned it."

Ilya lifted his other hand up, and Shane's eyes flickered to it before widening. How had he not noticed? *You were too busy thirsting over his collarbones.*

In Ilya's hand, was a ball gag.

Shane looked back and forth between *it,* and Ilya's face, trying to gauge what he was thinking. But his face betrayed nothing. Shane opened his mouth to ask, but immediately snapped it shut again. *He had not earned his words.*

Ilya smiled approvingly, as if Shane restraining himself had been exactly what he had been hoping for. "I will put this on you. And then I will finger you, and eat you out, until you scream so loud it will not matter that you are gagged. I cannot fuck you today, but you will take what I give you. You will be *good*, *da*?"

"Yes." Shane sighed, already floating in that amazing headspace that turned his brain off.

Ilya hummed, and secured the gag in Shane's mouth, clasping it behind his head. The weight of it wasn't that bad - not worse than a normal blowjob, but the constant stretch of his mouth would be challenging in the long run. He could already feel the ache incoming. But he wouldn't complain already. He was going to be *good.*

"So pretty. If you want to stop, you tap me three times, *da?* If I ask you for your colour, and it is green, you give thumbs-up. Understood?"

Shane gave Ilya a thumbs-up, the gesture slightly awkward in this setting, but it wasn't like he could actually speak.

"Good. Now get on your hands and knees for me."

Shane did as told, immediately missing the view of Ilya, instead burying his head into the pillow. It pushed the gag somehow deeper into his mouth in a way he didn't like, so he came up again and rested on his forearms. Behind him, there was some rustling, but he couldn't see what Ilya was doing.

Suddenly, two lubed fingers were circling his hole, one of them pushing in slowly, making Shane gasp. Already, there was drool gathering in his mouth, some of it leaking out and down on the pillow.

Disgusting.

"Colour, *malysh*?"

He hated that he was drooling everywhere, and the gag was getting more and more uncomfortable against his teeth, but it had barely been ten minutes. And this was *supposed* to be a punishment. He gave Ilya a thumbs-up, which made him push the finger inside him further in, soon accompanied by another.

Then, Ilya added his tongue, eating Shane out while scissoring him open, moaning as if Shane was the best meal he had ever tasted. It stirred the desire inside him, but what was normally a fucking bonfire at this point, was barely a little flame. Shane felt weird. Like he couldn't quite get into it enough. The floaty feeling he had reached when Ilya first introduced the gag was completely gone, Shane now hyper aware of every sensation.

His teeth and jaw were sore.

His chin was covered in drool in a way that made him want to *gag*, which he did not think would go over well right now.

His cheeks were squished by the strap, and they felt tingly. He had an urge to massage them, to get the circulation going again.

He hated not being able to speak, not being able to moan Ilya's name. Not being able to beg.

Ilya's ministration felt *good*, but not good enough, and Shane knew, without looking, that his cock was no longer hard. *Fuck, hopefully Ilya wouldn't notice.*

He had to be good. He had been bad, and now he had to earn it. He had said *yes*, when Ilya showed him the gag, so there was no going back now.

He glanced to his left, where Ilya's other hand rested, within reach, just in case Shane needed to safeword out.

But he *couldn't.*

He couldn't disappoint Ilya, not more than he already had today.

Horrified, he realised that tears were gathering in his eyes. *Fuck, pull yourself together, Shane.* He sniffled slightly, which immediately made Ilya pause behind him.

"Shane? Colour?"

Shane gave a thumbs-up, hoping it didn't look as shaky as he felt, and pushed his hips back towards Ilya. If he could just get him to focus back on what he was doing, he would have time to pull himself together.

But Ilya didn't resume. He pulled his fingers out, and rested the hand against Shane's hip, almost as if he wanted to flip him. Shane locked his body just in case, which in turn had Ilya make a questioning noise.

"Sweetheart, are you sure?"

And was he sure? No, he was anything but. He wanted the gag *gone*, and to cuddle up with Ilya instead. But there was no way Ilya would want to cuddle him, if he used his safeword for something so *basic* as a ball-gag. How pathetic would that not be?

But Shane could feel his limbs start to shake, and the beginning of a panic attack forming. Ilya would be so disappointed in him, but-, but Shane just couldn't fucking do it. *What a fucking failure you are.*

He reached a hand over to Ilya's, tapping him three times just as a sob rocked through him.

Ilya was on him immediately, a hand reaching out to unclasp the gag, letting it fall out of Shane's mouth onto the pillow in front of him. The release of it being gone, broke down the rest of Shane's walls, and he fell sideways onto the bed, sobbing uncontrollably.

Ilya froze for half a second.

Then, “Hey-, hey, no, no, *sweetheart.*” His hands were suddenly everywhere and nowhere at once, hovering before finally settling, one at Shane’s shoulder, the other cupping the back of his head. “Shane, look at me. Breathe. You’re okay, you’re okay.”

Shane curled in on himself, shaking, hands clutching at the sheets like they could anchor him. “I’m sorry,” he choked out between sobs. “I’m sorry, I’m sorry, I-, I thought I could, I just-”

“Stop.” Ilya’s voice cut through, his tone urgent. “No. None of that.”

But Shane only shook his head harder, breath coming in broken gasps. “I ruined it, I-, you’re gonna-, you’re gonna think I can’t handle anything, I just-” His voice cracked completely. “I wanted to be good for you-”

Something in Ilya’s expression shifted, panic flashing clear across his face before he could hide it. “Shane,” he said, softer now, but no less intense. “Look at me.”

It took a second, but Shane’s eyes finally found his.

“You are good,” Ilya said firmly, one hand steadying his jaw. “Do you understand me? You did exactly what you were supposed to do.”

Shane blinked at him, disoriented. “But I-, I stopped-”

“Yes,” Ilya said immediately. “You stopped. You told me.” His thumb brushed under Shane’s eye, catching tears as they fell. “That is the whole point. That is what I need from you.”

Shane’s breath stuttered, confusion cutting through the panic. “But I-, I couldn’t-”

“I do not care,” Ilya interrupted, sharper again, but there was no bite to it. “You think I care about that? About this?” He huffed as he grabbed the ball-gag, and threw it across the room. He then dragged a hand through his hair, something almost like frustration flickering across his face. “I only care that I did not-, that I did not hurt you. That you trust me enough to stop me.”

His gaze dropped for a second, jaw tightening. “You were shaking and you still tried to push through.”

Shane swallowed hard, tears still slipping down, but slower now. “I didn’t want to mess it up.”

“There is nothing to mess up,” Ilya said, voice rising slightly, before returning his hand to Shane’s face, as if the act itself was calming. “This is not a performance.”

A shaky breath left Shane. “It felt like one.”

Ilya’s expression softened, “I know. But you safeworded. You stopped me, when it no longer felt good for you. That is not failure, *malysh*.” His thumb pressed lightly against Shane’s lip. “That is you doing *everything* right.”

Shane’s chest hitched again, but this time it wasn’t panic. “You’re not… disappointed?” he asked, voice small.

Ilya let out a quiet, almost incredulous breath, like the question itself caught him off guard. “No,” he said, softer than anything he’d said so far. “I am *proud*.”

Shane blinked at him.

“You listened to yourself,” Ilya continued. “Even when you did not want to. Even when it was hard.” His hand slid into Shane’s hair, a slow, soothing motion, and Shane found himself breathing easier.

He pressed his face into Ilya’s shoulder without really thinking about it, seeking closeness and comfort even though a part of his brain was still convinced that he hadn’t earned it. But Ilya didn’t hesitate. His arms came around him immediately, pulling him close, one hand steady at the back of his neck, the other rubbing slow, grounding circles into his back.

“You’re okay,” he murmured. “I’ve got you.”

And despite not understanding *why* Ilya would still comfort him, a small part of him believed him. In the back of his mind, he knew, that tomorrow they would need to talk about it.

But for now, here in Ilya’s arms, he felt safe.

Chapter End Notes

I cannot even bein to explain how much it means that you all seem to be enjoying this fic. :((((
Thank you for reading <3

Chapter 7

Chapter Summary

> “…You said it feels like home,” Ilya whispered.
>
> Shane blinked. “I mean-, yeah. Kind of. Or-, I think it would. It just-” he huffed a small laugh, a little embarrassed, “It feels less lonely when I think about being there.”
>
> Silence.
>
> Long enough to make Shane start overthinking.
>
> “Say that again,” Ilya said.
>
> Shane froze. “What?”
>
> “That it feels like home.”

Chapter Notes

> While writing the next chapter, I couldn't shake the feeling that this little thing should have it's own moment. So here is a slightly shorter update. Enjoy <3

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Shane woke up feeling groggy, like he had almost just gone to bed. His eyelids were heavy, and his body felt like it would take a monumental effort just to wiggle his toe. He was just about to let sleep take him again, when he heard the sound of someone typing on a phone. He squinted his eyes, preparing for sunlight to hit him, but the room was bathed in darkness.

Weird. He didn't remember them closing the blinds last night. But then again, he didn't remember much after cuddling in Ilya's arms, so he must have fallen asleep. "Morning," he whispered, and the tapping stopped, arms immediately circling him from behind.

"Good morning, *solnyshko*. How are you feeling?"

"Like I got hit by a truck," he snickered, sighing contentedly at the feeling of Ilya's lips on the back of his neck.

Ilya hummed, his fingers running smoothing circles on his hip. "There is water on the nightstand. Whatever you want for breakfast, I will make, yes?"

"What time is it?"

"Around 11."

Shane's eyes opened, and he turned around to look at Ilya. "But that's so late. Didn't you say you had things to do today? Why are you still here? Have you had breakfast? I-"

"*Shane."*

Shane stopped in his tracks, and took a deep breath, trying to calm himself. He looked at Ilya, who was laying next to him with a look on his face that could only be described as *amused.*

"Shane, sweetheart, breathe for me, *da*? The meeting got moved, you don't have classes until later, and I didn't want to wake you, so I answered some emails in bed with a gorgeous boy next to me. I have had a perfect morning, so what on earth are you panicking for?" Ilya said with a small smile, fingers never stopping their soothing caresses.

Shane smiled back, and relaxed back into the sheets. Ilya was right. He leaned in for a kiss, and Ilya obliged, immediately licking into his mouth. Shane had half a thought about morning breath, but it disappeared the second Ilya nipped at his lower lip. They made out for a while, trading lazy kisses that weren't going anywhere, just kissing for the sake of it.

Ilya eventually leaned back, the look on his face slightly more serious. "I know that you will not want to do this. But we do need to talk about last night."

Shane immediately tensed, wanting nothing *less* than to open that can of worms. But Ilya was looking at him so earnestly, and hadn't he himself preached open communication? He couldn't back out now. So he nodded, willing his heart to stop hammering in his chest. *He won't make fun of you. If he had wanted to, he would have done so last night.*

Ilya's voice broke through his thoughts. "It is of course okay to not like something. It was a stupid, heat of the moment idea, and I'm sorry-"

“No, Ilya, no.” Shane interrupted immediately. “I loved the idea. When you first showed me the gag, *fuck,* I thought it was going to be so hot. Not being able to speak, and just getting to lay there and-, and take what you gave me, while my mouth was full? Ilya, that sounded like… like a dream, *in theory*.” Shane was blushing, but determined to get his point across.

“And what changed?”

“Honestly, I don’t know. Suddenly, I hated that I couldn’t say your name. That I couldn’t-” he cleared his throat, “couldn’t *beg*. And it was pinching and pressuring in all the wrong ways, and just threw me completely out of the moment.”

Ilya’s face remained passive, clearly trying to give him space to talk, but when Shane was done, he hummed and nodded, before his own brows furrowed slightly.

“I also-, well, I love it when you beg. Or when you are trying to boss me around, like the brat you are. Without it, it was… *quiet*? Like something was missing.”

“Then why didn’t you say anything?” Shane asked, but he already knew the answer. Ilya looked up at him apologetically.

“This will be very… what is the word? When you say one thing, and then do not do it yourself?”

“Hypocritical.”

“Yes, that. I wanted *you* to enjoy it. So, I did not care if… if *I* did.” Ilya cringed at his own words, as if he knew what that sounded like. “I am sorry, Shane. I guess I cannot expect you to communicate with me, if I do not do the same. I will try, to be better.”

Shane reached down and grabbed Ilya’s hand in his, bringing it up to kiss at his knuckles. “We will both be better.”

Ilya nodded, and leaned down to nuzzle into Shane’s neck. They laid there for a while, just enjoying each other‘s presence, until Shane broke the silence again. “I have classes today, and a presentation I need to prepare for tomorrow. I’ll-, I think it’s better if I go home today, and focus. I need good grades in this class.”

“‘This class’ he says,” Ilya smirked against his neck, “As if you are not a teacher’s pet, Mr. Hollander.”

“Hey! I am not. I just-, I just like school.”

“You *like* school? Nobody likes school, Shane.”

Shane rolled his eyes, even if Ilya couldn’t see it.

“Do not roll your eyes at me, Hollander. That’s not what good boys do.”

Shane squirmed, nuzzling his nose into Ilya’s curls. He was about to quip back, when Ilya continued, “You are allowed to do what you want, you know this right?”

The sentence sounded innocent in itself, but the tone of forced casualty threw Shane off. He looked down to meet Ilya’s eye, but couldn’t due to him hiding in the crook of his neck. “Yes, Ilya, I know. I was just telling you, so you knew. Why I would not come back here, after class.”

“Yes, but I do not want you to think-” Ilya sounded frustrated, like he couldn’t find the words. “I know I am a mafia boss. But you are not-, you are not one of my men. You are your own person, and I never want you to think that you have to ask my… permission, to do things without me.”

Ah, Shane thought. *Adorable.*

“Oh, but you misunderstand, Mr. Rozanov. Because I quite like asking your permission. Unless you hadn’t noticed.”

Ilya rose up onto his elbows then, and levelled Shane with a look. “Shane. I am serious. I know that you are a good boy that asks for permission. But not for this. Not for… not for your *life*. I will not control you. I want you to be with me, but still be… *you*.”

Shane had a feeling that there was a deeper story behind the statement. Another layer of Ilya’s life, that he wasn’t privy to. *Not yet.* He nodded at Ilya, and reached a hand up to caress his hair. “Ilya, you are not controlling. It’s normal in relationships to communicate, to know what the other person is doing. Not because you want to control me, but because you’re interested. Because you care. That’s *good.”*

Ilya looked at him with wide eyes, mouth slightly open, “Relationship?”

“I’d like to think so, yes?” Shane blushed slightly, hoping he wasn’t overstepping, “I’m already yours, Ilya. Putting a label on it is just a formality, don’t you think?”

“Nothing with you could every be just a formality, Shane Hollander.” Ilya said, with a shy smile. “So will you do me the honour, and be my boyfriend?”

“Fuck yes.” Shane whined, and their mouths met for a bruising kiss, that didn’t last nearly long enough. But Shane pulled back regretfully. “I have to go. I promised Hayden we would go over a paper before class.”

Ilya scrunched his nose. “I take back my previous statement. You cannot see Hayden Pike ever again. I forbid it.”

Shane barked a laugh while getting out of bed, “Yes, of course, whatever you say Mr. Big Scary Mafia Boss, how could I ever disobey you.” He threw a wink over his shoulder as he entered the bathroom.

He barely got into the shower, before he heard Ilya following him.

Shane liked university. He really did.

Normally.

These days, it was kicking his ass. And not because it had gotten significantly harder, or took up more of his time. No, the problem was, that his time and thoughts were so filled with Ilya, that he didn't particularly *want* to spend it on uni. But alas, him and Hayden had done an almost 24 hours long study group, and finished their presentation.

Shane wanted to pass out in his bed, and never get up again. Or even better, pass out in Ilya's bed. But Ilya was busy with meetings, and had a work event tomorrow night, so they probably wouldn't even see each other before the day after tomorrow.

Shane tried to not feel petulantly whiny about that. He had seen Ilya just yesterday morning, but he already missed him. Hayden had given him shit for being distracted, but Shane had seen too much of his flirting with Jackie, to let him get away with it without quipping back. They fell into a hesitant rhythm, but Shane could feel the strain on their friendship. He hated it.

Laying in his own bed now felt almost wrong. He hadn't been back here since… since *before.* It felt almost like another life now, one where Ilya wasn't *his.* The apartment he had lived in for years, had never felt less like home than right now.

As if he could read his mind, his phone rang, Ilya's name on the display. Shane picked up immediately, "Hi."

"Hi, *malysh*. How did your project go?"

"Good, I think. Luckily, it's over now." He heard some rustling in the background, and a lot of voices. "You're at the office?"

"*Da*." Ilya sighed over the phone, "A lot of preparation for the event tomorrow. And we have to investigate something out of town today, so we're leaving soon. Which actually reminds me. Do you have plans tomorrow night?"

Shane felt a shiver of excitement run through him at the prospect of seeing Ilya earlier, but his brain caught on something else first. "You're leaving?"

"We have a base outside of town, that has been acting up. With Alexei here… I have to check. It should not be that complicated, but it is a bit of a drive, so I will not be back before tomorrow morning."

"Oh. Are you-, Is it safe?"

Ilya laughed softly, before seemingly stopping himself. "Shane, sweetheart, there is not much about my work, that is *safe*. But-," he sighed before continuing, "But this should be… not difficult. More… annoying, than anything."

Shane hummed, not fully convinced, but knowing there wasn't much he could do about it. And he didn't want Ilya to feel like he had to… *soften* his job, because Shane couldn't handle it. "Okay."

"So, what about plans tomorrow?" Ilya pivoted the conversation back, and Shane couldn't help but chuckle.

"No, no plans."

Ilya hummed on the other side, barking some rapid Russian at someone, before coming back to Shane, “Sorry. Tomorrow, there is a charity event. An auction. I have to go. Would you, maybe, like to join me?”

Shane froze. “Like, to the event?”

“*Da.* It will be boring, which you will like, but then you will be there, so I will not be bored. Marley is coming too.”

“Oh, so you asked him first? Way to make a girl feel special.” Shane couldn’t help but chirp, delighted at the sound of Ilya’s laughter through the phone. “I mean, I would like to come. But I don’t-, I’ve never done anything like this. What if I say or do the wrong thing?”

“Shane. You could never. Please? Come be a pretty boy on my arm?”

Shane blanched, ready to outrageously defend himself, but then he realised… he wouldn’t actually mind being a pretty boy on Ilya Rozanov’s arm. That meant that no one *else* could be there. That Ilya had chosen *him*.

Fuck, what a heady feeling.

“Yes, okay, I will come.”

“Oh yes you will, *solnyshko.* But after the gala, yes? We will have some decorum.”

“*Ilya*.” Shane sighed with a laugh, exasperated.

“I will probably not be home before, though.” Ilya said regretfully. “I will give Marley your number, yes? He will pick you up tomorrow. I will meet you there, I promise.”

“Sure.” Suddenly, a thought struck Shane, and he bit his lip. Surely, he couldn’t…

As if hearing his thoughts, Ilya asked, “What is it?”

Shane bit the bullet. “I just thought-, Would you mind-, Would it be okay if I-”

“Shane, sweetheart, breathe. I can promise you, that there is nothing you could ask of me, that I would not give you.”

Shane’s stomach fluttered, and he tried to hide his blush even if Ilya couldn’t see him. “I just came home, and-”

“And what?”

“And it feels… empty. It doesn’t feel like *home*. I know you said you would not be there, but could I-”

“Could you what? Go to my house?” He couldn’t read the tone of Ilya’s voice, but forced himself to answer.

“Yes, God, I know it’s stupid, and weird as hell since you won’t be there, but I think I would… I *know* I would sleep better.”

Ilya let out a breath on the other end of the line. “Shane,” he said, slower, like he was choosing his words carefully. “That is not stupid.”

“It kind of is,” Shane muttered, rubbing at the back of his neck.

“No. You go there. You sleep. You take whatever you need.”

Shane smiled faintly. “Bossy.”

“Yes,” Ilya said, sounding slightly distracted, like his mind was somewhere else entirely. “And you-”

He stopped.

Shane frowned slightly. “And I what?”

“…You said it feels like home,” Ilya whispered.

Shane blinked. “I mean-, yeah. Kind of. Or-, I think it would. It just-” he huffed a small laugh, a little embarrassed, “It feels less lonely when I think about being there.”

Silence.

Long enough to make Shane start overthinking.

“Say that again,” Ilya said.

Shane froze. “What?”

“That it feels like home.”

There was something in his tone now, that made Shane’s stomach flip. “I just meant-” he started, then faltered. “It’s… your place. It smells like you, and it’s quiet, and… I don’t know, it just-, it feels easier there. Feels *right.*”

Another pause.

Then Ilya exhaled, breath clearly shaky even through the phone. “Shane,” he whined. Ilya Rozanov *whined*. “You have no idea what you are saying to me.”

Shane’s breath caught. “Is that… bad?”

“No. You are perfect. And I hate that I am here, and not waiting for you at my house.”

“Me too.” Shane admitted, getting up from the bed to pack a bag. “I’ll grab an uber there.”

“Okay. I will send you code, for the door. And Shane?”

“Yes?”

“When you arrive, and lay in by bed? Show me.”

Shane’s breath hitched, anticipation coiling in his stomach, at the prospect of taking pictures in Ilya’s sheets. Ilya clearly took his silence as confirmation.

“I have to go, sweetheart.” He sounded regretful, as if hanging up on Shane was the hardest thing for him to do.

“Go run your gang, Mr. Big Scary Mafia Boss. I will see you tomorrow.”

“Yes. Bye, *solnyshko.*”

“Bye.”

Entering Ilya’s house without him there to greet him was weird, but not as weird as he had thought. It felt… domestic. By the time he made it inside, he was barely standing on his feet, exhausted from the past 24 hours of pouring his brain out on paper. He left his bag at the door, and staggered to the bedroom on wobbly legs. He should take a shower, but the risk of him falling asleep standing was too high. God, it wasn’t even 7pm yet.

But he took off his clothes, leaving only boxers on, and crawled under the sheets, immediately feeling his whole body relaxing.

Ilya’s scent was everywhere, enveloping him tightly, and Shane sighed. He felt so *right.*

Without noticing, his hand had traveled down his body, and he squeezed himself through his underwear. *Fuck, when had he gotten hard?*

He should stop.

Ilya letting him stay at his house was one thing. But jerking off in his bed? That’s… *deranged.*

But then, why was his hand still moving?

He’d just-, just take the edge off. He wasn’t going to *jerk off*, he’d just… hold himself, while he went to sleep. Perfectly normal, and perfectly appropriate.

And since he wasn’t jerking off, it wouldn’t matter if he held himself… inside his underwear. It would feel… better. He reached a hand inside his underwear, and loosely grabbed himself, immediately whimpering at the sensation.

The loose pressure was *torturous,* and he desperately tried to not buck his hips into his fist.

Gentle touches, Shane. You’re not meant to be jerking off.

With that in mind, he ran a finger up and down his length slowly, and painfully gentle. “Fuck.” Maybe if he just-, just a little-

He moaned unabashedly as he tightened his fist around his cock, the relief immediate, followed by pure and unfiltered want for *more.* For Ilya.

But Ilya wasn't here.

But the bed smelled like him, and if Shane buried his nose into the pillows, he could almost trick his brain into pretending that it was Ilya's hand around him. He used his other hand to pull down the boxers, so he could fondle his balls, whining into the empty room at the dual sensation.

What if Ilya came home right now?

What if he walked into his bedroom, and saw Shane spread out on his bed, pleasuring himself? Would he pause in the doorway, to observe? To watch him finish, before joining him? Or would he tell him to stop?

The last thought sent a shiver through him, and he realised with a start that he was *so close.*

Surely, Ilya wouldn't mind? Looking at it, it was in fact Ilya's fault that he was riled up in the first place. His fault for smelling so good. His fault for not being *here.*

With that last mental hurdle gone, Shane only needed a few strokes, before he felt his orgasm erupt through him, making his thighs quiver. "Fuck, fuck, fuck, *fuck.*"

He came so hard, that some of his come landed on his chin, and all the way up his chest.

He laid there, catching his breath, waiting for the shame and regret to hit.

But it *didn't.*

Instead, he found himself reaching for his phone on the nightstand. He wasn't that… proficient in taking sexy photos, but he tried angling the camera so that it showed him from his mouth and down, making sure that the light caught in a way that made his come visible. His other hand remained loosely wrapped about his now softening cock. When he felt like he had a decent shot, he let the phone fall and rose to clean up in the bathroom.

He wiped himself down with a towel, making a mental promise to himself to shower properly tomorrow. He crawled back into bed, and forced himself to open a text thread with Ilya. He had promised him a photo after all.

Giddily, he typed out a message, attaching the photo, and pressed *send* before he could overthink it. He then put the phone away, and let sleep take him.

Shane: Made it. Your bed is comfy. Goodnight <3

Shane: *Attached a photo*

21:04

Ilya: I-

Ilya: Shane

Ilya: Shane Hollander is that

Ilya: *Fuck,* did you

Ilya: You send me that and then disappear?

Ilya: Are you serious right now

Ilya: I am standing here like an idiot staring at my phone

Ilya: Because of you

Ilya: You are in my bed looking like-

Ilya: Do you understand what that does to me

Ilya: Shane, answer me

Ilya: Please

Ilya: Fuck

Ilya: You look like-

Ilya: Like I should be there

Ilya: This is not fair

Ilya: You don’t get to do this when I’m not with you

Ilya: Do you have any idea how far away I am right now

Ilya: I told you to sleep

Ilya: Not-

Ilya: Fuck

Ilya: I can’t even touch you

Ilya: And you send me that

Ilya: I wish I was there

Ilya: Fuck, Shane, I really wish I was there

Chapter End Notes

Shane: My hand cannot touch my cock in Ilya's bed without him here, that's deranged.

Also Shane: *Sends Ilya a nude in his sheets with come streaks on his face*

Chapter 8

Chapter Summary

> Marleau was shaking his head at him, as if Shane was being silly. “Shane. As platonically as I can say this, you’re hot as fuck. And I’ve seen you at work, you clean up nicely, Hollander. I’ll just help you find an outfit that is still you, but… sharper. And even more importantly – one that will break Ilya’s brain. He expected you to just find something plain in his closet, you know? Not because you can’t rock something bolder, but because he thought it would be too much out of your comfort zone. Do you want to prove him right, or *wrong*?

Chapter Notes

> Hihi enjoy. Also, the inspiration for Shane's outfit and hair is Hudson's all black Oscar's look <3

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The first thing Shane registered was the blaring sound of someone pounding on the front door, his knee jerk reaction to just pull the blanket over his head, and ignore them. But then he remembered where he was, and jumped out of bed. He hastily pulled on a pair of joggers and a hoodie, that had been left on a nearby chair, and sprinted to the front door.

Once he could see it, he froze in his tracks. What the fuck is he going to do? Ilya wasn't here, so who would come knocking? Well, anyone from the *Bratva* might, but wouldn't Ilya have warned him? *Maybe he did. It's not like you've checked your phone.*

He took a step back towards the bedroom, and accidentally walked into a table, making it screech across the floor. *Fuck.*

The knocks stopped, and the person on the other side of the door seemed to have frozen, listening. "Shane? Are you there?"

Marleau.

Shane breathed out a sigh of relief and walked over to open the door. Marleau stood on the other side, with two coffees in hand and a grin. "Morning." He squeezed past Shane, and into the kitchen, placing the coffees on the kitchen island. "Do you always just ignore your phone?"

"I was sleeping. Why where you pounding on the door like a psychopath? Don't you have the code?"

Marleau hummed and looked at him quizzically. "And now you're awake - good. We have things to do. And for the record, Shane, no I do not have the code to Roz' house. No one does. That's like asking for a security breach, you know?"

Shane froze, not knowing what to say, but if Marleau noticed he didn't show it, still talking. "So how much did Roz tell you about tonight?"

"Uhm." Shane stammered, "Nothing, really. Just that it was a charity gala, and that he wanted me to… come."

Marleau shot him an amused look. "Yeah, and then he called me to make sure you had something to wear. He said I should take you shopping, or if you *really* didn't want to go, you could take something from his closet. Did he show you where his suits are, before he left?"

"Oh, no, he wasn't here when I got here. We just spoke on the phone."

Marleau froze, the coffee cup halfway up to his mouth. "Then how did you get in?"

'That's like asking for a security breach, you know?'

"Uhm. Ilya gave me the code, so I could… so I could sleep here." He braced himself, not knowing what to expect from Marleau. But the man just stood there, gaping at him, before absolutely *dying* of laughter.

Shane opened his mouth several times, ready to say… *anything*, but Marleau just kept laughing, clutching his stomach with tears streaming down his face. "So, you want to tell me..." he barked

another laugh, drying his tears with a hand, "You want to tell me, that he-, that he disregarded all safety protocol that *he* created. For you? God, you have that man whipped, Shane."

Shane felt the corner of his mouth quirk up. "I didn't-, I didn't know. About the safety thing. Should I delete the code from my messages, then?"

Marleau's eyes widened. "He gave it to you *in a text*? Oh my god, I can assure you, he's never going to hear the end of this. You've just given me teasing material for like… *months*. But yes, Hollander, fuck, delete the fucking code, please."

Shane laughed while pulling out his phone, deleting the text message that gave him access to Ilya's home. He had memorized it anyway, so it wasn't like he would need it. He then looked back up at Marleau, who seemed to have gotten over the worst of his laughing fit, and looked more composed. "So, you said something about an outfit?"

Marleau's eyes lit up. "Yes. We need to dress you up. Since you're with Ilya, everyone will look at you. And you obviously look great, but I've found that an outfit can work really well as a shield, in situations that are out of your control. And correct me if I'm wrong, but I assume you don't like feeling out of control?"

Shane shook his head.

"Then we style you in a way that will make you emanate so much authority, that people will be afraid to approach you."

"I don't think that's possible. I like cozy sweaters and joggers. Ilya is the-" he makes a vague hand motion around his whole body, "the *hot* one. The one where everyone looks when he enters a room? But like… respectfully."

Marleau was shaking his head at him, as if Shane was being silly. "Shane. As platonically as I can say this, you're hot as fuck. And I've seen you at work, you clean up nicely, Hollander. I'll just help you find an outfit that is still *you*, but… sharper. And even more importantly – one that will break Ilya's brain. He expected you to just find something plain in his closet, you know? Not because you can't rock something bolder, but because he thought it would be too much out of your comfort zone. Do you want to prove him right, or wrong?

Shane pretended to think about, but eventually smiled and nodded at Marleau, "Okay. But nothing fucking crazy. I'm not wearing like… lace or something."

"I'll let you save the lace for the bedroom," Marleau winked. "This is a very standard classy gala. So, we're getting you a suit. But a pretty one. Do you have any jewellery, or something you would like to wear?"

Shane's hand instinctively went to the bracelet around his wrist, Marleau's eye catching on it immediately, smirking. "I did see that the other day. Very pretty. A gift from Roz?"

"Yeah."

"Then we find you a suit that will show *that* every time you move."

"Where are we shopping? I don't-" Shane blushed in embarrassment, hating that he had to say this. "I have some money saved up, but not *a lot,* and especially not by like… mafia standards. I can't-, I

can't blow all my savings on a suit."

Marleau looked at him with a gentle smile, taking a deep breath as if gathering his thoughts. "You should really have this conversation with Roz. But-, Shane, money is really not something we think about that much. Roz wanted you to have a suit? That means he's buying you a suit. He would get offended, I think, if you tried to pay. Not because he doesn't think you could afford it, or doesn't see you as your own person – but because he absolutely loves spending his money on others. So, let's go find you a suit that will blow him away, huh?"

They ended up finding a suit surprisingly quickly. Shane wasn't sure if it was Marleau being efficient because he could sense Shane didn't like shopping that much, or if everything truly just aligned.

"Try this," Marleau said at one point, already handing him something before Shane could protest.

"I haven't even looked around yet," Shane muttered, taking it anyway.

"I know," Marleau grinned. "I'm saving us both time."

They also grabbed lunch afterwards, and Shane had to admit, that he was truly enjoying Marleau's company. He was funny, and sassy, but in a way that Shane… understood. And he was a goldmine, when it came to Ilya.

"So, he just… what? walked out?" Shane asked, halfway through his food, staring at Marleau in disbelief.

Marleau nodded, far too pleased with himself. "Mid-meeting. Didn't say a word. Just stood up and left."

"Why?"

"He was bored."

Shane snorted. "You're lying."

"I am not," Marleau said, offended. "He came back twenty minutes later with coffee. *For himself*."

Shane laughed, shaking his head. "That's insane."

"It gets worse," Marleau leaned in slightly, lowering his voice like he was about to share a secret. "He made us restart the meeting. From the beginning."

"Absolutely not."

"Absolutely yes."

Before Shane noticed, they had spent almost two hours just… *chatting*. Mainly about Ilya, Marleau telling him all the embarrassing stories he could remember, and Shane laughing at every one.

Marleau dropped him off at Ilya's house with his shopping bags around 2pm, pausing before Shane got out. "Five o'clock," he said, pointing at him. "Do not make me come inside and drag you out."

Shane raised an eyebrow. "You wouldn't."

Marleau smiled. “Try me.”

So naturally, Shane went into full panic mode.

The suit was gorgeous. Classy and clean, but also fitted and… and it made him feel *hot.* But what if he couldn’t pull it off? What if he looked like a kid, trying on his dad’s suit for fun. Everyone would look at him, and immediately know that he didn’t belong. That he was just a stupid uni student, who had happened to stumble upon *Ilya Rozanov,* and somehow hold his attention for this long.

So, he did what he always did when he was panicking about his looks.

He called Rose.

Luckily, she picked up immediately, “Shane? What’s wrong? You never call unless-, *oh*, is this a date emergency? Yay, I love those.”

“I really don’t.”

“I know. Tell me all about him.”

That was when Shane realised the next hurdle. Crazy, that he could somehow make the same oversight twice. “Oh. It’s-, I’m going to a charity gala.”

“Did you finally find a sugar daddy, like I recommended? Good for you!”

“No!” Shane yelled, before cringing. “I mean, no. It’s-, I’m going with… I’m going with Ilya.”

“Ilya.”

“Yes.”

“‘Ilya-who-made-you-have-a-meltdown-in-a-club-bathroom’, Ilya? That one?”

“Yes.”

Shane could her sigh on the line. “Shane, I’m not going to pretend like that man didn’t hurt you the most I have seen in… *ever.* But I know, that… if you took him back after all of that? Then he must be special. So, if you’re happy, then I’m happy for you. But I demand to meet him.”

Shane’s heart swelled. That had gone better than expected, and significantly better than with Hayden. “Thank you.”

“For what?” She sounded puzzled.

“For not making me defend him. For not questioning whether I’d lost my mind. For not hating him, and refusing to budge on it.”

He heard her deep sigh so clear, it was as if she was right next to him. “I’m going to kill Hayden, you know?”

Shane snorted. “He means well.”

“Do not defend him. He should trust you more. I *get* the urge to be defensive, God knows I get it too, but-, but I’ve never seen you like this around anyone. And if the two of you can somehow make it work? Then I have a feeling that this could be really good. At the very least, it’s worth a try, don’t you think?”

“Yeah,” Shane found himself smiling. “We’re-, well-, it’s actually official. We’re boyfriends.”

“Ahhhhhhh, Shane, oh my god, that’s so exciting.” Rose sounded so happy for him, that it loosened some of Shane’s nerves. “Okay now back on track, you said charity gala?”

“Yes. I have a new suit. But I can’t-, I can't- make *myself* fit it. Not like, measurement wise – that way it’s pretty good. But just like… me.”

“Oh babe.” He could almost see the furrow between her brows, “You’re hot as fuck. Just embrace it.”

“And how do I do that?” he scoffed.

“I’m so glad you asked,” Rose giggled. “You will take a shower, and do all of your skincare, so you feel good. Do you have any of those hair products that we bought?”

“Yeah, I’ve brought everything,” he started taking everything out of his bag, lining it up on the counter.

“‘Brought’? You’re not home?”

Shane froze. “Ah, no. I’m at Ilya’s, but he’s not here. He’s meeting me at the gala.”

“You’re going to tell me everything one day, but I understand that that can’t be today. So, here’s what you’re going to do, Shane. Go wash your hair, and then do it like I told you, yes? I know you usually just… let it flop on your forehead, but try to make it wavier and more voluminous. And then for your face – glitter. In whatever shape or form you want, *and* you decide the amount. Just a little extra something to make you feel-”

“Pretty?”

“Yes! Exactly.”

Shane smiled, a plan forming in his head. “Okay. I can do that.”

“And what about shoes? You cannot wear sneakers.”

“Don’t worry,” Shane laughed. “I bought shoes as well. Like… pretty dress shoes. With a red sole and everything, looked very fancy.”

He was met with silence from Rose, until she spluttered, “I’m sorry, red soles? Shane Hollander, did you buy a pair of *Louboutin’s*?”

“Umm, I don’t know? They were pretty?”

Rose laughed on the line, “Only you, Shane Hollander, would buy a pair of the most famous shoes *in the world*, because they ‘were pretty’. But that’s good. Get ready, and send me pictures, okay? And don’t panic. You’ll do great.”

“Thank you.”

“Anytime babe,” and she hung up, leaving Shane alone, sitting in Ilya’s bedroom. *You can do this. Just… get ready, and then if it looks horrible, you can always not go.*

He showered and did his skincare, before spending a totally ridiculous amount of time on his hair. Rose was right, normally he just let it flop slightly on his forehead, not bothering to style it, but when he put some effort into it, he had to admit it looked… good.

He put the suit and shoes on, walked over to Ilya’s floor length mirror, and froze. He almost didn’t recognise himself. The suit was hugging him perfectly, making him look hot, but also… *pretty*. He felt like he had done a good job with his hair, and the shoes were a nice touch. He really hoped Ilya would like it.

But now that he was ready, the nerves came back tenfold. He fiddled with his phone, before posing in front of the mirror, shooting a picture to Rose.

16:49

Shane: Am I going to get laughed at?

Shane: *Attached a picture*

Rose: Oh my God.

Rose: Shane Hollander, you clean up nice!!!

Rose: He won’t know what hit him <3 Go get him, loverboy.

Shane: <3

He didn’t get much more time to overthink, as his phone pinged with a message from Marleau.

16:55

Marleau: Five minutes until I go in there and get you, pretty boy. Do not force me to get out of this car.

Shane laughed to himself, before leaving the house, walking towards the car where Marleau was waiting. He rolled the window down, and yelled, “Not bad, Hollander.”

Shane couldn’t help but fiddle with the bracelet on his wrist, trying to calm himself. As he got in the car, he took a deep breath, trying to focus on his excitement for seeing Ilya. He had seen the string of messages left by his boyfriend as a reaction to his photo last night, and couldn’t help but blush slightly.

He hadn’t seen them before he woke up in the morning, but by then he had been swept up in shopping and preparing, so he hadn’t answered him.

And Ilya hadn’t written anything else.

Shane couldn’t help the tingle of excitement running down his spine. He had a feeling he was in… trouble.

But the kind of trouble, that he didn’t mind.

Ilya had stopped listening about ten minutes ago.

Someone was talking – something about donors, numbers, a timeline that mattered to people who weren’t him, but the words slid past without landing. His attention had drifted, restless in a way he didn’t enjoy, fingers tapping once against the side of his glass before he stilled them.

He checked his phone again.

Nothing.

His jaw tightened.

He had sent too many messages. He knew that. It wasn’t… composed. It wasn’t controlled. But Shane had sent *that*, and then disappeared like it meant nothing, like Ilya was supposed to just… what? Go back to work? Sit there and pretend his head wasn’t full of images of Shane in his bed, looking like he belonged there?

Ridiculous.

He slipped the phone back into his pocket with more force than necessary, lifting his gaze just as the doors to the main hall opened.

And then-

Everything else dropped away.

Shane.

For a second, Ilya didn't move. Didn't breathe.

The suit fit him perfectly – of course it did, Marleau wasn't incompetent, but it was more than that. It was the way it sat on him. Clean lines, sharp shoulders, the black fabric hugging his waist just enough to make it obvious. The trousers fell straight, elegant, breaking just right over polished shoes with that flash of red that caught the light when he stepped forward.

And Shane was stepping carefully, like he wasn't sure he was allowed to be here. Like he thought someone might notice.

Ilya's mouth went dry.

His hair was different. Styled, deliberate, soft waves pushed back just enough to show his face properly, but still falling in a way that made it look effortless. And there – subtle, but not subtle enough, something shimmering at the corner of his eyes and on his cheeks when he turned his head. *Glitter*. Of course.

Pretty.

Too fucking pretty.

Ilya felt something sharp and ugly settle low in his chest.

Mine.

The thought came without permission, and Ilya found himself scanning the room, like he was *daring* anyone to look. Shane hesitated just inside the room, scanning, clearly looking for him, and Ilya watched the moment the nerves started to creep in and the way his fingers moved to his wrist, fidgeting with something. *The bracelet.*

"Fuck*,"* Ilya exhaled slowly.

He was already moving before he made the decision to. People spoke as he passed them, someone said his name, someone else tried to stop him – but he ignored all of it, focus locked on Shane like nothing else in the room mattered.

Shane spotted him halfway across the floor.

Relief washed over his face so quickly it was almost painful to look at. His shoulders dropped, just slightly, like he could finally breathe.

And that-, that did something possessive to Ilya's chest.

By the time he reached him, he didn't stop immediately. He let his gaze drag over Shane again, slower this time, taking everything in up close. The black suit paired with a black dress-shirt underneath. The *Louboutin's*. The way he held himself, trying so hard to look like he belonged.

"Holy shit, Shane."

Shane blinked, clearly thrown off balance. "Hi to you too?"

Ilya's mouth twitched, but it wasn't quite a smile. He stepped closer, close enough that it would read as intimate to anyone watching.

"You are late."

"I'm not-, Marleau said five-"

"Yes, yes," Ilya waved it off, distracted, gaze still fixed on him. "That is not the problem."

Shane frowned. "Then what is?"

Ilya looked at him properly then, expression shifting. "This," he said, gesturing vaguely at Shane, like the words were failing him. "You walk in here dressed like this-"

"Like what?" Shane interrupted, a little defensive now.

Ilya let out a short, disbelieving laugh under his breath, leaning in just slightly. "Like you are trying to make my life difficult," he muttered.

Shane's ears went pink. "I'm literally just wearing a suit."

"A suit," Ilya repeated, like he didn't believe him for a second. His eyes flicked down again, slower this time. "Of course."

Ilya straightened, though his hand came up without thinking, brushing lightly at Shane's sleeve, smoothing something that didn't need smoothing.

"You did your hair," he added, almost conversationally.

"…Yeah," Shane said, quieter now.

"And this," Ilya's thumb hovered briefly near his cheekbone, not quite touching the glitter there, but close enough to feel it. "You did this on purpose."

Shane huffed a small, nervous laugh. "Rose helped me."

"Mhmm." Ilya's lips pressed together. "I would like to have a word with Rose."

Shane huffed a small laugh despite himself. "She'd love that."

Ilya smiled, before his next words escaped him against his will, making him sound almost… whiny, "You did not answer me."

Shane froze.

Ilya never dropped his gaze from him. "All night. All day," he continued. "After sending me *that*."

Heat flooded Shane's face immediately. "I-, I got busy-"

"Mhmm." Ilya cut him off gently, but there was nothing soft in it. "We will talk about that later."

Shane swallowed.

Ilya let the silence stretch just long enough to make it mean something, before finally offering his arm.

“Come,” he said. “You will stay with me.”

Shane hesitated for half a second, then slipped his hand into place.

Good.

Ilya glanced down at him once more as they started walking, something dark and satisfied settling under his ribs.

Yes.

This was better.

Much better.

Shane hadn’t expected it to be this… intense.

Not the room, the room was exactly what he expected. Elegant, expensive, full of people who looked like they had never once worried about the price of anything in their lives.

No, it was… Ilya. Or more specifically, everyone around Ilya. They barely made it ten steps before someone approached them. Then another. Then another.

“Rozanov,” a man greeted smoothly, all easy confidence and practiced charm. “You’ve been impossible to get hold of.”

“I have been busy,” Ilya replied, just as smoothly.

Shane retreated from Ilya’s arm eventually, choosing instead to trail slightly behind him. Ilya furrowed his brows at him, but didn’t comment, instead engaging everyone who wanted to speak to him alone. Shane stood slightly to the side, letting the conversations happen, fingers brushing lightly against the side of his glass, trying to look like he belonged here.

But the problem wasn’t just that Shane felt out of place. People leaned in too close. Laughed a little too easily. Touched Ilya’s arm like it was natural, like it was allowed.

At one point, a woman that looked stunning and effortless rested her hand on Ilya’s shoulder as she spoke, her smile just a fraction too knowing.

Shane felt something twist in his chest. It wasn’t rational. He knew that. This was Ilya’s world. These were his people. Of course they would-

But still, his grip tightened slightly around his glass. He told himself to relax. To not be-

What? Possessive?

God know it's too late for that.

Another man approached, younger this time, sharp suit, and an even sharper smile.

"Ilya," he said, eyes flicking briefly to Shane before dismissing him just as quickly. "You've been hiding."

"I have not been hiding," Ilya replied, tone neutral.

"Mhmm," the man hummed, stepping closer anyway. "Could have fooled me."

Shane exhaled slowly through his nose. Right. Okay. That was-

That was fucking enough.

Before he could overthink it, Shane stepped forward, closing the small gap between him and Ilya, that he himself had built. His hand found Ilya's sleeve, and stayed there, gripping firmly.

The man's eyes flicked down, and Shane couldn't help the surge of satisfaction. He smiled politely. "Hi."

There was a beat, like the man hadn't expected him to speak.

"I'm Shane," he added, tone friendly.

The man blinked once, recalibrating. "Right. I-"

"Ilya's boyfriend," Shane finished for him, still smiling.

Something shifted in the air, subtle but unmistakable. Shane felt Ilya step slightly closer to him, and relaxed.

The man's posture changed, stepping back half a step, reassessing. "Ah," he said, slower now. "I see."

"Do you?" Shane asked lightly, but if looks could kill, he was sure the man would be a puddle on the floor.

The man cleared his throat. "Well. I'll let you two-"

"Of course," Ilya said smoothly, like nothing unusual had happened at all.

The man nodded once and moved on.

Shane let out a breath he hadn't realised he was holding, his hand still gripping Ilya's arm. "Fuck, I'm sorry, I don't know what came over me."

"Shane."

Shane's eyes snapped up to meet Ilya's, seeing nothing but pure lust on his face. "Shane, that was so hot. You are so hot. *Fuck.*" Ilya followed the statement by a litany of Russian curses, before reaching a hand up to grab at Shane's jaw.

"Fuck, *malysh*, I can't stop-" he cut himself off by leaning in and catching Shane's lips in a bruising kiss, far too indecent for the *very* public setting. But Shane found himself lost in it, not caring who was watching. He hoped they all were. That way, they would know, that Ilya was *his.* And no one else would get to fucking have him.

Someone cleared their throat next to them, and Shane had half a mind to give them the finger, but Ilya pulled back with a smile. "What do you want, Marley?"

Shane looked to his right, seeing Marleau standing next to them, looking very… entertained.

"As much as I enjoyed the show, I believe the auction is about to start. So, let's find our seats before you two steal the spotlight from all the expensive things that people came here to buy."

"Rude." Shane couldn't help but say, as he chased Ilya's lips for one more peck, feeling like an alcoholic drunk on kisses. Ilya barked a laugh, before grabbing Shane's hand, pulling it up to leave a kiss on his knuckles.

"Let's go find our seats, *moya lyubov*."

"What does that one mean?"

"Mhmm, wouldn't you like to know?"

Shane giggled as he let Ilya pull him towards their table, "I would actually, yes."

"Maybe if you're good, I'll tell you later. But that will be challenging, given how *bad* you have been since I saw you last. Sending me sexy pictures while I have to focus on work, and then *ignoring me* for a whole day. Then showing up here looking like *sin.* Pure torture. You are *evil*, Shane Hollander."

"Ah," Shane hummed, "But you like it."

"Fuck me, I really do." Ilya admitted.

"Later, Mr. Rozanov. Have some decorum." Shane winked as he let Ilya guide him into his seat. Everyone around them was also sitting down, looking towards the little stage that had been set up in the front of the room.

The auction itself wasn't particularly interesting. Shane hadn't meant to drift.

Around him, people were talking, laughing softly, lifting their paddles with an ease that made it clear this was normal for them, spending amounts of money Shane couldn't even process on things they didn't need. Paintings, instruments, antique swords and firearms, old vases. Things that could be shown off in a big living room, to prove to everyone how *sophisticated* and *rich* you were.

He was just about to excuse himself to the bathroom, when they brought out the next item.

And Shane couldn't look away.

The necklace looked heavy. Not bulky, but weighted in a way that made Shane aware of his throat just looking at it. The silver chain sat close, almost snug, with a blue stone resting right where it would press into skin, curving in a way that looked like it was meant to stay exactly where it was placed. Fine strands of metal hung from it, brushing lower, catching the light with every imagined movement.

He gulped, and could almost feel it restricting his throat. His fingers twitched at his side, while his brain betrayed him, providing images of it *on him*.

It would sit right at the base of his throat.

Visible.

Impossible to ignore.

Shane swallowed, and thought of the bracelet on his wrist. The way Ilya had given it to him, had *claimed* him. Suddenly, he wondered what it would feel like to have… more.

Not just a bracelet. Something like this.

Something that didn't just sit on his wrist, easy to hide, easy to forget, but something that marked him.

His stomach flipped.

God, what was wrong with him? *You're fucking deranged. And greedy. Pull yourself together.*

He shifted slightly, trying to tear his gaze away, but it didn't work. His eyes kept flicking back, tracking the way the light hit the blue stone, the way it would look against skin.

Against *his* skin.

The bidding started. Numbers were called out, calm, detached. People barely reacted, like this was routine. Shane didn't move. Didn't breathe.

He didn't even know why he cared. But eventually, the room felt too stuffy, and he leaned towards Ilya. "I'm going to go the bathroom." He didn't wait for a response, just rose quickly, and headed for the bathroom, using all of his willpower to not turn his head to look at the necklace just one more time.

In the bathroom, he noticed the flush on his cheeks, and almost laughed at his reflection. Pathetic. *You get one shiny bracelet, and suddenly you want Ilya to what? To cover you in jewellery like his own personal doll?*

Shane's breath hitched at the thought. Of Ilya dressing him up, making him all… pretty. Just the way he wanted, Shane not having to think about anything. Fuck, he loved that image. *Control yourself, and get back out there.*

Eventually, he got his breathing under control, and went back to their table, Ilya squeezing his hand when he sat down. "You missed a very boring old book. Although, you might have actually found that interesting." Ilya said with a smile.

Shane snickered, and leaned slightly more into Ilya, enjoying the closeness.

The rest of the auction passed uneventfully, and soon enough, they were saying goodbye to Marleau, and getting into the car, heading home. Shane cuddled into Ilya on the drive back, letting his eyes slip shut. The event had been fun, and being paraded on Ilya's arm had felt… powerful. But his social batteries were dead, and he allowed himself a moment of silence, recharging slowly with the help of Ilya's hand caressing his hair.

They walked into the house in silence, but never more than half a step away from each other, both seeking the closeness of the other. Shane paused to take his suit jacket off, and hung it on the rack before turning towards the kitchen, where Ilya was gulping down a glass of water, his own suit jacket discarded on the counter. The white dress shirt hugging his bicep in a way that made Shane want to replace it with his *teeth.*

Ilya saw him looking, and cocked his eyebrow. Shane licked his lips, eyes glancing quickly down Ilya's frame.

"Do you want something, sweetheart?"

"Mhmm," Shane hummed. "I want many things."

"Oh, but have you earned them?"

Shane exaggerated a pout. "But I've been so good." He took a step closer towards Ilya, putting his fingers in his belt loops before murmuring, "You left me here, all alone, to go do your big boy job. But I was *so lonely*. I tried so hard to stop."

"Did you now, *malysh*?"

"Yes." Shane whined, biting his lower lip. "I tried *so hard*," he ground his hips into Ilya's letting him feel how *hard* he was, "But I was *so horny*, I just couldn't stop, surrounded by your scent. It was almost as if you were there. And then afterwards, I felt so pretty and cozy in your sheets, so I sent you a picture. To show you what you were missing. To make you come *home*."

Ilya moaned at his words, grabbing his hips firmly. "I was so fucking useless yesterday, *solnyshko*. It was such an easy job, but I was so distracted. I kept thinking about you here, spread out and waiting for me. I was dying to be here, to give you everything you wanted."

"You're here now," Shane murmured, leaning in for a kiss. "You can give me everything I want *now*."

"Are you trying to get out of the punishment, Shane?"

Shane whined, hips still rocking against Ilya's thigh. "I'm not trying to get out of anything," he protested weakly, even as his voice betrayed him. "I just… missed you."

Ilya huffed out something that might have been a laugh, but there was no softness in the way his hands tightened on Shane's hips, stilling him.

"Mhmm. Of course you did," he said, tone low, unconvinced. "And ignoring me all day, this is how you show it?"

Shane flushed, heat crawling up his neck. "I didn't ignore you, I just-"

“Enough.” Ilya’s voice wasn’t loud, but it cut clean through him, leaving Shane quiet in an instant. Then, quieter. “Turn around. Hands on the counter.”

Shane’s stomach flipped. He hesitated for half a second, before shifting, letting Ilya guide him. The movement was firm but not rough, hands steady as he manoeuvred Shane down, chest against the hard marble.

The position alone made his breath catch.

Vulnerable. Exposed.

Ilya’s hand settled at the small of his back, grounding him there.

“You wanted my attention,” Ilya said, almost thoughtfully. “You went out of your way for it.”

“Yes,” he admitted quietly.

“Good,” Ilya murmured. “Then you can take it.”

The first hit against his ass wasn’t hard.

More… surprising than anything else.

Shane startled anyway, a soft sound escaping him before he could stop it, his body tensing instinctively under the contact.

Ilya’s hand returned immediately, smoothing over the spot, steadying.

“Don’t move.”

Shane exhaled shakily, forcing himself to loosen, to trust. “Okay,” he whispered.

There was a brief pause, like Ilya was watching him. Assessing.

Then the next one came, slightly firmer this time.

Enough to make Shane’s breath hitch, his fingers failing to find grip on the counter, but he didn’t pull away. Didn’t try to move.

“Better,” Ilya said softly.

The rhythm settled after that, Ilya varying between his cheeks, and slightly lower on the back of his thighs. Each impact followed by the same grounding touch, Ilya’s hand smoothing over the abused skin possessively.

Shane’s thoughts started to blur at the edges, the earlier anxiety, the nerves, the jealousy – all of it melting into something simpler. Each hit pulled a reaction out of him, small sounds he couldn’t quite hold back, but he didn’t move. He just stood there, leaned over Ilya’s kitchen island, and took everything he was given.

“That’s it,” Ilya murmured approvingly at some point. “You take it so well.”

The praise went straight through him, warm and dizzying. Shane let his forehead rest against the cold counter, breathing uneven, his cock rock hard, still confined in his dress pants. Ilya's hand slowed eventually, the last touch softer, more lingering, before he grabbed his ass with both hands, kneading.

Shane choked out a sob, noticing the tears that were running down his face. He'd be so sore tomorrow… but he couldn't help but want *more.* How would it feel if Ilya pulled his pants down? If the hits weren't cushioned by two layers of clothes? Would his skin be tinged red? Would it leave a mark? Could he get Ilya to spank him hard enough for the imprint of his hand to be visible? Shane moaned unabashedly, pushing his ass further into Ilya's touch. For a moment, neither of them moved.

Then Ilya's hands guided him up, and turned him around, until he was leaning against him with his forehead on his collarbone, Ilya tracing slow, reassuring patterns into his back.

"Good boy," he said quietly, and Shane whined. "You took that so well, sweetheart. So fucking good for me, always."

Shane could only whine again, trying to get some friction on his cock, but Ilya held him firmly, tilting his head up with his fingertips. "You did so well, in fact, that I think you might actually deserve a reward."

Shane's eyes widened, his brain struggling to catch up, still slightly in that foggy state. Ilya ran a finger over his cheeks, clearing the tears that had mixed with the glitter with an almost reverent look on his face.

"Look at you," he murmured softly. "So pretty like this."

Shane's breath hitched, leaning into the touch without thinking. Then Ilya's gaze shifted, something more focused settling in. "Stay," he said quietly, before slipping away.

Shane stilled immediately, following Ilya with his eyes as he stepped around the island, and reached for his suit jacket. When he turned around, there was a small velvet box in his hand.

Shane blinked, trying to follow, brain still slow. "What?"

"I saw you," Ilya said, almost casually, but his eyes were sharp. "At the auction."

Shane froze, while Ilya opened the box.

The necklace caught the light immediately.

Shane's breath left him in a quiet, startled sound, his eyes locking onto it just like they had earlier.

"There it is," Ilya murmured, watching him instead of the necklace. "That look."

Shane flushed, heat rising fast now. "I didn't think-, I mean, I wasn't expecting-"

"I know," Ilya said. "You never do."

His thumb brushed lightly along Shane's jaw, guiding his attention back up for a moment before letting him look again. "You kept staring at it," he continued, voice low.

Shane swallowed. “I just thought it was… nice.”

Ilya’s mouth twitched slightly. Not quite a smile. “*Liar*.” The word wasn’t harsh. If anything, it sounded… pleased. “You were imagining it,” he went on, quieter now. “On you.”

Shane’s breath hitched again, caught.

“I could see it,” Ilya added, softer still. “You already knew where it would sit, and how it would feel.”

Shane didn’t answer, but he didn’t need to. Ilya hummed under his breath, like that was confirmation enough. He lifted the necklace from the box, letting it dangle slightly between them, the blue stone catching the light again. “I bought it for you,” he said simply.

Shane’s eyes flicked up, wide. “You-, what?”

“You wanted it,” Ilya replied, like it was obvious. “So, I got it.”

“Ilya that necklace cost a fortune, I heard the bids. It’s not that simple-”

“It is,” Ilya interrupted. “For me, it is. And if you, Shane Hollander, do not think that you are worth every single penny in my bank account? Then you are *wrong*, sweetheart. This?” he pointed at the necklace, “This is *nothing* compared to what I would give you, if you just let me.”

“You’re crazy.” Shane breathed, eyes constantly flicking back to the necklace.

“Mhmm, yes. But you like me crazy. Come on, sweetheart, put it on.”

“Put it on me, please?”

Ilya shivered, but reached out to gently place the necklace on Shane’s neck, reaching behind him to clasp it in the back. Shane felt a full-body shiver run through him when it made contact with his skin, and he couldn’t help the whine that escaped him.

Ilya was looking at him with a wild look in his eyes. “I want to fuck you while you wear nothing else but this necklace. Can I do that, *malysh*?”

“You could do whatever you want, you know? I’d let you.” Shane whispered, almost as if he didn’t want Ilya to hear him. But Ilya heard him loud and clear, his eyes rolling back for a moment, overcome with emotion.

“Fuck, sweetheart.” He took a deep breath, running his hands up Shane’s abdomen. “Anything I want? I need words, Shane.”

“Y-yes. Anything, *please.*”

“And if I did…. this?” Ilya pinched Shane’s nipples through his shirt, harder than he normally would.

“*Fuck,* harder.”

“That’s not how good boys ask for things they want, is it?” Ilya dropped to his knees, making quick work of removing Shane’s pants and underwear, before grazing his teeth across Shane’s inner thigh

and biting down, drawing the most gorgeous whimper from the man underneath him.

“Please, harder, I can’t-, I need *more.*”

“More? Greedy little slut,” the fondness in Ilya’s voice was unmistakable. He tested out the word, not quite sure if Shane would enjoy it, given the last time they had spoken about it. But he hadn’t needed to worry.

“Yours.” Shane whimpered, his fingers gently running over the necklace around his throat, momentarily distracting Ilya.

“What, sweetheart?” he inquired, getting back up and leaning over Shane to hear him better.

“N-not just a slut. *Your* slut.” Shane’s blush was so prominent it made his freckles pop, but his eyes were determined, as if daring Ilya to disagree with him. As if that was ever a possibility. As if he could be anyone else’s. As if Ilya would ever let anyone else as much as *touch* him, let alone see him like this. He was *Ilya’s*, and he would never let him go. And he was standing here in front of him, arching and whimpering so beautifully, with his necklace around his neck, calling himself *Ilya’s*.

This boy would kill him. This gorgeous, precious and kinky boy will be his downfall, and Ilya will not even resist. He put both hands underneath Shane’s thigh, and lifted him, carrying him to the bedroom as quickly as his legs would allow him, while kissing the skin around the necklace. He dropped Shane on the bed, immediately leaning over him. “Yes, *moya lyubov.* My little slut, only mine. No one else can have you, no one else is allowed to even *look* at you, yes? Only me.”

“Yes, God. Only ever you.” Shane whined, throwing an arm over his face.

“No no no, none of that now.” Ilya firmly pulled his arm away from his face, before pushing both of them up above his head, holding them there with one hand, “You cannot say such filth, and then get shy on me, Shane Hollander.”

“Ilya, please.”

“Shhh it’s okay sweetheart, you’ll get what you want, yes? Can you keep your arms up here by yourself?” Ilya let go of Shane’s wrists, not waiting for an answer. He knew his boy would be good for him. He reached underneath the pillow, searching for the bottle of lube he knew must be here somewhere, while reaching his other arm down and spreading Shane’s legs further.

Once his fingers were covered in lube, he reached down between Shane’s cheeks, and probed at his hole with his index finger, Shane’s body pulling him in with almost no resistance. “Oh, what a slut. Did you open yourself up for me? I could just slide right in, and you would take it, wouldn’t you? You’d take anything I gave you, and still ask for more.”

“Y-yes, when I showered earlier I-, *fuck*, please.”

“Please what?”

“Please fuck me, I need to feel you, *fuck,* please.” Tears were welling up in Shane’s eyes from Ilya’s teasing, and they were only getting started.

“So pretty for me. So gorgeous. My beautiful, beautiful boy.” Ilya punctuated the tender words by adding two more fingers, skipping the gentle build up. He knew Shane would take it.

Shane arched his back off the bed, the movement pushing Ilya’s fingers deeper, the coldness of his rings against Shane’s rim making a choked gasp escape his lips. “Fuck, Ilya.”

“Yes, I will fuck you. Patience, *moya lyubov*.”

“I have been- *ah,* so patient.” Shane started moving his hips, trying to fuck himself on Ilya’s fingers, desperate for more. Ilya wasn’t even sure if he was aware of the movement, the thought of Shane’s subconsciously seeking more of *Ilya* making his own cock jerk inside his pants, where it had been forgotten.

Ilya pulled his fingers out of Shane, the accompanied whine making his breath hitch, before getting up to take his pants off, never taking his eyes of Shane. The small bedside lamp cast him in a beautiful golden glow, making the necklace on his neck glint, catching Ilya’s eye every time. Not that he could ever truly look away from it anyway. Shane laid there, squirming, wearing nothing but jewellery that *Ilya* had put on him. Ilya was going fucking crazy.

He quickly poured more lube on his cock, hissing slightly at the cold temperature, before leaning back over Shane. He gently traced one finger up his left shin, before grabbing underneath his thigh and pushing it up to his chest. He didn’t even have to say anything, Shane automatically lifting up the other leg to match. It must be straining for him, without his arms to hold it up, but he didn’t complain. Just looked at Ilya with a look of such openness and fondness, that it momentarily took his breath away.

This boy and his obedience was everything Ilya wanted in life.

He leaned over him, to reach the nightstand with the condoms, but Shane stopped him with a hand on his arm. “No.”

“No?” Ilya was confused.

“No condom. Want to feel you. All of you.”

Ilya leaned his forehead against Shane’s shin, taking a deep breath. “Fuck, *malysh.* You will let me fuck you bare? With nothing between us? So I can fill you with my come, and watch it leak out of you after?”

Shane just moaned, his legs trembling.

Without preamble, he guided his cock to Shane’s hole, and pushed all the way to the hilt. Shane’s back arched of the bed, his mouth opening in a silent moan that never made it out of his throat. And Ilya’s attention was once again directed at the beautiful silver necklace adoring his boy’s neck, the blue gem glinting, making him look truly *mesmerising*.

He set a slow, but ruthless rhythm, forceful thrusts that hit Shane’s prostate every time, making him a babbling mess, tears now streaming down his face again.

“Ilya, fuck, I- I won’t last long, I’m *so* close, it feels so good. Please, more.”

“More? Even now, you want more?” Ilya’s voice rough from the exertion, Russian accent always heavier in these moments. “What do you need, *moya lyubov*?”

“Anything. Everything. Whatever-, *ah-,* whatever you’ll give me.”

Ilya loved Shane like this. When he finally let go, stopped overthinking, and let himself ask for what he wanted. For what he *needed*. If Ilya could keep him like this always, he would - as dirty as the thought was, it made Ilya’s cock jerk inside Shane.

“That’s right sweetheart, you’ll take whatever I want to give you, won’t you?”

“Y- yes.” Shane whines, his hands holding the headboard in a white-knuckled grip, desperately trying to be good for Ilya.

“And why is that, huh?”

“Because-, *fuck,* because I’m yours.”

At that, Ilya traced one hand from Shane’s hair, down his face and jaw, Shane flinching slightly at the coldness of his rings, before nuzzling into his hand, seeking more. And Ilya would rather die, than not give it to him. His fingers finally reached the necklace, that he had barely been able to look away from since putting it on Shane, since *branding* him.

“Yes, you are. Completely and utterly *mine.”* He reached a finger between the necklace and Shane’s neck, feeling his pulse flutter under his fingertips. “This is so pretty on you. Makes you look…*fuck,* Shane, it makes you look *perfect.* I cannot believe you let me put it on you.”

Shane muttered something, and despite being right in front of his face, Ilya didn’t catch it. “Can you repeat that for me, sweetheart?”

“I’ll-, I’ll never take it off. Wanna-, wanna be yours *always*.” Shane repeated, blushing furiously and looking anywhere but at Ilya.

Which, in this particular moment, was a good thing, because Ilya had no idea what Shane would find on his face. He’d frozen, completely enamoured by this lovely, lovely boy underneath him. So shy, so gentle and yet so trusting, serving himself on a silver platter, all Ilya’s for the taking. Every time Ilya was sure that *this time* he’d taken too much, Shane found some way of offering even more, shaking the ground underneath his feet. And Ilya was a greedy man, when it came to Shane Hollander.

He’s brutally pulled back to reality by Shane squirming underneath him, and not in a good way. Ilya realised that he stopped fucking him, too much in awe to coordinate his movements. Shane almost looked like he was trying to get away, and Ilya felt as if someone poured a bucket of ice on him. His lack of response clearly had Shane panicking in embarrassment, and Ilya simply could not allow that.

“Shane, hey, Shane, sweetheart look at me.” He gently grabbed his chin, forcing them face to face. Shane looked flustered, and his eyes were still glassy in the way that Ilya *adored*, but the look in his eyes was tainted by panic. “You are a dream. And I cannot believe I get to have you like this, that you *let* me have you like this, and call you mine. *Mark you* as mine.”

He traced more fingers underneath Shane's necklace, noticing Shane shoulders relaxing slightly as he gulped loudly. "You would keep this on for me always, *malysh*? Let everyone see? Let them know who you belong to?"

"Yes." Shane uttered the single word, leaning his head back, arching his throat further into Ilya's touch.

"You'd wear it under your comfy sweaters, yes? Under your work shirts? On full display at the gym, so anyone who dared to even look your way, would immediately know, that you are *mine*?" Ilya thrust into Shane harshly, slowly losing his composure.

"Whatever you want, Ilya, *please*."

"Only I would be allowed to take it off. No one else. Not even you. And I will *never* take it off, sweetheart. I'm keeping you forever, you belong to *me."*

"Yes, yes, yes, forever Ilya, *God,* fuck, harder please."

"Your wish is my command, yes?" Ilya picked up the pace, pounding into Shane so hard the headboard was hitting the wall loudly, but Ilya couldn't care less. The hand still fiddling with Shane's necklace tightened involuntarily around his throat, Shane letting out a choking sound. Ilya immediately letting go, slowing down at the same time.

"Fuck, I'm sorry sweetheart, I didn't mean to." He had another apology ready on his tongue, but before he could offer it, Shane looked up and their eyes met. The look in Shane's eyes could only be described as absolutely *feral.* Ilya froze, not sure what to say to not anger Shane more. He had crossed a line. *Him*, who always preached safewords and always checked in to make sure Shane was on board and enjoying himself. The tightening of his hand had not been on purpose, his possessiveness combined with the feeling of Shane clenching around him had gotten the better of him.

He opened his mouth, ready to apologise.

But yet again, Shane surprised him. He slowly lowered one arm from where he had been grabbing the headboard since Ilya had told him too, and gently grabbed the hand Ilya had lowered from his throat.

Without loosing eye contact, he slowly, and almost hesitantly, pulled his hand back up to rest around his throat. When Ilya's hand made contact with the necklace again, Shane's breath hitched, his pretty freckle-covered cheeks burning red, his pupils dilated.

He looked at Ilya, who was completely frozen above him, with fire in his eyes, "I said *harder,* Rozanov."

Whatever thread had been holding Ilya back, snapped. The voice in his head, that kept telling him to be gentle, to go slow, to not scare Shane away, was *gone,* replaced by a feral *need* running through his veins. "Oh? Does my little slut want to play *rough*?"

He lowered his mouth to Shane's nipple, biting it harshly, making Shane squirm. He purposefully kept the hand at his throat *light,* teasing Shane with the idea of what's to come. He moved to the other nipple, biting and sucking with no mercy, fuelled by the whines coming from Shane.

Suddenly, with no warning, he leaned up so he was towering over Shane, and resumed the brutal pace that he had previously interrupted. Shane moaned loudly, but the sound was quickly cut off by Ilya's hand tightening around his throat. Shane's eyes rolled back, and he went limp in Ilya's hold, surrendering completely. Ilya had never seen anything more beautiful.

He realised, that Shane truly would take anything Ilya gave him, and ask for more.

With that thought, he threw one of Shane's legs over his shoulder, the change in angle making Shane scream in pleasure. He leaned over to bite at his jaw, "Come for me, Shane." And just as he could feel Shane's body tensing, he choked him harder, not letting up. Shane's entire body trembled as his orgasm hit, covering his own stomach in come. While he was still riding the aftershocks, Ilya let go of his abused throat, instead running his fingers through Shane's stomach, before reaching up and feeding them into his mouth. Shane instantly started sucking on the digits, licking them clean with a determination that made it impossible for Ilya to look away.

"So good with your mouth, you just need something to suck on, don't you? My sweet little slut needs to be filled everywhere, so greedy." He punctuated the statement with a hard roll of his hips, making Shane whimper in overstimulation.

"Ilya-"

"What, sweetheart? You think I'm done with you? Such a selfish little slut. After everything you put me through? Your little photoshoot in *my* bed? Bold of you to assume that you're getting of the hook so easily."

Ilya lowered Shane's leg back down on the bed, before grabbing him by the hips, and effortlessly flipping him around, Shane moaning unabashedly at the display of strength.

"You can make me feel good, can't you? Milk my cock dry until it's got nothing left to give, yes?" He pushed back in, and the tight wet heat of Shane's hole sucked him in like he was always meant to be there. He started with shallow thrusts, not for Shane's benefit, but for his own. He wanted this to last just a little longer, and he'd been on edge since the clasp of the necklace closed around Shane's gorgeous neck.

"Yes, fuck, Ilya-" Shane's voice was muffled by the pillow underneath him, and Ilya's arm moved before his brain caught up, reaching around to grasp at Shane's throat, pulling him up by it until his back rested against Ilya's chest. The surprise made Shane clench around Ilya, and he had to rest his head against his shoulder, trying to keep his composure - and failing.

"Fuck, Shane, so tight for me."

"O-, Only for you." Shane slurred, clearly barely present in the moment, but still being so good, so *perfect,* for Ilya.

Ilya's thrusts grew faster, his rhythm faltering as he chased his own high, the hand on Shane's throat tight around the necklace, hanging on for dear life. Ilya had half a mind to consider that the pressure he put on the gemstone and charms might be hurting Shane, but then his lovely boy moaned loudly, and tightened so impossibly around Ilya, that he was done for. He pushed in all the way, biting harshly down on Shane's shoulder, pulling another whimper from the man.

When he had gathered his bearings, Ilya ran the hand from Shane's throat down his chest and abdomen, gently caressing until he reached his inner thigh, and pressed down on the bite he left

earlier. Shane hissed, and Ilya hooked his chin over his shoulder to get a better look at his face.

What caught his attention instead, was the wet spot in front of Shane on the bed. “Fuck, Shane, sweetheart, did you-, did you come again?”

Shane nodded while whimpering weakly, clearly past the point of words. Ilya gently pulled out, running his hands over Shane’s hips to soothe him as he hissed, and manoeuvred them away from the wet spot, so they lay face to face on the bed.

Shane’s eyes were still closed, as Ilya gently played with his hair until he let out a content sigh.

“Are you okay, *moya lyubov*?”

“Mhmm, perfect” Shane didn’t open his eyes, but blindly reached for Ilya’s hip, pulling them closer. Ilya’s eyes flickered down because of the movement, and caught on Shane’s throat, the picture making his breath hitch.

The marks from his hand weren’t that visible, only a light red hue. Ilya found himself secretly wishing that they would still be visible tomorrow, but his attention was quickly drawn to the necklace. Or what was under the necklace.

The marks from where Ilya had pressed over it, forcing the gemstone and chain into the delicate skin of Shane’s throat were slightly more prominent, and looked tender to the touch. He couldn’t resist running his finger over them gently, the possessive part of his brain going absolutely feral with the knowledge that *he* had marked Shane like this.

Shane hissed, but didn’t pull away, and just as Ilya was about to break the silence, he regained his voice. “That-, that was so hot, *fuck,* why was that so hot?”

Ilya honest to God *giggled*, completely enamoured with the boy in his bed. “Because you are a freak, Shane Hollander,” he teased, not able to keep the smile from his voice. “And we will have *so. much. fun.”*

“Yea? That-, that wasn’t too much? Or I don’t know… too weird?” Shane sounded genuinely hesitant, as if afraid that Ilya would throw it back in his face and mock him. As if Ilya didn’t just discover God, and would never be the same again.

“That, *moya lyubov,* was the hottest thing I have ever done in my life, yes? Nothing compares to this. To *you.* I-, I was not too rough? Your neck looks-” Ilya trailed off, unsure how to continue.

“You could have been rougher.”

And *that,* Ilya had not been expecting. Shane Hollander was full of surprises, and fuck if Ilya’s cock din’t pathetically twitch at that. “Rougher, huh? You want me to choke you…harder?”

“You should try choking me while I’m already choking on your cock. Might be fun.”

Ilya almost choked on air. “*Bohze moy,* you will be the death of me.”

“Oh? So, you don’t want to try that?” Shane pouted. “I think it might feel even… tighter, for you.”

“Oh, we are definitely trying that. Another day. Or my dick will fall off, and it will be very sad for you. Now let’s shower.”

“I don’t want to move.” Shane stretched his whole body on the bed like a cat, pushing his ass into Ilya’s crotch, *almost* succeeding in making it look like an accident. Ilya got off the bed, to the offended whimper of his boy, before walking around to his side of the bed, and picking him up bridal style.

Shane shrieked, “Ilya, put me down right now, what are you doing?”

“We’re showering. And since princess cannot walk, I will have to carry her, yes?”

Making Shane blush was becoming Ilya’s favourite past-time, and yet again he succeeded, Shane hiding his face in the crook of Ilya’s neck, leaving gentle kisses there as Ilya walked them into the bathroom.

He put Shane down against the shower wall, supporting his weight. Shane’s eyes were barely open, but the smile on his face was unmistakable. Ilya turned on the water, letting the warm streaks caress their bodies. But he had another bullet on his agenda. Gently, he guided Shane’s hips to turn, until he was leaning on his forearms against the wall.

“W- what are you doing?” Shane slurred.

“You let me fuck you bare, *malysh*. I’m just cleaning up my mess.” With that, he dropped to his knees on the hard tiles, immediately licking around Shane’s hole, catching the come that had already managed to escape. He moaned, letting his teeth graze the skin surrounding it, before reaching both hands up to spread Shane’s cheeks apart. He heard Shane’s muffled words from above, and he pulled back.

“What was that, sweetheart?”

He could feel Shane squirm against him, before he whispered, “It doesn’t hurt.”

Ilya was confused. “What doesn’t hurt?”

“My-, my *ass*. It’s not sore. I thought it would be sore, after… after you spanked me.” Shane said petulantly, and Ilya could swear he sounded *disappointed.*

“Hmm, did you want it to hurt more? Did you want to feel it every time you sat down? Every time your pants would slide against them when you walked?”

Shane moaned, “Yes, *fuck*.”

“Oh poor slut.” Ilya said, voice dropping condescendingly, before delivering a *very* hard smack against Shane’s right cheek.

“Fuck!” Shane yelled, trying to find purchase on the shower wall, Ilya immediately snaking his other arm against his hip to steady him.

“Is this what you wanted?” Ilya asked with another hit, the wet skin making an absolutely *obscene* sound, echoing in the bathroom.

“Yes, yes, yes, yes.”

“Then how could I ever deny you?” Ilya smacked the same cheek in quick succession, watching it bloom red under his fingertips. Just as he was about to do it again, he heard Shane let out whine, his

voice cracking halfway, and his entire body shuddering, muscles tensing.

No fucking way.

“Oh, *malysh,* did you just-”

“Shut up.” Shane whined. “Fuck, I think that was almost dry. It fucking hurt.”

Ilya hummed, “Yes, you have already given me everything you had in you, right sweetheart? And I just keep taking more. So mean of me.”

“I like you mean.”

The statement seemed almost… wholesome, given the circumstances, and Ilya felt butterflies in his stomach. Fuck, he really loved this boy. “I know, *solnyshko*. You were so good for me today, such a good boy. Let’s get you cleaned up now, and just cuddle on the couch, yes?”

“Yes please.”

“Oh, so polite. Is that what it takes? Three orgasms, to fuck the brattiness out of you?”

Shane made a sound as if he wanted to talk back, but all that came out was a whine. Ilya took mercy on him, and got up from his knees, quickly cleaning them both. He then guided Shane out of the shower, and into a fluffy towel, drying him while helping him stay upright on wobbly legs.

Once they were both dry, he stood in front of him and left a gentle kiss on the tip of his nose, Shane’s answering smile worth more than any of the items at the auction today. He let his finger run over the necklace adorning his neck. “How about a movie?”

Shane hummed in agreement, and let himself be led out of the bathroom.

They were going cuddle on the couch while they watched a stupid movie. Ilya would make sure that Shane was okay, and put some cream on his neck, and ass. Maybe feed him some ice cream.

They both had tomorrow off, and Ilya couldn’t wait to wake up with Shane in his arms.

It was becoming his favourite place in the world.

Chapter End Notes

My horny boys keep possessing me, forcing me to make them even freakier. Freak4freak
Hollanov, my beloved

Chapter 9

Chapter Summary

Ilya ignored all of them completely, nodding towards the spread out pieces of papers. “What do we have?”

Immediately, everyone refocused on business. One of the men tapped the map. “We still think port is most likely first move. Smaller security presence, easier access.”

“No,” Sergei disagreed. “Too obvious.”

“He likes obvious,” another argued. “Makes people panic.”

“He likes control, panic is just a side effect.” Ilya corrected calmly, moving closer to the table.

Chapter Notes

I'm sorry for the radio silence, I needed to take a step back and paint the timeline in my head before continuing the story. :) Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Shane woke up to a slight ache in his neck, and tried to crane it to ease the tension. He opened his bleary eyes, and spotted Ilya lying next to him on the couch, with his head on Shane's stomach. They must have fallen asleep during the movie, the remaining ice cream in the tub melted on the coffee table.

They were both only in their underwear, covered by a blanket Shane had pulled from a basket next to the couch. Shane rolled his head, trying to make the ache go away without disturbing Ilya, but felt tension around his neck that made him stop.

The necklace.

Shane lifted one of his hands slowly to his own neck, running his fingers gently over it, breath hitching. He couldn't believe last night had been real. That he was now *branded* by Ilya. He pressed his fingers slightly into the necklace, and had to hold back a hiss at the soreness. Ilya had applied cream to the area meticulously last night, but some places still felt tender to the touch.

And Shane fucking loved it.

He looked down at Ilya's sleeping form, followed the rise and fall of his shoulders with his eyes. He was facing away from him, leaving his back and hair on full display, and honestly, Shane couldn't get enough. His back was covered in moles, and Shane promised himself to one day trace them all with his fingers. Or his *tongue*. For now, his hand wouldn't move away from the necklace, differentiating between gliding along the chain and pushing the gem into his own throat.

His breathing was starting to become laboured, and he suddenly felt like he was overheating. *Pull yourself together. Ilya is asleep, and you're what? Getting horny over a necklace?*

Before Shane could panic about waking Ilya up, his voice pierced through the silence, still gravelly from sleep. "Mhmm, what a nice good morning present. Is that all for me?"

"W-what?"

Ilya hummed, before bringing a hand up and laying it atop Shane's hard cock. *Fuck, when had he gotten hard?* "It's very nice, I think. To wake up to your cock poking my face. Very romantic."

"Shut up, asshole." Shane whined, embarrassment creeping in at the fact that he had *woken Ilya up* because he'd gotten hard.

"Yes, I'll get to your asshole eventually. For now, let me enjoy my breakfast." With that, Ilya craned his neck further, and started mouthing at Shane's cock through his underwear. The sensation was so sudden, that Shane bucked his hips unintentionally, pushing further into the glorious heat of Ilya's mouth. Frustration built up at the layer separating them, and without thinking it through, he pushed a hand into Ilya's hair, grabbing his curls and pulling him up, while using his other hand to shimmy his underwear down, finally freeing his cock. The cold air made him hiss, but the sound was drowned out by the absolutely *obscene* moan escaping Ilya's lips.

"Oh, do you like your hair pulled, Rozanov?"

Ilya didn't deign him with a response, only leaned back in, and started licking at Shane's now exposed cock, making him whimper. Usually, Ilya liked to tease Shane until he was begging for it, but right now he was devouring him like a man starved.

And Shane certainly wasn't complaining.

He kept running his fingers through Ilya's hair, urging him on with deviating soft touches and hard pulls – the latter of which made Ilya moan in a way that sent shockwaves through Shane's cock, making him ride a way of pleasure that he hoped would never end. Unfortunately, sooner rather than later, he felt himself getting close. "Ilya, *fuck*, I'm so close."

Ilya popped of him, and without turning his head to look at him said, "Then what are you waiting for? I want my breakfast, *da*?" He leaned back in and teased Shane's tip torturously, before taking all of him into his mouth again, swallowing around him.

And Shane was fucking *gone.*

He pushed both hands into Ilya's hair, and pushed him flush against him, keeping him around his cock while he rode out the aftershocks. Only once the orgasm subsided, did he realise he had basically been choking Ilya against his crotch, and quickly let go. "Fuck, sorry, you okay?"

Ilya let go of him, placing a last kiss on his softening cock, before rolling his body around so he was still laying on Shane's stomach, but facing him instead. "No, Hollander. I died from having your cock in my mouth. And what a way to go."

"Asshole."

"Yes, I told you I would get to that later. But you'll have to be a good boy, and wait until tonight."

Shane frowned. "Tonight? What's tonight? I though we had today off."

Ilya looked at him apologetically, reaching a hand up to absentmindedly caress Shane's peck. "Yes, I know I said that, *solnyshko*. But last night… Sergei texted that they have spotted some of Alexei's men out in the city. They are getting bolder. *Too bold.* I don't know what he wants, or what he's planning and I-", he scrunched his nose, before cuddling further into Shane. "I hate it. We need to be prepared for anything, so everyone's coming over here. To plan."

Ilya looked up at him hesitantly, before continuing, "Shane I-, I do not think this is a safe place for you right now. We have safe houses all over the city, and I can station men I trust there, and-"

"Woah, woah, woah, *Ilya,* what the fuck? Have you lost your mind?"

"I just can't handle the idea of you getting hurt, and-"

"And you think shipping me off to some remote foreign house, instead of keeping me here with you, is where I'll be safest?"

"Shane-"

"*No*. This house is in the middle of nowhere, with great security – believe me, it was a hassle to get in even *with* the door-code. And I just told you that I can't fucking sleep anywhere else. Why are you so desperate to be rid of me?"

Ilya's eyes widened, and he shot up, quickly crawling into Shane's lap, gathering his face in both hands. "I never want to be rid of you, *da?* But I do not know how to be out there and fight him, while also being here to protect you. And it's-, it's fucking killing me."

Shane softened immediately. “Ilya. I know who you are. I might not know exactly *what* you do, and what exactly the consequences are, but I’m not stupid. I get the idea.”

“No. No, you really don’t.” Ilya shook his head, his face hardening into a snarl. “He knows you mean something. He might not know exactly how much, at least I really hope he doesn’t, but if he wants to hurt me, going for you is the next logical step. And he might truly… *hurt you,* Shane. If he got to you, he might beat you. He might shoot you. He might kill you quickly just to hurt me, or torture you slowly just to hurt me *more.* He would make an example out of you,” Ilya continued, jaw tight enough that the muscles ticked visibly. “He would break your hands so you could not hold things anymore. He would bruise your face because he knows I look at you too much. He would hurt you in ways that take months to heal, just because he could.”

Shane swallowed hard, not daring to interrupt.

“And much worse,” Ilya added quietly, the words rougher now, dragged out of him. His gaze dropped for a moment, like even imagining it made him sick. “He would tie you somewhere cold and dark and wait for me to come,” he said. “He would make me listen to you scream. He would use you to prove a point. He would touch everything that belongs to me,” Ilya said, voice sharpening again, something vicious slipping through underneath the fear. “Just to show me he can.”

“How do you know? That that’s what he might do?” Shane finally whispered, the question forming on his lips before his brain had caught up.

“Because-” Ilya paused, suddenly looking anywhere but at Shane, the next part coming out in a barely audible whisper. “Because that’s what I would have done. It’s what I *have* done, in the past. Alexei and I are… we are the same.”

“No you’re fucking not.” Shane bristled, reaching up to cover Ilya’s hands on his face with his own. “Listen, I know I don’t know your brother. And I know that I can’t even begin to understand what your life truly entails. But you-, Ilya you are so *good*. You are loving, and caring, and so, so sweet. You always put me first, and always take such good care of me. I feel so fucking *safe* with you. So don’t you dare sit there and compare yourself to your asshole of a brother, in order to try and get me to leave. I. Am. *Not*. Going. Anywhere.”

Before he could say more, Ilya kissed him fiercely, tasting slightly salty of the tears Shane hadn’t even noticed, too far in his own head. They kissed like that for a while, both clinging to the other.

Eventually, Ilya pulled back, and met Shane’s eyes with his own tearful ones. “I don’t know what I’ve done to deserve you, Shane Hollander. But I’m keeping you. And if you wish to stay-” he blinked quickly, as if not quite believing that Shane truly *wanted* to. “Then I will do my very best, to keep you safe here. You have my word, *malysh*.”

Shane smiled at the endearment, leaning in to steal another kiss from Ilya’s lips, giggling slightly. But before the kiss could escalate, Ilya pulled back slightly, a finger under Shane’s chin. “I have one condition.”

“Oh, okay, sure. What?”

“Do not agree before you know the condition. That is not very smart in this lifestyle.” Ilya said smilingly, and Shane couldn’t help but laugh.

“Oh? What shady, dangerous condition do you have for me, Mr. Big Scary Mafia Boss?” he asked teasingly.

Ilya levelled him with a look, but his eyes were sparkling. “I want to teach you how to protect yourself. Just a little.”

“I can throw a punch,” Shane felt the need to clarify. “I’ve done boxing for years. But other than that, yeah I don’t know.”

“That’s better than nothing. But in this life… if someone is close enough to punch, it might be slightly too late. I would like to teach you how to shoot.”

“With a gun?!”

Ilya laughed under his breath, looking at Shane in fond exasperation. “Yes, *solnyshko.* With a gun. As I said, everyone is coming over soon. So let’s get dressed.” He got up from Shane’s lap with a kiss to his cheek, and Shane immediately missed his warmth. But reluctantly, he followed Ilya into the bathroom, where they brushed their teeth and got dressed for the day. Ilya made them quick breakfast in the kitchen, members of the *Bratva* slowly trickling in as they ate and finished their coffee. They all politely greeted Shane, besides Marleau who smirked at him.

“Nice necklace, Hollander.”

“I know. You jealous?”

Marleau barked a laugh, shaking his head. “Not a chance. You look good.”

“Stop flirting with my boyfriend, and get to fucking work Marley.” Ilya snapped from across the kitchen island, but his voice was fond, eyes flickering between them as if he couldn’t quite believe they were truly getting along. His eyes lingered on Shane before he nodded his head towards the door next to the kitchen. “Whenever you’re ready.”

Marley glanced between them. “What are you two up to?”

“Wouldn’t you like to know.” Shane quipped, before getting up and walking around the kitchen island, grabbing Ilya’s hand and letting him lead them through the door, into what proved to be the basement.

But it wasn’t *just* a basement.

The space opened up far wider than Shane had expected, stretching beneath the house. The lighting was low but almost *cozy*, warm strips tucked into the ceiling instead of harsh overhead bulbs, casting everything in muted gold. A stark contrast to the actual room. Concrete floors, dark walls, polished steel. It looked less like a basement, and more like a private facility someone very rich and very paranoid had built beneath their home. One side of the room had clearly been turned into a gym, lined with equipment that looked very expensive. Free weights sat perfectly organised against the wall, alongside mats and punching bags suspended from thick steel beams overhead.

But it was the other side that truly caught his attention.

A shooting range.

His eyes widened slightly as he took it in. Several lanes stretched into the distance, divided by reinforced partitions, targets hanging far back where the light faded darker. Everything looked immaculate and precise. Very *Ilya*.

“Holy fucking shit,” Shane muttered.

Ilya’s hand tightened faintly around his. “Such a filthy mouth.”

“You have a whole supervillain bunker under your house, and my *swearing* is the problem?”

That earned him a soft huff of laughter. “It is practical.”

“Mhmm.” Shane looked around again, still slightly stunned. “Do you monologue down here too, or?”

“I only monologue if I am feeling particularly evil that day.”

Shane snorted despite himself, the tension easing slightly from his shoulders. Still, he couldn’t stop staring. The basement didn’t feel messy or chaotic like he’d maybe unconsciously imagined. No scattered weapons. No blood stains. No movie-style torture dungeon lurking dramatically in the corner. Everything had a place, and looked perfectly maintained and efficient. It somehow made it all feel more real. His gaze snagged on a locked cabinet against the far wall, then another, larger one beside it. Definitely guns. Definitely *many* guns.

Shane suddenly became very aware of the necklace sitting against his throat. Of Ilya beside him. Of the fact that this wasn’t pretend anymore. Before he could overthink it, Ilya ran a comforting hand across his lower back. “You okay?” he asked quietly.

Shane glanced at him, finding none of the teasing from upstairs left in his expression now. Just attentiveness. “Yeah,” Shane answered honestly after a second. “Just… adjusting to the fact that my boyfriend apparently has an underground lair.”

Ilya hummed thoughtfully. “Would you prefer ‘evil headquarters’?”

“Actually, yes. You should commit to the bit.”

Ilya laughed openly, warm enough that Shane’s chest squeezed. Then he stepped closer again, hand sliding briefly to the back of Shane’s neck, fingers brushing the clasp of the necklace absentmindedly. The touch grounded him immediately.

“You do not need to be nervous,” Ilya said softly. “No one is down here besides us. And even if they were, no one is expecting you to know what you’re doing.”

Shane exhaled slowly. “That’s good, because currently my expertise begins and ends with ‘gun bad.’”

“A strong starting point,” Ilya replied gravely, the corner of his mouth tilting up in a smirk.

Shane rolled his eyes, but smiled anyway. Ilya’s thumb brushed against the chain at his throat one last time before he finally stepped back, moving toward one of the secured cabinets.

“Come,” he said. “First lesson, *solnyshko*.”

Ilya unlocked one of the cabinets and pulled out a handgun with the same calm precision he seemed to do everything with. Shane watched carefully as he checked it over before turning back toward him. “First rule,” Ilya said, holding it out grip-first. “You do not touch a gun unless you know exactly where it is pointed.”

Shane took it cautiously. It was heavier than he expected. Not *impossibly* heavy, but solid. Real in a way that action movies never managed to capture. “And second?”

Ilya’s eyes flicked to him, amused. “You listen to me.”

Shane snorted. “That one feels less universal.”

“Mhmm, and how do you know? Are you gun professional?”

Shane rolled his eyes, but his pulse had already started climbing. Maybe it was the setting, or the way the way Ilya looked down here, sleeves of his white button-up rolled up slightly, voice lower and steadier than usual. Or maybe it was simply the fact that Shane apparently found competence mortifyingly attractive.

Ilya stepped behind him, close enough that Shane immediately felt warm all over again. “Feet apart slightly,” he instructed. Shane adjusted automatically.

“Good.” Ilya’s hand settled briefly against his hip, nudging him another inch wider. “Relax your shoulders.” *Easy for him to say.*

Shane tried anyway, very aware of Ilya’s chest brushing lightly against his back as he reached around him to adjust his grip. “Like this,” Ilya murmured. His hands covered Shane’s, large and warm and steady around the gun. Shane swallowed hard. “You are tense,” he murmured into Shane’s ear, making the hairs on his arms stand up.

“I wonder why.”

A quiet laugh ghosted against the side of his neck. “Focus, *solnyshko*.”

That was difficult when Ilya was practically wrapped around him. Still, Shane tried. He listened carefully as Ilya explained the basics, surprisingly patient through every question, every adjustment. He corrected Shane’s stance with firm hands and quieter praise.

“There. Better.”

“Do not anticipate the recoil.”

“Good boy.”

That last one nearly killed him. Shane exhaled slowly, trying to gather what remained of his concentration as he aimed at the target downrange. “Okay,” he muttered. “I’m going to suck at this.”

“I think you say that about everything, before becoming irritatingly good at it.”

Shane glanced back at him. “Was that almost a compliment?”

“It was a threat. Shoot.”

Shane laughed under his breath and pulled the trigger. The recoil jolted through him harder than expected, the sound cracking through the room and echoing off the concrete walls.

He blinked, looked, and had to blink again. Because the shot had landed far closer to the centre than it had any right to.

“Holy shit.”

Behind him, Ilya went still for half a second. “Beginners luck. Shoot again.”

Shane grinned despite himself and did. The second shot landed close to the first. “Oh my God,” Shane laughed, turning slightly. “I’m naturally gifted. This is amazing news.”

Ilya was looking at him strangely now. Not *strange*, exactly. But intense in a way that had Shane biting his lips teasingly. Ilya’s gaze dropped down immediately, before slowly dragging back to the target. “You are enjoying this too much.”

“You brought me to your murder basement.”

“Indoor range.”

“Murder basement sounds cooler.”

Ilya huffed a laugh, but there was distraction underneath it now. Shane could feel it in the way his hands lingered longer than necessary every time he corrected him. In the way his eyes kept dropping to the necklace at Shane’s throat whenever he tilted his head.

It got worse the more confident Shane became. Because after a few rounds, he actually started doing well. Not expert-level, obviously. But consistent in a way that made it *fun.* Each successful shot earned him another quiet “good,” from behind him, and Shane found himself chasing the praise embarrassingly quickly.

“Again,” Ilya murmured after another clean hit. Shane obeyed immediately. The shot rang out, and a beat of silence followed. Then Shane felt Ilya’s hand tighten suddenly around his waist. “Fuck,” Ilya muttered under his breath.

Shane’s stomach flipped. “What?”

Ilya stared at the target for another second before leaning in slightly, mouth close to Shane’s ear. “You look very pretty holding a gun.”

Heat flooded straight through Shane, sharp and immediate. “That’s a weird sentence.”

“It is your fault.”

“How is this my fault?”

“You are standing there,” Ilya said calmly, “wearing my necklace and shooting better than half the men upstairs when they first started.”

Shane nearly missed his next breath entirely.

Oh.

Oh, that was what this was.

The possessiveness in Ilya's voice wrapped around him warm and dizzying, turning his thoughts pleasantly useless. Behind him, Ilya exhaled slowly, like he was actively trying to control himself.

"Again," he said. But this time, it sounded strained. Shane moved into position, but had no intention of firing the gun. Instead, he pretended to aim, and shifted his stance slightly, so his ass brushed lightly against Ilya's crotch. He felt him tense behind him, so he pushed back more firmly, Ilya cursing softly in Russian under his breath.

"What do you think you are doing?"

Shane smiled, but didn't turn his head away from the target, still pretending to aim. "I don't know what you're talking about."

"You are playing a dangerous game with a loaded gun, *malysh*."

"Well then it's good that we just established you're an evil villain. You must thrive on danger."

Ilya nipped at his earlobe, making Shane melt into him, lowering the gun. Immediately, Ilya reached in front of him and pulled the gun out of his grasp. "You have to be more careful, you could get hurt."

"With you here? Never." Shane whispered, baring more of his neck to Ilya, who immediately started trailing kisses alongside it, nipping slightly in a way that had Shane's cock hardening in his pants. But before he could turn around and deepen the kiss, Ilya pulled back, walking back over to the locker, putting the gun away. "What are you doing?" he asked, definitely *not* whining.

"We are going upstairs before I decide that everyone else can survive without me for another hour," Ilya said flatly, locking the cabinet with perhaps slightly more force than necessary.

Shane grinned helplessly. "So I am distracting."

Ilya turned slowly, fixing him with a look that made warmth bloom all the way down Shane's spine. Ilya stepped back into his space one last time, fingers briefly adjusting the collar of Shane's shirt where it sat against the necklace. "Dangerous."

"But you said I shoot well."

"I did." Ilya's mouth twitched faintly. "Unfortunately."

Shane rolled his eyes fondly, but let Ilya guide him back upstairs anyway, fingers linked loosely together between them. The moment they stepped back into the living room, now populated by significantly more men then when they had left, conversation dipped slightly. A few pairs of eyes flicked toward them. More specifically, toward Shane.

One of the guys glanced down to Shane's neck, a smile forming on his face. "Oh, for fuck's sake," he cursed dramatically in broken English from his spot at the table. "So that is that where the auction necklace went?"

Shane blinked. "You know about that?"

“Everyone knows about that.” Marleau pointed accusingly at Ilya. “Do you know how much money this man spent because you looked at something with sad eyes for thirty seconds?”

“I did not look at it with sad eyes,” Shane protested.

“You looked at it like a Victorian woman staring longingly out a rain-covered window.”

A bark of laughter erupted from somewhere behind them. Shane turned, startled, finding one of the older Bratva members grinning openly now. He was broad-shouldered, heavily tattooed, with silver beginning to creep into his beard. “Is true,” the man said in accented English. “Very tragic. Very beautiful.”

“Oh my God,” Shane muttered, covering his face briefly.

“You are all embarrassing,” Ilya informed the room, though the hand at Shane’s lower back never moved.

“Boss bought matching bracelet too,” another man chimed in from the couch.

That made Shane’s head snap around. “He what?”

Marleau slapped the counter delightedly. “He doesn’t know?!”

“Marley,” Ilya warned.

“No, no, let him suffer like the rest of us suffered.”

Shane immediately looked down at Ilya’s wrist, but it was bare. He looked up questioningly at Ilya, and could swear that the tip of his ears were red. “Ilya. Is there a matching bracelet?”

Ilya looked like he wanted to be anywhere else. “Yes,” he whispered reluctantly.

Shane’s stomach flipped so violently he nearly forgot everyone else was still there. “Oh,” he said faintly, not quite knowing how to respond.

Several men in the room exchanged looks, and something softened in the atmosphere after that. Ilya ignored all of them completely, nodding towards the spread out pieces of papers. “What do we have?”

Immediately, everyone refocused on business. One of the men tapped the map. “We still think port is most likely first move. Smaller security presence, easier access.”

“No,” Sergei disagreed. “Too obvious.”

“He likes obvious,” another argued. “Makes people panic.”

“He likes control, panic is just a side effect.” Ilya corrected calmly, moving closer to the table.

Shane hovered awkwardly near the doorway for a second, suddenly unsure where to put himself, now that things had clearly become serious. Then Marleau reached over without looking and tugged him down onto the couch beside him. “Sit,” he ordered.

The conversation continued around him rapidly, switching between English and Russian often enough that Shane only caught fragments. Shipments, routes, safe-houses, retaliation. Alexei's name surfaced over and over again like something poisonous. Shane stayed quiet at first, mostly listening, but slowly he started piecing things together. Not specifics, exactly. More… patterns. How they spoke, what they worried about, and what they *weren't* saying.

"He wants you reactive," Shane said suddenly, before he could stop himself.

The room went quiet enough that he immediately regretted opening his mouth. Several heads turned toward him, and Shane wanted to bury himself into the cushions, but Ilya's gaze sharpened on him, keeping him there. "Explain."

Shane swallowed, suddenly very aware that he was speaking into a room full of dangerous men. But Ilya was looking at him calmly, so Shane pulled his legs up until his chin was resting on his knee, and continued – albeit hesitatingly. "If he wanted immediate damage, he would've already done something loud." He gestured vaguely toward the map. "But instead he's making everyone nervous first. Which means he wants people anticipating him everywhere." Shane frowned slightly, thinking out loud now. "That's useful because then eventually someone overreacts, or gets sloppy, or starts distrusting each other."

A moment of silence passed, then Sergei slowly nodded once. "Yes," he said simply.

Shane blinked, and another man leaned forward slightly. "You think first move is, what is the word, psychological?"

"I mean…" Shane shrugged awkwardly, before looking to Ilya. "Wouldn't yours be?"

A short laugh escaped Marleau beside him. "Jesus Christ."

Ilya ignored that entirely, eyes still fixed on Shane now with an intensity that made his stomach flip. "What would you do?" he asked.

Shane frowned harder. "If I was Alexei?"

"Yes."

"Well…" Shane leaned forward slightly despite himself, looking down at the map again. "If everyone expects violence first, then I'd probably do something smaller."

"Smaller how?" Sergei asked.

Shane hesitated. "Something annoying enough to prove I can get close whenever I want."

One of the men across the room swore quietly in Russian. "He's right. But how the fuck do we guard ourselves against *that*?"

The energy in the room shifted subtly after that, noticeable enough that Shane no longer felt like he was completely on edge. The occasional amused glances at him became more attentive. Like they had collectively stopped seeing Shane as simply Ilya's pretty boyfriend sitting in the corner. Marleau looked deeply delighted by this development.

"I told you," he announced to the room, pointing at Shane dramatically.

“Fuck off,” Shane muttered automatically. That got an actual laugh out of Sergei. And across the room, Shane caught Ilya watching him again. Only this time, there was unmistakable pride sitting underneath the intensity.

Eventually, after many, *many* hours, the *Bratva* had concluded that it was impossible to predict every move Alexei could make. Ilya ordered everyone to be vigilant, and to maintain the routines that always kept them safe and steady. After a round of take-away pizza, everyone trickled out, leaving Ilya and Shane alone.

Shane started to collect empty glasses and pizza boxes, but Ilya stopped him with hands on his waist. “You did good today.”

Shane froze, before hesitatingly glancing up at Ilya. “I didn’t-, I didn’t mean to. It just popped into my brain.”

“And what a lovely brain that is. You are full of surprises, Shane Hollander. But I want you to know, that you are never *forced* to participate, *da*? I know we are… a lot. And I am already so thankful that you’re even here.”

“I know, Ilya. I didn’t do it because I felt like I had to. I did it because it was… exiting.”

Ilya’s eyes sparkled, and a smirk was forming on his lips. Before he could say anything, Shane continued. “But do you know what was the most exiting today?”

Ilya frowned thoughtfully, “Hmm, shooting? You did seem to enjoy that.”

“No. I think it was very exiting to find out that you were *keeping secrets*.”

Ilya’s brows lifted slightly, though the corner of his mouth betrayed him immediately, curving into something far too smug to be innocent. “Secrets?”

“Yes, secrets,” Shane repeated, poking a finger lightly into his chest. “You somehow *forgot* to mention the matching bracelet.”

A flicker of surprise crossed Ilya’s face before amusement settled in fully. “Ah.”

“‘Ah’?” Shane scoffed. “That’s all I get? I find out in front of your entire criminal organisation that you apparently bought us matching jewellery, and your response is ‘ah’?”

Ilya laughed softly under his breath, hands still resting warm against Shane’s waist. “I did not think Marley would tell you.”

“Marleau would tell me the nuclear launch codes if he thought it would be funny, and make you squirm.”

“That is unfortunately true.”

Shane rolled his eyes. “When exactly were you planning on mentioning it?”

“I was… considering it.”

“That sounds suspiciously noncommittal.”

Ilya’s eyes sparkled. “You are very demanding today.”

“And you’re avoiding the question.”

For a second, Ilya simply looked at him, fondness softening something in his expression before he finally nodded toward the bedroom. “Nightstand.”

Shane blinked. “It’s here?”

“Yes.”

Immediately curious, Shane slipped out of Ilya’s hold and headed toward the bedroom, hearing Ilya following behind him at a much calmer pace.

The bracelet was tucked inside the nightstand drawer. Not hidden, exactly. Just… kept there. Waiting.

Shane picked it up carefully, his breath catching slightly as recognition settled. It really did match. Same silver chain, same blue stone. Only heavier than the necklace somehow, cleaner in its design, less delicate. It looked expensive in the way everything surrounding Ilya did, understated until you looked too closely and realized every detail had been chosen with terrifying precision. Shane turned it slowly between his fingers. “I can’t believe you bought this too. I hadn’t even seen it at the auction.”

“Ah, no, you wouldn’t have. They brought it out while you were busy panicking in the bathroom over how pretty the necklace was.” Ilya said while running a finger over Shane’s neck.

Shane spluttered, “I-, I was not *panicking.* I just-, I just had to use the bathroom.”

“Right, yes, of course sweetheart.”

Shane squinted his eyes at him, but decided to let the sarcasm go. Instead he asked the question that had been burning inside him ever since he found out about the bracelet. “Why?”

The question seemed to genuinely catch Ilya off guard, as if the answer should have been obvious. “Because I wanted it,” he said simply.

“For yourself?”

Ilya’s gaze flicked meaningfully toward the necklace resting against Shane’s throat before returning to his face. “For us.”

The room suddenly felt very warm. Shane looked back down at the bracelet quickly, trying to gather himself, but his chest had already gone painfully tight with affection. Because of course Ilya

had done that. Of course he had apparently seen matching jewellery at an auction and immediately decided Shane belonged in it with him. *Ridiculous man.*

“You’re insane,” Shane muttered softly, sitting down on the bed, not taking his eyes off the bracelet.

“Yes.”

Behind him, the mattress dipped slightly as Ilya sat on the edge of the bed, watching Shane. “Well?” he asked after a moment.

Shane glanced back. “Well what?”

“You are holding my bracelet hostage.”

That startled a laugh out of him. Then Ilya held out his wrist. The movement was casual, but something about it made Shane’s breath catch anyway.

“Put it on me, *solnyshko*. I put yours on you,” Ilya said, looking at him with a look of pure adoration. “It seems only fair.”

Something warm unfurled slowly beneath Shane’s ribs. The yearning in it almost embarrassed him, because this was stupid, objectively. Just jewellery. Just a bracelet. And yet suddenly his hands felt unsteady as he looked down at it resting across his palm, at the tiny clasp, at the blue stone that matched the one sitting against his own throat.

Ilya still held his wrist out patiently, like he didn’t dare to move it. Slowly, Shane took it into his hands. The skin there was warm beneath his fingers, pulse steady and strong. Shane swallowed hard and focused carefully on fastening the bracelet, suddenly absurdly nervous under the weight of Ilya’s attention.

Because Ilya wasn’t watching the jewellery. He was watching *Shane*.

His fingers fumbled slightly at the clasp. “You’re staring,” Shane muttered weakly.

“You are blushing.”

”You’re only making it worse.”

A low laugh slipped out of Ilya at that, warm enough to make Shane’s stomach twist again. Finally, the clasp clicked shut. There. *Matching*.

Shane’s hand lingered around Ilya’s wrist for a second longer than necessary, thumb brushing once against the blue stone before he looked up. Ilya’s gaze immediately dropped to the necklace at Shane’s throat, then to the bracelet on his own wrist. Something in his expression softened so suddenly and completely it almost hurt to look at.

“Come here,” he murmured quietly.

Shane barely had time to breathe before Ilya manhandled him into his lap, not waiting for him to come by himself. His hand slid up to his jaw, thumb brushing lightly across his cheek. The bracelet caught the light between them, now perfectly aligned with Shane’s necklace. They both drew in a

sharp breath, before their eyes met across the jewellery that now marked them as *each other's*. Shane turned his head slightly, and pressed a kiss to the bracelet.

Ilya looked almost undone by it. "Beautiful," he said softly.

And Shane had the terrifying suspicion he wasn't talking about the jewellery at all. His gaze dropped to Ilya's button-up, that still sat pristinely despite the many hours since he had put it on. Suddenly, he needed it *off*. He dropped his hands to the buttons, and started fumbling them open. Ilya arched an eyebrow at him, but Shane ignored him, focusing on the task at hand.

"Impatient," Ilya murmured.

"Yes."

That startled a laugh out of him, warm and low, but he lifted his arms slightly to help Shane ease the shirt off him anyway. And *there*. The silver glint of the nipple piercing caught the low bedroom light. Shane's breath hitched softly, and immediately, Ilya noticed.

His hands tightened slightly on Shane's waist. "Ah," he murmured knowingly. Shane flushed, because yes, *maybe* he had been slightly obsessed with them from the beginning. They just looked unfair on Ilya somehow, the silver against his skin turning something already beautiful into something almost obscene. Shane wanted to bite him a little bit. Or maybe a lot.

Without thinking, he let his fingertips drift lower, brushing lightly over the piercings. Ilya inhaled sharply. Shane's eyes snapped up, finding Ilya already watching him, dark-eyed and with a blush covering his cheeks. "You like that," Shane said quietly, a little breathless.

"I like *you*," Ilya corrected.

Shane swallowed hard and traced over them again, slower this time, fascinated by the way Ilya's body reacted. The slight tension in his stomach, the way his grip kept tightening unconsciously and the way his eyes were slowly looking more and more unfocused, as if Shane was pulling him out of his head with every stroke against his nipples.

"You look so pretty when I touch you here," Shane murmured before he could stop himself.

For a second, Ilya just stared at him. "Careful," he warned softly.

Shane absolutely did not want to be careful today. Not when Ilya was looking at him like that. Slowly, he leaned down, pressing a lingering kiss just beside the left piercing before letting his lips brush lightly over the metal itself.

Ilya cursed under his breath in Russian, before whining softly, as if the sound had escaped him against his will. It made heat bloom all the way through Shane's body, pleased and aching and wanting all at once. "There he is," Shane whispered teasingly, smiling against his skin. "I was wondering how long it would take before you cracked."

One of Ilya's hands immediately slid into his hair, tightening just enough to tilt Shane's head back, as if in warning. But his eyes looked wrecked already. "You are very brave today," Ilya said quietly.

Shane didn't answer, instead maintaining eye contact through his lashes, while pulling the piercing in between his teeth and biting down, not particularly *softly*.

Ilya's head tipped back immediately with a groan. "Oh, *fuck*."

The curse shot straight through Shane like electricity. There, that was what he wanted. Because Ilya was always so controlled, so composed, every reaction carefully measured unless Shane dragged it out of him piece by piece, and God, Shane loved doing it. Loved being the *only* one who could.

"And you are very sensitive today." he shot back softly, trying and failing to sound innocent. "I think these beauties-" Shane licked over the piercing before continuing, "They deserve some attention too, don't you think? They shouldn't be neglected, just because you got a new accessory."

With that, he leaned down again, teasing the other nipple with his teeth, while reaching a hand up to give the other equal attention. He kept nipping and licking, never giving Ilya a break, and above him was a litany of Russian curses, urging him on. He put both hands on Ilya's chest and pushed him back until he was laying on the bed. He positioned himself so he was straddling one of Ilya's legs, giving himself more flexibility to switch between his nipples without straining his back.

He couldn't resist kissing the pec around the piercing. Ilya was so *big,* his chest so firm and yet so soft. So *biteable.* And Shane did not have any self-control left today, so he leaned in and bit harshly at the firm muscle. Ilya moaned, both his hands coming up to grab at Shane's hair, but not to pull him away. To keep him *closer*. "Fuck, fuck, *fuck*, Shane."

Shane sucked on the skin before letting go, and licked over the mark he had just left. The indent from his teeth, accompanied by a nicely blooming hickey. The sight of it made Shane feral with a desperate need to leave *more.* So he did. He continued all across Ilya's chest, differentiating between sucking and biting, all the while Ilya was progressively falling more and more apart below him. A particularly obscene moan from his boyfriend had Shane bucking his hips involuntarily, and he groaned at the delicious friction of Ilya's thigh against his cock, even through their pants.

He couldn't stop, attacking Ilya's chest while grinding deeply against his thigh, and he realized with a start that he wouldn't last. Normally he'd pull back, and beg for Ilya to fuck him, but right now, the idea of coming just like this was *perfect.* As his orgasm neared, he went back to Ilya's nipples, biting softly at the now slightly puffy and abused skin.

Ilya whined above him, "Fuck, you're insane. God, don't stop, *please*."

And Shane wasn't going to, but it only took a couple of thrust against Ilya's thigh, and suddenly his orgasm was ripping through him. The pleasure made him bite down on Ilya's nipple *hard*, but if the moan he let out was any indication, Ilya was enjoying himself. Shane rode out the aftershocks while licking at the nipple, before resting his forehead against Ilya's chest, panting heavily. "Give me a minute."

But before he could say more, Ilya was using his whole body weight to push Shane backwards, turning them around on the bed until Shane was laying on his back, with Ilya hovering above him. "Fuck, Ilya, it's so hot when you do that."

Ilya just smirked, reaching a hand down to his own pants, undoing them and pulling his cock out. It was glistening from the amount of precome Ilya had been leaking, and he stroked himself slowly while looking at Shane. "You're so fucking beautiful."

Shane flushed, eyes darting down to the exposed cock. "Can I-" he hesitated, licking his lips. "Can I taste it, please?"

Ilya groaned above him, face contorting in a way that almost made him look like he was in pain. “You’ll be the death of me. I would love nothing more, than to see your pretty lips around my cock, *malysh*. It’s what they were made for, after all, *da?* But you have been teasing me for so long, that I will come immediately if that happens, and I have plans.”

Shane shuddered at the lust and promise in Ilya’s words. “What-, what plans?”

Ilya just wiggled his eyebrows, before scooting up Shane’s body, until his hips were bracketing his torso, one of his hand still stroking himself. Shane whined at being so close to what he wanted, but not allowed to have it. Ilya’s cock twitched at the sound, and Shane felt a sense of pride at having such an effect on him. He licked his lips, and looked pleadingly at Ilya, hoping he would change his mind.

But Ilya’s smile had taken on a mean glint. “Oh, is there something you wanted, sweetheart?”

Shane just whined, eyes darting down to the bead of precome threatening to drip from Ilya’s cock. Ilya followed his eyes, and laughed condescendingly. “So desperate for it. Such a slut for my come, yes? You already came, and now you want more? Want a taste?”

Shane wasn’t sure if it was rhetorical question, but he answered anyway. “Yes, please, *please*, just a taste, I just want a little bit, please Ilya, I *need it.”*

Ilya moaned above him, stroking his cock faster, the furrow of his eyebrows and the way his legs kept twitching around Shane’s chest betraying how close he was. “My adorable little slut, so hungry for it, begging for my come. I’ll give you a taste, you’ve been so good for me, haven’t you? Played with me so nicely, teased me so much. I’m going to feel your bruises on my chest for days, every time my shirt slides against my skin, I will think of you. Is that what you wanted? To claim me?”

“Yes, yes, yes, *fuck.*”

“I know, sweetheart. And I’m going to claim you right back.” With that, Ilya’s orgasm hit him, and Shane realized what was going to happen in a split second. He opened his mouth and stuck out his tongue, catching some of the come, while the rest covered-

Fuck.

The rest of Ilya’s come trailed down his throat, and covered *the necklace.* Ilya was looking at it completely transfixed while stroking himself through the aftershocks. He reached the hand with the bracelet up, and smeared his come into Shane’s neck. *Fuck,* it should have been… disgusting. Instead, Shane found himself blushing and whining at the feeling.

Eventually, Ilya collapsed next to him on the bed, both of them trying to catch their breath.

“Fuck, that was-”

“I know.”

Shane ran a finger over the necklace, before scrunching up his nose in disgust. “Okay but, as hot as that was, you better find a way of cleaning this properly without taking it off me. I am *not* walking around with your crusty come on my neck.”

Ilya snorted, before getting up and reaching a hand out to Shane. “Of course not, princess. Let’s shower, yes? I promise, no crusty come for you. Only fresh, right from the source, for my spoiled brat.”

“You’re disgusting.”

“Says the guy who just begged to *taste me*. I do not think you have any arguments, sweetheart.”

Shane couldn’t find any rebuttal to that, so he just rolled his eyes, and followed Ilya into the bathroom. Ilya might have just come on his face, but if he thought that Shane wasn’t getting the blowjob he wanted, he was about to be *very* surprised. He would like to see him try and say ‘no’, once Shane got on his knees.

And also, Ilya had a promise to keep.

After all, he had said he’d fuck him tonight, and Shane wasn’t about to let him get away with it, before Ilya had a chance to fully *fulfil* that promise - in every sense of the word.

Chapter End Notes

I have no words, freak4freakhollanov or whatever

Not little mob wife shane using his little psychology minor :((adorable

Chapter 10

Chapter Summary

Rose stared between them slowly, visibly trying to process the implications. “You matching-jewellery psychopaths.”

Heat exploded across Shane’s face instantly. “It’s not like that.”

“It is exactly like that,” Rose shot back, looking at Shane with a manic glint in her eye, before reaching out to expose more of Shane’s necklace. “That man bought you a collar.”

“It is not a collar!” Shane whispered aggressively, glancing around him to see if anyone was listening.

“It is spiritually a collar. People just normally buy a cheap one from a sex shop, not something that looks like it should hang in the Louvre.”

Chapter Notes

:)

UPDATE 18/5
If you’re re-reading, just know that I slightly changed the beginning of /THAT/ scene, so that Ilya takes the bracelet off Shane before they start. For safety reasons, but also bcs it will make more sense with the next chapter. *Laughing manically and running away*

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The next day, the first thing Shane notices is a stream of messages from Rose demanding his attention.

09:34 am

Rose: Shane Hollander, you better have a great excuse for why I have not heard everything about your little gala outing yet.

Rose: All of that work on your hair and makeup, and this is what I get?

Rose: NOTHING?

Rose: I have the day off today, and I know you're not working either, so we're having brunch.

Rose: If he's free, bring your man. I want to meet him.

His attention is quickly brought back to reality when Ilya starts trailing good morning kisses down the back of his neck. "Mhmm good morning, *solnyshko*."

"Morning" Shane whispers, arching his neck further into Ilya's touch.

"Who dares to steal your attention away from me? I want you all to myself."

"Just Rose."

"Oh, the ex girlfriend? Should I be offended? Or worried?" Ilya teases, biting at the soft skin behind Shane's ear.

"Rose is a-, ah *fuck,* she's a friend."

"Mhmm" Ilya hums noncommittally.

"She wants to meet you today, if you're free for brunch?" At that, Ilya stopped his ministrations to Shane's neck, and leaned on his elbow so their eyes could meet.

"She wants to meet me? *Me*?"

Shane smiled warmly. "She wants to meet the guy who's swept me off my feet."

Ilya shook his head in disbelief. "And what exactly have you told her about me? About what I do?"

"Nothing. I have told her that you're gorgeous, and that you make me happy. She knows about… about Boston, but she also knows we're past it now. She knows you're… *important*. Whatever story you want to tell her about your job, let me know. It's your life."

"You would lie to your best friend for me? I don't want you to do that, that is not nice."

Shane furrowed his brows. "Ilya, I would never force you to reveal something that might put you in danger. You don't exactly have a boring office job."

Ilya pushed his finger under Shane's chin to make him look into his eyes. "Shane. If you trust your friend, she can know. If you believe she will not tell, I do not want to make you lie to her."

Oh, he was such a sweetheart. Shane was going to melt over the level of thoughtfulness that Ilya exhibited even when a secret like *that* was on the line. Shane really fucking loved him. He wouldn't tell him just yet, too afraid to scare him away. But fuck, he couldn't wait to tell him.

"Okay." Shane nodded, probably smiling like a fool. "I trust her with my life."

Ilya nodded, as if that was enough for him. "Then let's get ready for brunch."

Brunch was apparently taking place at a tiny café downtown that Rose swore had "life-changing pancakes". Shane had not expected to be nervous about it, because it was just Rose, just brunch, just introducing his boyfriend to his best friend, but apparently his brain had decided that was enough to qualify as a life-altering event.

Which, okay, maybe it was a little bit.

He kept catching himself checking his reflection in shop windows as they walked, smoothing down his hair only to immediately mess it up again when the wind caught it, fingers fiddling absentmindedly with the sleeve of his coat until Ilya's hand settled against the small of his back.

"You are thinking too loudly again," Ilya murmured.

Shane glanced up sheepishly. "Sorry."

"What is happening in that pretty head?"

Shane huffed softly, eyes dropping to the pavement for a second before he admitted, quieter now, "I just really want you two to like each other."

Immediately, Ilya slowed slightly beside him.

"Shane," he said softly, pulling him a little closer as they waited at a crosswalk. "I already like her."

"You haven't even met her yet."

"She makes you smile every time you talk about her, and she's willing to meet me despite how much I hurt you." His thumb brushed slowly against Shane's hip through his coat. "I already owe her for that second chance alone."

And God, there it was again. That terrifying softness, that kept sneaking up on Shane when he least expected it, sliding out from between Ilya's sharp edges so suddenly that it almost made Shane dizzy every single time. *Dangerous man. Far too easy to love.*

The café itself was warm and crowded when they arrived, all fogged-up windows and clinking coffee cups and the smell of sugar hanging thick in the air. Shane spotted Rose immediately, because she stood up the second she saw them walk in.

Then she froze.

Her eyes widened dramatically as she looked Ilya up and down once before turning slowly toward Shane with an expression of utter betrayal. “Shane Hollander,” she said flatly. “What the fuck.”

Shane burst into laughter immediately, ducking instinctively into Ilya’s shoulder for a second because there was simply no surviving this conversation with dignity anymore. “What?” he protested weakly.

“You said he was hot,” Rose accused, pointing directly at Ilya. “You failed to mention he looks like he kills people professionally.”

There was a dangerous half-second where Shane remembered that technically, yes, that statement was alarmingly close to reality. Then Ilya barked out a laugh beside him, deep and genuinely amused, and the tension dissolved immediately.

“Rose,” Shane said brightly, trying to recover, “This is Ilya.”

Rose immediately held out her hand. “So, you’re the guy ruining my best friend’s life.”

Shane choked. “Rose!”

“Positively,” she clarified. “He smiles at walls now. It’s weird.”

Ilya smiled as he shook her hand, “Believe me, I find him equally distracting.”

Shane snorted as they slid into the booth, though he ended up pressed close enough to Ilya that their thighs touched immediately, which absolutely was not intentional and definitely not because he liked being close to him. Unfortunately, Ilya seemed to notice everything. Shane had barely picked up the menu before a warm hand settled against his thigh beneath the table, fingers spreading possessively like it belonged there.

His stomach fluttered instantly. Rose noticed within approximately three seconds, because nothing ever escaped her. Her eyes flicked downward briefly before a slow grin spread across her face. “Interesting.”

Shane groaned immediately. “Please don’t start.”

“I haven’t even said anything yet.”

“You were about to.”

Rose looked smug, turning to Ilya. “Unfortunately, he knows me too well.”

“I am beginning to understand this,” Ilya said with an easy smile.

“Traitor,” Shane muttered, though the effect was somewhat ruined by the fact that he instinctively leaned harder into Ilya’s side as he said it. The waitress came and took their orders, briefly saving

Shane from further humiliation, but the second she left, Rose leaned forward onto her elbows with terrifying focus. “So,” she said with feigned casually. “How exactly did this happen?”

Shane narrowed his eyes immediately. “You already know how.”

“No, I know how you met,” Rose corrected. “I want to know how we got from ‘emotionally devastating bar incident’ to…” She gestured vaguely between them. “This.”

“This?” Shane echoed weakly.

“This incredibly intense thing you two have going on, where you look at each other like you’re in the final scene of a tragic French film.”

Ilya nearly inhaled his coffee, and Shane made a strangled noise while Rose looked deeply pleased with herself. She kept looking between them, waiting for an answer.

“He pursued me,” Ilya offered helpfully.

Shane whipped around immediately. “Excuse you?”

“Oh please, you were playing hard to get, but you almost dropped a very expensive vodka the first time we met.”

“That is not the same thing! And you’re the one who stayed at my work like a stalker for hours.”

“I don’t think Rose needs to hear all about what we did at your work.”

“Ilya!”

Rose slapped a hand over her mouth, shoulders shaking violently with laughter while Shane buried his face briefly in his hands. Beside him, Ilya looked profoundly happy with himself, bringing his elbow up on the table, so he could rest his head on his hand.

Then Rose’s eyes suddenly narrowed. “Oh my God.”

Shane froze immediately. “What?”

“You’re matching.”

Both of them instinctively glanced down. The necklace rested partially visible against Shane’s throat beneath the collar of his sweater, while the bracelet glinted against Ilya’s wrist where his sleeves had been pushed down slightly by the movement.

Rose stared between them slowly, visibly trying to process the implications. “You matching-jewellery psychopaths.”

Heat exploded across Shane’s face instantly. “It’s not like that.”

“It is exactly like that,” Rose shot back, looking at Shane with a manic glint in her eye, before reaching out to expose more of Shane’s necklace. “That man bought you a collar.”

“It is not a *collar*!” Shane whispered aggressively, glancing around him to see if anyone was listening.

“It is spiritually a collar. People just normally buy a cheap one from a sex shop, not something that looks like it should hang in the Louvre.”

Honestly? Fair enough. Shane groaned softly while Ilya hid a smile behind his coffee. Rose looked delighted by this new information. “That is the most unhinged romantic thing I have ever seen in my life.”

“I know,” Shane muttered weakly.

“And you,” she continued, now pointing directly at Ilya, “are completely gone for him.”

Shane glanced toward Ilya instinctively just in time to see him answer without hesitation. “Yes.”

The simple certainty of it hit Shane right in the chest. No embarrassment or awkwardness, just calm, immediate certainty, like loving Shane was the easiest truth in the world. *Reign it in with the l-word, Jesus Shane.*

Rose slapped both hands over her heart dramatically. “Jesus Christ. You two are making me feel single in deeply aggressive ways.”

“You flirt with at least four people a day,” Shane accused.

“That is different. None of them buy me emotionally devastating jewellery.”

“Would you like me to?” Ilya asked politely.

Rose gasped theatrically. “Shane, can I keep him?”

“No,” Shane answered immediately, a tad harsher than he had intended, the answer escaping his lips before his brain had caught up.

The table went silent for half a second.

Then Rose burst into helpless laughter while Shane felt warmth flood all the way up to his ears as he realised how genuinely offended he had sounded. Beneath the table, Ilya’s hand tightened once against his thigh, thumb stroking slowly over the inside seam of his jeans. Shane shot him a warning look immediately, but Ilya just smiled innocently over the rim of his coffee.

Rose watched the entire exchange with narrowed eyes before groaning dramatically and leaning back into the booth. “You two are disgusting,” she sighed fondly. “I’m obsessed with it.”

The rest of the brunch went significantly better for Shane’s blood pressure once Rose got the initial shock of meeting Ilya out of her system, though “better” was perhaps generous considering she immediately slipped into full interrogation mode the second their food arrived.

Shane was halfway through stealing a piece of bacon from Ilya’s plate when Rose leaned back in the booth, narrowed her eyes thoughtfully, and asked, far too casually, “So what exactly do you do for a living?”

Shane nearly choked. Across from them, Rose blinked once. “Well, that reaction was horrifying.”

Ilya, meanwhile, looked perfectly calm beside him, though Shane felt the subtle way his hand tightened once against his thigh beneath the table. Shane swallowed hard. “Rose…”

Her expression softened immediately. “Hey. You don’t have to answer if it’s complicated.”

That somehow made it worse, because she trusted him so easily. Beside him, Ilya was quiet for a long moment, fingers absentmindedly tracing circles against the inside of Shane’s knee while Shane’s heart steadily climbed into his throat. Then he sighed softly. “I work for the Russian mafia.”

Silence.

Rose blinked once. Twice. Then slowly put down her mimosa. “I’m sorry,” she said carefully. “*Russian mafia*?”

“Yes.”

Another pause, where Shane’s stomach twisted so hard he thought he might actually throw up directly onto the pancakes. Rose looked between them slowly, her brows furrowing not in fear exactly, but in thought. Then, to Shane’s absolute horror, she asked, “Are you, like… a scary one?”

Shane made a strangled noise while Ilya actually laughed quietly beside him. “A scary one?” he repeated.

“You know what I mean,” Rose defended immediately. “There are levels. Are you accountant mafia or murder mafia?”

“Rose!” Shane hissed.

“What? I’m trying to understand the situation.”

Ilya’s shoulders were shaking slightly now, clearly trying not to laugh outright, which honestly felt deeply unfair considering Shane was actively dying. “I do not do accounting,” Ilya admitted gravely.

Rose stared at him for one long second. “Okay.”

Shane dropped his face briefly into his hands. “I’m so sorry.”

“For what?” Rose asked immediately. “Your boyfriend being weirdly charming while admitting to organised crime?”

“Do *not* encourage him,” Shane muttered.

“I am not weirdly charming,” Ilya said at the same time. Rose and Shane both looked at him flatly.

“You bought matching jewellery,” Rose informed him. “You lost the right to pretend you’re intimidating only.” Then her expression softened slightly as she looked back toward Ilya. “You’re okay with me knowing?” she asked.

“I told Shane that if he trusted you, then I would trust you too.”

The simplicity of the statement hit Shane yet again, and he found himself pulling the collar of his sweater out from his neck, overheating. Rose seemed affected by it too, some of the teasing slipping from her expression for the first time since they’d arrived. “That’s… actually very sweet,” she admitted quietly.

The table fell into an easier silence, the weight of the confession settling around them, though not nearly as disastrously as Shane had feared. Rose didn't look scared, or worried. If anything, she looked thoughtful. Then she sighed dramatically and pointed her fork at Shane. "You know this means Hayden is going to have an aneurysm when he finds out."

Shane groaned immediately. "Please do not remind me. He already thinks I've lost my mind."

"Well," Rose said reasonably, "You are dating a very affectionate mobster. From an outside perspective, it does sound slightly fake."

"Affectionate mobster," Ilya repeated thoughtfully beside him, almost to himself. Shane burst into laughter so suddenly he nearly knocked over his coffee. Ilya steadied it automatically before it could spill, the gesture so instinctive that Rose smiled at them knowingly.

Eventually, brunch drifted toward its natural end, plates emptied and coffees long gone cold while the café buzzed softly around them. Rose stood first, shrugging her coat back on before stepping around the table and pulling Shane into a tight hug.

"I'm happy for you," she murmured quietly into his hair. "Like… genuinely."

Shane swallowed hard. "Thank you."

She squeezed him once more before pulling back and immediately pointing a threatening finger at Ilya. "And you."

"Yes?"

"If you hurt him, I'll kill you."

Ilya nodded seriously. "That seems fair."

"Good answer." Rose smiled brightly at both of them before backing toward the café door. "Text me later! Preferably with gossip!"

Then she disappeared out into the fresh spring, the bell above the café door jingling behind her. For a moment, Shane just stood there watching after her. Then Ilya's arms slid around his waist from behind, pulling him gently back against his chest. "She likes me," Ilya murmured, sounding unbearably smug about it.

Shane rolled his eyes fondly. "You're impossible."

"Mhmm," Ilya hummed against the side of his neck. "But apparently charming enough for Rose. You can breathe now, *malysh*."

And Shane found that Ilya was right. His shoulders felt less heavy, like the weight of the brunch had been lifted once he realised that Rose wouldn't *hate* Ilya. Not that he had truly dreaded that… Rose was friends with everyone. But he had really wanted them to get along. He leaned back into Ilya's warmth, before carefully extracting himself, grabbing their jackets and leading them outside.

They were immediately greeted by warm sunrays and a gentle breeze, spring finally taking form in Montreal. Shane couldn't help but tilt his head towards the sun as they walked hand in hand, strolling through the city with no rush. He couldn't remember the last time he had truly been this happy.

The rest of the day passed in a mix of shopping, ice cream by the river, and a meeting with the *Bratva* at the office. Shane trailed along, using the time at the office to catch up on some uni work. The end of the semester was approaching, and while his mind certainly was… otherwise occupied these days, he wasn't about to throw his entire education. So, he got studying and exam preparation in when he could, exchanging notes with Hayden over the phone.

Their relationship felt strained these days, and he didn't know what to do about it. Hayden was one of his best friends, and while he appreciated his honesty and support, he would never leave Ilya, just because Hayden didn't like him. And he understood where his friend was coming from, truly. But sometimes it felt as if Hayden treated him like a kid, someone he needed to take care of, who couldn't be trusted to make decisions for himself without supervision. On the off instances that Shane had hooked up with someone who hadn't been what he had expected, or tried dating someone who turned out to be a jerk, Hayden was always there, ready to support him, but with a look of pity like everything was playing out like he had expected.

In the beginning of their friendship, he had kept trying to set Shane up with a bunch of Jackie's friends, each one less Shane's type than the previous. Once Shane had looked himself in the mirror, and realised that that was less because of the girls' looks or personalities, and more the fact that they were… *girls*, Hayden had taken it in stride, but backed off in the match-making. Shane was secretly relieved, because it meant he didn't have to talk to Hayden about… *preferences*.

He didn't think either of them would survive that conversation.

But Hayden very rarely seemed to *like* any of the guys Shane engaged with, not that there had been too many. And now, with Ilya, Shane was afraid that gap was too wide to bridge. Like too much had happened for Hayden to ever be able to take a step back, and see the bigger picture for what it was: Shane being *happy*, despite the road there being a bit bumpy. Because if Shane, who had lived through it himself, had found it in him to forgive Ilya and give them a second chance, shouldn't Hayden find it in him to support him? To trust his judgement?

Him not trusting your judgment is the whole fucking issue, Shane thought to himself bitterly.

Ilya had breached the idea of inviting Hayden and Jackie for dinner. He promised to be on his best behaviour, and not mention his job in any shape or form, anything to make the frown between Shane's brows at the mention of Hayden disappear. But Shane had refused, for purely selfish reasons.

And now, after the insane success that had been Ilya meeting Rose, Shane was even more sure of his answer. He wanted to enjoy how well it had gone, and how surprisingly tolerating Rose had been. Because deep down he knew, that dinner with Hayden wouldn't go that way *at all.* Him and Ilya had spoken about the *Bratva*, and whether Shane wanted to tell Hayden the truth, to try and explain how complicated the whole situation had been from the start.

Ilya had given Shane the same blanket permission as with Rose. "*If you trust him, we tell him*."

And Shane had hesitated.

He hated himself for it, hated that he didn't have blind faith in his best friend. And it wasn't because he was afraid Hayden would do something stupid and try to go to the police, or in any way become a danger to Ilya's operation. No, he just… really didn't think Hayden would get it. And he was afraid that if he found out this one thing about Ilya, he would never give him an actual chance. He would never try to get to know him, or try to understand how *happy* Shane was. He would just forever see him as a bad guy. A mobster, that didn't deserve his trust, or his respect.

And Shane was afraid that that would kill him.

So selfishly, he kept those parts of his life apart for now. Hayden was aware that Shane was staying with Ilya, and had expressed his disapproval, but at the end of the day, there wasn't anything he could do about it. Their interactions were limited to their course work, and how Jackie was doing.

Shane was dreading the upcoming weekend, and their shift at *Désir*.

He shook himself out of the dangerous train of thought, and focused back on his computer, finishing up some notes before closing it down. His brain wasn't collaborating today, anyway. He heard someone approach the little couch nook he had situated himself in, and when he glanced up, he found Ilya smiling down on him warmly. "Ready to go?"

"Yes, let's go home." Shane answered, gathering his things and standing, only then noticing that Ilya had seemingly frozen. "What?"

Ilya shook his head. "Nothing, *solnyshko*. I just do not think I will ever get used to you calling my house *home*. It does not… seem real."

"Sap." Shane muttered fondly, reaching up to leave a kiss on Ilya's cheek, before grabbing his hand and tugging him along towards the door. They passed the rest of the *Bratva*, and Shane waved at everyone, saying quick goodbyes. Someone laughed, and another person yelled, "Walk him like a dog, Hollander!"

Ilya snickered, squeezing Shane's hand when he caught the blush rising at the back of his neck. "They are not wrong."

"Shut up." Shane rolled his eyes, pulling him into the elevator.

"Are you in a hurry today? Do we have more plans I don't know about?"

Shane pressed himself closer to Ilya, their chests touching. "Hmm, I don't know. Would you like to have plans?" He licked his lips, glancing down at Ilya's before looking into his eyes again. "We have the whole night."

"Fuck." Ilya groaned, placing his hands on Shane's hips. "What do you have in mind in that kinky head of yours?"

Shane just smiled wickedly, just as the elevator pinged. He leaned in so his lips grazed Ilya's ear, "I'll tell you in the car."

He swore he could hear Ilya swallow, before he was dragged through the elevator doors, through the lobby, and outside – straight towards the Ferrari parked on the curb. The same one that they had driven the first time Ilya had come to Shane's apartment. Shane liked it the most, and maybe that made him a sap too. But Ilya gladly indulged him, despite the row of cars in the basement, many of which Shane hadn't sat in yet.

Once Ilya pulled out onto the street, he kept glancing back at Shane. "Tell me."

Shane giggled, placing a hand on Ilya's upper thigh. "I saw this video the other day," he said conversationally, trying to feign casualness. Next to him, Ilya hummed, encouraging him to continue. So, Shane did, no longer beating around the bush. "I think it would be hot if you tied me up."

The car swerved slightly, making Shane hold in a laugh. Ilya's eyes had widened, his grip on the steering wheel *tight*. "What?"

"I think I would enjoy not being able to do anything. Not being able to touch you, not being able to move. And you just… doing whatever you wanted. But obviously only if you want to."

"Obviously." Ilya said sarcastically, but his voice was strained. "You are trying to make me crash this car."

"No, I like this car."

"I know, *malysh.*" Ilya smiled, before returning to the topic at hand. "Tie you up… how? Just your hands?"

Shane thought about it, but the visual in his mind was very clear. "Not only. I mean, depends on what you're comfortable with, but I liked the video where the guy was… Well, he was fully bound in ropes. Wrists, arms, chest, legs. He couldn't move *at all.* But the guy he was with, he could move him around just how he wanted." At the end, Shane's voice was also strained, and his cock was twitching in interest in his pants.

"Fuck," was the only sound that came out of Ilya's mouth, his head arching back to lean against his seat, mouth falling open. Fuck, he looked gorgeous.

"I take it you wouldn't *hate* that?"

Ilya shot him a glare, and the heat behind it made pleasure shoot up Shane's spine. "No, Shane, I would not *hate* to have you all at my mercy. I would not hate to use you for my own pleasure exactly how I want to. I would not hate to have you spread out on my bed, beautifully covered in ropes. Now shut up, before I accidentally drive us into a ditch." He took Shane's hand away from his thigh, and deposited it on Shane's own lap, letting go of it immediately. "And keep your hands to yourself."

Shane bit his lip, and relaxed in his seat.

He couldn't wait until they got home.

By the time they entered the house, both of them were buzzing out of their skin. Ilya had desperately tried to calm his breathing, as to not crash the car, but Shane had not made it easy.

Bondage. You can do bondage, Rozanov.

He wasn't necessarily *nervous* about tying Shane up. Just… insanely exited and in total disbelief over the fact that Shane Hollander somehow kept surprising him. He had never tied anyone up in a more elaborate way than just attaching wrists to the headboard, but his lifestyle had taught him enough, to know what was safe.

They walked into the bedroom in silent anticipation, constantly glancing at each other. Eventually, Shane broke the silence, biting his lip. "Okay, so theoretically…"

Ilya narrowed his eyes immediately. "Whenever you begin a sentence like that, I become afraid."

"Theoretically," Shane continued anyway, "do you actually own rope? Or were you planning to, like… improvise with extension cords."

For one horrifying second, Ilya just stared at him. Then he barked out a laugh so sudden it echoed through the entire room. "Extension cords?" he repeated incredulously. "You think I run a *criminal organisation* and do not own proper rope?"

Shane's eyes widened, and he suddenly looked nervous. "Well, when you phrase it like that, it sounds obvious."

"It is obvious." Ilya smiled, entirely unapologetic. "What did you expect? That I would need to run to hardware store?"

"Maybe?" came the hesitant reply, and Ilya couldn't help but roll his eyes.

"Shane." Ilya leaned closer, voice dropping lower. "I own rope specifically designed to hurt. And rope that is softer, and designed to hold for a *long time*. Which one do you prefer, *malysh*?" he asked mockingly. Shane's face immediately went red, which only made Ilya feel more pleased. Oh, they were going to have *such fun.*

Meanwhile, he could see all the thoughts running inside Shane's brain, as if he was still debating the answer to Ilya's teasing question. As if he would ever tie Shane up in rough rope that would break skin in minutes. He would much rather have fun torturing him for hours, and see visible, but not *life-threatening* marks on his skin tomorrow. With that thought, Ilya pressed a kiss to Shane's cheek, and turned to leave the bedroom. At the threshold, he turned around and glanced at Shane, "Strip, and get on all fours on the bed by the time I'm back, or you don't get to come today."

He didn't wait for an answer, instead walking away from the bedroom, and towards the basement. He could hear the faint rustling of fabric, and Shane's feet on the hardwood floors, and he smiled to himself. His boy was so good.

Ilya didn't waste any time, grabbing what he needed and making his way back to the bedroom, stopping only in the kitchen on his way for a glass of water – Shane would need it, after. But when

he walked back into the bedroom, he almost dropped it.

“Fuck,” he whispered, the sight in front of him taking his breath away. Shane was on the bed exactly how he had been told, stripped completely bare, kneeling on the dark sheets with his hands planted in front of him, his hair slightly messy from undressing too quickly, cheeks flushed pink all the way down his chest. In the soft glow of the bedside lamp, the necklace and bracelet glinted invitingly, making him look ethereal. Shane shifted nervously, glancing up at Ilya. And God, the look on his face. Open, wanting and *trusting*. Ilya had to physically stop himself from crossing the room immediately and ruining the careful pace he wanted to keep tonight. Instead, he placed the glass of water on the nightstand slowly, followed by the coil of rope in his hands.

Shane’s eyes immediately dropped to it, his breath visibly hitching. “There he is,” Ilya murmured softly, slowly walking closer. “My brave boy.”

Shane swallowed hard, visibly trying not to squirm under the attention. “You make it sound like I’m about to be sacrificed, or something.”

Ilya climbed onto the bed behind him, one hand settling warmly against Shane’s lower back. “Mhmm. Possibly.” Ilya’s hand went down to the bracelet around Shane’s wrist. “Just for tonight, I think we should take this off, *solnyshko*. I do not want to hurt you more than necessary, and I do intend to bind your wrists. Is that okay?”

Shane hesitated slightly, “Yes but… but not the necklace.”

“Of course not,” Ilya softened immediately. “Nothing could ever make me take that of you.” Ilya made quick work of the bracelet clasp, and Shane huffed out a nervous laugh, though it melted quickly into a softer sound when Ilya leaned down and pressed a slow kiss against the space between his shoulder blades. “You still want this?” Ilya asked quietly.

“Yes.”

The answer came instantly, with no hesitation. Still, Ilya slid his hand up Shane’s spine slowly, grounding both of them before continuing. “And your safeword?”

“Red.”

“And what does it mean?”

“That everything stops.”

“Immediately,” Ilya confirmed gently. “No questions asked. No disappointment. No punishment. You say red, and I cut you free the second it leaves your mouth. Understood?”

Shane nodded quickly, before cocking his head. “Cut?”

Ilya hummed softly before reaching into the inside pocket of his jacket, pulling out the knife he always carried with him and placing it deliberately onto the nightstand beside the water. Shane’s eyes widened slightly.

“I always carry it anyway,” Ilya explained quietly, tracing his fingertips absentmindedly along Shane’s shoulder. “But tonight, I want you to see it. The second you are uncomfortable, the second you panic, the second you simply do not want this anymore, I cut the ropes. You understand me?”

The softness in Shane's expression nearly undid him. "You really thought this through."

"I am tying up someone *very* precious to me," Ilya said simply. "Of course I did."

Shane's face went warm immediately, his gaze dropping briefly to the sheets beneath him in a way that made something possessive and aching bloom inside Ilya's chest. *Mine*. He brushed Shane's hair back gently before pressing another kiss just beneath his ear, "Okay?"

"Okay."

"Good boy."

Shane shivered violently at that, his head dipping slightly. God, Ilya was going to lose his mind tonight. For a moment, neither of them moved, the room filled only with slow breathing, until eventually Shane glanced back over his shoulder, eyeing the rope again.

"So…" he said weakly. "How exactly does this work?"

Ilya smiled slowly. "Well first," he murmured, lifting the coil into Shane's line of sight, "I make you hold *very* still, while I tie you exactly how I want you."

Shane laughed nervously, blush prominent on his cheeks. "Holding still won't be easy."

"No, but I enjoy making things difficult for you." Ilya let the rope slide slowly through his hands, watching Shane's eyes follow the movement with helpless fascination. "And you enjoy it too."

The flush spreading down Shane's chest confirmed that immediately.

Ilya shifted closer behind him until their bodies nearly touched, his hands warm against Shane's ribs now, thumbs brushing slowly across soft skin while he spoke. "You tell me if anything hurts, if anything tingles or goes numb, if you feel trapped in bad way instead of good way. You understand?"

"Yes."

"And if I ask you a question?"

"I answer honestly."

"Good." Ilya smiled against Shane's shoulder. "You learn very quickly."

Shane turned his head slightly then, enough for their eyes to meet over his shoulder, and the expression on his face was soft beneath all the excitement, all flushed cheeks and blown pupils and quiet yearning. "I trust you," he admitted quietly.

Ilya's chest tightened so suddenly it almost hurt. Because Shane said things like that so easily when he got like this, handing over pieces of himself with both hands, unaware of how violently treasured they became the second they reached Ilya. Carefully, Ilya lifted one of Shane's wrists into his hands.

"So pretty already," he murmured, more to himself than anything else, thumb brushing over Shane's pulse. "And I have not even started yet."

Shane made a tiny sound at that, somewhere between embarrassment and pleasure, his body instinctively relaxing further into Ilya's touch. Then, slowly, carefully, Ilya began to tie the first knot.

The first knot settled neatly around Shane's wrist, snug without being tight, the soft rope a stark contrast against pale skin, and Ilya had to pause for half a second just to look at it. Shane was watching with parted lips, chest rising slightly quicker now every time Ilya's fingers brushed over him, his body caught somewhere between nerves and anticipation, trusting enough to stay still even as instinct clearly told him to fidget.

Beautiful.

Ilya bent his head and pressed a kiss directly against the rope, Shane's breath catching immediately. "Colour?" Ilya asked quietly, fingers still loosely wrapped around his wrist.

"So fucking green," Shane whispered.

"Good."

Carefully, Ilya guided Shane's arms back slightly, enough to begin binding them without putting strain on his shoulders, constantly watching the smallest reactions on his face as he worked, every twitch and little breath catalogued in the back of his mind.

He had tied people up before. But not like this. Never with this much care, and never had he been this affected by it himself. Never with the terrifying awareness that Shane was handing him something infinitely more dangerous than control over his body. *Trust*.

The thought settled heavy in Ilya's chest as he looped rope carefully around Shane's forearms, securing them together while Shane visibly melted further into the mattress beneath him. "There," Ilya murmured softly once the knot sat perfectly in place. "Still comfortable?"

Shane flexed experimentally before nodding. "Yeah."

"Good boy."

The words slipped out instinctively this time, rewarded immediately by the way Shane shuddered hard enough for the ropes to shift slightly.

Ilya smiled against the curve of his shoulder. "You like that very much tonight."

"Shut up," Shane muttered weakly.

"No."

Ilya grabbed the ropes binding Shane's wrists behind his back, and pulled, until Shane was on his knees. Another rope followed after that, this one winding carefully across Shane's chest and torso, not restrictive yet, more decorative than anything else, though Ilya still felt the subtle hitch in Shane's breathing every time the rope tightened enough to remind him he was being held.

Ilya had a vision, wanting to frame Shane's pecs, making the necklace a centerpiece. Once he was done, it glinted between the lines of rope, blue stone framed perfectly against flushed skin, and Ilya nearly lost his concentration entirely at the sight.

“Fuck,” he muttered under his breath.

Shane glanced up immediately, eyes warm and dazed already. “What?”

“You,” Ilya answered honestly. That earned him the shyest little smile imaginable. *Dangerous boy.*

Ilya’s fingers traced slowly along Shane’s ribs before continuing lower, pushing him back face first onto the bed. Without his arms, Shane couldn’t catch himself, and fell like a marionette having its strings cut, moaning unabashedly. Ilya bound one thigh next, then the other, securing his legs carefully enough to limit movement without discomfort, until eventually Shane shifted experimentally and realised exactly how trapped he was. His eyes widened slightly.

“*Oh*.”

Ilya hummed approvingly behind him. “Oh?”

“I really can’t move.”

The awe in his voice nearly drove Ilya insane. “No,” he murmured softly, palms sliding slowly over the ropes holding Shane in place. “You cannot.”

Shane shivered beneath his hands. Ilya leaned closer then, chest flush against Shane’s back, lips brushing lightly against the shell of his ear as he spoke.

“And how does that feel, *solnyshko*?”

Shane swallowed hard. “Good.”

“Just good?”

Shane made a tiny, frustrated sound, struggling slightly against the ropes as if testing them again before finally admitting, quieter now, “It feels… *quiet*.”

That caught Ilya off guard, and he pulled back slightly, studying Shane’s face more carefully, finding nothing but pleasure.

Quiet.

Like for once, Shane’s mind had finally stopped spinning. Because of *Ilya*. Something dangerously tender twisted inside Ilya’s chest. “You have been carrying too much tension lately,” he murmured, brushing his knuckles gently against Shane’s cheek.

Shane laughed softly, though it sounded slightly embarrassed. “Maybe.”

“Mhmm.” Ilya pressed another kiss against the side of his head. “Then let me carry it for little while.”

The sound Shane made at that was small and wrecked and helpless enough to nearly ruin Ilya completely. For a long moment, he simply held him there, tied securely beneath him, warm and breathing and entirely his to care for tonight.

Then Shane shifted slightly against the ropes again before glancing back over his shoulder with flushed cheeks and bright eyes.

“So…” he said weakly. “Now what?”

Ilya smiled slowly. “Now? Now I have my fun.”

He started by mapping lines along the ropes with his tongue. When he reached a bigger patch of exposed skin, he bit softly, enjoying the shivers and whimpers from the boy underneath him. He leaned over him, reaching a hand into the nightstand, pulling out a bottle of lube. He warmed it on his fingers before circling Shane’s rim, making him moan and try to push his hips back, only to moan louder once he realised he *couldn’t.* He had to lay there, at Ilya’s mercy, and take what he gave him.

One finger quickly became two, and eventually three, all the while Shane groaned at him to go faster, to give him *more*. Ilya reached in front of him, and grabbed the rope on his chest, pulling him back up on his knees, and *deeper* onto his fingers.

“Fuck, Ilya.”

“Mhmm, so good, Shane, *fuck.* So greedy for me, taking my fingers so beautifully. Do you want more, sweetheart?”

“Yes, please.”

“So polite for me. You’re gorgeous. And *all mine.*” He punctuated the statement by curling his fingers inside Shane, making him let out a sound somewhere between a groan and a scream. Ilya’s cock twitched in his pants, begging for attention. And his patience was running thin.

He gently pulled his fingers out of Shane, before quickly getting up to strip the remainder of his clothes, dropping Shane back on the bed in the process. In record time, he was back behind his spread legs, leaving kisses along his spine. Ilya poured lube onto his cock, and guided it between Shane’s cheeks, teasing his opening without actually giving him what he wanted. He applied a teasing amount of pressure, making just the head slip in, groaning loudly at the sensation of heat around him.

Below him, Shane whined into the pillow, his arms and legs straining against the rope. “Colour, Shane?”

“So fucking green, don’t you dare stop.”

“Demanding brat.” Ilya said with a smile.

“I wouldn’t have to ‘brat’, if you just-, *oh fuck.*”

Ilya chose that exact moment to push in to the hilt, burying his entire length inside Shane. It took both his and Shane’s breath away, the bedroom filled with broken moans and whines, intertwined to the point you couldn’t tell them apart, combined into the symphony of ‘Shane&Ilya’.

Once he caught his breath, Ilya set a punishing pace, pulling at the ropes to manoeuvre Shane exactly how he wanted him. The jostling made Shane’s face rest sideways against the pillows, giving Ilya a front row seat to the blissed out, far-away look in his eyes, that Ilya so adored.

God.

The sight of Shane spread across dark sheets like this, flushed and restrained was almost enough to make Ilya dizzy. Still, despite being almost completely overcome by pleasure, Ilya noticed the way Shane's eyes flicked sideways, not for the first time.

Toward the nightstand.

Toward the *knife*.

Something cold immediately twisted in Ilya's stomach. He tried not to react at first, continuing to run his hands over the ropes, changing the rhythm to slow but *deep*, but Shane kept glancing at it. Often enough that Ilya's thoughts started spiralling despite himself.

Too much. *Fuck, this is too much.*

Maybe the knife was stupid. Maybe showing it to him had been stupid. Maybe Shane had only been excited in theory, and now he was lying here, tied up, realising how vulnerable he actually was, too nervous to admit he hated it because he wanted to please Ilya. The thought hit hard enough that Ilya's chest tightened painfully. Immediately, he sat back slightly, cock slipping out. "Shane."

Shane blinked up at him lazily, brows furrowing at the sudden empty feeling. "Hm?"

"Colour."

"Green?"

"Shane, do not lie to me."

"What?" Shane tried to get up to face Ilya properly, but couldn't move because of the ropes. "What are you talking about?"

"You keep looking at the knife."

That seemed to startle Shane slightly. "Oh."

Ilya hated how careful his own voice sounded next. "Does it make you uncomfortable? Because I can put it away immediately, sweetheart. Or we stop entirely, I do not care. I only brought it out so you would feel safe."

Realisation flickered across Shane's face so suddenly it was almost comical. Then, impossibly, he started blushing, which only confused Ilya more. "Shane."

"No, no," Shane said quickly, visibly trying not to laugh now. "I'm okay. Really."

"Then why do you keep staring at it?"

Shane pressed his face briefly into the pillow like he was debating whether to answer at all. Which, naturally, made Ilya assume the worst. "Fuck," Ilya muttered, already reaching toward the ropes. "I pushed too far. I knew I should have started simpler; I should not have-"

"Ilya."

He stopped immediately.

Shane was looking at him now with flushed cheeks and slightly embarrassed eyes. “It doesn’t make me nervous,” he admitted quietly.

“Then what?”

Shane swallowed hard. Then, very softly, “It would hurt, right?”

Ilya frowned immediately. “Shane, I would never-”

“I think maybe I’d like it,” Shane interrupted quietly, face turning even redder somehow. “I mean… just a little.”

The bedroom was completely silent, while Ilya stared at him. Shane stared stubbornly back for approximately two seconds before losing the battle entirely and hiding his face in the sheets again. And suddenly it clicked in Ilya’s brain.

Oh.

Oh, *for fuck’s sake*.

Relief hit him so hard it almost made him laugh aloud. Instead, he sat there for one long moment, one hand covering his eyes briefly while Shane slowly died of embarrassment beneath him. “You are unbelievable,” Ilya muttered finally.

“I’m sorry!”

“No, you are not.”

“…No.”

Despite himself, Ilya barked out a startled laugh, all the horrible tension draining from his body at once. God, this boy was going to kill him one day. Slowly, he leaned back over him, sliding a hand into Shane’s hair before gently encouraging him to lift his head again.

The second their eyes met, Shane looked away, hopelessly flushed. “After me tying you up, and fucking you as hard and deep as I could, you were laying there, thinking about knives?” Ilya asked softly, unable to keep the dangerous amusement from his voice.

Shane groaned quietly. “Please do not say it out loud.”

“I think I must.”

“That’s evil.”

“Mhmm.” Ilya brushed his thumb slowly across Shane’s cheek. “And what exactly about it interested you, *malysh*?”

“I know you wouldn’t hurt me badly,” Shane admitted quietly. “I think that’s… kind of the point.”

Something sharp twisted low in Ilya’s stomach. “Explain.”

Shane immediately looked embarrassed again. “I hate when you do that.”

“Do what?”

“Use that voice.” Shane dropped his forehead dramatically against the mattress. “The one where suddenly, I want to confess crimes I haven’t even committed.”

Ilya smiled faintly. “*Malysh*.”

Shane sighed, but continued. “I just keep thinking about how careful you’re being with me.” His fingers flexed uselessly against the ropes binding his wrists. “You tied me up, and you keep checking on me every thirty seconds, and you put the knife there, so I’d know you’d cut me free immediately if I wanted.” His cheeks flushed darker. “And somehow that just keeps making me think about what it would feel like if you… used it.”

Ilya sat very still for a moment, studying him carefully, because Shane said dangerous things sometimes in the same tone other people used to discuss the weather, and Ilya had learned quickly that underneath all the teasing and impulsiveness, there was usually genuine thought hiding there too. “What exactly are you imagining?” he asked quietly.

Shane swallowed. “I don’t know fully,” he admitted. “Not like… actually stabbing me or anything.” He looked horrified at the idea immediately. “Jesus Christ.”

Ilya snorted softly despite himself.

“But maybe just…” Shane’s eyes flicked briefly toward the knife again. “The idea of you holding it against me. Or dragging it lightly over my skin. Enough that I could feel how sharp it is.” His voice dropped lower. “Enough that I’d have to stay still.”

Fuck. Ilya closed his eyes briefly, because of course Shane’s brain would somehow turn *trust itself* into foreplay. When he looked back down, Shane was watching him nervously now, clearly trying to gauge whether he had crossed some invisible line.

“Say something,” Shane muttered weakly.

“You are trying very hard to kill me tonight.”

That startled a laugh out of him immediately, tension easing slightly from his shoulders.

“I’m serious,” Ilya continued, brushing his thumb slowly across Shane’s jaw. “You say things like this so casually, like it doesn’t make me want to ruin you.”

Shane’s eyes softened instantly at that. “I just…” He hesitated. “I think I would like it because it’s you.”

The honesty of it hit hard, because Shane wasn’t talking about pain - not really. He was talking about surrender, to an even greater extent that he was currently giving. About being held carefully enough that even danger became intimate. Ilya exhaled slowly through his nose before leaning down until their foreheads touched. “You trust me far too much,” he whispered.

Shane smiled faintly beneath him. “And yet you still look terrified of hurting me.”

Because I am, he thought to himself. Even now, with Shane flushed and restrained beneath him, openly admitting he wanted more, Ilya’s chest still tightened at every tiny shift in expression, every

glance toward the knife, every possibility that he might push too far and ruin something fragile and precious between them.

Carefully, he reached toward the nightstand, and Shane visibly stilled in anticipation. Ilya picked the knife up slowly before immediately bringing the flat side of the blade against Shane's thigh first, entirely harmless, giving him time to feel it without surprise.

Cold metal on hot skin. Shane inhaled sharply, a whine escaping him.

"There," Ilya murmured softly, watching him the entire time. "Still okay?"

"Yes." The answer came out almost breathless.

Very carefully, Ilya dragged the blunt side upward along Shane's skin, barely any pressure at all, just enough to make Shane feel the shape of it, the possibility of sharpness hidden inside something controlled entirely by Ilya's hand.

Shane shivered violently beneath him.

"*Oh*," Ilya whispered. Because God help him, he suddenly understood exactly why Shane wanted this. And he wasn't sure that he was making it out alive.

It wasn't really about the knife.

It was about the helplessness of it, the intimacy of placing something dangerous into Ilya's hands and knowing, with complete certainty, that Ilya would rather cut himself open than truly harm him.

The thought nearly made his chest ache. Slowly, Ilya traced the flat of the blade higher along Shane's stomach, watching every tiny reaction carefully, every hitch in breath, every tremor running through restrained limbs. "So responsive," he murmured softly. "Look at you."

Shane's lips parted on a shaky exhale, his eyes dark and unfocused now as he looked up at Ilya. "Feels weird."

"Weird bad?"

"No." Shane swallowed hard. "Weird good."

Ilya smiled faintly, though tension still coiled tight beneath his ribs, refusing to loosen completely. He had dealt with weapons his entire life, had learned exactly how much damage they could do, exactly how quickly things could become irreversible.

And now Shane was looking at one like it was a love letter. *Dangerous fucking boy.*

The blade drifted lightly across Shane's chest now, just enough pressure for cold metal to register against warm skin, and Shane arched instinctively into it with a tiny sound that nearly made Ilya lose his mind. Then, so softly Ilya almost missed it, "Cut me."

Ilya froze immediately. "No."

Shane blinked at the instant answer, visibly surprised by how firm it was. "Just a little."

"No."

“Ilya-”

“No, *malysh*.” Ilya set the knife down briefly against Shane’s stomach, safely angled away while he leaned closer over Shane’s shoulder. “You do not get to say dangerous things in that sweet little voice and expect me to just go along with it.”

Shane frowned slightly. “I trust you.”

“That is exactly why I am worried.”

For a moment, they simply looked at each other, Shane flushed and restrained beneath him, Ilya hovering close enough to feel every uneven breath leaving his lungs. Then Shane sighed dramatically, “You’re no fun.”

Ilya actually laughed softly at that. “Brat.”

“Coward.”

That startled a sharper laugh out of him. “You are tied up in my bed insulting me while I hold a knife to your skin.”

“Yes,” Shane said immediately. “So, use it. Unless you’re all talk?”

God, he loved this brat with his whole heart. The way he pushed now, like he genuinely believed Ilya would catch him every single time. It made something hot and dangerous unfurl inside Ilya’s chest. Shane shifted slightly against the ropes again, eyes dropping to the knife before returning upward with deliberate innocence.

“Maybe just enough to leave mark?” he asked softly. “Something small.”

“No.”

“But-”

“Shane.”

The warning in Ilya’s voice should have ended it. Instead, Shane’s eyes sparkled. “But what if I want it?”

Ilya stared at him, gaze warm and challenging all at once now, the ropes keeping him spread open and helpless even while his mouth kept testing boundaries anyway.

“I think,” Shane said slowly, “that maybe I would like having proof.”

Fuck.

Ilya’s grip tightened involuntarily around the handle of the knife. “Proof of what?”

“That you did this to me.” Shane’s voice dropped quieter now, less. “That I was yours enough for you to leave something behind.”

Mine.

Mine mine mine.

Ilya had to close his eyes against the violent rush of possessiveness that surged through him, because Shane was playing fucking dirty, and Ilya didn't know how long he could keep resisting.

When he opened his eyes again, Shane was watching him carefully. "Well?" He prompted softly. "You gonna keep pretending you don't want to? Stop fighting it, and leave your goddamn mark, Rozanov."

Ilya exhaled slowly through his nose. Because that was the problem, wasn't it?

He *did* want to.

Desperately.

The thought of marking Shane in any way, of leaving something behind on skin that already carried his necklace and his fingerprints and his bite marks, hit something possessive and primal inside him that was becoming harder and harder to ignore around this boy. But wanting something and trusting himself with it were very different things.

Carefully, Ilya set the knife fully aside on the mattress, just out of immediate reach, before cupping Shane's jaw instead. "You are very determined to test my self-control tonight."

Shane's lips twitched faintly. "And?"

"And I am trying to decide whether you are brave or simply insane."

"Can't I be both?"

Ilya brushed his thumb slowly over Shane's lower lip, watching the way his eyes fluttered slightly at the touch. "Listen to me carefully," he said quietly, the teasing slipping from his voice. "You asking for something does not automatically mean I give it to you. Especially not when it comes to pain."

Shane's expression softened immediately. "I know."

"Do you?" Ilya searched his face carefully. "Because right now you are looking at me, like you would let me do almost anything."

Something vulnerable flickered across Shane's face at that. "Maybe I would."

"Fuck." Shane trusted with his entire body, didn't he? No half-measures, no careful distance, just throwing himself forward with both hands open and somehow believing Ilya would never let him fall. It was terrifying, and made Ilya want to lock every door in the house, and never let him leave. Slowly, he leaned down until their foreheads touched again, his voice quieter now. "And what happens if one day I hurt you?"

Shane frowned slightly. "You won't."

"You cannot know that."

"Yes, I can."

The certainty in his tone made something ache violently in Ilya's chest.

Shane shifted beneath the ropes again, not impatient exactly, but restless with wanting, his eyes dropping briefly toward the knife before returning upward. "Ilya," he said softly, "if you hated the idea, I'd stop asking."

"I do not hate the idea."

Shane visibly brightened at the admission, which immediately made Ilya regret being honest. "Oh my God, really?"

"Do not sound so excited."

"I can't help it."

Brat.

Ilya sighed softly, though he could already feel himself losing this battle inch by inch simply because Shane kept looking at him like that, all flushed cheeks and trust and impossible curiosity. "Tell me exactly what you are asking for," he said finally.

Shane swallowed hard. "Something small," he admitted quietly. "Not dangerous. Just…" His cheeks darkened further. "Enough that I'd know it was there tomorrow."

Fuck.

Ilya's hand tightened slightly against his jaw. He closed his eyes briefly, feeling his restraint fray a little more. When he opened them again, Shane was still watching him hopefully, completely at Ilya's mercy physically and somehow still the one steering the conversation exactly where he wanted it to go.

Very carefully, Ilya reached back toward the knife again. "Colour?" he murmured automatically.

"Green."

"You promise?"

"Yes."

Ilya studied him for another long moment before finally shaking his head softly, almost disbelievingly. "You are going to make me lose my mind one day."

Shane smiled faintly. "You already lost it."

Before proceeding, Ilya urged Shane further back on his knees, crawling around him so they were facing each other. He drew him in for a deep kiss, letting them lose themselves in it. Ilya kissed down Shane's jaw, before pulling back. Very gently, he brought the blade back against Shane's skin, still flat, still harmless, tracing it slowly along the curve of his waist while Shane's breathing turned uneven again instantly, his face tucked into the crook of Ilya's neck.

"This is all you get," Ilya warned softly. "One tiny mark, and if I think for even second that you are not okay, we stop. Understood?"

Shane's eyes practically glowed. "Yes."

And God help him, Ilya had never seen anything more beautiful than the way Shane looked hearing that answer. He wanted to pretend to debate with himself *where* to leave his mark, but the truth was… he already knew. He let the tip of the knife gently graze up Shane's waist and ribs, making him whine. They both looked down, unable to avert their eyes from the knife in Ilya's hand.

He finally let it rest exactly where his mark would go. Where it was always supposed to go. Right over Shane's left pec, over his *heart*. Where Ilya belonged.

"Fuck, Ilya." Shane whines, once he realises what Ilya was about to do. "Yes please, fuck, fuck, *fuck.*"

"Whatever you want, *malysh*. Always." With that, Ilya twisted the knife, so the sharp part rested against Shane's skin. And without further ado, he ran a line vertically from the top of Shane's pec, down to a little over his nipple. He kept it shallow, but deep enough to draw blood. Once he lifted the blade away from Shane's chest, it was like Shane finally breathed, letting out an obscene moan.

But Ilya was mesmerised, and couldn't look away from the line on Shane's chest and the droplet of blood gathering at the bottom, before running down Shane's nipples and ribs.

Suddenly, Ilya couldn't stop thinking… that the line looked-, well it looked suspiciously like an "I". Or at least, like it *could be an 'I'.* All it would take, would be- *stop it, Ilya. Don't be greedy.*

But something must have shown on his face, because Shane furrowed his brows, "What are you thinking in that kinky brain of yours?"

Ilya breathed a laugh, "That's my line."

Shane hummed noncommittally, raising an eyebrow at him. But Ilya was, for the first time since he met him, too distracted to properly look at his face, all his attention drawn to his chest, instead. Before he could think it through, his hand rose to grab at the ropes, steadying Shane's chest. The other hand, the one still holding the knife, followed it up, the tip resting right at the bottom of the previously cut line. He didn't look up at Shane's face, but he does ask, "You are mine, *da?*"

"Yes," Shane answered quickly, voice strained with anticipation and confusion, unsure what Ilya had planned. Ilya honestly wasn't sure himself. But while his brain was scrambled, and thoughts were coming at him in bursts, his hands knew what to do. He dragged the knife horizontally, creating a smaller line right underneath the previous one, following it up with an identical line over it.

The air was punched out of his lungs once his initial is staring back at him, and he let the knife fall down on the sheets. "Fuck, Shane, *holy fucking shit*."

"Ilya, oh my fucking God, that was insane, fuck, fuck, *fuck*."

"You're fucking *mine."*

"Yours, always yours Ilya."

Ilya rested their foreheads together, overwhelmed by possessiveness and *love* for the amazing boy in his arms. He never wanted this moment to end. But Shane pulled him back to reality, whining

desperately. “Ilya, please, I *need* to touch you. *Please*.”

Ilya reacted immediately, undoing the knots all over Shane’s body, letting the rope fall away. But his claim, etched into Shane’s chest, remained. Ilya wasn’t actually sure that he was still breathing, and glancing up, Shane wasn’t fairing any better.

With his hands free, Shane pushed at Ilya’s chest, making him fall back on the bed, before straddling his hips. Ilya barely managed to take a breath, before Shane was guiding Ilya’s rock-hard cock back into himself, waisting no time before beginning to ride him in earnest.

But it doesn’t last long. Ilya can feel his control slipping, and his orgasm approaching. “Shane, *sweetheart,* I’m so close.”

Shane opens his mouth, as if to answer him, but all that came out was a high-pitched whine, as he painted Ilya’s chest with his come. *Claiming him right back.* That thought sent Ilya over the edge, finishing inside Shane, where he belonged. Shane collapsed onto him, Ilya’s cock slipping out in the movement, but Ilya doesn’t care. He gathered his boy in his arms, holding him close.

He ran the tips of his fingers over the marks on Shane’s skin that the rope left behind, his eyes unable to decide where to look, taking it all in. In his arms, Shane looked… content. His eyes were closed, and he hummed softly every time Ilya ran over a particularly sore spot, his body instinctively pushing into Ilya’s touch – never away from it.

It was a power that Ilya felt *drunk* on, and he never wanted it to stop. “You were beautiful, and so, *so* good for me.”

Shane blinked sluggishly, but eventually his eyes opened and focused on Ilya, “You were perfect.”

Perfect. Ilya squeezed his eyes shut, and buried his face into Shane’s hair, suddenly so overcome by emotion, that he thought he might cry.

“Ilya, hey, don’t cry.”

Oh, too late.

“Sorry,” he whispered, taking deep breaths. “It is not bad tears, *solnyshko*. I am just-, everything is a lot.”

“Overwhelmed.”

“*Da.*”

“Understandable. That was fucking crazy. Can we do it again?”

Ilya couldn’t help but laugh. “You are a menace, Shane Hollander. And I am keeping you forever.”

“You promise?” Shane’s eyes sparked with mirth, but Ilya didn’t miss the undertone in his voice. He let one of his fingers run teasingly over the ‘I’ on Shane’s chest, and Shane’s breath hitched.

“You are mine, Shane Hollander. And I might call you crazy, and a slut, but I am all those things too. For you. And you are never getting rid of me.”

Shane lifted one of his hands to rest atop Ilya's, right underneath the fresh wound. "I still cannot believe you did that. For someone who fought tooth and nail at the first mention of drawing blood, you sure as hell folded fast when I asked nicely."

"Shh, do not say it out loud, I cannot have you know my secret."

"What secret? Shane's eyes sparkled.

Ilya leaned in, so his lips were hovering over his ear. "That I will always fold, when my boy wants something, and asks so nicely with those eyes. I am a weak, weak man, and you are… how did my men say it earlier? You are 'walking me like a dog'. And I do not mind, *solnyshko*, even when you are ruining my hard and impenetrable image."

"Well, you are still very… *hard*, I'd say, but you do the *penetrating* more, yes."

Ilya snorted despite himself, and Shane followed him, letting out a laugh that sounded like music to his ears. "Oh? And is that a problem for you, Mr. Hollander? Would you like to do the penetrating instead?"

"Eh, do you really want us to have mediocre sex? Because that's the best I can offer in that department."

Ilya giggled, letting his hand cup Shane's soft cock gently. "Such a big cock, and you don't even know how to use it? Poor thing."

"Shut up." Shane's cheeks reddened again, but his statement was refuted by his cock twitching in Ilya's palm.

Ilya pressed a kiss to his burning cheek, and let go. "Never." He then leaned over the bed, and grabbed the glass of water from the nightstand, giving it to Shane. "Drink."

"Bossy," Shane murmured, but took the glass, and drank half of it immediately.

"You like me bossy. Now, I know you're tired sweetheart, but we have to clean up. I am going to put some cream on you, and some disinfectant on *that*." He nodded towards Shane's chest.

"Yes, yes, whatever you want, as long as we can go to sleep faster." Shane punctuated that sentence with a yawn, so Ilya retracted himself and got to work. He grabbed two warm and damp washcloths, going gently over Shane's hole and thighs, and using the other to clean the drying blood on his ribs. He disinfected the wound, before he grabbed cream, and started going over the places where Shane had clearly been fighting the ropes.

"You know, if you had just laid still, you wouldn't need cream right now."

Shane raised an eyebrow at him, "Bold of you to assume that I didn't fight them exactly for the purpose of it leaving marks."

Ilya rolled his eyes, gesturing for Shane to hold out his wrists, which looked the most sore. The skin was an angry red, and Ilya couldn't help the way his heart skipped a beat at the thought that these marks would probably be visible for days. *You carved your initial into this boy's chest, and you're losing it over some rope burns? Get a grip.*

Shane smiled knowingly at him, as if reading his mind, and Ilya couldn't help but smile back. Every time he thought that he was too crazy, this boy outfreaked him so severely, that Ilya couldn't believe he was real sometimes. He finished putting cream on his wrists, placing a kiss on each of them, before snuggling into Shane. Shane pulled him even closer, his hands shaking slightly, which immediately alarmed Ilya. "You okay?"

"Yes," Shane nodded. "I am just feeling slightly untethered, and I need you… close, is that stupid?"

"Untethered?" Ilya frowned at word.

"Like-, I feel like I'm floating. And like you are keeping me from… God, I don't even know from what. But I feel *right,* when you are close."

"Then I am not going anywhere."

They fell asleep with their feet entangled, cuddling as close as humanly possible, buried under the covers in their own safe little bubble.

Ilya woke up, not to gentle sunrays and the smell of Shane's shampoo in his nose, but to the annoying sound of his phone ringing. He quickly grabbed it from the nightstand, disentangling himself from Shane, trying not to wake him. He looked at the screen. *3 am.* And Sergei was calling.

Fuck.

He padded out of the bedroom, closing the door behind him before picking up.

"*What's wrong?"*

"Sorry to wake you, boss. But Alexei is at one of our bars. He's just sitting there, ordering drinks. Figured you'd want to know, since we haven't been able to track him at all."

"Fuck, is he alone?"

"It looks like it, da. We're keeping an eye on him, but I think we need to move fast."

Ilya cast a longing look towards the bedroom. Fuck, what shitty timing.

"Boss, you there?"

He squeezed his eyes shut, and tried to center his breathing. He had no choice.

"Yes, I'm on my way."

He ended the call, and considered throwing his phone across the hall. Getting Alexei was a priority. Or at least… it should be. But Shane was laying in his bed, and had only asked for one thing last night – for Ilya to *stay close*. But the sooner Alexei was out of the picture, the safer Shane would be.

So, Ilya had to go… even if it killed him.

He stepped back into the bedroom, and took a second to just look at the man in his bed, before kneeling next to him on the floor, running his fingers through his hair.

"Shane, sweetheart, can you wake up for me?"

"Mhmm." Shane whined, eyes still closed.

"Can you hear me?"

Shane hummed, bringing a hand up to caress at Ilya's wrist, and Ilya took it as confirmation enough.

"I have to go. We have a lead on Alexei. I will be back before you wake up, I promise, okay?"

"Mhmm, be safe." Shane slurred, his hand going limp around Ilya's wrist, sleep having taken him under again. Ilya kneeled there for longer than he should have, unsure whether he was satisfied that Shane had truly understood what Ilya was saying. But he couldn't linger for longer. He had a job to do.

He got dressed quickly, almost running to his parking garage, jumping into the car and pulling out in record time. By the time he made it to the club, Marley was standing outside waiting for him.

"And?" Ilya asked.

"I've been trailing him ever since he entered. Then he went to the bathroom, and just didn't come back out. I went in there to look, but it's fucking empty." Marleau snarled, clearly really fucking pissed. "I'm so fucking sorry, Roz."

Ilya waved him off, the gears in his mind already turning. Why would Alexei even show up at the club, only to disappear? Did he realise he was being watched? But surely, he must expect to be watched once he showed up at one of *Ilya's* clubs.

Ilya couldn't make sense of it. He was tired, and grumpy, and he just wanted to cuddle his-

Cold dread suddenly crawled down Ilya's spine.

Shane.

His stomach dropped so violently it almost felt physical, every piece suddenly clicking into place in the worst possible way. Alexei showing his face at the club made no sense unless there had been another purpose behind it. A distraction. Something loud enough to pull attention here, while something else happened elsewhere.

Or someone else.

Shane's voice from a few days ago rang in his head. '*Something annoying enough to prove I can get close whenever I want.'*

Ilya was already reaching for his phone when Marleau caught the change in his expression immediately. "What?"

But Ilya barely heard him, pulse roaring in his ears as he hit Shane's contact. Once. Twice.

No answer.

Something ugly and terrified opened up inside his chest.

"Ilya?" Marleau's voice sharpened instantly.

Ilya looked up at him, and whatever Marleau saw on his face clearly alarmed him, because all traces of humour disappeared immediately. "Shane." The words came out low and horrified. "Fuck. *Fuck*."

He moved before his brain caught up, jumping back into the car, Marleau hot on his heels in the passenger seat. Ilya wasn't sure he had ever driven this fast. Someone somewhere must be watching over him, because he had no idea how they made it to his house in one piece. They jumped out of the car, and ran towards the front door, before stopping dead in their tracks.

It was *open.*

"No, no, no, please no." Ilya whined, pushing it wider, and sprinting towards the bedroom, gun in hand. Maybe it wasn't too late. Maybe they were still here. Maybe he could still-

The bed was empty.

Chapter End Notes

Runs and hides

Chapter 11

Chapter Notes

> For all the people following this fic's updates (which is still insane to me), please note that I made a small change in the last chapter, where Ilya takes off Shane's bracelet before the ties him up. For... safety, and not at all bcs I needed it for the plot.
>
> Okay byeeee

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Shane was pulled out of his very nice dream by the sound of the front door smacking. He blearily opened one eye, and gathered his phone from the nightstand. 3:25 am. *Where the fuck was Ilya going?*

But then he heard footsteps on the hardwood floors, and came to the conclusion that Ilya must be coming *back.* That thought triggered a vague memory of Ilya kneeling next to him, and telling him he had to go. Shane wasn't sure that it wasn't something he had dreamed, but given the circumstances it seemed believable. He waited for a beat, expecting Ilya to beeline straight for the bedroom, to catch up on as much sleep as possible, but he didn't. *Fuck, I hope everything is okay*.

He got up, and gathered a pair of boxers and Ilya's sweats from the floor, tugging them on as he walked towards the bedroom door, left ajar. Halfway across the room, he finally heard movement out in the hall, and smiled to himself, shoulders losing a tension he hadn't noticed. He was still feeling a bit… sensitive after last night, but knew it was nothing some cuddles from his boyfriend wouldn't fix.

"Ilya? You okay?"

He reached for the door, pulling it open and coming face to face with-

Fuck.

That's not Ilya.

Shane immediately tried to close the bedroom door, but the stranger wedged a foot in, and used his body weight to push the door back open. Shane staggered back, but didn't get further than two steps before the man was on him. He tried to grab Shane's left arm, and Shane reacted without thinking, pulling all of his muscle memory from boxing into the swing with his right hand, hitting the man right underneath his jaw. He must not have expected it, because he let go of Shane's other arm, giving him the movement range to swing again, this time hitting right in the middle of his chest, trying to knock his breath out of him.

And it worked.

The man crouched over, gasping for breath, and Shane didn't look back, sprinting out of the bedroom. *Think Shane, think. Go to the garage. The keys are by the door. Grab the first one, get in the car, and get the fuck out of here. Ilya will find you.*

With adrenaline pumping, he sprinted down the hall, only to collide with another person around the corner. This time, he didn't wait and see if it was someone he knew. He had a terrifying feeling in his bones, that this was about to go horribly wrong, so he slammed into the person, trying to get past them. *Come on, Shane, just get to the garage.* He just managed to squeeze past and run into the living room, when he looked up and froze. The way to the garage was completely blocked by a man approximately twice Shane's size. He glanced towards the front door, and found a man stationed there, as well as next to the door leading to the garden. *Fuck.*

There was no way he could fight them all.

He barely noticed the panic start to truly creep in, when he felt a sharp pain in the back of his head, and everything went black.

Consciousness returned slowly, sluggish and heavy, like Shane was trying to swim upward through dark water. Cold prickled across his skin unpleasantly, enough that his half-asleep brain immediately reached for the easiest explanation. Ilya had stolen the blankets again. *Asshole*. Shane tried to curl further into the mattress with a sleepy frown, searching blindly for warmth, broad shoulders and the steady weight of Ilya pressed against his back.

Except-

There was no mattress.

Something dug sharply into his wrists, sending shocks of pain through his system. *Rope*.

Shane frowned harder, still not fully awake enough to understand why that felt wrong. His arms felt heavy, stretched awkwardly behind him, shoulders aching faintly. His head throbbed.

And fuck, it was freezing.

A memory drifted sluggishly through his head then, ropes and soft praise as Ilya's hands carefully tightening knots around his body, and for one delirious second Shane genuinely wondered whether he had fallen asleep halfway through the scene somehow. "Ilya," he mumbled hoarsely, eyes still closed. "What's going on?"

Silence was the only thing that answered him, and through his confused brain, awareness began creeping in properly, and with it came the growing, sickening realisation, that his body couldn't move the way it should.

Shane's eyes snapped open.

Concrete. Dim lighting. A room he didn't recognise. For one terrible second, his brain simply refused to process what he was seeing. He stared blankly at the floor beneath him, at his bare feet, at the heavy rope attached to the arms and legs of the chair, like if he looked long enough reality might rearrange itself into something understandable. But then the memories came back to him, supplying images of strange men in their house, and the sharp pain before everything went black.

Then he looked up, and met a pair of cold blue eyes watching him from across the room.

Alexei.

Shane stopped breathing.

The man sat lazily in another chair a few feet away, one ankle crossed over the opposite knee, looking almost relaxed despite the gun resting casually in his lap. He resembled Ilya in a sharp, cruel sort of way, all expensive clothes and the same composed stillness, but there was something

deeply wrong in his eyes. Something empty. He smiled slightly when Shane finally looked at him properly.

"There he is," Alexei said softly. "I was beginning to think my guys had been too rough."

Terror hit Shane all at once. His pulse rose so hard it hurt, breaths turning shallow immediately as he yanked instinctively against the ropes again. They bit painfully into his skin, making him gasp, the sound echoing embarrassingly loud in the room.

Alexei watched calmly. "Careful," he murmured. "You'll hurt yourself. Or well… hurt yourself *more.* You already look a bit worse for wear, to be honest."

No, no, no, no-

This couldn't be happening.

His brain scrambled desperately for logic, for explanation, for literally anything else, but every possibility crashed against the same horrifying reality. He had been taken. The very thing Ilya had been afraid of happening, had just happened. And Shane had no idea what to do. He didn't say anything, instead trying to take in his surroundings. He didn't get much. The room was big, almost looked like a warehouse, maybe? That would explain the temperature, they were practically outside, and while the days had gotten warmer, the nights were still brutal.

He tried to move his hands again, but had to bite back a whimper at the feeling of the rough rope sliding over the marks still there from last night, skin so tender it almost made him want to cry. But he wouldn't give Alexei the satisfaction. "What the fuck do you want from me?"

"Mouthy. Is that why Ilya likes you?" Alexei answered, sounding amused. Shane didn't deign the comment with a response. Alexei sighed, reclining further into his chair. "There are many things I want from you, Shane Hollander. Mainly information. But also… entertainment, *da*? Russia is very different, but I have heard a lot about Canada's hospitality. And who better to show me Canada from its best side, than a nice, polite, Canadian boy."

The words somehow sounded like insults, and Shane found himself bristling in anger. "If you think I am telling you *anything*, you are even more insane than Ilya said you were."

Alexei cocked an eyebrow. "Oh? Does my dear brother talk about me a lot? Did he tell you all about me? Did he tell you all about *himself* too, or am I just the bad guy of the story?" He shook his head condescendingly as if he knew the answer. "I bet Ilya didn't tell you about his past. About his childhood. About how he did unforgivable things, only to get away with it, and then ran away to Canada, thinking justice would never reach him. He has always been entitled, and greedy."

"I do not care about his past. You're the fucking crazy one, if you've travelled all the way here for what? Some twisted sense of justice, just because you cannot cope with the fact that your brother got a better life than you?" Shane snapped.

For the first time since Shane had woken up, something genuinely ugly flickered across Alexei's face. He wouldn't call it anger, not exactly. More… wounded pride. It vanished almost immediately, smoothing back into cold amusement, but Shane caught it. And judging by the way Alexei's fingers tightened briefly around the gun in his lap, he knew Alexei realised he had caught it too.

Alexei tilted his head slowly. “Careful. You are not really in a position to annoy me.”

“And yet here I am.”

That earned him a sharper smile. “I can see why Ilya likes you. You bite.” His eyes drifted downward then, lingering over Shane’s exposed skin in a way that made bile rise in his throat. “Though clearly, you also enjoy *being bitten*.”

Shane went still.

Alexei’s gaze traced slowly over the fading rope marks around his wrists and chest, over the bruises blooming darkly across his hips from the night before, over the small bite marks decorating his skin like evidence Shane had never expected anyone else to see. Humiliation burned hot beneath his fear. Not because he was ashamed of the marks, but because Alexei was invading something that he and Ilya had cherished, and violating it.

Alexei laughed softly. “Oh, don’t look so embarrassed. You think men in our world do not fuck?” His eyes glittered cruelly. “But this?” He gestured lazily toward Shane’s body. “This is almost pathetic. You let him mark you up like *pet*.”

Shane forced himself not to react. Not because the words didn’t sting, because they did, horribly, especially here, chained to a chair and freezing and vulnerable in a way he had never been before.

But because Alexei wanted the reaction. He wanted insecurity and cracks he could exploit. And Shane would be damned if he gave him anything. “You can look all you want. I am not embarrassed. Because you’re just looking at proof of how much you fucked up by taking me. And you’re going to regret it.”

Alexei barked out a laugh so sudden it startled even Shane. “Wow,” he murmured almost approvingly. “I was beginning to think fear had mellowed your feisty side.”

Shane just glared at him, and the smile slipped slightly from Alexei’s face again. He stood then, slow and deliberate, walking closer until he was directly in front of Shane. Up close, he looked even more unsettling somehow, because there was something deeply performative about him, like every movement had been practiced in a mirror until it achieved the exact reaction he wanted. His fingers brushed lightly against the necklace still sitting around Shane’s throat.

Shane jerked away instinctively.

Alexei’s smile widened. “That one upset you.”

“Do not touch me.”

Alexei hummed thoughtfully. “Interesting. Should I get you a leash? Is that how my brother gets you to behave? Or does he enjoy your bratty side, because it gives him a sense of power when he *tames* you?”

Shane clenched his jaw, desperately trying to calm his heartbeat. Alexei crouched in front of him then, elbows resting lazily on his knees, expression almost conversational now. “You think too highly of him, little one,” he whispered. “Did he tell you, how it is his fault our mother is dead?”

Shane froze. Alexei watched him carefully, clearly pleased to finally get a real reaction. “She felt so bad for little, gentle Ilya, born into the *Bratva*, she desperately tried to get him out. But Ilya wanted power. He wanted to *stay*.” Alexei’s voice turned mockingly sympathetic. “And it made her so very sad. So sad, that she killed herself.”

Silence rang painfully in Shane’s ears.

Because objectively, he knew this was manipulation. Knew Alexei was twisting something ugly and complicated into a weapon meant to wound. But still, something cold settled in Shane’s stomach. Not doubt. *Never* doubt. Just grief, for the little boy Ilya must have been, and for the kind of childhood that could twist brothers into *this*.

Alexei studied him expectantly, clearly waiting for horror, revulsion or fear. Instead, Shane looked up slowly and said quietly: “That’s the saddest attempt at emotional manipulation I’ve ever seen.”

Alexei blinked.

“You really thought,” Shane continued, voice rough but surprisingly steady, “that if you told me enough horrible things about Ilya, I’d suddenly stop loving him? After kidnapping me?” He laughed once, disbelievingly. “God, you really don’t understand him at all.”

Something dangerous flashed across Alexei’s face then, no longer amused. “I think you are the one that doesn’t understand, Shane. You do not understand the gravity of the situation you have found yourself in. But that’s okay, I am not in a rush. I will give you some time to… reflect.”

“Reflect on *what*?”

“On whether you want to make it out of this room alive. Or if you want to die for a man, to whom you are disposable. Because you may be pretty, Shane, but there are many pretty boys in Montreal, willing to wear pretty jewellery. You are not special, and if you think Ilya will put his men at risk for you, you are mistaken. The sooner you realise that the longer you might live.”

With that, Alexei turned around, and left the warehouse, locking the door after him with what sounded like ten different locks. *Not like I can move from this chair anyway.* Then, the lights went out, and Shane was left in complete darkness. Without Alexei there to rile him up, the cold started to feel even worse. He was shivering, which made him jerk his arms involuntarily, which then pulled at his restrains. Other than that, he couldn’t move.

He was trapped.

Actually trapped.

The darkness swallowed everything so completely that Shane couldn’t even tell how large the warehouse was anymore, or where the walls ended, or whether someone was still standing in the room watching him silently. Every tiny sound suddenly felt enormous, the uneven sound of his own breathing, the faint creak of the chair underneath him whenever he shifted his weight. His wrists burned, and immediately, his mind betrayed him.

Rope.

Warm hands.

Ilya's voice asking for his colour every five minutes like Shane was something precious enough to handle carefully.

'You can always stop.'

The knife on the nightstand. The quiet promise that Ilya would cut him free the second he became uncomfortable.

Shane's chest tightened painfully, because this was what fear *actually* felt like. Because trust was the entire point. Trust transformed ropes into comfort instead of terror. Turned vulnerability into intimacy instead of humiliation. Without Ilya, this wasn't thrilling.

It was *horrifying*.

Shane jerked instinctively against the rope again, harder this time, desperate panic briefly overtaking logic, but the restraints barely moved. Pain shot through his shoulders immediately, sharp enough to make him gasp. "Fuck," he whispered shakily.

The darkness gave him nothing back. No sarcastic comment, no calm Russian accent telling him to breathe.

God, he wanted Ilya.

The thought hit him so hard it almost made him nauseous. He wanted Ilya's weight wrapped around him in bed. Wanted the stupid expensive blankets and the smell of his cologne lingering on the pillows and the feeling of those ring-clad hands rubbing circles into his back whenever Shane got too deep into his own head. He wanted to hear him call him *solnyshko* in that low sleepy voice. Instead, he was bound to a chair in the dark.

A hysterical laugh almost clawed its way out of his throat at the irony of it. Just hours ago, he had begged to be tied up tighter. Had practically melted under the weight of Ilya's control, wanting more and more and more. Now every inch of restraint against his skin felt unbearable. Shane squeezed his eyes shut hard, though it made no difference in the pitch-black room.

Okay. *Okay, Shane. Think*.

Ilya would come for him. The thought should have helped, because logically, Shane knew there was no universe in which Ilya Rozanov simply let this happen. He would tear the city apart looking for him. The *Bratva* would probably already be in motion, Sergei and Marleau and all the others turning Montreal upside down piece by piece until they found him, because Ilya ordered them too.

But another thought kept worming its way in underneath the reassurance. What if they were too late? His breathing hitched suddenly.

No.

No, no, no.

Shane tried to force the thought away, but now that panic had gotten properly inside him, it spread fast and ugly, spiralling outward into every terrible possibility at once. What if Alexei hurt him? What if Alexei hurt *Ilya*?

This was all Shane's fault, because he had insisted on staying close to Ilya despite the risk. He had laughed at the risk when Ilya had asked him, and insisted that he would be by Ilya's side no matter what. And now they were separated anyway. *You're a fucking fool.*

A sob caught painfully in his throat before he could stop it, startingly loud in the silence. Shane swallowed hard, blinking rapidly against the sudden sting in his eyes, but the panic only tightened further around his ribs, squeezing until breathing itself started feeling difficult.

He missed him.

God, he missed him so much.

"Ilya," he whispered helplessly into the darkness, like saying the name might somehow summon him, but nothing happened. That broke the rest of Shane's willpower, because Ilya always answered, always touched him back. Always grounded him somehow, even when Shane was spiralling, or bratty, or too deep in his own head. Now there was only darkness and cold concrete and the rough bite of ropes. Shane curled forward as much as the restraints allowed, trying instinctively to make himself smaller, warmer, safer.

It didn't help.

His shoulders started shaking harder. He thought back to a couple of hours ago, when Ilya had untied him, carefully rubbing over every red mark left behind on Shane's skin, like he regretted hurting him even slightly, looking at him like Shane was his entire world. The memory cracked something open inside Shane completely.

Another sob escaped him.

Shane pressed his forehead down against his own shoulder, breathing uneven and shallow now as panic finally overwhelmed whatever fragile control he had been clinging to. And alone in the dark, with nobody there to hear it, Shane finally let himself break.

Day One

He woke up to sharp pain on his cheek, quickly blinking his eyes open, momentarily blinded by the unexpected light. God, he must have fallen asleep sitting up at some point. Alexei stood in front of him, looking down with a raised eyebrow. "Sleep well?"

Shane clenched his jaw, feeling warmth spread across his left cheek. *Fuck, the bastard must have slapped him.* That somehow being the first act of violence made him giggle under his breath. "Amazing, 5-star rating. Does the accommodation come with breakfast?" He joked, voice wheezing slightly from the cold. He was still shivering, limbs feeling stiff. Even if he managed to get up right now, he wasn't sure his legs would carry him.

Through the window by the roof, the sun was peaking in, high in the sky. Fuck, it had been *hours* since he had been taken. He really hoped Ilya was okay.

Alexei didn't say anything, just pulled his chair from yesterday closer to Shane, sitting down while looking at him almost… curiously. Shane wanted to squirm in his seat, but managed to keep still, not wanting to appear affected just by Alexei *looking* at him. "So, Shane. Let me tell you how this is going to go. I have questions. Things I want to know, about Ilya, about his… operations. And you will tell me what I want to know, *da?*"

Shane opened his mouth to argue, but Alexei held up his hand to interrupt him. "And do not give me that shit with 'I do not know anything', yes? Because we both know that it is a lie. And I do not like liars."

They stared at each other, Shane not saying anything. Not to appear tough, but because he genuinely didn't know what to say. He knew… things, about Ilya's operations. The headquarters, the people, the immediate plans he had overheard at meetings. But he wasn't going to tell Alexei anything… or at least he really hoped he wouldn't.

Alexei seemed oblivious to his internal turmoil, continuing his monologue uninterrupted. "My brother has always been… soft. Making decisions with his emotions, instead of his brain. So, he has probably told you many things, that you do not even know are valuable. But that is okay. We will find out together, *da?*"

"Fuck off."

Alexei tsk'ed, shaking his head at Shane. "I would not go that way, if I were you. The only way you are making it out of here alive, is if you give me what I want."

"Ilya will come for me." Shane quipped, and this time his voice didn't quiver. He was unsure about many aspects of his current situation, but *that,* he would never doubt.

Alexei only looked at him with a pitying look. "Oh, little one, no he is not. Even if he wanted to, I can assure you, that he will not find you." When Shane didn't respond, Alexei continued. "But loyalty is a beautiful thing. It is even better to *break it*."

Alexei got up, walking to pick something up from outside Shane's line of sight. He came back holding a medium-sized bucket, and before Shane could wonder, emptied the contents of it over his head.

Water.

Why was he covering me in water?

He got the answer quickly, as his body immediately started shivering even more than before. God, it really was fucking cold in here. He looked up at Alexei, but his face betrayed nothing. He put the bucket down, and turned around, walking towards the door. The last thing Shane heard was, "See you tomorrow, Hollander."

When the door slammed shut behind him, the silence somehow felt even colder than the water.

Shane gasped shakily through clenched teeth as freezing droplets continued running down his skin in thin trails, towards the already soaked-through waistband of his sweatpants, dripping from his

hair onto his shoulders and chest, immediately turning icy in the warehouse air. His entire body started trembling violently within seconds, ropes tightening and shifting every time his muscles jerked involuntarily, the rough fibres scraping harsher against skin that already felt rubbed raw. *Fuck*.

He squeezed his eyes shut hard for a second, trying to control his breathing, trying not to panic, because panic only made the shaking worse, which only made him colder, which made the panic spiral harder. A vicious little cycle that Alexei had probably planned. Shane swallowed thickly and tilted his head upward slightly, staring toward the small dirty windows high up near the ceiling, the only indication that time was still moving outside this warehouse at all.

He blinked at the window. Clouds must have come in, the now thin grey afternoon light filtered weakly through the glass, dull and colourless, but it was *something*. Something to track. Something to focus on besides the cold biting deeper and deeper into his bones. So, Shane watched the sunlight move. It became his entire world for a while, the slow crawl of pale light across concrete, the gradual dimming of the sky beyond the windows, and somewhere along the way he realised he was counting time by imagining what Ilya would be doing at each hour.

He's probably having lunch now.

He's probably yelling at someone.

He's probably with Marleau and Sergei, trying to locate Alexei.

He's probably tearing the city apart looking for me.

He's probably having dinner.

The thoughts should have comforted him, but instead it just made something ache horribly inside his chest, because God, he missed him. He missed him in this endless, unbearable way that seemed to touch everything now, every thought looping back toward Ilya eventually, like Shane's mind physically did not know how to exist without reaching for him anymore. He missed his voice, and the constant warmth. Missed the way Ilya touched him like it was instinctive, hands always finding Shane's waist or neck or wrist like he needed the contact as much as Shane did.

He missed being looked at gently. Alexei looked at him like he was puzzle to solve, or toy to break apart piece by piece just to see what happened, and Shane suddenly found himself desperately replaying old memories just to survive it.

Ilya making him kneel in front of him at Désir.

Ilya's blinding smile when Shane had snapped at the man flirting with him at the charity gala.

Ilya's giggles as they had ice cream by the river.

Outside the windows, the weak spring light kept fading, slowly and cruelly. Shane watched it happen with growing dread curling heavier and heavier in his stomach, because daytime was awful, but at least daytime proved the world still existed outside this place. Daytime gave him something to measure. But nighttime… nighttime swallowed everything whole.

And when the last traces of sunlight finally disappeared beyond the windows, plunging the warehouse into complete darkness again, Shane felt like it would never end. He strained his neck,

so his chin rested on his shoulder. It didn't bring him any rest, but the position pulled on his necklace in way that reminded Shane of its presence.

And in the cold and dark hours of the night, the steady presence of it, of *Ilya,* around his throat, kept him company. The only comfort he had.

Day Two

The next time the door opened, Shane startled violently enough that the ropes dug deeper into his skin. He hated that immediately. Hated that his body had already learned the sound of fear so quickly, that the mere scrape of metal against concrete now had panic climbing halfway up his throat before he could stop it.

Alexei stepped into the warehouse carrying two coffees with a smile on his face. "Well," he sighed lightly, taking in Shane's condition with lazy amusement, "you look significantly worse than yesterday."

Shane didn't say anything, and Alexei smiled faintly at the lack of response, before setting one coffee down on a nearby crate and taking a slow sip from the other. Meanwhile, Shane tried not to visibly shiver at the thought of something *warm*, the second cup mocking him from a distance. He thought that he had grown accustomed to the cold, had pushed it to the back of his mind like a neglected memory. But now, it was suddenly being pushed forward, his body aware of every exposed and freezing part of his upper body. It was cold, but not in the dramatic way movies made it look, not visible breaths and dramatic trembling every second - but in the quieter, more exhausting way that slowly settled into bones and stayed there, making every muscle ache and every thought sluggish.

And being tied upright to a chair only made it worse, because he couldn't curl in on himself properly, couldn't move enough to generate warmth, couldn't do anything except sit there and wait, while ropes bit steadily into his skin.

And fuck, the ropes.

His wrists *burned*. At some point during the night, he had instinctively struggled against them in his sleep, and now the skin around his wrists felt raw and angry. The irony was almost enough to make him laugh.

Alexei walked closer slowly, gaze dragging over Shane's body in a way that made his skin crawl. "No greeting today?"

"Sorry," Shane rasped. "Still working through the disappointment of waking up and seeing you instead of your brother."

Alexei barked out a laugh, before crouching in front of him, elbows resting loosely against his knees. "So," he said conversationally, "where does Ilya hold meetings?"

Shane snorted immediately. “You think Ilya brings me to mafia meetings?”

“I think,” Alexei replied mildly, “that my brother would happily lay the world at your feet if you asked sweetly enough.”

Something in Shane’s expression must have shifted at that, because Alexei smiled slowly.

Fuck.

“I do not know anything useful,” Shane said quickly, because the last thing he needed was Alexei realising how frighteningly close to the truth he actually was. “And even if I did, I wouldn’t tell you shit.”

Alexei sighed, and Shane prepared himself for another clever word manipulation. Maybe another sob story from their childhood. Maybe another threat.

But then Alexei punched him.

Hard.

The hit came so suddenly Shane barely had time to tense before pain exploded across his mouth, sharp enough that stars burst behind his eyes instantly. His head snapped sideways violently, the chair scraping across concrete beneath him as warmth spilled immediately over his lips. The metallic taste of blood flooded his mouth. His lip had split, and for a second, all Shane could hear was ringing.

Then Alexei’s voice cut through it calmly. “There,” he said, almost softly. “That is for wasting my time.”

Shane breathed shakily through his nose as blood trickled down his chin slowly, warm against freezing skin in a way that felt morbidly *nice*, dripping lower until it stained the silver necklace hanging around his throat.

Alexei’s eyes followed it lazily. Then lingered, in a way that made Shane’s stomach drop instantly.

No.

Alexei reached forward slowly, fingers brushing the chains. “Pretty thing,” he murmured.

Shane jerked back instinctively despite the ropes holding him firmly in place. “Don’t fucking touch that.”

Alexei looked delighted by the reaction. “Oh,” he breathed softly. “Sensitive, are we?”

“Don’t fucking touch that, it’s mine.”

“No,” Alexei corrected mildly. “It is *his*.”

Then he grabbed the necklace, putting his fingers between chain and skin, and Shane trashed violently, genuinely panicked. “No-”

The necklace snapped free violently as Alexei ripped it off hard enough to bruise, the sudden force making Shane gasp sharply as pain flared across his throat. The chain and gem disappeared into

Alexei's hand, blood staining the silver.

For one horrible second Shane couldn't breathe properly. Because that necklace wasn't just jewellery. Ilya had put it on him with shaking hands, and looked at Shane like he had hung the moon. And now it was gone, ripped off by someone else. *Shane had allowed someone else to take it off.*

Alexei studied it thoughtfully. "You let him mark you up like a little dog," he said, while playing with the necklace, running his fingers over the chains, that just minutes ago had brought Shane so much comfort. Shane swallowed hard against the sudden burn in his eyes.

Alexei smiled, colder this time. "I think I will send this to Ilya," he murmured, slipping the necklace into his pocket. "As a souvenir. You know, like when owners bring home their dog's collar, when they are put down. He can put it on the mantle."

And then he left.

Leaving Shane alone again, with a split lip, and his own blood down his chin, while panic and grief twisted together so tightly inside his chest that he genuinely thought he might throw up. Because Ilya's necklace was gone.

And somehow that hurt almost worse than the punch. Now all he could think was that he had failed somehow. Which was irrational. Logically, he knew that there had been absolutely nothing he could have done tied to a chair, while Alexei ripped it away from him.

But logic had very little place in panic.

Because the necklace had symbolized everything about their relationship, their devotion, and now his throat suddenly felt unbearably bare and wrong and exposed without its familiar weight resting there.

Another tear slipped down his face. Shane squeezed his eyes shut hard enough they burned, trying desperately not to spiral further, but his thoughts kept circling the same horrible idea over and over again. Ilya had put it on him so carefully.

And Shane had let someone else take it off.

Day Three

The third day was worse.

Physically, Shane almost preferred the now vague pain on his lip, because pain at least gave him something concrete to focus on besides the spiralling panic constantly trying to claw its way into his brain. No, what made the third day worse was exhaustion, accompanied by hunger and thirst. The kind that settled into thoughts themselves, inescapable. He hadn't slept properly. Every time he drifted off, some tiny movement would jerk against the ropes binding his wrists and chest, pulling

him awake immediately. His shoulders ached horribly now, muscles cramping from being held in the same position for too long, and every inch of exposed skin felt cold. His throat felt like sandpaper, every breath almost wheezing, aching every time he tried to swallow his own spit. He was dizzy, his head pounding in a way Shane recognised as his body screaming for any kind of nutrition.

When the door finally opened again, he almost felt relieved. Which was deeply, deeply concerning.

Alexei stepped inside carrying food, and Shane stared at him blankly. Alexei held out a sandwich lazily. “You should eat.”

Shane just glared at him, until Alexei sighed and stepped around him. He fiddled with the ropes around his left hand, before Shane felt the tension with which his arm had been held behind the chair loosen. He almost moaned in relief, as his arm fell back forwards.

Alexei leaned in until Shane could almost feel his breath on his ear, the hairs on the back of his head standing up. “If you try anything, I swear to God, Hollander, I will shoot you. Do not tempt me.”

Shane really wanted to resist. He wanted to take the sandwich, and throw it back in Alexei’s face. But he was so fucking *hungry*. So, he grabbed it with his free hand, and brought it up to his mouth for a hesitant bite. *He wouldn’t have kept you alive if he was going to poison you.*

The taste exploded in his mouth in a way that almost made him want to cry. He kept the bites small, aware of how rough his throat felt without any water for days. He could only eat about half of it, before his stomach started churning, surprised by suddenly receiving food, so Shane put it down.

Only then did he look up at Alexei, who was leaning against the wall, typing away on his phone. *That’s how unconcerned he is with any escape you might attempt.* Almost as if feeling eyes on him, he looked up, staring at Shane. And Shane couldn’t help but wistfully wish the blue eyes belonged to someone else.

Alexei approached him, grabbing Shane’s arm and twisting it back behind the chair. The second the rope wrapped around his wrist again, Shane whimpered. The first acknowledgment of pain since he woke up here, and Alexei paused slightly at the sound. Then Shane heard him chuckle as he ran the rope over his wrist a couple of more times, before tightening it. Shane couldn’t help the pitiful sounds escaping him.

He almost wanted Alexei to ask him something. Anything. Shane wouldn’t tell him shit, but he wanted the *option.* Because somehow, being stubborn was better than just sitting there. It gave him something to hold onto, some tiny illusion that he still had control over himself, over his choices, over where the line was. If Alexei asked questions, Shane could refuse. He could bite back sarcastic comments, cling to the small vicious satisfaction of making himself difficult. But when Alexei was quiet like this, when he simply handled Shane like object instead of person, the panic got worse.

“Did you enjoy it?” he murmured almost thoughtfully, fingers ghosting over the restraint before tightening it another inch just to hear Shane’s breathing hitch. “All those bruises on you when I took you? Rope marks. Bite marks. That ridiculous carving.” His mouth curled faintly. “My brother turned you into little whore.”

Shane clenched his jaw hard enough it ached. But his face still burned, because it made this feel even more violating somehow. Like Alexei had stolen something private and dragged it into the

light just to ruin it.

Alexei leaned closer suddenly. “You know what I think?”

Shane stared at the floor silently.

“I think,” Alexei continued, “that my brother likes breaking pretty things slowly enough that they thank him for it afterward.”

Something sharp twisted through Shane’s chest at that, immediate and defensive. Because no. No, that wasn’t what it was. Alexei didn’t understand. He didn’t understand the way Ilya had trembled harder than Shane did while breaking him apart and putting him back together, but *better*. Or the way he constantly checked Shane’s reactions during every scene, like Shane’s comfort mattered more to him than breathing itself. He didn’t understand that every bruise Ilya left behind had been paired with worship afterward, with soft kisses pressed against sore skin and quiet Russian spoken like prayer.

Alexei only understood violence. Not tenderness or trust. Not the unbearable intimacy of someone holding power over you and choosing gentleness every single time.

The rope around his wrist finally settled into place, tighter than before, Alexei giving it one final tug, pulling Shane’s hands even further behind the chair. Pain shot sharply up Shane’s arms, and a sob escaped him against his will, tears pooling in his eyes.

Alexei chuckled softly behind him. “There you are,” he murmured. “I was wondering how long it would take, before you stopped pretending to be tough. Maybe tomorrow, we will finally reach an agreement.”

Tomorrow? Why tomorrow? When Alexei hadn’t even tried today. The question must have been visible on his tear-stricken face, because Alexei hummed. “What, did you want to say something?”

Shane shook his head, trying his best to glare, but probably failing due to how miserable he looked. Alexei walked towards the door, before pausing in the opening, letting more sunrays through. “Enjoy the silence, Shane. Tomorrow, you will only hear your own screams.”

Day Four

Shane didn’t sleep at all, Alexei’s words replaying constantly in his head.

The previous constant stream of ‘Ilya is coming, just wait’ in his head seemed to have quietened, replaced by Alexei’s mean smirk and terrifying promise. For the first time in four days, Shane never wanted the night to end. He would rather spend never-ending nights in total darkness, alone with his thoughts, than see what Alexei had planned for when the sun came up.

At some point, hunger returned, almost worse than before. As if three days without food had made it more dormant, but now, after a couple of bites, his body craved *more*. He could feel the rest of

the sandwich still resting on his lap, where Alexei hadn't removed it.

And he was so *thirsty*.

That was somehow becoming worse than the hunger now. Shane swallowed thickly, immediately regretting it when his throat stayed painfully dry anyway. The sandwich had been spicy. Not overwhelmingly so under normal circumstances, he hadn't even noticed it properly at first yesterday, too desperate for food to care what it tasted like. But now he wondered if Alexei had chosen it intentionally, if this was just another small cruelty to layer on top of everything else, to make him desperate for even a drop of water.

He shook his head, trying not to spiral.

He could do this. He *could*. He just had to keep his mouth shut. That was the only thing he actually controlled here anymore, the only thing Alexei hadn't managed to pry from him yet, and Shane clung to that stubbornly through the fear threatening to rot through his chest. He would not betray Ilya. He wouldn't. Even now, cold and aching and exhausted enough that his thoughts sometimes blurred strangely together, that certainty remained solid.

The locks finally clicked sometime after sunrise. Shane's entire body tensed instantly.

The door opened slowly this time, and Alexei stepped through it, dressed as immaculately as always, calm and composed in a way that somehow made everything worse.

"Good morning, Hollander."

Shane said nothing, and Alexei sighed lightly as he closed the door behind him, shrugging his jacket off for the first time in four days. "Still rude. Canada truly disappoints me."

He walked towards Shane slowly, pulling something out of his jacket pocket. Shane glanced down, and his stomach dropped so violently he genuinely thought he might throw up.

A knife.

Alexei noticed immediately.

"There it is," he murmured softly. "Fear is a powerful thing. And I was beginning to think nothing scared you."

Shane's breathing started turning shallow before he could stop it. Because knives were different now. God, they were different now in the worst possible way. His brain immediately betrayed him with flashes of Ilya again, cold metal dragged gently over skin while warm hands soothed him through every reaction, soft reassurances murmured between kisses, trust wrapped around danger so completely that Shane had melted instead of panicked. Now the sight of a blade only made terror claw violently up his throat.

Alexei crouched in front of him, studying him carefully. "You know," he said almost mournfully, "I really hoped we could avoid this."

"Bullshit." Shane rasped.

Alexei smiled faintly. "Fair enough."

Then he grabbed Shane's jaw hard enough to bruise and pressed the knife lightly against the side of his stomach. Shane froze instantly, the knife cold even against his icy skin.

"Where are Ilya's headquarters?"

"No."

The knife cut into him with no hesitation. Pain ripped through Shane so suddenly that a sound tore from his throat before he could stop it, sharp and humiliating and loud in the freezing warehouse. Heat immediately spilled down his side, and Shane jerked violently against the ropes on instinct, panic exploding through his chest as pain registered properly.

Fuck.

Fuck.

Alexei watched him carefully the entire time. "Again," he said calmly. "Who is his most trusted man?"

Shane's breathing turned ragged immediately, images of Marleau laughing while making sure he felt included making his stomach churn. "No."

Another cut, higher this time. Shane screamed.

The sound echoed horribly through the warehouse, bouncing off concrete walls while pain burned white-hot across his ribs, sharp enough that tears sprang instantly into his eyes. The ropes dug viciously into his wrists as he struggled uselessly against them, body reacting instinctively to escape even while his brain knew there was nowhere to go.

Alexei barely reacted to the screaming at all.

"Interesting," he murmured softly. "You really do love him, *da?*"

"Go fuck yourself," Shane gasped out through gritted teeth.

The next cut landed across his thigh, followed by several more, making Shane sob. Not because he wanted to, but because his body simply couldn't hold the sounds in anymore. Every nerve felt raw already from cold and exhaustion and fear, and now pain kept slicing through him over and over again without warning, each shallow cut enough to send panic crashing harder through his bloodstream.

Alexei kept talking calmly through all of it. Asking questions relentlessly.

Locations.

Names.

Weak points.

Trade routes.

Shane barely even processed half of them anymore through the pain. He just kept shaking his head, gasping out broken 'no's' between screams while blood slowly covered his skin.

And still, Alexei kept going. Another cut across his arm. Another over his stomach. Not deep enough to kill. *Unfortunately,* Shane thought bitterly. Just enough to hurt. Alexei wanted suffering. Wanted Shane breaking apart slowly in front of him.

The warehouse blurred strangely after a while. Shane couldn't tell how much time was passing anymore, only that everything hurt now, every breath scraping painfully through his ribs while tears streamed uncontrollably down his face. His throat burned from screaming. His entire body trembled violently against the ropes, blood sticking uncomfortably against cold skin.

"No," Shane sobbed after another cut opened across his shoulder, voice wrecked and desperate now. "I don't know anything useful, I swear-"

Alexei tilted his head slightly. "That almost sounded honest."

"It is honest," Shane cried, lying in desperation. "Please-"

The word slipped out accidentally.

Please.

Alexei stilled immediately, and for one horrible second, hope flared painfully inside Shane's chest. Then Alexei smiled coldly. "Too late."

Shane's stomach dropped. Alexei moved then, leaning over him, pushing him back in the chair and Shane's breathing immediately turned panicked all over again when fingers brushed lightly against his chest.

Against the initial. The carved "I" had scabbed during the past few days, but it was unmistakably still there. Shane remembered Ilya tracing it gently, eyes soft like he couldn't quite believe Shane had allowed it.

Now Alexei ran his thumb over it thoughtfully. "This," he murmured, "is still my favourite part."

Shane immediately started shaking his head. "No."

Alexei ignored him. "You let him carve himself into your skin." His voice sounded fascinated now. "Like ownership."

"No," Shane whispered, panic rising so violently he could barely breathe. "Please."

Alexei's eyes flicked upward sharply at the word. Then, deliberately, he placed the knife directly against the mark.

Shane broke instantly. "No, no, no-"

The blade dragged down hard across the carving, deeper than any previous cuts.

Pain exploded through Shane so violently he genuinely lost the ability to breathe for a second. A scream ripped out of him so loud it tore painfully through his already ruined throat, his entire body convulsing against the ropes while fresh agony blazed directly through the mark Ilya had left on him.

It felt violating in a way the other cuts hadn't. Like Alexei had reached directly into the softest part of Shane and sliced it open. Shane sobbed uncontrollably now, head falling forward while panic and pain crashed together, to the point he thought he might black out. Alexei kept cutting, mutilating Shane's chest with dozens of small, but deep cuts, covering up Ilya's mark until it was unrecognisable. Until Shane had nothing left of Ilya with him. Until he was completely alone.

He regretted letting Ilya take off the bracelet, wanting nothing more than to grasp at anything linking him to him. But then again, it would have been yet another thing for Alexei to take away. And he had already taken enough.

He vaguely registered Alexei asking more questions. Or maybe repeating the same ones. But Shane was too far in his own head to even think about answering. Eventually, Alexei pulled his head up by his hair, and stared at him while breathing hard for a long moment, as if waiting for him to speak, to finally break. When Shane said nothing, something in his expression finally seemed to snap.

"You stupid fucking boy."

The first punch landed directly against Shane's ribs, and something cracked immediately.

Pain burst through his side so sharply Shane genuinely couldn't scream this time, only choke violently on air while agony radiated through his chest in nauseating waves. Another hit followed before he could recover, then another, Alexei suddenly beating him with real fury now, all calm amusement finally gone.

The chair rocked violently beneath the force of it. Shane curled instinctively as much as the ropes allowed, sobbing brokenly every time another strike slammed into already damaged ribs. He could barely breathe, every desperate inhale scraped like glass now, and he could do nothing but try to hold on, and pray to whatever God was listening that Alexei wouldn't kill him.

Or maybe pray that he *would,* so the pain would finally stop.

Suddenly, Alexei released him with a snarl like Shane had disgusted him. He staggered back, Shane's blood on his hands. "You are of no use to me, Hollander. And I have grown bored. Enjoy your last day, because you won't see the sun rise tomorrow." With that, he grabbed his jacket, and stalked out, smacking the door behind him.

Finally left alone, Shane broke apart. He sobbed uncontrollably, tears streaming down his face as hoarse cries mixed with screams of pain finally fell unguarded from his lips. He just wanted it to stop. He just wanted the pain to go away.

And it would. Alexei had said so. Despite desperately clinging onto hope, Shane finally realised that he wasn't making it out alive. Ilya wasn't coming. He had been here for days with *nothing.*

And now, he was ruined. Alexei had taken everything that had made Shane *Ilya's* and ripped it away. What was left was a shell of someone Ilya maybe could have eventually… *loved*. Now, even if he burst through that door, what would he even find? Not the man he was looking for, but a tainted version of him. Shane would be lucky if Ilya would as much as look in his direction.

It doesn't matter what he'd do if he saw you. Because he won't. He's not coming.

Still, Shane would keep the fantasies of Ilya saving him close to his chest. It would get him through the night, imagining the *Bratva* finally localising him, *finally* coming to save him. If he closed his eyes, he could almost hear commotion outside, his imagination supplying voices that weren't there.

"Shane!"

God, he missed that voice. If he could just hear it one more time, he would be happy.

"Shane, *solnyshko*, please open your beautiful eyes and look at me."

Weird, for a figment of his imagination to be so demanding. But then again, Shane was supposedly just conjuring up a very realistic version of Ilya. And he was so tired, he really did not want to open his eyes. Then the dream would fade away, and leave him alone and cold. And Shane didn't want to feel alone and cold in his last hours. He wanted Ilya.

Suddenly he felt a hand on his cheek. *A real hand.* His eyes flew open, and met blue ones, and for a second his entire body froze in fear. *It can't be morning already, no, please no.* But then there were *tears* gathering in the eyes, and that wasn't right. Slowly, his vision gained sharpness, and he gasped when he realised that his mind wasn't playing tricks on him.

He opened his mouth and rasped, voice barely working. "Ilya?"

Chapter End Notes

peaks out of hiding, before running away again

WOAH that was something. probably the most challenging chapter i've written, even though it came surprisingly fast. but i don't think i've ever second guessed a whole chapter more. So if it sucks, i'm sorry, but i had to get it out there.

Chapter 12

Chapter Summary

> “ *Ilya.* ” Ilya’s eyes snapped up to meet his second in command’s.
> Marleau was putting on a brave face, but Ilya could see that his eyes were also slightly red.
> “We will find him. But we can’t do that if you’re sitting here feeling sorry for yourself. This is exactly what Alexei wanted. So, you have to prove to him that he was wrong. You can’t let him win.”
> “I do not give two shits about Alexei right now. He wants Montreal? He can have it. He wants my head on a silver platter? I will serve it myself. But he cannot have Shane, Marley, he-, he just *can’t* .”

Chapter Notes

> Ilya's pov :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The first hours happened almost in a blur. And Ilya was convinced, that if it wasn't for Marleau, he would still be kneeling on his bedroom floor, where his legs had given out, gun sliding out of his hand onto the hardwood floor.

Shane was *gone.*

Shane had been in his bed, all soft and cuddly, not even an hour ago. And Ilya had *left.* Had followed a stupid lead that turned out to be exactly what Alexei had been counting on. And now Shane was gone, and it was all his fault.

Marleau had followed in after him, making sure to secure the remaining rooms first. Ilya couldn't care less about any other rooms in his house, when this one was empty. Alexei could have taken every car, every piece of memorabilia, emptied his bank account and left him with nothing. And Ilya would still be happy, if only Shane had still been here. Marleau crouched down next to him, picking up his gun. "Roz."

Ilya drew in a breath, and it came out shaky. Fuck, he was *crying*, and he hadn't even noticed.

"Rozy, look at me."

Ilya shook his head, eyes not straying from the bed, where just a few hours ago, everything had been perfect.

"*Ilya.*" Ilya's eyes snapped up to meet his second in command's. Marleau was putting on a brave face, but Ilya could see that his eyes were also slightly red. "We will find him. But we can't do that if you're sitting here feeling sorry for yourself. This is *exactly* what Alexei wanted. So, you have to prove to him that he was wrong. You can't let him win."

"I do not give two shits about Alexei right now. He wants Montreal? He can have it. He wants my head on a silver platter? I will serve it myself. But he cannot have Shane, Marley, he-, he just *can't.*"

"So, let's go save your boy, okay?" Marleau got up, and reached out his hand for Ilya to take, which he did. Once they were standing, Ilya noticed Shane's phone on the nightstand. He went over and pocketed it, thoughts running a million miles an hour. Had they taken him from the bed? Had he woken up in panic, not understanding the hands on him? Fuck, they had gone to bed *naked.* If any of Alexei's men had-

No. Don't you dare go down that road, Rozanov. Keep yourself together.

He turned back towards Marley. "Gather everyone at the office. Now."

"Yes sir."

"Was there anything else in the house? Did they leave anything behind?"

Marleau shook his head, "Nothing."

"How the fuck did they even get in?" Ilya snarled, running a hand through his hair in frustration. "The door was just fucking open." *Oh god, had Shane let them in himself? Thinking it was Ilya?*

"I don't know, boss. We'll figure it out at the office, you have surveillance. Let's go."

So, for the second time in under an hour, Ilya left his house. Just an hour ago, he had kissed Shane's freckles goodbye, and promised to be back before he woke up. He had *lied*. And now Shane was somewhere out there, probably terrified, with only Ilya's cruel brother for company. Just as Ilya had feared. Fuck, he was such a fool, thinking that keeping Shane close would keep him safe. He had known, he had fucking *told* Shane, that it wasn't safe. And yet he had still let himself indulge in the fantasy of the two of them staying happily together in their little bubble, where nothing could touch them. *You know better than that. No one close to you is ever safe.*

—

The rest of the *Bratva* arrived almost at the same time as them, gathering in the meeting room where Sergei was pulling up all of Montreal's street surveillance on the big screen. Marleau must have briefed them, which Ilya was eternally thankful for. He wasn't sure any words would come out of his mouth, even if he tried.

Everyone looked somber, some of the older guys downright *furious*. And Ilya realised, that he couldn't just stand here in silence. He needed to say something, needed to highlight the importance of this. He cleared his throat, and everyone's eyes snapped to him. "I know all of you understand the severity of this situation already," Ilya began, and his own voice sounded wrong to him somehow, too calm, too measured for the violence clawing at the inside of his chest. "But I need everyone in this room to understand one thing very clearly. This is not business. This is not some fucking territorial dispute, or Alexei trying to posture." His jaw tightened visibly. "This is personal, *da?*"

Ilya glanced around slowly, meeting every pair of eyes in turn. Sergei's expression had gone frighteningly cold already, and Marleau looked ready to kill someone with his bare hands. Good.

"Alexei took someone from my home," Ilya continued quietly, and somehow the softness in his voice was worse than if he had shouted. "He took someone under my protection, someone innocent, someone who had absolutely nothing to do with any of this, solely because he knew it would hurt me."

His hands curled into fists at his sides. "And it *is* hurting me."

No one moved or said anything. No one dared. Because Ilya very rarely admitted weakness out loud, and certainly never in rooms like this. "But understand me carefully," he said, voice hardening abruptly enough that several people visibly straightened. "Shane Hollander is not collateral damage. He is not a random civilian caught in crossfire. He is *mine*. And if Alexei lays another fucking hand on him while we sit here wasting time, I will burn this entire city to the ground finding him."

The room went dead silent. There was no need for words, because every person in that room believed him completely. Ilya inhaled slowly through his nose, trying and failing to get the panic back under control enough to think clearly. Somewhere out there, Shane might already be hurt. Cold. The image kept flashing uncontrollably through his head every few seconds until he genuinely thought he might lose his fucking mind. So instead, he focused on logistics. On violence. On getting his boy *back*.

“We find him tonight,” he ordered, eyes flicking sharply toward the screens. “I do not care what it costs, I do not care whose territory we violate, and I do not care how many people we have to bury between us and Shane. We tear this city apart brick by fucking brick if we have to.”

Marleau nodded immediately. “Already started.”

“Good. Sergei, I want every camera feed from the last twelve hours crosschecked against the surveillance in my house. I want burner phones tracked, stolen vehicles tracked, warehouse leases tracked. Anything unusual, I see it immediately.” Sergei gave one sharp nod.

Ilya’s gaze swept across the rest of them. “And listen to me very carefully,” he said, quieter now. “If any of you find him before I do, you do not play hero. You do not engage unless you absolutely must. Alexei will want leverage, he’ll want to… play with his fucking food, which means Shane is alive. We keep it that way, or I swear you will never see another sunrise.”

The though of Shane dying tightened his stomach in knots, and his expression must have shifted, because Marleau’s face tightened almost imperceptibly. Ilya looked away immediately before anyone could see too much. “He’s family, boss.” Came a quiet but certain voice from the corner, and Ilya snapped his eyes up to meet Ivan’s. Ivan, who had made jokes about Shane being too ‘nice’, was looking at him with cold determination. “He might not be *Bratva* officially, but he’s one of us, *da*? And no one touches family.”

Nobody objected, everyone nodding along to Ivan’s words. Because Shane might not officially be a part of this, and he might still blush every time they called him ‘boss’s boyfriend’ behind Ilya’s back, but everyone in that room had seen the way Ilya looked at him. And everyone understood exactly what it meant when Ilya Rozanov said ‘*mine’*. Despite the circumstances, Ilya felt a wave of fondness for his men. For this family he had built for himself, once his own fell apart around him. Sergei broke him out of his thoughts. “I have your house surveillance ready, boss.”

Fuck, but was Ilya *ready?*

He nodded at Sergei, and leaned on the table on his arms, too wired to sit down. “3 am, Sergei, and not a minute before,” he said, probably harsher than needed. But fuck if he was going to let any of them get even a glimpse of Shane from last night. Sergei didn’t comment, just pressed the correct timestamp, and multiple screens from different parts of Ilya’s house showed up on the big screen. In the bedroom, Ilya could be seen on the phone with Sergei, then crouching down to say goodbye to Shane before leaving. Fuck, Ilya almost couldn’t look. Such a tender moment, just moments before disaster, it made bile rise in his throat. But he forced his eyes to stay on the screen. If Shane had lived through something horrible, the least Ilya could do was fucking watch it.

Then he could decide how long he wanted to draw it out, before ending his miserable brother’s life.

Before he could dwell on those plans, he caught movement on one of the cameras. A car pulling up, and five men getting out. *Five? Did they expect a fight?* They walked towards the front door, in an annoyingly casual tempo. *They knew I was gone. Fuck, did I drive past them on my way into the city?*

Ilya braced for them breaking the door open, or entering through the window. Or even, although he really hoped that wasn’t the case, for Shane letting them in, sleepy and confused at why Ilya didn’t just let himself in.

But he wasn't prepared for them just reaching for the code-pad, and *letting themselves in*. "What-", someone stammered to his right, the room overtaken by surprise. Because no one knew Ilya's door code. *No one.*

"Oh fuck," Marleau sighed, and Ilya's eyes immediately snapped to him in disbelief.

"Speak, Marleau, or I swear I will cut of your tongue."

Marleau took his arms up in surrender. "Woah, boss, it's not what you think. I just-, I think I know where they got it. And it's-, *fuck.*" Ilya just stared at him, and Marleau continued. "Shane told me, that you had sent him the code in a text, when he was visiting you once, the night before the charity gala? I made him delete it and I was just going to use it to tease you but-, fuck, could they have hacked his phone?"

Cold dread took Ilya's breath away, freezing him in fear and guilt, unable to escape. He had done this. He had sent Shane his door-code like an idiot, like a *rookie*, and given Alexei access to the one place where he had promised Shane safety. He might as well have stayed back at the house, and opened the door for them himself, inviting them inside. Taking a deep breath, he took Shane's phone out of his pocket, and passed it on to Sergei. "Figure out if it is being tracked. If you can, do not destroy it, but if you are in doubt, throw in the river. We cannot have Alexei surrounding us here."

With that, his attention snapped back to the screen. Shane was still in bed, but he stirred when the front door smacked. Ilya saw him reach for his phone, presumably to check the time, and sitting up in bed as a man came down the hall towards the bedroom. Shane grabbed underwear and *Ilya's* sweatpants, before getting up and walking towards the bedroom door.

No, Shane, don't go.

The sound from the camera cracked to life. *"Ilya? You okay?"*

No.

Shane reached for the door just as the man got there, and for a split second, the two of them just stared at each other. The man reached out for Shane's left arm, and Ilya heard him yelp as he tried to step back. But then, to Ilya's amazement, Shane swung his right arm back, hitting the man square in the jaw. The man let go of him in pure surprise, and Shane used it to his advantage, swinging again, this time making the man crumple forwards with a hit just below his chest.

"Wow." Marleau whispered, but Ilya didn't dare to take his eyes off the screen. Shane was running down the hall, and just as Ilya had gotten some of his hopes up, he noticed four men waiting in the living room.

There was no way Shane was getting past them.

But oh, he tried. He fought, pushing past one of the guys, and clearly beelining for the garage. *Smart boy.* But he was outnumbered, and he seemed to realise it too, freezing in the middle of the living room, with all of his exit routes blocked. The guy behind him swung his gun, hitting him in the back of his head, sending him crumpling to the floor. Ilya looked away, catching Marleau's eye. He also clearly did not want to look. The men carried Shane out of the house, not bothering to close the front door, and threw him in the trunk, before driving off.

“Track that car through the city surveillance.” Ilya said immediately, and Sergei followed the order. They followed the car down the main road into the city, and over the bridge. But when they jumped to the camera on the other side of the bridge, with matching timestamps, it was empty. Ilya cursed in rapid Russian, “The fucking car cannot vanish on a bridge, so where is it?”

No one had an answer, and the room fell into loaded silence. Because they all knew what this meant. They had lived in this life for long enough to know, that the worst thing that could happen when someone was kidnapped, was if the trail went cold. If you lost them immediately when they were being moved, the chances of locating them grew slimmer by the minute. And somehow, despite Montreal being *Ilya’s* city, they had just managed to *lose* Shane.

They kept looking until the sun was high in the sky. Ilya had called every contact, every supplier, every client, every fucking person he knew in Montreal *and* around it.

Nothing.

Like Shane had just vanished into thin air.

Ilya was snapping at everyone who dared to look at him too long, and Marleau was barking orders left and right, no trace of his usual cocky and joking self. Their eyes kept meeting over computer screens, maps, and stale coffee cups, the silent agreement clear.

We will find him no matter what it takes.

But Ilya could feel the telltale signs of panic creeping in at the back of his neck, making him jittery. With every stone they turned with no luck, with every blind corner they found themselves in, his breathing grew more and more shallow, eyes jumping frantically over the puzzle pieces in front of him, as if he could will them into forming a picture of Shane, guiding Ilya to him.

Sergei had asked only one question, before they all spread out to cover the most ground. “We need to think about why he is doing this. Rozanov, what does he want? What is the motive?”

Ilya had looked at him, and at everyone else in the room, before replying with a deep sigh, trying not to betray his quivering voice. “That is the problem. He will want nothing. He is not doing this for information, or for power. He is not interested in our operations. He just wants to dangle Shane in front of my eyes, and prove to me that I cannot have him. And that makes him fucking dangerous, so we need to be quick.”

But hours later, everyone had returned to the office empty handed. They needed to lay a plan and regroup, but everyone was skittish and afraid. They all kept looking at Ilya, waiting for orders, because that’s what they always did. But this time, Ilya wasn’t sure he knew what to say. Sergei returned last, shaking his head in frustration. “Nothing. I checked every warehouse in Montreal that

isn't being used by us, and then had our people check the ones that are. If he is keeping him in one, they must have driven outside the city."

"Fuck." Ilya couldn't help but cuss. Before anger could boil over, his phone rang on the table.

Unknown number.

Everyone went silent, staring at the phone. For one horrible second, Ilya couldn't move. He just looked at the screen while his heartbeat climbed higher and higher inside his throat, because there was only one person cruel enough to wait until Ilya had torn half the city apart before finally reaching out.

Ilya answered in Russian, "*Alexei*."

A low chuckle crackled through the speaker immediately. "*Brother*." Alexei sounded relaxed. Amused. "*You sound stressed.*"

"*Where is he?*" Ilya's voice came out rough already, fraying badly around the edges despite how hard he tried to keep it steady.

Alexei sighed theatrically. "*Straight to business. Canada has truly ruined your manners. And I thought they were supposed to be polite."*

"*I am going to ask you one more time*," Ilya said quietly, and the room somehow got even more silent around him. "*Where. Is. Shane.*"

For a moment, only static answered him, but Ilya didn't repeat himself. Eventually, Alexei sighed, "*He is alive.*"

The breath punched out of Ilya's lungs so sharply it almost hurt. Alive. Alive meant there was still time.

"*He is also surprisingly difficult,*" Alexei continued conversationally. "*Very mouthy. Not at all a nice Canadian boy.*"

Ilya closed his eyes briefly. *Oh Shane.* Of course, Shane had been fighting back. Some awful mix of pride and terror twisted together violently in his chest. "*What did you do to him?*"

Alexei laughed softly. "*Interesting. You sound angry already, and I have barely started.*"

Something cold crawled slowly up Ilya's spine. Behind him, he could hear Sergei quietly beginning to trace the call while Marleau typed furiously into the laptop, trying to gather anything they could. But Ilya barely noticed, because every single one of his thoughts had narrowed down to one horrifying truth.

Shane was alone with Alexei.

"*Let him go.*"

"*No*." The answer came instantly.

Ilya inhaled slowly through his nose, trying to keep his voice level despite the panic steadily climbing higher beneath his skin. "*This has nothing to do with him.*"

"*You are wrong,*" Alexei replied calmly. "*This has everything to do with him. You should have seen him, Ilya. Tied up in that chair glaring at me like little guard dog.*" His voice turned mocking. "*He even defended you.*"

Ilya's grip tightened around the table hard enough his hand hurt. "*What did you tell him.*"

"*The truth.*"

"What fucking truth, Alexei?"

"That you are not capable of love. And that when someone loves you, they usually… give up*, at some point. Sometimes even enough to end their life."*

Someone next to him drew in a sharp breath. It was common knowledge, that you never mentioned Ilya's mother. *Ever.*

Alexei hummed thoughtfully at Ilya's silence. "*Though apparently your boyfriend is very determined to see the best in you. Admirable, really. Delusional, but admirable.*"

"*Do not play games with me."*

"*But games are so fun*." Alexei laughed. "*Especially when your little Canadian pet gets upset. He is very expressive; did you know that? Every emotion right there on his face. Fear. Anger. Jealousy*." A pause. "*Embarrassment*."

Ilya went utterly still. "*What*-"

"*Oh, nothing dramatic, calm down*." Alexei chuckled softly. "*I merely pointed out the bruises you left on him. The rope marks. Bite marks. That ridiculous carving on his chest.*" His voice sharpened slightly with disdain. "*You marked him like property. Like a* whore*."*

Something dark and furious unfurled slowly beneath Ilya's ribs. Because Alexei did not understand.

Of course he didn't.

Alexei saw bruises and teeth marks and collars and thought humiliation, ownership, degradation. He saw Shane tied up and eager and soft for Ilya, and reduced it into something ugly, because Alexei had never understood the difference between being used and being cherished. Shane was not some disposable thing Ilya kept around for pleasure.

He was not a toy.

Not a pet.

Not a *whore*.

Shane had offered those pieces of himself freely, with flushed cheeks and shaking hands and bright trusting eyes, like every mark Ilya left on him was something precious instead of shameful, and every single time Ilya touched him, Shane had looked at him like he was being loved instead of consumed.

The memory hit Ilya so hard his chest physically hurt, because Shane had held his gaze while Ilya cut that initial into his skin and looked unbearably happy afterward, like belonging to Ilya in that

terrifying, reckless way meant something beautiful to him instead of degrading. And now Alexei had looked at those same marks and turned them into filth.

Ilya's voice dropped dangerously quiet. "*Do not speak about him like that.*" The thought of Alexei looking at those marks, touching them, speaking about them with that mocking tone made nausea rise viciously in Ilya's throat.

"*He did not like me touching the necklace*," Alexei continued lightly. "*That seemed important to him*."

Ilya's pulse stuttered painfully, anger consuming him. "*Don't you dare touch him again,*" he said, and even he could hear how unstable his voice sounded now. "*Alexei. Listen to me carefully. You can have whatever issue you have with me, but Shane stays out of it.*"

Silence lasted for a second, and then Alexei laughed quietly. "*My God*."

Ilya shut his eyes briefly, because he knew that tone.

"*You really think you love him*."

The words landed heavily in the room, and no one dared move. Ilya was staring at the phone, oblivious to everything that wasn't his only contact with Shane, albeit useless. "*I do*," he said, not caring that everyone heard. The honesty of it scraped him raw on the way out, and Alexei went quiet for a beat too long.

"*That is unfortunate.*"

"*Alexei-"* Ilya hesitated, "*Enough. Give him back.*"

The silence afterward was unbearable.

When Alexei spoke again, his voice had gone colder. "*You know what he said to me*?" he asked. "*After I told him what you were really like? He looked me directly in the eyes and said I did not understand you at all."*

Ilya felt his chest cave in slightly. Oh Shane. Even now, even there, still choosing him.

"*He thinks he is special to you,*" Alexei continued. "*It is almost cute.*"

"*He is.*"

"*No one is special to men like us.*"

"*He is to me.*" The response came so fast it barely even felt conscious.

And for the first time during the call, Alexei stopped sounding amused. "*You were always weak where affection was concerned,*" he said quietly, before laughing again, but this time it sounded wrong somehow. Sharper around the edges. *"You know, I really did not believe it until now."*

"*Alexei-*"

"*You sound devastated*."

Ilya squeezed his eyes shut hard enough for it hurt. Because he was. Because every second Shane remained alone with Alexei felt like someone slowly peeling skin off his bones. "*He is innocent,*" Ilya whispered.

Another pause, then Alexei sighed. "*Well. Since I am feeling generous tonight…*" A rustle of movement crackled faintly through the speaker. "*Check your email.*" The line disconnected immediately.

For one second, nobody in the room moved, then Marleau shoved the laptop fully toward Ilya. A new email had already appeared. No subject line. Just a link.

Ilya clicked it instantly, and what looked like a livestream loaded.

And the world *stopped*. Because Shane appeared onscreen tied tightly to a chair in the middle of a dark warehouse, ropes cutting visibly into his wrists and chest. He was looking around frantically, but Ilya couldn't see anyone else in frame of the camera. Eventually, he gave up, head slumping forwards.

Ilya felt nauseous, and like he was going to cry. He fell into a chair, and rested his head on his hands on the table, looking only at the screen. He wished to be able to transport himself to wherever Shane was at the moment, to ease some of the pain he was no doubt feeling.

Because the ropes.

God. *The fucking ropes.*

Yesterday, Shane had looked at those same restraints with bright eyes and flushed cheeks, standing in their bedroom while trying and failing to act casual about asking Ilya if he owned rope, as if Ilya had not immediately wanted to ruin himself over the thought of Shane willingly giving him that kind of trust.

Yesterday, Shane had practically melted beneath Ilya's hands while the ropes slowly wrapped around his wrists and chest and thighs, shivering every time Ilya tightened them just enough to make him feel held, helpless in the way he liked, safe enough to hand over control without fear.

And *now*?

Now Shane was tied to a fucking chair in some freezing warehouse, visibly trembling every few seconds while those same marks cut into his skin wrong, too tight and careless and cruel, his shoulders slumped forward with panic instead of relaxation, his breathing uneven in a way that made fear claw violently up Ilya's throat.

Yesterday, Shane had kept looking at him with those soft, trusting eyes every single time another knot was secured, asking silent questions without speaking them.

Is this okay?

Am I still good?

Do you still have me?

And Ilya had answered every single one, kissing every inch of skin the ropes touched. He had shown Shane the knife and promised him, with complete sincerity, that the second he became

uncomfortable, Ilya would cut him free. He had held water to Shane's lips afterward and rubbed warmth back into his skin, massaging his thighs because his legs had still been shaky.

Safe. Everything about it had been *safe*.

And now Shane was somewhere terrified and alone, restrained in almost the exact same way, except this time there was nobody there promising to keep him safe from the pain. A horrible sound escaped Ilya's throat before he could stop it, somewhere between a groan and a scream. His hands shook violently as he pressed them harder against his mouth, eyes never leaving the screen for even a second.

Onscreen, Shane jerked suddenly against the ropes again, like he had tried to move without thinking, only for pain to remind him immediately that he couldn't. The movement looked frantic and panicked. His chest rose sharply with quick breaths before he forced himself still again. Ilya felt his own lungs stop working properly.

Because he knew exactly what Shane was doing. He was spiralling. Shane could get trapped inside his own head sometimes when left alone too long, thoughts feeding into each other until anxiety became something living and impossible to escape from, and now he was trapped in darkness with nothing but fear and pain to keep him company.

"I cannot do this," Ilya whispered suddenly, looking away. Nobody answered. Not because they didn't hear him, but because nobody knew what to say. Marleau looked genuinely disturbed now, eyes flicking repeatedly toward the screen before away again, jaw tight in a way Ilya had very rarely seen on him. Sergei had gone frighteningly expressionless beside the surveillance setup, typing something rapidly while refusing to look directly at Ilya.

Probably because Ilya was falling apart in front of them, and everyone could see it. He bent forward abruptly, elbows braced against his knees while one shaking hand dragged through his hair hard enough to hurt. He felt sick. Truly sick. Every image in his head kept colliding violently with another version of Shane, softer ones, warmer ones, impossible to separate from what he was seeing now. Shane laughing breathlessly into his neck. Shane squirming happily against silk sheets. Shane whining in impatience. Shane asking if Ilya would hold him afterward.

And now *this*. This was what happened, because Ilya had loved him selfishly enough to pull him into this world. "He should not have met me," Ilya whispered.

That finally made Sergei look up sharply. "Rozanov-"

"He should be at brunch with his friends right now," Ilya continued over him, voice cracking openly now. "Or at work annoying customers, or at home watching terrible reality television while pretending not to cry over contestants he has known for fifteen minutes." A broken laugh escaped him. "He should not even know what ropes like that feel like."

He felt a hand on his shoulder, squeezing, and when he looked up Marleau was looking at him with a determined glint in his eyes. "But he chose *you.* Because despite the fact that you're a total dick, he loves you."

"I don't know if he does, we haven't-… and even if, after this, he will regret it."

"No. Because we're going to get him back." Around them, people were nodding, and Ilya's eyes fell back to the screen. To *his* boy.

And despite his heart breaking, Ilya tried to calm himself. Because Marleau was right. They were going to get him back.

Day One

They had worked through the evening and night, Ilya barely catching any sleep, and even then, it was only because he had collapsed in the chair, Marleau draping a blanket over him at some point.

But they hadn't found anything. Sergei kept getting tips from people they worked with, but they kept leading them to dead ends. Ilya kept sending his men to all possible corners of Montreal, while he himself didn't stray further than a couple of steps away from the laptop, always keeping Shane in his line of sight.

The night had been brutal. Ilya had been forced to sit there, and listen to Shane break apart, sobbing and pulling at his restrains. It broke Ilya's heart into a thousand pieces. The sound of his cries would haunt Ilya for the rest of his life. Sergei had opened the window at one point, letting ice cold wind in, and Ilya had almost thrown up. Shane was in a *warehouse* somewhere, his chest bare and exposed. Ilya almost opened every window at the office, just to feel an inch of the pain and discomfort that Shane was feeling.

At some point, once the first sunrays started filtering in through the windows, Marleau pulled him up by his arm, and led him to a nearby bathroom. "Freshen up."

"I can't, I have to find Shane-" he protested, but Marleau didn't budge.

"The rest of us are working equally hard on finding him, whether you are sulking in a chair, or taking a shower. So do us all a favour, and take a shower. If anything, and I mean absolutely *anything* happens on that screen, I will scream your name so loud that the whole of Montreal will hear me. I promise."

Ilya cast a longing glance at the screen, but reluctantly nodded and walked into the bathroom. His reflection staring back startled him. He looked hollow, and tired - which, to be honest, was a pretty accurate depiction of him at the moment. A knock pulled him out of his thoughts.

"I have clothes, Roz."

Ilya opened the door, and grabbed the change of clothes from Marleau, nodding at him. He got into the shower, and while the spray normally relaxed him immediately, today it brought him no comfort. Why did he deserve to wash his sweat away with warm water and nicely smelling soap, when Shane could barely take a deep breath?

He got out of the shower and dressed in fresh clothes. *Goddamn Marleau,* because he did feel slightly better. Not *good,* not by a mile. But good *enough* that determination and anger were cutting through misery and guilt. He had just brushed his teeth, when he heard Marleau scream, "Roz, get the fuck in here!"

Ilya had never run faster.

He yanked the door open, and sprinted across the floor until he reached the laptop, surrounded by everyone currently at the office. On the screen, Shane was awake in the chair, looking at Alexei who was sitting opposite him. The livestream was picking up their conversation, and Ilya turned the volume up as far as it would go.

"Fuck off," came the first sentence Ilya had heard from Shane since the previous night. He closed his eyes, and heard Marleau's sharp intake of breath. *Shane, you stupid brave boy.* Ilya didn't want him to piss Alexei off even more, God knows it would not end well.

"*-making it out of here alive, is if you give me what I want."*

"Ilya will come for me."

Ilya's heart stuttered in his chest, tears threatening to rise in his eyes. Shane's faith in him was both making him want to kiss him, and throw himself from the balcony. Because Shane had been kidnapped from *Ilya's* house by *Ilya's* brother, and he still sat there, completely convinced that Ilya would save him.

And so far, Ilya had failed. And he had nothing to go on. Alexei's voice rang through the speakers. "*-little one, no he is not. Even if he wanted to, I can assure you, that he will not find you. But loyalty is a beautiful thing. It is even better to break it."*

Ilya wanted to scream. To rage, to throw chairs against walls, and Alexei off a bridge. He wanted to scream into the laptop until Shane heard him, to reassure him that his trust and faith in him wasn't misplaced. Instead, he was forced to watch as Alexei brought out a bucket of water, and dumped its contents over Shane, making him shiver even more. *"See you tomorrow, Hollander."*

"Fuck, did he say tomorrow?" Marleau asked in quiet shock. "He's just going to leave him like that for a whole day? What's the point of a hostage if he catches hypothermia?"

Ilya couldn't form words even if he wanted. Because while Marleau was right, it only solidified what Ilya had already suspected. Alexei didn't want anything with Shane. He didn't care about any information Shane could give him, he didn't care if Shane died tonight.

And that made Ilya's job even more difficult, and time sensitive. Because Alexei was a ticking bomb at best, and an absolute nuclear explosion at worst. And Ilya wanted to make absolutely sure, that Shane was way outside of his range, once he exploded. And he would explode, of that Ilya was sure.

So, he threw himself headfirst into research. Sergei gave him a list of potential hotels that Alexei could have holed up in, and Ilya went through every single one personally, crosschecking guest lists against fake identities the *Bratva* already suspected Alexei to use, narrowing down which locations had underground parking, which had private exits, which employees had suddenly received suspiciously generous cash tips over the last week.

He barely blinked.

At some point Marleau shoved coffee and food into his hands, and hours later Sergei physically took the half-empty cup away because Ilya had apparently been holding it long after it went cold without noticing. The entire office blurred together into surveillance footage, maps and warehouse schematics spread across tables while men moved constantly around him, waiting for orders Ilya barely remembered giving.

And underneath all of it, always, Shane. Every passing hour made something crack inside Ilya's chest, because Alexei was unpredictable in the way unstable men always were. Sometimes charming. sometimes almost calm. But then suddenly violent in ways that felt deeply disproportionate to whatever had triggered him. Ilya remembered it from childhood vividly enough that even now it made nausea twist in his stomach.

One wrong word.

One perceived slight.

One reminder that someone else was happier than him.

And Shane… his beautiful and brave Shane, had bit back. Part of Ilya was horrifically proud of him for it, but the larger part of him was terrified, because Alexei did not respond well to humiliation, and Shane had probably insulted him six times before noon.

So, Ilya searched harder. He sent men to every road leaving Montreal. Had Sergei pull traffic cameras from highways, gas stations, abandoned industrial districts. They crosschecked recent purchases of medical supplies, generators, fuel, warehouse rentals under fake names. One team started combing through unused *Bratva* safe-houses that Alexei might know about, while another investigated rumours of Russian-speaking men outside the city.

Nothing.

Nothing, nothing, nothing.

And every dead end made the panic worse. At some point, long after sunset, Ilya stopped breathing for a moment when he saw Shane move. His head lifted weakly before turning slightly toward one shoulder, almost like he was trying to curl in on himself despite the restraints.

"What is he doing?" Ivan asked.

But Ilya could only shrug in helplessness, and keep watching as Shane somehow drifted off to sleep.

Day Two

By the second day, the office no longer felt like headquarters. It felt like a mausoleum waiting for confirmation of a death nobody dared name out loud. Ilya hated it, he wanted to shake every single person, and tell them to stop acting as if Shane was already gone, when they could see him so clearly on the livestream. But he understood how hopeless it looked.

His men moved quietly between screens and maps and laptops with the strained carefulness of people trying not to trigger something volatile, and at the centre of it all sat Ilya, unmoving except for the occasional twitch of his fingers whenever Shane shifted onscreen.

He had not slept.

Marleau figured that out sometime around six in the morning, when he found Ilya still sitting in exactly the same position as four hours earlier, staring at the livestream with eyes so bloodshot they looked painful. So now, Marleau shoved a plate down in front of him hard enough that it rattled against the table. “Eat.”

Ilya barely looked at it. “No.”

“That was not suggestion.”

“I said no.”

Marleau leaned both hands against the table, voice lowering dangerously. “Rozy, if you collapse before we find him, I swear to God, I will drag you to a hospital myself.”

“I am not hungry.”

“Neither is anyone else.”

Ilya’s eyes drifted back to the screen immediately. “He definitely is.”

Shane sat exactly where he had hours ago, ropes still wrapped tightly around his chest and wrists, head tilted awkwardly against one shoulder like his body no longer had the energy to hold itself upright properly. Every few seconds, he shivered visibly. Ilya felt physically sick looking at him.

“He hates the cold,” he whispered.

Marleau exhaled slowly through his nose. “I know.”

Because everyone knew now. Everyone had gotten to know Shane more and more, through overheard conversations and tiny habits, and the way Ilya softened around him without noticing. They knew Shane stole Ilya’s hoodies constantly and knew he fell asleep on couches like a cat if left unattended long enough, especially if he found a patch of sunlight. Knew he took way too long picking a tea flavour, because he took the names and descriptions way too seriously. *“This says* ‘nighttime cooldown’, *Ilya, and it’s only 3pm.”*

The memories hollowed him out so completely he *almost* didn’t notice when the warehouse door opened onscreen. The second Shane startled violently at the sound, ropes jerking tighter against his skin while panic flashed openly across his exhausted face, the entire room went still.

Alexei walked into frame carrying two coffees. “Oh, I am going to kill him,” Marleau muttered quietly, as Alexei said something unintelligible.

Shane answered immediately, voice rough from dehydration even through the poor audio quality. “*Sorry*,” he rasped. “*Still working through the disappointment of waking up and seeing you instead of your brother*.”

A few people in the room let out quiet disbelieving breaths, Ilya’s jaw dropping open. *Jesus fucking Christ.* Even now. Even fucking terrified and exhausted and freezing, Shane still fought back. And God, Ilya loved him so much it hurt.

Alexei crouched in front of him while Shane visibly shivered again. Ilya pressed one shaking hand over his mouth. Onscreen, Alexei asked another question.

Shane snorted weakly. "*You think Ilya brings me to mafia meetings?*"

Despite everything, a horrible fondness twisted painfully through Ilya's chest. Because Shane sounded so much like himself for one tiny second there. Sarcastic, sharp, almost indignant. All while *bullshitting Alexei to his face.* He didn't miss the approving murmur that went through the room, from people who had *seen* Shane at meetings.

"*I think my brother would happily lay the world at your feet if you asked sweetly enough.*"

The murmurs stopped, and Ilya felt his throat tighten painfully. Shane answered too quickly after that. "*I do not know anything useful. And even if I did, I would not tell you shit.*"

Then, to Ilya's horror, Alexei punched him. The sound cracked through the speakers violently, and Ilya lurched halfway out of his chair, watching as blood appeared on Shane's mouth. Warm and bright against pale skin. "No," Ilya whispered.

Onscreen, Shane breathed shakily through his nose while blood slid slowly down his chin until it stained the silver necklace around his throat.

Alexei's hand lifted again, this time almost following the path of the blood downward. And suddenly Ilya couldn't breathe properly anymore, because he knew.

He knew immediately.

No.

Alexei touched the chain lightly, and Shane jerked back so fast the chair scraped loudly against concrete. "*Don't fucking touch that.*"

Something inside Ilya cracked violently, the panic in Shane's voice squeezing and tugging at his heartstrings. Not over the hunger, the dehydration, the blood nor the pain.

Over the fucking necklace.

Alexei chuckled. "*Sensitive, are we?*"

"*Don't fucking touch that, it's mine.*"

Ilya's vision blurred briefly, because Shane sounded desperate saying it. *Protective*. And Ilya fucking hated it, because if there was one thing you could never show a man like Alexei? A *weakness.*

"*No*," Alexei corrected. "*It is* his."

Then he ripped it off.

Shane made a sound Ilya had never heard from him before. Not a scream, or a sob. Something smaller and infinitely worse. The chain snapped hard enough to bruise, and suddenly Shane looked genuinely devastated, eyes wide and wet while he stared at the necklace in Alexei's hand like something vital had just been carved out of him.

Ilya couldn't watch, but also couldn't look away. Alexei turned the necklace over in his hands thoughtfully. "*You let him mark you up like little dog*."

Ilya's vision darkened instantly, while Alexei slipped the necklace into his pocket. "*I think I will send this to Ilya as souvenir. Like when owners bring home dog's collar after they are put down*."

Marleau swore viciously under his breath, but Ilya barely heard him, because Shane was crying.

Actually crying.

Tears slipped slowly down dirty skin while he stared at the floor, split lip trembling faintly despite how hard he was clearly trying to hold himself together. And suddenly Ilya remembered fastening the necklace around Shane's throat, and he was convinced that Shane was thinking of the same. How morbid, that their memories were the only thing holding them together at the moment.

He couldn't help but think that Shane's throat looked horribly bare without it. *Wrong*. But selfishly, he couldn't help but slightly celebrate, that at least he was alive.

Alexei left, and the warehouse door slammed shut. And Shane broke, in a quiet way that made multiple of Ilya's men turn away from the screen. These tough guys, who have done much worse than pull jewellery off people for *Ilya*, softened by the gentle being of Shane Hollander. Shane, who just sat there with blood drying on his chin while tears slid silently down his cheeks, chest shaking faintly every few breaths like he was trying desperately not to spiral apart completely.

Ilya bent forward abruptly, pressing both hands hard against his face because suddenly he genuinely could not cope with the sound of Shane crying. This was *his* fault.

Every second of it.

He should have left Shane alone the second he realised how badly he loved him. Should have admired him from distance. Should have let Shane stay soft and untouched by this world instead of dragging him into it selfishly because Ilya wanted impossible things like matching jewellery and warm mornings and Shane in his bed forever. "I cannot lose him," he whispered into his hands.

The room stayed silent for long moment, then quietly, from beside him, Marleau spoke up, voice rougher than usual. "You won't."

Ilya looked up at the screen again, at Shane. And for the first time in his entire life, truly understood how love could drive a man insane.

Day Three

By the third day, Ilya had started measuring time exclusively through Shane's suffering.

Every hour that passed without finding him became another hour Shane spent freezing, terrified and alone, another hour for bruises to darken and ropes to carve deeper into skin that Ilya himself had touched so gently only days ago. Another hour for Alexei to get inside his head and twist every fear Shane had ever carried into something sharp enough to cut. Sleep no longer existed in any meaningful sense. Hunger barely registered anymore. His entire body felt strung too tightly together, like a wire pulled past the point of snapping, vibrating constantly beneath his skin until even sitting still required effort.

And worst of all, the livestream had become impossible not to watch. Because yes, it was torture. But it was also proof Shane was still alive.

So, Ilya watched. *Constantly*.

He watched Shane drift in and out of shallow, uncomfortable sleep, head jerking upright every time his body relaxed too much against the ropes. He watched him track sunlight crawling slowly across the warehouse floor with hollow, desperate focus, as if daylight itself had become a lifeline. The office had grown even quieter too. Nobody spoke unless necessary anymore, voices low and clipped whenever they did, because everyone could feel the tension tightening around Ilya more and more with every passing hour. The entire building felt like it was holding its breath.

Only Sergei still moved normally, coming up to Ilya. "I found something."

Ilya looked up so fast his chair nearly tipped backward. Sergei stood against the table, holding a tablet, expression tight with something dangerously close to hope. "What?"

"One of our people spotted unfamiliar vehicles near an industrial property outside Ottawa yesterday morning," Sergei said quickly, already crossing the room toward him. "Two black SUVs. Fake plates, but the descriptions match what witnesses reported near the club. There is an abandoned warehouse nearby that has not been used in years. No cameras. Isolated enough that nobody would hear screaming."

The word hit like a blade directly between Ilya's ribs. *Screaming. Shane screaming.*

Ilya stood so abruptly his chair crashed backwards behind him. "Why was this not checked already?"

"Because until now it looked unrelated," Sergei answered immediately, jaw tightening. "And because our focus has been on Montreal, not Ottawa. But one of the vehicles was spotted again less than hour ago."

Hope burst through Ilya so violently it almost hurt. Finally.

Fucking finally.

"I am going."

Sergei nodded at once. "Take Marleau with you. I will stay here and monitor the feed in case anything changes."

Ilya hesitated. The livestream still played silently across the large monitor mounted against the wall. Shane sat slumped forward today, exhaustion visibly dragging him down harder than before. Even through grainy footage, he looked miserable.

Something twisted violently inside Ilya's chest. "I should stay," he said quietly, barely recognising his own voice.

"You should get him back," Sergei corrected firmly. "If this is a real lead, every second matters. I will call immediately if anything changes."

Ilya stared at Shane for one more unbearable second before finally nodding once, sharp and decisive. "Keep me updated, no matter what."

“Of course.”

Then he left, feeling torn between leaving his whole heart in that laptop, and hoping against all hope, that he was moving physically closer to it. The drive felt endless. Every red light became a personal insult, every slow driver felt like an obstacle deliberately placed between him and Shane. Marleau sat beside him in tense silence, but Ilya barely registered him, because all he could think about was finally finding that warehouse and seeing Shane alive and warm and safe again.

Mine.

His phone rang halfway there. Unknown number.

Ice flooded instantly through his veins, and he answered before the first ring had even fully finished. “*Where is he*?”

Alexei laughed softly into the receiver. “Rude,” he answered, switching over to English. Was it so Shane could understand? Was he right there, on the other end of this call?

“If you touch him-”

“Oh, but that is exactly what I wanted to discuss.” Amusement dripped lazily through every word. “You know, brother, I finally understand your obsession now. He is so lovely to hurt.”

Ilya’s hands tightened violently around the steering wheel. “What did you do?”

Alexei hummed thoughtfully. “Nothing yet. Though I am considering taking him for little test drive.”

The world narrowed dangerously, Ilya sincerely hoping he had misheard. “What?”

“He is very pretty,” Alexei continued conversationally, like they were discussing weather instead of Ilya’s whole life. “And judging by all those bruises, all those bite marks, all those lovely little rope burns…” A soft laugh crackled through the line. “You certainly seemed to enjoy him thoroughly before I borrowed him.”

Marleau’s head snapped sharply toward Ilya. Meanwhile, Ilya stopped breathing entirely. “No.”

“I am curious,” Alexei mused lightly. “Is he actually that good? Or are you simply emotionally compromised enough to confuse attachment with skill?”

“Do not fucking touch him.”

“Why not?” Alexei asked softly. “We’re family, Ilya. Don’t you remember when mama taught us to share our toys?”

The car swerved violently enough that Marleau grabbed the dashboard with a curse. “Ilya,” he barked sharply.

But Ilya barely heard him, because suddenly all he could picture was Shane tied helplessly to that chair while Alexei touched him.

Shane terrified.

Shane crying.

Shane forced-

Rage detonated so hard inside Ilya's chest it nearly blinded him. "If you touch him," he said, voice frighteningly calm now, "I will cut you apart slowly enough that you will beg me for death."

Alexei laughed again, quieter this time. "See? There he is. My brother." Then, almost thoughtfully, "Finally you're getting off your moral high horse, done pretending you and I aren't the same."

"I will kill you."

"You keep saying that. Yet somehow, you haven't found me yet, and every minute you're stumbling around in the dark, is another minute I have him all to myself."

With that, the line went dead, and silence swallowed the car for several seconds afterward. Then Marleau said carefully, "He is trying to get into your head."

It was too fucking late for that. Ilya called Sergei instantly, but he didn't answer.

He tried again. Nothing.

His pulse spiked. "Why is he not picking up?"

"Maybe it's a bad signal," Marleau offered uncertainly, but even he didn't sound convinced.

Something felt wrong, deeply wrong. Ilya called again, and almost threw the phone out when it went to voice mail again. And again. And again. And again.

A horrible pressure started building beneath his ribs then, his foot pushing down on the gas pedal with too much force than was safe. But he didn't care, and Marleau didn't say a word. They pulled up to the warehouse, Ilya almost jumping out of the car before it had fully stopped.

The warehouse was empty.

Completely fucking empty.

No guards. No vehicles. No Shane.

Just abandoned concrete and machinery thick with untouched dust, enough to prove nobody had been there for months. Dead end.

Another fucking dead end.

Ilya stood in the middle of the cavernous warehouse breathing hard while rage and panic clawed violently through his chest until he thought he might choke on it. "No," he whispered.

Marleau kicked a nearby crate hard enough to splinter wood across the floor. "Fuck!"

Ilya called Sergei again instantly, and this time he answered. "What the fuck happened?" Ilya demanded immediately.

Static crackled briefly through the line. “Nothing. The feed cut out for a while. I have been trying to reconnect it.”

Everything inside Ilya went cold. “What do you mean *cut out*?”

“About forty minutes ago the stream suddenly died,” Sergei said, sounding frustrated. “I assumed interference. I only just got it working again.”

Forty minutes. Exactly enough time. Alexei’s voice replayed sickeningly through Ilya’s head.

Test drive.

Pretty.

Don’t you remember when mama taught us to share our toys?

The warehouse tilted slightly around the edges of his vision. “No,” he said again, quieter this time. Because Shane had been alone and defenceless. And Ilya had not been there, instead driving to fucking Ottawa for *nothing,* while Shane was being r-

He couldn’t even finish the thought.

“Boss? How was the lead?” Sergei still talking on the phone.

Ilya’s patience was fraying thin at the edges. “The lead was fucking bullshit, and a waste of time!” With that, he hung up, only barely refraining from throwing the phone against the wall.

Marleau drove them back to Montreal in total silence, not even once commenting on Ilya sobbing uncontrollably the whole way.

Day Four

Ilya’s mind kept filling in the gaps all on its own, creating horrors vivid enough to make nausea crawl constantly at the back of his throat. Every time Shane flinched too suddenly onscreen, every time he shifted uncomfortably in the chair, every time his expression pinched painfully for even a second, Ilya’s brain immediately supplied images he did not want. Alexei touching him. Alexei hurting him. Shane enduring it silently because he thought protecting Ilya mattered more than protecting himself.

It was driving him fucking insane.

Marleau had eventually shoved a glass of vodka into his hand sometime around dawn. “Either drink this or pass out,” he had muttered. “I genuinely do not care which anymore.”

Ilya had ignored the vodka completely.

Now morning light crawled weakly through the office windows while Shane remained motionless onscreen, head bowed forward, shoulders trembling faintly every few seconds from cold or exhaustion or pain, maybe all three. He looked pale even through the grainy footage. Too pale.

Then the warehouse door opened, and every single person in the room straightened instantly. Alexei stepped into frame, calm and composed as always, while Shane visibly tensed so violently against the ropes that even Ilya flinched reflexively in response.

"Fuck," Marleau whispered under his breath, but Ilya couldn't speak. Because Shane had looked tired, and mad, and cold over the last three days. But now, for the first time, he looked truly afraid. Not irritated. Not defiant in the bratty way he usually became when overwhelmed. Actually afraid.

Ilya moved closer to the screen subconsciously.

Alexei said something first. The audio didn't pick it up, but Ilya had gotten frighteningly good at reading Shane's expressions over the past few days, and right now terror climbed visibly up Shane's throat before he could suppress it. Then Alexei pulled something from his pocket.

A knife.

Ilya stopped breathing, the people around him also holding their breath. Because suddenly all he could see was Shane in their bed only days ago, tied beautifully in soft ropes while Ilya dragged a blade gently across his skin, Shane shivering and smiling and whispering 'please' in that wrecked little voice like the knife itself was intimacy instead of danger. Ilya had kissed every inch of skin afterward, and had promised him he would never let anything happen to him. And now Shane looked at a blade like he was about to die.

"No," Ilya whispered instinctively.

Onscreen, Alexei crouched in front of Shane, speaking calmly. *"You know, I really hoped we could avoid this."*

"*Bullshit."* Shane answered immediately, still fucking defiant, although he looked exhausted.

Ilya saw the exact second the knife cut into him. Shane jerked violently against the ropes, mouth opening in a scream that seemed to physically tear apart Ilya from the inside.

Marleau swore loudly beside him, and even Sergei looked away. But Ilya couldn't. *Wouldn't.*

Then Alexei's voice came through the speakers clearly enough to make the entire room freeze. "*Where are Ilya's headquarters?*"

Shane's answer was immediate, raw from dehydration and screaming and exhaustion. "*No*."

The knife cut into him. Shane screamed. The sound ripped straight through Ilya's chest, like someone had driven metal between his ribs and twisted. He lurched forward so violently his chair scraped backwards across the floor, one hand bracing against the table while the other pressed hard against his mouth, because for one horrifying second, he genuinely thought he might vomit.

Onscreen, Shane convulsed against the ropes, head thrown back, blood immediately spilling down his side.

Alexei kept talking calmly. "*Again. Who is his most trusted man?*"

Sergei went rigid beside the wall, and Marleau looked murderous. Meanwhile Ilya could barely breathe at all, because Shane knew the answer to that question. Shane knew all of them now. Names. Faces. Locations. Enough to destroy half their operations if he talked.

But Shane only gasped out, "*No*."

Another cut. Another scream.

Someone at the back of the room muttered something in Russian that sounded suspiciously like a prayer. The audio crackled again beneath Shane's broken breathing. "*Interesting*," Alexei murmured. "*You really do love him,* da*?"*

"Go fuck yourself."

Despite everything, despite the horror swallowing the room whole, Marleau let out one sharp, disbelieving laugh. "Jesus Christ," he muttered quietly. "Kid's insane."

"No," one of the older men said softly without taking his eyes off the screen. "He is loyal."

The word hit Ilya like another blade. *Loyal*.

Because that was exactly what this was now. Shane was protecting them. Protecting *Ilya*. While tied to a fucking chair and carved apart. And the worst part, the truly unbearable part, was that there was pride beginning to bloom beneath the terror inside the room too, visible on every face no matter how hard they tried to hide it, because the *Bratva* understood sacrifice better than anyone, understood loyalty written in blood and pain and silence.

Shane was becoming theirs in the most horrific way possible. Not because they wanted him to, or because they would ever willingly put him through such torture. But because he chose it, because he had chosen *them.*

Another cut landed onscreen, and Shane sobbed. Sergei looked away first. "Fuck," Marleau whispered, scrubbing both hands over his face. "Roz…"

Ilya didn't answer. Couldn't. Because Shane was crying now openly, trembling violently against the restraints while blood spread slowly across his skin, and still every answer remained the same.

No.

No.

No.

Not breaking, not giving Alexei anything. Like a fucking idiot. Like one of them. Ilya felt bile rise to his throat at the reminder that Alexei was doing this for *fun.* He didn't care whether Shane spoke or not. Ilya finally cracked, looking down at the floor as Shane's screams filled the speakers, before stopping. Then the entire room jolted again when Shane's voice cracked through the speakers desperately: "*Please*-"

Ilya's eyes snapped upward instantly. There seemed to be a silent conversation taking place between Shane and Alexei, and Ilya hated that he couldn't see his brother's face. But his answer came quickly. "*Too late*."

"No," Ilya whispered immediately, too quiet for anyone else to hear. Onscreen, Alexei leaned closer, fingers brushing Shane's chest. And suddenly Ilya knew exactly what was about to happen.

“No.” The word came out louder now, panicked. Marleau looked toward him sharply, meanwhile Shane had started shaking his head violently, breathing turning ragged and terrified in a completely different way than before.

“No,” Shane whispered brokenly. “Please.”

Alexei placed the knife directly against the carved initial.

The room erupted instantly.

“NO-”

Ilya didn’t even realise the scream had come from him until hands grabbed him from both sides, Marleau physically restraining him as he surged toward the screen like he could somehow tear through it to reach Shane.

The knife dragged downward, and Shane screamed. The sound echoed through the office so violently that several men visibly flinched. One of the younger guys actually swore and turned away entirely.

But Ilya couldn’t look away.

Couldn’t breathe.

Couldn’t *think*.

Because Alexei was destroying it. Destroying the mark Shane had accepted so sweetly beneath Ilya’s hands, ruining something private and vulnerable and cherished while Shane sobbed hard enough that he could barely form words anymore. It looked grotesque almost immediately, blood pouring down Shane’s chest while the clean lines of the carving disappeared beneath frantic cuts.

And still, Shane said nothing. No names, no locations, nothing. Just screams and shakes of his head.

“Oh my God,” Sergei whispered hoarsely.

“He still isn’t talking,” Marleau answered quietly, sounding horrified.

“He would rather die.”

“He might.”

The possibility settled over the room like smoke. Because everyone could see it now, how Alexei wasn’t slowing down. Pride and horror twisted together so tightly across the faces surrounding Ilya that they became indistinguishable. Every single man in this room would have done exactly the same thing, and now Shane was proving himself one of them in the worst possible way.

Alexei finally let the knife fall, grabbing Shane by his hair, forcing his head upward. “You stupid fucking boy.”

Then the punches started.

The first one cracked loudly even through the broken audio, making Shane fold instantly with a sound that barely resembled human speech anymore.

Ilya went still, just staring at the screen with eyes so empty Marleau's grip on his shoulder tightened immediately.

Another hit.

Another.

The chair rocked violently beneath Shane's body, but Ilya couldn't react, couldn't say a word. Because he had disappeared somewhere deep inside himself now, somewhere cold and murderous and hollowed out entirely by the sight of Shane trying to curl around broken ribs despite the ropes keeping him trapped upright.

Then suddenly, through the ringing silence consuming the office, footsteps thundered down the hallway.

Fast.

Urgent.

The meeting room door slammed open hard enough to hit the wall behind it, Ivan stumbling inside breathing heavily, face flushed from running. And just as Shane screamed again, Ivan looked at Ilya.

"We found him."

Ivan barely got the words out before Ilya was moving. The chair screeched backwards violently as he stood so fast it toppled over, and suddenly the entire room exploded into motion around him, *Bratva* members grabbing weapons, radios, knives, bulletproof vests, everyone talking over each other in sharp Russian while Sergei immediately pulled up the warehouse coordinates on the screen.

And when Ilya saw the address, his blood ran cold. "No," he whispered.

Because he knew that warehouse. All of them did. It was the one where they thought Alexei had holed up in the very beginning. The one they had all gone to, and been ambushed. It's where Ilya got shot.

They had checked it during the first sweep, Ilya remembered the report clearly. *Empty. No signs of activity.* Which meant either Alexei had moved Shane there after the search-

Or someone had *lied*.

The second possibility flashed briefly through his mind before disappearing again beneath panic too massive to hold onto anything else. "Cars. Now." Ilya snapped, already moving toward the door. "Ivan, Marley, with me. Everyone else follows behind and blocks every fucking exit. Nobody leaves that warehouse alive."

No one argued, no one hesitated. Because they had all seen Shane bleed for them. And now the *Bratva* was coming for one of their own.

Ilya sat in the passenger seat gripping his gun so tightly his knuckles had gone white, eyes locked on the dark blur of Montreal passing outside while every horrible possibility clawed through his brain faster than he could stop them. What if they were too late?

Too late, too late, too late.

Every red light felt like torture. Beside him, Marleau drove like a man possessed, tires screaming around corners while Ivan barked orders into a phone from the backseat, organising the other cars behind them. “Ilya,” Marleau said tightly without looking away from the road. “You need to breathe.”

“I am breathing.”

“That’s not breathing. That’s dying slower.”

Ilya laughed once, because that felt like the truth. Maybe he had already started dying the second Shane disappeared.

The warehouse finally came into view at the edge of the docks, huge and dark against the night sky. And *surrounded*.

“Fuck,” Ivan hissed from the backseat.

Alexei’s men stood there, almost twice their numbers. How the fuck did he even have that many men? The moment all their cars pulled up to the warehouse, gunfire exploded, and chaos swallowed everything instantly. Such a familiar feeling, Ilya almost felt déjà vu from a couple of days ago. Back then, he had pulled everyone back, so they wouldn’t risk their lives for an empty warehouse.

But now it wasn’t empty.

Bullets shattered against concrete and metal while *Bratva* soldiers spilled from vehicles with terrifying efficiency, returning fire fast enough the night became one continuous deafening roar of gunshots and screaming tires and shouted Russian. Ilya barely even processed it all.

Because the warehouse doors were *right there.* Somewhere inside them was Shane, still alive.

Please let him still be alive.

He shot two men without slowing down, barely even registering their faces before sprinting straight toward the entrance while Marleau shouted something furious behind him. “Ilya, don’t!”

Too slow, everyone was moving too fucking slow. So, he broke away from the others entirely and ran. The warehouse doors slammed open beneath his shoulder hard enough to rattle the entire

frame, darkness swallowing him instantly.

“Shane!”

His voice echoed violently through the warehouse. Nothing, the silence making panic surge so hard his vision blurred.

“Shane!”

His eyes adjusted to the darkness, and he noticed something at the centre of the room. *A chair*. And suddenly Ilya forgot how to breathe, moving as fast as his legs would carry him, dropping to his knees in front of Shane.

Shane, Shane, Shane, Shane.

God.

Fuck.

He looked awful. Blood covered his chest and stomach in dark streaks, head slumped forward limply like he physically couldn’t hold it up. Bruises crawled across almost every visible inch of skin, and even in the dim lighting, Ilya could see how violently the ropes had cut into his wrists.

Too thin. Too pale. Too still.

“Shane,” Ilya breathed, the word breaking apart in his throat, grabbing Shane’s face carefully between both hands.

“Shane, *solnyshko*, please open your beautiful eyes and look at me.”

Nothing happened at first, and terror unlike anything Ilya had ever experienced crashed through him instantly. No, no, no, no-

Then Shane stirred weakly. His brows pinched together slightly like he was confused, and Ilya made a sound somewhere between a sob and a laugh. A shaky hand lifted weakly against the ropes, twitching toward him before falling again.

Then finally Shane’s eyes blinked open. For one horrible second Shane looked terrified, and the realisation of *why* broke Ilya’s heart. Then, recognition hit. “Ilya?” he rasped.

And something inside Ilya shattered completely. “Yes,” he whispered immediately, tears already falling despite himself. “Yes, *moya lyubov*, I am here.”

Shane stared at him like he still didn’t fully believe it. “You came.”

“Always.”

Shane coughed, the sound scratching and horrible. “I thought-, I thought maybe you would be too late.”

Ilya pressed his forehead against Shane’s instantly, one hand cradling his jaw while the other shook violently against the ropes around Shane’s chest. Too tight. They were too fucking tight.

He reached for the knife at his belt-

Movement behind him made him pause, years of instinct screamed too late. Ilya twisted just as one of Alexei's men lunged from the shadows, slamming into him. The impact toppled him, and they tilted sideways and fell on the floor wrestling. Ilya had one hand at the guy's throat, the other desperately aiming for the guy's arm, where he was holding a knife.

"ILY-" Shane's scream broke apart halfway through from exhaustion and pain, barely audible over the roaring in his ears and the gunfire still going outside. But Ilya heard it. He eyes glanced towards Shane, with the ugly realisation that he hadn't managed to cut the ropes. He had been so overwhelmed seeing Shane alive that he had forgotten the only thing that mattered - getting him out alive.

That one split-second glance cost him his upper hand in the brawl, and before he managed to recover, a sharp pain in his abdomen made him groan. Footsteps thundered closer, and the warehouse doors burst open again as his men stormed inside like a tidal wave. Marleau appeared first, shooting the man on top of Ilya, before beelining for Shane.

Too much was happening too fast. Blood poured hot beneath Ilya's shirt.

"Shane," he breathed desperately, trying to reach back toward him again.

But his legs suddenly felt wrong. Weak.

"Ilya!" This time Shane's scream sounded genuinely terrified. Marleau turned instantly at the sound while kneeling beside Shane, knife flashing as he cut frantically through the ropes around Shane's wrists.

"It's okay, kid," he said quickly, voice rougher than usual. "We got you."

The ropes finally gave way, and Shane immediately fell sideways out of the chair, legs buckling uselessly beneath him after days of being restrained in place.

But he still crawled.

Fuck.

Even half conscious and broken and shaking violently, Shane still dragged himself across the concrete toward Ilya using mostly his arms, gasping every time his ribs scraped wrong, or when the cold concrete floor made contact with a wound. "Ilya," he sobbed.

Ilya could barely keep his eyes open anymore, but then Shane reached him. Warm hands immediately grabbed his face, trembling badly enough that Shane could barely hold on properly while pulling Ilya's head into his lap.

Around them, Marleau was yelling for a doctor, but suddenly it felt far away. Muted.

Because Shane was here, alive.

Alive, alive, alive.

Shane's tears kept dripping onto Ilya's, one hand pressed uselessly against the blood soaking through Ilya's abdomen. Ilya coughed, then finally managed to lift one bloody hand weakly toward

Shane's face, his rings brushing against Shane's cheek. And instantly Shane leaned into the touch like he needed it to survive, the sight nearly destroying Ilya all over again.

"*Moya lyubov*-" he whispered painfully.

"Hi baby," Shane answered softly, eyes already drooping with exhaustion himself. God, he sounded so small. So tired, and yet so heartbreakingly happy to see him anyway.

"*Ya tebya lyublyu*" Ilya whispered, because suddenly it felt unbearable not to say it now, not after almost losing him forever. "Shane, I-… I love you."

Shane's breath caught violently, then he laughed once through tears. But before Ilya could hear whether Shane said it back, everything went black.

Chapter End Notes

I'M SORRY

Chapter 13

Chapter Summary

Ilya giggled, and ran a finger over his cheek. “I missed your freckles.”

“Just my freckles?”

“They are very beautiful.”

“You are beautiful, baby.”

Chapter Notes

Hehe

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Waking up hurt.

That was the first thing Ilya registered. Not pain exactly, not at first, just the heavy awareness of his own body in a way that immediately felt wrong, every limb weighted down and sluggish, his stomach pulling sharply when he tried to move, throat dry, head pounding with the kind of exhaustion that settled deep into bone.

Then came the second realisation. *Shane*.

Ilya's eyes snapped open so violently that the motion immediately made his vision blur again. White ceiling. Soft lighting. He felt the comforts of home wash over him, recognising one of his guestrooms around him, the steady beep of medical equipment somewhere nearby. His hand jerked instinctively toward his abdomen and found bandages beneath his shirt, an IV tugged at his arm.

"Relax before you tear something open," a woman's voice sighed from somewhere to his left, entirely unimpressed. "I spent six hours stitching you back together. I would appreciate at least a little professional respect."

Ilya turned his head sharply enough to regret it immediately. Their doctor was sitting in an armchair near the window with a coffee balanced on one knee, dark hair tied back messily while reading through what looked like medical charts. She looked exactly the same as she always did after patching up one of them - tired, annoyed and deeply judgemental.

"You look terrible," she informed him calmly.

"Andrea, I got stabbed."

"Yes, and before that you apparently decided to spend nearly a week surviving entirely on caffeine, adrenaline and untreated psychological collapse." Andrea looked up from the papers with narrowed eyes. "Honestly, I am beginning to think you people get injured purely to inconvenience me personally."

Ilya ignored that, immediately trying to sit up. Pain shot through his abdomen hard enough to make him inhale sharply through his teeth, and fall back on the bed. Andrea pointed a finger at him instantly. "See? That. That is exactly the behaviour I'm talking about."

"Where is Shane?"

Her expression softened slightly at the panic in his voice. "Next room over," she said more gently. "Sleeping."

The sheer relief that flooded through Ilya almost made him nauseous. He let his head fall back against the pillow briefly, eyes closing for just a second as his body finally caught up to the reality of it. Alive. Shane was *alive*.

Andrea watched him carefully for a moment before speaking again, quieter now. "He is injured, Ilya." The words immediately tightened something deep in his chest again. "I can tell you the extent of it before you go in there," she continued carefully. "I thought maybe you would want to know what state he is in beforehand, especially considering the circumstances."

Circumstances.

The word lodged somewhere ugly beneath Ilya's ribs instantly, because he knew what she meant. Alexei's phone call replayed in his head immediately, slimy and taunting and deliberately cruel.

I think I should take him for a test drive.

Ilya swallowed hard enough his throat hurt. Andrea must have seen something shift in his expression, because her voice softened further. "Ilya-"

"No."

The word came out too quickly, too sharp. He pressed a hand over his eyes briefly, trying to steady his breathing. "No," he repeated quieter. "If something happened… he can tell me himself when he wakes up. I do not want him waking up to everyone already knowing his pain before he chooses what to share."

Andrea studied him silently for a long moment. Then she nodded once. "You can see him. But if your stitches rip open because you decide now is the time to have dramatic emotional breakdown sex on his hospital bed, I will personally kill you both."

Under normal circumstances, that probably would have made Ilya laugh. Now he just nodded impatiently until she finally rolled her eyes and stepped aside. He couldn't understand how she could even joke about it. As if Shane would ever want-

No, Ilya.

The hallway between the rooms was short… too short somehow, because suddenly Ilya found himself terrified to enter. Not because he thought Shane would not be there. Because he *would*.

And Ilya was not entirely sure he could survive seeing what Alexei had done to him up close. His hand shook as he pushed the door open. Then the world narrowed immediately.

Shane. Asleep. Safe.

The room was dim and quiet except for the steady rhythm of monitors, sunlight filtering weakly through half-closed curtains and painting soft gold across Shane's face in a way that felt almost unbearably gentle after everything. He looked devastating.

Bruises still crawled visibly across his skin even beneath the blankets, his split lip stitched now, dark lashes resting against cheeks far too pale. Someone had cleaned the blood away, but there was no hiding the damage underneath it. Bandages disappeared beneath the collar of his borrowed shirt and wrapped around both wrists where the ropes had carved him open.

Ilya nearly stopped breathing again at the sight of them, the guilt hitting so hard it almost folded him in half. Slowly, carefully, Ilya crossed the room and lowered himself into the chair beside the bed.

Shane didn't wake.

Good. He looked like he needed sleep more than oxygen.

For a long moment, Ilya just stared at him helplessly, then finally reached out. His fingers brushed carefully over Shane's cheek first, featherlight, like he was afraid too much pressure would break

him apart entirely. The skin there was warm now, no longer freezing cold beneath warehouse air, and Ilya had to close his eyes briefly against the sudden overwhelming relief of that alone.

“I am so sorry,” he whispered before he could stop himself. The words dissolved uselessly into the quiet room, because sorry felt pathetic now. Sorry did not erase ropes or knives or screams. Sorry did not erase the sight of Shane sobbing while Alexei carved through his chest. While he-

Ilya’s hand drifted lower unconsciously, fingertips tracing carefully over one of the freckles near Shane’s jaw, then another beside his throat. “You trusted me,” Ilya whispered shakily, eyes burning suddenly. “You trusted me to keep you safe.”

Shane stirred slightly in his sleep at the sound of his voice, brow furrowing faintly before relaxing again when Ilya immediately brushed a thumb softly across his cheekbone. “There you are,” Ilya murmured instinctively, voice cracking halfway through the words.

A quiet sound escaped Ilya before he could stop it entirely. Not quite a sob, but close enough. Slowly, he leaned forward until his forehead rested carefully beside Shane’s hand against the mattress, still holding Shane’s wrist gently between both of his own.

And for the first time since Shane disappeared, Ilya finally let himself break apart quietly where nobody else could see.

Marleau found him three hours later still sitting beside Shane’s bed, in exactly the same position he had been left in. One of Shane’s hands was loosely tangled in the fabric of Ilya’s sleeve now, like even asleep his body refused to let him wander too far away again. The sight made something painful twist behind Marleau’s ribs.

Because Jesus Christ, the kid looked wrecked. And somehow, Ilya looked worse.

“You look like shit,” Marleau said quietly from the doorway.

Ilya didn’t even glance up. “Andrea already informed me.”

“Yeah, well, Andrea says that to people with papercuts too.”

That finally earned him the faintest twitch at the corner of Ilya’s mouth, though it vanished almost immediately when his gaze dropped back toward Shane again. Marleau crossed the room slowly, lowering himself into the chair opposite the bed with a long exhale. For a moment, neither of them spoke. The silence wasn’t uncomfortable exactly. Just heavy. Exhausted.

Eventually, Marleau rubbed a hand down his face and muttered, “You scared the fuck out of me back there.”

Ilya’s expression tightened slightly. “Sorry.”

“No, fuck that.” Marleau pointed at him immediately. “Do not start apologising to me too, I don’t have the energy for your guilt spiral right now.”

Ilya looked away. Which, unfortunately, confirmed that was exactly what was happening.

Marleau sighed deeply. “Rozy.”

“It is my fault.”

“No.”

“It is.”

“*It isn’t*.”

Ilya finally looked at him then, and the sheer devastation in his face nearly made Marleau regret pushing. “I brought Shane into this world. Alexei took him because of me. He was tortured because of me. Starved because of me. Tied and cut up because I was too fucking stupid to realise Alexei would use the exact things Shane trusted me with against him, and-” His voice cracked slightly around the edges now, exhaustion wearing straight through his composure.

“I know,” Marleau interrupted softly.

Because they had all seen it, every single horrifying second. Shane shifted slightly in his sleep, brows pinching faintly before relaxing again the second Ilya brushed his thumb carefully across his wrist.

Marleau watched that for a second before speaking again, quieter this time. “Listen to me carefully. Alexei kidnapped him. Alexei tortured him. Alexei is the sick fuck here, not you.”

“But Shane was targeted because-”

“Because Alexei wanted to hurt you,” Marleau cut in firmly. “That’s on him. Not on you for loving someone.”

Ilya looked suddenly exhausted in a way that had nothing to do with blood loss. “He trusted me,” he whispered eventually.

Marleau’s expression softened despite himself. “And judging by the fact he refused to talk even while getting carved apart, I’d say he still does.”

That hurt Ilya almost as much as it comforted him. Because yes, Shane trusted him. Enough to suffer for him, to maybe die for him. And Ilya hated it, because he never wanted Shane in danger ever again. After a while, Ilya finally spoke again, voice quieter now. “I assume Alexei died in the warehouse. How?”

Marleau’s jaw tightened instantly. “No.”

The word dropped like a stone between them, and Ilya went very still. “What do you mean no?”

“He wasn’t there.”

Slowly, Ilya frowned. “Impossible.”

“That’s what I said.” Marleau leaned back in his chair with a grim expression. “But we swept the whole place twice. No body. No blood trail that matched him. Nothing.”

A cold silence settled over the room. Because Alexei had been there just minutes before they arrived, the livestream proved it. And yet somehow, by the time they stormed the warehouse, Alexei had vanished completely.

“He knew we were coming,” Ilya said finally.

Marleau nodded once. “Yeah.”

Something ugly shifted behind Ilya’s eyes then, slow and dangerous.

“The house code has already been changed,” Marleau continued before Ilya could spiral further. “I personally oversaw it. No one gets in without clearance now.”

“Good.”

“We also moved half the operations temporarily until we know what the hell happened.”

Ilya’s fingers tightened unconsciously around Shane’s hand. Then, very quietly, “We have a mole.”

Marleau looked at him sharply, and Ilya finally dragged his eyes away from Shane long enough to meet his gaze properly. “We checked that warehouse.”

A beat of silence, then understanding hit Marleau’s face instantly. “Fuck.”

“The report came back empty,” Ilya continued, voice growing colder with every word now. “No signs of occupation. No heat signatures. No movement. *Nothing*.”

“But Shane was there.”

“Yes.”

The implications spread slowly through the room like poison. Because the warehouse had not just been missed accidentally. Someone made sure it was missed. Marleau swore viciously under his breath. “You think it’s one of ours?”

“I think Alexei somehow knew exactly where we were searching and when.” Ilya’s jaw tightened hard enough it visibly hurt. “And I think someone wanted to keep Shane there.”

The rage underneath the words felt almost calm now, which was always when Ilya became most terrifying. Marleau leaned forward slowly. “You have someone in mind?”

Ilya didn’t answer immediately. Instead, his gaze drifted back toward Shane sleeping beside him, eyes lingering on the bruises around his throat, the healing cuts along his chest and arms, the wrists rubbed raw by rope.

“No,” he lied softly.

And Marleau knew instantly that he absolutely did.

Waking up hurt less than Shane expected, which probably said something deeply concerning about the last week. The pain was still there, obviously, lodged everywhere throughout his body in a dull, miserable sort of way, his ribs aching every time he breathed too deeply and dozens of smaller cuts stinging beneath bandages whenever he shifted even slightly, but compared to the warehouse, compared to freezing and starving and waiting for the next scream to be dragged out of him, this felt… safe.

His brain registered the mattress underneath him first, then the faint smell of antiseptic mixed with expensive cologne lingering somewhere nearby, before memory slammed back into him hard enough to make his stomach twist. And suddenly all Shane could see again was blood.

Ilya collapsing against in the warehouse, body going terrifyingly heavy in his lap while blood soaked through Shane's fingers faster than he could hold it in. The horrible slackness of his limbs. His eyes rolling shut mid-sentence. Shane remembered screaming his name. Remembered Marleau dragging him backwards while doctors rushed in, promising him that Ilya would be okay. Remembered fighting so hard against exhausted, useless limbs trying to get back to him.

His breathing turned sharp immediately.

No.

No, no, no.

Because if Ilya were alive, he would be here. He would never leave Shane alone after that. Never, not willingly. So either something was wrong.

Or something was *very* wrong.

Shane pushed himself upright too quickly, instantly choking on pain when his ribs protested violently, but panic drowned it out. "Ilya?" he rasped hoarsely into the empty room, his vision blurring instantly.

"No," he whispered shakily, trying to swing his legs over the side of the bed. Agony ripped through his torso so sharply he almost blacked out, but he kept moving anyway, hands fumbling uselessly against blankets and IV cords. "No, no, no-"

The door burst open before he could fall out of the bed completely.

"Jesus Christ," Marleau swore, rushing forward immediately. "What the fuck are you doing?"

Shane grabbed his arm hard enough to hurt. "Where is he?"

Marleau froze slightly. And that horrible, horrible hesitation, made Shane's entire world tilt sideways. "No." His voice cracked instantly. "No, no, no, don't you fucking dare."

"Shane-"

“No!” Shane was fully crying now, panic making every word sharp and frantic and ugly. “You said he was going to be okay, you fucking said-”

“*He is okay.*”

“What?” Shane froze. “Then where is he?”

Marleau blinked at him, and Shane could barely breathe now. “Why isn’t he here?” he demanded brokenly. “He wouldn’t leave me if he was alive.”

That clearly startled something in Marleau, because his expression shifted immediately into something softer and deeply exhausted. “He’s alive,” he repeated carefully. “Annoyingly alive. Andrea practically had to sedate him to stop him trying to get out of bed.”

Shane stared at him, breathing ragged. “Where is he?” he whispered again. Marleau hesitated just long enough for panic to start clawing up Shane’s throat again. He narrowed his eyes immediately despite how awful he felt. “Marleau.”

“He wanted to give you space.”

That startled a laugh out of him despite himself.

Space.

For one horrible second, Shane genuinely thought he had misheard him. “What?”

“You went through…” Marleau exhaled slowly, rubbing a hand over his face. “A lot. And Ilya thinks hovering over you the second you woke up might not exactly be… smart.”

Shane stared at him blankly. “I got kidnapped by a psychopath for a week, Marleau, not infected with fucking rabies. Is he stupid?”

Marleau blinked.

“No genuinely,” Shane rasped, voice cracking painfully. “Has he suffered catastrophic brain damage since I last saw him?”

That startled a laugh out of Marleau despite himself. Shane glared at him immediately. “I’m serious.”

“I can tell.”

“I want him here.”

“I know.”

“Then why isn’t he?”

Marleau opened his mouth carefully. “Shane…”

“No, because if he doesn’t get in here right now, I’m going to have to get up and find him myself.” Shane shifted slightly like he meant it too, immediately regretting it when pain ripped through his

ribs hard enough to make his vision spot. “And judging by the fact that breathing currently feels like being stabbed again, I’m assuming that’s medically discouraged.”

“Very medically discouraged.”

“Great. Then go get my boyfriend.”

Something in Marleau’s face softened completely then, the exhaustion briefly overtaken by relief so palpable Shane almost didn’t understand it. “You really scared him,” Marleau said quietly.

Shane’s irritation flickered uncertainly. “Well-”

The door opened again before he could finish his sentence. Andrea walked in first, already looking annoyed, one hand firmly wrapped around Ilya’s wrist as she dragged him bodily into the room behind her.

“There,” she declared. “Talk to each other before you drive me into early retirement.”

Ilya looked wrecked. Not physically, not in the catastrophic way, but exhausted so deeply it looked carved into his bones. His eyes immediately found Shane’s. And then, heartbreakingly, he stopped in the doorway instead of rushing closer.

Like he didn’t know if he was allowed to.

Shane’s chest twisted painfully, while Andrea pointed at Marleau. “Out.”

Marleau raised both hands obediently and disappeared immediately. The second the door shut behind them, silence flooded the room. Shane looked at Ilya, and Ilya looked at Shane like he was something holy and fragile and horrifying all at once.

“Hi.”

Shane nearly cried at the sound of his voice alone. “Hi baby,” he whispered back automatically.

The words visibly hit Ilya like a physical blow, tears already gathering in his eyes. But still, he didn’t move closer, making Shane frown immediately.

“Ilya.”

“Yes?”

“Why are you standing over there like I’m contagious?”

Something sharp flickered across Ilya’s face. “I am trying not to overwhelm you.”

“Bullshit.”

A startled breath escaped him, almost a laugh, but it vanished quickly. “Shane-”

“No, seriously,” Shane interrupted, increasingly distressed now. “Come here.”

Ilya hesitated. Actually fucking *hesitated*. Shane felt something cold open slowly beneath his ribs because this wasn’t Ilya. Ilya touched him constantly. Like breathing. Like *instinct*. Hands on his

waist, his neck, his wrists, fingers tangling through his hair absentmindedly whenever they sat together long enough.

Ilya always reached for him.

Now, he stood half a room away like there was glass between them. “Ilya,” Shane said again, quieter now. “Come here.”

Slowly, reluctantly, Ilya crossed the room and sat carefully in the chair beside the bed. Still not touching him.

Shane’s throat tightened painfully. Up close, he could see how bad Ilya looked. The shadows under his eyes. The stiffness in his movements. The faint bloodstains still trapped beneath his fingernails. But none of it explained why he looked terrified to even brush against Shane accidentally.

“You’re being weird,” Shane whispered.

Ilya’s expression crumpled briefly. “I know.”

“Then stop.”

A silence stretched between them. Shane looked down instinctively then, at his own body beneath the blankets. He could feel bandages wrapped around his torso beneath the thin hospital shirt. He could feel it stretching over where the initial used to be. Where Alexei had ruined it.

And suddenly Shane thought, that maybe he understood.

Shane tried to smile. Tried to make it light, casual. Easier for both of them. He had been expecting this after all, his mind replaying this possibility in the dark of the cold nights. But his mouth trembled too badly for it to work properly. “You could’ve just said it.”

Ilya went still. “Said what?”

“That you don’t…” Shane swallowed painfully against the sudden tightness in his throat. “Want to look at me right now.”

Shock flashed across Ilya’s face so violently Shane almost regretted speaking. “What?” Ilya said again, softer this time, like the word itself hurt him.

“The necklace is gone,” Shane continued quickly before he could lose his nerve entirely, because now that the fear had started leaking out, he couldn’t seem to stop it anymore, every horrible thought from the past few days suddenly clawing its way up his throat all at once. “And the mark, and I know I look awful right now, and you don’t have to pretend you aren’t disgusted-”

“Disgusted?” Ilya repeated, sounding genuinely horrified now.

Shane’s eyes burned instantly. “Then why won’t you touch me?”

The room went silent. Painfully silent. Ilya looked like Shane had slapped him, and somehow that only made the panic worse. Because Shane had spent days tied to that chair trying not to break apart over the idea that everything connecting him to Ilya had been taken away one piece at a time, first the necklace ripped from his throat hard enough to bruise, then the initial ruined beneath

Alexei's knife until there had been nothing left except blood and wrecked skin, and now Ilya could barely even look at him without seeming tense, and afraid, and distant.

Shane's breathing started shaking. "You wouldn't even come see me," he said quietly, voice cracking halfway through. "I woke up and you weren't there and I thought you were dead."

Ilya visibly flinched.

"But apparently you were just avoiding me."

"Shane-"

"No, because I don't understand!" The words burst out sharper now, panic finally spilling over fully. "You said you loved me, and then I wake up and you can't even sit next to me properly? You won't touch me, you won't look at me for more than five seconds, you're acting like I'm made of fucking glass-"

"I am trying not to hurt you."

"Well congratulations," Shane laughed shakily through sudden tears. "You failed."

Ilya leaned forward instinctively, before stopping himself so abruptly it looked painful, and Shane noticed it immediately. Of course he did. And suddenly, every terrible thought Alexei had planted started blooming viciously inside his chest all over again.

You are not special.

There are many pretty boys in Montreal.

You let him mark you up like a pet.

Shane's throat tightened hard enough to hurt. "I know he took it," he whispered suddenly.

Ilya blinked. "What?"

"The necklace." Shane's voice cracked completely now. "He ripped it off me and I couldn't stop him. I begged him not to, I promise, but he still did, and I'm *so sorry.*"

Something awful crossed Ilya's face.

"And the mark is gone." Shane's eyes blurred with tears again, humiliation and grief twisting together so tightly he could barely breathe through it anymore. "I know it's ruined now, I know that *I'm* ruined and-"

"Stop." The word came out rough.

Shane froze.

Ilya's chest was rising unevenly now, blue eyes wide with something that looked dangerously close to panic. "Do not say that about yourself."

"Why not?" Shane snapped suddenly, because he was hurting and exhausted and terrified and Ilya kept sitting so fucking far away from him. "It's true! He took everything you gave me, everything

that made me *yours,* and now you can't even stand to touch me!"

"That is not why."

"Then what is it?" Shane demanded brokenly. "Because I am trying really hard to understand why my boyfriend suddenly looks sick every time he's close to me."

"I do not look sick."

"You look terrified of me."

Ilya actually recoiled slightly, and Shane felt his stomach drop straight through the floor. Because suddenly there it was… *confirmation*. Cold and ugly and unbearable.

"Oh," Shane whispered.

"No."

"You *do* think I'm ruined."

"No!"

But Shane was already spiralling too hard to stop now, words pouring out through tears faster and faster while his ribs screamed every time his chest shook. "I knew it, I fucking knew it, because Alexei took everything and now you look at me like I'm some horrible thing you regret touching and I cannot do this right now, Ilya, I genuinely cannot survive you looking at me like that after-"

"After what?"

"I don't know!" Shane cried. "I didn't tell him anything, I swear, I tried *so hard* not to betray you, and I'm sorry that I let him-, that I let him touch me, but I couldn't do anything to stop him, I swear. So, you tell me! You tell me what you want me to do, Ilya, and I'll fucking do it, *please*."

And suddenly Ilya broke. "No," he snapped violently, voice cracking loud enough to echo off the walls. "You tell me how the fuck I am supposed to look at you right now and not see him!"

Shane went completely still. Ilya was breathing hard now, eyes bright with something frantic and devastated and furious all at once. "You think I do not want to touch you?" he demanded hoarsely. "You think I have not been losing my fucking mind trying not to touch you?"

"Ilya-"

"I saw you tied to that chair sobbing," he said over him, voice shaking harder now. "I heard you scream while he hurt you and I could do nothing, *nothing*, and then he called me talking about wanting to 'take you for a test drive,' like you were some fucking toy he borrowed from me." Ilya's breathing turned uneven. "And after that the stream went dead, Shane. *Dead.*"

Shane tried to interrupt, but couldn't.

"And all I could think," Ilya continued brokenly, "was that you would wake up and see my face and remember his, and yet I was desperately hoping you'd still see *me.* But then you opened your beautiful eyes in that warehouse, and you *flinched.* You looked at me, and you looked fucking terrified."

Shane stared at him, his brain not comprehending what was happening.

Ilya laughed once suddenly, but it sounded awful and wrecked. “So, forgive me for trying not to crowd you while you recover from being raped by someone who looks almost exactly like me.”

The word hit Shane like a physical blow, and for a second he genuinely couldn’t process it. Then realisation crashed through him so hard his mouth actually fell open in disbelief.

Oh.

Oh.

Ilya looked away immediately, jaw clenched hard enough to hurt.

“Ilya, he-”

“I do not want details,” Ilya said immediately, voice sharp with panic. “You do not have to tell me anything.”

“Ilya,” Shane whispered.

“I should have found you faster.”

“Ilya-”

“I should have protected you.”

“*Ilya*.”

“And now every time you look at me you are going to remember him touching you and I cannot-”

“He didn’t touch me.”

Ilya froze.

Shane stared at him incredulously through tears. “Ilya. *He didn’t touch me.*”

Nothing moved.

Ilya just stood there staring at him like he had stopped understanding language entirely. “What?”

“He didn’t-, he didn’t rape me. I don’t know what he told you. But he-, it didn’t fucking happen, Ilya.”

The silence afterward felt enormous. Shane saw understanding dawn across Ilya’s face in real time, followed immediately by something that looked almost like devastation. Then Ilya made a small, broken sound Shane had never heard from another human being before in his life

“Oh,” Ilya whispered. For a second, Ilya just sat there staring at him. Then, something inside him seemed to snap completely, and he flung himself out of his chair so fast, that Shane barely processed it before hands were suddenly cupping his face desperately, forehead pressing hard against Shane’s while a broken sound escaped him.

“Fuck,” Ilya whispered. “*Fuck*.”

And finally, *finally*, he was touching him again.

Shane started crying from relief alone, immediately grabbing fistfuls of his shirt like he was afraid he might disappear. “You idiot,” Shane whispered shakily.

“I know.”

“You absolute fucking idiot.”

“I know.”

“You thought I didn’t want you touching me?”

Ilya let out a wrecked laugh against his forehead. “You thought I would think you were ruined? You are perfect, *solnyshko,* absolutely perfect.”

Ilya kissed his forehead desperately, then his cheek, then the corner of his mouth, hands shaking badly enough Shane could feel it.

“I missed you,” Shane whispered finally.

Ilya closed his eyes hard. “*Moya lyubov*,” he whispered back. “I thought I lost you.”

“No, you could never, I’m too stubborn. I told you weeks ago you wouldn’t’ get rid of me, and I meant it.”

Ilya smiled through his tears, and *finally* captured Shane’s mouth in a proper kiss. It felt like coming home. Shan felt all of the tension leave his shoulders, the past days completely disappearing, as if they never happened. Because he was back in Ilya’s arms, so everything would be okay. He reluctantly pulled back from the kiss, and bumped Ilya’s nose with his own.

Ilya giggled, and ran a finger over his cheek. “I missed your freckles.”

“Just my freckles?”

“They are very beautiful.”

“You are beautiful, baby.”

Ilya blanched, clearly taken aback. “It is now the third time you have called me ‘baby’. I am not a baby, Hollander.”

“You are my baby.” Shane replied softly. “You can be a big scary mafia boss all day long, protecting me and keeping me safe. But you deserve to be taken care of. You’re allowed to be soft too.”

Ilya looked at him with a look of such fondness, that Shane ran a comforting hand through his hair. Then Ilya spoke, “I love you so much. I know it’s too quick-”

Shane giggled softly, interrupting him. “I know baby, you told me already. But you had gone and gotten yourself stabbed, and then had the audacity to pass out on me before I could say it back.”

“Oh,” Ilya looked almost bashful, tip of his ears turning red. “How rude of me.”

“Very. But luckily, I love all of you, bad manners included.”

“You do?” Ilya asked, almost sounding disbelieving, and that, Shane would simply not accept.

“Oh, absolutely not.” Shane immediately reached up and grabbed his face with both hands despite the ache in his ribs protesting the movement. “We are not doing that.”

Ilya blinked, startled enough that Shane almost smiled. “We are not,” Shane repeated firmly, thumb brushing gently beneath one of Ilya’s eyes, “going to sit here while you look at me like I just announced I enjoy eating drywall.”

A laugh escaped Ilya before he could stop it, soft and startled and still threaded through with exhaustion. “Drywall?”

“Yes, drywall. Because apparently that would seem more believable to you, than me loving you.” Shane narrowed his eyes slightly. “Which is insane, by the way.”

Ilya’s expression softened immediately into something so unbearably *in love,* that Shane nearly melted straight through the mattress.

“You were kidnapped for a week,” Ilya murmured. “You should not have to comfort me right now.”

“Well unfortunately for you,” Shane replied, voice gentler now, “I happen to love comforting you.”

The words made something flicker across Ilya’s face again. *Wonder*. Like he still didn’t quite know what to do with being loved this openly. Like every soft thing Shane handed him was still being received by bruised hands expecting it to vanish. Shane hated that, so he tugged lightly on Ilya’s sleeve until he finally gave in and shifted gently onto the bed. “There,” Shane sighed happily the second their bodies touched from shoulder’s down. “Much better.”

“You are very bossy for someone held together by stitches and spite.”

“And you are avoiding the point.”

“Which point?”

Shane stared at him incredulously. “The point where I am ridiculously in love with you.”

Ilya actually looked overwhelmed by that. Not flustered, but overwhelmed. Like Shane had physically handed him something too heavy to carry. So, Shane softened immediately, brushing his fingers through Ilya’s hair again slowly, carefully disentangling a few strands that had fallen into his eyes.

“I love every version of you,” he said quietly. “I love scary *Bratva* boss Ilya, unfortunately. Very hot of him. I love jealous Ilya, and dramatic Ilya, and terrifyingly competent Ilya who has a whole underground villain cave.” He smiled faintly when Ilya huffed out another laugh. “But I also love this version.”

“This version?”

“The one who clearly stayed awake for days looking for me.” Shane’s throat tightened slightly. “The one who sat worrying in the next room, thinking I wouldn’t want him near me, because he was more worried about making me uncomfortable than about what he wanted.”

Ilya looked away immediately, but Shane caught his jaw gently before he could fully turn. “Hey. Look at me.”

Slowly, blue eyes lifted back to his. “You make me feel safe,” Shane whispered. “Do you understand that? You. Not the house, or the men, or the guns, or any of the terrifying criminal infrastructure.” His mouth twitched slightly. “*You*.”

Something in Ilya’s expression cracked softly down the middle.

“And even after all of this,” Shane continued, voice wobbling slightly now despite himself, “the only thing I wanted when I woke up was you.”

Ilya inhaled sharply, having difficulties meeting his eyes.

“You’re home to me,” Shane admitted quietly. “Which is deeply inconvenient, honestly, because now I’m emotionally attached to a batshit crazy Russian.” Ilya made a broken little sound somewhere between a laugh and a sob, then suddenly he buried his face against Shane’s shoulder. Carefully. *So carefully*. Like he still couldn’t fully believe he was allowed, and Shane immediately wrapped both arms around him despite the pain, holding him close while Ilya breathed shakily against his neck.

“You are going to ruin me,” Ilya mumbled into his hospital gown.

Shane smiled into his hair. “Bit late for that, baby.”

“I am serious.”

“So am I.” Shane pressed a kiss into his hairline softly. “I am going to love you so hard that eventually you stop looking surprised by it.”

Ilya lifted his head slightly then, eyes suspiciously bright. “That sounds threatening.”

“It is.” Shane nodded. “I’m incredibly committed to the bit too. You should be frightened.”

“I am very frightened,” Ilya whispered, but he was smiling now - really smiling. Not forced, just soft and helpless and warm in a way Shane had feared he wouldn’t ever get to see again.

It made his chest ache. God, he loved him.

“You know,” Shane murmured after a moment, tracing absentminded circles against the back of Ilya’s neck, “I think getting kidnapped means you owe me at least three months of cuddling.”

“Three months?”

“Minimum.”

“That seems excessive.”

“You got stabbed dramatically in front of me,” Shane informed him. “Which means I now have abandonment issues. Doctor’s orders.”

Ilya laughed quietly again, the sound muffled where he’d tucked himself impossibly closer. “Fine,” he whispered. “Three months.”

Shane hummed happily. “Good.”

“And maybe,” Ilya admitted carefully, “I would also like the cuddling.”

Shane’s heart genuinely could not survive him. “Oh baby,” he whispered affectionately, pulling him even closer somehow. “You are going to get cuddled within an inch of your life.”

By the time Ilya and Shane finally left the guestroom, the entire *Bratva* had already gathered downstairs. Word had spread quickly that Ilya was awake again. Faster still, that Shane was alive.

The atmosphere inside the house felt strange now, stretched tight between relief and fury, grief and unfinished violence. Men nodded respectfully at Shane as he passed, some with visible shock still lingering in their eyes after seeing the state he had been found in. Others looked almost reverent. Because Shane Hollander had been brutally tortured for almost a week, and still hadn’t said a fucking word.

Foolish.

Loyal.

Bratva.

Shane walked slowly beside Ilya, one hand gripping lightly at his sleeve whenever his ribs hurt too badly to fully hide it. Andrea had tried to force him to stay in bed another day, but Shane had flatly informed her that if Ilya was going to “do scary mafia things,” then Shane was going too. And Ilya had insisted.

Andrea had muttered something in Spanish about stubborn men being a plague upon the earth.

Now, as they entered the main meeting room together, conversation immediately died. Marleau looked up first, relief flashing openly across his face at the sight of them both upright and together. Ivan leaned back against the wall with crossed arms, expression unreadable except for the way his shoulders loosened slightly when he saw Shane standing.

And Sergei smiled. “Good,” he said warmly, standing from his chair. “You both look significantly less dead than yesterday.”

Something cold twisted beneath Ilya’s ribs, because yesterday, those words would have comforted him. Now they made him want to kill someone. Shane must have sensed the shift beside him, because his fingers tightened slightly against Ilya’s sleeve. Ilya covered Shane’s hand briefly with his own before walking slowly further into the room.

Nobody sat down, nobody spoke. Sergei frowned slightly now, eyes flicking between the room. “What happened?”

Ilya looked at him for a very long moment, then he asked quietly, “You checked the warehouse personally?”

Confusion flickered across Sergei’s face instantly. “What?”

“The warehouse,” Ilya repeated calmly. Too calmly. “The one Shane was found in. You told me you personally checked every abandoned warehouse in Montreal.”

“I did.”

“And yet somehow,” Ilya continued softly, “Shane was sitting tied to a chair inside one.”

Silence spread slowly across the room, and Sergei’s expression tightened slightly. “I already explained that the surveillance footage-”

“You checked it personally,” Ilya interrupted again.

Marleau went still, and Ivan’s eyes narrowed immediately.

Sergei looked between them carefully now. “What exactly are you implying?”

Ilya laughed quietly, the sound horrible. “Do you know,” he said softly, “what finally made me understand?”

Nobody moved.

“You are very smart, Sergei. Smarter than most people in this room.” Ilya tilted his head slightly. “But you made one mistake.”

Sergei’s jaw tightened.

“You told me you personally checked the warehouses.” Ilya’s voice sharpened slightly now. “Not that you had men check them. Not that you reviewed reports. *Personally*.”

The room had gone deathly silent. “And then,” Ilya continued, “you somehow still missed a tied up hostage sitting directly in the middle of one.”

Marleau swore quietly beneath his breath, Ivan pushed himself fully upright from the wall. Meanwhile, Sergei’s face slowly emptied of expression entirely, making Shane inhale sharply beside Ilya.

“You pulled me away from the house that night,” Ilya said quietly. “You insisted we had almost certain lead, Alexei showing up at one of *my* bars. And the second I left…” His voice nearly cracked. “Alexei’s men took Shane.”

The room froze, almost as if nobody dared to move, or breathe.

“Oh,” Marleau whispered. Not shocked…*hurt*. Because Sergei had been theirs for years, for far longer than Marleau.

Family.

Sergei looked around the room slowly then, clearly realising the shift happening around him in real time. And then, incredibly, he smiled faintly. “You figured it out faster than expected.”

The betrayal hit the room like physical blow. Ivan lunged first, Sergei barely managed half a step backwards before Ivan slammed him face first into the table hard enough to crack wood beneath him. Chairs crashed violently backwards as several others surged forward instantly, pinning Sergei down while he struggled.

“What the fuck is wrong with you?” Marleau snarled, genuinely sounding devastated.

Sergei laughed breathlessly against the table. “You all worship him like he is some fucking king.”

“He is *our*s,” Ivan spat immediately.

“And look what he has become!” Sergei snapped back suddenly, finally losing composure. He twisted violently beneath their grip, glaring directly at Ilya now. “Weak. *Distracted*. All because of him.”

His gaze flicked toward Shane, which immediately seemed to be the wrong move. The room changed instantly, and Ilya moved before thinking. His fist connected with Sergei’s jaw hard enough to send blood across the table. “You do not speak about him,” Ilya said softly.

Sergei spat blood onto the floor and laughed again anyway. “Look at yourself. You would burn down empires for a boy.”

“Yes,” Ilya answered immediately. “And you would betray one, betray your *family,* for a man that doesn’t give two shits about you. So, what did he promise you?”

“He promised me power,” Sergei hissed. “Alexei understands what leadership requires. Fear. Sacrifice. Not…” he sneered, looking at Shane again, “whatever pathetic softness this is.”

Beside Ilya, Shane shifted slightly, then winced hard enough that Marleau immediately pulled a chair over for him. “Sit before your organs fall out, and Andrea kills us all,” Marleau muttered.

Shane sat down gingerly. “Rude.”

The normalcy of it in middle of betrayal and violence almost broke something inside Ilya. Instead, he looked back at Sergei. “I trusted you,” he said quietly. There was no rage in his voice anymore. Only grief. “I trusted you with my life.” Ilya swallowed hard. “With *his*.”

For first time since exposure, something uncertain flickered across Sergei’s expression. Then vanished again behind stubborn bitterness. “He made you weak.”

“No,” Ilya whispered, his gaze drifted briefly toward Shane. Sitting bruised and exhausted and stitched together beside him anyway. “He made me human.”

The silence afterward felt enormous, then Ilya looked toward Ivan. “Cell.”

Sergei fought violently when they dragged him downstairs, but nobody cared. The holding cells beneath in the basement of the house were cold. Concrete walls, metal drains - soundproofed, just in case. Built for enemies, and yet now holding someone they had considered their own.

Sergei stumbled when Ivan shoved him forward into the chair bolted to the floor. Ropes were brought immediately, wrists secured tightly behind the metal frame while several others stood watch nearby. Nobody spoke, until Ilya finally stepped forward. “You left him there,” he said quietly.

Sergei rolled his eyes despite blood still dripping from his mouth. “Still alive, isn’t he?”

The room exploded in outrage. Ilya grabbed him by the throat so fast the chair nearly tipped backwards. “You left him there cold and starving and tied to a chair for a week.”

Sergei stared back defiantly despite the hand crushing his windpipe. “Well, he’s here, and he’s fine. You’ve done worse to others than Alexei did to him, for *much less*.”

“Yes,” Shane said softly from behind Ilya. Everyone turned slightly, and Shane leaned weakly forwards in his chair, pale in a way that made Ilya want to bury him in comfort and never let him go. “So, imagine what he’ll do to *you* for *me*.” Shane’s voice stayed quiet.

Sergei laughed harshly. “You think that makes you special?”

“No,” Shane replied. “I just think you underestimated how far people will go for someone they love.”

Sergei sneered. “You’re all becoming fucking sentimental.”

Ilya released his throat slowly. “Maybe,” he said calmly. “But you still betrayed us.”

Sergei shrugged bloodied shoulders. “Do what you want.”

“Oh,” Ilya said with a wicked glint in his eyes. “I plan to.”

The room went still, because everyone knew that tone. Ilya turned toward nearby counter slowly where various supplies had been placed, just in case they were ever necessary. But Ilya turned away from them, instead putting his entire body weight behind punching Sergei in the chest, momentarily taking his breath away. But Sergei smiled coldly. “Going to punch me to death?”

“You will wish that I did.” Ilya answered, Sergei’s confidence finally faltered slightly.

“You’re insane.”

Shane tilted his head. “Says the traitor.”

Sergei lasted longer than most men would have.

Not because he was particularly strong, or loyal, or brave. Ilya knew now that none of those things were true. But Sergei had spent years inside the *Bratva*, years watching men break under interrogation and learning from it, learning how to delay the inevitable, how to hold his tongue just long enough to bargain with information when things became truly unbearable.

The basement holding room smelled faintly of bleach and damp concrete, harsh overhead lights casting sharp shadows over the chair Sergei had been restrained to. His wrists were zip-tied behind him now, ankles secured to the metal legs, chest heaving hard from the first beating Ivan and Marleau had given him.

And still, somehow, Sergei kept glaring at Ilya like he was the betrayed party here. "You've lost your fucking mind," Sergei spat blood onto the floor. "All this over some boy."

Somewhere beside Ilya, Shane shifted slightly, and Ilya immediately glanced toward him on instinct. Shane was pale beneath the bruising, one arm wrapped protectively around his ribs beneath the oversized hoodie, exhaustion pulling visibly at every line of his body. He should not have been standing in a basement right now. He should have been asleep upstairs with painkillers in his system and blankets wrapped around him.

Instead, he met Ilya's eyes steadily and gave the tiniest nod. *I'm okay.*

Liar. But brave. Too brave. Ilya turned back toward Sergei slowly. "You left him there for four days."

Sergei scoffed. "I followed orders."

"You sold him."

"No," Sergei snapped immediately. "I chose survival. There's difference."

Marleau barked out a cold laugh from near the wall. "Funny word for betrayal."

Sergei ignored him, eyes fixed only on Ilya now. "Alexei promised stability. Promised power. Meanwhile you've been spiralling over some bartender for weeks, letting him sit in meetings, letting him know things he should never know. You've gone soft."

The word echoed unpleasantly through the room. *Soft*.

Ilya almost smiled, because maybe he had. Maybe loving Shane had softened the sharpest parts of him, had taught him restraint and tenderness and devotion in ways he had never thought possible before. But Sergei had mistaken softness for weakness.

"You let him torture Shane," Ilya said quietly.

Sergei rolled his eyes. "Please. The kid survived. And you and I both know it was never about Shane, but about you."

Beside him, Shane inhaled sharply, barely audible. But Ilya heard it. And suddenly the image returned all over again anyway, vicious and immediate. *Shane tied to that chair. Shane screaming. Shane sobbing while blood covered his skin. Shane whispering please in that broken voice while Alexei carved apart the mark on his chest.*

Something inside Ilya went cold. Andrea had warned him not to aggravate the stab wound. Unfortunately, Andrea was not here. Ilya grabbed Sergei by the throat hard enough to slam the back of the chair against the concrete wall with a deafening crack. Sergei choked violently, eyes widening as Ilya leaned close enough for them to nearly touch foreheads. “You do not get,” Ilya said softly, “to speak about his suffering like it was just a minor inconvenience to you. We will see how many of your ribs I can break, before you’re no longer ’fine’.

Sergei swallowed hard, behind them, but Shane’s voice suddenly cut through the room. “Actually,” he rasped lightly, “breaking his ribs would take too long.”

Everyone looked at him, and Shane shifted awkwardly in the chair, visibly trying not to wince from the movement. Still, there was something terrifyingly calm in his expression now. Analytical.

“Bruised ribs hurt like hell, but they heal. Human panic is usually more useful than actual physical damage.”

Sergei stared at him strangely, but Shane stared back unflinchingly, Ilya waiting with bated breath for what his boy would say next. Shane glanced at the big bucket in the corner. “Waterboarding works because your brain can’t distinguish drowning from simulated drowning. The body panics anyway.”

Silence. Marleau blinked once. “Jesus Christ.”

Shane shrugged faintly, immediately regretting it when pain flashed across his face. “I took electives.”

Ilya felt something dark and vicious curl warmly through his chest. Because Shane was still shaking slightly from pain and exhaustion, and yet here he stood anyway, looking the man responsible directly in the eye instead of hiding behind Ilya.

Mine, some ugly possessive part of Ilya’s mind whispered instantly.

Sergei laughed nervously. “You’re letting him participate in this?”

Shane tilted his head slightly. “You participated in my kidnapping.”

That wiped the amusement off Sergei’s face immediately. Ilya finally released Sergei’s throat, stepping back while Ivan dumped a bucket beside the chair with brutal efficiency.

Four fucking days.

Ilya crouched beside the bucket slowly, rolling his sleeves up with careful movements while Sergei visibly began realising what was about to happen.

“You know,” Ilya said conversationally, “the funny thing is that I trusted you. “You knew where I kept my emergency codes. You knew where I slept.” His voice remained calm. “You were one of the few people I trusted around Shane.”

Something flickered uneasily across Sergei’s expression then.

“You left him there alone,” Ilya continued softly. “Cold. Starving. Tied to chair while your new boss cut him apart.”

“He didn’t die.”

Ilya smiled, but it was not nice smile. “No,” he agreed quietly. “But you will.”

Then he nodded once toward Ivan, and everything after that became ugly quickly. Sergei fought at first, thrashing violently the second Ivan forced his head inside the bucket while Marleau pinned his shoulders down. But restraint only made panic worse once the water hit.

Sergei bucked violently beneath their grip almost instantly, muffled screams dissolving into wet gasping panic as his body reacted exactly the way Shane had predicted. The human brain did not care about logic once drowning instincts kicked in.

It only cared about survival.

Ilya counted calmly in Russian beneath his breath before finally pulling his head up. Sergei gagged violently, coughing water everywhere while sucking in desperate breaths.

“Where is Alexei?”

“Go fuck yourself,” Sergei wheezed.

Ilya nodded once. *Again*.

This time Sergei lasted less than thirty seconds before convulsing violently against restraints, eyes wide with genuine terror now, as he came up for air.

Shane watched silently from the chair. Like he needed to see this through. Needed proof that his suffering meant something.

When they lifted his head the next time, Sergei nearly sobbed from relief. “He moved locations constantly,” he gasped. “I swear to God-”

Marleau punched him hard enough to snap his head sideways. “Wrong answer.”

Blood splattered onto concrete, but Ilya barely blinked. “Where?”

Sergei coughed hard, chest heaving violently. “Industrial district,” he choked out finally. “Old shipping yard near the river. Safehouse beneath warehouse thirteen.”

The room went still, Ivan immediately looked toward Ilya for orders. But Ilya only stared at Sergei for long moment.

“See?” Sergei rasped desperately. “I’m helping now.”

Helping. Interesting word. Because Shane still had stitches in his chest. Helping would have been not betraying them in first place.

Ilya stood slowly, Sergei’s eyes tracked him nervously now. “You know what your problem was?” Ilya asked quietly.

Sergei swallowed hard.

“You thought loving someone made me weak.” Ilya smiled faintly. “But all it really did was give me something worth becoming monstrous for.”

And judging by the fear finally entering Sergei’s face properly, he understood far too late what that meant. Ilya pulled his gun out with record-speed, and shot him in between his eyes. No one flinched - not even Shane.

And Sergei’s body sagged forward, dead.

Chapter End Notes

ARE WE READY FOR THE ANGST TO BE OVER??

Chapter 14

Chapter Summary

Marleau grinned faintly before stepping forward. “Listen, boss. Me and Ivan can handle it. Unless Alexei is hiding another army somewhere, most of his men are dead.”

Ivan nodded once. “We’ll bring him back alive.”

Marleau’s grin widened. “You know. So, you can still participate in all the horrifying revenge fantasies keeping you emotionally afloat.”

Chapter Notes

A little something something.

Heard Conan Gray live last night, so any emotionally devastation from Ilya's side is due to me finally hearing family line live. Apologies.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The gunshot echoed through the basement long after Sergei's body hit the floor, and for a horrible second, nobody moved. Ilya just stood there staring at him, arm still extended slightly from the recoil, smoke curling faintly from the barrel while blood spread slowly beneath Sergei's body in dark, uneven rivers across the concrete.

Dead.

Sergei was *dead*.

The thought did not settle properly inside his head. It just kept bouncing around numbly, refusing to make sense no matter how many times Ilya repeated it to himself.

Sergei, who had taught him how to hold a gun correctly when his hands had still been too small for the grip.

Sergei, who had smuggled him cigarettes behind his father's back when he was sixteen and furious at the world.

Sergei, who had once carried him half-conscious out of a knife fight in Moscow while cursing him out for being reckless.

Sergei, who had followed him to Canada without hesitation, standing by Ilya's side through it all, being his only true support.

Sergei, who had looked him in the eyes while Shane screamed on a warehouse floor, and still chosen betrayal anyway.

Ilya's stomach twisted violently. And then, immediately after, guilt crashed over him for even feeling guilty in the first place. Because Shane had nearly died. The betrayal burned so deeply inside his chest that breathing hurt, but somehow the grief still existed too.

It made him feel sick.

Someone gently took the gun from his hand. Ivan, probably. Ilya barely registered it. He just kept staring, until suddenly warm fingers wrapped shakily around his wrist.

"Ilya."

Shane's voice. Soft. Exhausted. *Alive*.

Ilya looked down sharply. Shane had somehow made his way across the basement despite Marleau very firmly placing him in a chair earlier. He looked pale enough to pass out, one arm wrapped protectively around his ribs while the other held onto Ilya's wrist tightly, grounding him.

"You shouldn't be standing" Ilya said immediately, voice rough.

Shane rolled his eyes weakly. "Oh, do you want to ask Andrea whether *you* are allowed to stand with that stab wound?" He punctuated the statement by poking Ilya lightly in his abdomen, making him wince and laugh simultaneously.

"So bossy and mean."

“If being worried about you was a crime, I’d outrank you all, just saying.”

A startled laugh escaped Marleau somewhere behind them, but Ilya barely heard it. Because Shane was looking at him with that same soft expression again. The one that always made something inside Ilya ache painfully open. Slowly, Shane tugged him backward a step. “Come here.”

“I am fine.”

“You are standing over a corpse dissociating so hard that Ivan just stole your gun without you noticing,” Shane replied flatly. “You are not fine.”

That nearly startled another laugh out of him. *Nearly*.

Instead, Ilya let Shane guide him backward slightly until his shoulder bumped against the wall. Shane immediately leaned into him despite clearly hurting everywhere, resting his forehead carefully against Ilya’s collarbone. And *God*, the simple weight of him nearly broke Ilya apart.

One of Ilya’s hands came up instinctively to cradle the back of Shane’s head. Behind them, the *Bratva* had slowly begun speaking again, voices low and tense. “We should move tonight,” someone said sharply. “If Alexei realises Sergei is gone-”

“No,” Andrea interrupted immediately, having been called down to ensure that Sergei was dead. “Absolutely not.”

Everyone turned toward her. The doctor crossed her arms tightly over her chest, glaring at them all like they were particularly disappointing children. “You are all injured, sleep deprived, and operating entirely on adrenaline. And before any of you argue with me, Rozanov got stabbed less than twenty-four hours ago.”

“I am standing,” Ilya pointed out weakly.

Andrea looked unimpressed. “Congratulations. Your organs are also currently inside your body. I would prefer to keep them there.”

That actually got a few strained laughs out of the room. “I am serious,” she continued sharply. “If you go after Alexei tonight, either Rozanov stays here, or I sedate him myself.”

“I can still fight,” Ilya said immediately.

Andrea smiled coldly. “And I can still hit you over the head with a frying pan. *Sit down*.”

Marleau snorted loudly, and Ilya glared at him, betrayed.

“Boss,” Marleau said carefully after a moment, expression softening slightly, “she’s right. You’re half held together by stitches and stubbornness right now.”

“And Shane can barely walk,” Ivan added quietly.

At that, Ilya finally looked down again. Shane was swaying slightly just standing beside him, exhaustion written into every inch of his body despite how stubbornly he tried to hide it. Guilt crashed through Ilya again instantly, because Shane had survived hell, and instead of resting, he was down here calming Ilya down.

“I should go,” Ilya said quietly. “Alexei is my responsibility.”

“And if your stitches tear open mid-fight?” Andrea snapped. “What then?”

“He would be annoying about it,” Shane offered helpfully.

“Thank you, Shane.”

“You’re welcome.”

Marleau grinned faintly before stepping forward. “Listen, boss. Me and Ivan can handle it. Unless Alexei is hiding another army somewhere, most of his men are dead.”

Ivan nodded once. “We’ll bring him back alive.”

Marleau’s grin widened. “You know. So, you can still participate in all the horrifying revenge fantasies keeping you emotionally afloat.”

“Cliff,” Andrea sighed.

“What? I am trying to support him.”

Despite everything, despite the corpse still warm across the room, despite the exhaustion clawing at his bones, Ilya felt something inside his chest loosen slightly. His family.

Still here.

Still standing.

Shane tugged lightly on his sleeve. “Can we please go sit down before Andrea tranquillisers all of us?”

Andrea pointed at him immediately. “Finally, someone intelligent.”

“I almost have a degree,” Shane informed her solemnly, smirking slightly.

“You also walked downstairs with cracked ribs. So ‘almost’ being the key word in that sentence.”

Shane considered that. “Okay, fair.”

Eventually, after Sergei’s body had been taken away and the basement cleaned with grim efficiency, Ilya let Shane drag him upstairs toward one of the lounges. The second they sat down on the couch, Shane practically collapsed sideways against him with a tiny, exhausted sound. Ilya immediately adjusted carefully despite his own injuries, pulling a massive blanket over both of them while making absolutely sure nothing tugged painfully against Shane’s bandages.

For a while, neither of them spoke. They just sat tangled together beneath the blanket while rain tapped softly against the windows outside. Ilya could feel Shane tracing lazy circles against the inside of his wrist.

Alive.

Warm.

Safe.

“I kept thinking you were dead,” Shane admitted quietly after a long silence.

Ilya’s chest tightened painfully. “Shane-”

“No, seriously.” Shane’s voice grew softer. “When you passed out in the warehouse…” He swallowed hard. “I thought maybe that was it. And then when I woke up without you there-” His fingers tightened slightly around Ilya’s wrist. “I genuinely thought you had died.”

Immediately, Ilya pulled him closer despite the ache in his abdomen. “I am here.”

“I know.”

Another silence settled. Then quietly, Ilya admitted, “Watching that livestream was the worst thing that has ever happened to me.”

Shane looked up slightly.

“I could hear you screaming,” Ilya whispered. “And every hour that we could not find you…” He swallowed hard. “I started thinking, that maybe Alexei was right. Maybe I really was too weak now. Too distracted by loving you to protect you properly.”

Shane frowned immediately. “No.”

“I should have found you faster.”

“No,” Shane repeated more firmly now, shifting carefully to look at him properly. “Alexei did that. Not you.” Ilya looked away, and Shane sighed softly. “He spent almost the entire week trying to convince me you were evil.”

That made Ilya frown, recalling the phone calls with Alexei. But Shane continued before Ilya could ask, “He kept talking about your childhood. About your mother.” Shane hesitated briefly. “About how she died.”

Pain twisted sharply through Ilya’s chest, the grief surrounding the memories of his mother a wound that would probably never heal. But Shane’s voice stayed gentle. “I don’t believe his version,” he said quietly. “And… if you ever wanted to tell me yours, you can. But only if you want to.”

For a long moment, Ilya said nothing. Then finally, quietly, “She wanted us out.”

Shane stayed perfectly still beside him.

“When we were little,” Ilya continued softly, staring down at his hands, “my mother hated this life more than anyone I have ever known. She tried everything. Begging. Bargaining. Hiding money.” He laughed once bitterly. “She used to tell me, that Alexei and I were too gentle for this world.”

Shane’s fingers tightened around his.

“But she could not get us out,” Ilya whispered. “And eventually…” His throat tightened painfully. “Eventually she stopped believing she ever would.”

The room stayed quiet except for the rain outside.

“I was twelve when I found her,” Ilya admitted finally, voice rough enough that the words almost scraped on the way out. “Alexei was fourteen.”

Shane inhaled sharply beside him, but didn’t interrupt. “She left a note for us,” Ilya continued quietly. “Telling us she was sorry. Telling us she loved us. Telling us to run if we ever got the chance.”

Rain tapped softly against the windows, and for a while, Ilya just stared down at the cross resting against his chest, turning it slowly between his fingers. Shane stayed curled against him beneath the blanket, warm and patient and heartbreakingly gentle in the way he always seemed to be with Ilya’s ugliest pieces. “I promised her I would get us out,” Ilya whispered eventually. “I remember sitting on the bathroom floor after, and promising that one day Alexei and I would leave.” His laugh came out thin and humourless. Shane’s face tightened painfully.

“But then…” Ilya swallowed hard. “I realised very quickly that children do not escape men like my father. Weak boys disappear. So, I stopped being weak.”

His voice had gone strangely flat now, detached in the way it only ever did when he spoke about Russia. “I became useful instead,” he said quietly. “Everything my father respected. Violent, efficient, and obedient when it mattered.” His fingers curled tighter around the necklace. “I learned how to hurt people before they could hurt me first. And eventually, he trusted me enough to give me power. And it ruined whatever relationship I had ever had with my brother. Alexei was older, technically, and felt like he was entitled to more. But I was more vicious and merciless.”

Shane looked at him carefully. “Because you thought it would help you survive long enough to leave.”

“Yes.”

“And you did leave.”

Ilya smiled faintly then, but there was nothing happy in it. “Did I?”

The question settled heavily between them. “I am still a *Bratva* boss, *solnyshko*.” His voice cracked slightly around the words. “And I don’t… dislike it. I hated Russia, and I hated my father, but just because I wear expensive suits in Canada instead of Moscow does not suddenly make me good man.”

“That’s not-”

“I killed someone I considered a father today,” Ilya interrupted softly. “And when I think of my brother, all my mind can conjure up, are different ways to torture him.” His eyes burned suddenly while the confession sat ugly and raw between them.

“I keep thinking-” Ilya laughed weakly, shaking his head once. “If my mother could see me now, would she even recognise me? Or would she just see another version of my father standing in front of her?”

Immediately, Shane reached for him. “No.”

“But maybe she would.” Ilya’s voice dropped lower now, quieter and more dangerous somehow because of it. “I command men with guns. I order executions. I threaten people into obedience.” His jaw tightened painfully. “And when Sergei betrayed us, I shot him in the head without hesitating long enough to stop myself.”

“You did hesitate.” Ilya blinked slightly, but Shane looked at him with terrifying certainty. “That’s why you’re upset. Bad people don’t grieve the parts of themselves that still hurt,” Shane whispered. “Your father wouldn’t be sitting here crying because killing someone made him feel sick.”

Ilya looked away immediately, but Shane just shifted closer despite his injuries, until their foreheads rested together carefully beneath the blanket. “You know what I think?” Shane murmured softly.

“What?”

“I think a truly cruel person would’ve let Sergei live after what he did to me, and done much worse to him.” Shane’s fingers brushed lightly against the cross necklace. “And I think your mother would’ve been devastated that you had to become this version of yourself to survive.” His voice cracked slightly now. “But I don’t think she would blame you for it.”

Ilya’s throat tightened violently.

“She wanted you safe,” Shane continued quietly. “And you were twelve years old.”

A tear finally slipped free despite Ilya’s best efforts. “I failed her,” he whispered.

“No.” Shane’s hand cupped his face immediately. “You survived her.” His eyes softened painfully. “That is not the same thing.”

For a second, Ilya genuinely thought he might break apart right there on the couch, because Shane looked at him like he was something worth mourning. Something worth saving. Someone worth *loving.* Ilya had made piece with living without love, accepting camaraderie and friendship as being all he deserved. But Shane had barrelled into his life, and broken down all of the walls surrounding his heart, as if determined to prove to him that it was there, just waiting for someone willing enough to find it, and love it exactly as it was. And if Ilya could, he’d let Shane crawl into his chest, and never leave. He’d keep him safe there, so he wouldn’t ever have to miss him.

Instead, he leaned down and placed a gentle kiss on his lips, Shane immediately opening up beneath him, as if every touch of their lips relaxed him further into the couch cushions. And Ilya couldn’t stop. He was addicted to the way Shane’s tongue felt against his, and the soft whimpers escaping his lips every time Ilya dared to pull back.

Ilya cradled his jaw in one hand, never wanting to let go. Shane’s hand was fisting his shirt, the movement of the shirt pulling lightly across his abdomen making Ilya shiver with want. They got lost in each other for a moment, but then Shane twisted firmer into him, as if wanting to get even closer, but had to abort the movement with a hiss, “Fuck.”

“Fuck, Shane, are you okay? I’m sorry.”

“What the hell are you sorry for?”

Ilya furrowed his brows, “We shouldn’t be-, I mean-, I don’t want you to hurt.”

“You are so silly.” Shane rolled his eyes at him fondly, “I’ll take my wounds hurting slightly any day, if it means I get to lay here, and have you this close.”

“Yes, but-” Ilya paused, searching for the right words. “We probably shouldn’t-”

“I’m not asking you to rail me over the armrest until both our stitches burst, and we bleed out. That would be so embarrassing, if the guys found us like that.” He smiled, resting his thumb on Ilya’s bottom lip, pulling it down slightly. “But-, But don’t pull back just yet. Let me taste you just a little more, *please*. I thought I’d never get to again, and now that you’re here, I want *everything*. But can I please just have a little?”

And how was Ilya ever supposed to resist? When Shane begged so sweetly, while leaning closer, his breath meeting Ilya’s, their lips almost touching. “Of course, *malysh*. But nothing strenuous, I would never forgive myself if I hurt you more.”

“Wow, *strenuous*, huh? Such a big word, I think Andrea might be surprised that you know what it means, Mr. Hypocrite.”

“I am not a hypocrite.”

“You wanted to run out of the house, chasing Alexei until your stitches gave up, but I’m not allowed to make out with my boyfriend? Not only a hypocrite, but a mean one.” Shane let go of his shirt, and instead let a finger trail down his happy trail, and over his pants until it was resting right against Ilya’s half-hard cock. *Traitor.* “And a *liar.*”

Ilya giggled, flustered. “I did not *lie*. I never said I didn’t want you, I was just trying to be… responsible, *da?*”

Shane’s expression softened so suddenly it made something ache inside Ilya’s chest. The teasing spark in his eyes dimmed, replaced by something far more fragile, something careful and searching that Shane usually hid underneath jokes and brattiness. His fingers trailed back up, resting lightly against Ilya’s stomach now, no longer teasing downward, just… there.

“But-, but you do want me?” he asked quietly.

The words hit Ilya like physical blow. Because Shane tried to sound casual about it, but there was still uncertainty buried underneath, thin cracks left behind by too many cold days spent wondering if he would survive long enough to be loved again. “Shane,” he whispered immediately, horrified. “*Moya lyubov*, how could you even ask me that?”

Shane shrugged one shoulder weakly, though the movement pulled slightly at his ribs. “I don’t know.” He laughed softly, but it sounded embarrassed more than amused. “I think my brain got a little scrambled, I’m sorry. I just-, we normally have such amazing sex. And now I’m sitting here, and I can barely move, and I-… I don’t know.”

Ilya stared at him for one long second before carefully leaning forward, placing kisses to Shane’s freckles, Shane instantly melting into the contact. “Shane Hollander, you are the most special person I have ever met.”

Ilya leaned back slowly until their foreheads touched. “You are so special that you made me betray every survival instinct I have ever had.” His voice dropped softer. “So special that I would burn

down an entire city to keep you safe. So special that I nearly died because the thought of losing you made me stop thinking like rational human being."

Shane's breath hitched slightly.

"And," Ilya continued quietly, "you are so painfully beautiful that I still want you even while you are glaring at me with bed hair and threatening your recovery. Even if we never have sex again. Even if we are forced to have boring vanilla sex until the end of time, I would love you."

That startled a tiny laugh out of Shane at least. "I don't know if we're capable of boring vanilla sex. I like your hands around my throat too much, and you better put them back there the second it's safe. I'll even ask Andrea for clearance if I have to."

"There he is," Ilya murmured fondly. "My favorite brat."

"Favorite? How many brats do you have on hand? Am I keeping you from your other boys?"

Ilya giggled against his will. "As if I would even have time for anyone else, when you consume my every waking thought." He reached down to grasp Shane's hand, and brought their joined hands to his lips, kissing Shane's knuckles gently. "I love you," he said again, because now that the words had escaped him once, he did not think he would ever stop saying them. "Only you. And I want you constantly. Unfortunately for both of us."

Shane grinned tiredly. "See? That wasn't hard."

"You are still not allowed to do anything strenuous."

"Making out isn't strenuous."

"With you it somehow becomes life threatening."

"That's because you're obsessed with me."

Ilya sighed dramatically. "Tragic, really." Then he kissed Shane softly at last, careful and slow and full of all the things he had thought he might never get to say again.

Eventually, the exhaustion got the better of them, and they fell asleep tangled in each other's arms. At one point, Andrea roused them, so they'd take more medication, before letting them sleep again. They needed all the rest they could get.

Shane woke with a start to commotion somewhere in the house. For one horrible second, his body reacted before his brain did, panic surging violently through him as he tried to jerk upright too quickly, pain instantly detonating across his ribs hard enough to make him gasp.

Warm arms tightened around him immediately. “Easy,” Ilya mumbled against his hair, still half asleep.

Right.

Not the warehouse. *Safe.*

Shane shut his eyes briefly, breathing hard through the phantom panic still clawing up his throat, until another burst of noise drifted upstairs. Heavy footsteps, a crash. Ivan laughing loudly enough to shake the walls, and then Marleau’s voice, “Watch his fucking head, idiot.”

Shane blinked, and Ilya had gone completely still beside him now, *listening*. Another angry muffled shout downstairs, in Russian. And suddenly Shane understood.

“*Oh*,” he whispered.

Ilya was already sitting up carefully despite Andrea definitely threatening murder if he moved too much. His jaw had gone tight instantly, shoulders tense beneath the loose black shirt hanging half open over his bandages.

“They found him,” Shane said quietly.

Ilya nodded once. For a moment, neither of them moved, then Ilya looked toward him immediately. “You stay here.”

Shane stared at him. “Absolutely not.”

“Shane-”

“You think I’m missing this?”

“You can barely walk.”

“You got stabbed like twenty-four hours ago, and still tried to threaten a nurse.”

“She tried to stop me from going to you.”

“Bullshit. I vividly remember her dragging you into my room like a child scorned by their parents,” Shane laughed weakly. Then immediately regretted it when his ribs protested viciously. Ilya’s expression softened at the sound, all sharpness disappearing into worry again. “*Malysh*…”

Shane reached for his wrist beneath the blanket before he could spiral. “I’m coming downstairs.”

Ilya hesitated visibly. Not because he didn’t want Shane there, Shane knew that now. Finally, fully, knew it. But because Ilya looked at Shane now like every bruise still physically hurt him too. Eventually, he sighed. “Fine. But if you collapse, Andrea will use my spine as decoration.”

“Worth it.”

“No.” Ilya leaned closer briefly, forehead brushing Shane’s softly. “You are worth surviving for.”

God, how was Shane supposed to survive sentences like that?

By the time they made it downstairs, slow and aching and tangled together enough that Shane was pretty sure Ilya was secretly supporting half his weight, the house had gone tense and loud around them. Men crowded the hallway in the basement, weapons still holstered at their sides, adrenaline hanging thick in the air.

Ivan spotted them first. “Boss.”

The entire hallway quieted slightly, then Shane heard it. Alexei laughing.

His stomach twisted immediately, not from fear exactly. Just revulsion. Like hearing a nightmare speak. Ilya’s hand settled more firmly against the small of his back before guiding him further towards the holding cell.

It looked exactly the same, as when Sergei had been tied there just hours ago. Except now, Alexei sat tied tightly to the chair directly in the middle of the room, wrists secured behind him, blood smeared across one side of his face like someone had introduced him violently to a wall on the way in.

He looked up immediately when they entered, and smiled. “Well,” he murmured. “There’s my favourite hostage.”

Every muscle in Ilya’s body tightened instantly beside Shane, but Alexei barely looked at him. His eyes stayed fixed on Shane almost lazily, like they were continuing some unfinished conversation instead. “You know,” Alexei sighed conversationally, “I was beginning to think you’d forgotten me already. Very rude after everything we shared together.”

Shane snorted. “Pretty sure kidnapping isn’t usually considered bonding.”

Alexei hummed thoughtfully. “No? I thought we got quite close.” His eyes drifted meaningfully over Shane’s bruises. “I bet you screamed for me more, than you ever did for him.”

Ilya moved so fast Shane barely caught it before a fist slammed hard against the side of Alexei’s chair instead of his face, the metal screeching violently across concrete.

“Do not,” Ilya said quietly, “fucking speak to him.”

Alexei only smiled wider. “Protective.”

“You tied him to chair for a week.” Ilya’s voice shook now beneath the fury clawing through it. “Starved him. Cut him open. Broke his ribs.”

“And still,” Alexei replied lightly, finally glancing toward him, “he did not tell me shit.”

The room went still, as something dark and ugly flashed across Ilya’s face. Pride, rage, devotion. All tangled together so tightly it looked painful. Alexei noticed too, of course he did. “He was very impressive, actually,” he continued conversationally, looking back at Shane again. “I kept expecting him to break eventually. Most people do. Especially pretty ones.” His smile sharpened slightly. “But your boy was stubborn.”

“He is not my boy,” Ilya snapped automatically.

Shane looked at him flatly. “I’m going to give you *one* chance to fix that sentence.”

“Not like that,” Ilya muttered, eyes not leaving Alexei, speaking directly to him. “You do not get to say it like that. Like he is not his own person, but a-, a fucking *pet* I own. Not unless you want to lose your fucking teeth.” Ilya corrected.

Ivan barked out a laugh loud enough to echo, and even Marleau looked briefly delighted. Alexei looked between Shane and Ilya with visible disgust. “Jesus Christ,” he muttered. “You’re both unbearable.”

“Yeah,” Shane said sweetly. “And yet you still lost.”

That wiped the amusement off Alexei’s face for exactly one second. *Worth it.*

Alexei leaned back slightly against the chair despite the restraints. “You know what I still don’t understand?” he asked Shane softly. “Why him?”

Ilya went utterly rigid beside him, and Shane frowned slightly. “What?”

“You could have had anyone,” Alexei continued, studying him almost curiously now. “You are beautiful, charming, annoyingly brave. And instead, you attached yourself to someone like him.” He tilted his head slightly toward Ilya. “Cold, violent, *mafia*.”

“Careful,” Marleau muttered from the wall. “You’re describing all of us now.”

Alexei ignored him completely. Shane looked toward Ilya then, really looked at him. At the exhaustion still carved into his face, the healing stab wound hidden beneath his shirt. The way he kept unconsciously hovering closer every time Shane breathed wrong. Then Shane looked back at Alexei. “He loves me, and I love him,” he said simply.

Alexei stared at him, then laughed softly like Shane had said something ridiculous. “That is your defence?”

“No,” Shane replied. “That’s why you lost.”

Something dangerous flickered across Alexei’s expression then, and beside Shane, Ilya suddenly stepped forward again, this time not stopping. His hand closed around Alexei’s throat so violently the chair tipped partially backward with a crack.

The room exploded instantly.

“Boss-”

“Rozanov-”

But Ilya barely seemed to hear them anymore. “You touched him,” he hissed, voice shaking hard now, “You tied him up and treated him like animal, and somehow, he still walked out of that warehouse more human than you will ever be, you pathetic piece of shit. I will carve you into pieces until you fucking beg me for mercy, and I. Will. Not. Grant. It.”

Alexei choked slightly but still smiled through it somehow. “There he is.”

Ilya drew his fist back, and Shane grabbed his wrist immediately. “*Ilya*.”

The room froze.

Ilya turned toward him instantly, breathing hard enough his entire chest shook. Shane could practically see the violence fighting for control behind his eyes. “*Baby*,” Shane said softly, stepping closer despite his aching ribs and rested one shaky hand against Ilya’s chest. “He wants that reaction,” he murmured quietly. “Don’t give him one. He is not fucking worth it.”

For a long moment, Ilya just stared at him. Then finally, painfully slowly, he lowered his fist.

Alexei coughed once, laughing weakly beneath it. “Wow.” he rasped. “So obedient for him, brother. And here I thought Hollander was the one on a leash.”

Shane turned immediately. “You know,” he said thoughtfully, “for someone tied to a chair, you really talk too much.”

Alexei smiled faintly despite the bruising already darkening around his throat. “And yet you listened every time.”

Shane’s expression cooled instantly. “Oh please,” he snarled. “If you think I listened to a word you said, you think too highly of yourself. Your monologues got boring on day one.”

That finally wiped the amusement from Alexei’s face completely, the cheap insult somehow hitting his ego more than anything else said so far. Marleau stepped forward with a long-suffering sigh. “Alright. Fun family reunion over.” He jerked his chin toward the stairs. “Both of you upstairs before Andrea starts shooting people.”

Ilya still looked ready to commit murder, but Shane squeezed his wrist once more. Eventually, reluctantly, Ilya stepped back. Alexei watched them carefully the entire time. Then Marleau killed the light, and Alexei disappeared into darkness.

The *Bratva* gathered in the living room, vodka bottles and beers circulating, Shane and Ilya not allowed to have any under Andrea’s watchful eye, despite Ilya pouting like a kid in a candy store.

“You were stabbed, and are currently on heavy painkillers,” Andrea informed him coldly from the armchair. “You do not get alcohol.”

“I have survived worse.”

“Yes,” she replied. “Unfortunately.”

That startled a laugh out of Shane, which immediately made him wince and clutch his ribs. Instantly, Ilya’s head snapped toward him, concern overtaking the sulking expression so quickly it almost looked ridiculous. “Easy, *solnyshko*.” His hand immediately settled against Shane’s side carefully, like he could somehow shield the bruised ribs from further damage through sheer devotion alone.

Shane melted into the touch automatically. Ivan suddenly lifted his beer toward Shane from across the room. “To the Canadian.”

Everyone looked over. Shane blinked, startled. Ivan grinned wolfishly. “Most kidnapped civilians cry and piss themselves after two days. You lasted four and told Alexei to go fuck himself repeatedly.”

A few people laughed darkly at that. Shane felt heat crawl up his neck immediately. “I mean,” he muttered awkwardly, “he really sucked.”

“He absolutely sucked,” Marleau agreed solemnly.

“And you still did not tell him anything,” another man added from the couch. “Not even when he cut you. It would have been okay if you had, you know? No one would have blamed you.”

The room quieted slightly at that. Not uncomfortable, just respectful. Shane shifted instinctively beneath the attention, suddenly hyperaware of the healing cuts beneath his borrowed sweater, of the ruined skin across his chest hidden carefully from view. Beside him, Ilya’s hand tightened slightly against his waist.

Ivan nodded from his place next to Marleau. “People talk, when scared enough.” His eyes shifted toward Shane then, something unexpectedly warm settling there beneath all the usual brutality. “You did not.”

Shane swallowed hard. “I just… couldn’t.”

“Couldn’t?” Marleau barked out a laugh. “Shane, most grown men would’ve folded after the first day.”

Ivan leaned forward, elbows resting against his knees. “You know what Alexei’s mistake was?”

Shane blinked. “Kidnapping me?”

“That too.” Ivan snorted. “But mostly, he thought you were soft because you are kind.” His expression sharpened slightly. “People like him think cruelty makes them strong, but it does not. I know I made a joke about you being too nice once, and I’m really sorry. It’s not a weakness. It’s your strength.”

A murmur of agreement rippled through the room.

“You sat there starving and freezing and still protected us,” Marleau added more quietly now. “That matters.”

Shane genuinely did not know what to say to that. Because part of him still felt pathetic about the whole thing. He remembered sobbing in that chair, begging Alexei to stop, crying over a stupid necklace while blood ran down his skin. He remembered feeling so terrified and helpless that sometimes he had genuinely wanted to die, just so it would end. And yet these men were looking at him like he had done something *brave*.

“You are family now,” Ivan said simply.

The words hit Shane so hard he almost stopped breathing. Beside him, Ilya went very still, and Marleau pointed his beer toward Shane lazily. “No offence, kid, but after all that? You’re kind of

stuck with us."

A few people laughed softly. Shane stared at them, throat suddenly tight for entirely different reasons now. Because these were dangerous, violent men. Men who had probably done horrible things. And somehow, impossibly, they had still spent an entire week tearing apart half the fucking city, trying to bring him home.

Fuck.

Shane blinked rapidly, and beside him Ilya immediately noticed. Of course he did. He always did. "Sweetheart?" he asked softly, thumb brushing against Shane's hip beneath the blanket.

Shane laughed shakily once. "Sorry," he mumbled. "This is just a really weird way to get adopted."

That finally broke the tension completely. The room erupted into laughter, even Andrea hiding a smile behind her wineglass.

"You were adopted the second you threatened Alexei while actively bleeding out," Marleau informed him.

Shane snorted softly, smiling despite himself. Ivan reached over and squeezed his shoulder once. "You did good, Shane."

And somehow, hearing that nearly made Shane cry harder than the kidnapping itself.

After a while, conversation dulled, but no one moved to leave. Eventually, Ilya looked around. "There are enough guest rooms here. Anyone who wants to stay, stays, *da?*"

Everyone nodded, and Marleau shot him a look. "What do we do with Alexei?"

Ilya had debated that internally, ever since leaving his brother in the dark basement. He had spent the days while Shane was gone split between missing him, and imagining the most painful torture methods once he got Alexei within grasp. And now he had him. And he was frozen.

He knew that once he got down there, he wouldn't be able to hold back, anger getting the better of him - but there was something annoying in how his brain seemed unable to process that he actually had him *now.* He felt Shane's fingers caressing his wrist, and looked down. His eyes were closed, he had been dozing next to Ilya for a while now. But even now, half asleep, his body somehow instinctively knew to comfort him.

He looked back up at Marleau. "For now? Nothing. We leave him there, and let him rot. All his men are dead, he is alone. And he knows it. So, he will talk shit to piss me off, and then try to bargain. And I'm not fucking interested in hearing his voice right now."

Marleau nodded, glancing at Shane. “I think-, If you wouldn’t mind of course, that we would all like a turn. Before you kill him.”

A few dark chuckles spread through the room at that, though there was still something ugly simmering beneath them, something furious and deeply protective. Ilya huffed softly through his nose. “Take a number.”

“That is not a no,” Ivan noted with satisfaction.

“Mhmm.” Ilya glanced down at Shane again, fingers absentmindedly combing through his hair. “Depends how generous I am feeling.”

“I think you’re plenty generous” Shane mumbled sleepily against his shoulder.

The room immediately softened at the sound of his voice. Shane’s eyes were still closed, clearly barely conscious, but apparently awake enough to contribute commentary anyway. Ivan barked out a laugh, and Shane startled slightly against Ilya before relaxing again once fingers immediately smoothed through his hair soothingly. Ilya looked down at him with such unbearable fondness that Ivan smiled into his beer. “You two are adorable.”

“You jealous?” Shane murmured without opening his eyes, making Ivan giggle.

Eventually people started drifting toward guest rooms or couches, with unfinished drinks still in hand. Andrea bullied at least three injured men into taking painkillers. Ivan stole all the good blankets, while someone turned the music lower.

And slowly, the house settled.

Ilya stayed where he was for a while longer, just holding Shane against his side and listening to him breathe. As if his brain had not fully accepted yet that Shane was really here. Warm and alive and safe.

Mine, something inside him whispered again, softer this time. No longer possessive in a violent way, just relieved. Eventually Shane stirred properly, blinking sleepily up at him. “Why are you looking at me like that?”

“Like what?”

“Like I’m a lost soldier that returned from war.”

Ilya’s expression flickered slightly. “You did.”

That wiped the teasing from Shane’s face instantly. He reached up carefully, fingers brushing against Ilya’s wrist. “Hey.” Ilya leaned down automatically at the quiet tone. Shane pressed a tiny kiss against the corner of his mouth. “I’m okay.”

Ilya kissed him back gently. “Come,” he murmured eventually. “Bed.”

Shane immediately perked up slightly. “That’s the smoothest thing you’ve ever said.”

“I am literally helping you walk.”

“Still counts.”

Ilya rolled his eyes fondly, but slid an arm carefully around Shane's waist anyway, helping him stand. Shane hissed immediately when his ribs protested, instinctively clutching tighter to Ilya's shirt. "Easy," Ilya whispered.

"Your definition of easy is unreliable."

"Slander."

Even exhausted and injured, Shane still somehow managed to keep talking. Ilya found himself absurdly grateful for it. The sound filled up parts of him that had gone hollow during the last week. They made their way upstairs slowly, Shane practically glued against his side the entire time, occasionally stopping dramatically on the stairs just to sigh like a Victorian heroine, until Ilya threatened to carry him. Which Shane had firmly denied with an angry frown on his face, given that Ilya wasn't fairing that much better. But Ilya caught his longing glance, and couldn't wait until he could carry him around again - hopefully in the near future. Even if his angry frown was adorable.

Inside the bedroom, Shane stopped in the doorway. The room still looked mostly the same. The sheets had been changed, and it looked untouched - which it was, Ilya himself not having been back since *that night.* But the atmosphere lingered anyway, memories layered strangely over the space now.

Shane went quiet, and Ilya noticed immediately. "*Malysh*?"

Shane swallowed. "Weird."

"Yes."

Because this had been the last place Shane had felt safe before everything happened, and Ilya stepped closer slowly. "We do not have to stay here tonight. We can leave right now, and go somewhere else. Another bedroom, or a whole other house. We can leave Montreal and never come back. Whatever you prefer."

Shane looked at him for a long moment before shaking his head. "No. I want to." His voice softened slightly. "I want good memories to win."

Fuck.

Ilya kissed him before he could stop himself. Soft and lingering and probably slightly desperate. Shane melted into it immediately with a tiny sound that nearly destroyed him. When they finally separated, Shane looked suspiciously smug. "You're obsessed with me."

"Unfortunately."

"Mhmm, I think I can live with that."

Ilya guided him toward the bed carefully before suddenly pausing midway through helping him sit.

Shane blinked up at him. "Why do you look like you're plotting?"

"I am thinking."

"That is always dangerous."

Ilya ignored that. “You should have a gun.”

Shane stared at him, before spluttering in shock. “What?”

“A gun,” Ilya repeated. “Small one. Easy to conceal.”

“…I know what a gun is.”

“You fought them.” Ilya’s expression darkened slightly at the memory. “When they took you. You broke a guy’s jaw.”

Shane looked mildly pleased despite himself while rolling his eyes. “Well…adrenaline.”

“I watched the security footage.”

“There was security footage?!”

“Yes.” Ilya’s mouth twitched faintly. “And for the record, watching you take down someone trained to kill was very hot and impressive.”

Shane choked on air. “Excuse me?”

“You heard me.”

“Ilya.” Shane stared at him in disbelief. “I got *kidnapped*, so it couldn’t have been that impressive to look at.”

“Ah, details. Still very attractive.” Ilya shrugged lightly.

“You’re deranged.”

“I never claimed otherwise.”

Shane laughed despite himself, pain immediately flashing across his face. Ilya crouched in front of him, concern returning full force. “Sorry. Sorry, do not laugh.”

“You’re impossible,” Shane wheezed, before the teasing faded slightly from his face. “You really want me armed?”

“I want you safe.” Ilya reached up, brushing his knuckles carefully against Shane’s cheek. “And after seeing you fight…” He smiled faintly. “You are scarier than I initially thought. You can handle it, and I will feel better.”

Shane hummed noncommittally, before suddenly freezing.

“What?” Ilya asked immediately.

“My phone, *fuck.*” Ilya could see thoughts running wild behind Shane’s eyes, snapping back and forth in panic. “I missed shifts.” Shane sat up straighter immediately before wincing again. “And classes, and Hayden’s probably losing his fucking mind, and Rose definitely thinks I’m dead because she watches way too many true crime documentaries-”

“Shane.”

“And my phone is gone, and I can’t even explain because what the fuck am I supposed to say? ‘Sorry I disappeared for a week, got kidnapped by Russian mob boss’s brother, be back soon’?”

“*Shane*.”

Warm hands settled carefully against his face. Shane finally looked up properly, breathing uneven.

“I will buy you a new phone,” Ilya said calmly. “Tonight, if necessary.”

“That’s not really the issue.” Shane laughed weakly, scrubbing a hand over his face. “People are probably worried.”

“You do not have to tell them the truth,” Ilya said softly.

Shane looked at him quietly for a moment, as if debating whether he even *could*. But the truth wouldn’t help, Ilya knew. Because what would he even say? ‘*Hey, sorry I disappeared, I was tortured in warehouse for a week because my boyfriend’s homicidal brother wanted revenge?’*.

Normal people did not survive stories like that. But if Shane decided to try the honesty route, Ilya would be by his side. Finally, Shane sighed softly. “I’ll tell them I got really sick.”

Ilya frowned slightly. “That simple?”

“What else am I supposed to do?” Shane muttered tiredly. “If Hayden sees me right now, he’s either going to call the police or start crying.”

“Probably both.”

“Yeah.” Shane looked down at his hands. “I just… I don’t want anyone looking at me like I’m broken.”

The room went quiet, and then Ilya tilted Shane’s chin upward carefully. “You survived something horrific,” he said softly. “That does not make you broken. It makes you strong.”

He could see tears start to gather in Shane’s eyes. “Still,” he whispered after a moment, “I think I want to keep this ours for now.”

Ilya nodded immediately, no hesitation. “Then it stays ours.” He pulled out his own phone, and shot Marleau a message regarding a new phone, as well as transferring Shane’s old phone number to it. His old phone was probably still somewhere at the office, but given that Sergei had been the last one to have it, Ilya would rather throw it in the river. Then he looked up at Shane, “You will have a new phone tomorrow morning. Then we can figure out what you want to say.”

Shane nodded, but Ilya could see that he was still overthinking, so he aligned them on the bed, tangling their limbs as much as their wounds allowed. He couldn’t make the pain and the stress go away. He couldn’t solve all the problems that have risen because of his brother’s greed. So, he did the only thing he could really do. He held Shane close.

And as they drifted off to sleep, he whispered sweet nothings into his hair, mixing Russian and English, as well as promises to never, *ever*, let him go. And just before sleep took them, he felt more than heard Shane mutter into the crook of his neck, “Do not think that you’re off the hook for apparently having cameras in here, and filming us having sex without me knowing. I want to watch it.”

Ilya smiled despite himself, giggling softly. “Freak.”

“Mhmm, your freak.”

Chapter End Notes

come yap with me on twt

Chapter 15

Chapter Summary

> Because downstairs sat his brother. His actual brother. Not merely an enemy, not some abstract monster disconnected from memory, but the same boy who had once curled up beside him beneath heavy blankets during thunderstorms while their mother stroked their hair and promised that one day things would be different.

Chapter Notes

> Finally, the Alexei chapter. :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The gun looked strangely innocent in Ilya's hands.

Not harmless. Nothing designed to end a life could ever truly look harmless to him anymore, not after growing up around weapons the way other children grew up around kitchen utensils and bedtime stories, but small enough that for one absurd second he found himself thinking of how easily his mother could have hidden it inside her purse all those years ago, back when she still whispered about escape like it was something holy and reachable, instead of fantasy destined to rot beneath Moscow soil.

Shane sat cross-legged on the bed bathed in sunlight, swallowed by one of Ilya's hoodies, bruises peeking above the collar in ugly blue-purple that still made nausea twist violently through Ilya every time he looked too long. The sight of those bruises felt carved directly into his nervous system now. Permanent. Every mark left behind by Alexei had become something Ilya carried too.

Shane watched him quietly while Ilya checked the chamber again despite already having done it twice. "You know," Shane said eventually, voice rough with lingering exhaustion, but already sounding so much more like himself than yesterday, "most couples buy each other flowers."

Ilya huffed a soft laugh despite himself. "Flowers are less practical."

"Depends on who you're trying to kill."

God. Even half-healed and exhausted, Shane still managed to sound like sunshine wrapped around razor blades. The thought hurt, but everything hurt lately. Not just physically, though the stab wound in his abdomen certainly protested every movement, now that adrenaline had long since abandoned him, leaving behind only stitches, deep bruising and the unpleasant awareness that Andrea was probably moments away from materialising through the wall to scream at him if he moved wrong. No, this ache sat somewhere deeper, somewhere behind his ribs where grief and rage and guilt had become so tangled together that Ilya no longer knew where one ended and the next began.

Because downstairs sat his brother. His actual *brother*. Not merely an enemy, not some abstract monster disconnected from memory, but the same boy who had once curled up beside him beneath heavy blankets during thunderstorms while their mother stroked their hair and promised that one day things would be different.

Different.

What a cruel fucking word.

"Baby?"

Ilya blinked, dragged sharply back into the room by Shane's voice, only now realising he had gone still staring at the weapon in his hands. "Sorry," he murmured.

Shane's expression softened instantly in that unbearable way it always did whenever Ilya looked even slightly fractured. "Where did you go?"

Moscow.

Bathroom tiles.

Scattered pills.

Twelve-year-old Ilya screaming loud enough to shred his own throat apart.

Instead, he only crossed the room slowly before sitting beside Shane on the mattress, careful of both their injuries, and placed the gun gently into Shane's waiting hands. The contrast nearly made his chest cave in - a weapon resting against healing cuts and bruised knuckles.

Shane held it carefully, brows furrowing slightly in concentration while Ilya adjusted his grip, his fingers wrapping around Shane's wrists instinctively, unable not to touch him whenever possible now, as though some terrified animal part of his brain still believed Shane might disappear the second contact broke. "You keep your finger away from the trigger unless you intend to shoot," Ilya murmured quietly. "And you never point it at something you are unwilling to kill."

Shane swallowed once, visibly feeling the seriousness settle over the room. "You trust me with this?"

The question hit harder than expected, because *trust*… trust had become such a dangerous thing. Sergei had carried Ilya on his shoulders as a child. Had patched scraped knees and taught him how to hold a knife properly and sat beside him after their mother died, while Alexei screamed at walls and broke furniture in grief so violent it frightened even their father.

And still Sergei had betrayed him. Trust had become a wound lately.

And yet… "There is nobody on this earth I trust more than you."

Shane's face cracked around the edges, eyes burning bright with sudden emotion, and Ilya reached for him without thinking, thumb brushing beneath his eye before tears could properly fall. "*Solnyshko*…"

"I'm okay," Shane whispered too quickly.

Lie. Beautiful, fragile *lie*.

Ilya leaned closer until their knees touched. "I am giving you this because I cannot survive watching someone take you from me again."

Shane's eyes went wet instantly, glancing back down at the gun eventually, quieter now. "What if I panic?"

"You won't."

"You sound weirdly confident considering I cried because the yogurt container was difficult to open this morning."

"It was unfairly sealed."

Shane giggled softly, and *God*. Ilya wanted to preserve that sound somewhere permanent. Instead, he leaned forward and pressed a kiss carefully against Shane's forehead, lingering there for just a second longer than necessary, because he could.

"Fear does not make you weak," he whispered against his skin. "But if anybody ever puts hands on you again, I want you to be able to protect yourself while I make my way toward you."

Shane stared at him for long moment before quietly asking: “Are we going downstairs now?”

The warmth drained out of the room instantly, like shutters slamming closed behind his ribs. Because downstairs waited Alexei, and every step toward that basement felt like walking deeper into a grave Ilya had been digging since childhood.

Still, he nodded once. “Yes.”

The holding cell looked the same. Men lined the hallway the moment they descended the stairs, conversations quieting immediately at the sight of Shane walking beside Ilya instead of hidden safely upstairs where everyone clearly wished he was.

Walking not behind him, but *beside him.*

Ilya noticed several of them noticing that too. *Good*.

Shane moved slowly because of his ribs, one hand occasionally brushing the wall for balance, but his chin stayed lifted stubbornly high regardless, bruised throat exposed above the hoodie collar like a challenge. Pride twisted painfully through Ilya’s chest.

So did guilt.

Because none of this bravery should ever have been necessary.

Marleau straightened first. “Boss.”

Ivan’s eyes immediately flicked toward Shane. “You sure he should be down here?”

“No,” Shane answered before Ilya could. “But unfortunately, I make terrible life choices.”

“That explains dating him,” Ivan muttered.

“Excuse you,” Shane said, visibly offended. “He’s gorgeous.”

A startled laugh nearly escaped Ilya before the basement door opened. Then everything inside him curdled black again.

Alexei sat exactly where they had left him yesterday.

Ropes wrapped tightly around his wrists, keeping his arms behind the chair in deliberate irony that nobody had needed to verbalise. Blood crusted dark beneath one eye where Ivan had introduced him to concrete during transport. And yet still, the fucker smiled when he saw them. Especially Shane.

“There’s my favourite hostage.”

Shane snorted softly. “You desperately need new material.”

Alexei ignored him completely, gaze dragging lazily across Shane’s bruises like he still had some claim to them. “You look better rested,” he observed conversationally. “I was beginning to worry my hospitality had exhausted you permanently.”

Something hot and ugly detonated behind Ilya’s ribs. He crossed the room before thought could intervene and kicked the chair hard enough that it screeched backward across concrete. Alexei grunted sharply as the ropes strained.

“You do not speak to him.”

Alexei looked up lazily despite the position. “Or what?”

Ilya hit him.

No finesse, no control. Just years of grief and rage condensed into bone and flesh and violence. His fist connected with Alexei’s jaw hard enough that blood splattered instantly across the floor, and the room fell silent.

Alexei laughed. Actually laughed. “Good to see you still got it.”

Ilya hit him again. And again. Each impact snapping Alexei’s head sideways while memories flashed violently behind Ilya’s eyes between punches.

Alexei teaching him how to pick locks.

Alexei standing in front of him with split knuckles after beating a boy twice his size for mocking their mother.

Alexei screaming after finding her body.

Alexei holding him for days afterwards, while Ilya vomited from crying too hard.

Then another memory layered over them.

Shane tied to chair.

Sobbing.

Begging.

And suddenly Ilya couldn’t tell whether he was trying to punish Alexei or erase him entirely.

“Boss.” Marleau finally caught his wrist.

Breathing hard, Ilya stepped backward. Alexei spat blood onto the concrete and smiled through red teeth. “You always did have anger issues.”

“You always did enjoy hearing yourself talk,” Ilya spat back.

“That’s because I’m usually the smartest person in the room.”

“I think you hit his head too hard, baby,” Shane said quietly from behind Ilya. “He’s delusional.” Alexei’s eyes found him immediately again, obsession settling over his expression in a way that made Ilya feel murderous all over again.

“You know what I missed most about you?” Alexei asked Shane.

“I was hoping the answer was ‘nothing.’”

“The attitude.” Alexei sighed dramatically despite blood dripping down his chin. “Very entertaining.” His eyes darkened slightly. “Especially when you cried.”

The knife appeared in Ilya’s hand before conscious thought caught up. He drove it straight through Alexei’s leg, all the way through to the chair.

Alexei screamed.

The sound echoed beautifully through the basement. “There,” Ilya whispered shakily while Alexei gasped around the pain. “You owe it to Shane, don’t you think? To let him hear *you* scream and cry, you fucking piece of shit.”

Blood streamed down the chair legs in steady crimson lines. Shane didn’t look away, and it briefly froze Ilya in his tracks. Because he should look away, should recoil from this world, from the violence and brutality of it all. Instead, he stood there, pale and bruised and *unflinching*. Gaze locked onto the bleeding leg, with a look not of disgust or fear. But determination.

And God help him, part of Ilya understood exactly why.

Alexei breathed hard through clenched teeth before laughing weakly again. “You know,” he rasped toward Shane, “he used to cry after hurting people when we were children.”

“Alexei,” Marleau warned quietly, going still against the wall, and Ilya felt something twist deep beneath his ribs.

“But then our father fixed that eventually.” Alexei smiled at Shane through blood. “Now look at him. All he needs is some *discipline*.”

Ilya ripped the knife free brutally, and Alexei hissed in pain, trying to conceal it. “You want a turn?” Ilya asked Marleau and Ivan without looking away from his brother. Marleau studied him for a long second, then slowly rolled his sleeves upward.

“Oh,” Alexei murmured through bloody teeth. “Democracy.”

The next hour became monstrous. Not theatrical, or cinematic, like in action movies. Just *ugly*.

Marleau knew exactly where to press, where to strike, how to make nerves light up with agony without killing him too quickly.

Ivan preferred blunt force. Knees, ribs, jaw. The sick crack of bone became rhythm beneath basement lights.

And through all of it Alexei kept speaking mostly to Shane, like even now, he still viewed Ilya merely as obstacle standing between himself and whatever fascination he had developed toward the boy who refused to break for him. “You know,” Alexei coughed after Ivan drove his boot into his

stomach hard enough to nearly tip the chair over completely, “I was actually quite gentle with you at first.”

Ilya’s vision flashed white, but Shane answered before he could. “You punched me in the face on day two.”

Alexei hummed thoughtfully. “Right. That was because you were annoying.”

Ilya stepped forward again, grabbing Alexei’s jaw hard enough to force eye contact, not saying a word. Alexei smiled slowly despite blood coating his teeth. “Jealous?”

Ilya drove the knife into his shoulder suddenly, Alexei wailing and trashing violently as blood soaked through his shirt. “Yes, actually.” Ilya whispered.

For one terrible moment, while Alexei’s blood soaked into his hands and the knife trembled in his hand, Ilya thought of his mother standing barefoot in their kitchen in Moscow, sunlight catching on the little gold cross that now rested permanently against Ilya’s own chest. She had once held both her sons by the face and whispered that they were still good boys, despite the bloodline they had been born into. That there was softness in them worth protecting. And God, what would she see now? One son almost dead on a basement floor, and the other seconds away from murdering his own brother with enough hatred in his chest to black out the world around him.

Ilya suddenly remembered Alexei at nine, laughing so hard milk came out of his nose while their mother pretended to scold him through her own laughter, and the memory hit with such unbearable tenderness that it nearly split him open. Because somewhere beneath the monster tied to that chair had once been a boy who carried Ilya home after he scraped his knees. A boy who used to point at stars in the sky talking about all the countries he wanted to visit. A boy their mother had kissed goodnight.

And Ilya wanted to kill him anyway. Not quickly, not mercifully. He wanted Alexei to suffer for every scream torn out of Shane’s throat, for every bruise, every cut, every hour spent freezing and alone. The violence inside him felt endless. Inhuman. And not for the first time since he was twelve years old, Ilya found himself wondering if his mother would look at him now and finally understand that both of her sons where way beyond saving.

Then Shane spoke softly behind him. “Baby.”

The nickname nearly shattered him more effectively than any weapon could, and Ilya closed his eyes briefly. Because down here beneath fluorescent lights, blood and old grief stood the boy he loved, calling him something gentle while his brother bled at his feet. And somewhere far away, inside a memory, his mother was still whispering *run*.

Run.

Run.

But nobody ever truly escaped this family.

Not Alexei, and certainly not Ilya.

“Leave us,” he said suddenly.

Marleau frowned immediately. “Boss?”

“Now.”

Neither man argued. Ivan squeezed Shane’s shoulder briefly on his way out before the basement door shut behind them, leaving only the three of them together beneath the buzzing lights. Silence settled heavy afterward.

Alexei stared between them slowly. “Dangerous decision.”

“No,” Shane replied quietly. “The dangerous decision was kidnapping me.”

Alexei leaned forward slightly despite the restraints digging bloody grooves into his wrists behind the chair. “You know what I still find fascinating?” His gaze stayed fixed on Shane again. “You genuinely believe he’s different from our father.”

Ilya went utterly rigid, but Shane didn’t, answering without hesitation, “He is.”

“You say that because he loves you.”

“No,” Shane said softly. “I say it because he would rather die, than become *you*.”

Something dark flickered across Alexei’s face, then vanished. “He told you about our mother.”

Shane stayed silent, and Alexei laughed once beneath his breath, tired and bitter. “Of course he did.” His eyes slid toward Ilya. “Did he also tell you she loved me more?”

Ilya lunged before thought could intervene. The chair crashed violently sideways as he slammed Alexei against concrete wall. “Do not fucking talk about her.”

Alexei smiled bloodily inches from his face. “So emotional.”

“You drove Sergei against me.”

“Yes.”

“You helped destroy this family. *My family*. Why?”

“There was never family here.” Alexei’s voice sharpened suddenly. “Only you, playing pretend at survival. Acting as if you somehow made it out.”

And there it was, the fundamental difference between them. Because Alexei had survived their childhood by hollowing himself out until nothing remained except ambition and cruelty wearing human skin. While Ilya, against all logic, had survived by continuing to love people anyway.

Sergei, Marleau, Ivan, *Shane*... his mother.

Even Alexei once.

Especially Alexei once.

“I heard him scream.” Ilya’s breathing turned uneven. “I listened to him cry while you hurt him and I could do nothing.”

“And?”

The single word hit like gasoline across open flame, and Ilya grabbed the knife again. This time he *carved*. Not clean enough to kill, just enough to ruin. Alexei screamed properly now as the blade opened flesh across his chest.

Again.

Again.

Again.

“You wanted to erase me from him?” Ilya hissed through shaking breath. “Then I will erase you from the fucking earth.”

Blood soaked his hands, his sleeves, the floor beneath them. Alexei panted harshly before suddenly laughing again through the pain. “You know what he screamed the most?” Ilya heard Shane’s sharp intake of breath. Alexei’s eyes glittered cruelly through swelling bruises. “Your name.”

Ilya’s knife shook violently.

Alexei smiled wider. “Over and over and *over*.”

Something wet struck Ilya’s cheek. *Tears*. He had not even realised he was crying.

“Ilya.” Shane’s voice came through, soft and careful. Ilya turned slightly toward him, desperate to see him.

But then Alexei moved.

Too fast.

One second he was restrained and at Ilya’s mercy, the next suddenly free, rope dangling loose from blood-slick wrists before Alexei slammed bodily into Ilya hard enough to drive him into the concrete wall. Pain exploded instantly through Ilya’s abdomen as damaged stitches tore, making him gasp sharply.

Alexei’s hand wrapped around his throat. “I should have killed you years ago,” Alexei snarled directly into his face.

Ilya slammed him backward once. *Twice*. Trying to get a grip to push him away, desperately pushing into his wounds with his fingers, to distract him and make him *hurt.* But before he could do anything, Alexei drove his knee directly into the stab wound, and agony detonated white-hot through Ilya’s body.

He folded instinctively with a broken sound, falling to his knees at his brother’s feet, who suddenly stood there with Ilya’s knife in his hand. *Fuck, when had he taken that?* Alexei grabbed a fistful of Ilya’s hair and yanked his head backward violently while pressing the blade against his throat.

“See?” Alexei panted harshly. “Still weaker.”

Ilya barely heard him through the pain roaring in his ears. Alexei ran the knife almost softly down Ilya’s throat, as if enjoying the view.

“You should run, little hostage.” He said to Shane with a smile on his face, eyes never straying from Ilya. Ilya’s vision blurred, the pain turning everything into sharp, broken flashes rather than a single coherent moment. Shane’s presence flickered at the edge of it all, too close and impossibly far, like something he had already failed to reach. Alexei’s voice sounded distant, almost amused, but what cut deeper wasn’t the risk of the blade at his throat. It was the certainty forming inside Ilya’s mind, slow and suffocating, that this was going to end exactly the way Alexei wanted. He was going to die here, useless and bleeding, and Shane would be left behind with no one strong enough to stop what came next. The thought didn’t just hurt, it settled in like guilt he couldn’t ignore. He tried, briefly, *desperately*, to push himself up again, to fight through the weakness dragging him down, to do anything that wasn’t surrender, but his body betrayed him with a brutal honesty he couldn’t argue with. There was nothing left in him that could win this. Only enough strength left to lose in slow motion, and to understand, with sick and terrifying clarity, that whatever happened to Shane after this would be because Ilya wasn’t strong enough to prevent it.

And then suddenly-

A gunshot.

The sound exploded through the basement so violently, that it seemed to split reality itself apart, warmth immediately splattering across Ilya’s face. Alexei jerked once, the grip on Ilya’s hair loosening.

Ilya looked up, and caught the truly morbid sight in front of him. Half of Alexei’s head was *gone*.

For one impossible second nobody moved, then Alexei collapsed dead, hitting the floor. Ilya stared at the body, and at the blood, before finally looking up.

At *Shane*.

Shane, who stood several feet away with both hands still wrapped around the gun exactly how Ilya had taught him in another room of this basement what felt like lifetimes ago, arms shaking violently from adrenaline. The weapon slipped from Shane’s fingers and clattered against concrete. “I…” Shane swallowed hard, eyes wide in panic, locked onto Alexei.

Ilya got up on wobbly legs, and crossed the room instantly. Ignoring pain, ignoring blood, ignoring the still warm corpse of his brother on the basement floor. Because despite everything, despite memories and grief and the terrible little boys they once had been, Alexei had still chosen his ending *himself* the moment he had put hands on Shane. Ilya grabbed Shane’s face almost desperately, smearing Alexei’s blood all over his cheeks. “Are you okay?”

Shane shook his head once, then suddenly burst into tears. Raw and wrecked and terrified. “I thought he was going to kill you,” Shane choked out. “I thought he was actually going to kill you and I couldn’t…” His breathing fractured apart. “I couldn’t watch that happen.”

Ilya pulled him close immediately despite both their injuries, Shane clung back hard enough to hurt. “I’ve got you,” Ilya whispered shakily into his hair. “*Moya lyubov*, I’ve got you.”

Behind them the basement door burst open as Marleau and Ivan rushed back inside with guns drawn. Both froze instantly at the sight of Alexei dead, and Ilya bleeding, barely standing and desperately clinging to Shane, who was sobbing against his chest. Looked at the discarded gun on the floor.

Marleau blinked once slowly. “Well,” he said finally. “That certainly solved the problem.”

Ivan stared at Alexei’s body. “Holy shit.”

Shane laughed weakly through tears against Ilya’s shoulder. “Yeah,” he hiccupped. “Apparently I’m very pro-gun rights now.”

A broken laugh escaped Ilya despite everything, then pain crashed through him hard enough that his knees nearly buckled. Marleau caught him immediately. “Okay,” he said firmly. “Romantic trauma bonding moment over. Andrea is going to murder all of us.”

Shane finally pulled back enough to look properly at Ilya again, blood and tears streaked across bruised cheeks beneath basement lights. *God he was still so beautiful.*

Still reaching for him despite everything. “You okay?” Shane whispered.

Ilya looked past him briefly toward Alexei’s body lying motionless on concrete floor. His brother. The boy their mother had done everything in her power to protect, the last remaining piece of his childhood now reduced to blood and silence and bone.

Grief twisted through Ilya so sharply he almost couldn’t breathe around it, but then Ilya understood with horrible clarity that if given the choice again, he still would have let Alexei die every single time, before risking Shane. The realisation should have horrified him more than it did, but instead he only looked back at the man in front of him and answered honestly.

“No.”

Shane nodded slightly like he understood completely.

Then he reached down blindly until he found Ilya’s hand, and held on tight.

Andrea finally stopped pressing at Ilya’s abdomen with the kind of sigh usually reserved for catastrophes and stubborn children. “Congratulations,” she said flatly, peeling off her gloves. “You are somehow still alive despite making every medically incorrect decision available to you tonight.”

Ilya leaned back against the couch with a wince. “You say this every time.”

“Because every time you behave like a fucking idiot.” She pointed directly at him. “You are not moving from this couch unless you are actively dying. And if your stitches tear again, I will personally haunt you.”

“Noted.”

She looked like she wanted to throw something at him. Instead, she turned toward Shane, whose knees were pulled to his chest beneath the blanket beside Ilya. “And you,” she said more gently, “Sleep. Eat. Stop shaking.”

“I’m not shaking.”

“You are literally vibrating.”

Shane glanced down at his trembling hands and muttered, “Rude.”

Andrea’s expression softened for half a second before she collected her bag again. “Call me if he starts bleeding through the bandages,” she told Shane while jerking her chin toward Ilya. “And call me if you start spiralling.”

Shane blinked. “Can she even say that as a doctor?”

“I can say whatever I want,” Andrea replied immediately. “Goodnight.”

Then she disappeared, leaving silence settling slowly over the living room. The house had gone quiet hours ago. Most of the *Bratva* had finally gone back to their respective houses, and somewhere in the basement beneath them, Alexei’s body still waited to be dealt with. Neither of them acknowledged it.

Shane curled closer underneath the blanket instead, carefully fitting himself against Ilya’s side while staying mindful of bruised ribs and fresh stitches. Usually, Ilya would immediately pull him fully into his lap anyway, unable to resist touching him for more than a few seconds at a time, but tonight he only rested one hand lightly against Shane’s hip, like he was afraid of holding too tightly.

That hurt Shane more than he expected. Because Ilya looked exhausted in a way Shane had never seen before. Not physically, something deeper. Like tonight had hollowed him out from the inside and left only guilt behind.

For a while neither of them spoke.

Then quietly, almost too quietly, Ilya said, “You should not have had to do that.”

Shane’s throat tightened immediately. There it was. Not anger, somehow that would have been easier. But grief sat all over Ilya instead, heavy and quiet and impossible to fight. Shane stared down at the blanket pooled across their legs. His hands still felt wrong. He kept remembering the recoil of the gun against his palms, the sound afterward, the blood that had splattered across the room. He wondered vaguely if he would hear that noise in his sleep for the rest of his life. But none of that was the part making him feel sick.

It was Ilya’s face afterward. That horrible look when he stared at Alexei’s body. Shane swallowed hard. “You were going to kill him.”

Ilya went still beside him. “*Da*.”

Shane nodded slightly, eyes burning suddenly. “And I just-, I took that choice away from you.”

Immediately Ilya turned toward him sharply. “Shane-”

“You were conflicted.” The words started spilling out before Shane could stop them. “I saw you down there. You hated him, but he was still your brother and I just…” His breathing started shaking again. “I just shot him.”

Ilya stared at him like Shane had said something incomprehensible. “You think I am upset because you killed him?” he asked quietly.

“Aren’t you?”

The silence stretched too long, before Ilya reached up suddenly and cupped Shane’s face with both hands despite the pull it caused through his injuries, holding him so carefully it almost hurt worse. “*Moya lyubov*,” he whispered, sounding genuinely devastated. “I am upset because you thought you had to save me.”

Shane’s eyes filled with tears, but before he could say anything, Ilya continued. “I should have protected you from all of this,” Ilya continued softly, thumb brushing beneath Shane’s eye. “I promised you that just yesterday, and-” His voice cracked slightly. “And tonight I put you in a situation where your only way of keeping me alive, was to kill someone. You should never have to do that.”

“He was going to slit your throat.”

“Yes.” Ilya’s expression twisted painfully. “And you saved me.”

“But he was your *brother*.”

The words landed between them softly, and Ilya closed his eyes briefly. When he spoke again, his voice sounded older somehow. “My brother stopped existing long before tonight.”

Shane shook his head immediately. “No, that’s bullshit. You loved him once.”

Something flickered across Ilya’s face then. Brief and terrible. “*Da*,” he whispered. “I did.”

The room fell quiet again, except for rain against the windows, while Shane rested his forehead carefully against Ilya’s shoulder. “I keep thinking about your mom.”

Ilya tensed almost imperceptibly, but Shane continued anyway because the thoughts had been clawing through him ever since he pulled the trigger. “You said she wanted both of you safe. Together.” His voice wavered. “And now one of her boys is dead because of *me*.”

Immediately Ilya pulled back enough to look at him properly, horror flashing across his exhausted face. “Do not do that.”

“But maybe this is better,” Shane whispered, tears finally slipping free. “Maybe now she can hate me, instead of you.”

Ilya went completely still against him.

Shane laughed weakly through tears. “Seriously. It’s fine. I can take it.” His chest hurt horribly from trying to breathe through the crying, but he kept going anyway. “If somebody has to be the villain in this story, maybe it should be me. Because you already carry too much guilt and maybe this way your mother can still love you, and if she’s angry that one of her babies died then she can blame me instead. Then you don’t have to worry, and I can carry this for you.”

For one awful second Ilya simply stared at him, then something in his expression shattered completely. “No,” he said immediately, violently enough the word almost echoed. “No, absolutely not.”

Shane startled slightly, while Ilya grabbed his face again almost desperately now, eyes bright with sudden tears. “You do not carry this for me. Do you understand?” His voice shook harder with every word. “You do not stand there and make yourself a monster so I can feel clean. I will not allow it.”

“But-”

“You saved my life.”

“You loved him.”

“And I love you *more*.” Ilya’s breathing turned uneven afterward, like even saying it that forcefully had ripped something open inside him. “I would choose you,” he whispered shakily. “Every time. Every single fucking time.”

Shane broke completely then, a sob tearing out of him before he could stop it, and immediately Ilya pulled him close despite both of them hurting, wrapping arms around him carefully beneath the blanket while Shane cried into his chest. “I’m sorry,” Shane choked out. “I’m sorry, I’m sorry-”

“Do not apologise.” Ilya pressed his mouth hard against Shane’s hair. “Never for surviving. Never for saving me.”

“But he was all you had left.”

For a moment Ilya said nothing at all. Then very quietly, with tears finally slipping free down his own face too, he admitted, “No.” Shane pulled back slightly, and Ilya looked at him with something unbearably soft and ruined in his eyes. “I have you.”

Shane reached up shakily and touched Ilya’s cheek, wiping away tears with clumsy fingers. “But your mom-”

A startled laugh escaped Ilya despite everything. Wet and broken and exhausted. “She would have loved you,” he whispered.

“You don’t know that.”

“I do.” Ilya smiled faintly through tears. “You are gentle with wounded things. She trusted people like that.”

Shane’s throat tightened violently.

Ilya leaned forward slowly until their foreheads rested together beneath the blanket. “And if she saw tonight,” he whispered shakily, “she would not blame you for protecting someone you love.”

Shane looked down. “You can’t know that.”

“No.” Ilya’s hand slid into his hair gently. “But I know she loved us enough that she wanted us alive.” His voice cracked again. “And you kept *me* alive.”

That silence afterward felt sacred somehow. Heavy, tender, and full of grief too large for either of them to hold properly. Eventually Shane whispered, “I was so scared.”

Immediately Ilya’s arms tightened around him. “I know.”

“I thought he was actually going to kill you.” Shane’s breathing trembled again at the memory. “And all I could think, was that I finally got you back and then I was going to lose you anyway.”

“You won’t,” Ilya whispered fiercely.

“You can’t promise that.”

“I can promise that I will spend the rest of my life trying.”

Shane started crying again immediately, quieter this time, exhausted tears soaking into Ilya’s shirt while Ilya just held him through it without complaint, fingers moving slowly through his hair over and over and over again like soothing frightened animal back from the brink. Eventually Shane mumbled weakly against his chest, “You know this is deeply codependent, right?”

Ilya kissed the top of his head softly. “*Da*.”

“We should probably see a therapist.”

“Absolutely not.”

Shane let out tiny watery laugh, and for the first time all evening, Ilya smiled properly.

Then he pulled the blanket higher around them both, curled Shane impossibly closer against his heartbeat, and held him there like something precious.

And Shane couldn’t help but think that he would do it all over again. He would kill a man, any man, if it meant keeping Ilya safe. And maybe that made him crazy. But he didn’t care.

Chapter End Notes

Phewwwww, no comment. Heh.

Chapter 16

Chapter Summary

> “This is so stupid.” Ilya groaned, running a hand over his face.
>
> “No, nothing you do is stupid.”
>
> “This is, Hollander, I promise you.”
>
> “Do not ‘Hollander’ me just because you’re nervous. Talk to me.”

Chapter Notes

> I'm bored this weekend, did someone say almost 8k of fluff? Me, I said that.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Two days later, Shane was beginning to feel like a person again.

Not completely. His ribs still complained when he moved too quickly, and every now and then a particularly deep breath reminded him that healing was not the same thing as being healed. But the pain had dulled from something all-consuming into something manageable. It no longer occupied every thought. It no longer dictated every movement.

Which meant, that he finally had enough energy to focus on other things.

Namely, the fact that Ilya Rozanov was driving him insane.

Rain tapped softly against the windows of the living room, turning the afternoon into something quiet and gray. The house itself felt strangely peaceful these days. Most of the *Bratva* had taken a couple of days to rest now that the crisis was over, leaving behind a silence that still felt unfamiliar after weeks of chaos.

Shane had claimed one end of the couch, Ilya had claimed the other. At least, that had been the original plan. Now Shane was halfway sprawled across him beneath a blanket, one of Ilya's arms wrapped securely around his waist despite repeated claims that he needed ‘space to recover’. *The hypocrite.* Shane smiled to himself and shifted slightly closer, but immediately, Ilya looked down. “Careful.”

“There it is.” Shane sighed.

Ilya frowned. “What?”

“The look.”

“What look?”

“The one where you act like I am three seconds away from collapsing dramatically onto the floor.” Shane rolled his eyes.

“You were kidnapped.”

“You were stabbed.”

“*Da*.”

“So why am I the only one being supervised?”

Ilya's expression remained completely serious. “Because you make terrible decisions. Starting by getting to know me, and ending with actually *choosing* to stay.”

The response was so *Ilya* that Shane actually laughed. A mistake, as pain immediately tugged along his ribs. Not much, but just enough for it to tense his features, Ilya's entire posture changing immediately. The arm around Shane tightened slightly, concern flashing across his face so quickly it was almost embarrassing. “Sweetheart?”

Shane groaned. “There. That's exactly what I'm talking about.”

“You laughed and then made pain noises.”

“I just laughed. And this,” Shane gestured towards his body, “this will keep hurting for a little while. Does not mean I want to *laugh* any less.”

For a moment they simply looked at each other, then something softened in Ilya's expression. It happened more often these days. The hard edges were still there, along the sharpness and the danger. But ever since the warehouse, Shane had started noticing moments where exhaustion slipped through the cracks. Moments where grief lived openly behind Ilya's eyes. Moments where he looked less like a *Bratva* boss and more like a man who had nearly lost everything.

Shane knew that look because he had probably been wearing the same one. Slowly, he reached up and brushed his fingers through the curls falling across Ilya's forehead, Ilya leaning into the touch so instinctually, that the movement almost seemed subconscious.

Shane's chest squeezed painfully, because *fuck,* he had missed him. Not in the dramatic, life-or-death way, although God knows they’ve had plenty of those. But no, he had missed him in all the small ways that turned out to matter most.

He had missed sharing space with him.

Missed hearing Russian muttered under his breath while reading documents.

Missed finding him asleep on the couch with a book fallen onto his chest.

Missed the constant, unconscious affection that seemed woven into everything Ilya did. The way he always reached for Shane first, the way he touched him without even realising it. The way he *looked* at him.

God, nobody had ever looked at Shane the way Ilya did. Like every version of him was worth loving, even the ugly and frightened ones. Even the broken ones.

Especially those.

God, he loved this man so much it was honestly becoming a medical concern.

The rain continued outside, the blanket warm around them, cocooning them in a bubble of safety Shane secretly hoped they would never have to leave, even if the thought was silly and unrealistic.

Ilya's heartbeat thudded steadily beneath Shane's ear, as Ilya ran a hand through his hair. “You are staring again.”

Shane smiled. “I know.”

“What are you thinking about?”

For a second, Shane considered lying, then he decided against it. “You.”

A faint blush appeared across Ilya's cheeks almost instantly, and Shane grinned. There it was. The terrifying mafia boss reduced to flustered silence by a single word.

“You are impossible.”

“No.” Shane tilted his head. “I am charming. And by the way, I’m doing absolutely nothing.”

“You are a brat.”

“You like when I’m a brat.”

A reluctant smile finally appeared, Shane taking it as a small victory. For a while neither of them spoke, the silence settling comfortably around them. Not awkward or empty, but *full*. Shane thought there was a very important difference. Some silences demanded to be filled, while others felt complete exactly as they were.

This one belonged to the second category.

Eventually, Ilya's fingers began moving through his hair again, slow and gentle. Almost absentminded in a way that made Shane nearly melt on the spot. It should not have felt this good.

It *absolutely* should not have felt this good, just to have his hair played with.

But after everything they’ve been through, every tiny gesture seemed magnified somehow, every touch feeling precious and stolen, every moment more intense. He turned slightly until he could see Ilya properly. He studied the gorgeous man next to him, from his golden curls, blue eyes and the faint scar on his jaw, to the stubborn line of his mouth, dusted with moles all over, marking all the places that Shane liked to kiss.

Home.

The thought appeared so naturally it didn’t even startle him. Because Ilya *was* home. It wasn’t a place, or a building. It was a person.

Ilya noticed him staring and raised an eyebrow. “What now?”

Shane smiled.

Nothing.

Everything.

The future.

Instead of answering, Shane leaned forward and kissed him. *Softly*. The way rain touched windows. The way sunlight touched skin.

No desperation, no urgency. Just affection. Just *pure fucking love*. Ilya immediately kissed him back, one hand sliding into Shane's hair, the other settling against his side. Careful, always careful now. As though some part of him still expected Shane to break. When they finally pulled apart, they remained close enough that their foreheads brushed.

“I missed this,” Shane admitted quietly.

Something vulnerable flickered across Ilya's face. “*Da*.”

“Even when you're being annoyingly protective.”

“I am not annoyingly protective.”

“You absolutely are.”

“I am *appropriately* protective.”

Shane laughed, and Ilya looked pleased with himself, which somehow made it worse. “You're impossible.”

“Yet you remain obsessed with me.”

Shane groaned, and Ilya giggled. Shane wanted to bottle that sound of pure happiness, simple and uncomplicated, and store it in his heart forever. The sort of careless feelings and openness that had felt impossible only days ago. And as Shane settled back against him, listening to the rain and the steady rhythm of Ilya's heartbeat beneath his ear, he found himself thinking that maybe healing wasn't one big moment after all.

Maybe it was *this*.

A couch, a blanket, and a quiet afternoon with the person you love still reaching for you, when everything was over.

“I have something for you.” Ilya broke the quiet, fingers never stopping their journey through Shane’s hair.

“Hmm?” Shane hummed noncommittally, finding it hard to pull his brain out of the half-fuzzy state it had been lulled into by Ilya’s side. But he forced his eyes to flutter open and meet Ilya’s beautifully blue ones, who were looking at him with surprised seriousness. Shane sobered up, furrowing his brows quizzically.

Ilya took a deep breath, that Shane could feel the shakiness of from where he was laying, and he put a comforting hand on Ilya’s chest. “Hey, it’s okay. Breathe.”

“This is so stupid.” Ilya groaned, running a hand over his face.

“No, nothing you do is stupid.”

“This is, Hollander, I promise you.”

“Do not ‘Hollander’ me just because you’re nervous. Talk to me.”

Ilya took another breath, eyes jumping all over Shane’s face, making him nervous. “I just, *ah* I hate English sometimes… I have something for you. And it is silly, and stupid, and you can laugh it off, *da?* I know that… after everything, it might not be something you would want. I do not want anything to feel… bad for you, okay? And it is not even a proper gift, you cannot give someone the same thing twice, and-”

“*Ilya.”*

Ilya stopped his monologue, gulping in air, looking at Shane with wide eyes. He then reached into the pocket of his sweats, and pulled out something glimmering in the light.

The bracelet.

The very first gift that Ilya had ever given him. The first *claim* he ever laid on him. Shane's eyes watered without his consent, fingers itching to reach for it, to touch it, to beg for Ilya to close it around his wrist again. But he waited patiently, until Ilya was ready.

"I took it off you for your safety, before we-, *that night*. And I have since thought, that while it hurt in the moment, to remove it from you, I do not regret it. Because it is a thing that my brother didn't… tarnish, *da?*"

"Yes." Shane breathed, voice husky already.

"So, if you would allow me, *moya lyubov,* to put it on you again, it would be my honour. But if it triggers… bad memories, I do not want you to push through just for me, okay?"

"Yes." Shane repeated, eyes never straying from the bracelet. "I want it. God, *fuck,* Ilya i want it so much. I want to be yours, I want to feel its weight again."

For a moment, neither of them moved. The bracelet lay across Ilya's palm, silver catching softly in the muted afternoon light filtering through the rain-streaked windows. Such a small thing. Just metal and memory. And yet Shane thought he might cry just looking at it.

Because it wasn't really a bracelet. It was Ilya's hand finding his for the first time. It was the first night he had been looked at like he was something precious instead of something disposable. It was every soft Russian pet name murmured against his skin. Every forehead kiss and every moment that had followed.

It was proof that someone had chosen *him*. And God, Shane wanted it back, the yearning hitting him so suddenly it almost hurt. "I want it," he repeated quietly. "*Please*."

Ilya's expression twisted, not because he didn't want to give it to him. But because he did. Shane could see it all over his face, but there was hesitation there too.

Fear.

Slowly, carefully, Ilya reached for his wrist, then stopped. Shane felt his chest tighten, following Ilya's gaze down. The rope burns were healing, the angry blood-red marks had faded into softer pink lines circling both wrists, evidence of what had happened without the raw brutality of it.

But they were still there, still visible, and Ilya stared at them intensely, until Shane watched something break behind his eyes. His thumb hovered above Shane's skin, not touching, almost as if he was afraid it would hurt. Like he was afraid he had somehow *failed*.

"Oh, baby." The words slipped out before Shane could stop them.

Immediately, Ilya looked away, which somehow made it worse. Because Ilya Rozanov could look death in the face without blinking. But this? This somehow undid him.

"Ilya." His voice came out softer this time, gentler. "I'm okay."

A humourless laugh escaped him. "No, you're not."

"No," Shane admitted, the honesty seemingly surprising both of them. "But I will be."

The room fell quiet, while the world continued turning, and still Ilya looked at those marks like they were his own wounds. “You know what I kept thinking about? In that warehouse?”

Ilya blinked. “What?”

“*That* bracelet.”

His eyes widened slightly, and Shane laughed weakly. “Not immediately. There were kind of bigger problems.”

A tiny smile flickered. *Worth it.*

“But after a while?” His gaze dropped to the silver resting in Ilya's hand. “I kept thinking about how you took it off.”

Ilya’s smile disappeared. “I know, and I-”

“No, *listen*” Slowly, Shane reached out and covered Ilya's hand with his own. The one holding the bracelet. “I think that was the last time I felt safe. Sitting in here with you. And while I mourned not having you with me in that warehouse, I was quietly so happy that you had taken it off. That Alexei didn’t get to rip yet another part of you away from me, that it was *here,* it was *safe,* and all I had to do, was survive long enough for us to come back here. And we *did*.”

The confession settled heavily between them, but Shane wasn’t done. “I never stopped feeling yours. I knew I was yours forever, and nothing Alexei said or did would ever change that. I was just worried, that I’d come back to you and find out I was the only one still holding on. That I would still belong to you in all the ways that mattered, but you’d look at me and see a reminder of what happened instead of the person you loved.” He took a shaky breath. “I was terrified that I’d spend the rest of my life being yours, while no longer feeling like you were *mine*. But that’s not true. We are each others forever, baby.”

Ilya looked devastated. Like Shane had handed him his entire heart and trusted him not to drop it. “Oh, *malysh*.”

The endearment cracked apart halfway through, and Shane felt tears prick behind his eyes. “I want it back.” His voice trembled, as he slowly, carefully, turned his wrist upward.

Offering. *Trusting*. Shane could practically see the battle unfolding behind his eyes. The good memories fighting the bad, the love fighting the guilt. The *need* fighting the despair.

Finally, Ilya exhaled shakily, then reached for him. The touch was impossibly gentle, like he was handling something sacred. His fingers settled around Shane's wrist, letting the bracelet follow in their wake, and fuck-

Shane hadn't expected that.

The reaction hit him instantly. Not desire, at least not exactly, the word somehow feeling too insignificant to describe what was in his heart.

The simple, overwhelming relief of being *found* again.

His eyes fluttered closed, and for a second, he was no longer on the couch, no longer in the living room, no longer carrying weeks of fear and grief and nightmares.

There was only Ilya. Only *warmth*.

Only the familiar feeling of being cared for so thoroughly that it became difficult to separate where Shane ended and where safety began.

The bracelet settled against his skin, the cool metal a steady weight of home. A shaky breath escaped him. Then another. He felt Ilya carefully close the clasp, and the way his fingers lingered afterward. Neither of them moved while Shane stared down at his wrist at the silver. At the *proof*.

And suddenly he was crying, quiet tears streaming uncontrollably down his cheeks. The kind that arrived when something hurt and healed at exactly the same time. The kind that appeared when a wound finally stopped bleeding.

“Oh.” The sound escaped him before he could stop it. His chest, his heart, everything felt too full, and Ilya immediately looked worried.

“Did I hurt you?”

The question was so painfully Ilya that Shane almost laughed. Instead, he shook his head. “No, you idiot. You made me whole again.” His voice cracked.

Ilya's eyes filled with tears instantly, and Shane couldn’t help but fall forward, resting his head on Ilya’s thigh, Ilya’s hands both running through his hair, holding on as if he never wanted to let go.

“Ilya,” Shane whined, not caring how petulant he sounded. “Please.”

“Whatever you want, sweetheart, *fuck,* Shane, whatever you want.”

Shane adjusted himself, so he was laying comfortably sideways on the couch. He then grabbed Ilya’s leg, and gently pulled it up, Ilya getting the memo immediately, lifting both of his legs up from the floor, and laying back against the armrest of the couch. This way, Shane was snuggled and bracketed between Ilya’s legs, his cheek resting against his inner thigh, breathing him in. “Please.”

Ilya’s eyes darkened, and he licked his lips. His reaction urged Shane on. “No… strenuous activity, I promise. Just-, *fuck,* Ilya, just let me hold you? I won’t move, nothing that puts pressure on my ribs, I just *need* you in my mouth.”

“Fuck, fuck, *fuck,* Shane. Okay sweetheart, of course, you can have whatever you want.” Ilya then shimmied out of his joggers and underwear, and Shane adjusted so he was laying right to the side of Ilya’s half-hard cock, his hair brushing Ilya’s pubes. He reached a gentle hand up to grab his cock, and leaned slightly over to *finally* put it in his mouth, with no further preamble.

Normally, he’d tease Ilya a bit, both with his mouth and fingers, but he was desperate to feel it harden in his mouth. He relaxed back against his inner thigh, and closed his eyes, just enjoying the weight in his mouth. Above him, Ilya had reached a hand down to caress his cheeks, clearly running over his freckles, before setting along Shane’s jaw, cradling him while he cradled Ilya.

Ilya kept growing harder, filling his mouth gloriously, until his jaw started to ache with the stretch. Shane never wanted it to stop. His mind was blissfully blank, only thought running on repeat being *Ilya, Ilya, Ilya, Ilya…*

Every now and then, he would suckle on the cock gently, not to stimulate, but to really feel it. Ilya let him, not moving at all, despite Shane knowing it probably wasn't easy. He played with Shane's earlobe, caressing it gently between his fingers as he hummed, "So good for me *kotik,* my good boy."

Shane whined, some spit escaping his mouth and running down to Ilya's pubes. He made a mental note to ask Ilya later what that pet name meant, meanwhile he used his tongue to leave small kitten licks on the cock still in his mouth.

They stayed like that for a while, long enough that Shane lost track of time. Ilya didn't move, didn't urge him to move, just laid there and hummed in pleasure every now and then, a litany of praise in both English and Russian leaving his mouth in a never-ending lullaby, keeping Shane floating without a care in the world.

Eventually, Shane reached a hand up, and ran it through Ilya's pubes and happy trail, before resting at the base of his cock. Not holding, not squeezing, just… there. He started softly sucking at the cock in his mouth, letting his tongue explore more, while he gently scratched his nails through the hair at the base. Ilya whined, muscles of his thighs tensing. Shane had half a thought to pop off, and tell Ilya to relax and just *take it*, but before he could, the hand on his jaw tightened, and a string of Russian curses sounded from above. "Fuck, fuck, *fuck,* Shane don't stop, please just stay like that, fuck sweetheart, I'm-"

With a high-pitched whine, muscles straining as to not buck up into Shane's mouth, Ilya came down Shane's throat. Fuck, Shane couldn't believe it, couldn't wrap his head around how fucking hot it was to see Ilya come undone like this. His own cock twitched in his pants, but Shane dutifully focused on swallowing everything, suckling gently while Ilya rode out his orgasm. Once his cock stopped twitching through the aftershocks, Shane gently let it go, instead now using his tongue to clean up wherever he could reach. Mostly, it was his own spit, and licking around it wouldn't necessarily make the spit disappear, but the *need* to do it was overriding logic.

Once he felt satisfied, he rested his head back against Ilya's inner thigh, nose brushing against his now soft cock, glancing up at him through his slightly teary eyes. Ilya looked absolutely *wrecked*. He was looking down at Shane like he was seeing him for the first time. "Well… that was deeply embarrassing."

"What, you coming from me holding you in my mouth? That was so hot, baby."

Ilya looked at him dubiously, before laughing and shaking his head softly. "You are a menace. You okay?"

"Never better," Shane smirked, kissing Ilya's cock and making him hiss, before gently climbing up to push himself flush against Ilya, his chin on Ilya's pec while Ilya ran soothing circles against Shane's back.

"What about you, *kotik?*"

"I'm good… just really wanted to feel close to you."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes. This is more than enough." And Shane found that he wasn't lying. Sure, his cock was hard, but how couldn't it be with Ilya being so gorgeous and making such beautiful sounds while his

weight stretched Shane's jaw wide. But he had gotten what he wanted, and now he just wanted to cuddle with his boyfriend.

Ilya hummed, and reached down to pull his pants back on, but winced at the strain it put on his abdomen. Shane immediately noticed, and swatted his hand away. Without getting up, he reached a hand down to Ilya's pants, and pulled them up one side at a time, focused on Ilya not moving a single muscle until it was necessary for him to slightly lift his hips. Then, they settled together, their hands finding each other, resting intertwined in Ilya's lap.

Suddenly, Shane's phone rang on the table, Hayden's name flashing on the screen. Marleau had gotten him a new phone, and had someone set it up with the same number, and all of his contacts.

Ilya glanced toward the coffee table as the phone continued vibrating across the wood.

The moment Shane saw Hayden's name, he felt something in his chest tighten, in guilt. Because Hayden had always been a good friend, and Shane had repaid that loyalty by disappearing for over a week and then sending a pathetic text message. A few days ago, he had texted Hayden and Rose a brief explanation. That he was sick, hit by some horrible stomach bug. That he'd gone to stay with Ilya because he didn't particularly want to spend days throwing up alone.

Technically, it wasn't even a lie. Just an insultingly incomplete version of the truth. The responses had arrived almost immediately. Rose had sent approximately twelve messages and three heart emojis, all wishing him a speedy recovery.

Hayden had simply replied 'You better not die.'

Which, translated from Hayden, meant, 'I am worried sick.'

"Want me to answer it?" Ilya asked quietly, looking at the phone.

Shane snorted. "That would go over great."

A reluctant smile tugged at Ilya's mouth. "*Da*. You are right. He would probably try to fight me through the phone."

"Probably?"

The phone kept ringing, and Ilya squeezed his hand once. "Answer it."

Shane groaned dramatically. "You're supposed to be enabling my bad decisions."

"You are hiding from your friends."

"I am recovering."

"No. You are using your recovery as an excuse to not even answer their texts. Rose knows what I do, and Hayden already doesn't like me. Imagine how you would feel, if one of them got a partner, and suddenly stopped answering."

"That's different."

"It is not."

The phone stopped ringing, and three seconds later it started again. Shane stared at it while Ilya raised an eyebrow.

“Fine.” He grabbed the phone and accepted the call.

“Hello?”

“*Ah, you're alive.*” Hayden screamed excitingly, and Shane immediately pulled the phone slightly away from his ear.

“Good to hear you too, Hayd.”

“*You sound awful*.”

“Thank you.” Shane rolled his eyes, even though Hayden couldn’t see him

“*You sound like you've been hit by a truck*.” Something warm settled in Shane's chest despite himself, because beneath the irritation and sarcasm, Hayden always worried first.

“I think I would have preferred it to how this stomach bug has been kicking my ass. But I'm getting better."

"*Uh-huh*."

"I am."

"*That's exactly what people dying from Victorian illnesses say.*"

Shane snorted. "Pretty sure it's gastroenteritis, not tuberculosis."

"*Have you seen a doctor*?"

"Yes."

"*What'd they say*?"

"Rest, fluids, more rest."

"*Any medication*?"

"No, not unless you count tea."

"*Tests*?"

"Yes."

"*And*?"

"And I'm not dying."

Hayden exhaled heavily, and the sound carried so much relief that Shane immediately felt worse for worrying him. But then realised that Hayden would be *much more worried*, if he knew what was actually wrong with Shane. So he let him stress about a mean stomach bug. "I'm sorry I didn't call."

"*You were sick*."

"I still should've."

"*Yeah*."

The agreement caught Shane off guard. "Wow."

"*What*?"

"You usually pretend I'm right."

"*You disappeared for four days*." Hayden sounded exasperated.

"I texted."

"*Four days later*."

"I was throwing up."

"*Still*."

Shane rolled his eyes, and across from him, Ilya looked suspiciously entertained. *Traitor*.

Hayden continued before Shane could respond. "*You know I would've come over.*"

The words were casual, but Shane heard what sat underneath them. The hurt. Not anger, just hurt. And suddenly Shane understood what this conversation was actually about. It wasn't about the illness or the lack of texts. It was about the fact that Shane hadn't called *Hayden.* He'd chosen *Ilya.* "I know."

"*Then why didn't you?*" Painfully direct, and Shane just looked down at his intertwined fingers with Ilya. Because he didn't have an answer. Or rather, he had one Hayden wouldn't like. But he was sick of lying, and he wouldn't lie about this.

"I wanted him."

Silence followed, the kind that always came after uncomfortable truths. Eventually Hayden laughed once, the sound oddly hollow. "*Yeah*."

Shane rubbed at his face. "Hayd-"

"*No, it's fine*."

"It doesn't sound fine."

"*It isn't*." At least he was honest. The words hung between them, and then Hayden sighed. "I *just don't get it.*"

Shane closed his eyes, knowing what was coming. "I know."

"*No, seriously, Shane*." Hayden sounded exhausted now. "*You spent weeks rebuilding yourself after Boston*."

Every muscle in Shane's body tightened. "I know."

"*And now you get sick and the first place you go is his house*."

"He's my boyfriend."

"*That's not what I meant*." Hayden made a frustrated sound, and Shane could practically picture him pacing around his apartment. "*I just wish you'd stop acting like what happened didn't happen."*

The words landed harder than Hayden intended, because Shane had never acted like it hadn't happened. Before the warehouse, he thought about Boston all the time. Thought about it when he couldn't sleep, and whenever Ilya looked at him with too much guilt in his eyes. Thought about it when he noticed how hard Ilya worked to do better. But while he had unpacked that journey with Rose, and most importantly, with Ilya, Hayden had been so closed off, that Shane found it easier to *pretend.* Because he knew, that if he showed any signs of doubt, Hayden wouldn't give him honest advice. No, instead he'd latch onto it, and use it in his ever growing 'Ilya Rozanov smear campaign'.

Hayden kept acting like forgiveness meant forgetting, but it didn't. It just meant choosing something else. "I don't act like it didn't happen."

"*Then why do you keep defending him*?"

Shane stared out the window.

Because he loved him.

Because people were more than their worst mistakes.

Because Hayden only knew one version of the story.

Because if someone judged Shane solely by the worst thing he'd ever done, he wouldn't survive the scrutiny either.

But mostly because Ilya had spent every single day since Boston proving that Shane mattered more to him than his pride.

"I defend him because he's trying."

The line went quiet. "*He hurt you*."

"Yes."

"*And you're okay with that*?"

"No." The answer came sharper than Shane intended. Beside him, Ilya immediately looked over, but Shane shook his head slightly. "I'm not okay with it," he repeated more gently. "I just don't think that's the end of the story."

"*So what*?" he asked finally. "*One apology fixes everything*?"

Shane laughed softly. "No."

"*Then what does*?"

The question hurt, because there wasn't an easy answer, just hundreds of small ones.

Showing up.

Listening.

Learning.

Changing.

Choosing each other every day afterward.

"He does."

"*What does that mean*?"

Shane smiled despite himself.

"It means he keeps trying. It's not one thing, Hayd. That's what you're not understanding. There wasn't some grand apology that magically fixed everything. There wasn't a moment where he said the right words and suddenly all the hurt disappeared. I remember all of it. I remember Boston. I remember how badly it broke me. I remember sleeping on your couch because I couldn't stand being alone with my own thoughts. I remember crying so hard I couldn't breathe. None of that went away." He glanced down at his and Ilya's intertwined hands. "But neither did he."

Shane swallowed. "You keep talking about what happened like it's the entire story, like the worst thing someone does becomes the only thing they're ever allowed to be. And I get why. *God*, I do. Because what happened was awful. But every day since then, I've watched him try. Not because I demanded it, or because he thought it would earn him forgiveness. But just because the idea of hurting me like that again genuinely horrifies him. When I was sick, he barely slept. He kept waking up every few hours to check if I'd managed to drink any water, he sat on the bathroom floor with me in the middle of the night because I felt miserable and didn't want to be alone. He carried me to bed when I was too exhausted to walk properly. And none of those things erase past hurts, I know they don't. But that's not the point."

For a moment, Shane looked over at Ilya. The man beside him looked almost embarrassed by being talked about this way, especially by Shane weaving in the truth from the past few days into the lie he was telling Hayden. Because while ‘sick’ didn’t mean ‘stomach bug’, everything else was true. How attentive Ilya had been. And somehow that made Shane's chest ache even more, making him continue.

"The point is that he listened. The point is that when he realised he hurt me, he didn't spend his time explaining why or making excuses or trying to convince me it wasn't that bad. He just... learned. He changed. He showed up. Again, and again, and *again*. Every single day. And maybe that sounds stupid, but after a while those days start adding up."

He laughed softly. "You know what's funny? Everyone thinks loving someone is about the big moments. The dramatic declarations and grand gestures and all that bullshit. But it isn't. At least not for me. It's noticing that somebody remembers how you take your coffee. It's waking up and finding them still choosing you, and it's realising that when you're scared or sick or exhausted,

they're the person your mind reaches for without thinking. And that's the thing, Hayd. I don't love him because he's perfect. If anything, loving him would be a lot easier if he were. I love him because I've seen every ugly part of him, and I've watched him fight against those parts anyway. I've watched him become softer, I've watched him learn how to trust. I've watched him choose me over and over again, even when it would be easier not to."

Shane's fingers tightened slightly around Ilya's hand. "I know he hurt me. I know that. But I also know what it feels like when he looks at me. I know what it feels like when he holds me. I know how much he loves me. And maybe that's not enough for everyone. Maybe if this was somebody else's relationship, I'd tell them to walk away. I honestly don't know. But I know what *I have*. I know what we've built together. And I know that if I spend the rest of my life beside him, I will never once doubt that I'm loved."

For a moment nobody spoke.

Then Hayden groaned. "*God, you're whipped. That was like, Jane Austen level shit. I think I might puke*."

A laugh escaped Shane. "That's rich coming from you. I've heard you gushing about Jackie for years before she even glanced your way."

Hayden laughed, and for the first time in a long time, it felt unrestrained. *Real.* Some of the tension eased, not all of it, but enough for them to tentatively find common ground again.

"*When can I see you*?"

Shane glanced down at the fading bruises still visible across his wrists. Not yet. *Definitely* not yet. "I'm still pretty wiped out."

"*Tomorrow*?"

"No."

"*The day after*?"

"Hayden."

"*What*?"

"Do you want Thomas to fire us both? Good luck explaining to him that you insisted on catching whatever took me out, and leave him *two* bartenders short. I'll let you know when I feel like a human again."

"*I hate that answer*."

"I know."

"*Promise*?" The question caught him off guard, and he swallowed.

"Promise."

Hayden hummed, and then said quietly, "*I miss you, idiot*."

Something in Shane's chest ached, because Hayden just missed his friend, and Shane had disappeared. "I miss you too."

The silence afterward felt softer, but eventually Hayden cleared his throat. "*Okay. Rest.*"

"I will."

"*Drink water.*"

"Yes, mom."

"*Eat something*."

"I'll try."

"*And if he lets you die from dehydration, I'll kill him.*"

At that, Ilya finally spoke, making his presence known. "Very rude. I am feeding him regularly, and now you are threatening me?"

Hayden immediately barked out a laugh. "*Yes. You should feel threatened.*"

"Terrifying."

"*You have no idea*."

Shane groaned and covered his face. The two men continued glaring at each other through a phone connection for another few seconds before Hayden finally hung up, and for a moment Shane simply stared at the dark screen. Then he set it carefully on the coffee table and exhaled. When he finally looked up, he found Ilya staring at him.

Not in the casual way people looked at each other after a conversation, not even in the familiar, lovestruck way Shane had grown used to. There was something almost unbearably vulnerable in his expression. Like Shane had reached inside his chest during that phone call and touched something delicate.

"Ilya?"

Ilya blinked, then immediately looked away. Which was suspicious, so Shane narrowed his eyes. "What?"

"Nothing."

"That's a lie."

"It is not."

"You literally can't even look at me."

At that, Ilya let out a small, defeated breath, and when he finally looked back, his eyes were bright. Not quite crying, but close enough for Shane to smile gently. "Oh."

Ilya laughed softly, a little embarrassed and clearly overwhelmed. "*Da*."

Shane had been so focused on Hayden, on defending them, and on trying to explain something that felt impossible to explain, that he hadn't considered what it might sound like from the other side. What it might feel like for Ilya to hear someone choose him out loud.

Again.

And again.

And *again*.

"I did not know you were going to say all that." His voice came out rough, and Shane felt heat creep up his neck.

"I was just answering a question." The smile pulling at Ilya's mouth said he absolutely did not believe that, and Shane rolled his eyes. "I hate you."

"You literally just spent five minutes telling Hayden how much you love me."

Shane immediately regretted everything, the idiot looked entirely too pleased with himself. Before he could formulate a proper argument, Ilya reached for him carefully, his hand settling against Shane's jaw. For a second, he simply held him there, studying his face the way someone might study a favourite painting. "You are very beautiful when you are defending me."

Shane groaned. "Oh my God."

"I am serious."

"You are impossible."

"No." Ilya's thumb brushed softly across his cheek. "I am loved. And it feels… very nice, to be loved by you, Shane Hollander."

The words were so quiet that Shane almost missed them. *Almost*. The teasing vanished immediately, something inside his chest cracked open. Because Ilya sounded genuinely surprised by it, as though some part of him still couldn't quite understand how he'd ended up here.

Shane's eyes burned. "You idiot."

A laugh escaped Ilya, small and fond. Shane moved before he could think too hard about it, closing the distance between them and pressing his mouth softly against Ilya's.

The kiss wasn't passionate, it wasn't hungry. Just warm and familiar, like coming home after a long day. Ilya sighed against his lips immediately, the sound carrying so much relief it nearly undid him. When they pulled apart, Ilya chased him instinctively for another kiss.

Then another.

And *another*.

Each one gentle, slow and unhurried. The sort of kisses people shared when they had nowhere else to be, when they simply wanted to exist inside the same moment a little longer. Eventually Shane ended up half sprawled across him again, Ilya's arms wrapped around his waist beneath the blanket. Holding him close.

Ilya buried his face against Shane's hair, and pressed a kiss to his temple, then his cheek, then the corner of his mouth, as though he couldn’t stop. As though affection was overflowing out of him faster than he could contain it.

Then, after a long moment, his arms tightened almost imperceptibly around him. And very quietly, so quietly Shane almost missed it, he whispered, "Thank you."

Shane frowned. "For what?"

Ilya was silent for a few seconds. “For everything.”

Shane felt his throat tighten, and instead of answering, he simply lifted his head and kissed him again. And when Ilya kissed him back, slow and reverent and full of impossible devotion, Shane thought that maybe some people spent their entire lives searching for home without realising it wasn't a place.

After lots of languid kisses had been exchanged, skin caressed and soft words spoken into the space between their lips where breaths were mingling, Shane pulled back with a menacing glint in his eyes. Then he sighed. "I think Hayden likes you more now. Are you warming up to him as well?"

Ilya looked horrified. "Absolutely not."

And somehow that made Shane laugh harder than anything else had all week.

Ilya had spent most of his life being injured alone.

There had been doctors, certainly. Men paid very well to stitch bullet holes and pretend not to notice where they had come from. There had been alcohol, painkillers and cold marble bathrooms stained pink with diluted blood. There had been countless nights spent sitting on the edge of a bed while patching himself together, because admitting weakness was dangerous and dependence was even worse.

It had never been like this.

There had never been anyone looking at his injuries with tears in their eyes. Somebody who frowned at every bruise as if personally offended by its existence. Somebody who treated healing like an act of love. Which was why, twenty minutes later, Ilya found himself sitting shirtless on the edge of the kitchen island while Shane stood between his knees, armed with fresh bandages and the deeply concentrated expression of a man performing open-heart surgery.

"You are glaring at my stomach."

"I am."

"You know it won't heal faster if you intimidate it."

Shane narrowed his eyes at the wound. "I'm willing to test that theory."

A laugh escaped Ilya before he could stop it. God, he was ridiculous. Beautiful and stubborn and *ridiculous*. The bruises decorating his neck had finally begun fading into shades of yellow and green, though they still looked wrong to Ilya. Every mark Alexei had left behind felt offensive somehow, like graffiti on cathedral walls.

Shane peeled away the old dressing with infuriating gentleness, and Ilya barely felt it. The stitches itched more than they hurt now, a constant irritation that made him want to claw at his own skin, but Andrea had threatened to physically restrain him if she caught him scratching again. Which, unfortunately, was a credible threat.

"Looks good," Shane murmured.

Ilya looked down. The wound was angry but healing. Not pretty, but not catastrophic either. Just another scar on a body already crowded with them. Shane's fingertips brushed lightly against the skin surrounding it, not touching the stitches, just tracing the healthy skin nearby.

The touch settled somewhere beneath Ilya's ribs.

"You know," Shane said quietly, "I don't think I've ever actually seen all of your scars before."

Ilya huffed. "There are many."

"I noticed." Shane's thumb brushed over an old bullet wound beneath his ribcage. Then a knife scar. Each touch lingered briefly, as though Shane was cataloguing them like they mattered. Ilya suddenly thought of his mother - not because she had ever seen these scars, as most of them had come… *after.* But because she had once spent an entire evening standing just like Shane now, patching up his scraped knees after he'd fallen from a tree at eight years old, clicking her tongue disapprovingly while insisting he was incapable of surviving five minutes unsupervised.

For one impossible moment, the memory overlapped with the present.

His mother's hands.

Shane's hands.

Love separated by decades.

"You okay?" Shane's voice pulled him back.

Ilya blinked, realising he'd gone quiet. "*Da*."

The lie lasted approximately three seconds, before Shane raised an eyebrow. Ilya sighed. "Just thinking."

"About?"

"My mother."

The answer softened Shane immediately, as though her memory deserved special handling. Maybe it did. Shane finished securing the fresh bandage before leaning forward and pressing a kiss directly above it. And suddenly Ilya found himself unable to remember why he had ever believed *surviving* was enough.

Because surviving had never felt like this.

"Okay," Shane announced, with one last kiss above Ilya's heart. "My turn."

Shane grabbed the ointment, and switched places with Ilya. He discarded his shirt while Ilya stood in front of him applying ointment across healing bruises.

The sight still made something ugly twist inside him, guilt lingering beneath his skin like a second heartbeat. But Shane just hummed contentedly as cool ointment spread across one of the bruises decorating his wrist. "That feels nice."

Ilya stared at him. "You are impossible."

"What?"

"You are treating this like spa day."

Shane snorted. "Sorry my near-death experience isn't matching your desired aesthetic. Can't a girl enjoy some self-care?"

Despite himself, Ilya smiled. "Not much 'self-care' over me doing it for you, love." He carefully smoothed more ointment across Shane's ribs, the skin beneath his fingers warm. Eventually the ointment was finished, the bandages were changed, the wounds were cared for.

And somehow, they ended up standing together in the kitchen afterward, because healing, apparently, required dinner. Shane had declared this with great authority, then immediately requested tomato soup. *Comfort food.*

Ilya was already gathering ingredients when Shane casually mentioned that it had always been his favorite when he was sick. Ilya stopped in his tracks, and for a second, he simply stared at the tomatoes in his hands. Then laughed softly.

"What?"

Ilya shook his head. "My mother used to make tomato soup, whenever I was feeling sick too." A small smile touched his mouth. "Not because it reminded her of home. Quite the opposite actually, she used to joke that every Russian grandmother would personally rise from the grave to haunt her for preferring tomato soup over borscht."

Shane laughed softly.

"My father hated it. He thought it was childish. Too simple." Ilya looked down at the basil beneath his hands. "So naturally she made it every chance she got."

"She sounds stubborn."

A laugh escaped Ilya. "Terrifyingly stubborn."

A small smile touched his mouth. Mama used to make it on nights when she wanted to pretend they were somewhere else. Somewhere warmer, gentler, somewhere fathers didn't come home smelling like blood and expensive cologne and somewhere little boys got to stay little.

For a while, neither of them spoke. Instead, they focused on chopping and stirring, until the pot with soup was bubbling softly on the stove. Shane reached for a spoon, dipped it into the soup, and held it out toward Ilya. "Taste."

Ilya obediently leaned forward. The spoon touched his lips, an array of flavours hitting his mouth. Tomatoes, onions, basil, garlic, a little too much black pepper. *Perfect*.

His eyes widened. "Oh."

Shane looked immediately pleased with himself. "Good?"

"Really good." The memory arrived unexpectedly. His mother standing barefoot in their kitchen, music playing softly from an old radio. Steam fogging the windows while snow fell outside, tomato soup simmering on the stove because she liked it, and therefore everyone else would be eating it too.

For years afterward, he had forgotten the taste entirely. Violence had a way of consuming softer memories. But now they returned, one by one, like birds finally coming home after a long winter. "She used to put too much basil in it," he said quietly.

Shane smiled. "Mine always uses too much pepper."

Ilya looked over. "Ah, that’s where you get your recipe from, then."

"Maybe. Any comments, asshole?"

Their eyes met, and suddenly they were both laughing. Not because it was funny, but because grief was strange. Sometimes it arrived sharp enough to cut, other times wrapped around fondness. And sometimes it arrived looking suspiciously like two boys standing in a kitchen discussing soup.

The rest of dinner came together slowly, while they bumped shoulders constantly and stole kisses whenever they crossed paths. The house gradually filled with warmth, and the scent of tomatoes and herbs. With the gentle domestic noise of two people building something ordinary together. And standing there, stirring soup while Shane leaned against his shoulder and absently traced circles against his lower back, Ilya found himself struck by a realisation so simple it almost hurt.

For years he had imagined happiness as something dramatic. An escape, a victory, a destination. Something earned through suffering, either his own or others’.

But perhaps happiness had been this all along.

A warm kitchen.

Healing wounds.

A pot of soup.

The man he loved humming quietly beside him.

Nothing extraordinary, nothing grand. Just… *peace.*

And somehow that felt infinitely more precious. Because for the first time in his life, Ilya had it, and for the first time in his life, he believed it might stay.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading and loving these boys with me <3 I can't wait to see what more this story will bring. :)

Chapter 17

Chapter Summary

> “My parents want to meet you this Saturday.”
>
> Ilya froze in his grasp, eyes widening dramatically as his jaw dropped in shock. “What?”
>
> “You heard me. They’re visiting Montreal, and want to meet you. If you-, that is, if you want to.”

Chapter Notes

> ENTER YUNA AND DAVID HOLLANDER

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The next week passed quietly, but not uneventfully. Shane's life filled with lectures, grocery shopping, missed alarms, stacks of academic articles spread across Ilya's kitchen table and endless cups of coffee consumed while pretending not to panic about deadlines.

Funny, what perspective could do, as Shane found himself cherishing every second of it.

The bruises decorating his body faded a little more each day. The angry marks around his wrists softened from pink to something pale enough that people stopped noticing them immediately. His ribs still reminded him of their existence whenever he twisted too quickly or laughed too hard, but even that was becoming less frequent.

Healing was strange, because for days after he was found, it had felt impossible. Now, it happened so gradually that sometimes Shane only noticed because he would reach for something automatically and realise it no longer hurt. A week ago, he had barely been able to get out of bed without help, and today he was sitting in a university library arguing with Hayden about citation formats. Life was ridiculous.

"I am telling you," Hayden said, stabbing aggressively at Shane's laptop screen, "that is not APA."

"It literally is APA."

"It looks wrong."

"That's because you're looking at it."

Hayden gasped, and across the study table, Rose immediately looked up from her own work. "Are we fighting?"

"We're always fighting," Shane said.

"Good point." Rose returned to her assignment, while Hayden continued glaring at Shane.

"You look healthier."

Shane rolled his eyes. "Aw, do you think I'm pretty?"

"Don't deflect."

"I'm not."

"You are."

Shane sighed and leaned back in his chair. The library around them hummed softly with the noise of dozens of students desperately attempting to finish semesters that felt simultaneously endless and alarmingly short. Papers rustled, laptops clicked, someone somewhere was eating something that smelled aggressively like tuna. Normal. Everything felt so wonderfully *normal*.

"Yeah," Shane admitted quietly. "I feel better."

Hayden studied him for a moment. "Good."

The simple word settled warmly in Shane's chest. Neither of them mentioned Ilya, but that had become its own strange sort of truce. Not avoidance exactly, just... restraint. Hayden still clearly

disliked him, and Shane still clearly loved him. Neither of them particularly wanted to have the same argument for the seventeenth time.

So instead, they discussed coursework, graduation requirements, the latest disaster at Désir, which they were both excited to return to once the semester was done, and the fact that Rose had accidentally consumed enough Redbull to potentially achieve growing wings.

It was easier, and perhaps, Shane thought, that was enough for now. Although deep down he knew that it was a ticking clock. He hated not being able to be open about his love for Ilya, while Hayden did nothing but gush about Jackie. He hated feeling like his love was somehow *lesser,* just because his best friend couldn't find it in himself to fully trust his decisions.

But for now, Shane turned a blind eye to jokes at his expense, and hoped for the best. Rose had been an absolute sweetheart when it came to diffusing the tension, giving Hayden plenty of push-back when he got too mean.

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"Okay, but genuinely," Hayden had said one morning, dropping into the chair across from Shane with enough force to make the library table wobble. "I still think your taste in men is abysmal."

Shane didn't even look up from his laptop. "Good morning to you too. Maybe you should use that excessive vocabulary for your thesis, instead of insulting my boyfriend."

Rose sighed dramatically from beside him, already rolling her eyes. "We've been here three minutes."

Hayden ignored her. "I just think it's funny."

"No, you don't."

"I do."

"No," Shane said, finally looking up. "You think it's concerning. Which would be sweet if you didn't express it like a dickhead."

Rose snorted into her coffee, while Hayden mostly looked offended. Shane shook his head and returned his attention to the screen, and for approximately twelve glorious seconds, silence reigned.

Then Hayden leaned back in his chair. "So, how's Mr. I Promise I've Changed?"

Shane closed his eyes. "Hayden."

"What?"

"You know his name."

"I do. I just enjoy annoying you."

"You should get a hobby."

"This is my hobby."

Rose looked moments away from throwing something at both of them, while Shane genuinely considered getting a new friend. “Anyway,” Hayden continued, entirely uninvited, “is he still being weirdly perfect?”

Shane blinked. “What does that even mean?”

“It means every time you talk about him lately, he sounds like a Disney prince.”

Rose laughed so suddenly she choked on her coffee, meanwhile Hayden held up a hand, counting on his fingers. “He cooks.”

“Yes.”

“He remembers everything you tell him.”

“Yes.”

“He buys you gifts for no reason.”

“Yes.”

“He apparently spent four days taking care of you while you were sick.”

“Yes.”

Rose snorted again. “You sound jealous.”

“I'm not jealous,” Hayden said immediately. “I'm suspicious.”

“Of what?”

“Nobody should be that boyfriend-shaped.”

Shane was about to answer, but Rose cut him off. “You know Hayd, I feel very bad for Jackie if that’s your standard.”

Hayden frowned. “What standard?”

“The one where a man remembering things about his partner is apparently grounds for suspicion.”

“That is not what I said.”

“You kind of did,” Shane pointed out, shooting Rose a thankful glance. Luckily, Hayden gave up then, and focused back on his thesis. And for now, Shane let the comments slide. For now, he laughed when Hayden rolled his eyes, and changed the subject when the jokes got too close to something real. But deep down, he knew they were postponing an inevitable collision, because someday Hayden would have to spend time with Ilya. And Shane already knew, with absolute certainty, that if Hayden ever made Ilya feel unwelcome, if he ever looked at him and saw only the worst thing he'd ever done instead of the person he *was*, Shane would not sit quietly and let it happen. Because he could take snarky comments and Hayden rolling his eyes, when it was just *him*. But he would never, ever, stand for Hayden insulting Ilya to his face, or in any way making him feel like Shane should be ashamed of him.

By the time Shane got home that evening, the sun was beginning to disappear behind the Montreal skyline. It still caught him off guard sometimes, how easily Ilya's house had become home. At some point over the last few weeks, it had stopped feeling like somewhere he was staying, and had become somewhere he *lived*.

His textbooks occupied every flat surface, his favorite coffee mugs had migrated from his apartment and into the cupboards, his shoes lived beside Ilya's near the front door. His favourite hoodie had vanished three days ago only to reappear on Ilya's body, to Shane's great great delight and endless distraction. There was something deeply unfair about watching the man he loved move through the house wearing *his* clothes, sleeves pushed up to his forearms, the fabric stretched slightly broader across his shoulders than it ever had been on Shane. Every time it happened, Shane found himself staring for far too long, struck by the ridiculous, possessive satisfaction of seeing pieces of himself woven so casually into Ilya's life. As if the hoodie had somehow become proof of what Shane already knew. That he belonged here, that this life belonged to both of them now. And if he occasionally caught Ilya's nose buried in the collar when he thought nobody was looking, well. Shane wasn't exactly in a position to judge. Not when half his favorite sweaters mysteriously smelled like Ilya's cologne these days, and not when that scent alone was enough to make something warm and aching unfurl beneath his ribs. Because somewhere along the way, their lives had quietly intertwined until separating them seemed less practical than untangling two trees that had grown around each other for years.

Shane was halfway through taking off his shoes when his phone rang.

Incoming call: *Mom*.

A smile tugged at his mouth, and answered before the second ring. "Hi, Mom."

"Shane Hollander."

The accusation in those two words was immediate, and Shane laughed. "Hello to you too."

"*You have been ignoring your parents*."

"I have not."

"*You absolutely have*."

"I texted."

"*Three times*."

Shane grinned despite himself, because some things never changed. His mother could guilt-trip people professionally. "I'm sorry."

"*Hmm*."

"You and Dad were travelling."

"*We still own phones, and yet somehow our son acted as if we'd disappeared off the face of the earth*."

Shane smiled and leaned against the kitchen counter. He could practically picture her, one hand on her hip, the other gesturing dramatically despite nobody being able to see it. His father probably sitting nearby pretending not to laugh. The image made his chest ache unexpectedly.

God, he missed them.

"Sorry."

Her voice softened immediately. "*Are you okay*?"

He thought about it. *Actually* thought about it. And found himself smiling, because despite what had happened in the past weeks, the overall answer was crystal clear. "Yeah," he smiled to himself. "Yeah. I think I am."

The silence on the other end felt pleased, almost as if mothers somehow always knew when their children sounded happier. "*Good*."

For a few moments they chatted about their trip, about his thesis, about the upcoming graduation, about whether he was eating properly. The answer was apparently incorrect because she immediately launched into a lecture about vegetables.

Then inevitably the conversation drifted toward the subject Shane had been quietly avoiding. "*So*."

Shane closed his eyes, bracing for the inevitable. "So?"

"*Tell me about them.*"

Shane laughed helplessly. "Mom."

"*What*?"

"You know what."

"*I don't know what you're talking about. You tell me nothing, but a mother's intuition is never wrong. You sound happier.*"

He rubbed the back of his neck, and the ridiculous thing was that he talked about Ilya constantly. To Rose, to Hayden, to the *Bratva.* But somehow talking about him to his mother felt infinitely more terrifying. "His name is Ilya."

"Okay, that's nice. And?"

Shane smiled despite himself. "And what?"

"*Do I have to do all the work*?" His mother sighed dramatically. "*Do you like him*?"

“Yeah." The answer came to him immediately, without hesitation. The softness in his own voice startled him, and apparently it startled Yuna too, because she immediately made a sound. Not words, mostly like a gasp combined with a squeak. The sound mothers made when they discovered important information.

"*Oh, you* really *like him*."

Shane groaned. "Mom."

"*You do*."

He could hear her grinning. "Okay," Shane admitted. "Yes, I *really* like him, okay?"

His mother laughed, and he couldn’t help but join in. Then he looked around the kitchen, at the house, at the evidence of a life built together. And realised he was probably making this significantly worse for himself. "Anyway, it's still new."

The silence that followed was loaded, and then his mother barked out a laugh. A loud one. "*New*?"

"Yes."

"*Shane*."

"What?"

"*How new*?"

"Fairly new."

“*Too new for us to meet him when we come down to Montreal in a couple of days*?”

Shane took a deep breath. “No, probably not too new for that,” he said hesitantly, already regretting it.

“*Perfect. Then we’re going for dinner*."

"Where?"

"*I was thinking that Italian restaurant near your apartment*? *We’ll stop by for coffee first.*"

That made sense, although Shane immediately spotted one major flaw in their plan. "I mean..." he hesitated.

"*Yes*?"

"It’s just that… I don't actually live there anymore."

Shane listened to static silence for a couple of seconds, before his mother found her voice again. "*What*?"

Shane closed his eyes and accepted his fate. "I cancelled my lease yesterday."

When his mother finally spoke, her voice sounded strangled. "*You cancelled your lease, and moved in with your ‘very new’ boyfriend*."

"Yes." Shane winced.

"*And you're still calling this relationship new?*"

"It feels new."

"*It absolutely is not*." Somewhere behind her he heard his father start laughing, loudly. Betrayal ran in the family. "*You're telling me this relationship is 'new' while you're living together?*"

"Technically-"

"*Absolutely not, Shane Hollander.*"

Shane was already laughing. "Mom."

"*No. You don't get to use the word new anymore. New is two dates. New is awkward texting. New is* not *moving in.*"

"We didn't exactly plan it."

His mother continued laughing, meanwhile Shane stared at the ceiling and questioned every life decision that had brought him here. Eventually she calmed down enough to speak. "*Okay. Can we come for coffee at this fairly new boyfriend's house?*"

He buried his face in one hand, and somewhere in another room he could hear movement. Probably Ilya, completely unaware that Shane's mother was currently organising an interrogation, and this time, *he* would be the one in the hostage chair. "We would actually love to just host you for dinner, if you want?"

Yuna hummed over the phone, clearly whispering with his dad trying not to make it obvious. "*We would love that sweetheart. Does Saturday work*?"

Shane glanced toward the hallway, toward the man waiting somewhere in the house. The man he couldn't fucking wait to introduce to his parents. "I'll double check with Ilya, but Saturday sounds great."

They said their goodbyes shortly after, and Shane was stuck standing in their kitchen with a nervous but besotted smile on his face. That's how Ilya found him, entering the kitchen looking immaculate as ever in slacks and a black button-up with the sleeves rolled up. Shane couldn't rule out, that he was maybe drooling.

"Hi sweetheart."

"Hi" Shane leaned in for a kiss, and Ilya obliged him immediately. They'd only been separated for a couple of hours, but they still devoured each other as if it had been weeks. And Shane had to admit, that despite them seeing each other daily, and sleeping in the same bed, he was very… pent up.

Besides the cockwarming-turned-blowjob a couple of days ago, Ilya had firmly shut down any and all of Shane's advances to progress their makeout sessions. Shane had tried everything, from grinding into him in bed, to letting his hands wander while they watched a movie, and even gotten as far as to outright *ask* him – which he had done with flaming cheeks and no eye-contact. But Ilya had been too worried about Shane's ribs, and other healing wounds, and had put a rigid sex-ban in

place until Shane could ‘wash his own back in the shower without sounding like he had run a marathon’.

Shane was not impressed.

But this time, it was him that pulled back first, and he giggled at Ilya chasing his mouth for more. *Hypocrite.*

“My parents want to meet you this Saturday.”

Ilya froze in his grasp, eyes widening dramatically as his jaw dropped in shock. “What?”

“You heard me. They’re visiting Montreal, and want to meet you. If you-, that is, if you want to.” Shane started to slowly doubt agreeing so readily to hosting them, the more he looked at Ilya’s panicked face. Ilya didn’t speak for a moment, which was rare enough that it made the silence feel like something had been dropped between them and was still rolling, still gathering momentum.

Shane watched it happen in real time, the way Ilya’s expression tried to reorganise itself into something composed. It was almost funny, in a cruel sort of way, how a man who could make entire rooms go quiet without raising his voice suddenly looked like he had been asked to defuse a bomb made entirely out of expectations.

“I-” Ilya started, then stopped again, swallowing whatever instinctive response had tried to escape him. His thumb, still resting against Shane’s hip, pressed there a little harder, as if anchoring himself through skin, as if that alone could stabilise whatever was cracking open behind his eyes. “They want to meet me.”

Shane’s smile faltered. “Yeah.”

Ilya exhaled slowly through his nose, and it sounded almost like a laugh that had forgotten how to become one. “And you told them… what exactly? That I am-” He stopped himself, as if even naming it would stain the air. His gaze flicked away toward the window, toward anything that wasn’t Shane’s face. “That I am a normal person?”

Shane opened his mouth, then closed it again. Because Ilya was doing the thing again – the recalibration of reality, where he tried to file himself down into something acceptable, something safe enough to be seen by someone’s eyes without consequence. As if he could sand down the edges of everything he was built from.

“I didn’t tell them anything,” Shane said carefully. “Just that I’m seeing someone. That’s it.”

He could tell it didn’t help. Ilya’s jaw tightened, a muscle jumping there once, twice, like something inside him was trying to find a way out through bone. “Seeing someone,” he repeated softly, and the words sounded almost foreign in his mouth. “You say it like it is… simple.”

Shane reached for him again, slower this time, like approaching a skittish animal that might bolt if he moved wrong. His fingers brushed Ilya’s knuckles. “It is simple.”

Ilya finally looked at him again, and there was something in his eyes that Shane couldn’t decipher. “You think I am…” Ilya searched for the word, and it didn’t come easily. “*Appropriate*?”

Shane blinked. “What?”

A faint, almost humourless curve touched Ilya's mouth. "For your parents."

Shane stepped as far into Ilya's space as he could, the earlier teasing completely gone now, stripped away by the way Ilya was suddenly very still, very controlled, as if he was actively holding something massive in place with nothing but discipline and pride. "That's not-, Ilya, this isn't a test."

But Ilya was already looking past him again, not quite retreating, but withdrawing in a way that was quieter than leaving. "My work," Ilya said, voice lower now, careful in the way one becomes careful when stepping near something fragile that might also explode, "is not something you bring to a dinner table. It is not something you explain between courses. It is not something that makes a father feel… *relieved*."

Shane felt something twist in his chest. Because this wasn't paranoia, and it wasn't arrogance either. It was calculation, the kind Ilya never turned off, the kind that had kept him alive long enough to become what he was, and now quietly poisoned every soft thing that tried to grow around him.

"I don't care what they think about your job," Shane said immediately. "Or whatever version of your job we give them."

That earned him a glance. Sharp. Almost incredulous. "You should," Ilya replied. "They raised you. They will see me and they will decide what I am doing to you."

Shane laughed once, but it came out wrong, thin and frustrated. "You're not doing anything *to* me."

Ilya's gaze dropped, briefly, to where Shane's hand still held his. "That is not how it will look," he said quietly. "People like me do not get to look harmless, we are not the son-in laws that mother gush over."

Shane grabbed Ilya's face until there was no space left for him to hide in anything except honesty. "You're not going there as… whatever you think you are in your head," he said, softer. "You're going there as my boyfriend."

A flicker, almost imperceptible, like a door in Ilya's mind had been nudged and briefly showed light before it tried to close again. "I do not know how to be that," Ilya admitted, and the confession was so quiet Shane almost missed it. His throat tightened. Because Ilya could negotiate with fear, with guns, with entire networks of men who answered to him without question. But this? This ordinary, domestic, terrifying thing of being introduced to parents over polite conversation and dinner - this was where he lost his footing entirely, where all that power became irrelevant.

"Yes you do, because you're already the perfect boyfriend every day. I don't need you to perform," Shane said. "I don't need you to impress them like you're auditioning for some role."

Ilya's eyes flicked up again, and for a second, Shane saw it. The young boy underneath the mask of a powerful man, the one who didn't know where to put his hands when he wasn't holding the world in place.

"I just need you there," Shane finished. "I am not asking you to meet them and defend the fact that you're a *Bratva* boss. We're not telling them that, just like Hayden doesn't know."

“Ah, yes, because Hayden Pike really likes me for me.” Ilya said sarcastically, giving Shane a pointed look.

“Bad example. Rose *knows* what you do, and absolutely adores you.”

Silence stretched between them, but it had changed shape now. It was something suspended, trembling slightly, like a bridge deciding whether or not it could hold weight. Ilya finally nodded once. Small, but certain.

“Saturday,” he said, as if committing the date to memory.

Shane exhaled, relief and worry tangling together in a way he didn’t know how to separate. “Yeah.”

And Ilya, still holding his hand like it was the only fixed point in the room, added very quietly, almost to himself, “I will try my best.”

“They will love you, Ilya. Like I love you.” He put his arms around Ilya’s neck, and drew him into a deep kiss, trying to convey everything that Ilya didn’t always know how to hear out loud.

Ilya had survived assassination attempts with considerably more dignity.

The realisation arrived sometime around noon, while he stood motionless in front of his closet, staring at a navy button-up as though prolonged eye contact might reveal whether it was too formal, not formal enough, or somehow offensively neutral. The shirt, unfortunately, refused to provide guidance.

For several long seconds he simply looked at it, then he looked at the black one. Then the navy one again. Then back to the black one.

"Sweetheart."

Ilya didn't move.

"You're doing it again."

Slowly, he turned toward the bedroom door. Shane stood there holding a mug of coffee, his hair still damp from the shower, dressed in a pair of sweatpants and one of Ilya's sweaters. The sight should have been illegal, because it certainly wasn't helping anything.

"What am I doing?"

"You've been staring at that shirt for ten minutes."

"It’s an important shirt."

"No."

"It is."

"It absolutely is not."

Ilya looked back at the closet. "It's the shirt your parents will remember me wearing when they decide whether or not I am worthy of their son."

Shane pinched the bridge of his nose. "Oh my God."

"What?"

"Do you hear yourself?"

"I do."

"And?"

"And I think I am being very reasonable."

Shane made a strangled sound, but the problem was that he genuinely *felt* reasonable. Because tonight mattered, and not because Shane had put any sort of pressure on Ilya, or because he had any *legitimate* reasons to believe that the Hollanders wouldn't like him, but because somewhere along the way Shane had become the most important person in Ilya's life, and the people who loved Shane therefore occupied a strange and sacred category all on their own.

These were the people who had *made* Shane. The people who had somehow raised a man capable of looking at someone like Ilya Rozanov and see something worth loving. Which meant, that their opinions felt heavier than they probably should.

"Come here."

Ilya frowned. "What?"

"Come here."

Suspicious… very suspicious. But he obeyed anyway. The moment he stepped close enough, Shane grabbed the front of his shirt and pulled him down into a kiss. Slow, warm, and unfairly fucking effective in making his mind go blank. By the time they separated, Ilya found it slightly harder to remember what exactly he had been catastrophizing about.

"Feel better?" Shane asked.

"No."

"Liar."

"Maybe a little."

Shane smiled, and God, there really should have been laws against that smile. "Ilya." The way Shane said his name made something soften automatically. "You know they already love you, right?"

"No."

"They do."

"They have never *met* me."

"No, but I've told them all about you, and they love you because *I* love you."

Despite himself, a laugh escaped him. A small one, but enough for Shane to immediately look pleased with himself. *Manipulative, gorgeous bastard.*

"They love you," Shane continued. "Which means they're already rooting for you."

The statement should have sounded ridiculous, but instead, it lodged somewhere behind Ilya's ribs, because nobody had ever rooted for him before. Not *truly.*

His mother had loved him, fiercely and unconditionally, but she had spent most of her life trying to protect him from a world that seemed determined to swallow him whole.

Everyone else had *expected* things from him, *demanded* things from him, *needed* things from him.

Feared him.

Obeyed him.

Very few people had simply hoped he would be *happy*. And that's why Ilya was terrified of the idea that Shane's parents might have… *high expectations.* Because disappointment hurt more when it came from kind people.

The rest of the afternoon passed in a blur of nervous energy. Ilya prepared and cooked as much as he could, while Shane sat down at the kitchen island with clear instructions to 'sit there and look pretty'.

With every hour, Ilya found himself wondering things he had never expected to wonder.

What had Shane looked like as a child?

Had he always laughed that easily?

Had he always cared so much?

Had he always thrown himself headfirst into loving people?

Had he inherited his stubbornness from his mother?

His sarcasm from his father?

Both?

The questions accumulated throughout the day until Ilya started to worry that he needed to write it down, if he was to have any shot at actually getting answers. Because loving Shane often felt like standing beneath a tree and studying the branches while becoming increasingly more curious about the roots.

And tonight, for the first time, Ilya would finally meet them.

By the time the doorbell finally rang, twilight had settled over Montreal, the house glowing warmly around them with dimmed lights. Ilya hated white and harsh lighting, always opting for softer and smaller lamps, rather than the overhead light fixtures.

Dinner waited in the kitchen while candles flickered softly on the dining room table. Shane reached for his hand, and squeezed it tightly with a warm smile. "You ready?"

No, absolutely not. Not even remotely.

Ilya looked down at their joined hands, then at the front door, then back at Shane. And because lying to Shane had always been impossible, he answered honestly. "No."

Shane laughed. The bastard actually *laughed*.

Then he rose onto his toes and kissed the corner of Ilya's mouth. And before Ilya could argue, before he could list all the reasons for why they could still cancel, Shane squeezed his hand again and pulled him toward the front door.

Shane opened it, and for one absurd second, Ilya forgot how to breathe. Which was ridiculous, as Shane’s parents didn’t even look particularly intimidating. If anything, they looked exactly like the kind of people Shane would come from.

Yuna Hollander was smaller than he had expected, standing beside her husband with one hand curled around the strap of her purse, dark hair falling neatly around her shoulders. There was nothing particularly imposing about her appearance. No hard edges, or coldness. And yet, the moment her eyes landed on Shane, her entire face transformed, the change instantaneous. Like sunlight breaking through cloud cover.

"Sweetheart."

Shane's answering smile was so bright it almost hurt to look at. "Hi, Mom."

Then she was pulling him into a hug, and Shane folded immediately, laughing softly as she fussed over him in the way mothers apparently considered a fundamental human right. "You look thin."

"Hello to you too."

"You need more sleep."

"I sleep."

"Not enough."

"According to who?"

"According to your face."

David snorted, but Yuna ignored him completely. And standing slightly off to the side, watching Shane allow himself to be loved so openly, so naturally, Ilya felt something strange twist beneath his ribs, because nobody in this family seemed embarrassed by affection, and nobody seemed to treat it like a weakness. It simply existed, as ordinary and expected as breathing, as if loving each other loudly was the most natural thing in the world.

Only after several seconds did Yuna finally release Shane and turn toward Ilya.

The smile disappeared. Not entirely, but just enough that Ilya immediately straightened his shoulders. Enough that old instincts stirred awake, and Ilya braced himself for assessment, evaluation, and judgment.

"Ilya." Her voice was calm and measured, but most of all… curious. *I can work with curious.*

"Mrs. Hollander."

Immediately she frowned. "Yuna. I am not that old." Something in her expression suggested this was not a request. "Ilya," she repeated.

He adjusted accordingly, with a small smile tugging at his lip. "Yuna."

Beside her, David extended a hand, and unlike his wife, he smiled immediately. "It's good to finally meet you."

The handshake that followed was firm and steady, but also comforting in a way that caught Ilya off guard. "Likewise."

David glanced between them, then looked directly at Shane. “So."

Shane immediately groaned. "No."

And just like that, the tension fractured, everyone laughing. Ilya invited Shane’s parents further into their home, letting Shane show them around while he put all the food on the table. Soon enough, they were all seated, with wine in their glasses and food on their plates. David served Yuna and himself, and Ilya served Shane before taking food on his own plate, as always. The dining room filled with conversation almost immediately, the kind that moved naturally between topics without anyone consciously directing it.

Travel, school, the upcoming graduation, Yuna and David’s neighbour’s dog.

Stories from Shane's childhood that Ilya knew were being retold for his sake, but he couldn’t find it in him to complain, when it made Shane blush so beautifully in embarrassment and burrow his head in his hands. And the entire time, Ilya found himself studying them. And the more he listened, the more impossible it became not to notice pieces of Shane everywhere.

His mother's determination and his father's dry humour. The way both of them listened when somebody else spoke, and the way they paid attention. The way they *loved*.

And once David had started with embarrassing childhood stories, nothing was stopping him. “Shane used to refuse to sleep unless one of us checked under the bed for monsters first.”

Shane pointed accusingly. “You promised never to tell anyone that.”

“I lied.”

“*Dad*.”

David shrugged. “In my defence, this is extremely valuable information for your boyfriend.”

Yuna smiled into her wine. “You also insisted the monsters were ‘probably just lonely.’ It was very cute.”

Shane looked offended and mortified, and Ilya was dying of laughter. Across the table, a small grin appeared on David’s face, the exact same grin Shane wore whenever he knew he was winning an argument. Ilya felt giddy with the knowledge that that’s where Shane got it from, like every discovery about his parents somehow brought him closer to Shane.

Eventually the conversation drifted naturally into the territory that Ilya had prepared for like a very high-stakes operation.

"So," Yuna said after a while, setting down her wine glass. "How did you two meet?"

Immediately Shane groaned again. "No."

"Why ‘no’?"

"Because you're doing the thing."

"What thing?"

"The parent thing."

"I am having a conversation."

"You’re conducting an interview."

David nodded thoughtfully, but looked at Shane with a small smile. “We’re not ‘interviewing’, Shane, but can you blame us for wanting all the sweet and fun details of a part of your life that seems to make you this happy?”

Ilya felt a lump in his throat. Could they really have spent so little time with them, and seen happiness in Shane’s eyes? Before he could muse further, Yuna looked back at him with a soft smile on her face, and suddenly, Ilya no longer felt like she was trying to evaluate him. But almost just like she was trying to *get to know him*… and that was almost worse.

"We met through mutual friends," Shane answered before Ilya could.

Yuna looked at her son. “Sweetheart."

"What?"

"He can speak, I hope."

"I know."

"Then *let him*."

"I'm protecting him."

"From what?"

"You."

David laughed into his wine, meanwhile Yuna looked scandalised. Ilya lowered his head, hiding a smile, but clearly failed if the way Shane kicked him beneath the table, was any indication.

"So, Ilya, since you are now allowed to speak," she shot Shane a fond glare, "What do you do?"

And there it was, the perfectly reasonable, standard, 'meeting someones parents 101' question, that would shift their worldview entirely, if answered honestly. But luckily, they had prepared for it.

"I work in trade."

Yuna nodded. "What kind of trade?"

"Mostly imports of Russian goods to Canada and America." *Technically not a lie.*

"Like what?"

"Alcohol, mostly."

David's eyebrows rose. "Alcohol?"

"Primarily vodka, since there is such a high demand for good vodka here."

David nodded once, entirely serious. "Thank you for your service."

Shane groaned immediately. "Oh my God."

Ilya startled into laughter before he could stop himself, and Shane's eyes immediately snapped to him, looking absurdly pleased. As if David making him laugh counted as some kind of victory. Which, judging by the expression on Shane's face, it absolutely did.

Yuna hummed thoughtfully. "And you enjoy it?"

The question surprised him, because she sounded like she genuinely cared about the answer. And he couldn't remember if someone had ever asked him that. In his line of work, you mostly didn't really have a choice, so no one bothered to lament over 'what ifs' and trivial things like *enjoying* it.

"I enjoy parts of it."

"Such as?"

He thought about it, and a small smile formed on his lips. "I like solving problems, and feeling like I make a difference." His own answer had surprised him, mostly because he realised that it was

true. He didn't necessarily enjoy the dark sides of the business itself, or the empire that came with it. Sure, it had its perks, and he *liked* his life with all of its benefits and financial stability. And he was *good* at it. But he liked negotiating, and building something solid. The anecdote might fall a little flat when talking about importing vodka, but looking at his actual job? He liked when the *Bratva* needed to strategise in order to acquire a new customer, or expand into more cities. He liked having people rely on him, because they knew that he'd always make it work. He liked being seen as… reliable, and *useful.* Like people could count on him. Those were the parts he actually loved.

The rest of the dinner went by quietly, and before long, Ilya and Yuna found themselves alone in the kitchen, Yuna having insisted on helping with cleaning, and Ilya accompanying her. Shane had tried to fight him on it, but Ilya just brought him a ginger ale, knowing Shane wouldn't want more wine, and insisted he stay and talk with his dad.

Ilya was currently washing dishes while Yuna put the rest of the food away in multiple containers, her system so very *Shane* it made Ilya smile. Yuna caught his eye and smiled back. "I see what Shane sees in you."

"Do you?" Ilya whispered, immediately snapping his mouth shut when he realised he had said that out loud.

"Yes," she looked at him knowingly. "You're a giver. You give attention, care, love, anything that the people around you need, because it makes you feel useful. And Shane needs someone like that in his life, because he doesn't always know how to… *take* what he wants. What he *needs.* His entire childhood was David and I playing a guessing game of what Shane might want, because he would never tell us. He claimed that he never wanted anything enough to *inconvenience* us with it. But you see through the ruse, you see *him.* Shane has always been… antsy and prone to overthinking, but you seem to be a calm presence that grounds him, even when he doesn't realise that he needs it."

Ilya could feel tears prickle in his eyes, but before he could say anything, Yuna continued. "So, thank you."

"Thank me? For what?" He rasped.

"For loving my son in the way any mother wants her child to be loved. Purely, unconditionally, and *proudly."*

Suddenly he understood where Shane had learned it from. That impossible way of looking at people as though he could see straight through every defence they carefully arranged around themselves. The way he reached into the spaces people tried hardest to hide and treated whatever he found there with unbearable gentleness. Shane did it so naturally, that Ilya had started thinking of it as something uniquely his, something strange and miraculous that had simply appeared in the world one day wearing freckles and an infuriating smile.

But no.

It had started here, with a mother who looked at people carefully enough to notice the shape of their loneliness. A mother who loved by paying attention.

Emotion hit him so hard he had to look away, down toward the sink full of warm water and soap bubbles trembling softly around his hands, because suddenly another kitchen rose up inside his memory without permission. Smaller. Colder. Moscow winter pressing white against the windows

while his mother stood at the stove in old wool socks, stirring soup with one hand while using the other to reach back blindly for him whenever he wandered close enough, always needing to touch him somehow, as if reassuring herself he was still there.

You are too quiet today, Ilyusha.

Eat something.

Come sit with me.

And God, she had known him too. Maybe not perfectly, nobody could, but enough. Enough to see every sharp thing growing inside him long before the rest of the world did. Enough to understand that underneath all his anger and silence there had only ever been a frightened little boy trying desperately to become someone nobody could hurt again.

Everything she had done, every meal, every worried glance, every soft hand against his feverish forehead, had been her own clumsy, human attempt at the exact same thing Yuna was doing now. Loving her child so fiercely that it spilled outward onto the people they chose to love too.

For one unbearable moment, the two women overlapped in his mind. Yuna standing beside him wrapping leftovers into containers for them to eat later, and his mother humming softly while hiding extra food in the fridge because ‘my growing boy will pretend he is not hungry at midnight.’ Two mothers separated by continents and languages and entirely different lives, yet somehow speaking the exact same dialect of devotion.

And suddenly grief hit him in a way that felt like it hollowed him out from the inside. Because his mother would have loved Shane, and the certainty of it devastated him. She would have adored the way Shane filled silence with warmth instead of noise. The way he loved recklessly, openly, as though affection was something to spend lavishly instead of guard carefully. She would have fed him constantly and complained he was too skinny, and would have touched his hair fondly and pretended not to notice the way Ilya looked at him like prayer.

And worst of all, she would have been *relieved*.

Relieved that somehow, despite everything, despite the violence and grief and ugliness Ilya had buried himself inside for years, somebody had still found him worth loving.

Ilya swallowed hard, considering escaping to the bathroom, but Yuna stepped closer without saying anything, just briefly touching his arm in that same devastatingly maternal way Shane did whenever he sensed Ilya drifting somewhere dark, and the gesture nearly undid him completely.

Because all his life, love had felt conditional. *Fragile*. Something that could vanish the second he became too difficult, too damaged, too much. Yet somehow Shane had come from people who loved as naturally as breathing. And somehow, impossibly, Shane loved him that way too. For years, he had believed families were things people survived. Something to endure, and eventually, *hopefully*, something to escape. Yet standing here now, having watched the Hollanders tease each other, interrupt each other, and love each other with reckless consistency, he found himself confronted by an entirely different possibility.

Maybe family could be a place you rested.

Maybe family could be safety.

Maybe family could be choosing the same people over and over until one day you wake up and realise they had become part of you.

And Ilya found himself wanting it with a desperation he had never felt this intensely before. Not just wanting Shane, or their house, or the life they were slowly building together. But all of it, including the dinners, the teasing, the *family*.

And when he glanced toward Shane in the dining room, only to discover Shane was already looking at him, smiling softly from across the table as if he could somehow see every thought moving behind Ilya's eyes, something deep inside him settled.

Enough to feel like home.

By the time Shane's parents finally left, the house felt warm in a way that had nothing to do with the heating. The front hallway was still carrying traces of them. His mother's perfume lingering faintly in the air, his father's laughter seeming somehow trapped inside the walls, refusing to dissipate completely. Shane stood by the open front door while his parents climbed into their car, the slightly cold Montreal night wrapping around all of them in the distant glitter of streetlights reflected across wet pavement.

Inside the car, his mother's eyes flickered briefly toward Ilya standing quietly beside Shane, hands tucked into the pockets of his pants. Something softened visibly in her expression then. "Take care of each other," she said softly.

And before Shane could answer, Ilya did. "We will."

The certainty in his voice hit Shane directly in the chest. His mother smiled once, small and deeply emotional in that dangerous mother way that made Shane immediately suspicious she might cry later in private, but his dad finally started driving before anyone could make the goodbye even more unbearable.

For a long moment, Shane and Ilya simply stood there in the cold watching the taillights disappear down the street. Then Shane turned, and immediately launched himself at Ilya. Ilya barely let out a startled noise before Shane grabbed the front of his shirt and kissed him hard enough to stumble them both backward into the house. The front door slammed shut behind them with a loud bang neither of them cared about in the slightest.

"Jesus Christ," Ilya laughed against his mouth.

"They loved you."

"I survived."

“No,” Shane corrected immediately, kissing him again, slower this time, full of something warm and dizzy and unbearably fond. “You charmed them.”

Ilya made a skeptical sound low in his throat, but his hands had already settled automatically on Shane’s waist, pulling him closer until there wasn’t an inch of space left between them. Shane could still feel the adrenaline beneath Ilya’s skin, the tension slowly unwinding now that the evening was over.

“You were so nervous,” Shane whispered, grinning against his lips.

“I was being interrogated by two very polite Canadians.”

Shane snorted. “You think my parents are scary?”

“Your mother is terrifying and your father has your sense of humour. Together they are unstoppable.”

Another laugh escaped Shane, but it dissolved halfway through when Ilya kissed him again. God, somehow the kiss felt different tonight. Not desperate, not grief-stricken, not sharpened by fear or relief or the lingering aftermath of survival. It felt soft, domestic, and familiar. Like kissing somebody after dinner in the house you shared. Like normal fucking people.

For weeks now, everything between them had carried traces of blood and fear beneath it. Even their tenderness had been sharpened by the knowledge of how close they had come to losing each other.

But tonight?

Tonight, there had been wine and teasing and his mother fussing over leftovers while Ilya dried dishes beside her. There had been his dad making terrible jokes while Shane sat pressed against Ilya’s side beneath warm lighting. There had been normalcy settling over the evening so naturally Shane almost hadn’t trusted it. And now Ilya was kissing him lazily in their living room while the silence hummed softly around them.

Their living room.

Their home.

Shane felt almost drunk on it. Eventually Ilya pulled back slightly, forehead resting against Shane’s. His lips were pink and swollen now, his curls slightly messy from Shane’s hands. “I need cigarette,” he admitted quietly.

Shane groaned dramatically. “That cannot possibly be healthy.”

“I am a mafia boss, sweetheart. We stopped prioritising health a long time ago.”

Shane rolled his eyes so hard it physically hurt. “You’re impossible.”

“And yet.”

“And yet,” Shane repeated helplessly, kissing him one last time.

Ilya smiled softly against his mouth. “Go shower. I know you want to.” *Damn him for being right.*

Shane pouted, but Ilya wasn't having it. "Go," Ilya said, swatting lightly at his hip. "Before I stop being nice and start bullying you again."

"Promises, promises." Still grinning, Shane finally headed upstairs.

The shower should have relaxed him, but instead it made everything worse. Warm water poured over his skin while his thoughts spiralled helplessly around the evening, around the image of Ilya sitting at their dining table looking nervous and beautiful and painfully earnest while answering his parents' questions like each one mattered. Around the way his dad had clapped him on the shoulder while leaving. Around the way his mom had looked at Ilya like she could already see what Shane saw.

Around the unbearable domesticity of all of it.

And *fuck*, if Shane didn't want this forever. The want, no, *the need* inside him felt so enormous, that he felt like he would explode if he didn't let it out. By the time he stepped out of the shower, his skin was flushed pink from heat and his pulse felt restless beneath it. He dried himself absentmindedly, barely paying attention while pulling on sweatpants before immediately changing his mind.

No. Not tonight.

He pulled them back off, and looked himself over in the mirror, his cock already half hard against his thigh just from the thought of what he was about to do. He ruffled his hair, prayed that it would look nice once it dried, before immediately thinking that he actually hoped it would be quite ruined – just not by air.

He then walked naked into their bedroom, the soft yellow light from the bedside lamp washing the room gold. The bed was slightly unmade from that morning, one of Ilya's books lying abandoned on the nightstand beside Shane's glasses, tiny pieces of their shared life scattered everywhere without ceremony.

The sight alone nearly undid him, and slowly, Shane crossed the room and knelt beside the bed. He straightened his back, laying his hands flat against his thighs, head bowed. He willed his breathing to quiet, as his knees sank into the soft carpet while cool air brushed against still-damp skin, and beneath the nervousness humming inside him there was something deeper too. Something vulnerable enough it made his chest ache.

Hope.

Because he missed this too.

Missed feeling desired without fear contaminating it afterward. Missed the simplicity of touching and wanting and being wanted back. Missed Ilya looking at him with hunger and not only just tenderness and worry. And he wasn't stupid, he knew that they were far from healed. He was aware that he would need to wait a while longer, before Ilya could throw him around like he used to. But this? They could have this.

So, Shane sat quietly in the warm bedroom, listening for footsteps downstairs, his heartbeat fluttering nervously beneath his ribs while the house settled softly around him, every sound feeling like it brought Ilya closer to him.

And like the good boy he loved to be, he waited.

Chapter End Notes

Heh

Also, I’m going on holiday tmr, so expect a little break in updates :))

Chapter 18

Chapter Summary

> But tonight had made something inside him unravel. Maybe because the evening had felt so devastatingly *ordinary*. Maybe because Shane's parents had looked at him and seen a man worth knowing instead of a weapon pretending to wear human skin. Maybe because for the first time in his life, Ilya could suddenly picture a future so clearly it frightened him.
>
> Or maybe because Shane had looked radiant all evening, all soft smiles and bright eyes and quiet touches beneath the dinner table, and Ilya was only a man after all. A desperately, hopelessly obsessed man.

Chapter Notes

> HIIII
>
> here's 15k of I don't even know what

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Ilya stayed outside for longer than the cigarette, watching the stars. The dinner had gone surprisingly well, and he couldn't quite tame the giddiness overtaking him at the prospect of this not turning out to be a total disaster.

He had really liked David and Yuna, even if their way of acting and *being* was such a whiplash from what he was used to. His phone vibrated in his pocket, and he pulled it out mindlessly.

21:06

Marleau: So, did you survive the in-laws, or did I get a sudden promotion?

Ilya: Like you could do it.

Marleau: Hey, I could absolutely be terrifying and emotionally unavailable in a tailored suit. It can't be that hard.

Ilya: You already are.

Marleau: ❤️

Ilya: Ew, that's gay Marley.

Marleau: Fine….

Marleau: 😘

Ilya: I am revoking your phone privileges.

Marleau: So how bad was it actually?

Marleau: Did they interrogate you?

Marleau: Did the father load a shotgun while maintaining eye contact?

Ilya: No shotgun, we just had dinner.

Marleau: Jesus Christ.

Marleau: Domesticity. The most dangerous battlefield of all.

Ilya: His mother hugged me goodbye.

There was a full minute before the typing bubble appeared again.

21:11

Marleau: …Are you okay?

Ilya stared at the screen longer than necessary while cold night air settled against his skin. The ridiculous thing was that he didn't actually know how to answer that question. Because 'okay' implied stability. What he currently felt was closer to standing too near a fire after years in the cold, skin aching with the shock of warmth.

21:15

Ilya: I think so.

Ilya: It felt… nice.

Marleau: Softie…

Ilya huffed out a laugh despite himself.

Marleau: Did Hollander survive?

Ilya: Barely.

Ilya: His father told embarrassing childhood stories. He was not impressed.

Marleau: Cute, that's a rite of passage.

Ilya: It is.

Marleau: You sound fond about it.

Ilya looked up toward the bedroom window upstairs, warm light glowing behind the curtains, and felt something inside him soften so violently it was almost painful.

Ilya: I am.

Marleau: Ugh, disgusting.

Marleau: Speaking of which, how long until you crack and propose?

Ilya nearly choked on air.

Ilya: Goodbye, Marley.

Marleau: THAT SOON?

Marleau: Fuck, I should start planning the bachelor party.

Ilya: I hate you.

Marleau: No, you don't.

Marleau: Also, for what it's worth… I'm glad it went well.

The message sat there quietly, stripped of sarcasm for once. That alone was enough to make Ilya's chest tighten unexpectedly.

Ilya: Thank you.

Marleau: Don't get soft on me now.

Marleau: See you, boss.

Ilya pocketed the phone, and walked inside, closing the terrace door behind him. The house was quiet, and all lights were off beside the soft glow coming from the bedroom. Ilya took a deep breath, and tried to steady himself.

It didn't work.

The cigarette had taken the edge off his nerves about dinner, but it had done absolutely nothing for the ache that had been steadily building beneath his skin all evening, because the problem was not nicotine. The problem was *Shane*. Shane laughing in their kitchen while stealing pieces of roasted potato straight from Ilya's plate. Shane leaning against his shoulder while introducing him to his parents with that soft, hopelessly fond look in his eyes. Shane casually referring to this place as home, as *theirs*, like it was the most natural thing in the world.

Shane, flushed from wine and happiness and affection, kissing him breathless by the front door after David and Yuna left. And God, Ilya had been trying so hard to behave.

For weeks now, every instinct inside him had been split in two. One half consumed by need, by the relentless craving to touch Shane properly again, to feel him pliant and warm beneath his hands, to hear those sounds dragged out of him until the entire world narrowed down to them alone. The other half crippled by caution, by the memory of bruises around Shane's throat and wrists, by the sight of him trembling in nightmares afterward.

Every time Shane kissed him too deeply, Ilya's body reacted before his brain could interfere. Every time Shane climbed into his lap during movie nights or pressed sleepy kisses against his neck in

bed, desire hit him so hard it bordered on painful. And every single time, he forced himself to pull back before wanting became greed.

But tonight had made something inside him unravel. Maybe because the evening had felt so devastatingly *ordinary*. Maybe because Shane's parents had looked at him and seen a man worth knowing instead of a weapon pretending to wear human skin. Maybe because for the first time in his life, Ilya could suddenly picture a future so clearly it frightened him.

Or maybe because Shane had looked radiant all evening, all soft smiles and bright eyes and quiet touches beneath the dinner table, and Ilya was only a man after all. A desperately, hopelessly obsessed man.

He loosened the top button of his shirt as he moved through the dark hallway, pulse heavy beneath his throat. Upstairs, the bedroom light spilled gold across the floorboards, warm and inviting and dangerous all at once.

His stomach tightened, and he drew in a deep breath. *Control yourself. Go inside, and kiss your boyfriend goodnight, and then go to sleep*.

He reached the bedroom door and pushed it open quietly.

Then stopped breathing.

Fuck, fuck, fuck.

For a moment, his mind simply failed to process the sight in front of him.

Shane knelt beside the bed completely naked, back straight, hands resting obediently against his thighs, damp hair still slightly wet from the shower, leaving droplet travelling down his shoulders, down his chest. The bedside lamp painted his skin gold, softening every line of him into something almost unreal. Beautiful. Waiting.

Waiting for him.

Ilya felt the impact of it physically, his entire body tightened at once, desire crashing through him so suddenly and violently he had to grip the doorframe for half a second just to steady himself. Shane looked impossibly soft like this, vulnerable in a way, and something deep inside Ilya nearly came apart at the seams from wanting.

God.

Fuck, he needed him. The need lived somewhere much deeper than lust now, tangled up with love and relief and devotion until separating one from the other felt impossible. Shane didn't look up, despite clearly having heard Ilya enter, if the way his shoulders stiffened was any indication.

Sitting there, offered so openly it made Ilya's chest ache. And suddenly, all he could think about was how badly they both needed this.

Not just sex.

This.

The surrender, the intimacy, the familiar gravity of slipping back into something that belonged entirely to them. Something untouched by fear or blood or healing wounds. They had tried to repress it, tried to prioritise healing, but tonight they would lose that battle. And Ilya had never been more happy with losing.

He closed the bedroom door carefully behind him, and Shane's breathing changed instantly at the sound. Slowly, Ilya crossed the room, unable to look anywhere except at the man kneeling beside their bed. Every instinct inside him screamed to touch, to grab, to kiss, to overwhelm himself with the reality of Shane being here on his knees, willing to do whatever Ilya wanted.

But underneath all that hunger sat something steadier too. *Control*.

Not the cold, detached kind he wielded elsewhere. No, this was different. Intimate, protective, a structure built carefully between them over time, brick by brick, trust by trust. And Shane responded to it so beautifully.

Ilya stopped directly in front of him, close enough now to see the slight flush spreading across Shane's chest, close enough to notice how hard he already was, resting against his thigh.

"Shane," he said quietly.

Shane swallowed.

Ilya watched the movement with darkening eyes before reaching down, fingers brushing gently beneath Shane's chin. "Look at me."

Shane glanced up then, brown eyes immediately finding his, and the expression that crossed his face nearly finished him completely. Hope, nervousness, want… *trust*.

Shane inhaled sharply, and Ilya felt it happen almost in real time, the subtle shift sliding through him like silk slipping loose. The tension left Shane's shoulders first, followed by something softer blooming across his face, his expression opening beautifully as his focus narrowed entirely onto Ilya.

Fuck, Ilya nearly lost composure right there. Because Shane trusted him enough to let go this easily. Because even now, after everything, his body still instinctively melted toward Ilya instead of away from him, and because Ilya had missed this so badly, he thought it might actually kill him.

"There's my good boy," he murmured before he could stop himself.

Shane's lips parted immediately at the praise, pupils widening. The sight hit Ilya like a shot directly to the bloodstream.

Fuck.

Fuck, they *really* needed this.

He let a finger run across Shane's lower lip, his boy opening up automatically, but Ilya didn't let his finger slip inside. He could see the furrow of Shane's brows at being denied something in his mouth, and he yet again marvelled at how perfect he was. How perfectly they fit.

There were so many things he wanted to do to him, now that the beast inside his chest had finally been released. But they still needed to be careful. They could indulge, and enjoy each others

company, but they couldn't be as rough as Ilya was craving. As *Shane* was clearly craving.

Ilya let go of Shane and backed away into the armchair in the corner of the room. He sat down and let his legs fall open, looking at Shane. Shane, who had not moved an inch besides his eyes flickering hungrily to Ilya's crotch. *So good.*

"So you think that you can just present like this, and then get everything you want? Here I am, trying to be *nice*, trying to help you *recover,* and you think that what? That you know better?" Ilya smiled meanly at Shane, and saw him gulp. But he didn't answer, didn't defend himself. Just stared at Ilya with an open expression that could only be described as 'desperate'.

Ilya tsk'ed. "And now you cannot even answer simple questions. Are you so far down already, *malysh*? Is there nothing in your brain but the need to get fucked? So desperate for me, and I've barely touched you. You truly are a slut, aren't you sweetheart?"

Shane's breath hitched, and he nodded frantically, making Ilya's heart clench. "Please, Ilya. Anything," he whispered, voice raspy and slurred, words clearly escaping him. And Ilya immediately knew that he had to exploit it.

"Anything? Hmm, okay, so we sit here like this, *da*? Talk about our day? Our plans for tomorrow? If *anything* can satisfy you, then why should I even as much as look at you? Why should I touch you?"

"No, no, no, *please,*" Shane's eyes widened in panic, and Ilya swore he could see them glistening from where he was sitting. "I'll do anything you want, just please touch me. Please *claim me*. I need to be yours, fully yours, please Ilya."

Ilya pretended to look thoughtful for a second, before tilting his head looking at Shane. "Crawl to me."

The command was barely out of his mouth, before Shane was already moving, falling forward onto his hands and making his way across the room. Ilya smirked slightly at the arch of Shane's back and the seductive tilt of his hips as he moved. *Teasing brat.*

He let him approach him, and get almost within touching distance, but when his head was inches away from his crotch, he grabbed his hair and pulled him back harshly. "Oh, I'm sorry, did you want something?"

Shane gasped at the sharp pull, the sound catching somewhere between pain and relief, and Ilya watched the reaction ripple through him. His thighs pressed together instinctively on the floor, breathing already uneven, pupils blown so wide that the brown of his eyes was almost swallowed whole by want.

"Yes," Shane whispered, voice wrecked already. "Fuck, yes, I want something. I want *you*."

The words hit low in Ilya's stomach. Shane had always been generous with affection, with praise, with need. But tonight there was something stripped bare about him, something aching beneath every syllable, like this wasn't only about desire anymore. Like he was trying to crawl back toward something they had both been missing for weeks. Ilya's grip loosened slightly in Shane's hair, fingers sliding through damp strands more gently now. "What do you want from me, *moya lyubov*?"

Shane looked up at him like he was starving. “You know.” The answer came embarrassingly fast, almost desperate. “You know what I want.”

“I want to hear you say it.”

A helpless sound escaped Shane’s throat, frustrated and needy all at once. “I want your hands on me. I want you looking at me like *that* again. I want…” He swallowed hard, cheeks flushing darker despite the haze already softening his expression. Shane shifted closer without permission this time, pressing forward until his chin rested on Ilya’s knee, eyes bright and pleading. “Please,” he whispered again, softer now, more vulnerable somehow. “I know we’ve both been careful, I know why, but I miss you. I miss this. I miss you wanting me without getting scared afterward.”

For a second he could only stare at him, struck speechless by how easily Shane always found the exact truth hidden underneath everything else. Because yes, that was exactly it. He had been terrified of his own desire, and of whether he could do this with Shane without hurting him, without making it all worse. And maybe Shane knew that, maybe this entire thing was Shane quietly reaching for Ilya, and showing him that it was okay to reach *back.*

Ilya exhaled slowly, thumb brushing across Shane’s lower lip. “You think I stopped wanting you?”

Shane shivered beneath the touch. “No,” he admitted quietly. “Honestly? That’s kind of the problem. You’re just torturing both of us.”

Despite himself, Ilya laughed softly. The sound seemed to melt some remaining tension out of Shane immediately, his shoulders loosening as he leaned instinctively into Ilya’s hand, eyes fluttering half closed. Beautiful boy. So responsive, so trusting. God, they really had been starving each other.

Ilya looked down at him for a long moment before speaking again, voice quieter now, stripped of most of its teasing. “Come here.”

This time, when Shane moved into his space, Ilya let him. More than that, he reached for him first, gathering him close with both hands, pulling him upward until Shane ended up half kneeling between his legs, breathing shaky against his mouth. And the second their lips finally met properly, weeks of restraint cracked open all at once. Shane made a broken little sound into the kiss immediately, clinging to him like he’d been waiting for this exact moment for years instead of weeks, and Ilya felt something hot and emotional and unbearably fond surge through his chest at the reaction alone. They had kissed many times since. But none of them had felt this monumental, this much like coming *home.*

Eventually, Ilya pulled back, eyes never leaving Shane, who once again looked like was floating somewhere, brain gone quiet in the way it only ever did with Ilya. In the dark of the night, when deranged thoughts felt less so, Ilya had found himself selfishly imagining what it would be like to keep Shane like this. Keeping him down, firmly in subspace with his brain turned off. All pliant and good for Ilya, and Ilya only.

How long could he keep him down?

Would Shane even let him? Did it matter?

Ilya was addicted to the view of Shane looking up at him with half lidded eyes, like no world existed outside of Ilya. His strong, independent and sometimes terrifying boy, becoming a puddle

of *need* at Ilya's feet whenever he wanted. It was intoxicating, and Ilya never wanted it to stop.

He grabbed Shane's jaw, and forced him to look him in the eye. "Get on the bed. On your back, legs bent."

Shane obeyed immediately, and Ilya's cock twitched at the sight. He grabbed a bottle of lube, before stripping himself, and crawling on the bed carefully, settling between Shane's legs, his favorite fucking place on earth. Without further ado, he slicked his fingers, pressing one into Shane immediately, relishing in the sounds coming from his boy. Despite wanting to cherish the moment, he found himself prepping him quickly, but if the sounds and the way Shane was chasing his fingers were any indication, Shane didn't mind.

Before long, Ilya was lubing himself up, finally holding the tip of his cock to Shane hole, and he had to take a deep breath, so he wouldn't come on the spot. God, he had missed this.

Above him, Shane was wiggling in impatience, and Ilya decided to take mercy on him. *But even mercy could be overwhelming*, Ilya thought as he pushed to the hilt in one go, the tight heat enveloping him gloriously, frying his brain completely.

Shane screamed in pleasure and surprise, legs immediately going up around Ilya's waist, squeezing him in place. Normally, Ilya might tease. He might set a gentle pace, until they were both about to go out of their mind. But this time, Ilya didn't have an ounce of patience.

He set a slow but hard pace immediately, the thought of their still healing wounds the only thing stopping him from pounding into Shane with reckless abandon. He angled his hips, so he hit Shane's prostate dead on every time, and leaned down to bite softly at his left nipple, the only one unmarked by healing cuts. Shane threw his head back, and tried to meet Ilya's thrust, but Ilya immediately pinned his hips down with his hand. "No. You move, and I will stop. Just lay there and take it like the gorgeous slut you are."

Shane's eyes rolled back, and he obediently let his entire body go slack, just perfect for Ilya to do whatever he wanted. And fuck, he couldn't wait to throw him around, to fold him in half and let his nails and teeth run over his skin, leaving marks that were *his* and his only.

But in the meantime, he'd have to compromise. As he felt his orgasm approaching, he forced Shane to look him in the eyes. "You have until I come. If you don't manage before then, you're not coming for a week, do you hear me? And don't you dare touch yourself, you're coming on my cock or you get fucking nothing."

Shane's eyes widened, and he nodded dumbly before tightening around Ilya's cock, as if he could force more friction that way. Ilya kept his rhythm steady, but it had been so long since he'd felt Shane's heat around him, that he couldn't make it last even if he tried.

Ilya was almost there, and clearly, so was Shane. But just as Shane's legs spasmed, the telltale sign of his orgasm approaching, Ilya reached down and squeezed the base of his dick *hard*, punching the air out of Shane's lungs, making him whine loudly. "What-, but-, but *Ilya,* I was right there, *fuck.*"

Ilya ignored him, thrusting two more times before emptying himself into Shane's glorious heat, rutting against his ass, riding out his orgasm. All the while, Shane tried desperately to get some friction, squeezing his cock so beautifully in an attempt to stimulate himself, but the firm grip Ilya had on his cock made it impossible. Once he had ridden out the aftershocks, he pulled out and sat

back on his haunches, looking at his ruined boy, with his cock a dark colour resting desperately against his stomach, leaking.

Ilya looked down at Shane's hole, where some of his come had started leaking out, and he reached a finger down, pushing it back in, not willing to let a single drop escape. Above him, Shane was crying, tears of desperation streaming down his face. "You-, y-, you said that I could-, that I could *come*, you *promised."* Shane stammered through his tears.

"Mhmm," Ilya hummed. "I said you were allowed to come, if you *could.* And now I'm done, and you haven't come. So clearly, you didn't want it enough."

"*No,* that's cheating, you cheated. You *stopped* it, I was right there, fuck, I was so fucking close."

Ilya pushed two fingers into Shane again, and immediately grazed his prostate. Shane almost screamed, back arching off the bed, cock twitching. "Are you saying, that I did not make you feel good, sweetheart? That my cock wasn't enough to make you come? So greedy, what more could you possible want? A good slut like you should be able to come when you are *told,* no? What use is a disobedient whore, that can't even do something as simple as *come*?"

*"*That's not-, *fuck,* that's not fair. I tried, I tried so hard."

Ilya cooed at him, fingers still playing inside him, tormenting him slowly, never enough to let him tip over the edge. "I know," he murmured softly. "I know you did. You were so desperate for it, weren't you? Tried so hard to be good and come."

Shane let out another broken sound, eyes glassy and unfocused now, tears clinging to his lashes while he nodded helplessly beneath him. And Ilya smiled, but it wasn't kind. "But sweetheart," he whispered, leaning down until their mouths were almost touching, "that's the problem. You keep thinking this belongs to you." His hand slid down Shane's stomach possessively, fingers curling around the base of his cock just long enough to make Shane gasp. "Your body, your pleasure, your orgasm."

He squeezed once, cruelly, then let go. "But none of it is yours anymore."

Shane actually sobbed at that, hips twitching upward instinctively before Ilya pinned him back down with one hand against his stomach. "You don't get to decide when you come," Ilya continued quietly, voice calm in the face of Shane's unraveling. "You don't get to chase it just because your body wants it badly enough. That's not how this works." His thumb brushed beneath Shane's wet eye, almost tender. "You are *mine*."

Ilya watched the words settle into Shane like hooks, and watched as he broke beneath them with a soft, wrecked sob, his entire body trembling where he lay spread out under him, thighs shaking uncontrollably around Ilya's waist while tears slid helplessly into his hairline. It should have looked ruined or messy.

Instead, it was the most beautiful thing Ilya had ever seen.

Because Shane wasn't fighting him anymore. Every ounce of stubbornness had dissolved into desperate, aching surrender, and Ilya could feel it in the way Shane kept unconsciously opening for him, chasing the movement of his fingers even while crying from frustration. "You hear me?" Ilya murmured, leaning down close enough that Shane could feel the words against his mouth. "You belong to me. Every sound, every tear, every pathetic little plea."

He kissed the corner of Shane's wet mouth almost tenderly before adding, far crueler, "And if I decide you stay desperate, then that is what happens, *da?*"

Shane whimpered so hard it nearly sounded painful. "Ilya," he cried softly, voice cracking apart around the name. "Please, *please*, I can't take it anymore."

"Yes, you can."

"No, I can't," Shane sobbed immediately, shaking his head against the pillows. "I'm trying so hard, I swear I am, I just need…" His breath hitched violently when Ilya curled his fingers again. "Need you, fuck, I need you so bad."

Ilya pulled his fingers slowly from Shane's body just to hear the broken sound that tore out of him. "No," Shane gasped immediately, panic flooding his face again. "No, no, please don't stop, please."

"There he is," Ilya said quietly, almost reverently. "That's my boy."

Shane cried harder at that, teats thick on his lashes now, chest heaving while he looked up at Ilya with complete devastation written openly across his face, and the sight hit Ilya like a blade directly between his ribs. He bent down suddenly and kissed him hard enough to steal the breath from both of them, swallowing the sobs spilling from Shane's mouth while one hand gripped his jaw possessively.

"You did so well for me," he muttered against Shane's lips. "*So fucking well*. Took everything I gave you like you were made for it."

Shane made a tiny, wrecked sound that might have been a thank you, and that nearly killed Ilya outright, because oh, would his boy regret thanking him. "You want to come that badly?" he asked softly, running a finger down the length of Shane's cock.

Shane nodded frantically. "Please."

Ilya nodded, and Shane's entire face lit up, thinking Ilya was going to agree, to finally let him have it. But instead, Ilya kept teasing his cock , and let their eyes meet. "No."

Ilya watched the realisation settle over Shane in slow increments. At first there was only confusion, his body still trembling violently with the orgasm that had almost happened, cock twitching helplessly against his stomach while pleasure continued sparking uselessly through him with nowhere to go, his breathing broken and uneven as he tried to understand.

Then came disbelief, wide blue eyes blinking up at him through tears as if Shane genuinely could not imagine that Ilya would do something this cruel after winding him this tightly, after pulling him apart so thoroughly that Shane could barely keep his thoughts together.

And finally, came the panic.

"No," Shane whispered immediately, voice cracking so hard it barely sounded like him anymore. Ilya let himself fall into the bed next to Shane, legs spread casually, one hand resting on his knee. Shane stared at him in pure disbelief, flushed skin glowing gold beneath the bedside lamp, tears slipping continuously down his cheeks while his chest rose and fell too quickly. God, he looked beautiful like this. Beautiful in the devastating way only Shane could manage, where every

vulnerable thing about him existed fully exposed and somehow trusted Ilya not to destroy it. Which was precisely why Ilya knew this needed to happen.

“A week,” he said quietly.

Shane stared at him as if he had been sentenced to death. “A week?” he repeated faintly.

“You heard me.”

The silence afterward stretched painfully thin before Shane made another broken sound and pushed himself upright on shaking arms, desperation overtaking humiliation so completely that he barely seemed aware of his own nakedness anymore. “Ilya,” he breathed, already crying harder now, words tumbling out unevenly, “please, *no*, you can’t-, *fuck*, please don’t do that to me.”

Ilya felt the plea hook beneath his ribs. It would have been so easy to give in. *Too easy.*

Shane was soft for him in ways nobody had ever been soft for Ilya before, endlessly trusting even now, even while shaking with frustration and need, and the instinct to gather him close and give him whatever he wanted nearly overwhelmed the thin strand of discipline Ilya still possessed.

But underneath the desperation and pent-up hunger and emotional wreckage of the past weeks, there was something else too. A need, not only Shane’s, but also *Ilya’s.*

Because Shane needed to feel owned and safe and wanted again without immediately throwing himself into the deep end hard enough to reopen every wound he still carried beneath healing skin.

And Ilya needed the control of it. Needed the intimacy of denying instead of taking. Needed to feel Shane unravel because of his words alone. “I think you will survive not coming for a few days.” Ilya said softly.

“A week is not a few days,” Shane shot back immediately, voice trembling violently. “That’s sadistic.”

A faint smile touched Ilya’s mouth, though there was very little amusement in it. “*Da*,” he agreed calmly. “It is.”

Shane looked genuinely devastated by how easily he admitted it. “I tried so hard,” he whispered after a moment, and that nearly fucking ruined Ilya, because there was no manipulation in it. No bratty dramatics anymore, just honest hurt. Shane’s gaze had gone glassy and helpless with it, shoulders shaking slightly where he laid next to Ilya, resting his head on Ilya’s chest, still aching for release so badly his entire body seemed unable to settle.

“I know,” Ilya murmured.

He reached out then, brushing his thumb beneath Shane’s eye to catch the tears gathering there, and Shane immediately leaned into the touch on instinct alone. The trust of it made something sharp twist inside Ilya’s chest. “You were so good for me,” he continued quietly. “So desperate. Tried so hard to give me what I asked for.”

Shane made a wounded noise. “Then why?” he asked. “Why won’t you let me?”

Because I need this too.

Because watching you come apart beneath me feels like breathing after drowning.

But what he said instead was, "Because I wanted you to *fail.* Because you wanted to feel *mine,* and it is up to me to decide how exactly I want to give you that." Ilya's gaze softened. "Sweetheart, do you think you can be good and manage this yourself?"

Confusion flickered weakly across Shane's face, then suspicion, then eventually shock. "No," Shane breathed.

"Or," Ilya continued, voice calm enough to feel cruel, "would you prefer some help?"

Shane's entire expression crumpled. "You can't seriously mean a cock-ring," he whispered, sounding genuinely betrayed.

Ilya tilted his head slightly. "Can I not?"

A tear slid down Shane's cheek. "That's so mean."

"And yet," Ilya murmured, reaching forward to curl his hand slowly around the base of Shane's cock again, "look how beautifully you take it."

Shane shuddered violently at that, another helpless sound escaping him as he folded forward, like the weight of wanting had finally become too much to hold upright anymore. And God, Ilya loved him so much it bordered on unbearable.

Shane's face crumpled so beautifully it nearly undid him, like something inside him had been stretched past the point of holding together and was finally beginning to split under the pressure of wanting too much. His lips parted around a shaky breath, tears still slipping silently down into his cheeks where he lay spread against Ilya, thighs still trembling so beautifully.

And still, he shook his head. "No," Shane whispered hoarsely, voice already ruined from crying and begging and being denied over and over again. "No, I can do it."

Ilya stilled for a moment, watching him carefully. Watching the way Shane's cock twitched wetly against his stomach despite the exhaustion beginning to pull at his body. Watching the way he tried to force his legs wider again after every involuntary attempt to close them. Watching the stubbornness underneath all that desperation.

God.

It would have been easier if Shane had asked for the ring. Easier if he had immediately folded and admitted he couldn't handle this alone. But instead, he looked at Ilya with swollen red eyes and the raw, earnest determination of someone who wanted very badly to be good at suffering if it meant belonging harder.

"You think so?" Ilya asked quietly, thumb dragging through the tears on Shane's cheek before smearing them across his skin. "You think you can spend an entire week aching like this and still behave?"

Shane nodded immediately. Too quickly. The movement frantic, desperate. "Yes. Yes, I can do it, I promise."

Ilya almost laughed. Not because it was funny, but because Shane was already shaking apart after less than one evening of denial, pupils blown wide and body twitching every time Ilya so much as shifted above him, and yet he still wanted to prove himself. Still wanted to crawl willingly into the fire if Ilya asked it of him.

“A week is a very long time, *solnyshko*,” Ilya murmured, voice low and dangerous now, fingers reaching behind him and sinking back into Shane with just the tips, slowly enough to make him sob. “Especially for someone this needy. And I will not make it easy for you. You may not be coming for a week, but *I will.*”

Shane made a wrecked sound beneath him, hips trying to chase the movement before immediately stopping himself, clearly remembering the rules before Ilya even had to correct him. That alone nearly made Ilya lose whatever remained of his restraint.

Because Shane was so fucking *good.*

Shane was letting himself be remade in Ilya’s hands without hesitation, without fear, offering up every ugly, humiliating, desperate part of himself like devotion instead of weakness. “I can do it,” Shane repeated, but his voice cracked badly halfway through the sentence. “Please don’t make me use it. I want to do it right.”

Ilya stared at him for a long moment. The room felt overheated now, thick with sweat and sex and the lingering remains of desperation, soft golden light catching on Shane’s damp skin while tears continued slipping uselessly into his hair. He looked thoroughly fucked already despite not being allowed release, body pliant and oversensitive and exhausted from being dragged to the edge until wanting itself had become painful.

And still he wanted *more*.

Still wanted to *earn it*.

Ilya leaned down slowly until their mouths were barely inches apart, close enough that he could feel Shane’s broken breathing against his lips. “You really want to be good for me that badly?” he asked softly.

The answer came immediately. “Always.”

Fuck.

Ilya closed his eyes briefly, taking a deep breath. When he opened them again, Shane was still staring at him with devastating sincerity, waiting for judgment like it mattered more than oxygen. So, Ilya cupped his jaw carefully, thumb pressing against the corner of his mouth. “Okay,” he said at last, voice rougher now. “Then no ring.”

Shane whimpered softly in relief.

“But listen to me very carefully.” Ilya’s tone hardened immediately, enough to make Shane’s breath hitch. “You do not touch your cock unless I allow it. Not in the shower. Not in bed. Not when you wake up hard and frustrated and thinking about my mouth. You do not come for a week unless I decide otherwise. Understood?”

Shane nodded instantly. “Understood.”

“And if you fail?”

Another tremble passed through Shane’s body. “Then you punish me.”

Ilya’s fingers tightened slightly against his jaw. “Yes. And you do not want this punishment, sweetheart. I can promise you that.”

“I’ll be good,” he whispered. “I swear I will.”

And Christ, Ilya believed him. At the very least, he believed that Shane would do his very best. And Ilya would do his absolute worst.

Day One

Shane woke up hard.

Not unusual in itself. What was unusual was the immediate, crushing awareness that came with it, the sharp memory of Ilya’s voice from the night before wrapping itself around Shane’s throat before he had even fully opened his eyes.

For a few seconds he stayed still beneath the heavy warmth of the blankets, staring blearily at the pale morning light spilling through the curtains while his body slowly caught up to consciousness, and watching Ilya sleeping on his stomach beside him, one arm tucked beneath the pillow, golden hair slightly dishevelled in a way Shane knew the man himself would hate if he could see it. The sight was unfairly soft. Unfairly beautiful.

And painfully, *painfully* domestic.

Shane swallowed hard, his cock throbbing weakly against his stomach just from the memory of last night, already aching with the kind of frustrated sensitivity that made everything feel too tight, too warm, too present. He wanted to touch himself so badly it bordered on humiliating. Instead, he squeezed his eyes shut and tried to think about literally anything else.

Taxes, snowstorms, Hayden’s horrifying protein shakes.

None of it helped.

Beside him, Ilya shifted slightly with a quiet exhale, still mostly asleep, and Shane immediately froze because even that tiny movement dragged the blanket across his naked thigh in a way that made his pulse stumble embarrassingly fast. *God*, this was going to kill him.

Then Ilya spoke without opening his eyes. “Good morning, *solnyshko*.”

The low rasp of sleep in his voice nearly made Shane combust on the spot. “Morning,” he croaked.

One blue eye cracked open slowly, and Shane felt the exact moment Ilya noticed his predicament beneath the blankets. There was no surprise in his expression, and no sympathy either. Just the faintest flicker of satisfaction and amusement. Which, frankly, Shane found deeply offensive.

Ilya reached out lazily and brushed his knuckles once against Shane's cheek. Barely a touch. Affectionate enough to feel intimate, brief enough to be maddening.

Then he sat up, and left the bed.

No kiss, no lingering hand sliding down Shane's stomach. No sleepy teasing. *Nothing*.

Shane stared at his back in disbelief while Ilya stretched slowly beside the bed, muscles shifting beneath pale skin, entirely unbothered by the fact that Shane was currently experiencing what could only medically be classified as psychological warfare.

"You are staring," Ilya observed calmly.

"You're evil."

"Mhmm."

"That wasn't even a denial," Shane muttered.

Ilya glanced over his shoulder then, mouth curving faintly, looking at Shane almost condescendingly, which somehow, impossibly, made Shane even more turned on.

The entire day unfolded like that, teasing in a way that slowly drove Shane insane piece by piece, until by noon he felt strung so tightly with want that even existing near Ilya had become exhausting. Because Ilya did not touch him, or even acknowledge him for more than a glance, for the whole fucking day.

And somehow that was worse than outright torment. It would have been easier if Ilya had spent the day teasing him physically, pinning him against walls and whispering filthy things in his ear, dragging him into subspace through touch and overstimulation and rough hands. Shane understood that language. He knew how to survive it.

This, however, was driving him mad, because Ilya simply… existed around him, acting like Shane was not losing his fucking mind. Around noon, Ilya had settled in the living room with paperwork spread across the coffee table, dressed in dark slacks and a charcoal sweater with the sleeves pushed up to his forearms while he worked through emails and phone calls in Russian with the same terrifying composure he brought to everything else in life.

And Shane, meanwhile, had once again been forced to admit the severity of his competency kink. *Fantastic*.

At one point Ilya gestured toward the kitchen, barely looking up from the document in his hands. "Coffee, please."

Shane blinked from where he sat reading articles for his thesis. "What?"

Ilya finally lifted his gaze then, slow and heavy enough to make warmth immediately coil low in Shane's stomach. "Bring me coffee," he said, voice dropping just slightly into *that* tone. The one that made Shane's spine straighten instinctively. "Like a good boy."

Shane's breath caught embarrassingly fast, which was ridiculous, honestly. Nothing explicit had even happened. The command itself was simple and innocent, but his body reacted instantly

anyway, Ilya's *voice* leaving no room for argument. It wasn't just his boyfriend being bossy for fun, it was the voice he used when he wanted Shane to obey him as his *dom*.

Heat flooded through him so suddenly it made his face burn, something sharp and dizzying unfurling low in his stomach while his cock twitched helplessly inside his sweatpants. And worse, far worse, was the immediate quietness that settled over his thoughts afterward, the strange peaceful ache of slipping obediently into that headspace without even realising it was happening.

Ilya watched him carefully, waiting. Shane stood up before he could think too hard about it. "Okay."

"Thank you."

The praise landed somewhere directly behind Shane's ribs. *God*.

By late afternoon, it had only gotten worse.

"Sit," Ilya had murmured while Shane hovered uselessly around the kitchen trying very hard not to think about the way Ilya's hands looked while chopping vegetables.

And Shane sat, immediately, cheeks burning in humiliation at how easily Ilya could command him around, and Shane reacted instinctively, without thinking. It would probably have been mortifying if it hadn't felt so *good*.

Because that was the thing Shane had never even fully understood himself, before meeting Ilya. Submission was not humiliation to him, it was relief. The profound, aching relief of putting his restless mind down for a while and letting someone else carry the weight of decision and control and thought. And Ilya did it so naturally, so instinctively, that sometimes Shane slipped under before either of them even noticed it happening.

"Eat," Ilya said softly later, placing food in front of him.

Shane obeyed, looking up at Ilya, who clearly knew exactly what he was doing. Shane could see it in the tiny flickers of amusement hidden behind his composure, could feel it every time Ilya's voice dipped lower and steadier while giving him simple instructions throughout the day.

Bring me that file.

Come here for a second.

Stay.

Every single command slid beneath Shane's skin, and meanwhile still, Ilya barely touched him. A kiss to the temple while passing behind the couch. Fingers briefly brushing Shane's shoulder while reaching for a glass. A soft press of lips against his cheek after dinner that lasted all of two seconds before disappearing again.

It was unbearable.

By evening Shane felt permanently flushed, nerves buzzing so sensitively beneath his skin that even hearing Ilya's footsteps moving through the house made his stomach tighten. And still, somehow, beneath all the frustration, aching want and humiliating horniness, there was something

else too. Underneath the denial, control, and the maddening lack of touch, Shane could feel it. The *care* in it. The *calm*.

By the time they climbed into bed that night, he genuinely felt delirious from wanting him. Ilya switched off the bedside lamp and settled beside him beneath the blankets, close enough that warmth radiated between them immediately, but not close enough to touch.

Shane stared into the darkness for almost thirty seconds before cracking. "This is torture."

Beside him, Ilya made a thoughtful sound. "You have been tortured, so you would know."

"This is emotionally worse."

Ilya snorted, looking at him with amused eyes. "Only you would say that, Shane Hollander. Come here."

Shane moved instantly, practically throwing himself across the mattress before catching himself at the last second and settling carefully against Ilya's chest instead. Strong arms wrapped around him immediately, steady and warm and devastatingly… polite.

No wandering hands, no escalation.

Just being held.

Ilya pressed a kiss into his hair. "You did well today."

The praise melted through Shane so fast it made his throat ache.

"I hate you," he whispered weakly.

A soft laugh vibrated beneath his ear. "No, you do not."

Day Two

Shane had been attempting to work on his thesis for almost an hour when Ilya finally lost patience with him. Or rather, lost patience with watching Shane type three sentences, delete two of them, stare blankly at his screen for several minutes, then sigh so deeply, you would think something more dramatic was happening than a writer's block.

"You are distracted," Ilya observed from the doorway of the office.

Shane didn't even bother pretending otherwise. "Whose fault is that?"

Ilya hummed thoughtfully, leaning one shoulder against the frame while watching him with that infuriating composure that somehow only made Shane's body react harder these days. "Five pages," he said after a moment.

Shane blinked. "What?"

"You have been avoiding this section for three days." Ilya crossed the room slowly, dark eyes flicking once toward the half-finished paragraph on Shane's screen. "Five pages. Then you may

stop."

Shane slumped deeper into the chair dramatically. "I can't concentrate."

Something dangerous flickered behind Ilya's eyes, and Shane noticed it immediately.

"Hmm," Ilya murmured softly. "Perhaps I should help, then."

Before Shane could fully process what that meant, Ilya was already kneeling between his legs.

The breath left Shane's lungs so fast it almost hurt. "Ilya."

"Sit still."

The command landed warm and heavy beneath Shane's ribs, that familiar quietness immediately beginning to spread through his thoughts before Ilya had even touched him properly. Shane's pulse stumbled as large hands slid slowly up his thighs, not teasing exactly, just grounding, deliberate enough to make him ache.

Then Ilya looked up at him, and Shanes brain blanked. *Fuck*.

Because there was something unbearable about Ilya on his knees while remaining entirely in control of the situation, composed and devastatingly calm even from below, like submission itself bent around him instead of the other way around.

"You are going to write your pages," Ilya said evenly. "And I am going to sit here and keep you company."

Shane's brain short-circuited instantly. "You can't just say that and expect me to function."

"I can," Ilya corrected mildly. "And you will."

Then, with annoying casualness, he pulled down Shane's sweatpants. Shane made a strangled noise somewhere between a gasp and a whimper as Ilya freed him slowly, eyes darkening slightly at the immediate reaction. Because of course, Shane was already hard. Permanently, these days. His body seemed to exist in a constant state of wanting, every nerve perpetually aware of Ilya even when they weren't touching.

Ilya stroked him once, just enough to make Shane's head fall back against the chair with a helpless exhale. Then he stopped, and Shane really wanted to kill him. "Ilya," he whispered weakly.

"Five pages." And then Ilya sank down onto him slowly.

Shane's entire body jerked, warmth enveloping him like a wet dream. The slow, overwhelming feeling of being taken so carefully after not even two days of denial and teasing, but his body had somehow become painfully sensitive to every sensation. His hands immediately gripped the arms of the chair hard enough to ache while Ilya settled fully into his lap with a quiet exhale, the pressure surrounding Shane suddenly so intense he genuinely lost the ability to think for several seconds.

"Oh my God." Shane almost laughed hysterically, because this was insane. Completely insane. Ilya sat there calmly, fully dressed, one hand resting loosely on Shane's thigh, mouth hovering over his cock, while the other reached up to grab at Shane's jaw, forcing him to face his computer.

“There, now write.” Ilya said.

Shane stared at him, and Ilya only raised one eyebrow. “Shane.”

That voice. That *fucking* voice.

Shane’s cock twitched helplessly, slapping Ilya’s cheek. “I hate you,” he whispered.

“No, you do not.” Ilya winked, and leaned forward to pull Shane’s cock into his mouth again, resting his cheek against his thigh, as if he was completely comfortable. They had never done it like this before. Usually, it was Shane and his *completely normal* oral fixation, that craved the weight of Ilya on his tongue. Ilya wasn’t normally submissive in any way, but Shane quickly realised by looking down at him, that this didn’t reverse their roles at all, despite Ilya being the one on his knees with his mouth full. Because Shane still wasn’t allowed to come, and Ilya now held all of the power to make it as difficult for him as he wanted to.

The first page was agony.

Not because Ilya moved much. Quite the opposite, actually. He remained almost perfectly still in Shane’s lap, warm and solid and impossibly present, occasionally shifting just enough to remind Shane exactly where he was without ever allowing genuine friction. Shane was hyper aware of everything, the weight of Ilya around him, the warmth slowly sinking through both their clothes, the steady rise and fall of Ilya’s breathing, and the faint scent of smoke and cologne lingering around him like something dangerous and expensive and entirely Shane’s.

And worst of all, every now and then Ilya would pull back and crane his head to look at Shane’s laptop. “Better,” he murmured quietly at one point, lips brushing near Shane’s pubes without quite touching. “See? You can focus when you try.”

Shane nearly fucking came right there.

By the time he finished the third page, he had become painfully aware of how unfairly good Ilya was at this. At handling him, at reading exactly what Shane needed even before Shane fully understood it himself. Because underneath the constant ache and frustration, Shane was writing better. Cleaner, faster, and less trapped inside his own head.

And every time he slowed too much, Ilya would speak.

“Keep going.”

“Do not stop now.”

“That’s my good boy.”

Each sentence settled beneath Shane’s skin like heat, and by page five, Shane genuinely felt delirious. His thoughts had gone pleasantly hazy around the edges, the earlier frustration replaced by something softer and heavier, the strange intimate calm that always came with following Ilya’s orders, and being *good*. He finished the final paragraph with trembling fingers before closing the laptop and letting his forehead fall forward against it in exhausted relief.

“There,” he mumbled. “Done.”

Ilya pulled off, then nodded once. “Very good.”

The praise alone nearly made Shane emotional, and he made a wounded sound loud enough to embarrass himself at the sudden lack of pressure around his cock.

A faint smile touched Ilya's mouth as he adjusted his sweatpants again. "Dramatic."

"Fuck you, that was horrible."

"And yet," Ilya said calmly, "you finished your work."

Shane glared at him weakly while trying not to think about the warmth already disappearing from his lap.

Unfortunately, the rest of the day only got worse, because now Shane was aware that Ilya could do things like that.

And apparently intended to.

By afternoon, they left the house for lunch at a small café downtown, the kind with crowded little tables pressed too close together and soft jazz humming quietly beneath conversation. Shane had assumed public space would mean temporary safety.

This assumption turned out to be catastrophically incorrect.

At first, everything seemed normal enough. They ordered coffee and sandwiches, Shane curled his hands around the ceramic mug while sun shined lazily through the windows outside, and for a brief beautiful moment, he actually almost relaxed.

Then Ilya spoke. "Are you horny right now too, or have you finally calmed down?"

"Public place," Shane hissed under his breath, once again aware of his half hard cock, which he had blissfully forgotten for a whole 15 seconds.

"Yes." Ilya's gaze drifted deliberately downward for half a second before returning to Shane's face. "That does seem to make this *harder* for you. Who knew you had an exhibitionist streak?"

Shane wanted to die. "*Ilya*."

"Of course, of course, I am only teasing, *moya lyubov,* I am very aware of how much you would love having all these people watch you get fucked. If I pulled you up and bent you over this table, hm? You wouldn't even resist, you'd take it like the slut you are, and they would all immediately know how fucking *good* you are for me."

Shane didn't know what to do with his hands, his leg bouncing under the table, glancing around hoping no one had heard him, while his brain betrayed him with thoughts of 'but what if they *did*

hear'.

"You are blushing so beautifully," Ilya said, as if it wasn't his fucking fault.

"You're a terrible person."

"And yet," Ilya murmured, eyes warm now in that devastating private way reserved only for Shane, "you still look at me like *that*."

God.

By the time they got home, Shane had been hard for hours, and was so frustrated he had considered walking directly into the St. Lawrence River multiple times on their way back. Instead, he followed Ilya through the house while trying very *hard* not to stare at the broad line of his shoulders beneath his coat.

"Take off your shoes properly," Ilya said without turning around, and Shane obeyed immediately.

He froze halfway through unlacing them, glancing up at Ilya who looked very amused. "I hate that this works on me. I've never *not* taken my shoes of properly, why is this even a thing?"

A soft laugh drifted back from the man in front of him. "True," Ilya said, "but you love it. Now, go run me a bath, *kotik*. Make yourself useful for me, *da*?"

"Okay." Shane didn't even try to fight him, instead almost thankful for something to do, for something to distract him from the growing fear of how long a week actually was, and that he was no longer sure he would come out on the other side victorious. Or even *alive.*

He ran the bath with all of Ilya's favorite soaps, scents and salts. He still remembered the child-like giddiness he felt, when he realised that Ilya Rozanov, scary and dangerous mob boss, liked cozy baths that smelled like lavender, and facemasks. So tonight, he was pulling out all of the stops, adamant to make it nice for his boyfriend.

Said boyfriend came into the bedroom just as Shane had left the ensuite to go find him, and they both stopped, looking at each other. Shane felt like Ilya was eyeing him like a piece of meat, and normally he would love nothing more. But it was only day two, and Shane was buzzing out of his skin.

Ilya stepped closer to him, lifting a hand to grab his jaw firmly, angling his head so he could nose at his throat. It was the most physical contact Shane had gotten for *hours,* and he felt starved. He stood there as Ilya let his fingers trail over his body, and he was so lost in sensation that he didn't even notice that Ilya was undressing him, until his shirt was pulled back over his shoulders, Ilya stepping away to hang it on the closet door. He let him remove his pants and underpants as well,

and stood there unmoving while Ilya undressed himself. His fingers twitched, desperate to do it for him, to feel the heat of his skin under his fingertips.

But he waited.

Ilya hadn't even explicitly told him to, but it was so heavily implied in the way Ilya was looking at him, that Shane didn't dare to move even an inch. But that also meant, that he could focus all his attention on the glorious sight that was an undressing Ilya, because *fuck,* Shane was lucky.

The piercings glinted as Ilya removed his shirt, and Shane's mouth watered as never-ending galaxies of moles were revealed to him. He never was one for stargazing, although his parents' cottage in Ottawa had a gorgeous night sky, but he could spend hours tracing constellations into Ilya's skin, and never get bored.

Ilya led them into the bathroom, and once again left Shane standing in the middle of the room, watching him as he gently lowered himself into the bath, letting out a borderline pornographic moan as he submerged himself in it, bubbles covering him from the neck and down. Shane mourned the view, but didn't get to dwell on it for too long, Ilya looking at him with heat in his eyes.

"Come here."

The second Ilya's voice dropped into that low, controlled register, Shane felt it like a physical thing travelling down his spine. He walked closer to the bathtub, until his hard cock was practically at level with Ilya's face – not that Shane had any hopes for that being acknowledged in the slightest.

"On your knees."

The words were not loud, they never needed to be. Ilya could command entire rooms without raising his voice, and Shane, already aching and oversensitive from two days of denial, obeyed before his thoughts had even caught up with him. The tile beside the bathtub was cold beneath his knees, steam curling lazily through the bathroom while lavender and cedar-wood thickened the air until the entire room felt soft around the edges, dreamlike in a way that lulled his thoughts.

Ilya raised himself up slightly, and sat back against the porcelain tub with one arm draped over the edge, broad chest glistening with water running down it in a way that almost made Shane *jealous*, his hair slightly curling at the ends from humidity. The sight alone made Shane's stomach tighten painfully. God, he was beautiful. Beautiful in the devastating sort of way that made Shane feel greedy just for looking at him too long.

"Good boy," Ilya murmured when Shane settled properly beside the tub, knees spread slightly, hands resting obediently on his thighs. The praise hit Shane so hard he nearly made a sound.

Because that was the problem with this week. The touching mattered, yes, but it was the voice more than anything that was ruining him. The ownership threaded through every command so naturally that Shane found himself slipping under before Ilya had even laid a hand on him. Sometimes all it took was a simple instruction delivered in *that tone* and suddenly Shane's thoughts would go warm and heavy, body easing instinctively toward obedience before he even consciously realised what was happening.

Ilya reached for the shampoo bottle and held it out toward him. "Wash my hair."

“Yes, sir.” Shane swallowed.

Fuck, where had that *come from?*

Something flickered across Ilya’s face at the title, quick and sharp enough that Shane knew it affected him too, no matter how composed he tried to seem. Then Ilya merely nodded toward the tub. “Carefully. Do not splash water in my eyes.”

The absurd domesticity of the instruction almost made Shane smile, except he was far too busy trying not to stare at the waterline dipping just above Ilya’s nipples, bubbles obscuring everything Shane desperately wanted to see.

He wet his hands first before reaching toward Ilya’s hair, fingers trembling slightly as they disappeared into the now darker strands. Immediately, Ilya leaned back further against the tub, allowing Shane access without surrendering an ounce of control, and Shane nearly melted on the spot at the sight. *Like a little puppy asking for pets.*

Ilya’s hair was so much softer than it looked when it was all neat and styled. Shane worked shampoo through it slowly, fingertips massaging against his scalp while steam drifted between them in slow ribbons. It should have been innocent. It should have felt gentle and domestic and sweet.

Instead, Shane was hard enough it bordered on painful.

Because Ilya was looking at him the entire time. Casual little glances from beneath his lashes, eyes half-lidded with relaxation while Shane knelt devotedly beside the bath like this was exactly where he belonged. And maybe it was. Maybe that was what terrified Shane most about all of this – how natural submission felt in Ilya’s hands, how easily his body interpreted control as safety when it came from him.

“Good,” Ilya murmured quietly as Shane rinsed the shampoo away with careful handfuls of warm water. “So attentive tonight. Maybe I should keep you there forever, servicing my every whim on your knees, *da?* You would probably even thank me for it.”

Shane’s cock twitched painfully. He both hated and loved how responsive he had become, how a few filthy, but softly spoken words could leave him dizzy with want. But somewhere beneath the embarrassment lived something warmer too, a pure, unfiltered *happiness.*

Once Shane finished rinsing the shampoo out, Ilya caught his wrist before he could fully pull away, keeping his hands in his hair. “Stay there.”

Shane immediately froze. Ilya’s thumb brushed once across the inside of his wrist before letting go again, and Shane dutifully kept them in his hair, playing gently with the strands. He was so engrossed in it, that he barely registered how beneath the bubbles, beneath the cloudy lavender water, Ilya’s other arm had shifted.

And then Shane realised.

“Oh my God,” he whispered faintly.

Ilya’s mouth curved slightly. “What?” he whispered, feigning innocence.

“You’re touching yourself.”

“Mhmm,” Ilya moaned softly.

Shane stared at him in horror. “That’s evil.”

A soft laugh escaped Ilya, low and rough around the edges. “You think so?”

“You know I can’t see under the bubbles.”

“Not only an exhibitionist, but also a voyeur? You really are a full plate of delicious, kinky meals, *malysh*.”

Shane made a genuinely wounded sound, and couldn’t even find it in him to retort. Because he could hear it now, the tiny shifts in water. The faintest hitch in Ilya’s breathing. Barely noticeable unless someone knew him intimately, unless someone had spent enough nights listening to the shape of his pleasure to recognise it instinctively.

And Shane did.

God, he did.

His mouth watered helplessly while Ilya continued touching himself somewhere beneath the waterline, expression remaining maddeningly composed despite the growing tension threading through his shoulders.

“You’re doing this on purpose,” Shane accused weakly.

Ilya lifted one eyebrow. “It’s not my fault that a pretty boy is kneeling at my side, teasing me into being hard. If anything, this is *your* fault.”

Shane whined, and the worst part was, that he couldn’t even look away. He sat there, kneeling obediently beside the bath, petting Ilya’s hair while he slowly unravelled himself just out of sight, denying Shane even the visual reward of watching. It was cruel in such a specifically tailored way that Shane was unravelling right with him.

“You’re mean,” he whispered eventually.

“*Da*. But you like me mean.”

Another tiny sound escaped Shane’s throat as he shifted restlessly on his knees. “I hate this week.”

“No, sweetheart,” Ilya said softly, eyes finally meeting his properly again. “You hate how much you love it.”

And fuck, that was the problem.

Because Shane did love it. Loved the aching anticipation winding tighter every hour. Loved the unbearable intimacy of being controlled so completely without even requiring sex. Loved the way Ilya’s attention had sharpened into something consuming these past days, every glance feeling deliberate, every command threaded with ownership until Shane felt so surrounded by it, that his world consisted solely of *Ilya.*

He was exhausted by wanting, and he had never felt happier in his life.

Eventually, the subtle movement beneath the bubbles stopped, and Ilya exhaled slowly through his nose, head tipping briefly back against the porcelain tub before opening his eyes again.

He had not come, Shane could tell immediately. The restraint of it made something hot twist low in his stomach.

“You didn’t…” Shane trailed off weakly.

“No.”

“Why?”

Ilya studied him quietly for a moment before speaking. “Because if you do not get to have everything you want,” he said softly, “neither do I.”

Something in Shane’s chest ached so sharply he had to look down for a second just to steady himself. Then, after a long silence, Ilya shifted forward slightly and spread his legs beneath the water. “Come here.”

Shane blinked. “What?”

“I said, come here.” Ilya’s voice gentled only slightly. “Into the bath. You earned a reward.”

Heat flooded Shane, and he climbed into the tub carefully, trying not to splash water everywhere, and the second he settled between Ilya’s legs, strong arms wrapped around him, drawing him back against a broad chest slick with steam and lavender-scented water.

The position alone nearly made Shane emotional, because this, too, felt like belonging. Ilya’s legs bracketed his hips comfortably beneath the water, while one large hand settled against Shane’s stomach, the other reaching automatically for the shower-head attachment.

“Lean back,” Ilya murmured against his temple.

Shane obeyed instantly, all his willpower going towards not grinding back about the very obvious shape of Ilya’s hard cock against his lower back. Fuck, he was so big, and Shane ached to be fucked so hard, that he would feel him in his fucking throat.

Warm water poured slowly through his hair while Ilya worked shampoo into it with slow deliberate movements, fingers massaging firmly against his scalp until Shane nearly melted bonelessly against him. Every touch remained maddeningly appropriate and caring, such a stark contrast to the thoughts running through Shane’s head.

“You carry all your stress here,” Ilya murmured eventually, thumbs pressing firmly into the tense muscles where Shane’s neck met his shoulders.

Shane made a helpless sound.

“Relax.”

“I can’t,” Shane admitted weakly.

“I know.” Ilya continued kneading slowly at his shoulders while Shane rested against him in the steaming water, surrounded entirely by warmth and the steady rhythm of Ilya breathing behind him.

And somewhere during it, Shane realised that this was what had ruined him permanently.

Not the sex, or the control.

This.

Being cared for so thoroughly it made him ache.

Day Three

By day three, Shane felt like he spent more time floating than not, stuck in an endless loop of need, and it was making him more and more desperate with every passing hour. Which was probably why cornering Ilya in the hallway before they left for the office felt less like a conscious decision and more like instinct.

“Ilya,” Shane said softly, catching his wrist before he could disappear into his office to grab some paperwork. “Please.”

Ilya looked down at him immediately, composed and immaculate in black slacks and a charcoal coat, every inch the terrifying *Bratva* boss the outside world saw, which was decidedly *not* helping Shane’s predicament.

“What do you need, *solnyshko*?”

The pet name nearly made Shane weak on the spot. He swallowed hard. “Please let me come.”

Ilya’s eyebrow lifted slightly. Shane hated how quickly desperation climbed into his throat under that look alone. “Please,” he repeated quieter this time, stepping closer instinctively. “I’ve been good.”

“You have,” Ilya agreed calmly.

The praise warmed Shane so fast it almost hurt.

“So, please,” Shane whispered, voice already fraying at the edges. “Please fuck me tonight. I miss you.”

Something flickered briefly across Ilya’s face then. *Hunger*. Real hunger. Shane saw it clearly before it disappeared again beneath control so practiced it almost looked effortless. Instead of answering immediately, Ilya reached up and adjusted Shane’s scarf with infuriating gentleness, fingers brushing his throat in a way that made Shane shiver.

“Does my slutty boy feel empty?” Ilya asked softly.

Shane’s face burned instantly, because yes. *God*, yes. He felt horribly and achingly empty. He nodded once.

A faint smile touched Ilya's mouth. "Poor thing."

Shane nearly melted, then Ilya tilted his head slightly, considering him. "Maybe I should help with that."

Hope exploded inside Shane's chest so violently it was almost painful. "Yeah?"

But Ilya only hummed thoughtfully. "Wear a plug today."

Shane blinked.

"A small one," Ilya continued mildly, like they were discussing weather. "Since you are apparently suffering so much from feeling *empty*."

Heat flooded Shane so quickly he thought he might actually die from embarrassment alone. "Ilya," he whispered.

"What?" Ilya asked innocently. "You asked for help."

And because Shane was already so far gone, that obedience felt easier than resistance, because Ilya's voice had gone low and firm in that particular way that made Shane's thoughts dissolve into static, he heard himself answer softly, "Okay."

He regretted it approximately seven minutes later. The plug was small enough to slide in easily while Ilya watched from the bathroom doorway with dark attentive eyes, one hand tucked casually into his pocket while Shane stood spread open on the edge of the bathtub trying not to shake apart from the intimacy of being observed so carefully.

"You can do better than that," Ilya had murmured when Shane hesitated halfway through pushing it in. "Come on. Be good for me."

And Shane, already blushing so hard his face hurt, had obeyed instantly. The problem was, that now he could feel it constantly. Every movement reminded him of it. Walking, sitting, *breathing*. It wasn't enough pressure to actually satisfy the terrible emptiness clawing inside him, but it was enough to keep him permanently aware of his own body, and how much it craved Ilya.

By the time they arrived at the office, Shane already felt half insane. The *Bratva* headquarters buzzed with its usual current of activity around them, men moving through hallways carrying folders and weapons with equal casualness, conversations flowing between Russian and English seamlessly enough that Shane barely registered the changes anymore.

Normally, he liked being here.

Normally, there was something fascinating about watching Ilya work, about seeing the terrifying competence he wielded so naturally. And he genuinely liked the guys, and enjoyed spending time with them.

Today, however, Shane was busy concentrating on not visibly squirming every time he sat down, which turned out to be much harder than anticipated. At one point during the meeting Ivan paused mid-sentence and frowned slightly at him. "Are you okay?"

Shane's soul briefly attempted to leave his body.

“Yes, of course.” he answered far too quickly.

Marleau snorted from across the table without even looking up from his phone. “That sounded believable.”

Shane shot him a glare strong enough to qualify as attempted murder.

Meanwhile beside him, Ilya remained perfectly composed, one hand resting against his jaw while listening to one of the reports being delivered, as if Shane wasn’t currently losing his mind less than a foot away from him.

It was *torture*.

Because every now and then, Ilya would glance at him. Just glance, nothing more. But the look alone carried too much awareness behind it, too much quiet ownership, and Shane would immediately feel heat crawl down his spine.

And the worst part? He loved it so much, he thought there might genuinely be something wrong with him.

By the end of the meeting Shane felt floaty with need, thoughts sluggish and body oversensitive from hours of constant awareness. He barely spoke during lunch afterward, mostly staying tucked quietly at Ilya’s side while conversations moved around them.

At some point Marleau narrowed his eyes at him. “You’re weirdly well-behaved today.”

Shane blinked slowly. “I am always well-behaved when you idiots don’t provoke me.”

Marleau barked out a laugh, while Ilya, the traitor, looked deeply amused.

By the time they got home that evening, Shane felt like he had been stretched too tight for too long. Every nerve in his body seemed tuned directly toward Ilya. He followed him through the house almost unconsciously while Ilya removed his coat, broad shoulders shifting beneath black fabric in ways Shane found actively unfair.

“Ilya,” Shane said quietly.

Ilya turned, and whatever he saw on Shane’s face must have affected him somehow, because his expression darkened immediately. “Come here.”

The command dropped straight through Shane’s bloodstream, and he obeyed without hesitation. Ilya stepped closer until they were nearly touching, one hand coming up to settle against the side of Shane’s throat, thumb brushing beneath his jaw slowly enough to make Shane shudder.

“So pretty like this,” Ilya murmured. “So obedient.”

Shane’s knees nearly gave out. “I need you,” he whispered helplessly.

Ilya looked at him calmly, not reacting to his words at all.

“Please,” Shane repeated, following him deeper into the house now, desperation making his voice thin around the edges. “I was good.”

“You were adequate.”

Shane blanched. “*Adequate*?”

“You fidgeted through half the meeting. Marleau almost figured you out.”

“You-, *you* made me wear a plug. And then made me sit for *hours,* and how was I supposed too-”

“*Shut up*.”

Shane immediately snapped his mouth shut, looking up at Ilya with wide eyes. The look he got back wasn’t tender or caring. It was cold and borderline mean, and Shane suddenly felt like someone had pumped the oxygen out of the room.

“You mean to tell me,” Ilya whispered. “That you are complaining about the plug *you* put in, after I was generous enough to allow it, because you were begging for something to fill you like a whore? And somehow, now you are standing here in front of me, being a fucking brat?”

The blood in Shane’s veins felt like it had frozen to ice. “No, I-”

“Because it sounds like you are being *ungrateful,* after a whole day of me being quite *generous,* and giving you what you wanted. That’s not how good boys act, Shane, and it is certainly not how *my* good boy acts.”

Shane bowed his head, feeling tears gather in his eyes against his will. Somehow, despite this going exactly like he wanted, and Ilya reacting exactly how he had goaded him to, Shane’s breathing was starting to get laboured. He tried taking a deep breath, but it came out shaky.

“Shane?” Ilya sounded far away somehow, the sharpness having vanished from his voice so quickly it almost made Shane dizzy. One second it had been cold enough to carve him open, and the next it cracked entirely, all that deliberate cruelty collapsing the moment Shane’s breathing hitched wrong.

Shane tried to answer, but his chest had locked up too tightly around the air. His pulse was suddenly everywhere, violent and suffocating beneath his skin, and humiliation crashed into him so fast it made his knees weak. God, this was stupid. So fucking stupid. He had wanted this, he had wanted Ilya mean and commanding and possessive, wanted the pressure of it until his thoughts disappeared beneath someone else’s control, but something about the word *adequate* had slipped past every rational part of him and lodged somewhere soft and awful inside his ribs.

Because adequate meant disappointing.

Adequate meant *not enough to be* good.

And Shane had spent three entire days trying so desperately to be *good*.

“I-” His voice cracked apart uselessly. Tears blurred his vision almost instantly, hot and humiliating as they spilled down his face. “*Yellow*.”

The effect was immediate, Ilya reaching up to frame his face, steady and warm and horrified all at once. “Hey,” Ilya said instantly, all traces of dominance gone now, voice low and grounding in a completely different way. “Hey, *solnyshko*, look at me.”

Shane tried. God, he tried. But his lungs kept refusing to work properly, each breath turning shallow halfway in.

“I am sorry,” Ilya said immediately. “I pushed too hard. That was my mistake.”

Shane shook his head frantically despite the tears. “No, no, I just-” Another breath hitched violently. “Do you really think I’m only adequate? Because I really-, I really tried, I promise. Not only today, but these last days, and I-, I guess I really thought I was doing good. That I was making you… proud.”

The words came out small, small enough that Ilya visibly broke over them. “Oh, sweetheart.” The endearment sounded wrecked. One of Ilya’s hands slid into Shane’s hair while the other stayed firm against the side of his jaw, anchoring him there like he was something precious and shaking apart in Ilya’s hands. “No, of course you are not ‘adequate’, you are perfect.”

Shane’s eyes burned.

“You are the best boy I have ever had,” Ilya said firmly, without hesitation, each word slow and deliberate, like he needed Shane to feel it settle beneath his skin. “Do you understand me? The sweetest. The most patient. The most beautiful. You have done everything I asked perfectly.”

Shane made a broken little sound.

“I was teasing you,” Ilya continued more softly now, thumbs brushing uselessly at the tears still slipping down Shane’s face. “Too harshly, for how wound up we both are these days. I thought you would tease me for using a, how do you normally say it, a ‘big word’? But I did not mean it.” His expression tightened painfully. “Fuck, *solnyshko*, you have been so good for me these last days that it is driving me insane.”

That finally pulled a shaky laugh out of Shane, though it dissolved almost immediately into another trembling breath.

“Breathe for me,” Ilya murmured.

Shane nodded weakly, and obeyed, dragging in a shuddering breath.

“There you go,” Ilya whispered when Shane finally managed a full breath without shaking apart. “That’s my good boy.”

The praise slid through Shane’s body. For a few moments neither of them spoke, the hallway remained dim and quiet around them, the only sound Shane’s gradually evening breathing and the faint hum of the refrigerator somewhere deeper in the house.

Then, carefully, Ilya brushed his thumb beneath Shane’s eye one final time. “Talk to me,” he said quietly. “Do you want to stop? We can call this whole thing off.”

And God, the thing was, Shane really didn’t. Even now, flushed and crying and embarrassed beyond belief, his body still thrummed with desperate aching need every time Ilya looked at him like that. The panic had passed quickly enough to leave behind the deeper truth underneath it all, which was that he still wanted this. Wanted Ilya’s control. Wanted the structure of it so badly it made his chest ache.

So, Shane swallowed hard and shook his head.

“Colour?”

“Green,” he whispered immediately, still sniffling a little. “So green. I want to be good.”

Ilya searched his face carefully, like he was looking for fractures Shane himself might have missed. Whatever he found there must have satisfied him eventually, because some of the tension eased from his shoulders. “Okay,” he said softly.

Then he leaned down and kissed Shane slowly, just warmth and possession and apology tangled together so tightly Shane could barely separate them. And when Ilya finally pulled back, resting his forehead briefly against Shane’s, his voice had gone rough around the edges again, dropping an octave. “On your knees.”

Shane’s body reacted before his brain could catch up, knees hitting the floor as heat flooded violently through him. The shift in perspective alone nearly made him dizzy, because Ilya standing above him always did something catastrophic to his nervous system, especially now.

“There he is,” Ilya murmured softly, fingers sliding into Shane’s hair before tilting his head back slightly. “You needed something to focus on all day, hm? And you did, walking around with the plug like such a good boy, staying full for me, exactly how I wanted you to. And now you deserve a reward.”

Shane nodded immediately, and Ilya’s thumb brushed slowly across his bottom lip, while the other opened his slacks and pulled out his hard cock.

“Open.”

And God, maybe it should not have felt this intimate after everything they had already done together, but it did. It always did. The quiet sound Ilya made when Shane took him into his mouth. The approving pressure of his hand tightening slightly in Shane’s hair. The low murmured “good boy” that immediately sent warmth flooding through Shane so hard it bordered on painful.

He loved this, loved it so much it scared him sometimes. Loved kneeling for him, loved being looked at like this, the impossible contradiction of feeling simultaneously cherished and completely owned beneath Ilya’s gaze.

The entire thing felt slow on purpose, Ilya taking exactly what he wanted from Shane’s mouth while Shane gave it willingly, thighs trembling slightly every time Ilya praised him softly for relaxing properly, for breathing properly, for ‘looking so beautiful like this’.

And all Shane could think the entire time was ‘more’.

More more *more*.

Please.

By the time Ilya finally came with a rough sound beneath his breath, Shane felt half delirious from wanting. He swallowed him eagerly and greedily, never tiring of the taste of him on his tongue.

And then, as if Shane was just a toy that had served its purpose, Ilya tucked himself back into his slacks, and brushed his thumb once beneath Shane’s swollen mouth. “Stay.”

Shane blinked up at him. “What?” he whispered, voice rough.

“I’m taking a shower.”

Shane stared in disbelief as Ilya turned and walked toward the hallway. “You can’t be serious.”

“I am completely serious.”

“*Ilya*.”

No answer, just the sound of footsteps disappearing upstairs. Shane remained exactly where he was on the floor, stunned silent for nearly a full minute before finally dropping his head, and settling in with a resigned sigh. He heard the shower running, and it lulled him into an almost sleepy state, where time didn’t feel real. It could have been minutes, or hours, before he heard the water shut off. Afterwards, a silence stretched over the house, Ilya clearly taking his time in the bathroom.

But it was okay.

Because Shane had never felt better.

He could stay here for the whole night, just kneeling and waiting for Ilya to grace him with his presence again, if only for the look of pride on his face once he came back.

Eventually, he could hear that Ilya had gone back to the bedroom, and he swore he heard the distant rustling of sheets. His eyes stayed firmly on the floor, only partially illuminated by the light coming from the open bedroom door, as distant as it was.

Suddenly, the light disappeared, and the entire house was bathed in darkness.

Fuck, had Ilya gone to bed?

The thought should have offended him, should have made him feel abandoned. Instead, his cock twitched in his pants, and he let out a shaky breath, that was now shaking with excitement at being treated like nothing but a toy for Ilya to use when he wanted.

A *good* toy.

Shane had just started wondering if he could fall asleep in this position, when Ilya’s soft voice rang through the house. “Come here.”

Shane got up, legs feeling like jelly, and strode towards the bedroom in darkness. He stood next to Ilya’s bedside, and waited for further instructions, not wanting to get ahead of himself.

“Fuck, such a good boy. You would stay there for the whole night if I asked, wouldn’t you? Kneeling by the front door like a dog, waiting for me to call your name? Pathetic.”

Shane moaned, legs wobbling as pleasure shot through him.

“But good toys deserve someone who takes care of them, *da?* So come and sleep in the bed, *malysh*.”

“Thank you.” Shane whispered, and walked slowly to the other side of the bed, stripping out of his clothes and placing them on the nearby chair. He got under the covers, and for a moment, the room

was silent, until Shane broke it again. “Could we-, can you hold me, please?”

Ilya turned to him, and pulled him in before Shane had even finished the sentence. “Of course, I will always hold you, sweetheart. *Ya tebya lyublyu*.”

“I love you too.”

They laid there, holding each other gently, and despite still being hard in his underwear, for the first time in three days Shane didn’t spare it a single thought.

Day Four

Morning arrived slowly, wrapped in orange sunlight and the soft creaking sounds of the house around them, and Ilya woke with Shane half sprawled across his chest like he had unconsciously gravitated even closer sometime during the night.

For a while, he simply looked at him. It was becoming a problem, this inability to stop looking at Shane whenever given the opportunity. Ilya had spent years teaching himself restraint in every possible form, had built an entire empire on discipline, control and the ability to remain untouched by weakness, and now here he was, lying awake at nine in the morning tracing the curve of his boyfriend’s mouth with his eyes like a lovesick teenager.

Shane stirred slightly against him with a sleepy sound, lashes fluttering before eventually opening, still heavy with exhaustion and warmth. The moment he realised Ilya was already awake and watching him, something soft spread across his face.

“Hey you” Shane mumbled.

Ilya’s chest tightened in fondness. “Hey you” he echoed quietly.

Shane smiled, before lifting himself enough to kiss him. It was lazy at first, all warm mouths and half-asleep affection, but it unraveled quickly after that, because apparently neither of them had any remaining self-control.

Ilya certainly did not.

His hands found Shane instinctively, sliding across his chest to feel warm skin beneath his palms, and *God*, he would never get enough of his boy. He tried to gather the remaining pieces of his patience, but the truth was, that he was reaching his limit. This whole thing started because Ilya wanted Shane to get the feeling of being *owned,* in a setting where Ilya could still be careful with him, and let his body heal. But despite technically being able to come, he almost felt as if he was teasing himself as well. Not because he wanted release, that part barely mattered anymore, and he had not even missed it the day before yesterday in the bath, the pleasure of having Shane close more than enough. And he had come down Shane’s throat only yesterday, his patience fraying already then. But what was truly destroying him, was *Shane*.

The constant trembling breaths, the desperate little noises every time Ilya used *that* voice on him. The way Shane still looked at him with absolute trust even after being denied over and over again.

The way he had cried the night before, genuinely wounded by the idea that Ilya might think him merely *adequate*.

The memory still sat like broken glass on Ilya's tongue, and when Shane melted beneath his hands now with a soft whimper, immediately arching closer for more touch despite still being half asleep, something inside Ilya gave way entirely. And he couldn't stand the idea of denying him for much longer. A week was completely out of the question.

"Come here," he murmured roughly.

Shane climbed fully into his lap with a sleepy eagerness that nearly fucking killed him.

"*Moya lyubov*," Ilya whispered before he could stop himself.

Shane made the smallest sound at that, almost shy. And suddenly Ilya needed to give him something, anything. Needed it with the same desperate certainty Shane usually carried when begging for him. Because Shane deserved to feel adored in ways larger than words. Bigger than denial and teasing and discipline. Shane deserved *evidence*.

Ilya's gaze drifted briefly toward the nightstand, then an idea bloomed.

"We are not doing bruises yet," Ilya said quietly after a moment, thinking out loud.

Shane blinked at him lazily, ad if the words weren't registering. "Hm?"

"I do not want to hurt you while you are still healing."

Understanding softened Shane's expression immediately, but the underlying question was still here. "Okay?"

Ilya's fingers drifting absently across Shane's ribs. "Still," he murmured, mostly to himself, "I would like to mark you somehow."

Shane shivered against him. "Ilya," he whispered.

And God, the hunger in his voice. Ilya's eyes darkened, and he reached over into the nightstand, pulling out a black marker, holding it up for Shane to see.

Shane froze, then stared at him like he had personally invented sex. "Oh my God."

Ilya almost laughed at the expression on his face. "You like this idea."

"Like?" Shane repeated faintly. "Ilya, I think I would let you kill me right now."

"Concerning, but very hot."

"You want to write on me?"

"Yes."

Shane looked almost feverish with anticipation, pupils blown wide, staring at the marker in Ilya's hands. Ilya gently tapped his hip, "turn around and lay on your back for me, sweetheart."

Shane did so, and giggled softly to himself. “You’re literally about to label me like a tupperware.”

Ilya climbed back onto the bed slowly, marker twirling once between his fingers. “You say this like it is a complaint.”

“It’s really, *really* not.”

Ilya pushed Shane gently into the sheets and kissed him until he was breathless again, slow, thorough and consuming enough that by the time Ilya finally moved lower, Shane already looked ruined.

He kissed every inch exposed skin, his mouth lingering at Shane’s throat, his collarbones, the center of his chest, every place where Shane’s breathing changed beneath him. And after each kiss came the cool brush of marker against skin.

Sweetheart, written carefully beneath Shane’s left collarbone, Shane whimpering when he realised what Ilya was writing. “Fuck,” he whispered shakily, staring downward at the word.

Ilya kissed the corner of his mouth softly before writing again.

Solnyshko, lower this time, along his ribs.

“Ilya,” Shane breathed, tears already gathering in his eyes again.

God, Ilya loved him so much. He continued lower.

Good boy, written against the soft skin of Shane’s stomach, fluttering underneath the marker with every letter.

Then, *Mine,* just above where Shane’s pubes started. Ilya almost considered writing it on Shane’s cock, but he didn’t want to touch it yet, enjoying watching it jerk and leak underneath him, from the feeling of the marker alone. It was such a small word, but Shane’s entire body tensed beneath him at that, tears finally slipping free.

“You feel that strongly about one word?” Ilya asked softly, a teasing smile on his face.

Shane looked wrecked already. “You know I do.”

Ilya smiled knowingly, and kept going.

Malysh

Cockslut

Pretty boy

Whore

Each word written carefully between kisses and reverent touches until Shane lay trembling beneath him, his chest, stomach and thighs covered in devotion disguised as degradation, crying openly now from sheer emotional overload.

And through all of it, Ilya never stopped touching him gently, never stopped kissing him, never stopped looking at him like he was beloved beyond reason. By the time he finally wrote *Moya lyubov* across Shane's hipbone, Shane was outright sobbing.

"*Ya tebya lyublyu*," Shane whimpered brokenly.

The marker slipped from Ilya's fingers onto the sheets. Because fuck.

Fuck.

There was only so much restraint a man could possess.

And Shane looked so unbearably beautiful beneath him, covered in words only Ilya had ever called him, body shaking from desire and trust and overwhelming affection, whispering Russian to him, and suddenly the idea of continuing to deny him felt *impossible*.

So, Ilya kissed him hard enough to steal the next breath from his lungs and whispered against his mouth, "I know."

Then he grabbed the lube from the nightstand, and pushed a slick finger carefully into him, immediately angling it into his prostate. Shane sobbed, arching into Ilya's touch, and Ilya let him. The time for denial, control and holding back was *over*. Now, all that mattered, was Shane's pleasure, and Ilya giving it to him in the best way possible.

He prepped him quickly, hands shaking at the sheer overwhelming pressure of Shane around him, desperate to feel the heat around his cock. And finally, when he determined Shane loose enough, he guided himself to his hole and pushed inside him.

Shane cried out from pure devastating relief. And *fuck*, Ilya nearly lost his mind from it, counting in his head to try and not come immediately, like a virgin. Because Shane wrapped around him like he had been starving for this, thighs trembling violently while tears still clung to his lashes and every inch of him seemed to melt open beneath Ilya's hands.

"There you are," Ilya breathed roughly, forehead dropping against Shane's. "There is my boy."

Shane clung to him desperately. "I missed you," he whispered.

The words nearly ruined Ilya completely, so he fucked him slowly at first, carefully despite his own unraveling control, hands constantly smoothing over Shane's skin as if reassuring himself this was real. Every word written across Shane's body blurred slightly beneath sweat and touch, but Ilya could still see them.

Every single one true.

And eventually Shane started getting louder beneath him, pleasure finally overtaking the lingering emotional fragility from the last few days until all that remained was *need*.

"Ilya," Shane gasped suddenly, panic threading through the pleasure now. "I'm close."

Ilya knew, he could feel it. Shane was shaking apart beneath him already, clenching rhythmically around Ilya's cock as if he couldn't help himself.

"But I can't-, I don't want to-," Shane whispered frantically. "I'm not allowed, I'll fail-"

“Oh, sweetheart.” Ilya kissed him hard enough to cut the panic off immediately. “You are *not* failing.”

Shane looked genuinely distressed, trying to hold himself back even while pleasure wrecked him open beneath Ilya’s body. The sight nearly broke Ilya’s heart, so he grabbed Shane’s jaw firmly and forced him to look at him. “You listen to me very carefully,” he said roughly. “You are coming, because I want you there.”

Shane’s breath hitched violently.

“I decide what happens to you,” Ilya continued, thrusting deeper now with enough force to make Shane cry out helplessly. “And right now, I want to feel you come for me. Understand?”

“Ilya-”

“*Come*,” Ilya ordered.

And Shane shattered instantly, just complete, overwhelming release ripping through him so hard he nearly screamed, body convulsing beneath Ilya while tears spilled freely down into his hair as he arched his head back, and every written word across his skin seemed to glow beneath flushed heat.

Beautiful.

Absolutely fucking *beautiful*.

Ilya followed moments later, with Shane still clinging to him like he never intended to let go again.

Afterward they stayed tangled together in the ruined sheets for a long time, Shane still shaky and boneless beneath him while Ilya lazily traced over the words on his skin.

Mine.

Still true.

Always true. Ilya would spend the rest of his life proving it to Shane, and enjoy every single second of it.

He couldn’t wait.

Chapter End Notes

me, struggling with the layout of this chapter: "how do i structure the days where shane can't come???"

the devil on my shoulder: "what if you made it EXACTLY the same layout as with the kidnapping, and also make it last four days??"

me, jaw dropped: "YES"

come yap at me, it means a lot <333

also, credits to @bucklerc for the body writing idea, thank you for always matching my freak♥

Chapter 19

Chapter Summary

Ilya kissed him again harder, with teeth this time, his wandering hands rougher now. And God, Shane had missed this so much he could barely think around it. “I should punish you,” Ilya whispered.

The words wrapped hot around Shane’s spine. “Yes.”

“I should put you to bed untouched after the way you behaved.”

Shane actually whimpered at that, eyes widening. He had wanted to be punished, but he had never considered that the punishment might be… nothing.

“Ilya,” he breathed desperately.

“No.”

Chapter Notes

Hiiii everyone - this chapter was kicking my ass, but it's finally done!!

Enjoy <333

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The following days blurred together like a fever dream wrapped in soft sheets, the kind of happiness that felt almost fragile in its intensity, as though both of them were afraid to acknowledge it too loudly in case the universe decided to take it back.

The dam had broken.

Now that they had started touching each other, they couldn't fucking stop.

Bent over the couch while some documentary narrated quietly in the background, neither of them absorbing a single word.

Half-dressed in the hallway because Ilya had looked at Shane too long after a shower and apparently that had been enough to destroy both of their self-control entirely.

In the bed, Shane pressed firmly into the sheets, unable to move, while taking anything Ilya gave him, and still, always begged for more.

Against the kitchen counter while coffees went cold, both giddy when it didn't hurt Shane's ribs, the revelation making them bolder.

Ilya reaching for him absentmindedly while walking past. A kiss pressed into Shane's temple while he studied, sleepy mornings tangled together under warm blankets while spring turned into early summer, and they could enjoy their nights outside on the terrace.

One night, they had made a fire, and put down blankets next to it, making love under the stars. It solidified Shane's conviction, that while the night sky was pretty, Ilya's moles in flickering light from the fire were *breathtaking*.

But eventually, their lives demanded attention. One afternoon, after what Marleau dramatically referred to as "a week-long disappearance into your sex dungeon," Shane found himself carrying coffees beside him through the streets while Marleau walked with his hands shoved into his pockets, scarf flapping behind him like he was starring in a music video. Shane secretly thought it would be a trashy pop-song.

"You look disgusting, by the way," Marleau informed him.

Shane blinked. "Thank you?"

"You have the glow."

"The glow?"

"The 'fucked regularly' glow." Marleau pointed at him accusingly. "You're moisturised. Relaxed. *Spiritually fulfilled*. It's upsetting."

Shane laughed before he could stop himself, warmth blooming in his chest. Their conversation drifted naturally after that, toward school, toward the future waiting uneasily at the edge of graduation.

Marleau listened more seriously than Shane expected when he explained the trainee position he'd been discussing with the Montreal Voyagers before everything had gone sideways with Alexei. "They'd probably gone with someone else now."

“You should still call them,” Marleau said simply. “You’re good at what you do, and you’re dedicated. They’d be lucky to have you.”

Shane stared down into his coffee. “Maybe. Or I can just start helping Andrea with patching you idiots up. That seems like a full-time job.”

“Mhmm, but you hate relying on people.”

That made Shane snort softly. “You say that like I’m not literally dating a *Bratva* boss.”

“Yes, but emotionally you are essentially a stray cat someone accidentally taught how to pay taxes.” Marleau looked at him knowingly. “And while dating Roz is one thing, you would hate having to *rely* on him.”

Shane hummed, and then quieter, after a moment, he admitted, “I just want something that’s *mine* too.”

Marleau nodded at that like he understood completely. “But you don’t seem to mind it… the *Bratva*.”

“No, not at all. I know I probably should, but… I don’t know, it doesn’t phase me. I’ll be as involved as Ilya wants me to be.”

“And what about what you want?”

“Ah,” Shane winked at him. “That’s where you clearly don’t understand how we work.”

Marleau frowned, before understanding crossed his face. “I didn’t take you for such a people pleaser, Hollander.”

“*Ilya* pleaser.” Shane corrected with a smile on his face.

“Freaks.” Marleau said affectionately, bumping his shoulder into Shane’s.

They kept walking for a while along the river, before turning back towards the main street. On their way there, they passed through som smaller alleyways, where a shop front caught Shane’s eye against his will. It was a small jewellery shop, but it was nothing like anything Shane had ever seen before.

Silver draped elegantly across mannequins, intricate body chains that looped like constellations across collarbones and waists, delicate enough to look fragile and dangerous all at once. Shane couldn’t avert his eyes, and he felt his legs slow down on their own accord.

Marleau followed his stare.

Then grinned slowly. “Okay,” he announced. “New mission. We’re finding something that will make Roz forget how to speak tonight. What do you say?”

Shane looked between Marleau and the window, suddenly feeling very shy. “No, not it’s-, it’s okay, I was just looking.”

“Shane.” Marleau lifted an eyebrow. “We both know that’s a lie. We have nothing but time, and I think it will be worth it for Roz’ reaction. You deserve something nice.”

Shane felt a wave of fondness for Marleau trying so gently to make him comfortable, to support their relationship. Shane hadn't really… consciously been seeking any sort of validation from any of the members of the *Bratva*, but still it had been nice to see that they accepted him. But Marleau…

Marleau was Ilya's *best friend.* One of the few people on this earth who also had Ilya's well-being as a priority, just like Shane. This might be the one person, that Shane wanted to like him. The one person in Ilya's life, who could give them his blessing.

So, seeing him so openly support them, and seem like he didn't mind spending time with Shane? He smiled, and nodded in determination. "Okay, let's just take a look."

Marleau smiled wickedly, and stretched out his arm towards the door, "After you, pretty boy."

Shane had barely stepped into the club before he felt Ilya's attention land on him, and suddenly every carefully rehearsed bit of confidence Marleau had helped him build in the shop earlier threatened to collapse beneath his skin.

The club was all low lights and gold reflections, bass vibrating through the floor hard enough to settle inside Shane's ribs, bodies moving together in slow, sweaty currents beneath flashing lights, but none of it mattered once Ilya looked up from where he was sitting with Ivan and two other men near the back booth.

Because Ilya froze, and Shane knew exactly why.

The black silk shirt he wore was intentionally half unbuttoned, soft fabric slipping low enough across his chest that every silver chain underneath caught the light whenever he moved, delicate lines of metal looping across his torso and disappearing under the shirt. The body chain had seemed almost obscene when Marleau convinced him to buy it earlier, all elegant and sharp silver against bare skin, but now, under the Ilya's lustful gaze, Shane felt… beautiful.

Wanted.

Marleau noticed the expression on Ilya's face and barked out a laugh beside him. "Jesus Christ," he muttered. "You nearly killed the man."

Shane grinned despite himself.

Across the room, Ilya's gaze dragged slowly down his body before returning to his face with an intensity that nearly made Shane stumble. There was no softness in it, just hunger so blatant it made heat rush straight between Shane's legs.

"Fuck," Marleau whispered gleefully. "He is going to ruin you tonight."

“Shut up,” Shane muttered, embarrassed, but the thought alone made Shane’s stomach flip pleasantly. By the time they reached the booth, stopping briefly at the bar for some shots, Ilya still had not looked away from him once.

“You’re staring,” Shane said lightly as he slid into the seat beside him.

Ilya’s eyes flicked briefly to the silver chain visible beneath the silk again. “And you,” he said slowly, voice rough enough that Shane immediately felt it in his cock, “are dressed like a fucking problem.”

Shane leaned closer deliberately, letting his thigh press against Ilya’s beneath the table. “You don’t like it?”

The look Ilya gave him then nearly stopped his heart. “Oh, I like it,” he murmured.

Ivan groaned loudly from across the booth. “Please flirt quieter. Some of us are trying to drink.”

“Some of us,” Marleau added, “are trying to survive the sexual tension radiating off you two like nuclear waste.”

Shane laughed, but Ilya only continued staring at him with that same dangerous focus, fingers tightening once around the glass in his hand before he leaned closer and murmured quietly enough that only Shane could hear,

“Did you wear this because you wanted attention, *solnyshko*? Or because you wanted me unable to think all night?”

Both.

But Shane only smiled innocently. “Maybe I just wanted to look pretty. Don’t you think I look pretty?”

Ilya’s jaw flexed.

“Pretty,” he repeated flatly. “You walked in here wearing chains underneath silk like someone’s expensive little whore, and you think *pretty* is the word in my head right now?”

Heat exploded through Shane, and God, maybe the alcohol was already getting to him a little, but suddenly he wanted to push. Wanted to see how far he could take this before Ilya snapped.

So, Shane leaned in close enough for his lips to brush Ilya’s ear. “Not just anyone’s expensive whore… *yours,* right? And you’ve barely even touched me since we got here,” he whispered mournfully. “Are you losing your nerve? Too afraid to take what’s yours? Or should I go look for what I want somewhere else?”

Ilya went completely still beside him. Marleau, unfortunately, noticed immediately. “Whatever Shane just said,” he said while pointing toward them, “I don’t want to know, but that’s Roz’ murder face.”

Shane laughed into his drink, smugness fizzing warmly beneath his skin, while beside him Ilya slowly turned his head. “You are being very brave tonight,” he said quietly.

Shane smiled sweetly. “You like when I’m brave.”

“No,” Ilya replied, eyes dropping pointedly to Shane’s throat before returning to his face again. “I like making you cry after you’ve pretended to be brave, whoring yourself out like a brat.”

Shane nearly choked on his vodka, but didn’t deign Ilya with a response. He just sipped his drink, and cuddled into his boyfriend, enjoying being able to stake his claim in a place where Ilya could probably have whoever he wanted. But he wanted *Shane.*

And Shane would remind him of that later, when Ilya would be complaining about exactly how much of a brat Shane could be.

By midnight, Shane had become a menace, affectionate in a way that almost seemed to take Ilya by surprise. The alcohol had settled warm beneath his skin hours ago, softening the sharp edges of his thoughts until every feeling inside him became bigger and brighter and far more difficult to hide, and unfortunately for Ilya, most of those feelings currently revolved around wanting his attention with alarming intensity.

Which meant, Shane had spent the better part of the evening draped across him, touching him constantly, smiling every time Ilya glared at him and whispering increasingly dangerous things directly into his ear just to watch his composure crack.

“It’s getting chilly in here, I should keep your cock warm under the table.”

“I think you should drag me to the middle of that dance floor, and fuck me while everyone around us sways to the music.”

“I love the outline of your nipple piercings through that shirt, it makes me want to play with them… with my teeth.”

“I picked the jewellery out for you, Sir, but I love it. When I move just right, it pulls across my nipple, and fuck, it feels so good I think I could come just from that.”

“I prepped myself before coming here. Didn’t wear a plug, wanted to be nice and tight for you, but still ready for you to slip in whenever you wanted.”

“Enough,” Ilya snapped eventually, voice low as someone pressed another shot into Shane’s hand. They stood near the back bar now, half hidden from the rest of the club beneath low lighting while music pulsed. Around them, the *Bratva* shouted over each other and danced and laughed, but Shane barely noticed any of it anymore.

Not when Ilya looked like that. Not when he kept staring at Shane’s mouth every time he spoke.

Shane took the shot slowly without breaking eye contact once. “Enough of what?”

“That innocent act,” Ilya said flatly. “It is insulting.”

Shane grinned. “You think I look innocent?”

“I think,” Ilya said calmly, taking the empty glass from his hand, “that you are drunk enough to forget, that I know exactly how your brain works.”

“Dangerous assumption.”

“Not assumption.” The corner of Ilya’s mouth twitched slightly. “Experience. And you will regret this, *moya lyubov.*”

Heat bloomed pleasantly in Shane’s chest. He fucking loved it when Ilya got mean, and he wanted *more.* So naturally, he decided the best possible course of action was to become *unbearable*.

“You know,” Shane murmured casually, leaning one elbow against the table, schooling his expression into pure devastation. “You’ve been so restrained today, it must be because you don’t love me anymore. It’s very sad, that I have to go out and find attention somewhere else, because my own boyfriend doesn’t find me hot.”

Ilya stared at him, clearly unimpressed by his antics. “You are testing God tonight.”

Shane smiled sweetly. “Just you.”

That earned him a hard look, the kind that immediately made heat coil low in his stomach.

“Oh, you think you are funny now?” Ilya asked softly.

“A little.”

“Mhmm,” Ilya stepped closer then, one hand settling low against Shane’s hip beneath the silk shirt, fingers spreading wide enough to make Shane inhale sharply. “There is something very fascinating,” Ilya continued quietly, “about how quickly you unravel when I stop reminding you to *behave.”*

Shane looked away briefly, smiling into his drink. “Mhmm, maybe you should remind me, then. Who I belong to?”

Ilya went completely still, then laughed once under his breath, sharp and genuinely disbelieving. “Jesus Christ, you say things like that in public and then wonder why I look at you like *that.*”

Shane leaned closer immediately. “And how exactly are you looking at me?”

Ilya’s gaze dropped briefly to his mouth. “Like I am trying very hard to remember I love you more than I want to strangle you.”

Warmth exploded through Shane so fast it almost hurt, because that was the problem with Ilya - even his threats sounded affectionate. Shane tilted his head slightly, letting the silver chain beneath his shirt catch the light deliberately. “God, please strangle me. Your hand around my throat looks and feels *so nice*. And you still haven’t even told me if you think I look pretty,” Shane pouted.

Ilya looked down at his lips, a look of pure hunger crossing his face, “You know you do.”

“I want to hear you say it.”

“Needy.”

“Yes.”

“You look beautiful,” Ilya said finally, voice quieter now. “Happy?”

“No.”

“No?”

Shane shook his head solemnly. “I think you should keep going.”

Ilya actually rolled his eyes then, though the hand on Shane’s waist tightened slightly. “Brat.”

“And yet, you’re doing nothing about it,” Shane whined, leaning his head into Ilya’s chest, looking up at him with pleading eyes.

“You are playing a very dangerous game tonight, *solnyshko*.”

Shane leaned in until their mouths were barely inches apart. “Am I? Sounds fun.”

For one second, Shane genuinely thought Ilya might kiss him right there against the table. But suddenly they were interrupted by someone arriving with more shots on a tray. Ilya grabbed two, and passed one to Shane, who just looked at him questioningly. “Please, Sir, am I really supposed to drink it myself? You won’t help?”

Ilya rolled his eyes, although the look he gave Shane was heated. He guided him into sitting in front of him in the booth, and stood between his legs. One hand splayed across his thigh possessively, and Shane fought the urge to arch into the touch. He felt very warm all of a sudden, and desperate for any kind of friction on his cock, which had been half-hard through the entire evening, but was now pressing uncomfortably against the seams of his pants.

Ilya grabbed one of the shots and took it himself. Shane followed the line of his throat as he swallowed, and felt his own mouth water. He then looked excitingly as Ilya took the other into his hand. The hand that had been grabbing his thigh came up to grab his jaw in a firm grip, face tilted upwards. Ilya had grazed his nipple on the way up, and Shane was losing his fucking mind with want.

Ilya stood above him, with a mean and heated look on his face, his thumb making its way to Shane’s mouth, forcing his jaw open. He then removed his finger, while still holding his jaw, and poured the shot into Shane’s waiting mouth.

Fuck.

Shane’s mouth closed automatically, but Ilya raised an eyebrow at him, and he held the shot in his mouth, not daring to swallow it yet. Ilya looked briefly around them, clearly checking that no one was paying them too much attention. What he found must have satisfied him, because he leaned down until their mouths where almost touching.

“Open,” he whispered.

Shane did so immediately, and Ilya leaned over him, and spit into his mouth, the liquid mixing with the fruity vodka already there. Shane moaned as loudly as he could with his mouth full.

Ilya laughed meanly, and then whispered into his ear. “Now swallow, you fucking slut.”

As Shane did, Ilya removed the hand cradling his jaw, but only to immediately return it to the side of Shane’s face with a loud smack. The sudden hard pressure cracked softly through the noise of the club, as Shane’s face flinched to the side.

Enough to make his entire brain short-circuit instantly.

Fuck, fuck, fuck, *fuck.*

Heat rushed through him so fast it nearly made him dizzy, all of his muscles spasming as he tried to stop the inevitable, the battle lost before he even knew he was fighting it. He came in his pants, head dropping down, forehead resting against Ilya’s chest as his body rode out the aftershocks. “Oh-, oh fuck, *Ilya.*”

“There,” Ilya said quietly, thumb brushing once across Shane’s cheek. “Better, now that you got something in your mouth?”

Shane looked up at him, absolutely betrayed by his own nervous system, and something in his eyes must have clued Ilya in, because his mouth dropped open in surprise, eyes darkening.

“Oh,” Ilya murmured softly, eyes dropping to Shane’s crotch.

Shane hated how breathless he sounded when he answered. “Shut up.”

But Ilya looked almost fascinated now. “Was that all it took?”

“No.”

“Liar.”

Another slap.

Shane nearly choked on air. The warmth in his stomach twisted, pulse stuttering hard enough that he suddenly needed to lean his arm against the table to steady himself. His cock twitched valiantly in his pants, and Shane looked up at Ilya with pleading eyes.

And Ilya, the absolute bastard, looked delighted. “You are so responsive,” he said softly. “Such a good boy for me. Such a slut.”

Shane looked away immediately, jaw tightening hard enough to hurt, as embarrassment painted his cheeks. But Ilya didn’t let him get far, his hand snatching his chin, fingers digging into the tingling skin and forcing him to look up at him. “That, Shane, was so fucking hot. Was that all you needed?” Ilya whispered smugly. “Need me to spit in your mouth and slap you a little, and then you come in your pants in the middle of the club, like a whore? What would my men think, hm? If they knew just how much of a cock-slut you are, just how easy and desperate you get for me. Maybe I should let them watch, show you off like you’ve practically been *begging for* since you came her. Maybe I should even let them have a turn? We’ve always shared everything…”

With every word out of Ilya’s mouth, humiliation and want shot through Shane’s spine, making him whimper and nuzzle further into Ilya’s touch. He wanted to deny it, but his body betrayed him. He didn’t think he would enjoy *actually* having anyone watch, and he wasn’t into sharing at all, but…

the *thought of it,* the daydream… it was so hot that Shane feared he might get hard again – and that would be torture.

Ilya stepped away from him just a fraction, but still shielding him from the rest of the club. He looked at him with hooded eyes, clearly not as unaffected as he pretended to be. "Hmm no I could never share you. They don't deserve to see you at all, they've already seen more than enough with the little show you've been putting on the whole night. Which you will pay for later, *da?* For now, let's enjoy the night."

Shane blanched. "But-, but *Ilya,* I'm all-"

"All what?"

"All… *dirty*. I can't stay here like this, please, let's just go home."

"Hmm," Ilya looked contemplating, before glancing at his watch. "No. I am not done partying yet. You were the one whoring yourself out, grinding against *air*, and now you'll sit here all pretty, in your filthy fucking pants, until I'm ready to go home and put that hole of yours to good use, *da?*"

Shane whined pathetically, running his hands across Ilya's chest, "Ilya, *Sir,* please. It doesn't feel nice, it's all sticky. Can I at least clean it up, please?"

"So pathetic. Can you even stand on your own, if I let you? Or do you need help with that too? Useless." With that, Ilya hauled him up, grabbing an arm around his waist, and walked them towards the bathrooms. He guided Shane into one, and locked the door. Luckily, since this was a *nicer* bar, it was a whole private bathroom, and not just a stall. Shane immediately leans his body into Ilya, crowding him against the door. "Please, can I please clean up, Sir?"

"Hmm, I am so tempted to deny you, just to watch you squirm for the rest of the evening. But I am feeling… generous*, kotik."* Ilya winked at him, before dropping to his knees on the bathroom floor, making quick work of Shane's pants. He reached one hand up underneath Shane's shirt, pressing his palm into his abdomen, fingers grazing the body chain adorning it. And then he got to work.

Ilya licked Shane clean, first along his inner thighs, then closer and closer, until he suddenly enveloped Shane's spent cock in his mouth. And that was all it took for it to immediately grow hard in his mouth, and for Shane to start panting and rutting into it.

Ilya let him thrust his hips a couple of times, Shane desperately chasing another high, but just as he was nearing the peak again, Ilya pulled back and tsk'ed at him condescendingly, "So greedy, Shane. Here I am, licking you clean so you don't have to go out there all *dirty,* and you are already thinking about the next orgasm. That's not what good boys do."

"Please, Ilya, *fuck,* please let me come."

"No. You already got to once. You will wait, like a good boy, until we are home later."

Shane whined, head tilting back and hitting the door behind him in frustration.

Ilya only raised an eyebrow at him. "Oh? You wish to complain, *malysh*?"

Shane immediately shook his head, eyes widening in fear. "No, no I promise, I'll be good, I can wait."

“I know you can, because you’re my good boy, *da?*”

“Da.” Shane whispered, taking deep breaths.

Ilya re-dressed Shane again, giving him a moment to collect himself before they reemerged from the bathroom to many whistles and claps from the *Bratva*. Ivan looked them up and down and smirked, “You can’t even go a couple of hours without?”

Shane waited for the embarrassment to hit, but it didn’t. Instead, he nodded towards Ilya, “Have you seen him? I’m very proud we lasted this long.” He then winked at Ivan, who raised his glass in a mock salute, to the laughter of everyone else at the table. Ilya’s hand splayed possessively across his lower back, and Shane leaned into it, throwing a wink Ilya’s way as well.

The rest of the night passed in a blur of drinks, and before long, they were in the car heading home. The drive felt like foreplay in the most dangerous way. The city blurred outside the windows in streaks of gold and rain-slick neon, while tension thickened between them so heavily Shane could practically taste it, metallic and electric at the back of his tongue. Beside him, Ilya sat with both hands clenched in his lap hard enough for the veins in his forearms to stand out sharply beneath smooth skin.

Which, naturally, only encouraged Shane further.

“You know what I’ve learned tonight?” Shane asked lazily, slumped low in his seat with one leg angled deliberately toward Ilya.

Silence.

Then, “That self-preservation is not one of your strengths?”

Shane grinned. “I’ve learned that you really like watching me flirt with you.”

“I have spent the last four hours contemplating homicide.”

“Mhmm. But *lovingly*.”

Ilya finally glanced at him then, slow and dark and exhausted in a way that made heat curl viciously low in Shane’s stomach. Shane lived for that look, like Ilya wanted to tear him apart with his *teeth.* Like restraint itself had become physically painful, and honestly? Shane understood. Because the body-chain had been a catastrophically good decision. The moment he had stepped into the club and caught Ilya noticing the faint silver glint beneath the open collar of his black silk shirt, Shane had known he was doomed.

After that, every touch had felt loaded.

Ilya's hand low on his waist while guiding him through the crowd.

Fingers hooking briefly beneath the collar of Shane's shirt like he wanted to rip it open right there in front of everyone, just to catch more than a glimpse.

Hands slapping hard against Shane's cheek, lighting his body on fire right there, in front of everyone.

That dark stare every time the chains shifted beneath the fabric.

And Shane, drunk on attention, liquor and the sheer thrill of being looked at like prey, had only gotten worse as the night went on.

"You are being very brave tonight," Ilya said quietly, glancing at him. "Or very stupid."

The laugh that escaped Shane came softer than intended because *fuck*, he loved him. Loved him even like this, sharp-edged and mean-mouthed and hanging onto control by threads visibly fraying at the edges.

Especially like this.

Because underneath all the annoyance, Shane could feel it. Ilya had touched him all night like a starving man pretending he wasn't hungry, and every single time, he had stopped himself before it could become more. Besides *accidentally* making Shane come, and licking him clean afterwards, Ilya had been nothing but *proper,* and it was driving Shane insane.

"You know," Shane murmured softly, tracing one finger along the inside seam of his jeans, "I think you're getting too nice to me."

Ilya laughed once under his breath. "You came in your pants because I slapped you twice."

Heat exploded across Shane's face immediately, before he schooled his expression into nonchalance. "Once, actually. The other one was like a dessert after a *very good* meal, you did also spit in my mouth after all - it almost made me hard again immediately, and I don't even think that's possible."

"You nearly climbed into my lap at the bar."

"I was emotional."

"You were *horny*."

Shane smiled dreamily out the window. "Same thing."

"*Fuck*, Shane."

It almost sounded fond. And Shane, selfish creature that he was, wanted more, wanted to push harder and see what happened if he kept pulling at the leash. So, he turned toward Ilya fully "I think I could get you to fuck me before we even make it upstairs."

Ilya choked on his spit, clearly trying not to react, but it was visible enough to make Shane grin viciously.

“You are unbelievable,” Ilya muttered.

“That’s not a no.”

“It is if you value your life.”

“See, this is what I mean,” Shane sighed dramatically. “You used to threaten me with *conviction*.”

Ilya went still, then very slowly, “You have exactly ten seconds to stop talking.”

“Or what?”

“Or I make the driver pull this car over and make you regret being able to speak.”

The words shot straight through Shane like lightning, his breath catching. And Ilya noticed, of course he did. That was the problem with loving someone this observant - nothing escaped him. Not the hitch in Shane’s breathing, or the way his thighs pressed together instinctively. Not the way his mouth parted slightly around nothing at all, but wishing for any weight of Ilya on his tongue.

Ilya’s eyes darkened instantly. “Ah,” he murmured softly. “There you are.”

Shane hated how weak his voice sounded when he answered. “Shut up.”

“No.”

They both left the car quickly once they arrived, and the door had barely closed behind them before Ilya grabbed him. One second Shane was laughing breathlessly while trying to kick off his shoes, and the next he was pinned hard against the wall with Ilya’s hand wrapped around his throat just enough to make his pulse jump violently beneath his skin.

Finally.

The relief of it nearly hurt.

Shane melted into him immediately with a broken sound, grabbing fistfuls of Ilya’s shirt while Ilya kissed him meanly enough to steal the air from his lungs.

“You have been acting like a fucking menace all night,” Ilya muttered against his mouth.

Shane smiled shakily. “You liked it.”

“I wanted to bite through your throat.”

“Romantic.”

Ilya kissed him again harder, with teeth this time, his wandering hands rougher now. And God, Shane had missed this so much he could barely think around it. “I should punish you,” Ilya whispered.

The words wrapped hot around Shane’s spine. “Yes.”

“I should put you to bed untouched after the way you behaved.”

Shane actually whimpered at that, eyes widening. He had wanted to be punished, but he had never considered that the punishment might be… *nothing.*

“Ilya,” he breathed desperately.

“*No*.”

“Please.”

“You spent the entire night trying to provoke me.”

“Because I missed you.” The confession slipped out accidentally, too honest and too soft for the conversation they were having. Ilya stilled immediately and Shane’s throat tightened. “I miss this,” he admitted quietly, eyes dropping briefly to Ilya’s mouth. “I miss you being mean to me. I miss feeling like you want me badly enough to lose your mind a little. Especially since we’ve actually started having sex again. It’s like you’re dangling my favorite piece of candy right in front of me, and I was raised an only child you know, patience is not my virtue.”

Something painful flickered across Ilya’s face then. “I always want you that badly.”

“But you hold back,” Shane whispered.

“I have to.”

“You *don’t*.” He stepped closer instantly until there was no space left between them at all. “I trust you,” he whispered.

Ilya laughed softly then, wrecked around the edges. “You trust me too much.”

“Probably. But I don’t care.”

Their breathing tangled together in the dim apartment while rain tapped softly against the windows somewhere beyond the bedroom, until suddenly they were making out again, and it wasn’t soft. Ilya grabbed Shane under his thighs, and hoisted him up, carrying him into the bedroom, and *throwing him* onto the bed. Shane’s brain short circuited, all blood rushing south immediately.

Ilya climbed on top of him, and ran a possessive hand over his chest, not being able to look away from the chain still peaking out from underneath his shirt. “You have been bad, *malysh.* You deserve to be punished.”

Then Shane, because apparently, he had learned absolutely nothing tonight, tilted his head slightly and asked in the sweetest voice he possessed, “You can do whatever you want to me. Just please, fill me up. I *need* it.”

“No.”

“Please, Sir, just-, just the tip? Just so I can feel you a little? I promise I’ll squeeze *so nicely* around you, so you’ll feel good too.”

Ilya stared at him, jaw gone slack and eyes unfocused. “You cannot possibly be real.”

“I’m real, and devastatingly serious.”

“You are impossible.”

“Please?”

“No.”

“Ilya.”

“*No*.”

“*Please*.”

The word came out embarrassingly desperate that time. Shane hated it, but clearly Ilya loved it, that much was obvious from the way his expression shifted instantly darker. “You want it that badly?”

“Yes.”

“Even if I won’t go all the way in? Just tease you the whole night?”

“*Yes*.”

Ilya cupped his jaw then, thumb pressing slowly into Shane’s mouth just to hear his breathing hitch. “Such a needy thing,” he murmured. “You spend all night acting like a brat and then come home begging sweetly like this.”

Shane flushed hard. “Please,” he whispered again around Ilya’s thumb. “Just a little. I promise.”

For one horrible second, Ilya looked genuinely prepared to refuse him. Then Shane watched the exact moment his restraint finally cracked. A tiny exhale, eyes falling shut briefly, forehead pressing against Shane’s.

“You are going to kill me one day,” Ilya muttered.

Relief hit Shane so hard his knees nearly gave out, but instead he smiled shakily against Ilya’s mouth and whispered, “So that’s a yes?”

Ilya answered by grabbing the hem of Shane’s shirt and dragging it upward roughly enough to make him stumble. And then he froze.

Completely.

The silk hit the floor soundlessly, and neither of them moved while Ilya admired Shane’s torso, fully revealed. The silver body-chain gleamed against Shane’s skin in delicate intricate lines, draping from a necklace and down across his chest and stomach, thin chains curving over collarbones and ribs before looping up in a way that almost made the entire thing look like it was inspired by gun-holsters – Marleau’s words.

Under the bedroom lights, it looked obscene somehow. *Intimate*. Shane watched Ilya’s pupils blow wide instantly.

“Oh,” Ilya said softly.

Fuck, the unguarded and desperate sound alone nearly made Shane come. Ilya's gaze dragged slowly downward over every inch of exposed skin and silver, thorough in a way that made heat bloom across Shane's entire body. His left hand settled on Shane's waist almost reverently, thumb brushing against the chains stretched across his stomach.

"You wore this under your clothes all night, and let me sit there imagining it" he said quietly.

"Well." Shane smiled weakly. "Technically, you were imagining correctly."

Ilya made a low sound in the back of his throat that sounded genuinely dangerous. "No amount of imagination could have prepared me for this, sweetheart. You look fucking gorgeous, draped in jewellery like this. Like my perfect little doll, that I get to dress up and make all pretty for me. You're perfect. Especially when you dress *yourself* up just for me, *da?*"

Then his fingers hooked beneath one of the chains over Shane's ribs, pulling it slightly before letting it fall softly back against skin.

Shane shivered violently. "Just for you. I'm yours, Ilya. Completely. Haven't you noticed yet, baby?"

Ilya's brows furrowed. "Noticed what?"

Shane giggled, blushing while taking Ilya's right hand, and guiding it down to the other side of his ribs, where one of the chains crossed from the necklace and right under his pec. "Look, baby."

Ilya looked down to where his hand was now covering Shane's pec, lifting it slightly while looking quizzically, clearly trying to figure out what Shane was talking about.

Shane saw the exact moment Ilya noticed.

"*Fuck*. Fuck, Shane, fucking look at you," Ilya murmured, almost to himself, staring in absolute awe.

From the chain crossing right under his pec, right above where the worst of Alexei's scars still healed, where once, for one glorious night, Shane had carried Ilya's initial, rested two charms.

I. R.

Ilya's gaze was fixed on the two letters, mouth agape and eyes so dark you almost couldn't see the gorgeous blue that Shane so loved. But if it briefly disappeared because of him, because *he* was making Ilya look at him like that? He wouldn't complain.

"*Shane.*" Ilya whispered reverently, voice barely audible while fingertips caressed the charms Shane had picked out giggling in that jewellery shop.

"They could make small adjustments on the spot, and I couldn't resist," he whispered back, reaching up to tilt Ilya's face towards him by his chin, making him meet his eyes. "I always want to be yours, and I know Alexei-, I know he took it from us once. But we should reclaim it, don't you think? So, when she asked if it was for someone special, I could only say yes. Don't you think it looks good, Sir?"

"Fuck, you're perfect, *kotik."* Ilya's gaze held so many emotions that Shane almost looked away. *Almost.* Because if he could, he would spend his entire life just *looking* at Ilya. The tenderness

hidden underneath the possessiveness nearly undid Shane on the spot.

“You like it?”

“I am trying very hard not to lose my mind right now.”

Shane bit back a grin. “Mission accomplished then. Marleau did think that would be your reaction.”

Silence.

Absolute *silence*.

“…What?”

Shane immediately started laughing, the possessiveness arrived so quickly it was almost unbelievable, darkening Ilya’s entire expression in seconds. “Marley saw this?”

“Yes, he helped me buy it earlier.”

“He saw you trying it on?”

“Well-”

“*Shane*.”

“What?” Shane grinned helplessly. “He has good taste.”

“I am going to kill him.”

“You say that about everyone.”

“Yes, but this time I mean it.”

The jealousy curling through Ilya’s voice was so absurdly intense Shane could barely breathe around his laughter. “You’re insane.”

“He saw you dressed like this before I did.”

“He saw approximately three chains and me having a crisis in a changing room.”

“That is already three chains too many.”

Shane was still laughing when Ilya suddenly grabbed him by the waist and hauled him flush against his chest hard enough to knock the air from his lungs.

“*Mine*,” Ilya said quietly.

All teasing vanished from Shane at once, replaced by something softer and infinitely more dangerous. “Oh. Yes, *yes please.*” Shane whispered.

Ilya’s gaze dragged slowly over the chains again before settling back on his face, eyes dark enough now to make Shane’s pulse stutter. “You wear something like this for me again, and I am not letting you leave the apartment.”

Shane smiled helplessly. “Promise?”

Ilya’s smile turned predatory, and he let a hand trail upwards along the chains, before curling around Shane’s throat, *hard.* All thoughts left Shane’s brain immediately, all that existed was just a completely overwhelming feeling of Ilya *everywhere.*

“Yes, sweetheart, I promise. Actually, I think I will keep you here forever, *da?* Maybe chained to the bed so you can never leave? Or on a *leash*, so I can always put you where I want you? Keep you naked and prepped for me 24/7, I have a feeling you’d love that.”

Shane whined. “I’m prepped for you *now*, you should-… you should use me. Please, *fuck,* please use me.”

Ilya caressed the skin around the necklace, his face taking on an almost condescending look. “I would love to use you, you’re my favorite toy. But you were acting like a brat today, and you don’t deserve to be played with. You should remain untouched and aching, like the *bad* boy you are.”

“No-, no please, I’ll be good, let me be good, *please.*”

“You can work for it, yes? Show me you can be good?”

“Yes, Ilya, *fuck,* anything.”

Ilya hummed, before getting off the bed and stripping out of his clothes. He then crawled back on the bed, and pulled Shane’s pants off him, leaving them both exposed, the body chain and bracelet catching the bedroom light. “Gorgeous.”

He licked a stripe up Shane’s inner thigh, making him shiver. He was just about to beg for *more,* when Ilya grabbed his hips and lifted him up, twisting him around so he landed on his front. The sheer display of strength had Shane dizzy, and he let out a loud moan, burrowing his face into the pillow. Ilya didn’t waste any time, immediately prodding at his hole with his tongue. Shane whined and pushed his ass back, trying desperately to get Ilya deeper, but Ilya’s hands came up to steady his hips.

“Don’t move, *kotik.* Behave.”

“I’m-, fuck, I’m trying.”

“Mhmm, I know. You want so badly to be good, but it must be so hard. Your cock is so fucking wet for me, if you were a girl you’d be dripping.”

Shane’s breath stuttered, and his cock leaked a burst of precome, not helping his case at all.

Ilya laughed condescendingly, “See? You’re leaking for me. If I took all of that, I wouldn’t even need lube to fuck you. I could slide right in, just like a pussy. What do you even need this big cock for, huh?” Ilya grabbed him and stroked quickly, making Shane whine. “So long and thick, but so fucking useless, *kotik.* You wouldn’t even know what do with it, if I gave you a chance, would you? If I let you fuck me? What a waste, you should just have a pussy instead, then at least you’d always be ready for me.”

“Fuck, Ilya.” Shane was breathless, unable to comprehend what Ilya was saying. It should have been filthy, and weird and disgusting, but his cock had never been harder. He found himself

imagining what it would be like, to always have a wet hole for Ilya to slide into whenever he wanted, not having to bother with prep and lube, but just always being *ready.* Because he had no doubt, that if he *had* a pussy, he'd be wet all the fucking time.

The mental picture caught him so off guard, that he had no chance of stopping his body before he tipped over the edge, practically untouched for the *second* time that night. The feeling of humiliation was quickly followed by *dread*, at having been *bad*. At not holding on, and doing what Ilya wanted.

But when he looked up, Ilya was staring at him in awe. "Oh, *kotik.*"

"Fuck, *fuck,* I didn't mean to I swear, it just-, it just *happened.*"

"I know, sweetheart, I know. I can't expect a slut like you to hold it in, you're too fucking easy for me, aren't you? So horny that you couldn't even wait for the tip that you had begged for so *desperately.* Such a shame."

Shane panicked. "No, no, no, please-, I can take it, please give it to me, *please.*"

"You've come twice tonight, and you still want *more*?" Ilya raised his eyebrow at him, and Shane sensed the undertone of Ilya genuinely checking in, but he was determined.

"Yes, please, I want it."

Ilya ran a finger down between Shane's cheeks, finding the slightly opened hole, and pushing just the pad of his finger inside. "So loose for me, I wonder if it will even feel good? Will I even notice that my tip is inside?"

Shane knew Ilya was exaggerating. He may have prepped beforehand, but he was nowhere near as stretched as when they fucked normally. But logic had escaped him, Ilya's words igniting a fire inside him despite his spent cock, which was still hanging soft between his legs. "I'll squeeze, I promise, just let me have it."

"Okay, sweetheart."

With that, Ilya reached over to grab the lube, but Shane immediately whined. Ilya froze in his tracks behind him, and leaned over to look at his face over his shoulder. "What's wrong?"

"No lube."

"What?"

"I prepped earlier, and you made me wet with your tongue, and it's *enough,* please just give it to me."

Ilya ran a hand over his lower back, "Hmm, you want to really feel me, yes?"

"Yes."

Ilya didn't answer, but just as Shane was about to beg again, he felt the unmistakeable pressure of Ilya's cock resting against his rim. Ilya didn't wait, didn't ask him if he was ready. But he didn't have to, he knew exactly what Shane's limits were, and Shane trusted him completely. When Ilya

pushed the tip of his cock in and *stilled,* Shane let out a ragged moan, the breath punched out of his lungs.

It was too much, Ilya stretching him bordering on painful in the best way.

At the same time, it wasn't enough, the usual feeling of ecstasy just out of reach.

Shane tried to push back against Ilya, but his hips were grabbed harshly. "What do you think you are doing, hm? You said you would be a good boy and take what I give you, yes?

"Y-, yes." Shane stammered.

"Then *stop moving,* and *take it*." With that, Ilya pulled out a little, before pushing back in, keeping only the tip inside him, but keeping his hole stretched. It felt glorious, and Shane found himself wishing that he'd stay there forever.

Suddenly Ilya laughed, "Yes, you would like that, wouldn't you?"

Fuck, had he said that out loud?

"You're so tight around me, such a good slut. You feel-, fuck, *Shane,* you feel perfect. Your hole is so greedy, it's pulling me in."

Shane could do nothing but moan and arch his back invitingly, desperately hoping for Ilya's composure to crack. His cock was hard again, and it was almost painful, but he *needed* to come. Above him, Ilya's breathing had turned ragged, the grip on Shane's hip desperately hard.

Oh, please let it leave marks, he found himself wishing, pushing back into the touch as if that could somehow make it stick. But suddenly, Ilya's hand disappeared, and Shane whined pitifully. The sound was cut off in his throat at the hard slap Ilya delivered to the side of his thigh.

Shane moaned so loud it was a borderline scream.

"You like that, yes? I have been so nice to you for so long, but my slut likes when I'm mean, *da?*"

"Yes, yes, yes, yes." Shane murmured on repeat, brain suddenly very fuzzy around the edged, all because of *one slap*. Ilya spanked him again, this time on his left ass cheek, and even harder than before. Shane was losing his fucking mind. Suddenly, Ilya pulled his cock out of him, to Shane's great disappointment, but he barely had time to complain before Ilya was spreading his cheeks with one hand, the other coming down on his hole with a loud smack.

"*Fuck*, did you just-"

"Such a greedy hole, it's trying to suck my fingers in, even when they're hitting it. Your hole is as slutty as you, *moya lyubov.*"

Shane whined and tried to arch his back further, using his body to silently beg for more.

And luckily, it fucking worked.

Ilya grabbed the back of his neck, *hard,* and leaned down to whisper in his ear. "I love you, and care about you so much. I never want you to hurt because of me." Shane furrowed his brows, unsure where Ilya was going with this, but he continued immediately. "But tonight, I'm going to

give us what we both need, and you're going to lay there and take it all for me like a good boy, *da*? Afterwards, I will take care of you, and we'll cuddle on the couch to a boring documentary, but now? Now I'm going to fuck you like the slut you are. Like you *deserve*."

Then, before Shane could even properly process Ilya's words, Ilya was guiding his cock back into Shane and pushing in with one smooth thrust. Shane's jaw dropped open, and he buried his face in the pillow, letting it swallow his moans.

But Ilya wasn't having it.

He grabbed a fistful of Shane's hair and pulled his head back, making him whimper in pain mixed with pleasure in the way he loved. "Do not hide your sounds from me, they are *mine,* just like the rest of you."

"Yes sir," Shane whined, unable to form more elaborate words than that.

Ilya fucked in and out of him in a brutal pace, hitting Shane's prostate every time. Despite already having come twice, Shane knew it wouldn't take too long. Not with the buildup, not with the occasional hard slaps to his ass, and not with the firm hand in his hair. He felt completely and utterly overstimulated, and if someone asked him his name right now, he was pretty sure all that would come out would be moans.

Ilya's hand remained in his hair, Ilya using it as leverage to pull Shane back onto his cock in time with his thrusst. It was rough, borderline *feral,* and it felt like coming home.

They had had amazing sex, they always did. But this-, this primal *need* to devour each other and leave no scraps, was something completely unmatched, a feeling that simply couldn't be replicated.

"Harder," Shane managed to stammer, Ilya immediately growling behind him, the hand in his hair tightening to the point of Shane seeing stars. And he fucking *loved it.*

Ilya, as expected, found it in him to fuck him even harder, and the sheer strength he was using was driving Shane insane. It only took three more grazes against his prostate before he was coming, squeezing desperately around Ilya whose pace stammered.

"Fuck, Ilya, keep going, I want you to come inside me. Please, I want your come, I *need* it in me."

"Oh my fucking *God,* Shane, you will be the death of me, I will never fucking recover from you, my perfect little slut." Ilya was losing it, cursing rapidly in Russian before forcing his cock as far inside Shane as it would go, stilling his hips as he filled him up. "Fuck, fuck, *fuck."* He cursed as he rode out the aftershocks, letting Shane's head drop as he instead grabbed two fistfuls of his ass, kneading it and making his cheeks squeeze even more around his softening cock.

Then, he pulled out, but instead of falling into bed next to Shane, he got up and strode across the room, into their dresser. "What are you doing?"

Ilya turned around, holding up a butt plug triumphantly, winking at Shane before situating himself back between his legs. Shane whined at the realisation, and then at the feeling of Ilya's fingers scooping up the come that had escaped his hole, and pushing it back in. "So fucking *pretty*, when you're all used and filthy. I could stay here forever, just making sure you were always full of *me*."

With that, Ilya took the butt plug, and pushed it inside gently. He then leaned over and kissed Shane's temple, before dropping down next to him.

For a moment, they just looked at each other, Ilya's eyes flickering over his face in a way Shane had come to find out meant he was cataloguing his freckles. Meanwhile, Shane couldn't look away from Ilya's eyes, drawing him in like a siren at sea. And he'd jump into the icy blue every single time.

He lifted a hand up, and ran it across the side of Ilya's face and into his hair, scratching gently. Ilya's eyes fluttered shut, relaxing into the touch. *Like a puppy.*

Shane smiled. "You're so fucking hot."

Ilya lifted an eyebrow at him, "Oh? Am I? Does my boyfriend find it hot when I fuck his brains out?"

"Fuck *my* brains out? I'm pretty sure your brain is fried too."

"Accusations, accusations. And yet, no proof. You don't just accuse men like me of crimes, Shane, that is so dangerous."

"Ohh, 'men like you', huh? You mean softies who pretend to be all emotionless and impassive? You're like a very well trained, but scary looking puppy. I am not afraid of you."

Ilya's eyes darkened and his lip quirked up in a smile. "Good. I never want you to be scared of me."

That statement somehow felt too deep and serious for the afterglow they were currently sharing, but Shane understood. He understood that this would always somehow be a part of their relationship. Shane didn't know a whole lot about Ilya's childhood, besides the few stories he had shared of his mother. Nothing about his father, which made Shane guess that he maybe hadn't been… nice.

And this dynamic they had was *amazing,* and they were both fucking living for it, but it teetered on the edge of a line, that he knew Ilya was afraid to cross. So, Shane would just have to spend the rest of their life reassuring him. Starting now.

"You went really soft on me with those spanks, Rozanov. You've lost your touch."

Ilya barked a laugh, clearly caught off guard. "Oh, was it not rough enough for you?"

"Eh," Shane shrugged. "You can always be rougher. If I ever find the 'too rough' limit, I'll let you know. But you're nowhere near it, so don't hold back."

"You're fucking crazy."

"Yes."

They both broke out in a fit of giggles, the sound almost too pure for the come stains on the sheets, and handprints on Shane's ass. But he wouldn't have it any other way. "I love you."

"*Ya tebya lyublyu."*

"You really should teach me Russian. Both so I can understand when you're saying sappy things about me, and *to me,* which I know you do," he shot Ilya a knowing glare, "but also because it

sounds really pretty. And it would be fun to talk to you in your mother tongue."

Ilya looked contemplative for a moment, a gentle smile crossing his face. "You're too good for me, Shane Hollander. But I am a selfish man, so I will be keeping you."

"Good, because you couldn't get rid of me if you tried."

Ilya's hand came up to caress the soft chains still around Shane's torso, some of them slightly tangled. "This was gorgeous, sweetheart. We will be getting more."

Shane blushed, which was somehow silly after everything they had done, before looking away. "Shut up."

"No." Ilya then furrowed his brows, looking at him like he was trying to read him. "What's wrong? Did you not enjoy wearing it?"

How this man could always somehow *know* when Shane had something on his mind, was beyond him. "No, I really enjoyed it, I promise. It was… somehow hotter than I had expected."

"Mhmm," Ilya nodded, eyes never leaving Shane. "And what made you pick it?"

That made Shane pause, eyes suddenly straying anywhere but at Ilya. "You're going to think it's stupid."

"Never."

"I just wanted something… I don't even know. I keep feeling like Alexei took something deeper when he pulled off that necklace. And I've been chasing that feeling of belonging for a little while now, and every time we're together, I feel so *good*. You make me feel so good, and like I'm yours no matter what, and I love it. But then, when we're apart, it's like I'm missing carrying around a part of you. And I know that I have the bracelet, and I love it. But-" He caressed it where it rested against his wrists.

"But it's not enough?" Ilya asked softly.

"Somehow not, no. But I don't want another necklace either. That one was special, and the moment was special, and everything around it just felt… natural, and *inevitable,* like we were always going to find our way there eventually. I don't want to drape myself in jewellery, hoping to feel just an inkling of that. I feel like an alcoholic constantly trying to quench my thirst in… fucking *ginger ale.* But I don't want you to think that I'm fucking pathetic or-, or that you're not enough, because you *are.* But I think there's a part of me that never made it out of that warehouse. Like the version of me that came out was somehow reshaped, and now I no longer fit into this mould that I… really fucking liked. And it has nothing to do with you, or the *Bratva,* or all of the ways in which my life is now objectively *crazy.* I don't care about that. But I care about the fact that we've been trying to gently make it all go back to how it was before, like that was the only possible goal, and I-, I just don't think we can. We're not the same."

"What are you saying?" Ilya whispered,

"That we-, that *I*, need to stop looking back and expect it all to eventually go back to that. I love you, and I know you love me, and that's fucking *enough*. Nothing else matters. I'm so fucking

happy with you. But there's a part of my brain that feels… broken, and I need to somehow acknowledge it before it escalates, I think. But I'm not sure how."

Ilya looked at him for a long moment, with concentration as though he was carefully turning Shane's words over in his head, examining them from every angle before deciding what they meant.

Shane suddenly wished he could take all of it back. Not because it wasn't true, but because it had been sitting somewhere deep inside him for weeks, growing teeth and claws, and now it was out in the open between them, impossible to stuff back into its cage. Finally, Ilya's thumb brushed over the inside of his wrist. "You think we're trying to go backwards."

Shane swallowed. "Maybe."

"You don't want to."

"No."

The answer came immediately, and it almost felt strange. If someone offered him his old life back tomorrow, he'd refuse it. He loved Ilya, their house, the *Bratva.* Loved the life they'd built from the wreckage. And yet… something still felt wrong, like he was carrying around a book with the middle chapters torn out, making it impossible to understand what the ending might mean. "I don't miss my old life," Shane said quietly. "I miss..."

The words caught.

"I don't even know what I miss."

Ilya's expression softened. "I think you do."

"Then tell me."

A faint smile touched Ilya's mouth. "If I knew what was happening inside your head, my life would be significantly easier."

Despite everything, Shane huffed a laugh, and Ilya looked unreasonably pleased with himself for causing it. Then, his expression turned serious again. "You keep talking about the necklace."

Shane's fingers instinctively drifted toward his throat, the absence of it still feeling strange sometimes. "I know."

"But I don't think it's the necklace."

"No?"

Ilya shook his head. "I think it's what it represented."

Shane frowned. "And what did it represent?"

"Me."

Shane froze, eyes watering against his will. And just like that, the dam broke. "I just-, I just want to be yours, and I want it to be as easy it was. I want to *feel* claimed, without it having all of these layers of pain, tainting the best thing that has ever happened to me. I keep thinking that if I just… if

I just do enough, if I show it *enough,* then no one else will ever dare to take it away again." Shane wiped his eyes before continuing. "But I don't think I can keep ignoring it, and hoping it will go away by itself. I just-, I don't know what to do. In movies, everyone survives horrible things and then gets a speech and a hug and magically understands themselves, and moves the fuck on."

"Movies are stupid."

That pulled another reluctant smile out of Shane, as Ilya squeezed his knee. Then his voice grew quieter. "You don't have to understand yourself immediately."

Shane looked at him. "I don't?"

"No." Ilya's gaze didn't waver. "You survived, and you're building a life. Maybe now you're finally reaching the point where your brain thinks it's safe enough to deal with the rest."

Something in Shane's chest tightened. "I don't know what to do with that."

"You don't have to do anything." Ilya intertwined their fingers. "You can just tell me when it hurts."

The simplicity of it made Shane's throat ache. No solutions, expectations, or pressure to become someone stronger or more healed. Just… just *them*. For a moment, Shane couldn't speak, he just stared at their joined hands and felt something inside him loosen, if only slightly.

Not fixed or healed, but acknowledged.

And somehow, that already gave him hope. Hope that they would be okay. Ilya suddenly furrowed his brows, reaching a hand up to fiddle with the cross around his neck. "Maybe…" he trailed off.

"Maybe what?"

"Do not… take this the wrong way, *malysh*." Ilya took a deep breath. "But maybe you should… talk to someone? Someone that isn't me, and isn't biased, yes? Someone that can help you… understand, what your brain is trying to tell you."

Shane stared at him. For a second, he genuinely wasn't sure he'd heard him correctly. "Therapy?" The word sounded foreign in his mouth.

Ilya winced. "See? This is exactly why I was afraid to say it."

Shane huffed a laugh despite himself. "No, sorry. I just..." He shook his head. "You realize you're suggesting therapy while simultaneously running a criminal organization, right?"

"Yes."

"You see the irony."

"I do."

"And?"

"And I still think it is a good idea."

Shane rolled his eyes, and Ilya looked annoyingly pleased that he hadn't immediately refused.

The bastard.

"I don't know," Shane muttered.

The truth was, he'd never seriously considered it. Therapy was something other people did, people with difficult jobs and bad childhoods and problems they could actually explain. Not people whose lives now required entire sections of the truth to be carefully cut away before they could tell a story.

"What would I even say?" Shane asked quietly.

Ilya's expression softened. "The truth."

Shane gave him a look. "The truth would get someone arrested."

Ilya fell silent, and Shane immediately regretted saying it. Because he knew exactly why Ilya's shoulders had tensed, and where his thoughts had gone… to all of the things Shane hadn't really spoken about, because there was nobody he could safely tell.

Nobody except Ilya.

And even then, he usually avoided it, because if he started talking about it, he wasn't entirely convinced he'd ever stop.

"I hate that," Ilya said suddenly.

Shane blinked. "What?"

A shadow passed over Ilya's face. "That you can't talk about it. You should be able to."

Shane looked down at their joined hands. "I talk to you."

"I know."

"But?"

Ilya squeezed his fingers. "But I don't think I should be the only one. You deserve to let it all out, without holding back because you're afraid too much honesty would make me sad."

Shane immediately opened his mouth to argue, but Ilya levelled him with a look. Which was irritating, because he'd expected to dismiss the idea immediately. Instead, it was sitting in his head, stubbornly refusing to leave.

"What if they judge me?"

Ilya smiled. "Shane."

"Ilya, I'm serious."

"If they judge you, I will have Hayden leave increasingly passive-aggressive reviews about them online."

Shane snorted a laugh. "That's your solution?"

"It is an excellent solution."

"Pretty sure it's not."

"Hmm." Ilya pretended to think. "Fine. Then I'll break all of their fingers individually, does that satisfy you?"

Shane shook his head.

Idiot.

His idiot.

The warmth faded after a moment, leaving the question behind. "What if I can't tell them everything?"

Ilya grew serious again. "You don't have to."

Shane looked up. "I don't?"

"No. You tell them what you can. You tell them how you feel. You tell them what you remember." His thumb brushed over Shane's knuckles. "And if there are things you cannot say, then you don't say them. But only because you don't want to, and never because of *me.*"

Something in Shane eased at that, because somehow, he'd been imagining a therapist sitting across from him demanding every detail, that Shane wasn't sure he was ready to share. "And you'd find someone?"

The question came out quieter than he'd intended. Immediately, Ilya nodded. "Of course, if you want me to."

"Someone we can trust?"

"Someone *you* can trust."

The distinction made Shane's chest ache. Ilya shifted closer, pressing a kiss against his temple. "You deserve to talk about what happened to you, *malysh*." His voice was barely above a whisper now. "You deserve more than carrying it around alone because my life is complicated."

"*Our* life." Shane smiled, leaning in to kiss Ilya gently, before pulling back again and resting his head on a pillow, closing his eyes.

For a moment, neither of them spoke. Then he exhaled slowly. "Okay."

Ilya went completely still, and Shane opened one eye.

"Don't make that face."

"What face?"

"The one where you're trying not to look smug."

"I am not smug."

"You absolutely are."

"...Maybe a little. But only because I want you to be happy, and I want you to feel good."

Despite everything, Shane found himself smiling. And for the first time since the conversation had started, the idea didn't feel terrifying. Just… unfamiliar. Like a door he hadn't realized was there until somebody quietly pointed it out. “Thank you, baby.”

Ilya smiled, one that transformed his entire face into a ray of sunshine. God, Shane couldn’t get enough. He couldn’t believe that boy was *his,* and his alone. He leaned in and placed a gentle kiss on Ilya’s lips, which was immediately deepened by Ilya’s tongue prodding for access.

Access that Shane would always grant.

They made out for what felt like forever, Shane nipping at Ilya’s lower lip, while Ilya’s hand tightened in his hair. Eventually they pulled back for air, and Ilya cradled his jaw. “You are *mine,* Shane Hollander. And I do not need a necklace to prove it.”

Shane shuddered, and brought their foreheads together. “I love you.”

Ilya smiled at him, before stretching out his body until he was draped halfway across Shane, making him giggle. “Do you love me enough to carry me into the shower?”

“Carry you? Oh, I’m sorry, do your legs not work? Where you the one getting fucked within an inch of your life just minutes ago?” Shane laughed while pushing Ilya off him and getting of the bed.

“So mean to me,” Ilya pouted, looking up at him from the bed.

Shane rolled his eyes, but couldn’t help but find him endearing. “Come on you big baby, we need to clean up.”

“Yes, you said I was ‘your baby’ once, *da?* And babies get carried, so you are not very nice to your baby Shane.”

“Oh my God.” Shane sighed, faking exasperation, before leaning over, and sliding one arm under Ilya’s knees, and one under his back, not giving him a chance to react before he was hauling him up.

“SHANE, sweetheart, *solnyshko,* you’re crazy, I was *joking*, I was fucking joking, put me down.”

“No, you wanted to be babied, you’re getting babied.”

“Shane, I’m heavy, put me down.”

“Oh please, you’re light as a feather. The heaviest thing about you is your ego.”

Ilya balked, but his eyes were shining in mirth. “Everyone thinks you’re soooo sweet, all my men love the sweet and polite Canadian, Shane Hollander. They do not know that you are a *menace,* and pure evil.”

“Say that again and I’ll drop you.”

“No, you would never.” Ilya smiled smugly, leaning his head into the crook of Shane’s neck, and Shane’s heart fucking melted at the gentleness of the movement.

“You’re right, I would never drop you, baby.” Shane kissed his temple as he walked them into the bathroom, slowly putting Ilya down on the floor before reaching over and turning on the water. Ilya unclasped the jewellery around Shane’s torso, and put it on the counter, gently. Once the temperature was satisfactory, Shane pulled them both under the spray.

They didn’t say much as steam rose around them, but they didn’t have to. Tonight had been intense for both of them, both physically and emotionally, but it had been *good*. Shane felt lighter than he had for weeks, and the ache between his legs only made him even more giddy. They would figure it all out, and they’d do it together.

And as the warm stream washed away their sweat and other fluids, Shane couldn’t help but feel like it washed away some of the heaviness that had been weighing him down, and he found himself melting into Ilya’s arms, until they were just holding each other.

There was nowhere else Shane would rather be.

The serenity of the moment was ruined by Ilya breaking out into a fit of giggles.

“I cannot believe we had such a serious conversation with you plugged up.”

“*Ilya!*”

Chapter End Notes

Hhehehe, the duality... the smut was challenging, and then it grew angsty legs and ran away from me.👀

For the observant ones, we got a final chapter count. And it's terrifying. BUT, I am far from done with this story - but I've decided to turn it into a series. 👉🏻👈🏻So please subscribe that if you want updates, but we've still got one chapter to go on this one!!

Come yap at me <333

Chapter 20

Chapter Summary

The graduation party at Ilya's house looked like a postcard. Tables had been set up across the garden, flowers lined the paths, fairy lights had been strung through the trees despite the afternoon sun still hanging overhead.

Ilya and him had worried about mixing Shane’s family and friends with the Bratva, but Shane had insisted on everyone being there, and had demanded Ivan and Marleau to be on their absolute best behaviour. Which seemed to be going… surprisingly well.

Chapter Notes

AHHHH OMG IT'S HERE I'M SO NERVOUS

See the end of the chapter for more notes

01:34 am

Marleau: I found it

Ilya: Really? Fuck

Marleau: Yea, I'll bring it tomorrow

Ilya: Thank you

Marleau: Anytime, you big softie

By the time Shane stepped out of the graduation hall, diploma tucked securely beneath one arm, he finally believed it.

He'd done it.

Four years of lectures, deadlines, all-nighters, caffeine-fuelled breakdowns and one thesis defence that had shaved several years off his life expectancy.

He had a master's degree.

His parents spotted him first, his mother hurrying across the courtyard before he even had time to put his bag down, wrapping him in a hug so tight his graduation cap nearly slipped off. "You did it!"

"I did."

She pulled back just enough to cup his face, beaming. "I'm so proud of you."

David laughed as he stepped in next, pulling Shane into a hug of his own. "Congratulations, son."

"Thank you."

"You survived."

"Barely."

"I knew you would."

"I wasn't nearly as confident."

Before he could say anything else, Rose launched herself at him. "Oh my God, Shane, you've got a *Master's*. I should totally change your nickname in my phone to like 'Master Shane' or something."

"Please don't."

"I'm absolutely calling you that now."

"I'll block your number."

"You can't."

"I can."

"You *won't*."

Hayden arrived a second later, throwing an arm around Shane's shoulders. "WE DID IT!"

Shane laughed in his friends' arms, before pulling out to look at Hayden. "Can you imagine? We're supposed to be adults now!"

"Damn, do they know you still can't socialise properly? How are you supposed to help people if you don't *like* them?"

Shane rolled his eyes, but before he could say anything, Rose punched Hayden in his shoulder. "Leave him alone."

"I am congratulating him."

"By insulting him?"

"It's our love language."

Suddenly, a familiar voice joined them. "I believe congratulations are in order, yes."

Shane turned. Ilya had made his way across the courtyard, one hand tucked into the pocket of his dark suit while the other carried a bouquet of white lilies and blue irises. He looked completely at ease among the sea of families and graduates, as though attending university ceremonies was something he did every week instead of quietly running half the continent.

His smile was small, almost private. "Congratulations," he said, holding out the flowers.

Shane accepted them carefully. "They're beautiful."

"I hoped you'd like them."

"I do."

Their fingers brushed for only a second as Shane took the bouquet, but just long enough that neither of them entirely wanted to let go.

"So," Hayden said loudly, looking between them, "are we all pretending that's a normal amount of romantic tension over flowers?"

Shane immediately looked away. "They're gorgeous graduation flowers."

"They're *flowers*."

"Shut up, Hayden.”

Yuna laughed, linking her arm through Shane's. "Come on. We have a party to get to."

Shane glanced once more at Ilya, who was already looking back, sending a wink in his direction.

The graduation party at Ilya's house looked like a postcard. Tables had been set up across the garden, flowers lined the paths, fairy lights had been strung through the trees despite the afternoon sun still hanging overhead.

Ilya and him had worried about mixing Shane’s family and friends with the *Bratva,* but Shane had insisted on everyone being there, and had demanded Ivan and Marleau to be on their absolute best behaviour. Which seemed to be going… surprisingly well.

His mother had somehow ended up chatting animatedly with Ivan about gardening.

His father had cornered Marleau into discussing wine.

Rose wandered around taking photos of absolutely everything, Hayden following close behind.

"So..." Hayden eventually said, watching Ilya across the lawn. "Does Mr. Perfect own anything that isn't tailored?"

"No."

"I hate him."

"I know."

"I don't think I've ever seen him wrinkle."

"He wrinkles."

"When?"

"...Sleeping."

Hayden blinked, before rolling his eyes. "You absolute sap."

"Oh, fuck off."

The party drifted on, Shane making sure to circulate and talk to everyone. Eventually, he found himself sipping champagne in the shade, surrounded by Ilya, Ivan and Marleau.

"So…" Marleau leaned comfortably against the edge of the terrace, a whiskey glass balanced in one hand as he looked at Shane with unmistakable curiosity. "Can we finally ask?"

Shane frowned. "Ask what?"

"What your thesis was about."

Shane blinked. "That's what you've been waiting to ask me?"

"For weeks."

"You've known I was writing it? You've *seen* me write at the office on multiple occasions. Why wait until now?"

Marleau shrugged. "I figured I'd wait until it was finished."

Shane laughed. "It wasn't exactly classified."

"No," Ivan agreed mildly. "But we didn't want to like… disturb your house of cards or whatever. But now that it's done, we're very curious. We have bets on the creativity of the title, so *spill.*"

Shane narrowed his eyes. "Why do I suddenly feel like I'm being interrogated?"

"Occupational hazard," Marleau said.

Ilya, standing beside Shane with a glass of champagne, looked entirely too amused. "I admit," he said, "I'm curious as well."

"You never asked either!"

"I wanted you to tell me when you were ready. You seemed so nervous and focused, I didn't want you wasting time trying to explain to me, when I probably wouldn't even understand half of it anyway."

Shane looked between the four of them.

Marleau.

Ivan.

Ilya.

Three men whose collective understanding of violence probably exceeded that of several small armies. Suddenly, his thesis felt... embarrassing. "Ah, I wouldn't sell yourself short on that front. But it's really not that exciting."

"Mhmm," Marleau smiled. "When someone says *that*, it usually is."

Shane rubbed the back of his neck. "It was just..."

He hesitated, and Ivan's teasing smile softened. "One thing at a time. Can we get the title?"

"Human Movement in High-Threat Environments: A Biopsychological Perspective."

Silence.

Complete silence.

Marleau stared, Ivan blinked once before seemingly freezing, Ilya slowly turned his head to look at Shane.

"I'm sorry..." Marleau set his glass down. "*What*?"

Shane rolled his eyes. “I studied kinesiology and psychology."

No one spoke.

“It made sense, I used to watch a lot of hockey as a kid, and they’re fighting all the time!”

Finally, Ivan cleared his throat. "That is… an extraordinarily interesting title."

"Oh, come on! *It made sense.*”

Marleau laughed. "I have absolutely no doubt it did."

Shane looked helplessly towards Ilya. "Say something."

Ilya's lips twitched. "You wrote a master's thesis called Human Movement in High-Threat Environments."

"Yes."

"You started it six months ago? Before meeting me?"

"Yes."

"And you don't see why we're amused."

"It wasn't about the *Bratva*!"

"No," Marleau agreed. "It merely sounds exactly like the sort of document we'd circulate internally. Like an employee handbook."

"It does not!"

Ivan raised an eyebrow. "What were your chapters?"

Shane sighed. "I don't remember the exact titles."

"*Liar*. Come on, talk us through it."

He sighed, before putting his fingers up to count.

“Performing under pressure.”

Ivan nodded.

“Reading movement before it happens.”

Another nod.

“The cost of hesitation.”

“Mhmm” Ivan nodded, clearly fighting back a smile.

“Shut up.”

“Sorry, sorry, please continue.”

Shane narrowed his eyes, but eventually kept talking. “*Decision making under pressure.”*

Ilya smiled, nodding along. “And the last one? You spoke about five main chapters when you were revising last week.”

Shane groaned dramatically. “…*Winning the first three seconds*.”

Silence.

Then Marleau burst out laughing. The sort that forced him to put his drink down before he spilled it. Ivan wasn't much better, a grin breaking across his face, eyes shining in mirth. Even Ilya looked down, shaking his head into his champagne.

Shane stared at all three of them. "I hate every single one of you."

"You planned on writing it before you met us?" Marleau asked between laughs.

"Yes!"

"Entirely before?"

"Entirely."

"You hadn't even heard of Ilya."

"I had not."

Marleau wiped at the corner of one eye. "So, you independently decided to write what is, essentially, a hundred-page guide to surviving organized crime."

"It was *sports science*."

Ivan looked unconvinced.

"With a minor in psychology!"

"That does not improve your argument."

"It wasn't about organized crime!"

"It has a chapter called ‘Winning the first three seconds’, Shane."

"Because people get into fights!"

"They do," Marleau agreed. "They do not usually write dissertations about winning them."

"I wasn't studying *winning*!"

"No?"

"No!"

"What was the conclusion then?"

Shane opened his mouth.

Closed it again.

"...That optimal performance under acute stress depends on repeated exposure, controlled physiological regulation, and trained motor responses."

Marleau slowly looked at Ilya. "I'd hire him."

"Technically, I did," Ilya replied without missing a beat.

Ivan chuckled quietly into his drink. Meanwhile, Shane groaned loud enough that a few guests glanced over before returning to their conversations. "I picked the topic two years ago," he insisted, looking from one infuriatingly amused face to the next. "Long before I met any of you. I thought it would be interesting because stress affects movement, movement affects injury prevention, and understanding both could improve rehabilitation and self-defence education. I was really aiming for that internship with the Montreal Voyageurs, so it was kind of angled at hockey."

The three men regarded him with identical expressions that Shane couldn’t read.

"W-, what?" he stammered.

Ilya stepped closer, unable to suppress the smile tugging at the corners of his mouth. "You accidentally spent two years academically preparing yourself to date a *Bratva* boss."

"I did not."

"You absolutely did."

"I was researching biomechanics."

"You were researching how people survive knife fights."

"I was not specifically researching knife fights."

Marleau tilted his head. "Were there knife fights?"

Shane hesitated. "...There was a section. But it was a little anecdote putting my research into perspective with other types of fights!"

Ivan laughed, a full, genuine laugh. Even Ilya couldn't hide his anymore. Shane buried his face in his hands. "This is the worst audience I could possibly have had for this conversation."

"It is," Ilya agreed warmly, resting a hand against the small of his back. "But *solnyshko*, you have to admit… the timing is extraordinary."

“Shut up.”

After lunch, someone suggested presents, and Shane immediately wanted to run away and hide from the attention. But he stood there, under the trees in his and Ilya’s garden, and tried to enjoy having all of the people closest to him together – something he had been worried would never happen, due to the secret they were carrying about Ilya’s… job. But the stories told themselves as Marleau and Ivan helped create a bigger picture of Ilya’s ‘trading business’, and Shane found himself quickly relaxing.

Until now, where all of the attention was back on him.

Rose handed him a scrapbook she'd secretly been making throughout university, every page filled with photos, ticket stubs and little handwritten notes that somehow made him laugh and cringe in equal measure.

His parents gave him a watch with the date engraved on the back.

Hayden shoved a badly wrapped box into his hands. Inside was a mug.

WORLD'S OKAYEST GRADUATE

Shane stared at it. "Really?"

"I spent almost twelve euros on that."

"I'll treasure it forever."

"You'd better."

Then, Ilya walked up to him, having remained seated until now. When he reached him, he took a medium-sized velvet box out of his jacket pocket, a box that for some reason looked oddly familiar, and Shane’s heartbeat quickened for reasons he couldn't explain.

"I have one more."

"You really didn't have to."

"I know."

He held out the box, and Shane took it carefully. He frowned slightly before lifting the lid.

And his heart skipped a beat.

A silver necklace rested against the velvet, with intricate charms and chains weaving around the blue gem nestled at the centre.

Simple, elegant, and… entirely unmistakable.

His necklace.

Not one like it… *His*.

His fingers froze around the box, because that wasn't possible. Alexei had ripped it from his neck. He still remembered the sting as the chain snapped, the feeling of emptiness afterwards. He'd thought it was gone forever. Mourned it in quiet moments he never spoke about, much more often than he admitted to Ilya. Because it had never *just* been a necklace.

His vision blurred.

Not now.

God, not now.

Everyone was looking.

He swallowed hard before looking up at Ilya. "So-" His voice almost betrayed him, but he cleared his throat. "Would you...?"

A tiny smile touched Ilya's mouth, his eyes glassy as well. "Of course."

He lifted the necklace from the box, Shane turning around. He became acutely aware of every pair of eyes on them.

His parents smiling.

Rose watching fondly.

Hayden looking entertained, but mildly disgusted.

Ivan and Marleau looking at them knowingly, and slightly teary-eyed as well, though they would probably deny it later.

Warm fingers brushed the back of his neck, as the clasp clicked shut. And then... the weight was there again, resting against his clavicle.

Exactly where it belonged.

He thought he had admitted to himself how wrong it had felt without it, but he had been so, *so* wrong. It couldn’t be described, until this very second, exactly how *empty* he had felt, and how fucking right he felt now.

Like a missing piece had quietly found its way home.

Ilya's hand lingered only long enough to smooth the chain flat against Shane's collar. Shane took a deep breath. "You-" His voice barely existed, but it gave them some privacy. "You found it?"

"Marley did. It took him a while, but he found it last night, just in time for it to be fixed this morning."

Shane stared straight ahead over Ilya's shoulder, terrified that if he turned around, everyone would see exactly how close he was to crying.

"I couldn't leave it there," Ilya said softly, whispering into his ear. "It belonged with you. And I know it doesn't fix anything, I know it's just… a piece of jewellery, at the end of the day. But you deserved the choice to have it, if you wanted."

Something inside Shane simply... gave way. He wrapped trembling fingers around the gem.

Home.

"Thank you," he whispered.

Ilya's thumb brushed almost imperceptibly against the back of his neck before his hand fell away. "No, Shane Hollander. Thank *you.*"

"What are you two whispering about?" Hayden called from across the yard.

Shane blinked rapidly before turning around. "Nothing."

Hayden narrowed his eyes. "That looked suspiciously emotional for a necklace."

Before Shane could think of an excuse, Yuna smiled brightly. "I didn't know you liked jewellery that much."

Heat rushed into Shane's cheeks. "It's not..."

He stopped himself, because ow was he supposed to explain?

Actually, my boyfriend gave me this months ago as a symbol that I belonged with him, then his murderous older brother ripped it off my neck while kidnapping me, and apparently Ilya sent one of his men to spend days searching through the guy's stuff just so he could give it back today.

Instead, he laughed awkwardly. "I just... thought I'd lost it."

"Sentimental, then," David smiled.

"I suppose."

Hayden grinned. "So, our Shane's become materialistic."

"Oh, shut up."

"I buy you the funniest mug ever made and you barely react."

"You bought me a mug."

"I'm just saying, if I'd known jewellery was the way to your heart..."

"I suggest you don’t finish that sentence, Pike.” Ilya said menacingly, but his eyes were crinkled in a smile.

The conversation moved on as easily as it had begun, the attention once away spread out.

Rose started teasing Hayden.

Yuna asked David to take more photos.

Marleau quietly rescued Ivan from another discussion about gardening.

Nobody thought twice about the necklace anymore, nobody knew what it really meant. Shane was grateful for that, because he wasn't sure he could have pretended it didn’t mean the world, if someone asked. His thumb found the chain, tracing its familiar edges over and over as the conversations around him faded into the background.

For weeks, he'd told himself it was just an object, that losing it hadn't mattered. That what it represented could never be taken from him.

He'd been right.

And yet...

Feeling its weight against his skin again made something deep inside him settle, as though another piece of Alexei's shadow had finally been reclaimed. Not the last one, Shane wasn’t foolish enough to believe he was magically healed. But it almost felt like someone had given him a lantern to use as guidance through the pitch-black tunnel that was his mind. *No*, not just someone… *Ilya*.

Shane shot another meaningful look towards his boyfriend, who had migrated over to his parents, and was seemingly in a very passionate conversation with his dad. But as if feeling Shane’s eyes on him, he looked up, shooting him a small smile and a wink.

Shane knew what it meant.

Keep it together until later.

And Shane would, while counting down minutes.

The door had barely closed behind the last guest, before Shane was on Ilya with a fervour that was borderline animalistic. Ilya could barely react, Shane pushing him against the door and devouring his mouth, his tongue fighting for dominance and Ilya, on this rare occasion, *let him*.

“You are insane,” Shane moaned as he left trails of kisses down Ilya’s neck, alternating between licking and biting, not letting up for even a second.

“You’re so pretty, *solnyshko,* and the necklace looks so good around your throat, it should stay there forever.”

“Yes, yes, yes, yes.” Shane panted, leaning back up to nip at Ilya’s mouth with his teeth. Ilya grabbed his hips, pulling him flush against him, a thigh between Shane’s legs, creating glorious friction that Shane kept chasing with frantic thrusts.

“Such a good boy, *my good boy,* now yet again claimed, and marked, and *collared* like he deserves.” Ilya’s words were washing over him like honey, making his thoughts syrupy and heavy, his brain slowing down. But Ilya wasn’t done. “I was going crazy once I put the necklace on you. I wanted to put you on your knees right there in front of everyone, and admire how it would look beneath me with the sun making it glint beautifully. I wanted to strip you right there in our garden, so the only things you were wearing, were the things that made you *mine.”*

“Ah, fuck, Ilya.”

“Yes, say my name, *malysh.* Say it gently and softly now, because I can assure you that by the time I’m done with you tonight, you will be screaming it.”

It was as if a switch flipped in Shane’s brain, making his eyelids heavy, and body slow. Ilya reached underneath his thighs and lifted him up, making Shane yelp slightly. He would never get used to Ilya lifting and throwing him around without breaking a sweat.

Ilya walked them into the living room, and put Shane down on the dining table. Normally, Shane might consider germs, and never looking at a piece of furniture the same again, but right now, he had no objections. He just needed Ilya *closer.*

Ilya ground his crotch into Shane’s making them both whimper, before reaching up to unbutton his shirt, sliding it off his body, dropping it on the floor. “Whatever should I do with you?” Ilya murmured into his ear, hand splaying possessively around Shane’s waist.

“I might have an idea.”

Ilya leaned back, looking at him quizzically. “You have an idea? Well okay then, tell me what’s running through that filthy brain of yours.”

Shane blushed, but didn’t let it deter him. “Do you remember the first time you choked me with this necklace on?”

Ilya’s eyes widened, pupils dilating. “Of course I do.”

“You were so nervous after,” Shane whispered into Ilya’s ear seductively, “so afraid that you had hurt me, because the chains had left marks on my throat. Do you remember what I told you?”

He leaned back again to watch Ilya’s eyes frantically jumping between his, could see his mind working overtime, desperately trying to remember. Shane waited patiently, hand trailing down Ilya’s torso and gently squeezing his cock through his slacks, making him whimper, but never breaking eye contact.

Shane could see the exact second that Ilya’s brain provided him with an answer.

His breathing stuttered, brows furrowing as a low groan made it out of his throat, the grip around Shane's hips tightening. "You-, you said that I should-, *fuck-,* you said that next time, I should choke you while you were already choking on my cock."

"Mhmm, good memory, baby. And we never got around to doing it, such a shame. But we should probably move this into the bedroom then."

"Hmm, why do you say that?"

"I think the angle will require you to stand while I lay down, sucking you off. I know you're horny, but your brain cannot be that fried, baby." Shane giggled softly, but Ilya didn't reciprocate, making him falter.

"*Moya lyubov,* but I do not want to go into the bedroom, I cannot wait that long. And I think," he leaned in to bite at Shane's earlobe before continuing, "that this table is the perfect height. All we need is just for you to lay back and relax, and you'll be perfectly spread out for me, like my own personal feast. What do you say, sweetheart?"

"Fuck, Ilya, right here? On the fucking table? We *eat* here."

"Yes, so it's a perfect place for you to have some dessert, don't you think?"

Fuck, Shane was going to die.

Ilya didn't wait for an answer. He placed a kiss on Shane's cheek, surprisingly gentle given the setting, before stepping back from him. "Stay."

As if he was going anywhere.

Ilya moved around the table, taking the bouquet of flowers from the centre, and moving them to the kitchen island, before coming back between Shane's legs, and pushing his chest down until he was laying with his back flat on it. He then walked around to the other end, and grabbed Shane's biceps, pulling him towards him until he was laying fully across the table, with his head angled down towards the floor.

Fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck.

The pressure of the necklace against his throat in this position was *fucking perfect,* and Shane found himself whimpering before Ilya had even properly touched him. Ilya luckily didn't waste any time, freeing his own cock from the confines of his pants, and Shane's mouth watered at the sight of the leaking head right in front of him. By the looks of it, Ilya had been hard for *a while,* and Shane was sure that if he were to touch his underwear, there would be a wet spot.

Shane suddenly craved to press his nose into it, but he refrained.

Next time.

Ilya grabbed his cock, and smeared the tip of it against Shane's nose and cheeks, making him moan loudly. Fuck, he could smell nothing but *Ilya* now, and he never wanted it to stop, his whole world narrowing down to the musky scent of his boyfriend. Shane opened his mouth, willing his jaw to slacken, and luckily, Ilya got the hint.

Immediately, his throat was full, as Ilya pushed his cock in to the hilt, slowly but surely. Shane breathed through his nose and managed to keep his gag reflex at bay – not that it was ever particularly prominent, but this angle almost made Ilya's cock feel a couple of inches longer. He moaned around it, the vibrations making Ilya's hips stutter.

"Fuck, Shane, you feel so good, sweetheart. So nice, squeezing around so greedily. You'd take whatever I give you, wouldn't you? And you'd thank me afterwards, like the good boy you are. But even when you squeeze around me, it's just not enough, sweetheart, I'm sorry."

What? Shane blinked quickly, brows furrowing, but Ilya's cock was still firmly in his throat, and he couldn't talk.

"Yes, it's just not… *tight* enough, I can barely feel it. We'll have to make it tighter, yes?"

Oh.

Oh fuck.

Before Shane could even contemplate reacting, Ilya was setting a punishing rhythm, abusing Shane's throat, as his hand snaked up and squeezed around it, forcing Shane's throat tighter around his cock, as the chains of the necklace were pushed into his skin. Shane was in fucking *heaven.* He thanked God that they didn't have any plans tomorrow, as he was pretty sure his voice would be raspy at best, and absolutely ruined at… well, also at best, if he was being honest with himself. He wanted to feel and hear the effects of Ilya's cock deep in his throat for days, and when it would start to be less noticeable? He'd just have to ask him to do it again.

His brain was blissfully quiet, the only thing of any importance was the feeling and heavy weight of Ilya on his tongue, being pushed in an out at a maddeningly fast pace, Ilya clearly chasing his own pleasure, with no care in the world for Shane's.

Just like it should be.

Nothing got Shane off quicker, then when Ilya just used him for his own benefit, putting him where he wanted him, like a fucking *toy.* Which was also why, despite getting no friction on his cock, Shane could feel his orgasm approaching. He tried to warn Ilya, gurgling around his cock, reaching up a hand to grasp at his hip, but Ilya didn't let up.

And Shane knew he wouldn't.

Shane could trash, cry and scream around his cock, but unless he actually *tapped out*, Ilya would continue, ignoring him completely.

And it was the hottest fucking thing *ever*.

"Yes, are you close, you slut? All you needed was just a cock in your throat and a hand around it, and you're so close, aren't you? Such a perfect toy, getting off on being used. Good for you, because you're not getting any friction on your cock, *malysh,* so you better fucking come *right now.*"

The command was all Shane needed to tip over the edge, trying to gasp for air as his body spasmed to no avail. Ilya had stilled inside Shane's throat, not letting him breathe *at all,* all the while his hand remained firmly around his throat in a way that bordered on truly painful.

And Shane still wanted more.

When the aftershocks stopped, Ilya pulled out of his throat, letting it go to Shane's great disappointment, making him whine through the air he was greedily breathing in.

"Shh, sweetheart, you did so well. But I have plans for you, and they require a relocation, *da?*"

Shane could only find it in himself to nod, practically boneless as Ilya hauled him up and helped him off the table, lifting him under his back and knees, and carrying him to the couch, where he threw him on the cushions. Ilya was immediately upon him, pushing him into a sitting position, before he straddled him, cradling his jaw in his hand, thumb brushing over the necklace.

"So beautiful. My little princess, all for me to doll up and make pretty. With tight, perfect holes, that I can use whenever I want, yes?"

Shane nodded, but Ilya quirked his eyebrow, clearly demanding word.

"Y-, yes." Shane rasped, voice absolutely wrecked, the sound making Ilya's eyes shine in delight.

"So hot, fuck, Shane. But do you know what else is very pretty about you, princess?"

Shane shook his head, unable to form a single sentence, or deduct what Ilya meant.

"I really, *really* like these." Ilya punctuated the statement by grabbing two fistfuls of Shane's pecs, and *squeezing.* Shane's head fell back against the couch, a moan punching out of him. His nipples were always *so sensitive,* and on the few occasions that Ilya had given them more attention, Shane had been falling apart at the seams.

This time, Ilya was giving them *all* of the attention, and Shane had nowhere to run to – not that he would, but the feeling of being trapped underneath the firm weight of Ilya was only making his oversensitive body scream more, and one look at his boyfriend confirmed that he was enjoying it *immensely*.

"Fuck, Ilya, that feels so-"

"Mhmm, it feels good, doesn't it? You like having your boobs played with, sweetheart? Just like a good doll should, you're perfect."

"I don't-, *fuck-,* I don't think I can come again, I'm so fucking sensitive."

Ilya tsk'ed. "Who said anything about you coming again? I'm not playing with you so *you* feel good, I'm doing it for me, silly boy."

Shane shuddered, and arched further into Ilya's touch, one of his hands pinching his left nipple while the other squeezed his entire right pec like a fidget toy. Shane was floating, and it almost felt like the knowledge that this wasn't for him, that his pleasure wasn't important, somehow let him enjoy it more. Without the usual rush towards his orgasm, he could lean back and let the feeling take him, all the while having a front row show to Ilya's reactions.

And he didn't disappoint.

Ilya's face was scrunched in pleasure, despite the angle giving him no friction on his cock. His eyes were locked firmly on Shane's chest, occasionally flicking up to the necklace, as if he couldn't

quite decide where to look. “Fuck, Shane.”

“Ilya, come on.”

“Oh, you have demands now? Tell me, *kotik,* what does a whore like you want?”

Blood rushed to Shane’s cheeks in humiliation, but he somehow managed to look Ilya in the eyes. “Come on me, please. Brand me, mark me, I want it fucking *everywhere.*”

Ilya groaned. “Fuck, so filthy, God, you’re fucking perfect. Can you do something for me, sweetheart?”

Shane was nodding before Ilya even finished the sentence. “Yes, yes, yes, whatever you want.”

“Hold your tits together.”

Shane froze.

Then he took a deep breath. It came out shaky, while he looked at Ilya with parted lips. “W-, what?”

“You heard me. Hold them together, nice and tight for me.”

Shane obeyed immediately, although his brain was scrambling, lost somewhere between nipple stimulation and Ilya’s command. He grabbed his pecs and squeezed them inwards, creating what was essentially a fucking cleavage, and Ilya looked at him like he was his favorite meal, about to be devoured. He let a hand grab a fistful of Shane’s hair, pulling his head back to expose the neck, before he got up on his knees, bracketing Shane in. He leaned in to whisper in his ear, “And don’t you dare let them go. Keep them just like that for me, *da?* Gorgeous.”

Shane could only nod and look as Ilya positioned the head of his cock beneath Shane’s pecs, and thrust his hips upwards.

Fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck.

Shane could feel the glide of Ilya’s cock pushing its way between Shane’s pecs, and when he looked down, he could see the head poking out at the top.

It was simultaneously the filthiest and hottest thing he had ever seen.

Ilya moaned above him, clearly overwhelmed by the sensation. “Oh fuck, that feels *so good,* Shane, it’s so tight, fuck, you’re perfect, princess.”

Shane whined, and tightened his grip, desperate to make it as good for Ilya as possible. He squeezed them together firmly, moving against Ilya’s thrust to create even more friction, and Ilya’s pace stuttered.

“Come on, Ilya, *baby,* give it to me, please.”

Ilya was bracing himself on the couch behind Shane, but snaked on hand back to once again grab Shane’s throat. That, combined with the slide of his cock against his chest, made Shane completely unable to think. He could hear Ilya above him, ranting and cursing in Russian, but the words wouldn’t register even if he tried. His world was reduced to *Ilya, Ilya, Ilya, Ilya.*

He wanted to touch him, to slide his hands up and squeeze his ass, but he was stuck, unable to move as much as a finger, afraid it would make him loose grip, and *ruin it*. So, he sat there dutifully, and let Ilya fuck his chest, while his own cock twitched in interest underneath him.

And of course, Ilya noticed.

“Oh, is this turning you on, princess? Me fucking your tits? Once again, a reason for why you would have made such a pretty girl. But you don’t even need to be one with tits like this, you’re already fucking perfect. Letting me use them for my pleasure, thank you, sweetheart.

Shane could only whine in response, looking up at Ilya with watery eyes and a slack jaw. Ilya looked back, face tense from exertion, a droplet of sweat making it down his temple.

Shane wanted to lick it.

“Fuck, Shane, I’m so close.”

“Yes, yes, yes, come for me baby, give it to me, mark me as yours.”

With a low groan and stuttering hips, Ilya pushed forwards one last time as his orgasm hit him. His come spurted out and covered the top of Shane’s pecs and the hands holding them, but he also felt some of it land on his neck, and-

Fuck*,* on the *necklace.*

He shuddered as realization hit. He had never felt more *claimed,* and more at peace.

As Ilya shuddered through the aftershocks, more and more of his weight fell against Shane, like the world’s comfiest weighted blanket. Shane was hard, but he had no intention of pursuing release, even if Ilya allowed it. He was content to just hold his boy in his arms now, and cherish that they *got to.*

Eventually, Ilya fell back, and his cock slipped from between Shane’s pecs. Shane took it as a sign to let go, and immediately grabbed Ilya around his waist, pulling him against him. Ilya didn’t resist, laying his head in the crook of Shane’s neck, his heavy and ragged breathing brushing the hair at his nape, making him shiver slightly.

They both caught their breath in silence, Ilya’s fingers tracing patterns on Shane’s arm before he got up on shaky legs, reaching out a hand towards Shane. “Shower?”

Shane nodded and accepted the hand, the two of them making their way through the house and into the ensuite. Ilya turned on the water, and checked the temperature before pulling Shane in, flush against him as if every part that wasn’t touching the other was a travesty.

They caressed each other in silence as the water washed over them, never letting go, not stepping back once. Ilya grabbed the soap and gently washed Shane’s body, following the stream of water with kisses. He was especially gentle to skin around the necklace, making Shane hiss as it was tender to the touch.

He loved it.

Shane washed Ilya’s hair, making sure to massage firmly, just like he knew Ilya liked.

Then they wrapped each other in fluffy bathrobes, before falling on the bed in a tangle of limbs, Shane's head on Ilya's biceps, their hands entwined on Ilya's lap. It was all so… soft, and domestic, complete and utter bliss. Shane never wanted them to leave this perfect little bubble of warmth and safety.

They spoke about summer plans, now that Shane had graduated, and no schedule kept him in Montreal. Ilya had travelled significantly more than Shane, and kept mentioning all of the countries they could go to, and all of the gorgeous places he had visited, that he now wished to show Shane.

Spain kept coming up, Shane having never been, and Ilya insisting that it deserved a visit.

"What, Barcelona then?" Shane asked, already planning when they could leave.

"No, *malysh*. Barcelona is pretty, yes, but Madrid is better. Will you go to Madrid with me?"

"Ilya, I'd go anywhere with you."

—

Just as the afterglow settled around them, and plane tickets were almost booked, a knock sounded at the front door. Ilya looked quizzically at Shane as he got up to get dressed, but he looked equally confused. They both found the nearest clothes, Shane ending up in Ilya's hoodie, while Ilya was pretty sure he was wearing Shane's socks, before making their way through the house, Ilya with his gun in hand, just in case.

But what greeted them at the other side of the door wasn't an enemy.

It was Marleau.

"Hi, sorry to bother you. Can I come in?"

Ilya waved him inside, already on edge due to how weird his friend was acting. He had just left a couple of hours ago, and as far as Ilya remembered, there had been nothing requiring his immediate attention. But he didn't have to wonder too long, as Marleau, clearly nervous himself, got right to it as soon as they made it to the kitchen island.

"I'm sorry to come this late, but it can't wait, and I didn't want to ruin your party earlier…" Marleau glanced apologetically at Shane, before looking back at Ilya with a look on his face that had him holding his breath. "News have reached Moscow that Alexei is dead."

Fuck.

Ilya blanched. "And? What are they saying?"

"Some of them are implying that you were behind it… which would mean treason." Marleau hesitated before continuing. "The rest don't blame you, but only because-, well because they say America made you soft and you wouldn't have had the guts, just as you clearly weren't capable of protecting your brother, since he died on your territory."

Ilya closed his eyes. “Fuck.”

“Yea, Roz, it honestly doesn’t look great. We’ve been trying to keep them at bay, but they’re all used to speaking to Sergei, who is *also* dead, so it’s… it’s very volatile right now.”

Ilya was about to open his mouth, when Shane piped timidly up from the sideline, and Ilya allowed himself half a second to preen over how wrecked his voice sounded. “What-, what would happen? Like at worse, what can they do?”

Ilya looked at him, and took a deep breath before answering. "If Moscow decides we're enemies..." The sentence died before he could finish it. He pressed the heel of his hand against his temple, trying to force his thoughts into some kind of order, because there were too many consequences to list, too many threads that all led back to the same conclusion.

"The *Bratva* isn't just Russia," he said quietly. "People think it is because that's where it started, but everything branches out from there. The American operations, Canada..." He gestured vaguely around the room. "*This*. It's all still the *Bratva*. I've been ‘trusted’ to run this territory, but it was never mine to separate from them."

Shane's face fell slightly as understanding began to settle in.

"If they stop recognizing my authority..." Ilya continued, "...then they stop recognizing all of ours."

Marleau gave a grim nod.

"Every shipment that comes across the Atlantic becomes a question mark," he added. "Weapons, ammunition, counterfeit documents, cash. Every contact we've built over decades suddenly has to decide whether dealing with us is worth risking Moscow's wrath."

"And most won't,” Marleau supplied.

Ilya nodded once. "No. Most won't."

Because loyalty in the *Bratva* was never simply personal. It was survival. No one wanted to be remembered as the man who sided with a traitor. He could already imagine the conversations happening in smoke-filled offices seven thousand kilometres away, men he'd grown up respecting sitting around polished tables, discussing whether his name should still carry weight, whether Alexei’s younger brother had become so attached to his peaceful life, that he'd forgotten who he belonged to.

America made you soft. He could practically hear the words, Alexei had repeated them often enough himself.

And now Alexei was dead.

Dead after crossing an ocean to kill him.

The bitter irony was, that the men who knew that part, the men who had helped Alexei arrange his trip or had watched him leave Moscow with enough men to invade a small country, were unlikely to speak. Admitting Alexei had come to Montreal to murder his own brother would mean admitting that *he* had intended to commit treason first, and kill one of their own. Men protected the dead

almost as fiercely as they protected the living, especially when the dead had once sat at the head of the table.

Which left only the version that was easiest to believe.

Alexei had gone to America.

Alexei had died.

Ilya had survived.

To men looking from thousands of miles away, it was a story that almost wrote itself.

"And if enough people believe that version..." Ilya said at last, his voice quieter than before, "then every *Bratva* soldier from Vancouver to Miami becomes a potential liability. Some of them were Alexei's men before they became mine. Some may have known exactly why he came here, others may only know the rumours. Either way, if Moscow orders them to choose..." His jaw tightened almost imperceptibly. "I can't guarantee they'll choose me."

Shane swallowed. "Would they... would they come after you?"

Ilya met his eyes. He wished he could lie.

"Not just me," he said softly. "All of us."

Another silence settled over them, heavier than the last. Because if Moscow declared them enemies, there would be nowhere in the *Bratva's* reach that truly belonged to them anymore. Every safe house became uncertain. Every familiar face became a question. Every handshake had the potential to conceal a knife. And for the first time since Alexei's death, Ilya found himself wondering whether surviving his brother had merely postponed the inevitable.

Shane had furrowed his brows, clearly contemplating their options, but Ilya knew that the decision was already made. He thought of Madrid, of walking around with Shane’s hand in his, eating ice cream while strolling gorgeous streets, not a care in the world.

And he hated that he had to shatter it.

He forced himself to maintain eye contact as he looked at Shane, trying to morph his face into an apology already, before any words had even managed to leave his mouth.

“We have to go to Russia.”

Chapter End Notes

I genuinely can't fucking believe, that I have officially marked this as complete. This is my pride and joy, my little filthy baby, where I've crammed most prompts and ideas that I've had for MONTHS.

And now it's done. :(((((

Thank you so so so much for every single one of you that made this journey exiting, and took the time to comment on every chapter - it meant the world for my motivation, and I love every single one of you.

Thank you to Andy, for yapping and brainstorming and proofreading when I was overthinking, this story wouldn't have happened without you. Hell, I don't think I would have ever taken up writing if not for you.

See you all in Part 2!!! (I hope <333)

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!