

In Case of Emergency

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In Case of Emergency

by [Caraphernellic](#)

Summary

If you are reading this, it means that Danny is following my emergency plan that we practiced. I'm not safe and neither is he. Please, I beg you, take him to his grandparents at this address.

Yuna and David Hollander
2242 Grandview
Ottawa, Ontario

If I ever get the chance, I will repay you.

Please tell him I love him. My parents too. And if you could tell them I'm sorry.

~Shane

Notes

I do not consent to having my works uploaded to any AI platforms and I did not use AI in any way to create this story, I simply finally learned how to properly use an em dash.

FYI- this is an Omegaverse story where although he is male, Shane's pup calls him 'mama' and he is referred to as the pup's mom, and it is not uncommon in this universe.

Chapter 1

Ilya stops and cocks his head. Yes, there it is again, that noise. A faint knock. He sets down the cup he had been washing and dries his hands on a dish towel.

He had not been expecting anyone, perhaps it is a package arriving or something similar? Ilya looks out the frosted glass window on the front door and sees nothing.

Knock knock knock

The small rapping begins again. He furrows his brow and opens the door.

Daniel–Danny–is standing there.

He is the neighbor pup from across the street. Ilya does not know him well, really, but he frequently sees him and his mom, Shane. They wave to one another, exchange mixed up mail, help each other out on trash day, and the like.

He is a sweet and cute little boy of five years old. He is chattier and more outgoing than Shane, who is polite but quiet, seemingly a little shy.

“I’m s’posed to give this to you.” Danny says, handing Ilya a piece of paper. He stands patiently as Ilya scans it.

If you are reading this, it means that Danny is following my emergency plan that we practiced. I’m not safe and neither is he. Please, I beg you, take him to his grandparents at this address.

Yuna and David Hollander

2242 Grandview

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If I ever get the chance, I will repay you.

Please tell him I love him. My parents too. And if you could tell them I'm sorry.

~Shane

Ilya's heart has dropped into his stomach and he feels cold. Shane is in danger? What does that mean? Is it the Alpha that he sees over at their house sometimes? Shane is not mated, but Ilya has always wondered if the Alpha is Danny's father. He has never gotten a good vibe from the other Alpha.

"Come inside, Danny." Ilya says. The pup crosses the threshold and Ilya shuts the front door behind him. Ilya crouches down to his level. "Where is your mama?"

"My Alpha father came. Mama says he's my father but not my dad, that those are different." Danny says.

"Your mama went with him?"

"My Alpha father got real mad and was yelling and throwing things." Danny says. "Mama said when this happens I should hide in my special spot and not come out."

Ilya swallows hard and tries to look encouraging so that Danny will keep going.

"He said that if I'm there a *really* long time and he doesn't come get me, I should bring that paper to you."

“Yes, you did good, Danny.” Ilya tells him. “Are you okay? It can be scary when Alphas yell.” Danny nods, looking at him with big, round eyes. This close, Ilya can smell his sweet pup scent. It reminds Ilya of cinnamon and maple syrup, maybe with a dash of whipped cream. Like a thick, fluffy stack of decked out waffles.

“I’m okay. I hope mama comes back soon.” He says innocently.

“Well, you and I are going on a little trip. We are going to see your grandparents.” Ilya deflects.

Danny gasps. “Gramma and Grampa?!”

Ilya smiles despite himself. “Yes. Your Gramma Yuna and your Grampa David.”

“I haven’t seen them since I was this many.” Danny says, holding up two fingers. Ilya’s chest feels tight, but he needs to hold it together in front of the pup.

“What do you have in your bag?” He asks, gesturing to Danny’s backpack. The boy slips off the bag and holds it out to Ilya. Ilya unzips it and peers inside. There appears to be a few pairs of clothes, a small stuffed bear, and a coloring book.

“Do you have a ‘mergency bag too, Mr. Ilya?”

“You don’t have to call me Mr.” Ilya says. “We are neighbors and friends, right?”

“Right.” Danny nods.

“I will have to pack my bag.” Ilya says, answering Danny’s question. “Do you need to go potty before we get ready to leave? Or have a snack?”

“Hm.” Danny considers. “Maybe potty.”

He uses the bathroom while Ilya hastily shoves essentials in a bag. This is insane. Ilya still feels like he’s ten steps behind whatever is going on and he’s filled to the brim with confusion and adrenaline.

But he’ll be damned if he doesn’t heed Shane’s plea.

~

Ilya luckily finds the car seat he keeps in his garage for when his niece visits from Russia and gets it installed in his vehicle. He feels like he’s moving on autopilot. His mind is still racing. Was Shane alright? How did such a sweet Omega get mixed up with such a bad Alpha? Although they did not know each other very well, privately, Ilya had always liked Shane and thought he was quite beautiful.

However, he never wanted to push. Shane clearly had a pup and his own life, not to mention the other Alpha who came around every so often. Now he wishes he would’ve pushed more, maybe someone he could’ve helped before things got to this point.

“Are you ready?” He asks Danny.

“Yes!” He says happily. “Are they gonna be surprised?”

“Yes, they are going to be very surprised.” Ilya says, lifting Danny into the car seat.

“Cool.” Danny smiles, bright and full, with all of his teeth. He really is an adorable little boy.

“All set?” Ilya asks.

“Can Beary sit with me?” He asks sweetly. Ah, he must mean the bear from his backpack. Ilya fishes it out and hands it over.

“If you need anything, call out, okay?” Ilya says. “The drive is two hours, but we can stop if you need to go potty.”

“Okay, thanks Mr. Ilya.”

“Just Ilya, remember?” Ilya smiles in what he hopes is a reassuring manner, then closes the door to the backseat. He takes a deep breath before he climbs into the driver’s side, and then they’re off.

Danny hums quietly to himself on the ride. Ilya mentally rehearses his speech to Shane’s parents. This could go terribly wrong, they could think *he* did something to Shane and kidnapped Daniel.

“Mr. Ilya?” He hears, about thirty minutes into the drive.

“Yes?” He doesn’t bother correcting him right now.

“Can you play some music?”

“What do you like?”

“Umm...Disney?” Danny asks.

Ilya finds a Disney playlist and puts it on shuffle. He hears Danny cheer and he smiles to himself. Another thirty minutes goes by and the little voice from the backseat pipes up again.

“Mr. Ilya?”

“Yes Danny?”

“I gotta go potty.”

“Okay, bud, let me find rest stop and we will pull over, okay?”

“Okay!”

Three miles down the highway, there is an open rest stop. Ilya parks and goes to the backseat to unbuckle Danny. He climbs out, Beary in hand. “He has to go potty too.” He announces.

Ilya holds his tiny hand as they walk into the building. People smile at them, and Ilya wonders if they think he is an Alpha with his pup. He would be truly lucky to one day have a pup of his own that is as wonderful as Danny.

Ilya helps Danny use the restroom, then the bear uses the potty too. He’s a little worried Danny will wash the bear’s paws in the sink, but thankfully he doesn’t.

“Do you need a snack?” He asks, pointing out the row of vending machines.

“Hm.” Danny ponders. “I like Goldfish!” Ilya gets him a package of Goldfish crackers and a water and then they’re off again. The closer they get to the address that Shane gave him in the letter, the more nervous Ilya becomes.

Finally, they’re pulling up to a long, winding dirt drive surrounded by forest on either side. Ilya’s palms are sweating.

When he gets out, he realizes Danny is asleep. “Hi buddy, we are here.” He says gently.

Danny blinks his eyes open sleepily and yawns. “We’re at Gramma and Grampa’s?” He checks.

“Yes.”

“Maybe mama will be here!” He says excitedly.

“Maybe.” Ilya gives a tight smile. “Grab your backpack.” The house is large, built in a cabin style. Ilya stands on the front porch with Danny by his side, gathers all of his courage, and knocks on the front door.

The knock seems to echo in Ilya’s mind. They wait. Danny tries to see inside through the windows on either side of the door, sticking his nose to the glass. After a minute, the door swings open. A beautiful, middle-aged woman with dark hair gapes at them. Her scent wafts out of the doorway- the same underlying cinnamon scent, it must be the family note - as well as something stronger, like pine and petrichor.

“Gramma!” Danny exclaims.

“Daniel?” She gasps. “Oh my goodness, honey, what are you doing here?” She crouches and he flings himself into her arms. “David! Come here!” She calls out to her husband. She looks over Danny’s shoulder at Ilya. “I’m sorry, but I don’t think we’ve met.”

Ilya is about to reply when David appears. “This is a wonderful surprise! Is Shane in the car?” He asks, holding his hand out to Ilya to shake.

“I am afraid not. Can I come in, Mr. and Mrs. Hollander? I need to speak with you.”

They decide that David will occupy Daniel in another room, to keep him from hearing any negative information. Yuna will fill her husband in afterward. She and Ilya sit at the kitchen table.

“I am Shane and Danny’s neighbor.” Ilya explains. “For years now, I live across the street. Today, I am cleaning, and I hear tiny knock at the door. When I open it, Danny is alone, and he gives me this.” He had brought the letter along, so he handed it over to Yuna. Her face remains stoic as she reads, but Ilya can see the hurt in her eyes. Ilya also tells her about the brief conversation he had with Danny before they left, letting her know that the pup had told him that his Alpha father was yelling and he went to hide.

“Do you know Danny’s Alpha parent?” She asks, looking at Ilya.

“No.” He says truthfully. “I have seen him around sometimes, but I have never spoken to him.”

“Well if you haven’t guessed, he’s a real piece of work.” Yuna scoffs, raising the letter. “Shane has always been so kind. I was surprised when he brought home Dallas. I always knew there was something off about him. David said I was just being paranoid, but a mother always knows.”

Yuna seems like a good mom. Both of the Hollanders, actually, seemed like really good parents.

“After a few months, Shane told us he had something to tell us. I prayed that he wasn’t going to say that he and Dallas planned to bond.” She shakes her head with a wry smile. “He was pregnant. And I don’t want you to misunderstand me, we love Danny and we wouldn’t trade him for the world.”

“I understand.” Ilya says quietly.

“Dallas did just enough to keep Shane around, when they were dating, and then when he got pregnant, things got worse. They seemed to escalate. The leash kept getting shorter and shorter. We got to see Shane and Danny less and less. Then it stopped altogether. I’m

surprised he even remembers us, he was so young.” Ilya recalls Danny saying that he hadn’t seen his grandparents since he was two years old. “It was hard. It *is* hard. We didn’t want to push, in case Dallas would retaliate, take it out on Danny or Shane.”

Ilya can only imagine. He has had experience with abusive Alphas with his own father. It can be like walking on eggshells, afraid to make any wrong moves.

“Thank you for bringing Danny here.” She says then, reaching over to place a gentle hand on his forearm.

“I would like to continue to help.” Ilya admits. “I am worried about Shane.”

Yuna nods. “Me too. We can’t just call the police, unfortunately.” These things are tricky, when a pup and their biological parents are involved. Especially when there’s no documented abuse. It’s sad, but it’s the truth. The police could very well make it seem as though Shane or both Shane and Dallas simply abandoned Danny.

By now, the late afternoon sun is streaming in through the windows, casting everything in a golden glow that feels out of place for the situation.

“I hope you’ll stay for dinner.” Yuna tells him. “We would love to host you, as just a small thanks for what you’ve done for us today. You could even stay the night, we have a guest bedroom. It’s a long drive to make twice in one day.”

“I would love to stay for dinner.” Ilya accepts. He isn’t quite ready to commit to staying overnight yet. He will think about it. It’s all a lot to process. He had not expected any of this when he woke up that morning.

Yuna nods in understanding. “Will you tell me anything you know, just from being his neighbor?” She then asks. “Anything could help.”

Ilya agrees, and he tells her all the small tidbits he's gathered over the years, although it's not much. Details like how he never got a good vibe from Dallas, how he wasn't always around but Shane had perpetually seemed more tense around him. They're interrupted by little ears.

"Grama!" Danny tells, appearing in the doorway. "Mr. Ilya!" Yuna and Ilya both soften as they stare at the little boy. "I think you should come hang out with me and Grampa now. Mr. Ilya, I want you to see my room."

They all troop to Danny's bedroom, with him leading the pack. It's decorated as a forest theme and fully furnished with a toddler bed, a dresser, a toy chest, and a small mountain of stuffed animals.

"This was his room when he was younger. We finally upgraded from the crib last year. I guess we never lost hope." Yuna says quietly to Ilya. "We always hoped he and Shane would come back one day, and we wanted to be ready when they did."

The thought makes Ilya's chest hurt. He pictures Yuna and David opening the door to this room and Shane's room, dusting it, sweeping out the stale air, trying hard not to face the emptiness and the untouched items for what they were.

"Mr. Ilya!" Danny turns around, calling for him loudly even though they are only a few feet apart. "Come here." He demands. Ilya abandons his spot in the doorway next to Yuna and fully enters the room. "These are my toys." Danny says proudly, showing Ilya.

"They are very nice." Ilya compliments sincerely.

"Play with me?" He asks, dropping to his butt on the carpet. Ilya obliges him, of course, and they end up playing with toy cars together while David and Yuna excuse themselves to make dinner. Ilya assumes they also need the privacy to discuss everything that he and Yuna had just talked about.

"Grampa is making hamburgers. That's my favorite!" Danny tells Ilya happily. "Do you like burgers?"

“I do.” Ilya confirms.

“Do you like pickles on your burger?” Danny wonders, rolling a red car on his own leg.

“I do.” Ilya says again. “Do you?”

“Yes! Mama doesn’t like pickles, but he buys them just for me.”

That’s sweet. It makes Ilya smile, although it’s bittersweet. He deflects. “I bet I can eat more pickles on my burger tonight than you.” He challenges.

Danny looks shocked. “No way!” He practically throws the car down and jumps to his feet. Ilya follows him to the kitchen. The smell of sizzling meat and seasoned fries wafts through the air. “We are having a pickle contest.” He announces to David and Yuna. They both look at Danny, amused.

“I am planning to eat more pickles on my burger than Danny.” Ilya fills them in.

“Nuh uh!” Danny insists. He scrambles onto one of the stools surrounding the island counter. Ilya unconsciously reaches a hand out in case he needs assistance.

“The food is almost ready, why don’t you boys wash up?” David suggests. He pulls a pan of fries out of the oven and then disappears out of the sliding glass door toward the grill, presumably to retrieve the burgers. A light breeze flutters the curtains on the open kitchen window. It draws Ilya’s eye. It’s so nice here, peaceful.

Shane should be here with his family. Ilya has an intense flash of just how out of place he is here. He shouldn’t be here instead of Shane, it’s just wrong. Ilya is in a slot that he doesn’t belong in.

“Are you okay?” Yuna asks, placing a light hand on his shoulder.

“Yes. I will go wash my hands.” Ilya says, ducking his head. He and Danny wash their hands side by side at the kitchen sink. He’s using a worn wooden stool with handles, the kind made specifically for young kids. The soap is foamy and smells like lemon, and Danny is having entirely too much fun with it.

“Stop playing and wash your hands, Daniel.” Yuna says sternly.

They sit around the table and eat. Ilya lets Danny win the pickle contest and the boy is delighted and pleased with himself. David catches Ilya’s eye and gives him a nod of acknowledgment and thanks. Yuna and David ask him a few light questions about himself and his life in an effort to get to know him. The topic of Shane feels like the elephant in the room, but Ilya is aware that nobody wants to upset Danny or bring up the subject in front of him.

After they finish eating, Yuna insists on cleaning up herself and all of the boys head outside. David shows Ilya the lakefront property and the dock, and Danny is really excited to show him everything as well. He points out a few fish that can be seen swimming in the water towards the shallow end of the dock, as well as the fireflies that are starting to emerge in the evening.

“We really do hope you’ll accept our offer of using the guest room tonight.” David tells Ilya. “I hate to think of you driving back all that way in the dark.”

“Mr. Ilya is staying the night?” Danny asks, having walked up behind them. He has a firefly on his arm. “We can watch a movie! And have a bonfire! And make s’mores!”

“That sounds like a whole night. What time is your bedtime, young man?” Yuna asks, coming out of the sliding glass door.

“8:30.” Danny mumbles, looking slightly crestfallen.

The three adults look at him, with his tiny pout and his messy dark hair. He really does look like a mini-Shane. There's no way Ilya can make the boy even more sad by leaving. He will stay the night. He did pack a bag just in case, after all.

"If you get ready for bed *first*, we can watch one episode of *Scooby* before bed." Yuna expertly negotiates. It is clear she has done this before with Shane- she is a seasoned veteran at this point.

"Do you like *Scooby*?" Danny asks, turning his attention to Ilya again.

"I do." Ilya says.

"Cool." Danny grins.

"Let's get you into the bath and into your pajamas." Yuna tells him, smoothing his hair back.

"I take showers now, Gramma." Danny informs her.

She pauses for half a second. "Right. Because you're a big boy now." She murmurs. They walk hand in hand inside.

David lays a gentle hand on Ilya's shoulder. "Have you decided to stay, son? I can show you to the guest room."

"I did not lie, I love *Scooby-Doo*. I cannot miss it." Ilya tells him, and they both share a small, sad smile. The guest room is nice and clean and features an adjoining bathroom, which is perfect, it gives Ilya time to properly wind down and catch his breath. The Hollanders are great, so kind and hospitable, but that doesn't change the fact that this whole situation is slightly awkward. He's a complete stranger in their home.

Yuna, David, and Danny have gathered on the large plush couch in the living area.

“Come sit next to me.” Danny demands. Yuna is on the end and he’s on the other side of David, decked out in space-themed pajamas with damp hair and the smell of minty toothpaste. Ilya takes his place there on the other end next to him. They do watch an episode of *Scooby-Doo*, one of the originals, so it’s quite short. Despite this, Danny is mostly asleep by the end of it, sagging into his grandfather’s side.

David stands, lifting Danny with him. He buries his face into David’s shoulder, making a sleepy noise. “Goodnight.” He nods to Ilya.

“We’ll have breakfast in the morning.” Yuna tells Ilya. “Do you need anything else?”

“No, you both have been very kind, thank you. Goodnight.” Ilya walks down the hall to the guest room and quietly closes the door. He stands there for a moment, reflecting on everything that has happened, and just breathes.

Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

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

The bed is very comfortable, but Ilya barely sleeps that night. He can't stop imagining Shane being somewhere with that asshole Dallas. How are they going to find him? How are they going to *help* him?

Strangely, Ilya feels a sense of responsibility. As if somehow, he should have sensed what was going on across the street. As if he could have done something. It's an ignorant thought, really, but it comes anyway.

He thinks back to the very first time that he met Shane and Danny. It was nearly three years prior. Ilya had been living in his own place for a year and some change already. The house across the street had held some renters, then sat vacant for several months before being put up for sale by the elderly Beta that owned it. Ilya had been curious to see who would move in. The day the large white moving truck appeared, he could hardly keep his eyes away from his front window, waiting to catch a glimpse of the new neighbor. When he saw who he would later learn is Shane, he had inhaled sharply. He was a beautiful Omega, that much was obvious to Ilya right away. Then he'd seen his pup. Danny had been around two then, all huge dark eyes and looking like a miniature version of his mama.

Ilya had been torn between wanting to be friendly, and not wanting to come across as an overbearing Alpha. Besides, if the Omega had a pup, it wasn't unlikely that he had a mate as well. He wanted to be respectful, not coveting another man's partner. The thought is laughable now, looking back.

It had been a few weeks before they formally met. The Omega was taking his pup down the street in a stroller at the exact same time that Ilya was walking down to get his mail. He waved, and the Omega waved back. He had paused, seeming to consider something, then crossed the street. He stuck his hand out to Ilya. "Hi, I'm Shane Hollander."

"Hello. It is nice to meet you. I am Ilya Rozanov." Ilya said. "Welcome to the neighborhood."

“This is Daniel. Danny.” Shane had said, gesturing to where Danny was buckled into the stroller.

“Well hello.” Danny was even cuter up close. Ilya was instantly charmed.

“Hi!” He’d said happily, waving at Ilya with his tiny toddler hand.

“Please let me know if you ever need anything. I am home a lot.” Ilya had told Shane.

“Thank you.” He was shy, looking away from Ilya. “Well, we’d better get going. This one gets antsy if we sit still too long.”

“Enjoy your walk.”

“Thanks! You too! I mean.” Shane had blushed, Ilya remembers it, even now. “Thanks.” He repeated, clearly embarrassed.

From then on, they would wave if they saw each other. The days passed by, and Danny got bigger. He began to call Ilya ‘Mr. Ilya’. The bus for preschool and then eventually kindergarten would come and pick him up. They lived their lives, separately, but so close.

And occasionally, over the years, Ilya saw Dallas. He didn’t come by very often. Shane never smiled when he was around. Ilya couldn’t see much from his glances from across the street, but he could glean enough. The Alpha was not a nice person. There were times when it gnawed at him, but what could he do?

It wasn’t his place.

In the morning, he's woken from his scant hours of restless sleep by the rich smell of coffee. He uses the bathroom, brushes his teeth, and redresses before he goes out to the kitchen. Danny is standing on the stool again, helping David pour pancake mix onto a griddle.

"Good morning." Yuna greets. "Coffee's fresh if you want some."

"Thank you." Ilya grabs a cream colored mug and pours himself a cup, taking it black. "Can I help?" He asks.

"Nope." David says easily. Ilya sits at the dining table, out of everyone's way. Beary is already sitting in the chair next to him. Breakfast is served family-style, big plates of pancakes, crispy bacon, and sliced fruit being passed around.

"I will head home after the meal." Ilya states.

"You're leaving?" Danny pouts.

"Yes buddie, I have to go home." Ilya tells him gently.

"Oh." Danny says sadly, looking dejectedly down at his plate. Then, he looks at Yuna. "Is mama coming today?"

"I don't know, honey." Yuna says lightly. All of the adults exchange a glance.

Ilya is packing his things when he hears a light rapping on the doorway. He is unsurprised to find Yuna when he turns around.

"I was hoping we could exchange phone numbers." She says. "In case you see something or happen to find out any more information."

“Of course.” Ilya nods, handing over his phone. “I will keep an eye on Shane’s house.”

“I appreciate that. I will be going down there myself later today or tomorrow, to see if I can find anything and pack more of Danny’s stuff.”

“Is it safe?” Ilya asks her worriedly. “For you to be there?”

“I don’t know.” Yuna says honestly. “But Shane is my boy. I have to try. I refuse to sit here and do nothing.”

Ilya nods. He would do the same if he were a parent.

“David is going to take Danny somewhere fun to distract him. I’m playing lead detective.” She smiles, but it doesn’t quite reach her eyes.

“Good luck with everything. I will let you know if I hear anything.” Ilya tells her. “Thank you for letting me stay last night.”

“Oh, it’s no trouble. You did us the biggest favor in the world. Thank you, Ilya.” They embrace. “Do you want to say goodbye to Danny?”

“Yes.” Ilya confirms. It will be sad for both of them, but Ilya couldn’t possibly leave without a proper goodbye just to spare some uncomfortable feelings. Danny deserves for him to do it the right way. They find David and Danny in the backyard near the water. Ilya crouches in front of him. “I’m going back home. Be good for your Gramma and Grampa, okay?” The words feel foreign in his mouth. It’s certainly much cuter when Danny says them.

“Bye, Mr. Ilya.” Danny says softly. His brown eyes are large and threatening tears.

“Can I have a hug?” Ilya has barely finished the words before Danny is throwing himself into his arms. Afterward, Beary hugs Ilya’s bicep too.

Yuna walks him to the car, and they exchange a solemn nod before Ilya is off. It feels strange to drive home, listening to the radio and going about his life as if everything is the same as it was 24 hours ago.

It's not.

Ilya will go home, and see the empty house across the street. Barren, devoid of life. No warm glow coming from the windows at night, no glimpse of Shane and Danny going for a walk. No Shane in his slippers getting the mail with a squint and messy hair. No Danny outside, coloring the sidewalk with chalk.

Ilya lasts half a day before he calls Svetlana. He's half-heartedly making a quick lunch, too distracted to do much else.

"Sveta. I need to tell you something." He says as soon as she answers the phone.

"What is it?" She sounds serious immediately. Ilya tells her the entire story, starting with the knock at the door yesterday in the early afternoon up until now.

"Ilyusha, are you sure you want to get mixed up in all of this?"

"I already am." Ilya doesn't regret it, not in the slightest.

"Why would he have Danny give the note to *you*?" She wonders out loud. It's something that Ilya has wondered himself as well.

"Maybe because I am close by?" He guesses. "I am not sure."

“Do you want me to come there?” Svetlana asks. She is his best and oldest- maybe even *only* -friend. She moved with him from Russia to Canada. They see each other whenever they can, but she has a great job as an assistant coach for the Ottawa Centaurs hockey team. Ilya works a safe, but boring job in logistics. It’s far from his passion, but after a career-ending hockey injury, he wanted to be as far away from it as possible. He could’ve gotten a similar job as Sveta, but it was just too painful.

These days, he just wants to be able to pay his bills and keep his head down. It may be a little lonely, but it’s not a bad life by any means.

“No. Just next week for our dinner date.” Ilya tells her. “I will keep you updated, okay?”

“When I told you to stop being a lonely Alpha holed up in your house, this isn’t exactly what I had in mind.” Sveta chastises him.

“He needed me, Sveta.” Ilya tells her. He isn’t even quite sure himself whether he means Shane or Danny.

“Just be careful.”

Ilya sits at his kitchen table and eats his lunch. He looks around at his silent home. It’s a nice place, but it’s empty. There’s no mate, no pack. Just Ilya and his scent of fresh snow and firewood.

He sees Yuna pull up later that evening. She is inside Shane’s home for a little while, and when she re-emerges, Ilya comes outside and waves to her. She walks over.

“There doesn’t seem to be much out of the ordinary inside.” She tells him. “Nothing is broken, there’s no obvious signs of a struggle.” In theory, that’s a good thing, but Dallas could have done any number of other things to make Shane leave with him ‘willingly’.

Yuna holds up a cell phone. “This is Shane’s.” She says. Ilya’s heart drops. If this is how he feels, he can’t imagine what Yuna is feeling. She’s probably terrified out of her mind.

“We will find him.” He says with conviction. “I am sure he will be okay. Now get back to Danny and David. I will keep an eye on things here.”

She bites her lip and nods. “Thank you, again. You didn’t have to get mixed up in all of this and you chose to.”

“What are neighbors for?”

Ilya watches as Yuna drives away until her car is out of sight. He stares at the house across the street, willing something to happen.

It becomes nearly all-consuming for Ilya. He works from home the majority of the time, so he tends to have a lot of down time. It never really bothered him before, but now with all the extra down time, all he can think about is utilizing the time to help find Shane.

He tries looking for information for Dallas on the Internet, but he doesn’t know his last name. He could ask Yuna, but he also doesn’t want to bother her every day. She’s obviously going to be very busy with her own search for Shane.

The empty house across the street seems to taunt him as the days go by.

“You look like you haven’t been sleeping.” Sveta says. Ilya sits across from her, sipping on his vodka. They find time to do dinner together at least once a month. This time, they’d met up at some pretentious restaurant downtown that Svetlana wanted to try. It has white linen tablecloths and overpriced drinks, but Ilya would do just about anything to make her happy.

Ilya shrugs to avoid answering.

She gives him a scrutinizing look. “I don’t think it’s healthy to get so wrapped up in this.”

“My neighbor is *missing*.” Ilya bites back. Besides, shouldn’t he get wrapped up in something? Something other than living the same, monotonous day over and over? No significant other, no pack, barely any friends- just the same computer screen every day. He’s come to realize that he was just letting life happen to him. It was passing him by.

Sveta is right when she says that he keeps himself holed up. He spent most of his life chasing peace and when he finally found it, he settled in it and forgot to chase any joy or adventure.

However, this was a real chance to help someone, and he wanted to take it. Shane had entrusted Ilya with his pup for some reason, and he wanted to see this thing through, whatever that meant. It didn’t feel finished. Taking Danny somewhere safe wasn’t enough.

“I just want you to be careful. You know I always worry about you.” She says, slightly more softened after seeing Ilya’s expression.

“I will be careful.” Ilya says.

“I can get you a ticket to the next Centaurs home game.” She continues. “You should come, get out of the house.”

Ilya hasn’t been to a hockey game in years. He doesn’t even watch it on tv anymore or keep up with it via social media. It’s too painful. It was supposed to be his career, and then it all ended with one knee injury.

“Maybe.” He tells her noncommittally. They both know he means no.

“*Think* about it.” She urges.

“Okay. I will *think* about it.” Despite the interrogation, the dinner is nice. It always is. Ilya loves spending time with Svetlana. She’s the only piece of home that he has left. He hugs her tightly afterward, and then goes home to his empty house.

For a brief moment, Ilya thinks of calling one of the Omegas that he’s messed around with in the past. The thought is unappealing, however, since it would be an empty connection. Meaningless sex doesn’t have the same appeal for him as it once did.

He dreams of his mother that night, as he often does. This dream is different, however; she’s trying to tell him something important, but he can’t hear her. She is behind a glass wall, right in front of him. He can see her lips moving, but he can’t hear her.

“Mama!” He pounds on the glass. “Mama I can’t hear you!”

~

A week passes. Then two.

Ilya has taken to getting Shane’s mail for him. He will hold onto it until the other man returns. He just couldn’t bear to see it piling up in the mailbox, the damn thing so stuffed that eventually it wouldn’t even close properly.

Yuna sent him a message the day prior that they would be visiting the house this weekend. Danny had been begging and pleading for it. She told Ilya that the poor boy had been upset and anxious the last several weeks, albeit rightfully so. He wanted to be in a familiar space. Yuna suggested a visit from Ilya might help to cheer him up, if he would be willing.

Of course Ilya was willing.

He stands outside, waving, as they pull into Shane’s driveway. He watches fondly as Danny holds David’s hand and they look both ways before crossing the street. Danny bounds up to him.

“Hi, Mr. Ilya!”

“Hello, Danny.” Danny breaks away from his grandfather and hugs Ilya’s leg. Ilya lays a gentle hand in his hair. He shakes David’s hand over the pup’s head.

“I’m gonna go see my house but then I’ll be back.” Danny tells him. “I can draw you a picture with my chalk!”

“That sounds perfect.” Ilya tells him. He waves to Yuna across the street. Not wanting to sit and stare, he goes back inside and lets the Hollanders do their business. After some time, sure enough, Danny is now on the sidewalk outside of Ilya’s house with a bucket of chalk.

“Would either of you like some coffee, a soda, or water?” Ilya offers David and Yuna. They both stand at the end of the driveway, watching Danny.

“No, thank you, honey.” Yuna tells him. She hesitates a moment, and then, in a quieter tone, says “We hired a private investigator.”

“How is it going?”

“Not much, yet.” She sighs. “There’s-”

“I don’t have to-” Ilya starts, but she cuts him off.

“No, I want to tell you these things.” She inhales deeply. “That day I came back to look through Shane’s house, I found another letter. He had written an apology to me and David.” She bites her lip and smiles wryly. “He apologized for letting things with Dallas get so far and for not being in contact with us. As if it was his fault.”

It wasn't, it was Dallas' fault. He was the one controlling Shane behind the scenes. Ilya wants to say something, but what is there to really say? Nothing he can convey can possibly do anything to soothe her worries or ease her pain.

Instead, he crouches beside Danny. "Your picture looks nice." He compliments.

"Thanks." He says, in an uncharacteristically quiet tone. He didn't seem this way when he greeted Ilya just a short while ago.

"What is wrong?" Stupid question, really, but Ilya asks anyway.

Danny shrugs and continues pressing a blue piece of chalk into the concrete. He's quiet for a minute longer before he speaks up again. "I thought mama would be here." He admits. He looks up at Ilya, his brown eyes filled with tears. "I really miss him."

"I know wherever your mama is, he really misses you too." Ilya tells him. "I know he has a good reason for being gone and he would want you to be happy and be a good boy for your grandparents while he is away."

"I'm being *so* good." Danny insists. "I brush my teeth every night and I eat all my veggies. Even the carrots, which I don't really like."

"That is very good." Ilya praises. "Can I color with you?" Danny looks pleasantly surprised. He nods and pushes the chalk bucket a little closer to Ilya. They draw in silence for a little while, which again, is uncharacteristic of the chatty pup, but he has been through a lot lately.

When David takes Danny inside to go potty, Yuna comes over to admire their art. "You said you don't know him and Shane very well, but you're so good with him." She remarks.

"I love kids." Ilya says honestly. "He is easy to be around, especially. He is so bright and funny."

“He is.” Yuna agrees. “He likes you a lot.” That makes Ilya feel good, like he’s passed some sort of test.

“I am probably just familiar.” He tries to downplay it.

“He may be young, but his instincts can sense when he can trust someone. He sees you as a safe adult.”

Maybe it’s stupid, but Ilya feels proud at that. When Danny returns, Ilya helps him to put all the chalk pieces back into the container.

“Mr. Ilya?”

Ilya looks at the pup to show that he’s listening.

“You’re an Alpha, right?”

“Danny.” Yuna scolds.

“Is okay.” Ilya tells her. “Yes, I am.”

“You’re a nice Alpha.” Danny says. “You colored with me, and you never yell, not like my Alpha father.” Ilya knows about Alpha fathers who yell, that is for sure.

He looks at Daniel seriously. “Sometimes, there are people who are hurting or unhappy, so they are not nice. Sometimes, people are not nice for no reason at all. It is important to always be who you really are – and I know you are a nice boy – despite mean people. Do you understand?” Ilya asks. He hopes he isn’t overstepping.

Danny nods. "I'm really nice. I always share toys when I go to day camp. And mama taught me to always say please and thank you!"

"Taught." Yuna corrects gently. She rests a light hand on Danny's shoulder. "It's time to go, bud." "*Thank you*", She mouths to Ilya over Danny's head.

Ilya nods. "Have a safe trip home. I will keep in touch." He shakes David's hand again, and then he is left only with a blue and yellow sidewalk.

It's difficult not to think about his past that evening when he is alone. Danny's words about mean Alphas echo in his mind. Ilya's earliest memories of Russia are good, but they turn sour somewhere along the way. When he was really young, he remembers things being great. His father was a policeman who worked a lot, and his mother, Irina, stayed home to take care of Ilya and his older brother, Alexei. She was soft-spoken and kind, with beautiful, long blonde curls and a tinkling laugh.

She would take them to the park and the shops, and their birthdays were filled with toys wrapped in brown paper with curly bows and homemade cakes. They had money, but she always took the route of doing things from the heart. As the boys got older, though, their mother's smile seemed to diminish over time. Their father became harsher, and he was around more because he began to work less. He had made his ranks, and he was quite a bit older than their mother, so he began to cut his hours to accommodate his aging body.

He seemed to never have a kind word to say to Irina, he would criticize her at every opportunity and it began to wear on her. Ilya recalls days where she would hardly get out of bed or leave her bedroom. The days at the park or walking downtown got fewer and far between, until it stopped altogether when Ilya was maybe 9 or 10.

Ilya remembers sitting in his mother's darkened bedroom, reading to her on days when she didn't want to get up. He would try anything to get her to smile. Irina and Grigori had always had separate bedrooms. Looking back, Ilya thinks that it was one of the many reasons that her inner Omega was so lonely. He and Alexei could only do so much as children. They couldn't be everything to her.

Ilya fell asleep that night reading aloud to himself, the book on his chest.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you all so very much for all of the love on the first chapter! Updates will be Tuesdays and Fridays until the story is finished.

Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

Posting this a little earlier in the day because I have a busy Friday ahead of me <3

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

The sidewalk chalk washed away with the rain three days ago. Ilya has been in a strange mood since. A funk, Sveta had called it. His mind has been filled with mostly grief. For his mother, for Shane, for everything, it seems.

Another week goes by before Yuna sends Ilya another message. She tells him that the private investigator may have found something. His heart stutters stupidly in his chest.

There was an Omega checked into a facility 60 miles east of Montreal matching his description, under a different name. She texts.

Ilya: *Facility?*

Yuna: *It's unclear. It's marketed as a 'health facility', but both the private investigator and myself and David think it's fishy. A cover.*

Ilya: *He checked in. Is he still there?*

Yuna: *No. We're trying to uncover a better trail on where the Omega is now, if it is even him. Has there been any activity at the house?*

Ilya: *No. No one has stopped by or been poking around.*

Yuna: *Okay, thank you.*

Several more days pass without any contact with Yuna. Ilya is so wrapped up in his own head that he nearly forgets about the annual barbecue that is being put on by his workplace. It's mandatory attendance for all, for 'team building' and 'networking'. Ilya only works in the office one day a week and typically does not interact much with his colleagues, so it's always a somewhat awkward affair. He will go, partake in the free food and make small talk with people that he will barely ever see again.

The barbecue event is being held on a Friday, so at least Ilya will get to enjoy a leisurely day instead of working. It's a nice day in the middle of June, warm and sunny. However, the atmosphere doesn't quite match his mood, making it a strange juxtaposition. The cheery checkered tablecloths and brightly colored balloons feel out of place in his life.

He chitchats with the few co-workers that he does know on a friendly basis, but while they opt to participate in some of the games, he sits alone at a picnic table to watch the antics. Ilya takes a sip of his Coke and reaches for his hamburger when someone sits down across from him.

It is an extremely young looking male Omega with cropped blonde hair and glasses. Ilya vaguely recognizes him as a new intern, but he cannot recall his name.

"H-hi. Mr. Rozanov." The man greets, flushing and stumbling over his words.

"Hello." Ilya greets politely.

"I'm Luca. Haas. The intern?" He says it like a question.

"Yes, I remember." Ilya lies. "How are you? Are you enjoying the picnic?"

“It’s nice, yeah, I just don’t know very many people yet.” Ilya feels for the kid, he’s obviously shy and feeling even more awkward than Ilya. It wouldn’t kill Ilya to get more social interaction himself, so he doesn’t mind sticking around the Omega today.

However, as the hours wear on, it becomes increasingly clear that perhaps Luca has a crush on Ilya. He is very sweet, but Ilya is not really looking for a partner at the moment, much less one that works at the same company as him. He is thinking of a tactful way to let him down gently when they aren’t surrounded by their co-workers when Luca ups the ante.

“So.” He says, clearing his throat. They’re both at the cake table grabbing a slice. “Do you, um, have a mate?” His cheeks burn a bright pink as he says it.

Ilya freezes for a moment. He doesn’t want to embarrass Luca or make him feel bad. “Ah, no, I do not.” He says honestly, and grits his teeth. “I am not looking for one.” He continues gently.

Luca refuses to look at him. “Mhm, yeah, I get that. It was stupid of me to— yeah, never mind. Forget I said anything.” He squeezes his eyes shut and clenches his fingers on his paper plate so hard that it crumbles, almost sending his slice of cake tumbling onto the grass.

“It is not stupid.” Ilya insists. “I enjoy your company. We should be friends, I could use more friends.”

“Really?” Luca perks up. “Do you mean that?”

“I do.” Ilya confirms.

“Cool. Yeah, friends.” Luca grins. They sit down to eat their dessert. When they’re finished, Luca looks at him. Ilya can tell that he is going to ask him something. “So, you don’t want a mate or a family?”

Family. Ilya hasn't had anything close to resembling one in a long time. For some reason, his mind flashes to Yuna and David Hollander, then to Shane and Danny. A beautiful family. Ilya *would* like to have something half as wonderful as that one day.

"I did not say that." He says. "I am just not actively looking for a mate right now. Is complicated."

"I get that." Luca agrees thoughtfully. "I can't wait to have a family one day. Someone to come home to at the end of the day, pups in the yard, knowing that I have a group of people who will always choose me." His expression is wistful. Ilya's heart is doing something funny inside his chest. He and Luca have the same aspirations, it seems. One day, he will make a wonderful mate for someone. That someone is just not Ilya.

~

Ilya starts conducting late night research binges via Reddit. It seems to be one of the only online platforms to give real information regarding what goes on at 'Omega Health Centers'. When he had Googled them, they all spouted the same lies about being safe and comfortable places where Omegas were taken care of. Even Ilya knew those were lies.

So he turned to Reddit for first hand accounts.

LoveLizard14: *My parents put me in one when I was 15. It was awful. They didn't care about helping you, they just wanted you to submit.*

PlainJain: *My brother went to one and he wouldn't talk about it after, but he had nightmares for years.*

BigDawg88882: *my partner went to one when he was newly presented. They abused the Omegas and denied them basic biological needs and then would yell or beat them if they weren't compliant, it was some sick shit.*

Ilya slams his laptop closed, unable to stomach reading any more. He scrubs his hands over his face in frustration. Shane apparently isn't at a center anymore, but he *was*. Or, they think he was. He can't quite decide which is worse, the Omega matching his description being him or not being him. If it wasn't him, then they still have no trace of him at all. If it was him, then the issue is obvious.

Ilya stares at the ceiling in the dark, a familiar sight given his many sleepless nights. He watches as the occasional swath of yellow from passing car headlights lights up the room for a few moments at a time before disappearing again.

At some point, pure exhaustion overtakes him enough to fall asleep. He wakes up to the light of dawn slipping in through the curtains. His eyes burn and his mouth feels dry— it was not a good night of sleep. He lays there, weighing the pros and cons of getting out of bed. The idea of coffee wins out and he hefts himself up and out of the tangled sheets.

As he passes by the living room, a flash of movement out the front window catches his eye. He stops in his tracks. Someone is at Shane's house.

No—

Not someone, *something*. Something small and a little scruffy. A little dog sniffs around the flower beds in Shane's front yard. It looks a little scraggly, like it might be a stray. Ilya has always loved dogs, so he rummages through his fridge for some cheese and goes outside, armed with his bribe. The dog looks at him somewhat warily as he approaches, but doesn't run.

Ilya crouches a few feet away holding out his peace offering. "Awh, I am not going to hurt you." He coos. "Look, I have snack!" The dog tilts its head at him, then sniffs the air. Apparently deeming him safe, it trots right over. Ilya lets it eat cheese from his hand while he checks for a collar. There isn't one.

"Hm, maybe you have a chip? Maybe someone is missing you?" He asks the dog. Predictably, it doesn't answer. It is a she, from the looks of it. He takes her to the local animal shelter to have her checked for a microchip. When it's determined that there isn't one, and that she likely is a stray given her condition, Ilya suddenly finds himself adopting a dog.

He names her Anya. She's some sort of mixed breed, and he takes her right to the doggie spa to get cleaned up before they go to the pet store to buy her everything she needs. Okay, and a lot of things she doesn't.

Sitting on his couch with Anya in the middle of the floor admiring her new pile of toys, Ilya feels lighter than he has in weeks. His house feels less like a mausoleum with another living being inside of it.

He sends photos to Svetlana, who is delighted. Ilya knows she has been worried about him, so he hopes this eases her mind a little. *See?* He wants to say. *I am a functioning person. I am fine.*

He wishes he could believe that.

Despite his distraction, it's no surprise when his mind wanders to the Hollanders. He can't help but think that Danny would be delighted with Anya. If circumstances were different, Ilya could walk across the road and knock on the door. *I got a dog, does Danny want to play with her?* He could say. Maybe they would go to one of their backyards, and Shane would offer him a soda or a cup of coffee, and he'd accept. Danny and Anya would run around and be so cute together.

Maybe it would become a regular thing.

Perhaps it's pathetic, the way Ilya is latching onto this daydream. It's not his family and this tragedy isn't even his story, he was just a small piece of it.

A week and a half goes by, and he and Anya settle into a tentative new routine. They go for a walk in the morning and the evening, and she keeps him company in his home office during the day. She falls asleep in her dog bed in Ilya's bedroom, but somehow he'll wake up with a face full of fur or paws on his cheek. He finds that he doesn't hate having someone to wake up to, furry being or not.

She also keeps him company as he watches the Stanley Cup playoffs— normally he wouldn't, but Sveta's team, the Centaurs, are in contention for the first time in many years. They end up losing, which admittedly dampens his spirits, although the ache in his chest isn't entirely due to the loss.

The hole inside of him that hockey left may never be filled. It was his first love, maybe even his only love this far in his life, and his ticket out of his life back in Russia.

It was also one of the only things about him that had ever made his father proud. It was something he loved to do and he was good at it, and he had been planning to go as far as he could go with it. A catastrophic knee injury took away that path for him when he was almost nineteen.

The following few years were dark for him in a way that he doesn't like to think about for very long. Sveta is of course the one who refused to let him continue sinking and dragged him to Canada anyway. She told him that just because his dream was gone doesn't mean he couldn't find a new one.

So, yes, he's upset for Sveta about the team's loss and he's upset because he's never *not* upset when he's thinking about hockey.

At least Anya in his bed abates some of the sadness that night when he lays down for bed.

He wakes up the next morning and takes Anya on a long walk through the neighborhood. The air early in the morning is just cool enough to be the perfect weather, before the heat of the day kicks in. The fresh air and cuteness of Anya bolsters his mood a little. When they return home, he's making a fresh pot of coffee when he hears a scuffling on his porch.

A flash of Déjà vu hits him. He walks to the front door and peers out of the peephole. There, standing on his porch, half-slumped over, is Shane.

Ilya's hands shake as he unlocks the door. "Shane?" His voice comes out as nothing more than a whisper, as if too loud of a tone could make the scene before him disappear.

“Ilya.” Shane says, reaching for him. He falls more than steps forward and his eyes roll back in his head.

Chapter End Notes

This is the shortest chapter so far, but hopefully the content made up for it? Have a great weekend and see you all on Tuesday!

Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

Surprise! I thought it would be fun to post this chapter a day early.

Pro: You get to read this chapter early

Con: Technically you're waiting an extra day for the following chapter :')

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

Ilya pulls Shane bodily through the doorway into the house. “Shane?!”

“I’m okay, I’m okay.” Shane mumbles unconvincingly. Ilya helps him to the couch and deposits him there, then crouches in front of him. The Omega looks exhausted, and frankly, a little worse for the wear. After all, he had quite literally just collapsed in Ilya’s arms. The elation at having him here clashes with the fear and worry Ilya has for him.

“Danny.” Shane says. “He’s okay, you took him to my parents?”

“Yes.” Ilya confirms. “He is okay.”

Shane blows out a harsh breath. “Oh thank god, thank god. *Thank you*. Can we go there right now?”

“Shane, I-” Ilya begins to protest. The man looks exhausted and potentially hurt, perhaps he should be checked out by a doctor before doing anything else.

“Please. Please Ilya. I will explain everything to everyone, I just need to see Danny. I need to be with him and tell him that I’m okay.”

“Okay.” Ilya says. “Yes, alright.” He couldn’t possibly deny Shane this. Anya chooses that moment to appear, having heard the commotion, and trots up to Shane, sniffing his knee.

“You got a dog?” Shane asks, reaching a careful hand down to pet her.

“I did.” Ilya confirms with a small smile. “Her name is Anya, she is very sweet girl.”

“Danny would love her. You should bring her with us.” Shane comments. Ilya’s heart does something funny in his chest.

“Okay.” Ilya is ready to agree with pretty much anything Shane asks. He gets up and grabs a water bottle from the fridge, handing it to Shane.

Shane accepts it with a grateful smile and drinks almost all of it in one go. “I can’t thank you enough for what you did. And are going to do, I guess.” He sighs. “I don’t have my license or my phone, and besides, I don’t think I’m in any condition to drive right now.”

There are so many questions that Ilya has in the present moment, but he can sense that now isn’t the time. Shane said he would explain, and Ilya knows that he will. When he’s just returned from an unexplainable absence and is exhausted and possibly hurt is not the time for an interrogation.

“Do you need anything from your house?” Ilya asks.

Shane shakes his head. “No, is it okay if we just go?” Ilya loads up Anya and within a few minutes, they’re pulling out of the driveway.

“You should call Yuna.” Ilya comments. “Let her know we are coming.”

“I don’t have my phone.” Shane says again.

“Use mine.” Ilya says, handing it over.

“You have my mom’s number?” Shane asks, brow furrowing.

“Ah...yes. From when I brought Danny.” Ilya says. “And I have been keeping an eye on your house.” He doesn’t elaborate further.

“You were doing that for me?” Shane asks, as if he’s surprised.

“That’s what neighbors do.” Ilya answers. He tries his best not to listen in on Shane and Yuna’s phone call, but it’s difficult not to.

He hears Yuna say his name through the speaker, and then, “No, it’s me mom.” Shane says, his tone sounding choked up. “Ilya is bringing me there right now. I will explain everything, I promise.” He snuffles. “I know. I know. I wanted to tell you I’m okay and that we’re coming right now. Okay. Yes. I love you too. I’ll see you soon. Okay, bye.” Shane puts Ilya’s phone in the cupholder and wipes his eyes. The car is quiet aside from Anya’s occasional sighs.

After a little while, Ilya notices that Shane fell asleep. The poor man is likely exhausted. He rests his head against the passenger side window, occasionally swaying with the motion of the car.

It feels strange to be making the drive up the long, winding path to the Hollanders under such different circumstances. Perhaps the sense memory of the driveway wakes Shane up, because he blinks awake when they’re almost up to the house.

David, Yuna, and Daniel are all standing outside of the house waiting. Ilya barely has the car parked before Danny is sprinting toward them, and Shane is throwing open the door to meet him.

Shane kneels and Danny jumps into his arms. “Mama!” The pup exclaims. Shane holds him tightly.

“Hi baby. Oh baby, I’m so sorry.”

“I missed you!” Danny exclaims.

“I missed you too, so much. I love you.”

Yuna and David stand a few feet away, holding each other’s hands tightly with tearful expressions on their faces. It’s obvious how much they want to run to Shane as well, but they’re giving their son a moment with his own pup. Ilya walks away to give them all some more privacy and to let Anya out of the car.

“We have a surprise for you.” Ilya hears Shane tell Danny. Anya comes bounding around the side of the vehicle, right up to Danny and licks his face.

Danny gasps and giggles. “A doggie?!”

“Ilya got a dog.”

“Mr. Ilya is my friend! He brought me to Gramma and Grampa’s and they were so surprised.” Danny tells his mom. “And we had a pickle contest and we watched *Scooby* and we drew with chalk together.” Shane smiles tearfully and brushes the hair out of Danny’s eyes.

“Danny, do you want to see Anya do a trick?” Ilya asks. He’s sure Shane needs a moment to reunite with his parents.

“Yes.” Danny responds enthusiastically. Shane shoots him a grateful look and gets up to embrace David and Yuna. Ilya can’t imagine what they’re all feeling, seeing one another for

the first time in nearly three years. They talk quietly together while Ilya shows Danny the few tricks that he's discovered Anya can do.

"She's soft." Danny comments, petting her gently.

"I found her outside of your house." Ilya tells him.

"Really?" Danny asks. "Cool." He addresses Anya, "You were coming to my house to play, huh?" Anya's fur is getting all over his *Lightning McQueen* shirt, and Ilya grimaces and hopes no one minds.

"It's supposed to rain, boys, we should get inside." Yuna says. Shane walks back over and scoops Danny up, settling him on his hip and scenting him.

"I better get going then." Ilya says. "Anya, come."

"Ilya Rozanov." Yuna addresses him sternly by his full name. "You better get in this house."

Shane looks between them, surprised.

"Okay." Ilya says sheepishly. The group migrates inside the house. The adults are all misty-eyed but trying to put up a good front for Danny. The pup is talking a mile a minute to Shane, filling him in on every detail he missed while he was gone.

Ilya is surprised when Yuna pulls him into a fierce hug.

"You have done so much for us." She whispers in his ear. "I can't thank you enough."

"You're staying for dinner again." David says.

“Again?” Shane asks.

“Yes, Ilya spent the night here when he brought Danny.” Yuna answers him.

Ilya watches his expression in response to that. Shane looks a mixture of intrigued and confused. Ilya wonders if he thinks that he’s overstepped his boundaries.

“Mr. Ilya, can you play cars with me again?” Danny asks him. “Mama can play too!”

“Okay.” Ilya agrees. “Anya will come too.” Several minutes later finds the four of them sitting on the floor of Danny’s room. Danny is lightly driving a car on Anya’s back. She’s very sweet and docile, so she doesn’t mind.

Shane still looks utterly spent even after his little nap, but he’s putting up a good front for Daniel. He’s looking around the room, eyes tracking all of the little changes since the last time he’s been here.

“Mama?”

“Yes, honey?” Shane asks.

“Are we gonna go home? Or are we gonna live here?” Danny wonders.

Shane hesitates, but he says, “We’re going to go home.”

“Is my Alpha dad gonna be there?” Danny pulls a face. “He’s mean to you. And I don’t like it when he yells.”

Shane's gaze slides to Ilya, then back to Danny. "No, buddie, he won't be there. We're gonna go home in a few days and we're gonna visit Gramma and Grampa all the time from now on. There will be no more yelling and no more leaving, okay?"

"Okay." Danny says easily. "I missed you, mama." He says again.

"I missed you too. Every single second." Shane tells him. Danny puts his car down and climbs over Anya into Shane's lap and curls up.

Ilya stands. "I should go see if David and Yuna need help in the kitchen."

Shane gives him a nod of acknowledgement.

"How is he?" Yuna asks when Ilya enters the kitchen.

"He is putting on a brave face for Danny." Ilya says. "I think he will explain when he can."

Yuna and David both nod. "It's complicated, with little ears around." David comments. "We just...we really want to understand what happened."

Ilya completely understands. "He just showed up at my door." They all lapse into silence for a moment, unsure of what else to say.

Ilya helps David chop vegetables for dinner. He's a lot like Shane, quiet but quick with a joke. A strong presence even in his silence.

The rain rages on outside, pelting the windows. "You should stay the night again." Yuna comments as she glances at it. "These roads get flooded pretty easily." Ilya is once again amazed at their generosity and hospitality.

“You should.” Pipes up a voice from behind them. Shane has appeared with a rumpled looking Danny on his hip. “I’d like to talk to you a little later.” He says to Ilya.

“Okay.” Ilya agrees easily. He has Anya, so she won’t be home alone all night, and he has some of her food with him. The rest he can figure out.

Dinner is a somewhat awkward affair. There is very obviously an elephant in the room. The only one who doesn’t notice is Danny. He tells Shane all of the details he can remember about every day that he was gone. He talks about fishing with David, and going to the park with Yuna while David is at work. Shane listens attentively, asking questions and making comments. Danny is so pleased to have everyone’s attention on him.

Ilya lets Danny put Anya’s food in a bowl for her and he is very excited. “Look mama! I’m feeding Anya her dinner too!”

“Good job baby.” Shane says sincerely. “Now c’mon, it’s time for your shower.”

“Can I play for a little bit after, before bed?” Danny asks with wide puppy dog eyes.

“We’ll see.” Shane says.

Ilya is surprised when Shane knocks on the guest bedroom door only a few minutes later.

“Hey, um, sorry to interrupt.” He says, as bashful as ever. “I have some clothes for you. I haven’t been here in a long time, obviously, so they don’t smell like me or anything...” He hands Ilya a stack of clothing. “They should fit, I think.”

It wouldn’t necessarily be appropriate if the clothing was covered in Shane’s scent, due to unmated Omega and Alpha dynamics, but since they aren’t, it’s fine. If they were dating however, things might be different. They could wear each other’s scented clothing any time.

But they aren't, and the clothes don't smell like anything other than laundry detergent and the faint smell of a drawer, anyway.

"Thank you." Ilya says, taking the clothing from him.

"I'm going to get Danny tucked in and talk to my parents, but if you're still awake later, I meant it when I said I would really like to talk to you too." Shane says.

"You do not owe me anything, Shane." Ilya says gently.

"I know."

Ilya nods at him, and Shane leaves the room. Ilya takes a shower in the guest bathroom and changes into the clothing that Shane provided him with. They are a tiny bit tight but they do fit for the most part. It will certainly be more comfortable to sleep in than wearing the jeans and flannel he had been wearing all day.

When he emerges from his room, the house is quiet. He assumes the Hollanders are having a discussion somewhere. He knows it's been a long time coming. The rain has finally let up, so Ilya lets himself into the backyard. Anya joins him. The air has that particular sticky, humid quality to it that it gets after a summer rainstorm.

Ilya sits on the end of the dock, and Anya curls up beside him. She may be new to his household, but she's incredibly loyal already.

The water is placid after the storm, rippling only slightly and covered in a thin layer of fog. It's peaceful. He's unsure of how long he sits there for, listening to the crickets and frogs.

He hears the creaking of the boards of the dock, the telltale sign that someone is walking on it. He doesn't turn around—he already knows who it is.

“Hey.” Shane says quietly when he reaches them. “Mind if I join?”

“It is your house.” Ilya teases lightly.

Shane quirks a smile and sits down next to Anya. “Danny’s asleep.” He says. “He told me to tell you he said goodnight.”

Ilya smiles. “He is such a sweet pup.”

That makes Shane smile too. “He is. I’m so lucky.” He looks out over the water and his smile fades. “I don’t even know where to begin.” He admits. He sighs and looks down at his hands now. “Well, I guess I can start with why I picked you to have Danny give the letter to. I bet you’ve been wondering.”

“Yes.” Ilya confirms.

Shane doesn’t look at him as he begins speaking. “You have always been so kind to us. Not like Dallas— that’s Danny’s father —”

“Yuna told me.” Ilya interjects gently. “She told me some things.”

Shane nods. “Yeah. So then you know he’s a real piece of work.” Ilya smiles despite himself. Yuna and Shane used the exact same phrase to describe the other man. “He isolated me and Danny from everyone. It was slow, you know? He seemed great at first, and then everything began to change incrementally. Slow enough to where I couldn’t understand what was happening at the time. That expression about how if you put a frog in boiling water, it will jump out, but if you put a frog in water and slowly turn up the heat, it will stay? It was like that.”

Shane twists a thread on his pants and pauses before he continues. “I just wanted to protect Danny. If Dallas said not to do something, I didn’t, because I didn’t want any retaliation. So

when he ‘suggested’ that I pretty much stop communication with my parents, I did.” Shane sounds so unbearably sad. “It was so hard, but I did it. To protect my pup.”

Ilya swallows a lump in his throat.

“Dallas didn’t...he’s never done anything to Danny. I would *never* allow that.” Shane says fiercely. He finally looks back up at Ilya and his eyes seem to glitter in the dark. “He doesn’t even hate Danny. I don’t know if he’s capable of love, so I wouldn’t say that he...Danny is just a pawn to him.” Shane finally articulates. “He’s nothing more than another way to control me.” Anya rolls over and lays her head on Shane’s thigh, as if sensing that he needs the comfort. “You were always so kind to us, and Danny knew you, and we didn’t have anyone else. I knew you were safe, and so when I came up with the emergency plan, I included you.”

Ilya nods. That makes sense. “I’m sorry that you had to do that.”

“I’m sorry that I included you without your consent. Obviously, I hoped it would never need to be used.”

“I understand. I am happy I could help in some small way.”

“It was not *small*.” Shane says emphatically. “I am sorry that you got dragged into this, though. I don’t know if you’re entirely safe anymore, either.” He admits.

“I am not worried about Dallas.” Ilya says dismissively.

“You said you kept an eye on the house, right?” Shane changes the subject a little.

“Yes. There was nothing. No one came by.” Ilya says. “Except Anya.” He gestures to her.

Shane nods with a small frown. “I don’t know what Dallas is planning. He did all of this just to disappear? It’s weird.”

Ilya hadn’t really thought about it like that. It *is* strange. “Maybe the waiting and not knowing is his point?”

Shane shrugs. “Maybe...”

It could make sense. Shane would be on edge, unable to relax, not knowing if something else was coming. It was its own type of psychological torture. That wasn’t the only thing that Dallas had done to Shane, though.

“Shane.” Ilya says quietly. Perhaps he shouldn’t even ask, maybe it wasn’t his place. “What happened to you? Where were you?”

The pitter patter of light feet and the telltale slight motion of the dock interrupts them. They both turn to see Danny, walking down the dock with Beary in tow. He looks adorable and sleep-rumpled in pajamas covered in cartoon trucks.

“What are you doing out here?” Shane asks, reaching for him.

“I couldn’t sleep, Mama. Then I went to your room and you weren’t there.” He says sadly. Now that he’s close, Ilya can see how upset the poor pup looks.

“Oh, honey I’m sorry.” Shane pulls him into a hug. “I’m here, I just came out here to talk to Ilya.”

“Can I sleep in your bed tonight?” Danny asks, his little voice muffled by Shane’s shoulder.

“Of course.” Shane says immediately. He stands, bringing Danny up with him. “Let’s get you all tucked back in, hm? All snuggly. And I’ll join you.”

“Can Mr. Ilya and Anya come say goodnight too?”

Shane looks over Danny’s shoulder to Ilya for confirmation. He stands too. “Yes.”

They troop back inside. Ilya hovers at the door of Shane’s room. He’s never been in this room, obviously. It’s an Omega’s personal space.

“You can come in.” Shane tells him quietly. “It’s barely even my room anymore. This is my first time sleeping here in years.”

It’s clean and mostly bare, and indeed, it only smells very faintly of Shane. Or, what he imagines is Shane’s scent, since the other man staunchly wears blockers.

“It is still yours.” Ilya says, but steps inside. Danny gets cozy under the covers, looking impossibly tiny in the king sized bed. He smiles serenely up at Ilya and barely stifles a yawn.

“Goodnight Mr. Ilya.”

“Goodnight, Mr. Danny.” Ilya says, just to make him laugh. It works, his giggles lightening the tension that still lingered. He looks to Shane, who looks soft and tired in this light. Tired in a way that has nothing to do with the late hour. “Goodnight, Shane.” He says.

“Goodnight, Ilya.” He looks like he wants to say something else, but a beat of silence lingers too long, and he doesn’t add anything on.

Ilya goes back to the guest room, feeling oddly bereft.

Chapter End Notes

Trust that all will be revealed in due time- just not right away or all at once.

Chapter 5

Ilya wakes up the next morning to a small body bouncing on his bed. It is decidedly less furry than Anya. He cracks an eye open to see none other than Danny.

“Hi!” He stages whispers.

Shane appears in the doorway. “Danny, don’t-” He looks sheepish when he sees that Danny has already done his damage. “I’m sorry. I *told* him not to wake you, but he was faster than me.”

“It is okay.” Ilya says, sitting up. “Oh no.” He says. “Danny, you have woken someone else up...”

Danny cocks his head in confusion. “Who?”

“The tickle monster!” Ilya says, shooting his hands up from under the covers.

Danny shrieks and tries to roll away, but Ilya is faster. He turns his hands into fake claws and tickles Danny’s belly.

“Ahhh!” Danny half-yells, half-laughs. “Mama, mama help!”

“I tried to tell you.” Shane says mock-sadly. “How will I tell Gramma and Grampa that you’ve been eaten by the tickle monster?”

“No, don’t eat me, please!” Danny squeals breathlessly. “There’s breakfast!”

Ilya stops and pretends to consider. “Hm. What is for breakfast?”

“Pancakes.”

“Ah, yes, pancakes taste much better.” Ilya relents. Danny jumps off the bed and runs out of the room, Anya hot on his heels.

“No running in the house!” Shane calls fruitlessly. “Sorry about that, again.” He says to Ilya.

“Is no problem.” Ilya says, and he means it.

“He really likes you.” Shane says suddenly.

“He is the best.” Ilya says. “You should be so proud of raising such a wonderful pup.”

Shane smiles. “I am. Um, I’ll let you get dressed. See you out there.”

Ilya changes back into his clothing from the day prior and heads into the kitchen. Danny is drinking chocolate milk from a coffee mug and feeding Anya scraps of pancake under the table.

“Oh, good, you’re up!” Yuna says to Ilya. Shane glances at him and Ilya bites his lip to keep from laughing. Yuna tracks the movement but doesn’t comment. “Go ahead and sit down.” She taps the back of the chair between Shane and Danny. She and David carry plates filled with hot, delicious smelling food. Pancakes, sausage links, a bowl of fruit, and a small tray with toppings for the pancakes.

The Hollanders are like a family from a movie, in Ilya’s mind. The picture-perfect nuclear family full of love and genuine care for one another. It fascinates him to no end.

The spell breaks when Yuna accidentally drops a glass in the kitchen. It shatters with a loud crash, and Shane *flinches* hard and ducks, reaching for Danny. Ilya, David, and Yuna freeze.

“I’m sorry honey, it slipped out of my hand.” Yuna says weakly, looking at her son.

Shane looks up with red cheeks. “Sorry, it just um, surprised me.” It was more than just surprise, it was pure fear and instinct, and they all know it.

Yuna gives a brittle smile. “Of course.”

Ilya’s heart simultaneously hurts and burns with fury. He tries desperately to keep the anger at bay. He doesn’t want to scare Danny or Shane with his scent. If he had it his way, he would bury Dallas Kent where no one would ever find him. He’s sure David and Yuna are feeling the same.

“It’s okay mama.” Danny says, patting Shane’s arm.

“You should show Ilya and Anya more of the property, Shane.” Yuna changes the subject. “I’m sure Anya could stretch her legs before the long drive home.”

Shane looks a little startled at the suggestion. “Um, yeah, sure.” He fidgets for a moment. “Yeah, after breakfast we can go on a walk?” He says it like a question.

“Can I come?” Danny asks.

“Of course.” Ilya, Shane, and Yuna all say at the same time.

“Why don’t you finish your breakfast and wash up while Ilya and your mama get ready?” Yuna suggests to Danny.

“Okay!” Danny says excitedly. He starts shoving pancakes into his mouth and Ilya stifles a laugh. The rest of the meal is relatively quiet as Ilya and Shane finish up. Danny finished first and went to wash his hands and David left to supervise.

“I can clean up.” Ilya tells Yuna, who promptly shoots him down.

“Absolutely not, you’re a guest.” She refuses to let him help in any way, so Ilya gets Anya ready for a walk. He waits by the front door. Shane emerges with Danny in tow, decked out in a miniature ball cap, a little pair of sunglasses, and sneakers that light up when you stomp hard.

“I got my sunscream on.” He tells Ilya seriously.

“That is good. Very important.” Ilya nods.

Anya’s leash is long, and she walks ahead on the dirt path with Danny by her side. Danny is chatting away, pointing things out to her.

“Look Anya, a flower!”

“Look at that rock!”

“Woah, that tree fell over.”

Ilya and Shane walk in surprisingly comfortable silence for a few minutes. Ilya is the one to break it. “Me and Anya are going home after this. You are staying?”

Shane blows out a breath. “Yeah. We’re going to stay at least for a few days. It’s so nice to see my parents again, you know?” It was an innocent, offhand comment, but Ilya internally flinches.

No, he does not know.

“I forgot how much I loved it here, somehow. I think I blocked out how much I missed it on purpose.” Shane adds.

“It is very beautiful.” Ilya agrees. “I will continue to keep an eye on your house. Just in case.”

“Thank you.” Shane says. “And...I’m sorry for last night. For, dumping all of that on you, or whatever. I just wanted to give you some context, I guess.” He seems embarrassed and a little shy about what he had revealed to Ilya.

“You do not have to be sorry.” Ilya says. He wishes he could properly convey his feelings about it, but he isn’t sure he can articulate it. They both look up at the sudden sound of Danny crying. He has fallen and skinned his knee.

Shane crouches in front of him. “I’m gonna suck all the ouchies out, okay bud?” Danny nods, his lashes thick with tears. Ilya watches as Shane cups his hands around the wound and makes a humming noise. He pulls away after a few seconds and makes a big show of dusting his hands off. “All gone.”

Shane is such a great mama.

“Can you carry me back?” Danny asks Shane. “Just in case.” Shane scoops him up and puts him on his hip. They walk for a bit longer before they turn around and head back toward the house.

Danny looks at Ilya from where his cheek is smushed into Shane’s shoulder. “Are you Anya’s dad?” He wonders.

“Yes. In Russia, we say ‘papa’. So yes, I am her papa.”

“Can I come over and play with her when we go back home?”

“Yes. If your mama says it is okay.”

“He will.” Danny says confidently. Then, “Mama, can I have a Spider-Man bandaid when we get back?”

~

Danny waves goodbye to him and Anya until he’s just a speck in the distance. Oddly, Ilya misses him already as soon as they’re on the road again.

He calls Svetlana as soon as he gets home to fill her in on Shane’s return.

“Something tells me you still will not let this go.” She says.

“What does that mean?” Ilya asks, mildly annoyed. “What is there to ‘let go’? They are my neighbors, I am friendly with Shane. That is it.”

“Do you stay awake at night wondering about the safety of *all* of your neighbors?” She counters.

He should’ve known Sveta would be able to see right through him. He changes the subject.

“I am sorry for the loss. It was a good game.”

“You watched?” She asks, surprised.

“Da.”

“That’s good, Ilyusha. Next season will be our season.” She says confidently.

“Maybe I will come to game.” He offers. He can probably muster up the courage over the next few months, right? They chat a bit more before they say goodbye.

The summer heats up and the days of June start to fade into July. Two weeks pass before Shane and Danny come back. Ilya is at the office that day, but when he arrives home, he sees Shane and Danny in their front yard. Shane is watering their flowers and Danny is doing cartwheels.

“MR. ILYA!” Danny yells excitedly. He runs to the sidewalk.

“Daniel, you better *not* run across that road.” Shane says sternly. Danny stops abruptly and looks at his mom sheepishly. He holds his hand out and they walk over together. Danny runs to give him a hug.

“Hello.” Ilya greets both of them.

“Hi.” Shane says. “Sorry for bombarding you right when you get home.”

“It is no problem.”

“Where’s Anya?” Danny asks.

“She is inside, I need to let her go potty and then she can come out and play.”

“Are you sure? We don’t mean to interrupt your night.” Shane says.

“I am sure. Just give me a few minutes.” He goes inside to let Anya out into the backyard and changes into some comfortable clothes. Anya is excited to see her pal Danny when he lets her out the front when they’re ready. She plops down on the grass next to him while Danny sits on the sidewalk with his bucket of chalk again.

“Do you want a soda or something else to drink?” Ilya offers.

“Do you have ginger ale?” Shane asks.

“You have tummy ache?” Ilya asks, concerned.

Shane’s cheeks go pink and he shakes his head. “No, it’s just my favorite.” He admits. Hm, interesting. Ilya will have to buy some ginger ale to sit next to the cans of Coca-Cola in his fridge.

“I do not, I am sorry. I have beer?”

“I’m okay.” Shane waves him off. He looks a little better than the last time Ilya saw him, which admittedly was not too difficult to achieve. He looks as though he’s gotten a little more sleep and his cheeks are less hollow.

“How are David and Yuna?” Ilya asks. He looks down to see Danny drawing a flower.

“They’re really good.” Shane says. “I think we might stay most of the summer with them.” They’re leaving again? Ilya hates that his stomach tightens a little at that.

“That will be nice.” He forces himself to say. His inner Alpha whines in dissatisfaction, which is kind of strange. Ilya will analyze that later. For now, he stuffs it down.

“Yeah. We’ll have to be back mid-August. Danny’s hockey practice starts back up then, then school a few weeks later.”

“Hockey?” Ilya’s head snaps up.

“Yeah, he plays in the peewee league.” Shane smiles. “I played hockey as a kid too. My dad played in college and my mom is the *biggest* hockey fan.”

Ilya opens and closes his mouth, speechless for a moment. It shouldn’t be that strange, really, they’re in Canada after all. He was just unprepared.

“I played hockey in Russia.” He says, the words spilling out of his mouth before he can stop them. “I was going to play professionally, but I hurt my knee.”

Shane frowns. “I’m sorry, that must’ve been hard. I think I would’ve gone pro too, but...” It’s not *forbidden*, but there are currently no Omegas in the professional hockey world. They simply don’t get drafted. It’s a sad truth.

“You like hockey?” Danny asks, looking up at them.

“I do.” Ilya says. “My best friend works for the Centaurs.”

Danny gasps like Ilya just told him a unicorn was joining them for dinner.

“That’s *so* cool.” He has a smudge of blue chalk on his cheek.

“I could get you tickets to a game.” Ilya tells Shane. Sveta is going to have a field day with this.

“That would be really great. Danny would love to go.”

“Yes!” Danny agrees. “And you can come to one of *my* games Mr. Ilya!”

“It’s very cute.” Shane stage-whispers. “Seeing all of the kids on the ice. You can barely see them under all their gear.”

Ilya imagines it and it makes him smile.

“So, um, we were going to go for ice cream.” Shane says. “Would you want to join us?” He’s doing that thing he does sometimes where he’s not looking at Ilya, and he’s a little bashful and a little too still, like he’s trying very hard not to fidget.

“Yes.” Ilya says automatically.

Shane’s gaze flicks to him for a second and he looks pleased. His expressions are more minor than most people’s, but Ilya can tell. “It’s walking distance. Anya can come.”

“I will get her leash.” Ilya retrieves it and then they’re off.

“I’m going to get ice cream with sooooo many sprinkles.” Danny says out loud to no one in particular.

“You can have *some* sprinkles.” Shane says.

“A little bit of sprinkles.” Danny corrects.

“Anya is going to get her own doggie ice cream.” Ilya tells Danny.

“Can she have sprinkles too?”

“No, sugar is not good for doggies.”

“Ohhhh.” Danny nods. “Maybe I shouldn’t have any. I don’t want her to feel bad.”

Danny is so sweet, it never fails to get to Ilya. They arrive at the ice cream shop and Ilya orders his and Anya’s first and then snags a table. When Danny and Shane sit down, Ilya’s eyes catch on Shane’s. It’s a small bowl with one scoop of plain vanilla and that’s it.

“What is that?” He says, nodding to it.

“What do you mean? My ice cream.”

“It looks like Anya’s doggie portion.”

“I try to be healthy.” Shane sniffs.

“Hollander, you are so boring.” Ilya says without thinking. Shane’s eyes widen and Ilya is about to hastily apologize when Shane shakes his head with a half-laugh.

Ilya made him laugh. He smiles down at his own cone—two scoops of Rocky Road in a waffle cone. “You said you could have gone pro with hockey, but what do you actually do for work now?” Ilya asks him. All this time, all of the things that have happened, and Ilya still doesn’t even know the basics about the other man.

“I’m a nutritionist.”

“You are kidding.” Ilya says.

“Nope.” Shane says wryly. “I work from home most of the time, making meal plans for clients and doing consultations or sessions virtually. It’s a good gig, it lets me be home with Danny. Well, now he’s a big boy and goes to school, but before then.”

“I work from home most of the time too.” Ilya volunteers.

“What do you do?”

“Eh. Logistics. Is boring.” Ilya says. He doesn’t particularly like talking about himself, so he deflects. “Danny, what do you want to be when you grow up?”

“An astronaut. Or a hockey player. Orrrrr...” He thinks about it. “A vet-vet- mama, what’s the word?”

“A veterinarian.”

“Yes!” He’s sticky and happy to just be in this moment and Ilya finds that he is, too.

~

The day after the ice cream, Ilya sees a home security installation van at the Hollander household. However, the day after that, Shane and Danny leave again.

Yuna invites him to dinner in the weeks that follow, but Ilya caught a summer cold and regrettably had to decline. He occupies his summer by taking on a big project at work and occasionally attending the lavish pool at Sveta’s fancy apartment. He forces himself not to think about the fact that he is in Ottawa and the Hollanders home is as well.

“That Omega is looking at you.” Sveta says to him in Russian from the lounge chair next to him. Ilya has already noticed the Omega giving him not-so-subtle glances from across the pool. He’s been politely but steadfastly ignoring her.

“I am not looking for a hookup.” Ilya says simply.

Sveta nods and doesn’t say anything else, although Ilya is sure she wants to. This seems to be the case a lot, lately.

The hot days of July bleed into August. Summer starts to get that golden tinge to it, more mustard yellow than bright. At least, that’s how Ilya has always thought about it.

One evening when he’s nursing a beer and watching the sun set in the backyard with Anya, his phone buzzes with a text from an unfamiliar number.

Hey, this is Shane Hollander. My mom gave me your number.

Ilya smiles to himself. As if he wouldn’t know who it was if the other man had just said Shane. He’s such a dork sometimes, Ilya kind of loves it.

Hi Shane, He texts back.

Shane: We are coming home tomorrow. My mom made food for you, I will bring it by if you’ll be home.

Yuna cooked for him? Ilya is touched.

Ilya: *Yes I will be home. Safe travels back.*

Shane 'likes' his message.

The following day, as promised, Shane and Danny show up. Danny is carrying a comical amount of containers for his size. Ilya opens the front door for them.

"He insisted on being the one to carry them." Shane tells Ilya.

"Grammy made you food!" Danny says from behind the mountain of Tupperware.

"Did you help her?" Ilya asks, grabbing the food from the pup.

"He's an excellent supervisor." Shane answers for him. Ilya opens the sliding glass door to let Danny out into the backyard where his pal Anya is. "I hope it was okay that I got your number and texted you." Shane continues. They both watch Danny and Anya run around in the grass.

"That is okay." Ilya tells him.

"I just thought the last time either one of us knocked on the door unannounced..." Shane trails off.

"Ah." Ilya nods. He makes a good point.

"So anyway. You um, had a good summer?" Shane asks.

"It was pretty good." Ilya says. He wants to take a chance here. He thinks he and Shane could be genuine friends if they stopped tiptoeing around one another. They've been taking baby steps toward it. Their small chats, and the time they got ice cream at the beginning of the summer.

“Do you want to stay for dinner?”

Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

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

The dinners become their thing.

Shane's eating habits are bland compared to Ilya's tastes, but they make it work. At least once a week, they get together at Ilya's and have dinner the three of them.

Four, if you count Anya.

Shane hasn't really had a friend in his adult life, due to Dallas' isolation, and Ilya really only sees Sveta, which is different since they were childhood friends. This is a good thing for both of them.

The first time they hang out without Danny as a buffer, Ilya can't tell which one of them is more nervous. The pup is at a friend's house, and it's just the two of them for the very first time. They've always had at least one other person with them, until now. After some initial shyness, they settle into their dynamic. They eat dinner as usual, but then they decide to play video games since Ilya has the latest NHL game. Shane is surprisingly good at it.

"I would have beat you if we played real hockey though." Ilya teases him.

"No way." Shane insists. "I'd be the number one player in the league but you could be number two."

"How generous of you." Ilya says sarcastically. They both laugh. Shane takes a sip of his can of ginger ale. It's been a staple in Ilya's fridge for weeks now. He feels so lucky to see Shane like this, at ease and in comfy clothing with mussed hair. It's nice to see him relaxed and having fun.

“This was really great, Ilya, thank you.”

“Of course.” Ilya says automatically. “I enjoy our dinners.”

“Yeah.” Shane says, then seems to hesitate. “Me too, but I don’t mean just that. I mean it was really nice to hang out just the two of us. I know you love Danny, and that’s so important to me, obviously, but I guess I just...” Shane is choosing his words very carefully. “I didn’t know if you liked *me* too.” He swallows hard. “Does that make sense?”

Ilya looks at him for a long moment.

“Danny is easy to love. He’s so cute and charming and funny. A lot of people find me... boring.” Shane says, using Ilya’s own descriptor.

“Shane.” Ilya says, stopping him. “You are my friend. I enjoy your company.” It makes him incredibly sad to think about other people rejecting Shane in the past. He has quirks, but Ilya truly, genuinely *likes* spending time with him. “Of course I like you.”

Shane nods shyly down at his hands. “I’m just not used to this.” He admits.

“Me neither.” Ilya says. He nudges his shoulder against Shane’s. “Besides, you are cute too, not just Danny.” He says lightly.

Shane huffs a laugh and rolls his eyes. “Yeah. I’m cute like my five year old.” He says sarcastically.

“Hm. Maybe different.” Ilya says. His heart speeds up. “Danny is very cute, is true, but you are beautiful.” Maybe he’s stepping outside the bounds of their friendship, but he couldn’t resist saying it. The Omega should know that he’s beautiful, especially that he’s beautiful to Ilya.

Shane looks at him with big eyes. “Thank you.” He says after a beat. He leaves shortly after to pick up Danny, but the glow of their night together stays with Ilya long after he’s been gone.

~

Sveta: *Dinner, Saturday, our usual place.*

They had gotten dinner two weeks before, per their usual monthly cadence. Now, Ilya has dinner plans with Shane and Danny that night.

Ilya: *I already have other plans.*

Sveta: *YOU have other plans??*

Sveta: *Sitting on the couch with Anya does not count as plans, Ilyusha*

Ilya: *I am aware. I have real plans.*

He doesn’t elaborate, not wanting to hear Sveta’s response. He loves her, he really does, but she always thinks she knows what’s best for him. He is an adult and he can make his own decisions about how to spend his time and who to spend it with.

They are doing a homemade pizza night. Shane and Danny are rolling the dough while Ilya preps the ingredients. There is a can of Coke, a ginger ale, and an Honest Kids juice box lined up on the counter. It’s the best Saturday night Ilya can think of. He is separating the pepperoni when he hears the front door unlock and swing open, and they all freeze.

Only one other person has a key to his house.

Svetlana steps into the room and stops short. She surveys the surroundings. Danny and Shane blink back at her in shock. Anya trots up to greet her curiously.

“Sveta. I told you I had plans tonight.” Ilya says through gritted teeth.

“Indeed.” She smirks.

“Who are you?” Danny wonders out loud.

“I am Svetlana, Ilya’s friend. My friends call me Sveta though. Who are you?” She asks, although she must know. She sticks her hand out and Danny shakes it with his own flour-covered one.

“I’m Daniel, but my friends call me Danny.” He says sweetly. Ilya laughs despite himself. Shane still looks frozen. “Are you Mr. Ilya’s girlfriend?” Danny wonders.

“No, we are just friends. Best friends.” Sveta answers.

“You are interrupting.” Ilya tells Sveta. How rude and thoughtless of her to barge in here like this. Shane and Danny have been through a lot, and it could have really scared them.

“I came to make sure you were not sitting here alone on a Saturday night.”

“Well I’m not.” Ilya snaps.

“I’m sorry.” She says, looking at all three of them.

“You should stay.” Shane pipes up, seemingly having found his voice. “You’re Ilya’s childhood friend, right? From Russia? The one who works for the Centaurs?” He steps out

from behind the kitchen table.

Danny makes an excited noise.

“I am.” Sveta confirms. “You must be Shane.” She holds her hand out for him to shake as well. “I am sorry for barging in here, it was thoughtless of me.”

“It’s okay.” Shane says, far too generously. “I was just surprised.”

“I like hockey.” Danny says, tugging on the hem of Sveta’s shirt. “I *play* hockey.” He says proudly.

“That is awesome. I can get you tickets to a Centaurs game if you want. If your mama says it is okay.” She smiles.

“Can I mama?” Danny asks immediately, looking at Shane for confirmation.

“Of course.” Shane says. “That would be really great, Svetlana.”

She claps her hands together. “Wonderful! When the season starts I will secure them.”

Ilya shares the pizza he had started making with her. The smell of rich tomato sauce lingers in the air and Anya has had *way* too much shredded cheese, but Ilya thinks the night is going okay, all things considered. Shane is more shy and reserved than usual, but Danny is his usual charming self. He tells Sveta all about starting first grade at the beginning of the month. He and Sveta are picking out a movie when Shane joins Ilya in the kitchen for clean-up duty.

“You okay?” Ilya asks him lightly.

“Yes.” Shane says. “It’s nice. You know my family, now I get to meet a member of yours.”

That hits Ilya hard. It’s true, and he hasn’t even thought of it that way. He blinks hard. “Yeah.” He’s a little too choked up at the moment to add anything else.

“Danny has her wrapped around his finger.” Shane comments, changing the subject to something a little lighter.

Ilya laughs a little. “Who doesn’t?”

“Good point.” Shane remarks. They’re close enough that their arms brush as they quickly do the dishes. Danny almost always falls asleep during the after-dinner movie and Shane hates to leave Ilya with the cleanup despite his insistence that it’s fine, so they’ve developed a system by now.

Danny reappears in the archway between the kitchen and living room. “Pj time.” He announces. He’s definitely Shane’s kid, the way he loves a schedule. Ilya ruffles his hair as he walks by to join Sveta in the living room.

“They will be back out soon.” He says to her.

“This is very domestic.” She says to him in Russian. “Danny told me you guys do this every week.”

“Yes.”

She nods slowly. “They’re great. Danny is such a sweetheart.”

“They both are.” Ilya says automatically.

“Yes.” Svetlana agrees. “I like how you are around them. You seem lighter, happier.”

“I am.”

They watch *Finding Nemo*, one of Danny’s favorites. He falls asleep halfway through, on one side, draped halfway onto Shane’s lap and with one tiny foot wedged into Ilya’s ribcage on the other.

When the movie ends, Sveta heads upstairs to Ilya’s guest room to get ready for bed. Ilya walks Shane and Danny back across the street like he always does. Danny stays asleep, nose buried in Shane’s neck. The night air has a slight chill to it as they cross the short distance to the Hollander home. Mid-September is starting to fade into true fall, the last warm days of summer already behind them. The crickets still chirp, valiantly performing their duties before the nights become far too cold.

Ilya feels a sort of thickness in the air. “Thank you for inviting Sveta to stay.” Ilya tells Shane once they reach the porch.

“I like her.” Shane responds.

“She likes you too. Both of you.”

The thickness has turned to awkward tension. Why does Ilya feel a strange buzzing in his veins? Perhaps it’s because he’s close enough to count Shane’s freckles, with only the dim orange glow of the porch light scattering the darkness. Ilya’s inner Alpha is pacing. It sees this beautiful Omega in front of him and it *wants*. Ilya swallows hard.

He and Shane look at each other for a prolonged moment.

“I’ll see you next time, Ilya.” Shane says softly.

“Goodnight.” Ilya says quietly. He gently brushes over the back of Danny’s head.

~

Ilya: *I got that boring bread that you like.*

Shane: *Can we reschedule? Danny is sick.*

Ilya frowns. Danny is sick? Poor pup. He sits there for a moment before making a decision. He grabs his keys and leaves for the grocery store.

Two hours later, he’s packaging up the shchi, traditional Russian cabbage soup. It’s not as good as what his mother used to make, but in his opinion it’s not half bad.

He walks across the street and knocks on the door. Shane opens it, looking a little harried.

“I made soup. It is still warm.”

“Thank you.” Shane says immediately. He blinks. “Um, do you want to come in? Maybe seeing you will cheer him up.”

Ilya has actually never been inside his home, they always come to his place instead. It’s clean and cozy inside, with photos of Danny at various life stages all over the house. The fridge is covered in crayon drawings and appointment reminders.

“Sorry, I’m just so tired. He’s been up all night.” Shane says, scrubbing a hand over his face. “He’s on the couch if you want to say hi.”

Ilya enters the living room to see Danny laying in a nest on the couch.

“Hi.” He croaks. His eyes and nose are both tinged pink. The poor boy looks miserable.

“Hi buddie.” Ilya says, crouching down in front of him. “I heard you were not feeling well. I brought some soup.”

“I don’ wanna be sick no more.”

“I know.” Ilya says, brushing his hair back. His forehead is clammy.

“Beary is sick too.” Danny says, producing the bear from underneath the pile of covers.

“You both need lots of rest.”

Ilya sees Shane hovering in the doorway, so he gets up. “I can keep an eye on him if you need a minute. You should eat too. There is plenty of soup.”

“Honestly, that would be great.” Shane admits. “I really need to shower.”

“Take your time.” Ilya assures. It must be hard to be a single parent, even more so when your pup is sick. He sits with Danny and Beary to watch some cartoons while Shane takes a shower.

When he’s finished, clean and with wet hair and fresh scent blockers, he prepares the soup for himself and Danny.

“It smells great.” He tells Ilya. Ilya feels pleased that he is feeding the Omega with something he made himself.

Danny eats practically on Shane's lap at the table, but he finishes almost the entire bowl.

"Let's let your mama eat." Ilya says gently.

Danny holds his arms up for Ilya to carry him. He melts a little.

"He's kind of heavy, he's growing so fast." Shane warns.

"I am big, strong Russian Alpha." Ilya assures him. Shane gives a tired smile as an answer. Ilya lifts Danny up. The pup immediately snuggles into him, his fever-warm body wrapping around him.

Ilya takes him back to the living room to the nest on the couch so Shane can have a few minutes to eat. Danny reaches for a bin that sits in the middle compartment of the coffee table. Upon closer inspection, Ilya can see that it's full of a few small photo albums.

"Wanna see me as a baby?" Danny asks hopefully. Never mind the fact that Ilya met him when they moved in when the pup was two.

"Yes." Ilya also didn't think people still made physical photo albums, but he loves the idea of Shane painstakingly printing and arranging photos of his pup into these organized books.

"He begs me to look at them and tell him stories of when he was a baby." Shane says, appearing in the entryway to the living room.

"Show me." Ilya encourages Danny. Danny flips through the first book, of him as a newborn up to a few months old. He had a shock of dark hair and chubby cheeks.

"Mama says I was the cutest pup in the *whole world*." Danny says proudly.

Ilya is inclined to agree. They flip through page after page of Danny's childhood. Shane isn't in many photos, sadly, because Ilya assumes he was the one taking them. There are a few though, and Ilya is struck by how young Shane looks. He turns the page and inhales sharply and involuntarily. There's a photo of Shane when he was pregnant. He's holding his belly and looking so, so soft. Pink-cheeked and glowing. He looks incredibly beautiful.

"Sorry, I forgot that one was stuck in there." Shane murmurs.

"You were so cute pregnant." Ilya blurts out.

Shane flushes. "I gained a lot of weight and I was nauseous all the time. I certainly did not feel cute." He looks at Danny, who is starting to wilt into Ilya's side in his sleepiness. "He was worth it though."

"What was he like as a baby?" Ilya wonders out loud.

"Surprisingly, very similar to him now. Too smart for his own good. Funny. The innate ability to charm anyone and everyone."

Danny's eyes are now closed. Shane reaches for the last album in the bin and hands it to Ilya. "Look at this one."

Ilya opens it and immediately stifles a laugh so as not to wake the sleeping pup next to him. It's a 'baby book' for Beary. There are photos of the bear in different places and positions, complete with Danny's crooked handwriting describing Beary's life stage.

"He is so creative." Ilya comments.

"Honestly, I had fun helping him with it." Shane admits. "He was four and determined that his baby should have a book too." They finish looking through the book, matching stupid grins on their faces.

“Want to watch something that doesn’t involve talking animals?” Shane suggests, reaching for the tv remote. Ilya can tell the other man is exhausted, but he doesn’t decline. They watch part of an old 2000s romcom before Ilya glances over and notices that the Omega has fallen asleep. He gently wiggles himself out from underneath Danny and lays a blanket over Shane.

He goes into the kitchen to quietly tidy up, loading up the dishwasher with the dirty bowls from the soup and wiping down the counters. Shane is very neat, so for him to have counters covered in smudges and crumbs and dirty dishes laying around, it is considered a disaster zone. It’s a true testament to how busy he’s been with his sick pup.

Ilya locks the front door and slips out into the night, mentally planning to make another soup, chicken noodle this time, for tomorrow.

Chapter End Notes

Happy Tuesday, my dear readers!

I have a lot of plot points for this story that I am trying to fit in to the best of my ability, please know that I haven't forgotten about Shane's past and the reveal IS coming! It's just a matter of when I can fit it in.

P.S. Feel free to headcanon what Beary looks like, but to me, he looks like the Bartholomew Bear Jellycat (:

Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

I'm sorry this is so late in the day (it is currently 11:32pm EST for me). This almost didn't get finished and posted today at all, so I consider this a win.

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

Danny's sixth birthday is October first. He is having a party at the local ice rink with his friends from hockey and elementary school in attendance. Ilya attends with both his and Sveta's gifts in hand. She regretfully wasn't able to make it, since the hockey season begins in a few days.

As soon as he steps inside, sense memory accosts him. The smell of all ice rinks is the same anywhere you go— rubber, ice, and slightly stale French fries. It reminds Ilya of being a boy in Moscow, of everything he's lost. He shakes himself out of it and sets the gifts in his hand among the pile of brightly colored paper and bows already neatly stacked on a table. The small party room is set up for Danny but is empty. However, Ilya sees David standing in the rink area, so he goes to join him.

"They're so cute, aren't they?" David comments. He stands beside Ilya as they watch the kiddos skate around on the rink.

Ilya agrees. Some of the kids can't skate at all— he would hazard a guess those are probably the friends from school. Danny is skating around with a shiny red party hat on. He sees Ilya and waves furiously. He skates up to the plexiglass.

"Hi! Thanks for coming to my party!"

"Of course. Happy birthday!" Ilya tells him.

“Thanks.” Danny gushes. His friend calls out to him and he waves again and skates away to join him. Ilya and David go to find Shane and Yuna to see if they need any more help setting up the food. He finds Yuna, but not Shane.

“I’ve been instructed to send you to the bench.” Yuna says cryptically, pointing.

Ilya sits dutifully and waits, although he has no idea what he’s waiting for. He gets his answer a few minutes later. Shane plops onto the bench beside him and puts a pair of skates at Ilya’s feet.

“Here. These should fit.”

Ilya looks down at the ice skates, his heart thumping harder even by just looking at them. He looks at Shane, who is lacing up his own skates— not rentals —and makes a decision.

Lacing them up feels like a fever dream. It’s been so many years since he’s done this.

“We can just go for a few minutes. Take it easy on your knee.” Shane says.

Ilya nods mutely. He gets himself properly laced up and stands, the tottering walk of being on skates still feeling familiar even after all these years. They walk over the rubber flooring and over to the ice. Shane goes first, but he waits for Ilya by the entrance.

Stepping onto the ice feels like no time yet forever has simultaneously passed. “I didn’t know you still skate.” He comments to Shane.

“I bring Danny to free skate sometimes and we do it together.” They skate a loop, side by side, Shane letting Ilya quietly feel his feelings.

“Sveta will have a cow when I tell her this.” He says to Shane, who cracks a grin. “She was sorry she couldn’t make it.” He adds.

“That’s okay, I know she’s super busy.”

“She sent good gift as replacement.” Ilya assures.

“Did she get the tickets?” Shane guesses. Ilya affirms. “Danny is gonna flip.”

Ilya tilts his head at the expression. Sometimes there are random English expressions that he hasn’t heard before that he doesn’t quite know the meaning of (he learned the flip a cow expression from a co-worker a few years prior). Using context clues for ‘flip’, he says, “He will be very excited?” He says.

“Yes.” Shane confirms.

As if on cue, Danny spots them skating. “ILYAAAAA!” He screeches. This is the first time Ilya can remember him saying his name without the “Mr.” in front of him. Ilya is oddly touched. He skates into Ilya full force.

“Be careful!” Shane warns.

“I’m okay.” Ilya hugs Danny against his legs.

“You’re skating!”

“I am.”

“For my birthday?”

“Yes.”

“Let’s go!” Danny grabs one of Shane’s hands and one of Ilya’s and they do some laps around the rink with him in the middle. “This is so fun.” He says happily.

Ilya wishes he could capture this moment forever. Danny’s hand is small, warm, and slightly sticky inside his, and his knee twinges just a tiny bit, but he’s skating and he’s *happy*. It’s perfect. He glances over at Shane and he’s pretty sure he’s thinking the same thing.

Ilya has spent so long avoiding everything to do with hockey, mourning his dream. All along, he’s been missing out on things like this.

Maybe it’s time to find a new dream.

However, all good things must come to an end, and after his first time skating in almost a decade, his knee is ready to call it quits.

“Let’s go get ready to eat.” Shane suggests to Danny, as if he can sense it. Danny looks ready to protest, but Shane continues. “Then we’ll open presents.”

Predictably, that works like a charm.

“You okay?” Shane checks as soon as they get off the ice.

“I am okay. Go get ready for the food. I will be there in a minute.”

Shane looks at him for a beat longer and nods. Ilya takes approximately three minutes to regain his composure and return his skates at the rental counter before he joins the adult table next to the bigger tables of chattering five and six year olds happily munching on pizza.

Shane is delicately eating one slice of pizza and a whole heaping of salad. Ilya does the exact opposite and eats three slices of greasy pizza and no salad.

Gift opening goes swimmingly. Danny was unfailingly polite— thanks to both Shane and his grandparents, Ilya is sure —as well as enthusiastic at every gift from his friends. Action figures, Legos, Hot Wheels, and even two science kits pile up. When the other kids start to get picked up to go home and the crowd gets smaller, Ilya gives Danny the gifts from him and Svetlana too.

“You’re coming too, right?!” Is the first thing he asks regarding the tickets from Sveta, as soon as he stops jumping up and down excitedly. Truthfully, Ilya hadn’t planned on it, but Danny *and* Shane are looking at him hopefully and expectantly.

“Sure.” He says with a tight smile. He’s sure he can get another ticket from Sveta, that isn’t the issue. Yes, he faced down a demon today, but what if he panics at the game, in front of everyone? What if he can’t rein in the memories and he spirals?

“Next one is from me.” Ilya changes the subject, nodding to a blue bag with silver tissue paper. Yuna, David, and Shane all watch as Danny pulls out a custom Centaurs jersey with ‘Hollander’ on the back.

“This is awesome! I look like a *real* hockey player!” Danny exclaims. He puts it on over his current clothing. It’s a little big so he can grow into it and have it for a while.

“That probably cost you a fortune.” Shane whispers to him.

“I know a girl.” Ilya winks in response.

“You spoiled him.” Shane says, but it’s full of affection and fake admonishment.

“There’s actually one more thing. That small bag.” Ilya gestures to it.

Danny grabs it and enthusiastically rips out the tissue paper. He pulls out an even smaller jersey, a clone of the one he's wearing. Ilya is sure it was tough to get 'Hollander' to fit on the back of such a small jersey, but somehow they managed. Ilya had it custom made from someone on Etsy who specializes in stuffed animal and doll clothing.

"ME AND BEARY ARE GONNA MATCH!" Danny holds it up to himself. "This is so cool. This is like, the coolest thing *ever*."

"That is the cutest thing I've ever seen." Shane whispers to him. "How did you get it?"

Ilya shrugs. Danny launches himself at him. "Thank you thank you thank you!" Ilya hugs him. "And thank you for coming to my party. And for skating with me!" He addresses his mom and grandparents too. "Thank you! This was the best birthday ever!"

Shane smiles and ruffles his hair. His hand brushes past Ilya's arm. "Now help us clean up, mister." Danny, to his credit, doesn't complain and does indeed help clean up the party and load up the car.

"It was so good to see you, Ilya." Yuna says, hugging him goodbye in the parking lot.

"It was good to see you too."

"Don't be a stranger! Come up for dinner sometime with Shane and Danny!" Ilya promises that he will, and then they all get into their vehicles and go home.

Ilya gets a photo that night of Danny and Beary sleeping in their new jerseys.

The game is a week and a half later. Sveta did indeed secure him a ticket as well. They drive together to Ottawa, and plan on staying the night at Yuna and David's afterward so they don't have to make the long drive back to Montreal after the game.

Ilya feels really nervous about attending a hockey game. He's not sure how much his emotions will spiral once he's there. He tries to focus all his energy on Danny and his excitement instead. He's pretty sure Shane has picked up on his mood, because he keeps giving him sneaky glances but not saying anything.

Danny's excited chatter fills the car as they drive to the arena. He's wearing his jersey of course and has his bear in tow. Their seats are a perfect view, lower bowl, center ice. They spoil Danny with popcorn and a soda before they sit down. Ilya finds himself getting sucked into the game rather quickly. The first period is intense but there are no goals.

During the first intermission, the announcer booms over the loudspeaker. "We have a special birthday in the house tonight. Haaapppyyy birthdayyyy Danny!"

It must have been Sveta.

"Mom, they know it was my birthday!" Danny says happily, tugging on Shane's arm.

Shane kisses him on the head. "You're extra special."

When the first Centaurs goal is scored, Danny goes absolutely wild. He spills a quarter of his popcorn when he jumps up. He boos with the rest of the crowd when the opposing team scores a goal as well. It's impossibly cute.

"You okay?" Shane asks him over Danny's head. "I know it must be hard."

"I am okay." Ilya confirms. "I am having fun."

“Okay, good. Me too.” Shane smiles his small, sweet smile that Ilya admittedly adores. After the second period ends, they take Danny for a potty break, weaving through the crowd with him in the middle.

When Shane is in the bathroom, Ilya buys Danny a soft pretzel. He folds immediately when the boy asks.

“That thing is huge! You’re not going to eat all that bud. You’re going to get a tummy ache if you keep eating all the snacks here.” Shane admonishes him lightly.

“Ah. You see, I wanted a pretzel but it is so big. Danny so kindly offered to share it with me.” Ilya says.

“Yeah, mama! It’s Ilya’s pretzel and I’m just helping.” Danny says, looking up at his mom with the same big brown eyes.

“Mhm.” Shane says, clearly not believing their fib. “You two together are trouble.”

“Ilya! Hey, Ilya!” A voice calls from behind them. A familiar voice. Ilya turns to see Luca Haas from his work weaving through the crowd and calling his name.

“Hey, man, I didn’t know you were into hockey.” He says, chipper as always.

“Yes, I used to play, but we are here for the birthday boy.” Ilya says, nodding at Danny, who is standing closer to Shane now but looking at Luca curiously.

“Oh, I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to interrupt.” Luca says, clearly chagrined.

“Who are you?” Danny asks.

“I’m Ilya’s friend from work.” Luca tells him. “Are you the birthday boy?”

“Yes. I turned six on October 1st!”

“Happy belated birthday.”

“Thank you.” Shane taught his pup impeccable manners.

“This is Shane and Danny, my neighbors and friends.” Ilya says, feeling obligated to introduce them.

“*Best* friends.” Danny emphasizes.

“That’s right.” Ilya smiles at him.

“I’ll let you get back to your seats. I just wanted to say hi. It’s good to see you.” Luca says to Ilya. They nod and then the other man is walking away.

Ilya turns to see Shane looking at him strangely.

“What?”

“Nothing.” Shane mumbles. They head back to their seats and Ilya can’t shake the feeling that Shane is being a little quieter now, a little more reserved. He doesn’t have a lot of time to dwell on it right now though because of the game. He does split the pretzel with Danny, who munches happily while watching the game with more concentration than Ilya has ever seen from a kid.

The Centaurs win 3-2, and the celebration from the entire stadium is raucous. Ilya puts Danny on his shoulders as they exit, to keep him out of the crowd.

“This is the best day of my whole life.” Danny announces once they get back outside. A not so small part of Ilya feels the same way. Shane however, is still quiet at his side. He stays that way as they pile back into the car. Several minutes into the traffic getting out of the parking lot, Ilya peeks behind them to see Danny already passed out in the backseat.

“He’s crashed.” Ilya comments, just to break the silence between him and Shane.

“He’s had a big day.” Shane says, a little blandly.

“Did you have fun?” Ilya asks. Now, he’s starting to become a little worried that for some reason Shane didn’t.

“Yeah.”

“Shane.”

“What?”

“You are being...weird. Quiet.”

Shane shrugs, still staring straight ahead as he drives. A long moment passes before he says, “That was nice to meet your um, friend from work.”

Ilya’s brows knit together as he frowns. Luca? He hadn’t even been thinking about him at all since the encounter. “Yeah, he is nice. Young. He is an intern. We started talking at the company picnic earlier this year.”

“Cool.” Shane says flatly. “That’s...cool. It’s good that you like him, he seemed like he was into you.”

The conversation is not at all going where Ilya thought it was going. Actually, he’s slightly confused. “I think maybe he has a bit of a crush on me, yes.” He clears his throat. “I am not into him, though.”

“Oh?”

A wild, deep part of Ilya thinks, “*I think maybe I am in love with you.*” It’s a sudden thought but also not. It makes perfect sense to every single cell in Ilya’s body.

But this is Shane, his sweet friend who has been through *so much* at the hands of an Alpha. He needs a friend, not another Alpha trying to court him.

“We are not, um...” Ilya struggles to find the appropriate word.

“Compatible?” Shane supplies.

“Yes. I think so.” Ilya is pretty sure that is correct, but he looks it up just to be sure. “Yes. We are not compatible.” He confirms.

Shane nods, but he seems visibly less tense than before. The quiet between them is different now as they finish the drive back to David and Yuna’s. Shane carries Danny inside and Ilya trails behind to get the doors and such. Danny is half-awake, so Ilya follows to his room to say goodnight and help tuck him in.

As Shane lays the pup in his bed, Danny yawns and opens his eyes a little. He looks right at Ilya and says, “I wish you were my Alpha dad.”

Shane is so jealous he's sick with it, poor guy.

No spoilers but next chapter is going to be juicy!!

Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

Trigger warnings: Mentions of domestic violence and abuse

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

Ilya and Shane both freeze. Danny has already closed his eyes again, so Ilya doesn't need to respond, thankfully. Ilya excuses himself so Shane can finish tucking him in. He isn't sure whether Shane wants to address what just happened, so instead of going to the guest room, he hovers awkwardly in the main living area. When Shane comes out, closing the door to Danny's room quietly, he spots Ilya immediately.

"I'm sorry if that made you uncomfortable." He says softly.

"No, it didn't." Ilya confesses. He and Shane stare at each other for a moment in the dimly lit living room.

"Thanks for today. Tell Svetlana we said thanks again too and send her the photos." Shane says.

"I will." Ilya promises. "Goodnight, Shane."

They probably need to talk about what just transpired. Ilya doesn't even know what he would say. He wishes he was Danny's Alpha dad too, to be honest. He would love Shane and Danny with his entire heart and protect them forever.

Hell, he already feels that way.

He goes to the guest room where Anya is already waiting for him.

In the morning, he, Danny, and Shane stop at the local farmer's market before they head home. Ilya knows that Shane loves their produce. He seemed surprised that Ilya didn't mind the detour— as if there was anywhere else he'd rather be than here. Ilya holds onto Anya's leash and watches as Danny trails just behind his mama, the two of them perusing the fresh fruits and veggies.

If he *were* Danny's father, this could be his life. Saturday mornings in Ottawa at his in-laws, watching the two people he loves most debate strawberries versus blueberries.

But he isn't, so he eats his bearclaw donut and drinks a cup of warm cider and puts the yearning out of his mind.

The drive home is quiet but not uncomfortably so. Ilya is pretty sure all of them are still tired from the excitement the night before. The drive is beautiful, with all of the fall colors on display.

Shane parks in his driveway and they all exit the vehicle. "Say goodbye to Ilya." He prompts Danny, who can sometimes get too distracted and ahead of himself.

Ilya stands with his bags at his feet and Anya's leash in his hand, ready to give Danny a proper goodbye. He's sure he'll see them again in a few days, so it'll only be a farewell for now, but still.

Danny comes up and hugs him around his legs. Ilya rests his hand on the pup's shoulder. "Bye, Danny."

"Bye, Papa." Danny says, so softly and quietly that Ilya could almost think he imagined it. For the second time in twelve hours, this little boy has managed to melt his heart and freeze him up at the same time. His heart is in his throat. He looks up to see if Shane heard, and he can tell by the expression on his face that he did.

"Danny..." Shane says gently. Ilya is still speechless.

“What? He’s Anya’s papa. He can be my papa too.”

“That’s not really how it works, bud.” Shane says, his voice strained.

“Well he does all the things an Alpha dad should do and I want him to be my papa!” Danny says loudly, stomping his foot. There are tears in his eyes now.

“I’m sorry, baby.”

Danny’s face is turning red now and he bursts into tears, running into the house and slamming the front door behind him. The poor boy was obviously upset and maybe even a little embarrassed, or whatever the six year old version of that is like.

“I need to go after him.” Is all Shane says, and he disappears into the house too, leaving Ilya and Anya bewildered and shaken up.

Is this his fault? Did he do something, or multiple things, to make Danny think he was trying to be his father? Shane will probably cut off contact with him. Ilya has overstepped.

The thing is, he can’t even really deny it. He wasn’t consciously trying to do anything, but he’d be a liar if he said he didn’t want it.

He alternates between sitting on the couch and pacing. He’s too keyed up to settle down. He doesn’t call Svetlana, he doesn’t want to talk about it right now. He needs to get things straight in his own head.

Ilya goes through the motions the rest of the day, feeling like a robot who is running purely on battery while his mind is far away. He’s so worried that he’s messed everything up that he can’t focus on anything else. He also feels terrible that Danny was so upset. When his phone

buzzes from a text from Shane that night, he stares at it for a moment, almost afraid to look at it.

Shane: *Danny is asleep. Come over?*

Ilya's hands shake as he walks across the street. He lets himself in and finds Shane sitting at the kitchen table with two beers. Ilya has rarely seen Shane drink in all the time they've known each other. He doesn't look up to meet Ilya's eye as he sits down across from him, but he pushes the other beer bottle over to him.

"I have to tell you something." Shane says, his voice shaking.

"Okay." Ilya says, proud of his steadily his voice comes out. Inside, he's trembling.

"I know where Dallas is. I've known almost this whole time."

Ilya lets out a breath. He's shocked to hear this. He waits for Shane to continue.

"The private investigator that my mom hired to find me gave us the information a few days after I got back, when I was still staying with my parents." Shane picks at the label on his bottle. "Dallas is in jail. He got picked up for drunk driving a few days after...after he took me away. Anyway, his 90 days is almost up and he'll be released. I don't know what I'm going to do."

Wow. Ilya was not expecting that.

"Do you think you are in danger?" Ilya asks.

"I don't know. Maybe." Shane says noncommittally. He sounds so tired, sad, and defeated. It hurts Ilya to see sweet and mild Shane like this. Shane, who had a quick wit and a peculiar sense of humor that you wouldn't even know about if you didn't know *him*. Pretty Shane

with the strong thighs and the silky hair and the bland, boring diet. Shane, who he had spent so many nights with, watching movies with his pup, cooking dinner, doing puzzles. Shane who felt like *his* Shane.

Shane takes a swig of the beer in his hand. “There’s...there’s so much you don’t know. I’m sorry. I’m sorry I didn’t tell you. Maybe I was embarrassed, or hiding from it all, or maybe things when I’m with you have just been so good that I want to pretend there was nothing else beyond it.”

Now that’s something that Ilya can certainly understand. However, there’s something that Ilya knows for certain.

“You have nothing to be embarrassed about.”

Shane gives him a thin, disbelieving smile. “Well, I guess you pretty much know this part already, but Dallas and I have never had a good relationship. I thought we did in the beginning, but it was all an act. I should’ve recognized it for what it was, but I was young and naive. Even after I was pregnant, he never wanted to bond or mate with me, which I should be thankful for. I am, in a way, but it was also a part of his control. He would make me think that if I was better, more obedient, more *traditional Omega*, that would be on the table.”

Ilya is struggling to keep his anger in check. He clenches his hand around his bottle tightly but quickly releases it. He doesn’t want to scare Shane or make him more upset than he already is. This isn’t about Dallas, this is about what happened to Shane.

“That wasn’t something I ever wanted though. I tried a little in the beginning, but I didn’t really want to change myself to please someone else. I am who I am. I have my own opinions. I don’t want to be a barefoot and pregnant stay at home Omega who doesn’t have a job or any interest outside of his Alpha. Besides the mental aspect, obviously I’m also bigger than a traditional Omega. I’m stronger and more muscular. I was never going to fit what he wanted anyway. You already know that Dallas didn’t come around too often anymore, but when he did, he expected me to be a certain way. A perfect little obedient Omega. And this time I just...got tired of it. I didn’t play into it.”

Shane takes a break to just breathe and collect his thoughts. Ilya waits patiently.

“I had the contingency plan in place with Danny for almost a year prior. Dallas came over looking to pick a fight, and like I said, I was tired of rolling over and just taking it. He escalated to screaming and throwing things, and I gave Danny our secret signal. He went to hide and I was prepared to deal with my fate, not thinking that he was going to take me away. He—” Shane clears his throat. “Hit me enough that I was complacent and he put me in the car, drove me an hour away to an Omega reformatory, and checked me in.”

So it was true. The fake name, the Omega matching Shane’s description, those nights Ilya spent researching ‘Omega Health Centers’.

“They call them health centers, but that’s not really what they are.” Shane says wryly.

“I know, I did my research.” Ilya admits.

“Then you know that they just wanted me to submit. They did unconventional things to ensure this. I was supposed to go through their program and come out as a perfect, cookie cutter Omega for Dallas.”

“How did you get out?”

“I escaped.” Shane admits. “Me, and one other Omega. Troy. I don’t even know his last name.” Shane’s beer is gone now and Ilya collects it, along with his own half-drunk bottle, and puts them beside the sink to be rinsed out later. He then gets them each a glass of water. Shane accepts his with a grateful smile. “We left and hitchhiked to the nearest bus station. He got on a different bus than me. I don’t know what happened to him, but I hope he’s okay. That’s how I ended up at your door.”

Ilya remembers Shane looking exhausted and weary, suddenly appearing on his doorstep.

“They did not look for you or go after you? The staff at the center?”

“Well, they didn’t know my real name. That was one small favor from Dallas, but also, I don’t think they even could. What could they do? Call the police and tell them that one of their prisoners escaped?”

“I do not understand how the health centers are legal.”

“Easy. They bring in a lot of money. The government gets money and ‘well-trained Omegas’ released back into society. It’s a don’t ask, don’t tell situation.”

That’s bullshit, but Ilya can begin to understand what that means now that Shane has put it that way. If the government is benefiting and the centers continue to market themselves favorably and cannot be debunked, they can’t— or won’t —be shut down. It’s a sad and disgusting truth.

“The worst part wasn’t even being there, it was being away from Danny.” Shane continues. “I worried about him so much. I *missed* him so much.”

Those weeks without Shane were so dull and dreary in his mind. Ilya remembers it all too well. His phone suddenly buzzes in his pocket, pulling him out of his memory. He ignores it, not even pulling it out.

“I figured you took him to my parents, but I didn’t *know* for sure. I just had to hope that he was safe and that he was okay.” Shane bites his lip. “And then I came back, and I saw how above and beyond you went. My mom told me everything. Not just the obligation to take him to Ottawa, but about the times you played with him, or made him feel seen and heard even though he’s just a little boy. That’s so special, Ilya. He...he loves you so much.” Shane’s voice breaks a little. “I understand why he wants you to be his papa.”

Ilya bites his own lip to try to keep his emotions at bay. His phone buzzes once again, and again, he ignores it. This is far too important. Whatever Sveta wants can wait.

“I think I wish that you could be too. Our lives would be so much better for it. You *already* make our lives so much better. I should have said it sooner. You’re my best friend.” Shane

looks at him as he says it. Ilya knows how hard eye contact is for him sometimes, so he knows this is a big deal.

“You are my best friend too.” He promises. “I am sorry about what happened to you, both of you, but I am so happy it has brought you into my life.” Without this, they would probably still be just neighbors waving from afar. It’s strange to think about.

“You stole my line!” Shane laughs. “I was going to say I’m glad all of this has brought you into our lives. If we had to go through it, I’m at least glad that it brought us you.”

Buzz buzz buzz. His pocket vibrates for the third time. Ilya is starting to become annoyed now.

“Shane...what did they do to you?” He asks quietly. They were almost past the subject, but he has been wanting to know. He feels like he *needs* to.

Shane gets a faraway look on his face. “They forced us to submit. Sometimes it was over something stupid, but it was about the blind submission more than anything else. To train us out of having any sort of opinion of our own. They would scruff us or force us to kneel if we didn’t obey. They...if we kept refusing, they would use an electric cattle prod.”

Health centers. They call these places health centers. Ilya’s knuckles clench under the table.

“Plus, it was overcrowded and the food sucked.”

Ilya arches a brow. “Mr. Boring Diet Food thinks the food was bad?”

“If I say it’s bad, you know it’s really bad.”

They both huff shaky laughs, even though they both know nothing is funny.

When his phone buzzes yet *again*, Ilya finally pulls it from his pocket. He has missed calls from Sveta and his brother Alexei. He hasn't spoken to his brother in months. His heart drops. Something is wrong.

"Shane, I am sorry, please give me one minute." He says woodenly, standing up and pushing away from the table. He hits the call back button on his brother's contact.

"Ilya." Alexei says. "Papa is dead."

Chapter End Notes

I'm sorry this is a day late. Truthfully, I am going through a lot personally right now and I may not be able to keep up the same posting schedule. However, I am committed to this story and will not be abandoning it.

Additionally, I wanted to speak on the rampant AI use for fics in this fandom. I have heard a lot about this over on twitter and am very disheartened to realize just how MANY Heated Rivalry fics, especially in the Omegaverse genre, have been generated using AI/have been 'written' by heavily leaning on AI, without proper tagging to acknowledge such, with authors passing these off as their own. I do not support the use of AI that is killing our environments. There is no reason to ever rely on generative AI. Write the fic, even if you think it's bad, use your brain and your own creativity and support AUTHORS, not AI.

I will never use AI in any way related to my fics and that is a promise. Everything here is written by me on the Google Docs app on my phone and is something that I both enjoy and take pride in doing.

If you took the time to read all of this, thank you.

Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

Thank you to everyone who was so kind and understanding on my last chapter. As I stated, I have a lot going on in my personal life right now. For the time being, this will be updated only once a week on Tuesdays.

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

Leaving Shane after he told him so many painful and personal things is one of the hardest things Ilya has ever had to do. He has to make some phone calls and book a red eye flight to Moscow.

His father is dead.

His father, who despite the recent decline with his mind, always seemed so invincible to Ilya. Tall and stern and well-respected in their community. Ilya's relationship with both his father and his brother were complicated, but when it came down to it, they were the only two members of his true blood pack that he had left.

Now it was down to one.

Ilya does not like visiting Moscow. The only solace is that Sveta is joining him. Their fathers were good friends and she knew Grigori well. Ilya's mind tortures him on the plane ride. All of his worst memories from Russia, from his childhood, the things that Shane told him last night.

"Ilyusha?" Sveta asks, squeezing his hand. Ilya is pulled from his thoughts. He blinks hard and looks over at her. "We're here." She says. "Time to get off the plane."

He feels like a robot. Everything feels dull and distant and crushing under the weight of his emotions. To add insult to injury, the time difference is brutal.

Moscow is the same as he remembers it, grey and dim. It feels like he has lived a hundred different lives since the last time he was here. He hasn't been back at all since he and Sveta left about seven years ago. She comes back at least a few times a year, but he always stays in Canada.

The house he grew up in looks more or less the same as it was when he left it. Large and ornate but missing the most important things— love, genuine care and kindness. It's a mausoleum in its own right.

He feels numb as he helps Alexei with the funeral arrangements. Their father suffered from Alzheimer's disease in his final years. He became a shell of the man he once was. Ilya will always feel guilty for not being around during everything. Yes, he had a whole life in Canada, but he should have been here, he should have been a son. Of course, his brother makes sure to tell him as much as well.

The only upside to being here is that Ilya gets to see his niece, Anastasia, whom he hasn't seen since two years prior when they last came to Canada. She's a little older than Danny, but Ilya can't help but think that they would get along well.

They all have a stilted family dinner together after the official arrangements have been made. Ilya can't deny that he does find some comfort in the traditional Russian food. His sister in law is a great cook. Otherwise, eating here in this dining room is an exercise in torture in it's own right.

Finally, after an absolutely exhausting day, Ilya retires to his old bedroom. He immediately checks his phone and sees two texts from Shane.

The first is a photo of Anya and Danny on the living room floor. Danny is playing with some toy cars on a surprisingly elaborate racetrack and Anya appears to be supervising. Shane was watching Anya for him while he was in Russia. He misses her, and he misses them. He wants to go back home to his real family.

Shane: *How is everything going?*

It's tricky with the time difference. If Ilya thinks about it too hard, his head will start to hurt. He is currently seven hours ahead of Shane. The text was from a few hours prior. He sends another one back instead of calling like he really wants to do, because Shane is likely asleep. He's surprised when his phone buzzes only a few minutes later. It is nearly 10pm here, so it is the early hours of the morning in Montreal.

"Shane? Is everything okay?"

"I couldn't sleep. I wanted to talk to you. Unless you're too tired."

"No, I am not." Ilya says, drawing back the covers of his old bed. How strange it feels to be sleeping in this bed and in this room again.

"It's bad, isn't it?" Shane asks quietly.

"Yes." Ilya admits. His cheek is now smushed into his pillow. "It feels...wrong."

"How is your niece?" Shane switches to a lighter topic.

"She is good. It is nice to see her. She is growing so fast."

"Mm, pups tend to do that." Shane agrees. "Anya is in the bed with Danny."

"And you didn't send me photo?!" Ilya exclaims, fake-outraged.

"I didn't want to blow up your phone! I saved the pictures though."

“She is being good girl?” Ilya checks.

“Always. They’re like two peas in a pod.” Shane says. He hesitates, then adds, “Also, I talked to him about the other night.”

Ah, yes. How could it slip Ilya’s mind? He had to leave when things were an emotional disaster. “He is okay?”

“He is. He understands now, I think. To some degree.” Shane responds. “He thought you were upset with him.”

Ilya’s heart sinks. “No, I would never be upset with him. I am sorry I had to leave before he woke up the next day.”

“Ilya. It’s okay. It’s not like you could’ve helped what happened.”

“You sound sleepy.” Ilya says, now the one to divert the subject.

“Kind of. I just kept thinking about you.” Shane says. Ilya knows he means the predicament that Ilya is currently in, but still, the phrase makes his heart skip a beat.

“I will be okay.” Ilya says, although right now, he isn’t even sure if it’s the truth. His emotions are so impossibly twisted up inside him.

“I was thinking, maybe you could tell me everything, but in Russian. So you can get it off your chest but you’re not really telling me everything you’re not ready to say.”

That’s actually a really great idea. Ilya could use that right now. “You are sure?”

“Yes.”

So, Ilya does. He clutches the phone and spills his guts into the speaker. He talks about how he failed as a son and how he hates being here. About how he did his best to give his family what they needed but it was never enough.

He even says that he wants Shane. He only ever wants Shane.

He feels wrung out when he finishes. He's confessed so much, and Shane doesn't even know it. They hang up with the promise of sleep for both of them. Ilya will be here in Moscow for another six days. It feels like a lifetime. Sveta would tell him he's being dramatic. She likely will, tomorrow. Perhaps he is.

All he knows is that this place hasn't been *home* in a very long time.

~

Shane would be so mad at him right now, Ilya thinks as he stands on the balcony and smokes a cigarette. He quit years ago, and he might be inviting the habit back in doing this, but he needed the calming rush of the nicotine. He looks out over the city. He slept a few restless hours but got up at dawn to watch the sun rise. It was one thing that always made him feel closer to his mama, who loved both the sunrise and the sunset. Sitting here now, in his old home, exemplifies the feeling.

The door behind him opens. Ilya doesn't turn around.

His brother grabs a cigarette out of Ilya's pack and his lighter. They puff quietly for a minute until Alexei speaks.

“You are different.” He states.

Ilya turns to look at him. “Different how?”

Alexis shrugs. “You do not belong here anymore.”

Ilya snorts even though the comment stings. He ashes his cigarette and turns away.

“It is not a bad thing.” Alexei insists. “You have someone, back in Canada?”

“It is complicated.”

“Life is short.” His brother says. “Maybe after everything, you should let yourself be happy.” Ilya is surprised to hear him say this. Their relationship is often a struggle.

“You sound like Sveta.” He says in lieu of an acknowledgement of the response.

“She is a smart woman.”

“I never said that I am sorry for leaving you here with papa.” Ilya says before he loses his nerve.

“I am the older brother.” Alexei responds. “It was always my burden to bear.” Ilya doesn’t really believe that in the same way, but he accepts the answer for what it is.

The funeral for his father is entirely what he expects. Long, arduous, and difficult to get through. He plasters on a brave face and shakes the hands of all of his father’s old acquaintances from the police force. He feels like a child again, in some strange way. Some of their faces he can remember from back then.

Ilya visits his mother's grave every day. He tells her all about Shane and Danny, as well as his life in Canada. He feels the breeze in his hair and the sun on his face and he knows she is with him. He talks to Shane and Danny every day, even if it's just for a few minutes. He sends photos of the better parts of Moscow, stuff that would be fun for them to see.

When he finally boards the plane back to Canada, Ilya feels aged. He's restless enough on the flight that Svetlana keeps shooting him looks.

"You should tell Shane how you feel. I've seen the way he looks at you, he feels the same way."

"He has enough to deal with." Ilya says. It's ironic that Sveta doesn't know that he technically *did* tell Shane. Even if it was in Russian.

"And you don't think he'd like someone to lean on while he does?"

Ilya doesn't answer her.

When they get off the plane and head for the baggage claim, a small boy runs up to Ilya and crashes into him.

"Danny!" Ilya exclaims, lifting him up. "I missed you."

Shane walks up with a smile. "He wanted to make you a sign like in the movies." He holds it up to show Ilya. It's clear that Danny made it himself and worked really hard on it.

"That is beautiful. Can I keep it?" He sets Danny back down on the ground and grabs the sign.

"Yes. I made it for you." Danny says. "Anyu helped a little." Svetlana shoots him yet another look that he pointedly ignores as they all stand at the luggage carousel to wait for their bags.

“Were you surprised?” Danny wants to know. Ilya knew they were coming to pick up he and Sveta, as it was pre-arranged, but he’d assumed they would wait in the car.

“Yes.” Ilya promises. “Best surprise.”

They eat dinner together that night, Chinese takeout at Ilya’s house. Shane keeps watching Ilya carefully, like he might break down at any moment. When they are cleaning up, Danny approaches him with a card and his patented shy look that makes him resemble his mama even more.

“I’m sorry about your papa.” Danny says, giving him the handmade sympathy card.

“Thank you.” Ilya crouches to be more eye level with him. “Sometimes, when someone is sick, like my papa, it can be...a comfort, that they are at peace now.” His gaze flicks to Shane’s to make sure that it’s okay that he’s describing it this way to Danny.

“Are you at peace too?” Danny wonders aloud. Kids have that way of asking you an innocent question that hits you right where it hurts the most.

“I am getting there.” Ilya promises him. “You know what would make me feel better? If we watched a movie before bed.”

“Okay!” Danny says enthusiastically. “Mama, we have to watch a movie.” He says, turning to Shane.

“Go get your jammies on.”

“Should we make popcorn?” Ilya asks, already reaching for the snack cabinet.

“Ilya.”

“Hm?” Ilya suddenly feels arms wrap around him. Shane is hugging him. “Hey.” He turns fully and wraps his arms around Shane in return.

“Hey.” Shane says quietly into his chest. “I just wanted...I missed you and I just wanted to hug you and tell you that it’s okay if you’re hurting.”

Ilya blinks back unexpected tears. “Thank you.” He says hoarsely. He lets himself be held by Shane just as he lets himself revel in how good it feels to hold the other man as well. He’s always respected Shane’s privacy, but he wishes more than anything right now that he could detect his scent. Maybe one day they will both go without scent patches.

They pull away at the same time, but not far. Their faces are only about an inch apart. Ilya relishes in it. He reaches a hand up to tuck a lock of Shane’s hair, which has grown longer recently, behind his ear.

His eyes lock onto Shane’s lips, so close to his own, and he leans in even closer before he loses his nerve. He’s rewarded by a sharp inhale from Shane and the movement of him meeting Ilya in the middle. Ilya presses their lips together softly and gently.

“What movie are we watching?!” The sound of Danny’s voice and his little feet thundering down the stairs sends them jumping apart.

“Um, Ilya is making popcorn and we are going to watch *Over the Hedge*.” Shane answers. He’s blushing profusely. It makes Ilya want to kiss him again.

And again.

And again.

I'm not going to lie, this chapter did not come out of me very easily and I'm not entirely happy with it. However, our boys have made PROGRESS and I hope you enjoyed it anyway. Thank you for reading and sticking around for this story, it truly does mean a lot.

Chapter 10

Chapter Notes

TW: Some violence

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

They haven't talked about the kiss.

The following day they attend one of Danny's hockey games together, so they're a little busy. It's the first one of the season that Ilya has been able to attend. He finds himself once again surrounded by the familiar scent of an ice rink. It's unbelievable how Shane has brought his first love back into his life without even trying.

Danny is so cute, all bundled up in his hockey gear. He's so excited that Ilya is here to see him play.

"He is very good. Best one." Ilya comments to Shane.

"You're biased."

Ilya raises a brow. "You think someone else is better?"

"Of course not. He's totally the best one." They both laugh.

Ilya gets the pleasure of seeing Hockey Mom Shane in full glory. He watches the game with full intensity, as if he's analyzing plays in a professional hockey game.

During the short intermission, Ilya stands. "I am going to use restroom. Do you need anything?"

Shane doesn't answer. He's staring straight ahead with a strange expression on his face.

"Shane?" Ilya gently touches his shoulder. "Are you okay?"

Shane finally moves, but it's robotic. "Yeah. I thought I saw something." He slightly shakes his head as if to get his thoughts back into order. "I'll come with you."

That was weird. Ilya has an uncomfortable feeling now. His instincts are prickling. He scans the crowd of people but sees nothing out of the ordinary. They go to the restroom together and then stand in a short line while Ilya gets a refill on his soda.

Shane seems alert in a different way throughout the rest of the game. However, Danny's team wins the game so any angst is forgotten.

The team goes out for ice cream at a nearby local place afterward to celebrate. Ilya sits with Shane and the other parents, fondly watching as the pups faux-argue over sprinkles and hot fudge. The tables at the ice cream parlor are sticky and the place is crowded, but there's nowhere he'd rather be. Ilya eats a waffle cone filled with two scoops of Rocky Road and Shane doesn't have anything.

"You are okay?" Ilya asks Shane quietly.

"I'm fine. Just tired." Ilya doesn't believe that, but he lets it go since they're in public. He'll check in with him about it again later.

After the kids finish their ice cream, everyone heads home pretty quickly because it's supposed to storm that night. Ilya goes back to his own house since Anya has been alone for a few hours while they were gone.

“Great game.” He hugs Danny goodbye in the driveway.

“Thank you for coming.” The pup says sincerely. He looks tired but happy.

Ilya watches them go inside and walks back across the street. He lets Anya out and sits on his back patio while she sniffs around the yard.

“Go potty, it is going to storm.” He tells her. She ignores him in favor of doing a languorous smelling routine. Maybe it’s the ozone crackling in the air due to the impending weather, but Ilya’s instincts still feel like they’re on overdrive. He scans the yard and finds nothing. Anya doesn’t react in any way out of the ordinary either.

They make it inside just as the sky opens up and dumps rain. The day is fading to blue-grey, when the dark storm clouds making it appear darker than it really is at this hour.

He gives Anya her kibble and makes himself a quick and simple dinner. He plans to finish out the evening by watching some trashy tv and maybe taking a hot shower before bed, but in the middle of his show, the power blinks out. He sits there in the darkness for a minute, then two. After fifteen, it’s clear that it’s a true power outage.

He takes a dark picture and texts it to Shane. Shane sends back a question mark, obviously confused.

Ilya: *That is Anya. the power is out*

Shane: *Get over here!! I have a generator!*

Ilya peeks out the window. The rain is coming down in droves. Still, getting wet would be better than sitting in a dark and cold house all night. And being with Shane and Danny is

better than anything else, anyway. He wraps Anya in his raincoat and books it across the road. Shane opens the front door as soon as he steps onto the porch.

“You’re soaked!” He exclaims. He goes to find some towels while Ilya sets Anya, who is mostly dry, down onto the floor.

Shane comes back and starts scrubbing a towel over Ilya’s wet curls. “You’re gonna get sick.” He admonishes. Ilya shamelessly lets him dote on him and dry him off, even though he’s perfectly capable of doing it himself.

It ends with a towel wrapped around Ilya’s shoulders and Shane less than an inch in front of him. His hands are on the corners of the towels that drape off of Ilya.

“Oh, I—” Shane inhales sharply. It’s then that Ilya realizes. The combination of the rain and the drying process have removed most of Ilya’s scent blockers.

“Is okay?” Ilya asks quietly. His voice is so low that it’s almost a whisper.

“Ilya.” Shane drops his forehead to Ilya’s chest. His fingers still grip onto the towel. He nuzzles into him. Ilya is immediately obsessed with the feeling.

“You smell so good.” He murmurs. Ilya’s inner Alpha roars to life at hearing that.

He lets Shane rub his cheek on him a few more times before he says, “Shane.”

Shane peeks up at him. His eyes are big and a little glassy.

“Can I kiss you?”

This kiss is nothing like the last. It's deep and fervent. They move away from the front door and end up on the couch with Shane on top of Ilya. Ilya's hands roam all over him, feeling hard muscle and warm skin.

They keep kissing until they get lost in each other. Shane's weight on top of Ilya just feels *right*. He lets the Omega scent him, softly and sweetly. He knows that when the time is right, Shane will return the favor.

"I might need you to never wear blockers again." Shane mutters.

"Whatever you want." Ilya says, and means it. He cups Shane's jaw tenderly.

"This is crazy." Shane says.

"Is not so crazy." Ilya insists. The crazy part would be Shane giving him even an iota of a chance at a romantic relationship. Shane is just so wonderful *and* has been through so much, Ilya would understand if he never wanted to be more than friends.

"I never thought I'd meet somebody like you." Shane whispers. He kisses Ilya's jaw. "An Alpha who was kind and sweet, who didn't expect anything from me. Who was kind to Danny too and didn't care that I'm a single mom who has never been mated."

"You are everything I have ever dreamed of." Ilya confesses. "Every single thing about you." Shane is pressing a kiss to his scent gland that is making his spine absolutely melt when they hear little footsteps. Shane jolts up and off of Ilya just as Danny comes around the corner.

"Mama? It smells like an Alpha in here." He accuses.

Ilya sits up too and smooths his hair down. "It is just me, *solnyshko*."

Danny looks between the two of them for a long moment. "It's storming." He announces.

“Yes. Ilya’s power is out.” Shane says. He is still hiding his blush.

“Can we make a fort? We usually make a fort when there’s a storm.”

“We should get you back to bed.” Shane says gently.

“I’ll sleep in the fort!” Danny insists. He spots Anya curled up on the couch and coos at her.

“I will help build fort but you have to go back to bed. No foolishness.” Ilya says.

Danny giggles at Ilya’s choice of words. Shane shoots him a grateful look for the backup. The three of them build a cozy fort that’s akin to a nest, comfy and piled high with a lot of blankets and pillows. It smells like a combination of the clean scent of the laundry detergent that Shane uses and Danny’s sweet pup scent. Once Danny and Anya are inside and tucked in, Shane turns his sole attention back to Ilya.

He tugs his wrist gently. “Are you staying the night?”

“Yes. I would not miss the fort.” Ilya teases. Shane rolls his eyes. They brush their teeth side by side, and Ilya can’t help but think he wants to do this every night for the rest of his life.

Crammed into a fort on the living room floor with another adult, a kid who kicks in his sleep, and a dog, Ilya has one of the best night’s sleep he’s ever had.

The last of the fall days fade into even cooler weather. Ilya and Shane are taking things slow, but there’s a definite progression in their relationship. They have been cuddling and kissing and Ilya has spent the night several more times, in Shane’s bed with him.

“You are being weird.” Ilya tells him one night. Danny is playing in his room while they cook dinner.

“No I’m not.” Shane lies.

“Spill.” Ilya demands.

Shane clears his throat. “I just wanted to tell you. Um, I’m due for a heat next week. Danny is going to my parents. So, I wanted to tell you we won’t be able to hang out because I’ll be... indisposed.”

“Okay.” Ilya says simply. “Do you need anything?”

“No, I’m covered.” Shane seems incredibly embarrassed about this even though it’s normal and natural. Actually...Ilya hadn’t even been thinking about it, but he’s nearly due for one of his biannual ruts as well. He and Shane are both on blockers that regulate their heat/rut to twice a year.

“You will call me if you need anything? Groceries or supplies delivered?”

“Yes.” Shane promises, but he still won’t meet Ilya’s eyes. His shy Shane. Ilya kisses his temple and is rewarded with a smile.

The holidays are coming up soon, and general daily life is occupying most of Ilya’s mind. He’s all but forgotten Shane’s weird behavior from weeks prior at Danny’s hockey game.

~Danny~

Danny looks at the selection in front of them carefully. He and Mama had come downstairs to their pantry to pick out some sides to go with dinner tonight. Ilya is coming over soon, he just has to finish working. He works from home on his computer just like Mama.

The stairs leading to the basement creak, signaling that someone is walking down them. Danny turns, expecting to see Ilya, but instead seeing his Alpha father. Danny doesn't consider him his dad, but he gets mad if Danny says that.

He isn't supposed to be here. Danny freezes in place. He's scared now. Mama freezes too, but then he speaks. His voice is flat like it gets when Danny is in trouble.

"What are you doing here, Dallas?"

Dallas grins meanly. Danny has always thought he has a mean face. It's something about his eyes. He darts over to Shane and slams him up against the shelving unit that holds their canned and boxed goods. Danny flinches away.

"That stupid asshole Alpha isn't here to save you now, is he?" Dallas spits the words right into Mama's face. "His car isn't in its usual spot. Guess he found another wet hole for the night."

Danny doesn't know what that means, but he does know that Ilya's car is in the shop. That's where you take your car to pay money when it needs to be fixed. This morning they followed him there and then he rode with them to take Danny to school. They stopped for a donut and it was really fun. He rode home with Mama after they dropped Danny off.

Danny catches Mama's eye over his Alpha father's shoulder. He knows Mama wants him to hide again. He's really scared for Mama, but he needs to be brave. He fakes to the right like he does sometimes in hockey and when Dallas moves that way, he swerves hard to the left. He's small and fast and he makes it through an opening in the railing and runs upstairs two at a time.

However, he doesn't go for his special hiding spot.

He runs right to Ilya's.

Chapter End Notes

Things are happening!!

Also, a few notes:

- 1.) I know I mentioned heat and rut, but there is no smut for this story. I hope that's not too terribly disappointing. I just don't think it fits with this plot.
- 2.) You may have noticed that the chapter count has been updated- there are two chapters left for this specific story. The last one will be an epilogue of sorts and I'm not sure how long it will be, just a heads up. However, don't be too sad! I am planning to do a sister fic of Shane's POV AND a sequel that shows where our boys are next.

As always, thanks for reading!

Chapter 11

Chapter Notes

TW: Violence, mentions of a gun

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

Danny bursts through Ilya's door. Ilya almost flings his laptop off of his lap in surprise.

"Ilya you have to help Mama! My Alpha father is there and he's hurting him!"

Ilya's blood runs cold. He jumps up. "What?!"

Danny is trembling and out of breath. "Please, you have to go help!" He yells.

Ilya crouches in front of Danny. "Stay here. Do not open door for anyone but me or police. I'm locking it behind me."

Danny nods fervently.

"I love you." Ilya tells him. "Stay here and don't open door!" There's so much more he needs to say, but he needs to get to Shane. He runs out the door and dials the police with shaking fingers as he does. He calls twice and hangs up. He doesn't have time right now to talk to an operator but he needs officers to be sent out.

His brain is full of noise as he books it across the street and bursts through Shane's door. His head, his heart, and his instincts are all screaming Shane's name at him.

He hears scuffling coming from the basement. The door is open and the light is on, so that's clearly where Shane and Dallas are. Ilya barrels down the stairs, almost tripping in his haste.

Dallas and Shane are tussling on the floor. Ilya rips Dallas up and clocks him in the face. Then, he's the one being tackled.

"I should've known." Dallas snarls.

"Shane, run!" Ilya struggles to get the words out as he tries to hit Dallas again. The man is flailing and throwing his body weight and making it nearly impossible. Ilya hears Shane scramble up, but he doesn't have the capacity to watch him right now.

"I put Shane in a place where he could learn to be a *real* Omega. Obedient. Then I got picked up and went to jail, but I thought, eh, the more time there, the better for him. No biggie." If Dallas has this much time to talk, Ilya must not be doing a good job. He slams him down harder into the ground. God, he truly wants to kill him.

His Alpha is roaring inside of him, filling his mind with the color red and pure rage. "You don't deserve to *look* at Shane." He spits out. Dallas elbows him hard in the ribs in response and flips them over. Landing on the hard flooring momentarily takes the breath out of Ilya.

"Imagine my surprise when I go to pick up my Omega after months and he isn't there. Instead, he's playing house with some other Alpha and my kid."

"I was never your Omega." Shane says, reappearing at the top of the stairs. Ilya takes the opportunity of Dallas being distracted to start choking him. He doesn't notice yet that Shane is holding a gun, all he can focus on is his pure rage at the man underneath his hands.

He squeezes harder and harder, unaware of anything else until the sound of sirens in the distance grow closer.

“Ilya!” Shane’s voice combined with the sirens breaks him out of his haze. He looks up to see Shane standing at the bottom of the steps with the gun trained on Dallas. His hand is shaking. Ilya keeps his weight pinning Dallas down but releases the hold on his neck.

“Are you—” Dallas is cut off by noises upstairs.

“Police!”

“Down here!” Shane calls. Several policemen appear.

“Drop your weapon, Sir.”

Shane sets the gun down carefully and puts his hands up. “This man attacked me in my home. I was defending the life of myself and my pup.” The police descend the stairs slowly with their weapons drawn. They see Ilya and Dallas on the ground.

“I didn’t attack him.” Dallas lies. “His pup is *our* pup. I’m the pup’s biological father.”

“Where is the pup now?” One of the officers asks.

“He is at my home. Across the street. I instructed him to lock himself inside.” Ilya says. Shane looks at him in surprise. Ilya assumes that Shane thought Danny was hiding in his secret spot again. After confirming that Dallas does not live here, was not invited, and that he and Shane are not bonded or mated, Ilya can see the police beginning to put together a picture in their minds of the truth about what really happened. They’re not falling for Dallas’ lies. Ilya can’t wait until they run his information and also realize that Dallas has recently been to jail and is still on probation as well.

“I want to see him. Please. I’ll answer any questions you want afterward, but please let me see my son first.” Shane begs the cops. They all exit the house, Dallas being cuffed and held by two police officers the entire time and protesting despite his right to remain silent. One of

the cops had radioed another who now has Danny with her in Ilya's front yard. Ilya has to bite back his emotions as he watches Shane and Danny embrace.

Danny got a few brief moments with Shane and is now being shown one of the police cars by another officer. It's a good tactic, but Ilya knows that Danny is old enough and smart enough to still be scared, upset, and confused right now, despite the distraction.

Ilya can't stop sneaking glances at Shane. He's bruised and has a cut on his cheek and a split lip. His knuckles are also red and busted. He gets checked out by the paramedics who have also arrived on scene. Ilya waved them off for himself. He's also a little bruised but it's nothing major. Shane on the other hand, Ilya has no idea what happened before he got there.

It's quite the process, answering all of the questions that the police have. Dallas has been officially apprehended and put into the back of one of the squad cars while Ilya and Shane are questioned separately. He's taken away a few minutes later. Ilya sincerely hopes he can be locked up for a long, long time this time around.

When they're finished taking their reports for the time being, Ilya and Shane are dismissed with the promise of a follow up. They go inside Ilya's house, since Shane's is technically a crime scene.

"I should call my parents." Shane says woodenly.

"I can, if you want." Ilya offers.

"I should be the one to do it."

"Take a breath, sit down for a moment." Ilya instructs. Shane is too still, too calm.

"I'm fine."

“Shane.” He pulls the other man into his chest, wrapping his arms around him. “You are safe now.”

Shane inhales raggedly against him. “I was going to shoot him, Ilya.” He whispers. He starts sobbing into his chest, all of his emotions coming out like a tidal wave.

“Shhh.” Ilya soothes. “It does not matter now, hm?” He pulls Shane to the couch and sits him down. Danny joins them quietly. They all sit there for a little while, quietly coming down from the adrenaline. Anya lays at their feet. After some time passes, Ilya asks Shane if he wants to call David and Yuna together.

Of course they insist on coming right away.

“Let them come and see that you’re both alright.” Ilya tells Shane. “They can sleep in my guest room.” It’s unspoken that no one will be returning to Shane and Danny’s home tonight.

Shane looks at him with defeated, hollow eyes. “Okay.” He agrees.

Yuna and David arrive two hours later with pizza. They must have floored it to get here in that amount of time with food in tow.

“We figured you boys would be hungry.” David states. Now that he mentions it, Ilya is starved. They hug Shane and Danny, and then they embrace Ilya as well.

“We’re so glad you three are okay.” Everyone is a little misty-eyed. It’s a running theme, this group having dinner and avoiding the elephant in the room because of Danny. Once he goes to bed, Ilya is sure they will have a lot to discuss.

Shane and Ilya lay awake in the dark of Ilya's room. Danny is sleeping soundly on one side of the bed.

"Thanks for coming to get me." Shane says to the ceiling.

"Of course." Ilya frowns. "I will *always* come for you."

Shane nods, his head brushing against the pillow. "Do you think I'm a bad person?"

"*What?*"

"I was going to shoot the father of my child. I really was."

"I was going to kill him with my bare hands. I was so angry. I still am." Ilya admits. "Do you think I am bad person? Are you scared of me, of my Alpha?"

"Of course not." Shane says automatically. "But it's not the same."

"You had a choice to make. Him, or you. I do not think you were making the wrong choice if you chose yourself."

"I would have shot him for *you* too, you know." Shane says. He turns to look at Ilya. Their eyes meet in the darkness. "I saw you two fighting, and all I could think about was losing what we have. What we've built up these past few months. You, me, Danny, Anya. We feel like a family." Shane's voice is soft and tentative.

Ilya kisses his forehead. "We are." He says definitively. "*Ya tebya lyublyu.*" He whispers. He knows Shane won't understand it.

“I feel like it’s my fault. I thought I saw him in the crowd the day of Danny’s hockey game, but I brushed it off. I told myself I was just seeing things.”

“You couldn’t have known he was going to come attack you.”

“He had been watching us, I think. He didn’t see your car at home and he thought you were gone.”

“He will be put away for a long time, now.” Ilya tries to reassure him. “We told the truth, and Danny told the truth, and the cops saw what happened.”

Shane closes his eyes. Neither of them sleeps much that night, but they lay cuddled together until dawn. When they get up, David is already in the kitchen with a cup of coffee.

“I’ll make breakfast when Danny gets up.” He comments. He looks at ease here. Like an Omega ready to take care of his pack.

When Shane is in the shower and Yuna and Danny are cutting up some fruit, David places a gentle hand on Ilya’s shoulder.

“I wanted to say thank you for always taking care of my boys.”

Ilya meets his eyes. “I would like to continue to do so, for as long as they’ll have me.” David nods to him, and they both know what Ilya just confessed to.

~

There is a big dilemma on whether Danny should still go stay with David and Yuna as planned. Shane’s heat is due to start any day now, on top of everything else. Danny is reluctant to leave his mama, but in the end they manage to convince him. Yuna and David

initially wanted Shane to come too, but he's adamant that he would like to stay by himself and not have his parents around while he's in *heat*.

The evidence from his house is gathered and he's permitted to return home. Ilya can admit to himself that he's feeling a little apprehensive at Shane being alone as well, even though logically he knows that Dallas is back in jail. Besides, his own rut is due to start as well anyway.

Two days go by.

Then three.

Ilya's rut is late. It has never been late. On the third day, Shane texts him. Ilya has been eagerly awaiting hearing from him but did not want to intrude.

Shane: *My heat still hasn't come.*

Interesting. He's late just like Ilya.

Ilya: *Neither has my rut.*

Shane calls him. "This is weird, right?"

"Maybe we should call doctor."

"I don't know..." Shane says noncommittally.

"How are you feeling?"

“Weird.” Shane admits. “On edge. A little dizzy and irritable. Nothing sounds good to me. To eat, to do, none of it.”

That doesn’t sound like he’s doing very well at all.

“Should I come over?” Ilya asks hesitantly.

“I...I don’t think I’m ready for that right now. Is that okay? If my heat starts...or your rut...”

“I understand.” And he does, but a part of Ilya still feels hollow. He too has been feeling restless. His home feels empty without Shane and Danny’s presence, but he tells himself to respect Shane’s wishes.

The house still smells faintly like Danny’s maple scent. In a day or two, it’ll likely be gone, and his Alpha will be even more perturbed.

After they hang up, Ilya distracts himself with some tv for a while until his phone rings again. Just as before, it’s Shane.

“Ilya. I don’t feel right. Can you take me to the hospital?”

Shane is pale and shaky. He leans heavily on Ilya as they get into the car.

“Are you sure we don’t need ambulance?” Ilya worries.

“I’m sure. It’s not an *emergency*, I just feel sick. Not right.”

Ilya drives them to the nearest emergency room anyway. They take Shane back by himself since they are not bonded or mated, and he has to suffer through staying in the waiting room before he hears anything. He sits in an uncomfortable plastic chair, the smell of antiseptic burning his nose, for a long time. Finally, they call him back and allow him to see Shane.

He's sitting up in a bed and he looks a little better. He's hooked up to an IV and has a cup of apple juice next to him.

"They said my symptoms are a manifestation of the trauma my Omega has been through. Even the delayed heat. My Omega doesn't feel safe, so my body won't go into that vulnerable state."

"What can I do to help?"

Shane smiles softly. "Just be you." He reaches a hand out and Ilya comes closer and takes it into his own. "I'll be okay, it's just going to take time. They've given me some electrolytes now. I just need to rest and let my mind recover."

"Why do you seem kind of...happy?" Ilya asks, mildly confused.

Shane laughs a little. "I don't know. I just have this feeling that things are going to get better from here. I haven't felt like that in a long time. I know we aren't out of the woods yet with Dallas, but it kind of feels like the other shoe has already dropped, you know? I was waiting for him to reappear for so long, for something to happen, and then it did, and we came out the other side. And now I know I don't have some mysterious illness, so...I am kind of happy, I guess."

Ilya kisses his hand. "Everything is going to be okay."

"Yeah. I think it really is."

When Shane is discharged, the ride home is mostly quiet. They're both exhausted. Ilya is moving on autopilot and almost jumps when Shane speaks and breaks the quiet.

"There's something else. Something I've been thinking about for a while now. My mom and I have been talking about it, and I think it's time. I want to move us back to Ottawa to be by my parents. A fresh start after all of this."

Before Ilya can even begin to comprehend what that means for his and Danny's place in Ilya's life, Shane continues.

"I want you to come with us."

Chapter End Notes

These poor boys. They've been through so much! And I know David and Yuna are exhausted from so many phone calls with bad news!

Thank you for reading, I hope everyone is staying safe through all of the wildfires, extreme temperatures, and crazy weather. Have a good week and see you all next Tuesday for the final chapter of this story :)

Chapter 12

Chapter Notes

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

“What do you think?” Their realtor asks. They just finished touring a fifth house in Ottawa.

Shane’s heat was two months late after all was said and done. His Omega didn’t settle enough for one until after the holidays. Ilya’s rut came around the same time. His Alpha was very clearly in tune with Shane’s Omega. They didn’t spend that heat together, but the one that came on its regular schedule four months after *that*? Well...

Now, it’s been almost eight months since the incident with Dallas at Shane’s house. They started looking for a place in Ottawa this spring, with plans to move in the summer after Danny finishes the school year out in Montreal.

Now it’s July and they still haven’t found the right fit.

“It is not the right fit.” Ilya tells her with a regretful smile.

Undeterred, she nods. “On to the next! This will be the last one for today, and then if you gentlemen don’t want to put in an offer, it’s back to the drawing board for me.”

They get back in their car and follow the realtor to the next location. Ilya reaches for Shane’s hand and kisses it. They officially bonded during Shane’s last heat, almost two months ago now. They plan to formally mate and have a traditional ceremony sometime next year.

“You are quiet.” Ilya comments.

“I’m just thinking.” Shane says. “I just want to find the perfect house for us. Then we can show Danny.” It had been a tough decision not to bring him along on the tours, but they

didn't want him to get attached to any house that they either didn't want or didn't get an accepted offer on.

"We *will* find the perfect home." Ilya says with conviction. They are looking for a cozy place with a little room to grow. Something with a space for a home office for Ilya and maybe a built-in nesting room for Shane. A spare bedroom for a pup of their own in the future. So far, nothing has felt like *them*, so they haven't put in a single offer so far. However, the task is feeling a little more daunting with summer slipping away. They wanted to move and get Danny enrolled in school out here before the new school year started. Plus, it'll be a lot more difficult to make the drive out here so often for tours without the long summer days.

Shane squeezes his hand in response.

The drive to this home is particularly pretty, with a long, winding driveway surrounded by trees that reminds Ilya of Yuna and David's home. However, his mind wanders to Dallas, as it so often does. The man is currently rotting in jail, although he has a trial coming up in the fall that Shane will be testifying at. Dealing with the aftermath of everything Dallas put Shane and Danny through hasn't been easy, but Ilya wouldn't trade being the person for them to lean on for the world.

It's easy to brush away the thought of Dallas like ash as they pull up outside of the house and park.

"It looks pretty from the outside." Shane comments. It does— a butter-yellow sided home with white shutters and beautiful flower bushes in the front yard.

"Let's go see inside."

Ilya knows pretty immediately when they walk in that this is their home. However, he keeps quiet and watches Shane's face as they walk through. It has three bedrooms, a finished basement that would be a perfect office space for them, and an all seasons room on the back of the house. There is a great backyard that Danny and Anya will love.

Shane is taking it all in, quiet and analytical and making small comments to Ilya.

“This room would be perfect for Danny. We could make that little alcove into a window nook for him.” Ilya imagines him there, reading to his stuffed animals.

“This kitchen is great, look at the tile.”

When they come to the third bedroom, the non-primary nor the one they discussed for Danny, Shane looks at it with a peculiar look in his eye. Ilya wonders if he’s thinking about pups, as he is. This could be a nursery one day.

“I want it.” Shane says, turning to Ilya. “I want this house.”

The good thing about both of them selling a home at the same time, is they have a little cushion to put in an offer over asking price. Their realtor goes back to the seller’s realtor to provide them with the information, and Shane and Ilya head back to Yuna and David’s.

They get the call with the good news three days later, when they’re back in Montreal. There was no occupancy, so they can move in as soon as they close. Yuna and David make the drive down to Shane and Danny’s to have a family dinner to celebrate, probably for the last time in this home.

“Mama, can you help me with something?” Danny asks during dinner.

“I can help him so you can eat.” Ilya offers, but Shane shakes his head and stands. Yuna, David, and Ilya watch them exit the room. They’re back only two minutes later, but this time, Danny is wearing a new shirt.

Big Brother, it reads.

Ilya drops his fork.

Shane smiles softly at them all and gently touches his lower stomach.

“Mama has a baby in his belly!” Danny proudly announces.

“What?” Ilya gasps in shock. Shane has smelled differently lately, but he thought it was from their bond. He smelled more like Ilya. Now he realizes it’s because he smells like Ilya’s *baby*.

Shane’s last heat.

“I’m sorry I waited so long to tell all of you.” Shane says, his eyes shining happily. “I wanted to be *sure*. And then I wanted it to be special. I’m about nine weeks.”

The initial shock wears off and Ilya gets up and hugs him tightly (but carefully), and kisses him.

“You’re not upset with me, are you?”

“Of course not. I am so, so happy.” He understands why Shane waited. It’s *his* body, after all. Ilya hugs Danny too. “You knew the secret!”

“Yes, I helped Mama!” Danny says with a big smile. Yuna and David are next, and then they’re all hugging and rejoicing. Ilya recalls Shane saying months ago that things were going to get better.

Ilya thinks perhaps that was an understatement.

Chapter End Notes

If MPreg isn't your jam, feel free to ignore the very end and pretend their happy ending was them buying a new home. However, if it is, congrats! Now you also get a sequel with pregnant Shane. That being said, I am taking a little break from posting to work on writing. I need to decide whether I want to write this story from Shane's POV or the sequel first. I am also planning on starting another WIP that isn't in this universe (so stay tuned for that one as well).

Thank you to every single person who read this story and left a comment or kudos, it means more than you know <3

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!