You Decided to Knock

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by Shield_Theyden

Summary

Submissive Shane Hollander was taken and trafficked three years ago, passed between abusive Doms and clubs. Then he meets Dom Ilya Rozanov, who unexpectedly brings him home. Shane knows better than to trust Rozanov's gentle smile and soft words, after all, Rozanov has a reputation of making subs disappear and allowing reckless doms into his own club back in Boston. The trouble is, Rozanov settles his mind and body. Shane has never wanted a consistent bonded Dom, but he can't escape how much he desires and craves Rozanov's touch and voice.

This is a story of rebuilding a stolen life, healing from the unspeakable, and learning that it's okay to love yourself.

Notes

CW: Shane is an abused sub and his shitty dom is shitty. Short depictions and memories of violence in this chapter.

The character Andrei is inspired by Andrei/Alexei, but is NOT related to Ilya. He just makes a perfect villain character.

Chapter 1

“Did you see who’s here tonight?”

“I saw. Do you think he’s gonna make a trade with the Master?”

“Maybe, but like, which would be worse, working here or getting shipped to fucking Boston?”

“I hear that he only takes Doms who are particularly rough. Like they’ve been kicked out of other clubs and shit, and that’s why they end up at Raiders.”

“I heard that he bought a slave from another dom a few years ago and then the sub just disappeared. Like, no one saw him again.”

“Fuck, that’s sus.”

Shane sat on the floor, his head tipped back against the cold wall behind him. He listened with interest to the other subs’ and slaves’ conversation and speculation on some new big-shot Dom that was visiting Andrei’s tonight. Whoever this guy was, people were clearly intimidated by him and he wasn’t even here yet. If Shane kept his head down, served his master, and didn’t cause a fuss, hopefully he would never even see the man.

Or maybe he would never leave this room. Andrei had tossed him in this room two days ago, with barely any food or water. Only tonight, as the club prepared for a special evening, were there even other people allowed in here. Two days of complete isolation weighed on Shane, with nothing but his memories and anxieties. Andrei had told him to use the time to think about what he had done, but it felt like a game he set up to lose. Shane had done everything the Dom had demanded of him, but he must have been too slow, too on edge, too sloppy. Andrei never lost a chance to tell him he was a bad sub. As if Shane had chosen his own biology and was now failing to uphold some unspoken deal.

Andrei hadn’t put him in proper subspace in weeks, and Shane’s body was starting to feel it. It was like an ache deep in his bones. It was ever creeping in on him, like a shadow spreading in the late afternoon, getting ready to pull him down into the darkness.

Maybe tonight Andrei would use him. Or let one of the visitors play with him. Play, such a harmless word for the horrible ways Shane’s body and mind were treated every day. Before this, before Andrei, before the man before him, before all of it, Shane had plenty of sub friends who enjoyed their dynamics, loved the attention and care of their Doms, wanted it more than anything. Shane had always been too brazen, too loud, too much. He had never found a Dom who he clicked with, who wanted his brattiness and worked with it.

And now it didn’t matter. Shane’s body would eventually get sick if Andrei or one of his men didn’t force him to scene at least occasionally, and so even when he hated himself for it, he still found the stillness, painful as it was, in their touch. He had been counting the days since he’d last been in subspace, and his math told him that he was coming dangerously close to

dropping if he didn't scene properly soon. He had a week at most. So hopefully someone, not the scary Dom everyone was gossiping about, would at least use him enough tonight to take the edge off.

"Pet. Up. Andrei wants you."

Shane stood, eyes downward, and followed the handler out into the main room.

The club was blissfully warmer than the room Shane had been locked in. He was still wearing the tight black lace underwear Andrei had him dress in most of the time. He had spent the last two days hunched in on himself trying to stay warm. Now, he felt the eyes of the patrons on him, or, more likely, on the medley of scars, bruises and cuts that covered his body.

The lights were low and had a faint reddish, purple glow to them. Garish decor and fake velvet couches gave the room a bit of a discount-dungeon vibe. EDM music pumped through the speakers, accompanied by the sounds of people scening in different corners of the room.

The handler led Shane to the top of the room, where Andrei and several men were lounging and smoking. Shane kept his eyes downward, so he wasn't able to get a good look at the guests, nor did he see Andrei's hand raised before it came down, hard on his face. His mouth hadn't been fully closed, and he felt the extra pain of the hit on an open jaw.

"Approaching on your feet?!" Andrei spat. "Get on your knees where you belong, *pet*."

Shane immediately complied, but shot a dirty look at the handler. The handler had told him to *walk* over here, why was he being punished for an expectation he didn't know? He kept his mouth shut, because speaking up only made Andrei more angry.

The hand slapped across his face hard again. "Nothing to say, little one?" Andrei demanded. He grabbed Shane's hair and yanked his head back painfully. "You better hope you find a way to make up for it tonight. We both know the clock is ticking, yes?" This part he whispered in Shane's ear, and the sub felt his blood run cold. Andrei was tracking him as well. Andrei knew he was due for a scene. He was using Shane's own biology against him, and using the impending drop as a new form of punishment.

"I'm sorry, Master," Shane said in a small voice. "Please, let me serve you tonight."

"We'll see," Andrei said, in a faux casual voice.

Shane stayed on his knees, head bowed. What else could he do. He hadn't realized Andrei was tracking him so closely. He hadn't realized that he even paid attention to Shane when he wasn't using him. He needed to get this right, tonight. He needed to either serve Andrei or attract the attention of one of his guests.

"Our guests are thirsty, pet," Andrei said eventually.

"Yes, sir." Shane bit back his anger as he crawled over to the table in front of them, ignoring the shame that crept through him Andrei forced him to do this. He poured drinks for the four

men and began handing them around, Andrei first, then to his guests.

His fingers brushed against the fingers of one of the guests and hunger shot through him at the brief touch. Shane looked up and stared into beautiful eyes. The man had curly blonde hair and a strong jaw. His eyes trailed over Shane's face, but he didn't leer at him the way the guests usually did.

Shane's hands were shaking as he gave glasses to the other guests when Andrei clapped his hands loudly together right next to Shane's ears, causing him to startle and spill a bit of the vodka.

"See. This one scares too easily, makes for shit play," Andrei said to his guests as though Shane wasn't there. "Broken and bratty, basically useless."

"Did you apologize to our guests?" Andrei demanded of Shane. "So rude to spill their drinks and you don't even offer to make up for it."

Shane pushed down the anger bubbling inside him. He bowed his head towards the guests. "I'm sorry, sirs." Fighting to steady his hands, he refilled their glasses and waited for the slap to come.

"Andrei," the blonde man said, "I was looking for a bit of fun tonight. I don't want to overstep, but would you let me … would be okay if I got to play with this one a bit?"

Shane could feel the dom's eyes on him and he forced himself to stay still.

"This useless shit needs to be punished before he gets to play," Andrei mused.

"Andrei, come on. I can handle punishment, yes? That will be our warm up before the real fun."

"Ah, you know I can't say no to you. Enjoy." Andrei grabbed Shane's hair and yanked him close. "You hear that? Rozanov is going to punish you. You're lucky you haven't heard the stories. I wonder what *he'll* do to you."

Shane felt the blood leave his face as he forced himself to stay steady when Andrei shoved him down.

"Come, little sub," the man called Rozanov said. "Let's have some fun."

Shane knelt in the playroom, waiting to see what form of punishment this dom would subject him to.

"What is your name, little sub?"

"Pet, sir."

"Ha. Yes I heard Andrei call you that. But what's your *name*, pet?"

"Pet."

“Yes, but what is your name?”

“I don’t understand, I’m sorry.” Shane clenched his fingers on his thighs.

“Okay, you can be pet. Andrei says you are bad sub. Are you bad sub?”

“Yes sir, I’m sorry, sir.”

Rozanov put a finger under his chin and tilted it up. Shane brazenly met his eyes.

“I don’t think you are bad sub,” Rozanov said after a moment. “I think Andrei is terrible dom. Does he always make you fail and then punish you?”

Shane wasn’t sure what to say. He probably shouldn’t shit talk Andrei to one of his guests. Wait, did Rozanov just say Andrei was a bad dom?

“There is couch over here, much more comfortable than kneeling. Come sit.”

Shane stood up and followed Rozanov to the couch. He sat down, still waiting to see what the dom had planned for him.

Rozanov handed him a bottle of water, but Shane just stared at it. “Is okay, drink.”

It was an order, and as Shane took a long sip from the bottle, something settled for a moment in his mind.

“Good job, pet.” Rozanov sat down beside him, but didn’t touch him. “Andrei wants me to punish you, but I didn’t see you do anything that needs punishment.”

“You can punish me, sir.” Shane wanted him to. Maybe Rozanov would like it enough he would properly scene with Shane and take him into subspace, let his mind rest.

Rozanov smiled darkly. “‘And maybe I will.” His eyes raked across his body, pausing to examine some of the cuts and bruises on Shane’s arms. “These have not healed. Why?”

Shane did not answer.

“No antiseptic? No cream or bandage? Does Andrei not treat your injuries?”

Shane didn’t know what to say.

“Are you here by choice, pet?” Rozanov asked.

“What?” The question caught Shane so off guard he responded without thinking. “I’m sorry, sir, I mean —“

“Can you leave?” Rozanov asked.

Shane shook his head. “I don’t understand.”

“Andrei does not treat you well. Is visible on your body, these marks should have been treated. Is visible watching him hurt you. You are scared, I could see it the minute you came over. Sub should be respectful, not scared.”

“Please sir. I don’t understand. I don’t know what you want, just tell me how to play sir and I will.”

“Pet, this is not game. I am asking you question. Can you leave here or are you Andrei's prisoner? You choose to be here?”

“I belong to Andrei, sir.” Shane could tell it wasn’t what the dom wanted to hear. “I’m sorry sir, I don’t understand. Just tell me what you want and I’ll do to, I’ll say it. Just tell me what to do, please.”

“Do you want to be good little sub?”

Shane nodded. Fuck yes, he wanted to be good for Rozanov. He wanted Rozanov to use him and touch him, he wanted to taste him. He usually hated being alone in the playrooms with Andrei's guests, but there was something calming about the dom next to him and he wanted to keep that feeling with him for as long as he could.

“Yes sir.”

“Then tell me if you like working here.”

Shane felt the tension between knowing he shouldn’t disrespect his master and wanting to tell Rozanov the truth.

“Pet? Be good. Tell me if you are safe here.”

What was this game? Shane couldn’t wrap his mind around it.

“Okay, I ask something else. Say I am going to punish you, what are your limits? Pet. Answer me. Limits. What do you hate?”

And Shane found himself telling the truth. “There are no limits here, sir. You can do whatever you want to me.”

Rozanov nodded. “Okay, but I want punishment to be fun for both of us. So what should I avoid?”

Shane knew what he was doing. He was trying to learn Shane’s deepest fears to hurt him, just like all of them. He wasn’t in the mood to play along.

“You don’t have to, I’ll be fine, sir.”

Rozanov put a hand on his cheek, and Shane realized belatedly he was putting soothing cream where Andrei had hit him.

“Okay. No limits. So if I lock you in cold dark room for say, three days, you would not mind?” His tone was light but he was watching Shane closely. And fuck. Shane’s body must have responded because he saw the gleam of success in Rozanov’s eyes. “If I injured you, but didn’t treat your wounds and you just had to hope they don’t get infected, that would be okay? And if I never let you scene properly so you were always at risk of drop, this would be fine?”

Shane sucked in a breath. He had already given too much away.

“Stay here.” Rozanov said. He handed Shane a bar of chocolate. “Eat this before I get back. Small bites. You’ll have at least three minutes, don't rush.”

And then he was gone. And Shane was left confused, curious, and intent on fulfilling the dom's order. It took him less than two minutes to eat the chocolate. He hadn’t had anything this luxurious in months, and it wasn’t even good chocolate, just the generic bars in the playroom. He closed his eyes and waited for the dom to return.

At some point Rozanov entered and smiled when he saw Shane had followed orders. “Good job, little pet,” he soothed. “You did so well for me.”

Shane tried to ignore the pleasant feeling that bloomed in his chest. This dom was unpredictable and he didn’t like that. Everyone else he could anticipate, and thus keep himself out of trouble and pain; but with someone as strange as Rozanov, so unpredictable, Shane was terrified trying to figure out how to please him and what it would be mean for him if he didn't.

“Andrei and I have little chat. He agrees you can come home with me. Does that sound good, get you someone safer than here?”

Shane stared at him.

“Little pet, do you hear me? I’m getting you out of here.”

Shane couldn’t move. He didn’t understand. Andrei had just … given? ... sold?... him to this dom? What was he supposed to do? Was he supposed to argue and ask to stay with Andrei, was this a test of loyalty? Was the devil he knew better than this perplexing stranger?

“Stand. Come. We are going to my car outside. Do you have anything?”

“Anything?”

“Things. Things you want to bring with us. Pet. You aren’t coming back here, do you understand?”

Shane didn’t understand, but he wasn’t going to let this new dom know how confused and scared his was. He set his jaw defiantly.

“No sir. I don’t have anything.” Anything he did “have” was Andrei's, so it wasn’t like he could take it with him.

“Let’s go. You will not speak until we are in the car, unless Andrei addresses you and you are scared for your safety if you stay quiet.”

Shane’s head was spinning. Who was this Ilya Rozanov? Nothing about him made sense.

Rozanov led him out of the playroom, back through the main hall. Andrei was there, leering at him. He grabbed Shane’s arm and pulled him roughly aside.

“Rozanov is doing me a favor, getting rid of you. Who knows how long you’ll last in his house, I’ve heard people simply disappear. Before you go, just let me hear you say it one more time, pet.”

Shane wanted to scream. Because of course Andrei wouldn’t lose one more chance to humiliate him, even while he was sending him to seemingly a much worse fate. Shane glanced at Rozanov for a moment and Andrei slapped him hard.

“I am still your master until you leave this room. Say. It.”

Shane’s head was reeling and the slap had caused tears to well up in his eyes. He pushed down the bile in his throat and spoke, his voice hollow.

“I’m a broken and useless sub. No one should waste their time on me.”

Rozanov stepped closer, he looped his finger through the clunky steel ring on Shane’s collar. “Well done, pet. Now. Say thank you to Andrei.”

Shane didn’t risk another look at Rozanov, not with both men’s eyes focused on him.

“Thank you, Master.”

“Good job. Thank you, Andrei. I will have particular fun breaking this one.”

Rozanov put a hand on Shane’s arm and led him out the door. And for the third time in three years, Shane found himself passed from one dom to the next with no idea where they were going or what to expect.

Chapter 2

Rozanov guided him to the alley behind the club and into a sleek black sports car. He took his jacket off and wrapped it around Shane's shoulders, then opened the passenger's seat and Shane froze. Another test, another chance to fail and anger this strange man.

"Pet. Get in," Rozanov said. "What's wrong?"

Shane held out his wrists. He looked around. He wasn't blindfolded. Or bound. That couldn't be a good sign. That meant Rozanov wasn't planning to keep him long enough for it to matter. There wasn't anyone else in the car that he could see, so why weren't his arms bound?

Rozanov looked down and noticed his offered wrists. "No, no. Just get in. I don't do that."

Shane obeyed for lack of anything better to do. Rozanov must be planning to use him, that's why he was sat upfront. He's never done that to someone actively driving, but he could make it work. Maybe Rozanov would put one of his gentle but firm hands on his head again while he did it…

Rozanov started the car and glanced over. "Seatbelt, pet."

Being buckled in would make reaching the dom's lap a bit harder, but he could manage.

They drove in silence for at least ten minutes before Rozanov spoke.

"My place is not far from here. Maybe an hour. Rest, if you want."

Shane needed to get it right from the start. Show Rozanov how good he could be. Fuck, why did he want so badly to please this man? This man who had just, what, bought or kidnapped him? He needed to figure out what kind of dom Rozanov was so he could avoid as much pain as possible. Be good and stay out of trouble, that's what kept him alive so far.

"I can —. I mean. I figured you'd want me to —. I'm sorry, sir, I should have served you already."

Rozanov glanced over at him. "What do you mean?"

Shane had already shifted in his seat and was running a hand along Rozanov's thigh and reached for his zipper. Calmly, Rozanov took his hand and pushed it back to Shane's own lap.

"No, no, pet, you don't need to do that. We just drive, yes? When we get to my place we talk more. For now, just rest, okay?"

Shane shook his head. No dom ever just turned him down like that without it warranting a punishment later. No dom allowed him rest without putting a price on it. His mind raced as he tried to figure out Rozanov's game. How could he get this right if the dom kept giving him

opposite clues to everything he'd learned while in captivity? He had no chance of surviving without some kind of way to read Rozanov.

"Did I do something wrong, sir?"

"You don't need to call me sir," Rozanov said.

That was a trap. Shane knew better. "What should I call you, sir?"

Rozanov almost smiled at that. "Call me Rozanov for now, is okay, yes?"

Shane's jaw almost dropped. No dom had ever let him call them anything beyond master or sir or some stupid power-hungry nickname they'd given themselves. He decided to say nothing.

"You did nothing wrong," Rozanov said. "Just rest." He reached down and turned on the radio, letting whatever pop station that came on play in the background.

Shane stared out the window. He saw warehouses, then the outskirts of a city, then the passing lights of the highway. He tried to read the signs without looking like he was. Andrei had barely let him out of the house, so even though he had a vague idea he was in New Mexico, it was completely different to see the desert outside the car window.

Shane's body stayed on alert the entire drive. He was certain at some point Rozanov would tell him he'd done something wrong, or that he owed him something for letting him sit quietly. But the dom just drove in silence, listening to the radio. He glanced over at Shane occasionally, but that seemed to be more from curiosity than anything else.

"I do not live here," Rozanov said, pulling into an apartment complex. "Is short term rental while here on business. But it's comfy enough."

Shane nodded absently. So, he was going to be trafficked across state lines again. And if this wasn't Rozanov's home, then it unlikely he would have neighbors who would notice someone new, if Shane was ever allowed outside. There were very few cars in the parking lot, which could mean many of the other units were empty, meaning no one would hear him if he screamed or tried to get help. For now, he was on his own, no outside interference.

"Let's get inside and we can talk more." Rozanov walked around and opened Shane's door for him, throwing his mind off balance again. Why was this dom being so … chivalrous?

Shane followed him inside. The apartment was furnished and decorated with very generic art on the walls. It definitely looked like a short term rental, the basics, but nothing fancy. Rozanov seemed to expect Shane to follow him, so he walked behind the dom, ready to cast his eyes down or kneel as demanded.

"Kitchen, help yourself to anything. There's plenty of snacks, so don't be shy about eating. Living room, TV, that weird orange chair is more comfortable than it looks. Bathroom through here, sorry there's only one, my room in here, and your room in here."

Rozanov opened a door and walked in, cocking his head for Shane to follow him. The room was basic, like the rest of the apartment. A bed, a small dresser and closet, a chair in the corner. It looked like something from an IKEA catalog, all clean lines and muted colors.

“Is okay? It’s not long term, but it should work for a few days. I don’t know what Andrei had for you, but I assume was not very good?”

Again, Shane wasn’t sure if he could say anything negative about Andrei. It felt like a trap. Or maybe this was the loyalty test, to see if sided with his new master.

“I just slept on the floor, sir.”

Rozanov said something that sounded like a curse in Russian. “Well, okay, see, already moving up in the world.” He walked back to the living room and with no better direction, Shane followed him.

“Are you hungry? I know it’s late, but did you have dinner?”

“I’m fine, sir – Rozanov. I don’t need to eat.” It was a lie, but what was he going to say.

Rozanov watched him for a moment.

“You are scared, I understand. Let me explain. I am not like Andrei, I don’t keep subs as pets and I hate the ones who keep them as slaves. You are not prisoner here, okay, I just want to help you.”

Shane bit back a laugh. Oh, okay, he was a *good* trafficking dom. Sure. He probably told himself that to stroke his own ego. *Look at me, I don’t call them slaves, I’m so progressive.*

“Okay,” Shane replied.

“You do not need to kneel or call me sir or serve me, okay? You are here to heal and recover, that’s all.”

And then what? Shane wondered. And then he’d be shipped off to Boston to work in Rozanov’s club instead of Andrei’s. The one known for taking broken subs and volatile doms. That was where this was leading. Rozanov didn’t want Shane as his own sub, he was fixing him up for the long term return on his investment.

“If you are hungry, eat. If you are tired, rest. If you want to watch TV, is there. For now, please stay inside the apartment.”

There it was. So sweetly phrased as a question, but prison bars were prison bars no matter how beautifully dressed up.

“Yes si-, yes, Rozanov.”

Rozanov looked like he wanted to touch Shane, but he didn’t. Instead he offered a small smile. “I know this is a lot in one night. It’s almost 2am, yes, maybe get some sleep now and

we can talk more in the morning." He looked up and down Shane again, not in a creepy way, but there was something like care behind his eyes. "I think a hot shower first, yes?"

Rozanov lifted a careful hand up to Shane's neck and touched the collar there. It was worn, ugly, secondhand and already uncomfortable when Andrei had forced it on him. Rozanov's fingers were gentle and soft against his skin as he slowly worked the clasp open.

"May I?" he asked softly, looking into Shane's eyes for permission.

Shane wanted to cry. He hated that collar. He hated how Andrei had tightened it when Shane misbehaved, causing him to spend the day feeling slightly out of breath, and or have difficulty eating. He hated how the doms in the club were use it to yank him around. He hated how it chafed his neck and he could never feel truly clean. He hated everything about it.

"If you want, tomorrow we can burn it in the sink, or toss it in a dumpster out back." Rozanov tossed the collar onto the coffee table like it was worthless. "Okay, hot shower and then some sleep, yes? There are clean towels in the cabinet under the sink, shampoo, soap, everything you need in there. Help yourself."

"Thank – thank you, Rozanov," Shane said, meaning it.

"I think we are about same size, or would be if Andrei fed you right. I will put some clothes in your room and you can pick something comfortable to sleep in."

Shane noticed the subtextual meaning that he would sleep clothed, in his own room. Both of which felt very out of the ordinary. He wouldn't get a read on Rozanov tonight, so he may as well shower and sleep, conserve his energy for whatever fresh hell awaited him tomorrow.

"Both bathroom and bedroom have lock from inside, you should use if it makes you feel safer." Rozanov said it so calmly, as though he anticipated Shane's fears. "Okay, enough talk from me. Go shower. I'll be awake for a bit if you need anything."

Shane had never felt so rebellious. He turned the shower as hot as he could stand it. He stood under the spray and just let it beat down on him, relishing in the feel of actual hot water that seemed limitless. He scrubbed his hair and conditioned it – Rozanov traveled with very nice products – he used a washcloth to scrub his skin raw, taking care not to irritate the open wounds on his thighs and arms. He lost track of time, but his hunger and exhaustion were catching up with him, so he finally turned off the water. If that was the last good shower he took for a year, it would be worth it.

Wrapped in a towel, he crossed the hallway into his bedroom and closed the door. It did indeed lock from the inside and he felt a thrill turning it. Maybe it was a trick and Rozanov had the key. He owned Shane now, so it didn't matter in the big picture. If Rozanov wanted to pretend to be this nice, easygoing dom, then fine. Shane would play along and reap the benefits of his Good Guy Act.

Rozanov had left a few tshirts, soft joggers, and an unopened package of boxers on the bed. There was also an oversized hoodie that Shane immediately wanted to curl up in. He dressed

slowly. He couldn't remember the last time he had worn anything that wasn't Andrei's garish fetish gear or leather or nothing. He cherished the feeling of soft cotton instead.

Shane opened his door and paused when he heard Rozanov's voice down the hall.

"... yes, you were right about Andrei, you can gloat later, Hunter. … No, but now I have surprise houseguest. …. I don't know. …. He won't say. …. Andrei is as bad as you expect, of course little sub doesn't trust me. …. We will figure it out. …. Honestly, I am worried he's too injured and traumatized at the moment for that. Give me a day or two to build some trust first, yes? … Hunter, no, we cannot send him back like this, is too soon. Trust me, old man, you did not see him, but I am right."

Send him back.

Rozanov had told Andrei he would have fun breaking Shane. And he was clearly not here long term. Was that the plan, to build up this fantasy world of safety to bring it crashing down on Shane, breaking him properly, before sending him back to Andrei's? As terrifying as the idea was, something finally made sense to Shane. *Okay, Rozanov, game on.*

Shane backed into his room and sat down on the bed. Before he could consider his next move, there was a soft knock on the door.

"Pet, when you are dressed, I have something for you."

Ah, something, huh? A slap? A paddle? Shane wondered what Rozanov was holding on the other side of the door. Whatever it was, it would probably hurt. Shane steeled his expression and opened the door.

Rozanov smiled at him. "I forgot to bring you the first aid supplies, here. Cream for wounds, bandages, those weird suture bandages that pinch cuts together." He held out a basket of supplies and Shane took it, examining the contents.

"Also, snacks in case you get hungry tonight." Rozanov was holding a bottle of electrolyte sports drink, dried fruit, and protein bars, which he placed on the dresser.

Shane sat down on the bed and pulled his sweatpants down, giving him access to the cuts and bruises on his inner thighs. He hissed as he put the antiseptic on some of the worst injuries and only belatedly noticed Rozanov crouch down in front of him.

"Let me help," Rozanov said softly, taking the tube of cream and gently applying it to Shane's cuts. He laid bandages over the worst ones to let them heal. "There are more on your back, yes? I saw them earlier tonight."

Shane pulled his sweatpants back up and moved to take the t-shirt off. But his energy failed and his arms could barely lift. He was so, so tired. He was drained after a deeply confusing and terrifying night. He just couldn't do more right now.

Rozanov stood and took the hem of the t-shirt. "Lift your arms, that's it." He touched Shane's shoulders to slowly reposition him to the side and he sat down on the bed next to him. "These

ones are worse and I will be as gentle as possible." He cursed in Russian. "No one should ever have done this to you. I am so sorry you were hurt this way."

Shane closed his eyes and tried to ignore the sting of the cream and bandages over his injuries. He focused instead on the soft touch of Rozanov's hands, how his fingers ghosted over the sensitive skin. He ignored the way his breath caught at the gentle touches. He couldn't remember the last time he had been handled so gently.

"In my country, Russia, subs are treated like this," Rozanov mused as he worked. "There is no help for them, no one they can go to. Many of them are abused or injured beyond healing, and they are treated like slaves, not dynamic partners. So many of them simply give up, stop fighting, or find a way to make the pain stop forever. Is ugly. Is terrible to see doms who act like this. Is not right. We are supposed to take care and protect, not abuse and injure."

Something in the words tugged at Shane's mind, but he was so exhausted, he couldn't pinpoint it. Rozanov's voice and touch was so gentle, he felt his body and mind settling and for the first time that evening, he thought he might actually sleep.

"Okay, we should check them again in a day or two, but hopefully this will help your body heal. I am sorry no one took care of you before now, was not okay. Was not okay to hurt you this bad, and was not okay to leave you to suffer."

"Thank you, for taking care of me," Shane whispered, his voice raw. He felt pulled towards this confusing dom and he didn't know why. He felt intrigued by Rozanov and he didn't understand it. He was also terrified. It was too confusing and he was far too tired to untangle it tonight.

"You should get some sleep," Rozanov said. He helped Shane put his t-shirt back on and then got up. "Do you need anything else?"

"No, thank you, Rozanov."

"Okay, I am down the hall if you need anything tonight. If you get hungry, there's plenty more snacks in kitchen. Please eat, yes?"

"Thanks. I mean, thank you."

"Sleep well, Pet."

***

Shane hadn't slept that well in years. Maybe since the day he was taken. He woke up feeling actually somewhat rested, and he defiantly lay in bed for a bit, just appreciating the feeling of soft blankets and an actual pillow to rest his head on. Whatever game Rozanov was playing, he knew this level of luxury wouldn't last, so Shane would soak up every moment of it until it was ripped away. As long as he kept reminding himself that this was all temporary, it wouldn't hurt when he once again lost it.

Eventually he made his way to the bathroom and down to the kitchen, where he found Rozanov sitting at the table, reading a book. The Dom looked up and smiled when Shane approached, closing his book.

“Did you sleep well, Pet?”

Shane nodded.

“Breakfast? Well, it’s more like brunch now, but there’s plenty to choose from. Do you drink coffee?”

Shane thought he had prepared himself for how off kilter he felt around Rozanov, no, not just off kilter, it was like his body was immediately comfortable with the man, wanting to relax, to let him in, while his brain screamed that a nice jailer were still a jailer.

Rozanov got up and opened the refrigerator and started chatting happily. “There’s eggs, bread if you want toast, orange juice, would probably be good for you to get hydrated, um, weird sugary American cereal, is quite good –” he paused, watching Shane. “I am sorry. Is too many choices overwhelming right now?”

Shane’s eyes snapped to him. “What?”

Rozanov pulled the orange juice out and closed the refrigerator. “I imagine you have not had many choices about anything in so long, maybe long list is not helpful.”

It was true. The sheer amount of options for something as simple as breakfast had made his brain freeze. Usually if he ate, it was whatever bland, oatmeal or bread was put in front of him. Shane hadn’t been able to cook or eat a proper meal in years. Years spent watching Doms eat their own meals while giving him a scrap or two, or nothing.

“Pet, would you like me to choose something for you?”

Yes, one hundred percent. Shane wanted nothing more than for Rozanov to tell him what to eat. Fuck, he was falling into a dynamic with him so quickly and it hadn’t even been a day. But Shane’s brain was still catching up to his surroundings, he was still trying to understand this bizarre dom, and despite himself, something in his innermost instincts wanted to trust him.

A gentle hand cupped his face and Rozanov’s thumb brushed a tear from his cheek.

“Are you still here?”

Shane nodded. “Please, sir, please can you choose.”

“What do you need, Pet? Do you want to be held?”

How did this dom read him so well? He hated this. He needed to put space between himself and his jailer. He needed his body to stop responding to the most basic of human niceties. Maybe he had been captive too long and he couldn’t remember how normal people acted. Maybe he really was broken, he would have to be, to trust this man who had simply

purchased him on a whim. Yet, the allure of Rozanov's strong arms around him, of his touch being the thing to ground Shane, that was undeniably tempting.

Shane nodded and leaned forward into Rozanov's chest, letting out a shaky breath as the Dom enveloped him in his arms. Like the soft blankets on the bed, Shane knew this gentleness came with an expiration date, but he would selfishly indulge until that point.

Rozanov whispered softly to him in Russian, and though Shane did not understand a word of it, he felt soothed by it.

"I don't want to keep calling you 'Pet'," Rozanov said quietly. "Is there something else you want to be called, now that you're free?"

Shane felt his body run cold. There it was. Everything came with a price and Rozanov just tipped his hand. Surely Andrei had told Rozanov his name, right? So it wasn't like he was hiding it. But he had been down this road before, it started with a name, and then with stripping that name way like it meant nothing, and then with –. No. He wasn't playing that game again. If Rozanov wanted to pretend he didn't know who Shane was, Shane would let him.

"Pet is fine," Shane murmured, trying to keep the anger out of his voice. He didn't want this soft moment to end, he needed the security and touch of the dom. So for now, he chose not to anger the monster he didn't understand.

"Okay. Come sit down, I will make you some food. Are you allergic to anything?"

Shane shook his head. He let Rozanov guide him to one of the chairs and slowly drank the glass of orange juice he was offered while Rozanov moved around easily in the kitchen. A few minutes later, a plate of eggs, toast with jam, and a freshly cut peach were presented to him. Shane hadn't been allowed to eat a table like this at Andrei's. He wondered if this was another test. If Rozanov would just tell him the rules –. But maybe that was what the dom enjoyed, maybe, like Andrei, he would set Shane up to fail so he would have an excuse to hurt him under the guise of punishment.

Better to err on the side of caution. Shane slid out of his chair and knelt on the floor. He heard Rozanov exhale and then felt the dom's hand on his shoulder. "We don't do that. Come sit, please. Eat with me."

Barely trusting it, but without other options, Shane returned to his chair and realized that Rozanov was serious. The man had prepared a similar plate of food for himself and was watching Shane, clearly waiting for him to start eating. Feeling ashamed and confused, Shane picked up his fork and took a few hesitant bites. He ignored the warning in his mind that the food could be drugged, he pushed away his sub instincts that demanded why he hadn't cooked this food for the dom.

"It's good," Shane said after a few bites, and Rozanov gave him a small smile.

"Is nothing fancy, but I think a day or two of easy food is good for you before we move to something more exciting. Andrei didn't exactly take good care of you, and we can't shock

your system too quickly."

"Are you going to punish me for last night?" Shane asked when he was done eating.

Rozanov quirked an eyebrow. "Last night?"

"I didn't –. I mean, we never actually played at the club, and then when we got here, I thought you would –. I'm sorry, sir, I should have come to your room."

Rozanov's expression was guarded, but Shane could see small sparks of anger behind his eyes. "Pet, I thought I told you. That's not why you're here. I just want you to recover and feel like yourself again. I would not punish you for something I told you to do."

"You must be the only dom with that rule," Shane bit out before snapping his mouth shut. Fuck, did he really just say that? He looked in horror at Rozanov, prepared for the slap or the scream or –

Rozanov was laughing. "Yes, I might be. Do you need anything else to eat?"

The moment passed. Shane wasn't sure what else to do. Now that he had eaten and was feeling slightly less terrified, his body felt heavy with exhaustion again.

"May I go rest more?" Shane asked quietly, prepared for a resounding now.

"Of course. You don't have to stay in your room though, if you want to watch tv or read or anything, there's some random books on the shelf over there."

"Thank you, Rozanov," Shane said. He stood up and retreated down the hallway to his room. Well, the room Rozanov gave him, he told himself. Don't get too comfortable and forget where we are.

***

A soft knock on Shane's door came hours later. "Pet, is almost dinner time. Are you awake? I'm going to order takeout, do you want anything in particular?"

Shane roused himself and walked to the door. He opened it and on instinct started to kneel down before his brain caught up and reminded him that Rozanov told him not to do that. The dom clearly saw all of this and he gave Shane a small smile.

"Good, thank you for remembering, Pet," Rozanov said. Even "Pet" sounded good in his mouth. When Andrei or the other doms at his club called him that it always felt derisive and humiliating; when Rozanov said it, it sounded like an endearing nickname. The praise itself shot through Shane's body and he tried to ignore how good it made him feel.

"Does pizza or pasta sound good dinner? Still easy food, but we can get you something more hefty than just toast."

Shane nodded. Whatever the dom wanted to eat, Shane wasn't going to argue.

“Okay, I will order. Want door closed?”

Shane considered. It didn’t feel like a test but his brain was still a bit foggy and he figured he could sneak a little more rest in before the food arrived. He nodded and to his complete surprise, Rozanov closed the door.

When the pizza arrived, they ate at the kitchen table again, and then Rozanov moved to the couch and switched on the TV. Feeling a bit hesitant, Shane followed him and sat down on the far end of the couch away from Rozanov. The dom did not seem to mind, in fact, Shane saw a small smile tug at his mouth.

Go ahead and think I’m breaking, Shane thought. *I won’t be caught like that again.*

Chapter 3

The next morning passed pretty quietly. Rozanov made their breakfast, and Shane noticed how closely the Dom watched to make sure he got enough to eat. He knew it was likely just Rozanov's instincts and responsibility to make sure his brand new sub was fit and healthy by the time they went to wherever they were going next. Shane alternated between resting in his room, watching TV and poking through the random books on the shelf in the living room.

When lunchtime rolled around, Rozanov had made them sandwiches and invited Shane to join him at the table.

"How are your injuries healing?"

Shane kept his expression neutral. "Fine."

"If you have energy today, please check and change the bandages if you need. Let me know if you want help with the ones on your back, they looked a little worse."

"Right, yeah."

"Also, something I wanted to ask you about –." Rozanov pulled out a phone and placed it on the table in front of Shane. "Now that you are free, is there anyone you'd like to call? Parents, partner, friends?"

Shane almost choked on the juice he was drinking. Was Rozanov serious right now? He stared at the phone with wide eyes, then back at Rozanov, then back at the phone. There was no way he would expose himself like this. However, knowing there was an extra phone laying around the apartment was good to know. He had seen Rozanov text on his own phone, and this one had a different colored case.

"No one," Shane said, trying to stay non-challant about it. "Thanks though, that's a nice offer." *That I'm sure you had no intention of following through.*

Rozanov looked at him, calculating. "You are sure? You have no family or friends who might be looking for you or worried? Did Andrei ever let you–"

"I don't have anyone," Shane said, knowing it was the safer answer. "So you don't need to worry about that." He should have tried harder to keep the bite out of his voice, but he wasn't feeling amazing at the moment and the phone was triggering too many painful memories.

"Okay, I'm sorry, *kotik*, I thought maybe we could –. Doesn't matter."

"Kotik?"

"Yes, is kitten. You look like small, angry kitten when you are annoyed at me. Kotik. Until you give me something else to call you."

Shane was sure whatever his face did in that moment only strengthened the angry-kitten allegations. He tried to relax back into his chair, but his eyes kept darting to the phone.

Rozanov noticed, because of course he did.

“Phone is yours, yes? You can call whoever you want. I mean it. Is not trick.”

“Right, thanks.” Shane quickly finished the food on his plate and stood up. “May I go back to my room?”

Rozanov gave him a sad look. “You can do whatever you want, today. And phone will be here, when you change your mind.”

“I won’t.”

“Okay, Kotik.”

Shane shrugged it off and returned to his room, aimlessly pacing for a few minutes. It was a trick, right? Like last time. He couldn’t risk that again. So far, Rozanov seemed to be far more in control than any Dom that Shane had met. If that was true, this was likely part of the plan. This Dom could play the long game and Shane was not going to give him the satisfaction of helping him hurt the sub.

When pacing didn’t calm his mind, Shane flopped down on the bed. No, that was worse. Fuck. He counted the days in his head. He was so far past needing to go into subspace, he would be lucky if he didn’t get sick. His hands shook slightly and he took a deep breath. No, he would not give in, not right now.

Shane knelt on the floor, leaning his forehead against the bed. He could not survive this way, he would drop if he kept this up. He took several steadying breaths. In and out. In and out. He slowly came back to himself. He could do this. He could.

By dinner time, he realized he couldn’t. He needed some kind of intervention. He couldn’t tell Rozanov the whole truth, he didn’t trust the man and he didn’t need the Dom to have that much power over him. But perhaps he could coax Rozanov into giving in just enough to stave off the pre-drop aches in his body.

Rozanov heated up the leftover takeout from the night before and set out two plates at the table. Shane approached slowly, but didn’t sit down. So the dom wanted to play hero? Let him.

“Can I ask you for something?” Shane said softly, keeping his eyes downcast.

“Of course. Are you okay?”

Shane shook his head slowly. “Not really. Could I –?” He knelt down next to Roznov’s chair and finally looked up at him, keeping his posture submissive.

A look of understanding came across Rozanov’s face. “You need –?”

“Please,” Shane said, trying to look helpless enough the dom would finally start acting normal, the ways doms were supposed to act, the way Shane *needed* Rozanov to act.

Rozanov nodded and sat down. He placed a gentle hand on the back of Shane’s neck, his fingers brushing lightly. Shane’s body sank into the touch. His hormones were so messed up from the past several weeks at Andrei’s, even this light touch was enough to help settle his mind. Rozanov squeezed gently, a comforting pressure, and Shane bit back a moan. Fuck, this was it, this was what he needed right now.

“I’m going to feed you,” Rozanov said, his voice taking on a bit more of an authoritative edge. Shane shivered slightly at the words and tone.

Rozanov kept one hand on Shane’s neck and upper back, rubbing gentle circles. The other he used to feed him bite-sized pieces of food. Shane closed his eyes as he chewed, relaxing into the dynamic. He wished Rozanov would take him down for real. If this was just a taste of what the dom could do to him, his body itched with pleasure at the thought of what he could do in a real scene.

Shane forced his mind to stay in the present. He couldn’t get lost right now, not while he didn’t truly understand the dom. He needed to figure out how to navigate Rozanov safely first, and then he could indulge.

“You’re doing so well,” Rozanov said above him, putting another bite of food in Shane’s mouth.

So what if Shane’s lips tried to close around his fingers. So what if he sank deeper with the grounding touch of Rozanov’s hand on his back. This was medicinal, clinical, nothing more. The first rule Shane learned of keeping safe with a dom was figuring out what made them feel most powerful and giving it to them. That had kept him from countless beatings and punishments for the past few years. If Rozanov needed to feel like he was taking care of Shane, then Shane would use it to his advantage.

“Good job, kotik. …. Thank you for eating. … You are taking such good care of your body to let it rest. …. I will take care of you, you don’t have to worry.” Rozanov’s praises washed over him, scratching the part of his mind most at risk of falling. This would work. This would push off the drop until he could get Rozanov to scene with him properly.

By the time the meal was over, Shane felt much better. His mind was more at ease than it had been in days. His body had fully relaxed, despite kneeling for almost an hour. Slowly, Rozanov helped him stand and guided him over to the couch. He handed Shane a glass of water and sat down next to him, but not touching.

“Did that help?” Rozanov asked.

Shane nodded. “Yes, thank you, sir–, Rozanov. Thank you.” Shane leaned back into the corner of the couch and let his eyes fall closed. He lost track of time, but eventually a soft hand rested on his shoulder.

“Do you want to sleep here or in your room?”

Shane looked around, a little confused as his mind sorted itself out. “Oh, I’ll go to bed I guess.” He mechanically went through the motions of washing his face and brushing his teeth before falling into a deep, peaceful sleep.

***

Shane’s head was killing him. The room was too bright, the soft blankets too scratchy. His own skin felt like a prison. He lay in bed trying to piece together what had changed, he had felt so at ease when he went to sleep and now he felt ready to either cry or scream.

He found Rozanov in the kitchen, typing away on his phone. The other phone, the one Shane had refused yesterday, still sat on the table. He tried to ignore the feeling that it was taunting him. He wasn’t going to get sucked into this bullshit. Rozanov looked up to greet him but Shane didn’t meet his eyes.

His body felt heavy and a bit clumsy, so he ended up almost dropping the mug while he tried to pour himself coffee. He set it down too hard on the table and tried not to flinch. He didn’t dare look at Rozanov.

Shane’s whole body was itching for a fight.

About six months after he was taken, the man who had owned him had left town for a week, leaving Shane chained up in a room with barely enough food and water to last the whole time. By the end, he had to ration his supplies. He spent endless hours laying on the floor (there was no bed in the room), trying to keep his mind busy doing basic arithmetic or trying to remember movies he had seen as a child. His skin felt too tight, his head felt like a pressure cooker.

When his master had returned, Shane had screamed and tried to hit him, thrown the discarded food containers at him, and had basically been a pain in the ass until Master started beating him with a cane. He couldn’t help it. It was like something had broken inside of him and he couldn’t hold it back, all he could do was watch from a distance in his mind while his body picked a fight he could never win. Master had beaten him so thoroughly, using his body for pleasure afterwards, that Shane could barely stand the next day.

He had never felt that caged-animal feeling again. Until now.

Shane spent the rest of the day alternating between wanting to scream at Rozanov and being terrified of what would happen when he did. Andrei’s words about him vanishing still echoed in his ears. So what, the angriest part of him argued, what did it matter if he disappeared. Thankfully, the more rational side of his brain was winning. For now.

He tried watching tv. He tried reading. He tried to take a nap, but after two hours of tossing and turning, unable to quiet his mind for even a moment, he had to give up.

By the time Rozanov knocked on his door, Shane felt like a boiling pot threatening to spill over.

“Kotik? There is dinner. I know you are having tough day, please come eat.”

That goddam fucking nickname was the final straw.

Shane burst out of his room and stormed down to the kitchen. Rozanov was spooning something that looked like a meat stew into bowls. Shane felt like a madman, standing at the threshold of the kitchen. He watched as Rozanov carried their bowls to the table and motioned to his seat.

“I know today has been hard,” Rozanov said gently, his tone further infuriating Shane. “I thought maybe some nice comfort food would help.”

“Oh you did?” Shane said. “Some nice comfort food. Comfort food from a fucking jailer. I can’t do this, okay, I have tried. I have played along, I have let you pretend you’re some nice hero who just wants to help, but I can’t do it anymore. This,” Shane motioned wildly at the dinner set before him, “this is too fucking *confusing*.”

“What? What are you talking about?”

Before he could think better of it, Shane crossed to the table, picked up one of the bowls of stew and threw it on the ground. There. That would piss off the Dom. Rozanov stared at him, but didn’t move.

“I can’t fucking *do* this anymore. Just punish me. Just tell me what the rules are. Just hit me or use me or fuck me or beat me. I don’t care. I don’t care anymore.” Shane was vaguely aware of the tears falling down his cheeks. “I can’t keep waiting. Every minute, every hour that I’m here, locked in this fucking bland-ass generic apartment with it’s stupid books and it’s boring decor, and I’m just *waiting* for you to fucking act like a Dom. Hurt me. Whip me. Tie me up. I don’t care, I don’t care what you do, please, just do it.”

“Kotik, that isn’t –”

“THAT’S NOT MY FUCKING NAME!” Shane screamed. He was completely out of control. He had never felt like this before. He wanted to hurt and be hurt. He wanted to hit and be hit. He wanted something to make the terrible, itchy, too hot feeling under his skin just disappear. He needed this Dom to get angry. He needed Rozanov to punish Shane so he could feel normal again.

“I hate this fucking game,” Shane continued, his voice breaking as he continued to cry and scream. “You wanted to break me, you fucking did it. I don’t understand what I’m supposed to do. I don’t understand what you want from me. Just fucking punish me like you want to. Mark me, cut me, I don’t fucking care. Just show me who you fucking are already. Please. Please.” He was losing steam. He could feel his body starting to crash.

“I’m sorry, I–” Rozanov stood and took a tentative step towards him.

It wasn’t enough. Shane needed him to drop the Good Guy Act and just fucking lose it. Putting all of his rage and anger into it, he punched Rozanov square across the jaw. The other man’s head recoiled with the hit.

That should do it. Now to make Rozanov really lose control, Shane turned on his heel and ran back to his room, closing but not locking the door. Let him come. Let him finally show Shane who he really was.

Chapter 4

A soft knock at the door.

Gentle words.

Another knock.

Shane braced himself.

“Come in,” his voice was raw.

The door opened slowly and Rozanov stood in the threshold, visually taking stock of Shane from a distance.

Shane was pacing back and forth, tugging at his hair, occasionally scratching his arms where his body felt worst. He felt nauseous. When Rozanov appeared, Shane forced himself to get down on his knees, waiting for the hit.

No hit. No screaming. Rozanov crossed the room to the dresser and Shane distantly heard him set something down. He came back and stood in front of Shane. No slap. No angry words. Just a gentle hand on his head, fingers brushing through his hair.

Shane hated that he leaned into the touch.

“Stand up,” Rozanov said, still using the same soft tone from the kitchen. He offered a hand and guided Shane over to the bed. He held out a bowl and Shane stared at it.

“You didn’t get a chance to eat yet,” Rozanov said, matter-of-fact. “Your body is still healing, you need food and energy to get better. Please. Please just eat.”

Shane could count on one hand the number of times a Dom had ever said please to him. Maybe even on one finger. He hesitated, but eventually reached out and took the bowl. The stew was very good, full of flavour, but did little to warm the cold spreading inside him.

“Thank you,” Rozanov said.

They sat in silence, the only sound in the room the clanking of the spoon against the bowl. Shane felt like his body was moving on autopilot, but now that the adrenaline had worn off, he was so tired.

“Better?” Rozanov asked.

Shane nodded. His mind and body flooded with emotions. Anger. Embarrassment. Fear. He finally felt in control again, but with that control came the knowledge of accounting for his actions to the dom.

“Okay. Listen. I am not going to punish you,” Rozanov said. “You are not a prisoner here. I am trying to help you. I want to get you home, that’s all. I promise.”

Shane’s brain was too tired and foggy to fully process this.

“I should have explained before,” Rozanov said. “I’m sorry. You are new type of case. This is what I do. I help subs, and sometimes doms, who have been taken or abused. I get them home. That’s why I give you a phone. I wanted you to be able to call your family or friends, I wanted you to get some help to get home. Just tell me where you want to go, a city, a state, I will get you there.”

Shane stared at him, saying nothing.

“I know you have been hurt, I know you don’t trust me. I understand. But I swear to you I am just trying to help.”

Shane couldn’t process this right now. His eyes felt heavy. The energy brought by his attempt to fight earlier had quickly faded, leaving him feeling empty and hollow. His brain felt hazy, not the nice, floaty feeling of subspace, but foggy and messy, as though words themselves had little meaning.

“You are tired, let’s talk tomorrow.” Rozanov pulled back the blankets so that Shane could get under the blankets. He took the bowl and turned off the light.

“Hollander.”

Rozanov turned in the doorway.

“My name,” Shane said, his voice barely above a whisper, “is Hollander.”

Rozanov beamed at him. “Thank you, Hollander.”

***

Ilya: says his name is Hollander

Ilya: I think is surname. He didn’t give me anything else

Svetlana: I will look

Svetlana: Ottawa. 3 years ago. We didn’t look in Canada, that’s why we couldn’t find him. I send you picture, is this him?

Ilya: Da

Ilya: get me everything you can. Family. Friends. School. Work. Police report.

Hours later, a very confused and sleepy Hollander stumbled his way down the hallway and knocked on Ilya's door.

"Hollander, is everything okay?"

Ilya turned the small lamp beside the bed on. He looked at Hollander – he barely looked aware of his surroundings, his eyes wide and confused.

"I –. I can't –. I don't know," Shane mumbled. "I don't –. Everything feels weird and fuzzy and wrong. Please, I don't know what –. I'm sorry."

On a rational level, Ilya knew he should take Hollander back to his own room and help him settle. He should offer to sit near him while he fell back asleep. Ilya was far too attached to this injured sub.

His dom instincts took over. Ilya knew what Hollander needed, even if his mind screamed at him to just keep his distance. He knew how to help, even if it broke his rule of not getting too close. His mind and instincts were at war, and his dom side ultimately won out.

Ilya pulled the blankets back and gestured for Hollander to climb in, which he did without hesitation. Ilya slept shirtless, with just his boxers on. He pulled Hollander close to him, resting the sub's head against his bare chest. Everything about it felt right.

"Breathe with me, yes?" Ilya said. He turned the light out and let the darkness hold them. "Good, good job Hollander. You are safe in here. You have been through so much, I cannot imagine all of the horrible things running through your head, but you are safe here."

Ilya put a hand on Hollander's chest, applying very gentle pressure and felt Hollander's body go soft under his touch. This beautiful sub, who had known so much pain, who deserved safety and gentle touches, and soft kisses. Ilya had never felt this drawn to a sub before, he had done scenes, like any dom, but he had never felt this deep craving to protect and defend someone before.

Before his brain could stop him, he gently kissed the top of Hollander's head.

Hollander relaxed against him, his breathing finally evening out as he fell asleep.

***

When Shane woke up the next morning, everything felt off. He couldn't really remember last night. He remembered feeling like shit all day and picking a fight with Rozanov. He remembered … did he really throw a bowl of stew on the floor? He remembered Rozanov did not hurt him, despite him acting like a complete asshole. His body remembered the soft touches of Rozanov's arms holding him close.

Shane remembered soft and gentle words that put him at ease, but his mind is too fuzzy to recall exactly what Rozanov said.

"You are awake. Good."

Rozanov was carrying a large envelope, which he tucked into the upper drawer of his dresser. He gave Shane an appraising look before coming to sit down on the edge of the bed.

“How are you feeling?” Rozanov asked.

“Not great. Everything feels … weird?”

Rozanov nodded. “Last night was rough, especially after hard day. I think today we just relax, eat on couch or in bed. Do you need –” he reached out a tentative hand and brushed Shane’s hair back. He traced his thumb across the smattering of freckles on Shane’s cheeks.

Rozanov shifted closer on the bed and Shane melted against him.

Shane hated how easily his body attuned to Rozanov’s. He hated how safe he was starting to feel curled up in his arms. He hated that when he had awoken confused and distressed in the middle of the night, he had apparently come into Rozanov’s *bed.*

The day passed easily. At some point they moved to the couch, Rozanov made sure Shane ate. Neither of them spoke much. They watched a hockey game on TV. Rozanov made sure Shane drank water and electrolytes. Shane was vaguely aware of Rozanov texting more than usual, but they had been cooped up for several days, he was probably bored.

At some point Rozanov’s phone buzzed and he disappeared into the bedroom. Shane sat on the couch for a few minutes before his body drew him towards Rozanov. He walked down the hallway, and stopped when he was close enough to hear the conversation. He wasn’t trying to eavesdrop, but the tone in Rozanov’s voice sounded like he would not want to be interrupted.

“...Really? And everything is above board? …. Okay, that sounds promising. …. How come they didn’t …. Fucking Andrei, that son of a bitch … Good, is good Hunter. Alright, I’ll go meet Sveta and we can move from there. Once we get Hollander taken care of, I will get back to Laura. … I know, I know. I didn’t expect it either.”

Once we get Hollander taken care of...

Shane peered through the doorway and saw Rozanov flipping through a folder, which he slipped back into the dresser. Shane quietly backed down the hallway, and was seated on the couch by the time Rozanov returned.

“Hollander, I need to go out on quick errand,” Rozanov said. “Will you be okay?”

Shane nodded, keeping his eyes on the tv.

“I will be back in maybe hour. Should not take long. Your phone is on table and my number is programmed in case you need anything. Please keep resting.” Rozanov watched him for a long moment and then he was gone.

Shane watched the door close. He counted to sixty, and once an entire minute had passed he jumped up off the couch. Rozanov was acting weird today and he needed to know why. The folder, the phone call, the constant texting. Shane had been here for four days now and he

knew the dom's routine. Something had broken it. Something was changing and Shane needed to know what it was before he got caught in another trap.

He eyed the phone on the table. No. It was too easy. No way Rozanov just left the apartment and left him a convenient phone. There was something else going on here. Maybe cameras hidden in the apartment to see what he would do? The phone obviously would track and record whoever he called, and he wouldn't do that again.

The clock was ticking. Either Rozanov was out in the hallway watching Shane on a camera or he was actually going on an errand. Maybe Shane had seemed pathetic enough today that Rozanov felt he could leave him alone without causing trouble. No matter the reason, he needed more information and he had very little time. Steeling his nerves, Shane made his way down the hallway to Rozanov's room.

To Shane's surprise the top dresser drawer had no lock. It did, however, have four file folders with names on each. *Laura Woods. Martin Bronch. Amina Matthews. Hollander.*

Shane's hands were trembling as he opened the file labeled with his surname. His mouth dropped open. It looked like a folder from a police procedural: his picture was stapled to the top left side, his full name, hometown, high school and university names were all listed neatly under the photo. There were articles about a "missing Ottawa man", a photo of his parents (Shane shuddered) clearly taken at a police press conference, along with what looked like an Ottawa police report. There were internet search results, articles about Shane's hockey career in college, lists of Ottawa clinics and clubs, with question marks written in red pen (serial killer much?).

Shane stared in horror, unable to look away. His body went cold.

His instincts had been wrong. His body had wanted to trust Rozanov, his mind settled peacefully when the dom touched him. He had felt safe enough last night to tell Rozanov his real name and climb into his bed when his chaotic mind woke him up and terrified him in the middle of the night.

But none of Rozanov's Nice Guy Routine was real. He had been … what? Stalking Shane? Researching him? Getting information on his latest acquisition?

Shane saw his parent's phone number scrawled in pen at the bottom of one of the pages. Fuck. He pushed the memory away. He could not get lost in the past right now, he needed a plan.

The phone. It was a test. Rozanov had been checking to see if anyone would even miss Shane. Maybe he was planning to ship him off to the Boston club. Maybe he was planning to bury Shane in the desert outside Santa Fe. Clearly the dom just needed to make sure there were no loose ends to tie up first. Shane couldn't put his parents in danger, not again. He would need to convince Rozanov he was worth keeping alive and make a plan later.

Fuck, his head was hurting again. His body couldn't keep going like this. The small touches, the words of praise from Rozanov had helped push off a drop, but he wasn't sure how much longer he could go without a proper scene.

Shane glanced through the other folders. They looked similar to his, although with information about current whereabouts and theories about their disappearances. Rozanov, or whoever created these creepy-ass folders, had written down names of presumably doms and clubs that were holding these people. So this was how he stocked his club: he pulled subs that no one wanted, broken and abused like Shane, and brought them to Boston. Or, according to Andrei and the rumors, he simply made them disappear.

The door to the apartment opened and Shane heard Rozanov call, “Hollander? I’m back.”

Shane’s pulse raced as he closed the folders. He should put them back, lay down in Rozanov’s bed, and pretend he had wandered in here to rest. He rubbed his eyes, his head was hurting and he just couldn’t think properly. Fuck. Why couldn’t he just focus and get his body to move?

“Hollander?”

Rozanov stood a few feet away, his eyes darting from Shane to the folders and back to Shane.

“What. The. Actual. Fuck,” Shane demanded.

Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

Finally some answers! And a double chapter update!

Rozanov cocked his head towards the kitchen. “Come, I will explain.” Without another word he left the room, giving Shane no choice but to follow. Rozanov sat down at the kitchen table, motioning for Shane to join him.

“What the fuck is this?!” Shane demanded throwing the folders down on the table. “You were stalking me?!”

Ilya stared at him and Shane pushed down his fear and carried on.

“Where did you get all this information about me? You know my hometown, my high school, my GPA, my hobbies, what the fuck even is this? You acting like you didn’t even know my name. What was that, just another sick game to make me trust you? You keep saying that I can trust you meanwhile you’ve got a fucking folder on me.”

Ilya opened his mouth to respond, but Shane carried on, tossing the other three folders down as well.

“Who are these people? Your next victims? Or previous ones? This one is stamped ‘complete’! Did you fucking sell her or break her or whatever it is you do to us? Whatever it is you plan to do to me? I heard some of the other subs talking when you got to Andrei’s, they say you run a club. What am I, your newest acquisition?”

Shane was out of breath, his chest was heaving, he was trembling and fighting to keep his voice steady. Ilya had been patient with him so far, had overlooked so many things about Shane’s behavior. And now Shane knew why. He wasn’t keeping Shane as his own sub, he was getting ready to break him, really, truly break him. All of his kind words and gentle touches were a lie. And now Shane would find out who this man Rozanov really was.

“Please sit down. I will explain everything and answer anything you want to know,” Ilya said calmly.

“I’m fine where I am,” Shane said.

Ilya shrugged. “Okay, your choice.”

“*Nothing* is my choice,” Shane bit out, his voice bitter. “*Nothing.*”

“Hollander, I explained this last night,” Rozanov said carefully. “I told you that I was going to get you home.”

Shane pushed his memory, trying to remember what Rozanov had said last night. The whole evening felt lost and hazy, like trying to remember a dream.

“You were very upset,” Rozanov continued quietly. “Do you remember what we talked about last night, that I help people who have been taken? Shane?”

Blinking back tears, Shane shook his head.

Rozanov sighed. “Okay, let me start again. I am sorry you found out this way. This is not usually how it goes. But you were special case and I should have explained sooner.”

Here it comes, thought Shane. Now he’d find out exactly what this monster had in store for him. Shane could barely imagine something worse than being a prisoner and forced sub at Andrei’s. But if Andrei was afraid enough of Ilya to hand Shane over so easily, it stood to reason his new master was worse than anything he could imagine.

“I do own BDSM club, is my day job,” Ilya said, as though he was calmly explaining a game of cards. “Is good income and supports what I actually do.”

Was he … in the mafia or something?

“My club is much different than Andrei’s. No slaves. No tolerance for abuse. Doms who need training can learn. Subs who have been hurt can feel safe. Is different. Is safe.”

Ilya got up and retrieved two glasses of water, placing one down on the table closest to Shane and taking a drink from the other.

“Cold water helps reset nervous system, helps prevent panic or drop. I learned long ago that not all subs choose their masters. Some are forced into serving — blackmail, debt, or even just fear. They have no path home, no way to get free. I built a small team who find and free them.”

Ilya gestured at the folders. “That’s what these are. We track down subs who have gone missing or have been rumored to be taken. I go in and either buy them or strike deal with their doms. We have a few clubs we keep eye on, they have reputation for this, and we try to help as many people as we can without making suspicion.”

“What happens once you free them?” Shane asked, his curiosity overriding his fear.

“Depends. We get them somewhere safe, either family or friends. My friend Svetlana has helped a few find jobs or housing. Sometimes their families trafficked them and we can’t send them home, they would be at risk again. Sometimes it’s as simple as calling partner or parents or friend and giving them a plane ticket.”

“So you … were looking for me?” Shane asked, a small hope lighting in his chest. Ilya’s story was insane, but insane the way that almost meant it had to be true.

“You were special case,” Ilya said, shaking his head. “I was at Andrei’s just to check in. I’ve heard bad reports about his club and I wanted to see if was true. It was, obviously. When I saw you … fuck, Hollander, the moment I saw you I knew something was wrong. But I was stupid. I’ve never taken someone like that, knowing nothing, not even name, nothing. I’ve never just … So I had no way to know who you were or how to get you home. I tried to ask you, but I think I scared you more.”

Shane nodded, remembering the conversation two days ago when Ilya had asked him about his name, his parents or friends.

“I am sorry. I should have told you. I thought … you did not want to trust me, which I understand, but I should have told you. When you told me your name, I asked Svetlana, she’s one of the people I do this with, to track you down. She put together this folder for me and had it dropped off. We try to avoid digital footprint, so we go old school like spies in bad movie.”

Shane wanted to believe it. Fuck, he wanted to believe it all so bad. Ilya’s explanation fit perfectly. Everything was so nice and perfect, it all fit together. It meant he was going home, it meant he could finally get back to his life, it meant –. No, it was too good to be true.

Ilya must have seen his hesitation. He motioned to the phone that had sat on the table for the past two days.

“Is not trick, Hollander. I asked Svetlana to track down your parents and vet them, make sure they wouldn’t sell you back into slavery or anything. But luckily, seems like your parents are nice people, yes? Would you like to talk to them?”

Shane’s knees buckled and tears spilled down his cheeks.

“Please don’t do this,” Shane whispered.

Ilya looked shocked. “Hollander, I am serious, this is not game.”

Shane bowed his head in submission. Fine, if this was what it took to make Rozanov stop this bullshit, he would do it. He couldn’t do this a second time. He couldn’t have this particular hope dangled in front of him. Fuck. He knew it was too good. Rozanov was just like that first asshole who bought him. He was stuck between the nightmare of the current moment and the memory that haunted him.

Ilya tapped the phone and hit call. He must have put it on speakerphone, because Shane heard it ring twice before –

“Hello?”

Shane gasped, squeezing his eyes shut.

“Hello?” the woman’s voice asked again.

“Say something,” Rozanov hissed. When Shane did nothing, Rozanov spoke into the phone. “Mrs Hollander, my name is Ilya and I found Shane. He’s right here with me, but I think is

too scared to –”

“Right, right, I’ll stop you there, Ilya. I’m sure you put a lot of thought into this scam, but we’re not newbies.”

“Is not scam,” Rozanov’s voice was indignant. “Hollander, say something, tell your mama you are here.”

Shane shook his head and pursed his lips. He would not play along in this sick joke.

“Like I said, have a shitty day, Ilya,” Yuna’s voice replied.

“Wait, I prove. I send you photo.”

Shane kept his head bowed and eyes closed, even as he heard Rozanov text a picture of him.

“Shane?” Yuna’s voice cracked a bit. He could hear her surprise.

“Red,” Shane said, ignoring Rozanov’s questioning look.

“I love you,” Yuna said, her voice hard.

The line went dead.

Rozanov stared at the phone and then at Shane.

“Please don’t hurt them,” Shane said, his voice small. He kept his gaze downward. “Please, I will do whatever you want. I will serve you. I will work in your club. You can sell me or give me back to Andrei, just please, please Sir, please, don’t hurt my mom.”

Rozanov knelt down beside Shane, cupping his chin and tilting it up. “I don’t know how to prove this is real,” he said softly. “I have flight for you for tomorrow to go home, here.” He pulled up the boarding pass on the phone. It had Shane’s name and information on it. One ticket from Santa Fe to Ottawa, dated for the next day. “I will send information to your mom so she can pick you up at airport.”

Shane bit down on his lip, as though biting back a cry of pain. “Please, fuck, please don’t. Rozan —, Sir, please.” It was harder to breathe. It was harder to focus. He needed to fix this, quickly. He did the only thing he could think of. He whipped off his shirt, tossing it aside, followed by his sweatpants and boxers. He reached for Rozanov’s zipper. Surely he could appease this man. Even the worst doms he’d ever been given to still had basic desires that drove them.

Rozanov grabbed his hands and stopped him. “Hollander, no. This is not a trick. This is not a punishment. I am sending you home. Please, please believe me. What can I do to make you believe?” His voice cracked and Shane almost believed him.

“Put your clothes on,” Rozanov said gently. “Get some rest. Or watch TV. Something to relax.” He stood up and handed Shane’s clothes to him.

Resigned that he would have to entertain this stupid game, Shane did as he was told. He dressed. He collapsed on the couch, barely aware of Rozanov sitting on the other side, flipping through the channels. Eventually, Shane's adrenaline rush ended and he nodded off.

***

"Hollander, I am sorry."

Rozanov turned on the TV to the national weather report. There, on the screen, was a blizzard. An early season, unpredicted, wrench in every plan, goddam blizzard.

"Ottawa is –"

"Snowed in," Shane finished for him. "So can we stop pretending?"

Rozanov sighed. "They will change your ticket. They have to. I put the number for your phone on the contact information, they should call or text you to reschedule. Here," he handed Shane an envelope. "This has ID. Svetlana has a guy who makes fakes. I know, I know, is not ideal, but takes too long for real one to come through and you have to make it across border. Passport card will work for now, and when you get home, you can replace whatever you need."

Shane stared at him. Rozanov was really going to continue this charade? When he didn't take the envelope, Rozanov simply set it down next to him and walked away. He returned a few minutes later with a cup of coffee and a plate of toast and eggs.

"Do you want privacy to call your mom and let her know change of plans?" Rozanov said.

Shane ate his toast and eggs. He drained the coffee in a few large gulps. He had a plan and he wasn't going to initiate it on an empty stomach. He would need stamina for what Rozanov would do to him, but he needed this bullshit about going home to end. He knew it was fake, but the earnestness in Rozanov's voice was killing him. It was tempting him as though it was a real possibility and he simply couldn't handle it. He could take the physical pain, but he needed this sick mental game to end.

"Can I leave?" Shane said.

Rozanov looked at him. He seemed to notice that Shane was wearing shoes, the first time he had put them on since Rozanov had brought him to the apartment. Shane clutched the phone and ID in one hand.

"I mean, if I'm going home, then you probably wouldn't mind me leaving for a stroll or whatever," Shane continued. He would get a response from Rozanov. He got up and walked towards the door.

Rozanov remained seated. He looked … he almost looked sad?

"If you want to leave, Hollander, the door is open."

Shane threw on a fake smile and walked to the door.

“Hollander, if you need to come back, the door will stay unlocked.”

Shane reached out and grabbed the door knob. This was going to hurt. He wasn’t sure at what point Rozanov would break, but he was in for the worst punishment of his life. At least the game would finally end and the Nice Dom act would be over.

“Be careful, and get home safe,” Rozanov said quietly.

Shane opened the door. Wait, what? The door opened? He felt the rush of air from outside. He looked back at Rozanov, certain he would see the other man rushing to grab him or hurt him or stop him. But Ilya just sat at the table, his expression resigned.

Shane didn’t think. He just ran.

Shane ran out of the apartment complex and onto the main road. He ran down the road and past a gas station, a strip mall, a big boxstore. He ran until his lungs were screaming for air and his body ached from an exercise that used to come so easily but he hadn’t done in years. He walked into a grocery store and tried not to look terrified. He hadn’t been out in public, fully unaccompanied, since he had been taken. He hadn’t had the freedom to move his body the way he wanted in years. He hadn’t been himself in years, just a version of himself who could survive the horrors he was subjected to.

“Mom? Green!” Shane had to stop himself from shouting into the phone.

“What? Are you serious?” Yuna’s voice was thick with emotion.

“Yes, but I don’t know how long I have.” Shane was out of breath. “He gave me a plane ticket, told me this whole story about flying home today. But then –”

“The storm, yeah honey, I’m so sorry. Where are you?”

“Santa Fe. Here, I’m sharing my location with you,” he said, adjusting the settings on the phone.

“Okay, we’re getting you a hotel, David will do the booking now and I’ll send you the address. Once you’re in the room, stay there until one of us gets there.”

“Got it.”

“We will have food delivered at mealtimes so you don’t have to go out. Oh my god, I can’t believe you got away. Wait, Shane, how did –”

“He said the door was open and I tested it. It was open. And then I just, ran. Fuck, I don’t know. Shit, he’s probably looking for me.”

“Get to the hotel, honey. Go quickly, but don’t draw attention to yourself.”

“I’ll text you when I get there.”

“Do we think this line is secure?”

“Honestly? I don’t even know. Once I get to the hotel, I’ll turn it off.”

“I’ll see you soon,” Yuna promised. “Don’t go anywhere.”

“I’ll see you soon,” Shane said. “I love you.”

Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

A year ago, the man who owned Shane before Andrei (he couldn't even remember his name, he'd only ever called him Master) had tracked down Shane's parents. He had called them and promised Shane he was going home, a reward for good behavior. He had driven Shane to the airport, and in the departures lane he had placed a gun to Shane's head and promised him that if he ever tried to leave, the man would record himself killing Shane's parents and force him to watch the video everyday.

A month later Shane had stolen a phone from one of his security guards. He told his mom the whole story and in the few short minutes they had, Yuna had given him "the warplan" for next time something like this happened. She told him to use the safewords that would come most easily for him to let her know if he was safe on the phone, that if he had ever had an open door or opportunity to run, to take it, don't worry where he would go. To get in contact with a location and she would book him in a hotel that he could hide in until she or David could come get him.

Now, as Shane checked into the hotel and collapsed on the bed, he couldn't believe it had actually worked. He was free. His parents knew where he was. He was going home. They could come get him once the storm had passed through Ottawa. In just a few days he would be back home. He would never have to see Rozanov or any of the other assholes who tried to break Shane again.

Yuna ordered takeout delivered to his room, which Shane promptly ate as though it was his last meal. He stripped and showered, relishing the freedom of the hot water and the security that no one was going to barge in and hurt him. Finally, he curled up under the blankets and fell into a deep sleep.

***

The storm hadn't cleared by the next morning. It would take one more day until Yuna could get to Santa Fe. Shane paced back and forth in the hotel room. He tried watching tv, he tried exercising, he tried taking a nap.

Something was wrong. He was cold, his skin felt itchy and heavy, his body ached as though he was getting sick.

"Mom, I'm dropping," Shane said sadly into the phone. His head was spinning and his vision was blurring. He just needed … he didn't even know. Well, he did know. He needed to scene with someone. He needed to tap into subspace safety and be brought back up correctly. He hadn't done a scene since Rozanov had taken him from Andrei's, and now he realized that all of that pent up fear and rage and despair had snowballed itself into a catastrophic drop.

"I don't know what to do," Shane said, failing to hide the fear in his voice.

“I can find a clinic near you,” Yuna offered. “Somewhere that likely has emergency services.”

“No, no clinics,” Shane said. “I can’t.”

“Okay, then you need to stay safe. Make sure you’re staying hydrated and warm; take a hot shower if you need, and try to avoid contact with anyone who might take advantage.”

Shane nodded, he knew all of this. He had dropped before, so many times in fact since he’d been taken, but this felt different. With his previous ‘masters’, he’d known to keep his mouth shut because either they wouldn’t care, or worse, they’d hurt him while he was too far down to even resist.

“Yeah, okay, thanks Mom.” Shane hung up and tried not to feel guilty.

Because, there was somewhere he could go. Someone who no doubt would help him.

Yesterday and all morning, he had been so convinced that Rozanov would show up at the hotel, storm in and take him back. Or he would have a corrupt cop do it. Or he would pay off the hotel manager to turn Shane over. But nothing had happened. Shane had slept until he woke up, cozily tucked into his bed, alone. Rozanov must have the number to Shane’s phone, he gave it to him, after all, but he hadn’t called or texted. It was as though, when he said the door was open, he had meant it.

Was it possible that Rozanov’s whole story was true? Had he really only wanted to help Shane?

Shane shivered as the drop got worse throughout the day. He just needed to make it through one more day. Or maybe two, depending on the Canadian weather. He just needed —. Strong hands, warm, calloused, comforting hands. Hands that knew their way around his body, that held him with pressure in all the right places, that provided him the grounding his own body could not.

No. No. That was crazy.

Shane filled and refilled the cup at the sink, drinking until he couldn’t stomach any more water. He layered blanket after blanket on himself, but he couldn’t get warm. He shivered and let the tears fall. Fuck, it had been too long, way, way too long, especially considering all the extra stress he had been under the past few days at Rozanov’s.

Rozanov.

Shane opened the Contacts list in the phone. There were two: his parents, and IR. He didn’t want to, but he hit Call.

“Hollander?” Rozanov answered almost immediately. “Are you okay? Are you hurt?”

“No, no, I’m dropping.”

“Fuck, Hollander. When did you scene last? Like properly?”

“Over a month ago,” Shane whispered.

“Blyat. I’m sorry, I should have asked you sooner. I never imagined Andrei would keep you strung out this long.”

“I thought what we did … I thought it would keep me stable. I’m sorry. I’m sorry.”

“No, no sorry, Hollander. I’m sorry. Is my fault, I shouldn’t have let you go so long without scene. What can I do? You have food and water? You are somewhere safe, with locking door?”

“What?” Shane couldn’t process what Rozanov was saying. Why was he asking all these questions instead of yelling at Shane, or insisting he turn himself in?

“Are you safe?” Rozanov asked again. “You have door that locks, yes?”

Shane nodded.

“Words, Hollander.”

“Yes,” he whispered.

“Google says there are clinics here, can you get to one of them?”

“No, please, I can’t.”

“Okay, is okay, Hollander, you’re not in trouble. Just wondered. I think clinic is best. Clean, easy access, and you–”

“I was taken from a clinic,” Shane said, giving voice to something that had haunted him for three years.

“What?” Rozanov demanded. “Tell me.”

Shane’s head was feeling a little floaty talking to Rozanov. The command, intentional or not, itched one of the worst parts of his mind.

“I went in for a regular session. I just needed someone to scene with me, you know, keep hormones in balance or whatever. The guy worked who there … he hurt me. He sent me so far down so quickly, and I was barely conscious by the time he left. He let someone else in the room, and then all of sudden I was blindfolded and drugged and ….” his voice died in sobs, the memory pulling him further down as he relived it.

“Fuck, Hollander. I am sorry. I am so sorry. Should never happen. So no clinic. Let’s get you safe, yes? Can you drink some water? Do you have any food, especially something sweet?”

“Why are you helping me?” Shane whispered into the phone.

“Because I just want to get you home, Hollander,” Rozanov’s voice was tired and emotional. “I know you do not trust me, is okay, I understand, but I just want to help you get home. I

promise."

Shane must have fallen pretty far down, because wow, he really believed Rozanov.

"Water, Hollander."

"Done."

"Good boy."

Shane let the words wash over him. This was what he needed, even if he hated it.

"Food, small bites."

"Mhm," Shane hummed around a bite of leftovers from the lunch his parents had ordered to his room.

"Doing so well." A pause. "Take another sip." They continued that way for ten minutes until Shane started to feel slightly more coherent. "Good boy. You're doing so well. You're being so brave."

Finally, Shane felt settled enough. "Thank you," he said, his voice cracking.

"Call again if you need."

The next hour or so was manageable. Rozanov had helped push away the worst of the drop. But Shane could feel it coming back in his body. Their phone conversation had been a bandaid at best, on an open wound that was gushing blood. Something like this couldn't be solved over the phone, not with how far gone Shane was feeling.

He realized, somewhere in the haze of his mind that Rozanov hadn't asked where he was. He had just asked if Shane was safe, he had just asked if he had food and water. He had tried to provide care on the phone. If he wanted Shane's location and to drag him away, he could have. Instead, everything Rozanov had done in the past 24 hours supported the story that he was just helping.

It was with this knowledge that Shane found himself retracing his steps from the previous day and knocking on Rozanov's apartment door at 11pm.

"Hollander?" Rozanov's expression was surprised and baffled to say the least. "Fuck, you are still dropping?" he asked, stepping aside and giving Shane the option to enter.

Shane nodded. His body was exhausted, pushed beyond its limits. His eyes were red and swollen, his limbs were trembling and all he wanted was to collapse into the arms of a man that less than a day ago he had been convinced wanted to sell or torture him.

"I need your help," Shane said quietly. "Please, please, I tried everything, but I think it's worse than usual because it's been so long …"

Rozanov nodded, placing a gentle hand on Shane's back and guiding him to the couch. A moment later a glass of water was placed to his lips and Shane drank.

"Tell me what care you need," Rozanov said simply. As though they were new play partners negotiating a scene. When Shane didn't immediately answer he said, "Is okay, I give options and you tell me."

Shane nodded.

"Cuddles and touch?"

Shane nodded.

"Kind words? Yes, it helped on the phone?"

Shane nodded.

"Compression, like heavy blanket?"

Shane couldn't understand how Rozanov could know all of this, but maybe he was just that good of a dom.

"Hollander, can I put you in a hot shower? We'll keep covered, but I think the hot water will help your body regulate temperature."

Shane didn't hesitate. Everything Rozanov said was soothing his mind. He was already here. If the dom wanted to hurt him, he would. Shane nodded.

"You need food and salt and sugar to help your body. Do you want me to feed it to you?"

Shane closed his eyes and nodded. Yes, he wanted the whisper of Rozanov's fingers against his lips as he fed him literal life saving candy. Fuck. If this man turned out to be a monster, Shane would truly hate himself.

"Okay. Couch or bed?"

"Bed." Shane's voice was barely audible.

***

Ilya scanned the sub in front of him.

Hollander's skin was clammy, his eyes were red and tired. The sub looked like the thread he'd been hanging on had just snapped. Everything in Ilya screamed at him to take care of Hollander, to wrap him up safely, away from everything that could hurt him, including his own tortured mind.

Ilya needed to get him through this drop, he needed to help Hollander's body get well enough to travel. The idea of sending him home tugged at Ilya, and he pushed away the part of himself that begged to keep the sub near him a little longer.

“Come, let’s get you warm.” Ilya took Hollander’s hand and guided him to the bathroom.

As steam began to fill the room, Ilya stripped down to his boxers. Tentatively, he reached out and touched Shane’s shoulder.

“May I?”

Shane nodded, his eyes unfocused.

Ilya took the tshirt off and discarded it to the side. He considered his next move before deciding to let Hollander do his pants.

“Pants off, leave boxers on if you want.”

Hollander did as he was told, his body still shivering.

Ilya stepped into the shower, offering Hollander his hand and guiding him in. The hot water pounded down on them, Ilya making sure Hollander was directly in the hot spray.

“Thank you for trusting me,” ilya said. “I’m so happy you came back so I could help you. I know you’re scared and hurting, and I promise you that you’re safe here.”

Hollander turned and leaned against Ilya, his head falling on the dom’s shoulder. Ilya ran one of his hands through Hollander’s hair, the other held firmly on his back, holding him firmly.

Ilya could feel the tremor in Hollander’s shoulders as he cried. Ilya couldn’t imagine how painful a drop this bad must feel, and he hated that he hadn’t intervened sooner. He’d been so focused on getting the sub to trust him and not getting lost in his own desire to be too close to him, he’d completely failed to save Hollander from his own biology.

It was insane that Andrei hadn’t sent him properly down in over a month. Inhumane. Ilya couldn’t think about it too much now or his anger would steal his focus.

The hot water poured over them. Hollander wrapped his arms around Ilya, pressing his chest against the dom. The shivering seemed less, hopefully his body was finally warming back up. Ilya continued to soothe him, whispering gentle praise and rubbing his back.

Eventually, Ilya reached down and turned off the water. He untangled himself from Hollander and wrapped them both in thick, fluffy towels. He gently dries the sub’s body, careful of the wounds on his back.

“Turn around.”

From behind, Ilya carefully pulled down the now shower soaked boxers and helped Hollander step into a clean pair.

“I’m going to put more cream on these cuts.”

The clear announcement of everything he was doing seemed to ease the sub, and Ilya smiled to himself as he saw Hollander’s body relax into his touch.

“You’re doing so well, kotik, just like that. So perfect, letting me help you.”

Ilya quickly dried himself off and swapped into a pair of clean sweatpants. He toweled his hair off and then guided Hollander back to his bedroom. Ilya pulled the blankets open and helped Hollander settle into the pillows. He draped a weighted blanket around the sub’s shoulders.

Hollander’s gaze was softer now, his body seemed to be relaxing finally. Ilya slid in next to him and wrapped an arm around Hollander, pulling him close to his chest.

“Hollander, I need you to eat a little bit,” Ilya said gently. He held out small bites of chocolate and pretzels, with sips of water throughout.

“Good boy, Hollander, so good.”

Ilya smiled when he saw Hollander’s breath catch at the praise. Fuck, this sub was so perfect. Ilya wished they had met under different circumstances, wished he could properly take Shane Hollander into subspace and raise him back up. He wished he could kiss Hollander breathless, he wished he could taste him, bite him, care for him.

Ilya shook himself and tried to focus on the present.

“Just a few more bites, good job.”

Hollander sighed contentedly and snuggled deeper against Ilya’s chest. Ilya kissed the top of his head and carded his fingers through the sub’s hair. Ilya could sit like this for hours.

“You can sleep, kotik,” Ilya whispered. “I promise you are safe here. Close your eyes and let your body rest.”

Hollander hummed against him, tucking his head under Ilya’s chin. Within a few moments, the rest of his body followed him into a restful sleep.

Ilya stared at him. He had not yet seen Hollander look this peaceful, this calm. Ilya wanted to keep him this happy as long as he could. He wanted to ensure no harm ever befell this beautiful man again. He wanted to wrap his arms around Hollander and keep everything else away.

***

The bright rays of sunlight were already streaming in through the windows by the time Shane woke up. During the night he had burrowed down further and had apparently sprawled himself over Rozanov like a koala.

“Good morning,” Rozanov said quietly. “You look a lot better. How are you feeling?”

Shane lay quietly in his arms for a little longer before asking, “Why did you–?”

“I told you last night. I just want to get you home. I cannot imagine what they did to you, how so many people felt the right to hurt you, but Hollander, this is what I do. I get people home. You too. I want to get you home.”

Slowly, Shane sat up and followed Rozanov back into the kitchen where their fateful conversation had been two nights ago. He checked the phone and saw the text from his mom saying her flight had taken off about an hour ago.

Rozanov placed coffee, water and juice in front of him on the table. He pulled out some fruit and cereal, leaving it like an offering for Shane to choose from.

They ate quietly for a while before Rozanov finally asked, “Which clinic was it?”

Shane didn’t look up from his food as he said, “On Star street.”

“I don’t know them, but they’ll soon know me,” Rozanov promised. “Do you remember name of man who sold you? Is okay if not, was years ago and also awful.”

Shane shook his head. “Tall, white guy, kinda overweight, greasy black hair. I don’t remember his name.”

“Is okay, that is more than enough. Svetlana can find anyone.”

“Is she your girlfriend?”

“Ha!” Rozanov laughed. “No, she is also domme. Sometimes our cases need man or sometimes woman to get someone out. We have another friend, Scott, who also does this. It’s not big government operation, just a bunch of friends who got drunk one night and decided to play Robin Hood.”

“Thank you.” Shane said quietly. “I … I guess I’m still not sure if I can trust you, but if this is real, thank you.”

Rozanov nodded.

“I should go, I want to be back at the hotel before my mom gets there. She’d kill me if she knew I literally ran back here to you. I’m sorry, that’s a shitty thing to say after what you did last night.”

“Goodbye Hollander,” Rozanov said, walking him to the door.

Shane took one final, and perhaps his first real look at Ilya Rozanov. The dom was just a tiny bit taller than him, his body was muscular and well built. His eyes shone as he looked at Shane, and his expression looked between hope and despair. Shane pushed down every single emotion trying to make its way out and turned to go

He turned back. He looked at Rozanov watching him, careful to leave enough space that Shane didn’t feel anxious by his presence. It was crazy, it was insane, but Shane stepped forward and kissed him.

Rozanov’s hands cupped his face as his lips opened to meet Shane’s. His mouth was gentle even with all the heat pouring into the kiss. Breathless, Shane pulled back. If he didn’t stop now, he would never stop kissing this man.

“Goodbye Rozanov. Thank you. For everything.”

Chapter End Notes

I promise I won’t keep them apart for long …

Chapter 7: One year later

Chapter Summary

One year later. A dance club with a familiar face…

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

1 year later

Rose: Still good tonight ?

Shane: There's no chance we could go to like a quiet bar where the music plays at a reasonable volume ?

Rose: LOL. No chance

Rose: I promise I won't make you dance

Shane: liar

Rose: 😜

The New York dance club was exactly what Shane expected. The lights flashed in bright colors, the music blasted and shook the walls and floor, the dance floor was crowded and hot, with everyone pushing their bodies against each other.

It was a testament to how much Shane loved his friend Rose that he was willing to come here. When she'd invited him to New York for the week, he'd known it would involve at least a little partying. Rose was on a rare break between projects and wanted to soak up as much fun before her next preproduction started in the city next week.

Drinks in hand, and promising it would just be the one dance (it would not, that was a lie Rose told him to get him out of their seats), Rose led Shane out onto the floor.

The lights were playing tricks on his eyes. They had to be. Because why was Ilya Rozanov standing across the dance floor, his eyes transfixed on Shane?

He was dressed in a tight white shirt with some kind of animal print on it, his eyes roaming across the club as though searching for something. Maybe he was. Maybe he was here for work, which meant, maybe this club wasn't that safe.

Shane leaned closer to Rose so only she would hear him. “See the guy across the room, tall, blonde curls?”

Rose tossed her head and moved to the music, making it less obvious that she was following Shane’s gaze.

“Damn,” she said. “Think he swings your way?”

“That’s him,” Shane said.

“That’s who?”

“The guy. Who got me out.”

“Wait, *that’s* Robin Hood?”

“Please don’t call him that.”

Rose swung around, this time not even trying to hide her apprising look.

“Holy fuck, you didn’t tell me you were rescued by a literal sexy god.”

Shane stared at Rozanov across the dance floor, his eyes solely focused on the other man. He was vaguely aware of Rose pushing him across the room.

“Go!” She said. “Go talk to him. Go dance. See if he wants to hook up.”

Shane shook his head. “We never —“

“I know, but that was over a year ago. Come on, if you don’t talk to him, I will.”

“You’re not a sub—?“

“I could an exception for arms like those —”

“Fuck off.” But Shane let himself be drawn across the floor to Rozanov. The other man stepped back from the dance floor and cocked his head to the side, motioning for Shane to join him in the little nook in the wall.

“Hollander,” Rozanov breathed. Like he could barely believe his eyes.

“How are you?” Shane asked, before mentally kicking himself. What an incredibly boring question.

Rozanov smiled. “I am good. And you? You are, okay, after everything?”

Everything. The thing they certainly couldn’t talk about here. Shane nodded. He stepped closer, everything in him drawn to the man before him.

“If you’re here,” Shane said, “is this place not safe?”

Rozanov shook his head. “No, it’s not like that. Is easy place to meet a contact, just getting some information. You don’t need to worry.” He glanced across the dance floor where Rose was sipping her drink and watching them. “Is she your domme?”

Shane smiled awkwardly. “Oh, Rose, no nothing like that. I mean, she’s great and we tried a few times, but it just didn’t, we weren’t, uh, compatible.”

“You have one, though?” Rozanov asked, sounding more like an awkward schoolboy talking to his crush than the infamous Boston dom.

Shane shook his head. “No, uh, I have —. It doesn’t matter, but I promise I won’t panic on you again.”

Rozanov smiled. “Sorry, I shouldn’t ask.”

“No no, it’s okay,” Shane said. He felt like he was misstepping every moment of this conversation. “I … it’s good to see you.”

Now Rozanov looked surprised.

“I mean it,” Shane said. Feeling bold, he leaned closer, close enough for his breath to tickle against Rozanov’s neck as he said, “I’ve never stopped thinking about you. Not since that morning. There’s so many things I never said, cuz you know, I thought you —. It doesn’t matter. I’ve just, I’ve thought about you. I know you’re working, but if you have a break, come find me.”

Moving with far more confidence than he actually felt, Shane ghosted his lips down Rozanov’s neck, never actually making it into a kiss. He stepped back and gave Rozanov one last look before disappearing back into the crowd.

***

Ilya watched Hollander return to his friend. Rose, right? Ilya had definitely recognized her. Was she an actor or pop star? Something like that, he wasn’t sure.

He spent the rest of the evening trying to focus on the task at hand: find the woman he was supposed to make contact with and get her list of potential rescues. They had opted to meet at this club because of how busy it usually was. The fact he had seen Hollander here of all places was insane.

A year had not dulled the pull that Rozanov felt towards Hollander. He had thought about him at least once a day for the past year. Seeing him so suddenly had brought all of those feelings to the surface once more. Ilya closed his eyes and took a deep breath to steady himself. He had no way of contacting Hollander, the phone he had given him had been left with a note at the hotel where Hollander must have stayed when he ran from Ilya’s apartment.

If he lost sight of him tonight, who knows if or when he would ever see him again. Perhaps that was for the best, five minutes in his presence and Ilya had already lost his entirety of focus. He might want Hollander. His dom instincts were screaming for him, every part of him wanted to run across the club and order Hollander to his knees.

Ilya scanned the room again, bringing himself into the present. There. On the far end of the wall across from him. A woman in a nondescript black dress, she could have been anyone or no one. Except for the small green carnation pin she wore, the sign people in Ilya's circle had co-opted — ignored by most people who didn't know queer history, assumed by those who did to simply be a nostalgic nod to the past. For Ilya's group, it was the symbol they'd chosen as sign for each other in public.

Keeping his eyes anywhere but his target, Ilya began moving his way across the dance floor. He didn't go in a straight line, taking the time to dance with or be ground on by people on the floor. He couldn't look like he was going somewhere particular.

A few moments later, he felt a pair of hands holding his waist, and a quick tilt of his head confirmed his contact had joined him on the floor and was moving seamlessly with him as though they were any two strangers. No one would notice her hand slip down into the pocket of his jeans, leaving a small USB stick. They continued for a few more minutes before mutually breaking apart.

Ilya found his way to the bar, and the woman disappeared into the dancers.

Perfect timing. Hollander was leaning against the bar and getting a drink.

Ilya slid in next to him at the bar.

"Found you."

Hollander smiled at him. It might be the first time he'd ever seen Hollander genuinely smile.

"So you were looking for me?" Hollander teased.

His casual tone. His confidence. It was so different from the man he'd met a year ago. And Ilya was obsessed with this energy.

"I was hoping to see you before you left," Ilya said. "I am … done working for tonight."

Hollander turned so his body was fully in Ilya's space. "Really? What will you do with the rest of the night?"

Ilya studied him. Hollander wasn't drunk, his movements and words were far too coordinated. A sober Hollander was a Hollander that Ilya could play with … A year ago, Hollander would barely look at him, had been terrified of him. Now, he seemed to be as drawn to Ilya as Ilya was to him, as though they were orbiting each other and could only eventually collide together.

"I have a few ideas," Ilya said teasingly. He reached out, slowly titling Hollander's face to look at him. He needed to see the confirmation there, he needed to know the other man wouldn't shy away from him. Worse still, Hollander leaned into the touch, his body visibly relaxing a touch at the contact. Ilya bit his lip.

"My hotel isn't far from here," Hollander said. "Can I take you there, *sir*?"

A year ago Ilya had insisted Hollander never call him that. Now, the sound of the title on his lips made Ilya's blood boil with desire.

Ilya leaned closer so he wouldn't be overheard when he murmured in Hollander's ear, "Will you get on your knees for me, little kotik?"

He felt the shiver go through Shane's body, and the man looked ready to drop to his knees right there in the club. Ilya guided Shane's mouth to his and kissed him.

Their single kiss just before Shane left a year ago was burned into Ilya's mind.

When Ilya first met Hollander, he had imagined kissing him, but he had to focus on getting Andrei to let Ilya take him away. He had wondered what Shane's mouth would taste like during the week he recovered in Ilya's boring rental apartment, of course he had, he was still human. Had he dreamed about kissing Shane once or twice since the last time he'd seen him, remembering this beautiful and tense sub and wondering what their dynamic could have been if they met under different circumstances?

None of his imaginings and not even the memory of their shared kiss came close to the feeling of Shane's lips on his. The way his mouth opened, inviting Ilya in. The way their tongues and lips moved together in mutual pleasure. The way Shane chased his lips when he pulled away.

"Come back to my hotel," Hollander said, breathless. "Please."

Fuck, he begged so beautifully, Ilya wanted to take him apart right there. A dark thought crossed his mind, and even though he wanted to be wrong, he needed to check. He needed to know this was desire and not just need. Not that Ilya wouldn't be open to fulfilling the sub's needs if that's all this was, but some part of him wanted to be wanted, not required.

"When did you scene last?" Ilya asked gently.

Hollander stared at him for a minute as though processing the question before understanding lit his face.

"Two days ago. I went to the clinic before I came here." He reached over and entwined his fingers with Ilya's. "I'm not asking for your help, I'm not asking you because I need to. I'm asking because I want to play with you." He leaned forward and nipped at Ilya's neck and ear lobe. "When did you last get to just play? Just for fun. No work. No rescue mission. No preventing drops. Just play."

"Fuck. Hollander."

"I'll tell Rose I'm leaving. Meet me at the exit in 5 minutes."

The cold air outside was welcome after the heat of the club. They walked quietly together, Hollander occasionally bumping his hand or his elbow into Ilya, as though he simply needed the reassurance of touch. Ilya had noticed this about him last year and filed it away for later that night.

If they were really going to do this, they did need to talk. Ilya worried that once they were in the hotel, neither would be thinking totally with their brains.

“Hollander, I have questions,” Ilya said. When Hollander nodded, he continued. “What are your limits?”

“Don’t kidnap and traffic me,” Hollander joked.

Ilya understood the discomfort hiding behind the joke, but they couldn’t do a scene like this. He stopped walking and raised his eyebrows, forcing Hollander to pause and reassess.

“I’m sorry. You’re right. Okay, I don’t like degradation, but I do like teasing. I know that’s a hard line to find. But if you call me slut or whatever, it just needs to be in a sexy positive way, not as judgement.”

Ilya nodded.

“Bondage or rope is good, as long as you know enough to do it safely. Impact is okay, but I don’t want you to scar me or break skin.”

Ilya once again wondered what happened in the past year that Hollander could speak so openly like this. That made him wonder …

“Is there anything from … from before I found you, that would trigger you? Words, actions, anything that could make you drop?”

Shane considered this for a moment. “I don’t want to feel owned. I can be your sub, but not your slave. And I need you there after, I don’t want to be left alone or wonder if I failed.” His voice shook for a moment and Ilya realized how much that had been done to Hollander as a punishment.

“Sex?” Ilya asked.

Hollander grabbed his coat and pulled him in for another kiss. “If it was a different kind of club I would have had you in my mouth already.”

They quickened their pace.

By the time they got to the hotel, Ilya felt confident in the budding scene growing in his mind. He also realized that even just thinking about it had made him half hard already.

The hotel door closed behind them and Shane surged forward, kicking off his shoes and pushing Ilya to the bed, collapsing on top of him and kissing him hard. Ilya let his hands roam over Hollander’s body. He wanted all of him, or at least as much as the Hollander would give him. He could feel Hollanders arousal matching his own and for a moment wondered if they should just scrap the scene and fuck.

Hollander pulled back first, sliding off the bed and stepping back, his gaze focused on Ilya.

“What do you want me to do?”

Ilya hid his smile and clicked into his Dom voice. “Try again.”

Hollander grinned before looking down at the floor. “What do you want me to do, sir?”

“Clothes off. Then kneel. Show me how good you can be.”

Shane complied in quick and smooth motions. He removed his clothes and folded them neatly on the dresser. He stepped to the bottom of the bed and dropped to his knees, hands on his thighs and eyes downcast. The perfect vision of a sub.

Ilya wanted to devour him.

Hollander risked a glance up at him and Ilya’s knees buckled. So he was a brat. This was going to be fun.

“Close your eyes.”

A long pause. A sharp intake of breath from Hollander before he shook his head. “Yellow.”

Ilya knelt down on the floor next to him. “You were blindfolded a lot?” he asked gently. Hollander nodded. “Okay, is good you tell me. Thank you, you are so good to tell me.” He leaned forward and kissed Hollander before standing back up.

It didn’t surprise him that Hollander didn’t want to give up his ability to see what was happening. Ilya could work with that. He could use Hollander’s need to see and understand to build suspense and tension for him.

Ilya walked over to the pile of clothes Shane had folded and pulled the belt from Shane’s jeans. He snapped it a few times, watching the sub’s reactions to the sound.

“You like this, yes? Question is what should I do with it.” He snapped the belt again. “I could use it to bind your beautiful arms,” he ran a hand down Hollander’s shoulder and arms, delighting in the shivers he got in response.

He moved the belt down to Hollander’s neck. “I could —“ he paused, they hadn’t negotiated on using objects for breathplay.

“Green,” Hollander said clearly, as though realizing the same thing.

Ilya leaned down to kiss him again. “So good for me.”

He snapped the belt one more time. “I could mark that beautiful ass, make you remember me in the morning.”

A whine escaped Hollander’s mouth. *Oh.* He’d only meant that one as a tease, especially after seeing what had been done to Hollander by his captors. But clearly the idea of pain, with someone he trusted, someone who didn’t own him or kidnap him, was appealing to the beautiful man in front of him.

“I don’t think you’ve earned that quite yet, maybe soon,” Ilya said. “For now, take what you’re given.”

“Yes sir, thank you,” Hollander’s voice cracked a bit as Ilya used the belt to secure his forearms together behind his back. Despite his obvious enthusiasm for more serious play, Ilya reminded himself that this was their first time and while he was honored and downright horny over the face Hollander was letting him do this, he should still be a responsible dom, especially with someone he knew had experienced trauma at the hands of others.

Ilya stood and stepped in front of Hollander, placing a hand in his hair to guide him forward towards Ilya’s legs. His other hand traced down Hollander’s mouth, tapping his mouth to open. Hollander obediently sucked down on two of his fingers.

“Fuck, so good for me,” Ilya praised. He watched Hollander’s eyes flutter shut at his words, the sub was ready to be pulled into subspace already.

“Please,” Hollander whispered, leaning against Ilya’s thigh, his mouth dangerously close to Ilya’s now hard dick. “Please, sir.”

This is what Ilya had imagined last year: meeting Shane Hollander in a circumstance where they could engage as equals, getting the opportunity to take him apart and watch him unravel before Ilya put him back together. Ilya couldn’t believe the universe was letting him have this.

Ilya unzipped his pants and let them drop to his ankles.

“Color?”

“Green.”

Ilya pushes his boxers down and waited. Hollander’s eyes fixed on his cock, and he unconsciously licked his lips.

“You want something?” Ilya teased.

“Yes.” His voice was rough.

“You’ve been so good, take your reward.”

Ilya was not prepared for the enthusiasm with which Hollander leaned forward and swallowed him down. His mouth moving skillfully, his tongue swirling around the head of Ilya’s cock, his need so potent. Ilya was not gonna last nearly long enough if Hollander kept this up.

Replacing his cock with his fingers again, Ilya maneuvered some space between them.

“So good for me,” he said, hoping to prevent any worries Hollander would have that he had made a mistake. “You almost make me come before we have all our fun. So good, so so perfect.”

Hollander gave a satisfied hum around Ilya's fingers. Fuck, why was he so perfect.

"I'm going to stand you up," Ilya said, taking his fingers back from Hollander and ignoring his whine of protest. He supported Hollander's weight and maneuvered him up and onto the bed.

Ilya leaned down and teased a kiss across Hollander's lips, but didn't let the sub actually complete the kiss.

"So needy," Ilya murmured. "Such a beautiful slut for me." He watched to make sure the term landed as intended and saw Hollander nod slightly.

"I'm going to roll you onto stomach," Ilya said, knowing Hollander wouldn't be able to see what he was doing once repositioned. "I'm going to mark you, kotik. I'm going to tease you until you're begging me to touch you. And then," he leaned down and nipped at Hollander's ear, "I'm going to make you come on my cock. Color?"

"Green," Hollander moaned. "Please, yes, please."

Ilya glanced around the hotel room for anything that would be safe to play with. He opened the closet and took the belt of a terry cloth robe, which he brushed along Hollander's back. The sub moved towards the soft touch, letting Ilya draw a cry of surprise and pleasure from him when he bit down on Hollander's shoulder. He sucked a mark into the beautiful skin, before kissing and licking it.

"You like the pain," Ilya said approvingly. "You want me to bite and make you."

"Yes, mark me, please."

Ilya delivered one quick slap to Hollander's ass and felt his cock twitch in response to the noise Hollander made.

"Mark me what?"

"Sir, sorry sir, please mark me sir."

Ilya did. He used the robe belt to tickle gently, bringing Hollander's attention to one area of his body, before slapping or biting him on a different spot. After a few minutes of this, Ilya noticed Hollander's hips grinding into the bed. That wouldn't do.

Ilya dug his fingers into the sub's hips and pulled them up. "You want to come, you earn it. You don't touch yourself until I say."

Hollander whined but stayed in the new position, bringing his ass tantalizingly in the air. Ilya delivered three quick slaps against his ass.

"Yes, sir, thank you," Hollander gasped out, his voice wrecked with arousal.

Ilya had never met a sub who activated his dom instincts so completely. He was torn, knowing they only had this one night and not wanting to push anything too far. He kissed and

massaged the red skin where he'd slapped Hollander.

He let his mouth travel down further, licking a stripe across Hollander's hole.

"Color?"

Hollander moaned pleasantly.

"Words, Hollander."

"Green. Please. Please sir, please fuck me. I'll be so good for you."

Ilya licked him again. "I know you will, you're so good for me, kotik, so perfect." Ilya reached into his pants pocket and opened the small packet of lube he'd stashed there earlier this evening.

He slicked up a finger and pushed slowly into Hollander.

"Green," Hollander breathed, anticipating the question on Ilya's lips.

Ilya worked him open, kissing his back and hips, whispering praises. Hollander was so beautiful like this, his arms bound together with the belt, his reddened ass presented to Ilya like a trophy. Everything in his body hummed with desire.

"Please, fuck me, sir," Hollander begged, his thighs shaking and body trembling with desire.

That broke the last of Ilya's reserves. He slicked up his cock and slowly pushed into Hollander.

"Yellow."

Ilya froze. "What's wrong? What can I do?"

Hollander shifted his head so he could almost face Ilya. His pupils were blown wide with lust and he looked like it was taking all of his willpower to not fall fully into subspace.

"I know you're scared of hurting me, and I know why. But, I'm not breakable, I promise. Please, just be a little rough."

"I will trust you to tell me if that changes," Ilya said, fighting every instinct in his body to simply slam his hips into Hollander.

"I will. Please sir, fuck me like you mean it."

Ilya did. He set a brutal pace, snapping his hips forward and thrusting into Hollander again and again. His fingers dug into Hollander's ass and thighs, and he knew there would be bruises there tomorrow.

Hollander was mumbling, swearing, slurring his words as he said how good he felt. It sparked Ilya's dom instincts in a way he hadn't felt in a long time. He wanted to claim this

man. To mark him and collar him and never let him go. He knew that was far beyond their spontaneous play arrangement, but his entire body craved it.

Ilya could tell Hollander was getting close, his body trembling with the tension of holding back his orgasm. Such good control, Ilya praised, unsure if he said it aloud or not.

“Come for me, little sub,” Ilya ordered.

Hollander did. He choked out a cry as he came, which soon turned into a whimper as Ilya continued fucking him through it. He never wanted this moment to end, but the sight of Hollander spread out before him, taking him long past his own orgasm, pushed him over.

Slowly, gently, and slipping into aftercare mode, Ilya pulled out and untied the belt around Hollander’s arms. He repositioned him so he was laying on Ilya’s chest as they both caught their breath. Ilya stroked his arms and whispered soft words of praise, kissing Hollander’s lips, cheeks, forehead.

Eventually, Ilya lifted him up and took them to the shower. He washed Hollander’s body, careful with the sensitive under the marks. Back in bed he massaged Hollander’s arms where they’d been bound, his shoulders to release the tension. He massaged cream onto his ass. Ilya knew from last year how much Hollander craved physical touch to prevent a drop, Ilya held him close and made him eat snacks and drink water.

Wrapped up in one another, Ilya could not imagine anywhere else he’d want to be. His hormones must be really out of wack, he never felt this strongly for a sub after one scene.

“Hey,” Hollander’s voice eventually broke the silence.

“There you are,” Ilya said, placing a gentle kiss on his lips. “How do you feel?”

Hollander grinned. “So perfect.”

“You were so perfect,” Ilya said again. He could praise this sub from now until the end of time and still not say it enough.

“Thank you,” Hollander said, “for the scene. That was incredible.”

They lay together a bit longer, before Ilya realized he shouldn’t overstay his welcome. They had agreed to play, not to sleep over.

“Can I give you my number?” Ilya asked as he got dressed. “Just in case anything goes wrong. You don’t have to use it, but just. I don’t know, if you wake up feeling bad tomorrow, I want to fix.”

Hollander smiled and handed over his phone. Ilya added his number.

On a whim, he gave Hollander one final kiss before heading back to his own hotel. His body felt more settled than it had in ages.

Chapter End Notes

Okay, they finally got to playyyyyy!

Also. Yes, Shane has spent the last year on a healing journey. He'll share that when he's ready

Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

Sorrynotsorry this chapter is long. like 9 inches long

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Unknown number: hey it's Shane. Thanks for last night, I'm doing good this morning.

Rozanov: thank you for letting me know.

Rozanov: was good to see you, I had fun

Shane: good luck on your case

Rozanov: : thank you

**

Shane: hey, I wore that belt again today and thought about New York

Rozanov: oh you did? 😈

Rozanov: regrets?

Shane: none

Shane: maybe one

Shane: I have better rope back at my apartment

Rozanov: what color?

Shane: … … …

Shane: the regular kind

Shane: like the plain hemp kind

Rozanov: omg so boring Hollander

**

Rozanov: am back in NY. Is much less fun without you

Shane: how often do you travel?

Rozanov: depends. Usually once a month, sometimes not for several weeks

Rozanov: I have longer trip coming up soon. Might take a few weeks or months, we have big investigation we are putting together

**

Hayden Can you come in a little early today? The whole front desk crew has the flu

Shane: that's cuz the whole front desk crew keep making out in the breakroom

Hayden: I thought love is love or whatever

Shane: here's your gold star for allyship today

Shane: Yes, I'll be there in half an hour.

When Shane arrived at the Centaurs Community Center, he stashed his bag in the staff room, grabbed a ginger ale from the communal fridge and plopped down in the worn out office chair by the front desk. He ensured the computer and sign-in system were up and running, then pulled out his notebook to review his sessions for later that day.

Four months ago, Shane had finally felt safe and stable enough to move out of his parents house. He'd decided on Montreal, which meant it was easy to go home on the weekends or grab dinner with his parents if he wanted. He knew his way around the city from his days in university, and he was happy to be establishing himself as an independent adult again.

Centaurs had been the primary factor in his decision. The community center catered specifically to queer youth, with a special focus on empowering the sub community. Shane ran their sports programs, carving out opportunities for young people who, either because of their identities, dynamics, or economic backgrounds, had been denied a chance. Shane's classes and teams gave them the chance the rest of the world wouldn't. The participants were empowered to build on their own strengths, to test their limits in healthy and supervised ways, to participate in sports and activities the world usually denied them.

The pay was shit, but Shane wouldn't trade it for the world.

He had quickly become friends with the clinic director, a self-describing soft dom named Hayden who had a lovely wife and kids. Hayden and Jackie had become a core part of Shane's life in Montreal, and he was often at their house for family dinners.

Harris Drover, an overly friendly sub with a golden retriever personality, ran the Center's nutrition and healthy eating program. Harris, with his famous sweet tooth, shared family recipes for everything from apple pie to a three course dinner made only using low budget

items at the grocery store. Alongside the sports program, the cooking classes were the most popular.

During his first month, Shane had lunch with Harris and finally asked him why the center was called “Centaurs.”

“Okay so it was just called the “Community Center”, but some of the paint was peeling on the sign and someone graffitied "center" to say “centaurs”. And then everyone thought it was hilarious so we just left it. Which led to other street artists tagging that front wall with their own centaur themed art, and by that time, it just stuck. At some point I guess someone in charge officially changed the name to Centaurs Community Center, but everyone just shortens it to Centaurs.”

Shane had laughed with Harris and began to appreciate the makeshift mural on the front of the building in a whole new light. It fit with everything else about Centaurs. Everyone was operating on a tight budget and long hours, but they all loved the work they did and they all got along, so even on days when the wifi went down, the air conditioning failed in the gym, and the food deliveries accidentally came halfway through the cooking class, they laughed it off and made do.

“Thank you so much, you’re a lifesaver today.”

Shane looked up from his notes and smiled at Hayden. His friend had dark circles under his eyes, his hair looked a bit wild, and Shane wondered which of the kids had kept him up all night.

“Arthur is teething,” Hayden said, gesturing at himself. “Thank you, thank you for coming in your day off. I’ll make Jen or someone teach hockey one day to make it up to you.”

“Oh god, please don’t, we don’t have that kind of insurance,” Shane deadpanned.

Hayden laughed. He handed Shane the binder with the scheduled appointments and open drop in spots at the clinic. “Hopefully we’ll have a quiet day.”

“Not now that you jinxed it, we won’t,” Shane teased.

Centaurs also ran a dynamics clinic for over 18s, who had begun to present their dynamics but did not have safe access to regular scene partners. Most of their clients were between 18 and 24, although anyone could technically register. For queer subs in particular, finding a safe environment for self-exploration without the risk of assault, inexperienced doms, or STIs, was important.

Shane also made use of the clinic and he wondered how different the past few years of his life would have been if he’d lived in Montreal or had access to something like Centaurs. Sometimes he had this crazy idea of setting up partner clinics for queer young adults in other parts of the province or Canada in general, but he had no idea how to even go about that. For now, he was happy to empower youth through sports and sneak leftover treats from Harris’ cooking classes.

The day passed easily. Clients came and went. Harris' club was having a friendly competition to make one-pot meals, and Shane was invited to step in as a guest judge. Some of his hockey and soccer students were there and they were clearly excited to have their coach try and praise their edible creations.

Mid-afternoon, Shane's phone had a notification.

Rozanov Hollander, you are Canadian. Can you explain something?

Shane smiled at his phone. In the month since he had seen Rozanov in the NYC club, they had exchanged fun and easy text messages back and forth. They didn't message everyday, but enough that it felt like a consistent part of Shane's week.

Shane: Didn't you know, I'm the official spokesman for Canada?

Rozanov I think is spokesperson. Don't be sexist 😛

Shane: Fuck off

Shane: Now I'm not gonna answer your question

Shane: You'll just have to wonder about the mystery that is Canada

Rozanov: 😕

Rozanov: Why are Montreal bagels so different than New York?

Shane stared at his phone.

Montreal.

Was Rozanov … ?

Shane: Where did you find a Montreal bagel in Boston? Isn't that like heresy or something?

The three dots appeared and Shane ignored the way his pulse quickened as he dared to dream that Rozanov was in Montreal.

Rozanov: Look at this bagel. Too much hole.

Rozanov: and I never say too much hole 😉

Rozanov: it tastes different too

Shane looked at the picture Rozanov had sent him and his heart leapt. A bagel and coffee sat on a table in a cafe. Shane recognized the name of the bakery on the coffee cup.

Shane: You're in Montreal?

Rozanov: Answer bagel question!

Shane: You're in Montreal?

Rozanov: Hollander, focus. Great bagel mystery must be solved.

Shane: I live here

Three dots appeared. Disappeared. Appeared again. Shane tapped his foot impatiently.

Rozanov: So you ARE Montreal bagel expert, explain hole!

Shane: You did not just type that

Shane: I don't know. It has to do with the ingredients, the different water in the two cities, and the way they're shaped.

Shane: How long are you in Montreal?

Rozanov: A few months. I think. Is unclear

Rozanov: You really live here?

Rozanov: Yeah, since March

There was a long pause. Shane started to type, then saw Rozanov's three dots and stopped, then started again. Fuck, they were playing texting chicken, weren't they? Finally, a new message came through.

Rozanov: Can I see you?

Shane could almost hear it in Rozanov's voice, how vulnerable and shy he would sound. He could picture Rozanov's eyes, wide with anticipation and anxiety that Shane wouldn't want to see him again. Their last meeting had been so perfect, Shane had thought about it (and yes,

jerked off to the memory) every day since he'd gotten back from New York. Texting with Rozanov had been like a soothing balm on the ache that made him want to run straight into the dom's arms.

Shane: Yes

Shane: Please

Shane: Tonight? Are you working?

Rozanov: I have time for you

The rest of the day passed in a blur. Shane couldn't focus on anything other than the memory of Rozanov inside him. He couldn't think about anything other than how much he wanted the dom to touch him, slap him, hold him. His whole body was electrified just thinking about it.

By the time Shane got home, he thought he would vibrate out of his skin with anticipation. He went through each room of his small apartment and made sure it was clean and tidy, although, when was it not? He walked between rooms. He sat down on the couch. No, that felt weird. He turned the TV on for distraction, still weird. He changed his clothes twice.

Why was he so obsessed with making a perfect impression on Rozanov? The man had literally met him while he was half naked and a slave in a skeevy club, he had helped Shane clean and dress literal festering wounds on his back. Why did Shane feel anxious about what color shirt he was wearing?

The doorbell rang and Shane tried to look casual and not like he was freaking out.

***

Hollander's apartment was in a small complex in a residential neighborhood. Ilya smiled as he rang the bell. He couldn't believe Hollander lived in Montreal. Ilya would be here for a few months, and if the one night they spent together in New York had taught him anything, it was that he wanted endless days and nights with Hollander.

It was nice of fate to throw them together again. Hollander had responded quite happily about his presence, so hopefully he wouldn't think Ilya was stalking him. The Hollander he'd rescued and housed had been suspicious and angry, struggling with his body and mind as he clawed his way out of the misery Andrei had inflicted on him. The sub he had met in New York was completely different, confident in himself and trusting, and Ilya wondered if that was Hollander before captivity. The person who he texted with was fun and flirty, with deadpan humor that always made Ilya smile. As he nervously shifted, waiting for the door to open, he wondered which version of Hollander he'd get today.

Hollander looked like he was trying not to appear as nervous as Ilya felt, but Ilya could feel the anxiety radiating off of him. Hoping to settle both of them, Ilya stepped through the

doorway and guided Hollander backwards until Ilya's arms could cage him against the wall. He leaned in and kissed him, feeling Hollander respond eagerly under his touch.

Ilya couldn't get this man out of his head. He couldn't stop thinking about all the things he wanted to do to him. He couldn't fall asleep at night without wondering what Hollander had done that day. He couldn't touch himself without picturing the sub's beautiful eyes and freckles.

"You missed me," Ilya practically purred against Hollander's lips.

Hollander's eyes were half closed and god, Ilya wanted to take him right there. Instead he trailed some kisses down Hollander's neck and biting down playfully on his shoulder before capturing his lips once more.

Finally breathless, Ilya pulled back just enough to see Hollander's reaction.

"Is this how you greet all your houseguests?" Ilya teased. "Should I be jealous?"

Hollander laughed. "No, every time Hayden comes over here with his wife I just simply refuse to kiss him."

Ilya scoffed. "Poor Hayden, his loss."

Hollander reached down and took his hand. "Come on, let me give you the tour."

He led Ilya through the apartment. It was cute and very Hollander. The kitchen was pristine and organized. The living room had a very comfortable looking L-shaped couch and short bookcases. There were some photos and art on the wall, all clean lines and cool earthy tones; very Hollander.

"Bathroom is down there," Hollander said, pointing to a half-closed door. "I use the second bedroom as like, a yoga studio, office space, whatever I need room for. And my bedroom is here."

Hollander's room looked cozy and comfortable and Ilya could easily see how he'd made sure it was a safe place for himself. He noticed the weighted blanket folded neatly across the end of the bed, the sheer number of pillows lined against the headrest, the natural light and windows that assured Hollander he was free and alive.

There was a book and a set of glasses on the bedside table and Ilya made a mental note to ask Hollander to put them on later.

Ilya took it all in and followed Hollander back to the living room where they sat down on the couch. He felt a bit overwhelmed with emotion.

"I thought maybe we could order some dinner? I didn't want to assume, but if you wanna stay and —. Whoa, Rozanov are you okay?"

Ilya looked away, trying to school his expression.

“It’s nothing, I’m fine.”

“Hey, hey,” Hollander cupped his face and coaxed into a gentle kiss. “Montreal takeout choices aren’t that awful.”

Ilya let out a breath. “I never… I never see anyone on the other side. I never see anyone living their life again or being happy. I see people when they’re at the worst time or the lowest point and maybe, maybe hope that blossoms when they can call their family or friends and go home. But I never … it’s so good to see you so settled and happy and normal and … boring.”

“Boring?”

Ilya smiled. “Yes, boring Canadian life. Exactly what you deserve.”

Shane leaned forward, kissing him again. “Because of you.”

Ilya paused and Hollander noticed.

“Is that why —? Hollander, you don’t owe me anything —“

Hollander scanned his face. “I know. Wait, do you think I feel indebted to you or something?”

“I mean. Maybe? I have worried about it since that night in New York”

Hollander smiled. “Okay, then leave. Go on. Get out.”

Ilya didn’t move.

“What. You think I invited you to thank you or something? Rozanov, *of course* I’m grateful you got me out. Of course I owe my life to you. But I wanted to see you because I want to see *you*.” Hollander traced a finger along Ilya’s jaw. “Because I've never felt this safe with anyone else. And I wish it hadn’t come with the price tag it did, but I …” He kissed Ilya and the worries started to float away. “I want you.”

“I mean. You could be a *little* grateful, Hollander, I did save your life,” Ilya teased, pulling them back into more comfortable territory.

“You’re such an asshole,” Hollander said, sliding down the couch and putting his face in Ilya’s lap. “Let me show exactly how grateful I am then.”

Without warning, Hollander bit his thigh and Ilya yelped (he would deny this, as Russians never yelp). Hollander laughed and Ilya pulled him back onto the couch.

“Better?” Hollander asked, still smiling. “Okay, now can we order dinner?”

Half an hour later the coffee table was covered in Chinese takeout containers.

“You said you’re here for a couple months?” Hollander asked.

"*Da.* I have a couple cases here and decided was easier to come in one trip. Svetlana is running club in Boston for now, she is very good."

"She helps with your whole operation, right?"

Ilya nodded. "She is old friend from Russia. We grew up together. She and I started the club first, the other part came later."

"Is it dangerous?"

"Sometimes. Depends on who we deal with and how closely they guard their people. Someone like Andrei —" Ilya paused, but Hollander didn't look distressed, "he cares more about feeling in control than actually being in control. So like, he was easy to take from."

"For the first few months, I was worried he would find me and take me back," Hollander said, his eyes dark.

Ilya squeezed his thigh. "I'm sorry. I can't imagine."

"Do you ever worry they'll come after you? The people you take subs from?"

"Sometimes. We are very careful. But, yes, is not safe."

Hollander looked at him for a long moment and then put his hand over Ilya's. "Thank you, I mean it."

Ilya tried not to let the swell of emotion he felt show on his face. Occasionally he had Sveta check on some of their clients after they got home; it was a mixed success. Some, like Hollander, seemed to get their lives back together; others spent months or years struggling to transition back into normal life and maintain their dynamic health, haunted by the things that had been done to them. After Hollander left, Ilya told Sveta to not track him. Ilya worried if he kept any connection with the sub he would never be able to let go. Now that he was here in Hollander's living room, the sub's presence confirmed that for him.

"Your job, tell me," Ilya invited. Hollander had mentioned something about sports coaching in one of their text messages.

"I work at a place called Centaurs," Hollander said.

"You are mythical horse now?" Ilya teased.

Hollander smiled. "Long story about the name, but yes. It's a community center for queer youth and young adults. I run the sports program. There's an employment help program, cooking club, and then there's also a clinic."

"For subs?"

"And some doms. But yeah, mostly for subs. Hayden, my friend who runs the clinic, says he thinks there's been a significant drop in reported dynamic abuse issues in the city since they opened the clinic."

“That’s very good work, Hollander. You are happy?”

Hollander nodded. “I even, uh, I use the clinic too.”

Ilya was impressed. He remembered how terrified Hollander had been of clinics when they first met, and he had worried when they parted ways how Hollander would care for his sub needs if the option wasn’t open to him.

“Can I ask you something?”

Ilya nodded.

“Did you ever investigate the clinic where I —. Where I was taken?”

“Da. The dom who sold you no longer worked there. How much do you want to know?” Ilya asked carefully.

“Everything. I want to know that no one else will be taken like I was. I want … want to know that he can’t put anyone else through what I went through.”

Ilya reached out and laid a gentle hand on Hollander’s back. “The clinic was forced to undergo a review, and they fired half the staff who may have been part of the trafficking ring. As for the man who hurt you, he disappeared. Sveta has alerts set up in case he shows his face again, but for now, he’s not going to take anyone else.”

Hollander let out a breath. “Thank you. I know that’s not what you do, but —“

“Is *exactly* what I do. But I would have done it anyway.” Ilya admitted before he could stop himself.

Hollander slowly met his eyes, and Ilya could see the desire there. They hadn’t really agreed to what the evening would be, and Ilya was torn between wanting to just stay on the couch and hear about Hollander’s life, and wanting to hold him down and fuck him so hard they both forgot their names.

Perhaps Hollander noticed his discomfort. He shifted closer to Ilya on the couch.

“Do you want to stay for a bit? I have better supplies here than my hotel room.”

Ilya’s face lit up and his whole body warmed with anticipation.

“Yes.”

Hollander stood up and offered Ilya his hand. Ilya followed Hollander back down the hallway into his bedroom and watched as he pulled a box from under his bed.

“What, uh, what would you like to do?” Hollander asked shyly. As though Ilya hadn’t literally tied up him and fucked him last time they’d seen each other.

Ilya smiled at the sub before turning his attention to the contents of the box. Rope. Lube and condoms. A paddle. A pair of handcuffs, but the proper leather kind. A flogger. All the basics that Ilya would expect a sub to keep on hand.

His eyes fell on a purple dildo and he cocked his eyebrows at Hollander who rolled his eyes.

“Jealous of a toy, Rozanov?” Hollander teased.

Ilya took the bait. He stepped forward into Hollander’s space and tilted his chin up to meet the dom’s eyes.

“No, just planning to remind you the real thing feels better.”

Hollander’s breath caught.

“I’m going to make you beg for it,” Ilya growled.

Hollander grinned at him. “Oh yeah? Fucking make me, Rozanov.”

Ilya resisted the urge to throw him down on the bed right there and smash their mouths together. They hadn’t discussed anything yet, but it was killing Ilya to hold back.

Hollander’s chest was heaving slightly and Ilya smirked at the effect he had on the sub. He waited. And waited. Finally, Hollander stepped back.

“Binding your wrists?”

“Yes.”

“Restraining you to the bed frame?”

Hollander considered, his eyes searching Ilya’s. After a moment, he nodded.

“Eyes open, yes?”

Hollander smiled slightly and nodded. Ilya wondered if the sub was surprised he remembered, as though he could forget anything about this man.

“Sex?”

“Please. I mean. If you want.”

Ilya grinned. “Oh I want.”

“Good. I mean. Me too.”

Ilya wanted to kiss him.

“Impact?”

“Yes. I trust you.”

Ilya tried to ignore the rush of warmth that spread through his body at that comment. How had he earned the trust of this gorgeous man was beyond him.

“Marks?”

“I hope so.” Hollander fucking winked at him. Oh, Ilya was going to enjoy this.

“What about you?” Hollander asked.

“What about me?” Ilya asked, curious.

“Your limits?” Hollander’s tone was so goddam sincere.

Ilya traced a line along Hollander’s jaw, and found his eyes. “I don’t want to hurt you,” he said after a long moment. “Pain, yes. But I … I don’t want to actually hurt you.”

“And?” Shane prompted, turning his head slightly and drawing Ilya’s thumb into his mouth and sucking down gently.

“Fuck,” Ilya felt out of control in the best possible way. “I don’t know, Hollander. You make me want to do and try everything. I just don’t want to hurt you. Or scare you.”

Hollander nodded slowly, brushing his tongue over Ilya’s thumb.

“Hollander, we haven’t finished —“

Hollander looked at him through hooded eyes and Ilya was gone.

Ilya gripped Hollander’s jaw and put the other hand on his chest, walking him backwards until his knees hit the bed. Hollander folded under him and welcomed Ilya’s body straddling him as he fell backwards.

Hollander was already half hard and Ilya ground down on him, just to add to his arousal.

“Fuck, please.”

Ilya added more pressure. “Please what?”

Hollander chased his lips, but Ilya pulled out of reach. “Please sir.”

“Good boy.” Ilya rewarded Hollander with kisses along his jaw and down his throat. “Take off your clothes.”

Hollander scrambled to obey, not even pausing to fold his clothes.

“I’m going to restrain you now,” Ilya said, remembering how much Hollander needed to know what was going to happen.

Ilya pulled back and retrieved the restraints from the box and fastened them around Hollander’s wrists and the bars of the bedframe.

“Don’t move,” Ilya growled at him. “I’m going to drive you crazy, push you close to the edge, but you won’t be able to touch me.”

“Need to –”

“No. Touching.”

Hollander glared at him. “I could be so good for you though,” he added with a little catch in his voice.

Ilya scoffed. “Such as brat. You want to be good, you take what I give you.”

To illustrate his point, Ilya kissed his way down Hollander’s stomach, getting closer and closer to his hard cock, but skipping right over it and instead moving to kiss and nip at the inside of his thighs.

Hollander’s hips unconsciously began to thrust upward, seeking friction and Ilya moved away completely so they were no longer touching. Hollander whined at the loss of contact.

“Behave,” Ilya reminded him. “That’s one.”

Hollander made an annoyed sound, but his body stilled.

Ilya shifted back on top of the sub. He dipped his head between Hollander’s legs and bit down on the sensitive skin of his inner thigh. Ilya sucked down, making sure the mark would be visible for several days. This sub drove him crazy. He wanted to mark him, claim him, coll–. Nope, he pushed that thought away. That wasn’t what this was. He needed to let go of that idea.

Ilya moved to Hollander’s leg and felt the sub tense in preparation for another bite. Instead, Ilya left feather-light kisses until he felt Hollander relax. And then he sucked down hard, his body responding to the gasp of pleasure he heard from Hollander.

“So good,” Ilya murmured, kissing his way back up Hollander’s body. “You want me to touch you now, *kotik*?”

Hollander nodded. “Please.”

“No.”

Ilya scraped his teeth along Hollander’s throat, and then reached down and wrapped his fingers around the sub’s cock. Hollander’s body responded unconsciously and pushed into Ilya’s hand, which immediately released him.

“Ok, we’re done,” Ilya said, pulling away.

“What? No,” Hollander whined. “Please, sir, please, touch me.”

“No, you clearly cannot behave. That’s two.”

“Rozanov –”

Ilya shoved his hand over Hollander’s mouth and the sub quieted.

“That’s three. You cannot behave. You cannot show proper respect.” Ilya stood up and moved away. Hollander’s eyes tracked him as he moved towards the bedroom door. “You sit now for three minutes. Alone. One minute for each time you misbehave.”

“Yellow. Please don’t leave the room.” The fear was present in the edges of Hollander’s voice.

Ilya nodded. “Okay. Thank you for telling me. I will stay. But *you* don’t talk.”

He pulled a chair from the corner so that he was sitting in Hollander’s line of vision. He sat down and spread his legs, his erection obvious in his pants. He ran a hand down his own thigh, palming himself and looked at Hollander.

“This could be yours, *kotik*, if you could just behave.”

Hollander whined, but pressed his lips together. Good.

Ilya unzipped his pants, but kept himself covered. He reached in and took himself in hand, pointedly not looking at Hollander. Ilya was annoyed at himself, he knew the sub didn’t want to be left alone, he shouldn’t have threatened to leave. He could still easily punish Hollander within the limits of his boundaries.

Hollander’s eyes were wide, watching Ilya touch himself. The sub was almost shaking as he restrained himself from moving or speaking. Ilya bit back a smile.

“Do you want to know how it feels, touching myself while you are spread out before me so beautifully?” Ilya growled. “I wish it were your mouth, but you are too busy being brat to put your mouth to good use.”

Hollander’s cock was beginning to leak and Ilya smirked, squeezing his own balls and adding pressure to his strokes.

“If you cannot behave, I will be forced to come all by myself. Leave you here, tied up so pretty, your poor cock just aching for release.”

Hollander bit down on his lower lip, his expression almost feral as Ilya let out a long moan.

Slowly, Ilya pulled his hand out of his pants and crossed back over to the bed. He held his hand up to Hollander’s mouth. “Lick.”

Hollander did, running his tongue between each of Ilya’s fingers.

“Your three minutes are up. Can you behave, do what you are told?”

“Yes sir, I will behave.”

Ilya leaned down and kissed him. “Good boy. So good for me. So pretty, all worked up. Do you want a reward now?”

“Please, sir, please, I’ll be so good for you,” Hollander practically cried.

Ilya quickly stripped his clothes off and shimmied his way up the bed until his cock was right in front of Hollander’s mouth. To his credit, the sub had clearly learned his lesson, he didn’t lean forward or try to touch Ilya.

“Do you want to taste me?” Ilya asked.

“Please, sir.”

Ilya pushed into Hollander’s mouth and let out a sigh of pleasure as the sub swirled his tongue around the head.

“*Da*, like that, *kotik*, show me how good your mouth can be when you’re not mouthing off.”

Hollander did. He licked, he sucked, he relaxed his throat so Ilya could push further in. He balanced letting Ilya fuck his mouth while also remaining engaged. He was perfect and Ilya quickly realized he was too close to the edge. He pulled back, but rewarded Hollander by putting two of his fingers in the sub’s mouth instead.

“So hungry for me, my delicious little slut,” Ilya praised, his eyes never leaving Hollander’s swollen lips. “Cannot get enough of your dom.”

Hollander sucked down harder.

“Do you want me to fuck you?” Ilya purred in his ear and Hollander’s body shuddered. “I could leave you bound like this, you couldn’t touch me, you’d only feel me right here.” Ilya’s fingers brushed along Hollander’s ass and he reveled in the absolutely filthy sound Hollander made. “You liked it last time, when all you could do was take me. I could just your mouth and your hole, but never touch your cock.”

Hollander nodded. “Whatever you want, sir. Use me, please.”

Ilya kissed his way down Shane’s body, ignoring his cock and pushing his legs up to give Ilya better access. He licked a stripe across Shane’s hole and the sub’s body tensed at the sudden contact.

Shane was in heaven. It had to be. There were skilled doms and there was Rozanov. Rozanov, who understood Shane’s fears and took the time to adjust to them while still maintaining the scene. Rozanov, who knew exactly how to pleasure Shane’s body and launch him into subspace while letting him be a brat. Shane had never met anyone like this man, and he would never let –. No, that line of thought was no good. Rozanov was just here for a few months, better to focus on this moment than dream up an impossible future.

Shane’s body was trembling by the time Rozanov opened him up, slowly working his fingers in and out. His tongue lathed at Shane’s rim, and just as he promised, he brought Shane close

to the edge before drawing back. Shane tried his best to stay still. He tried his best not to shove his ass into Rozanov's face. He moaned as Rozanov curled his fingers inside Shane.

"Are you ready?" Rozanov whispered, in a voice almost too tender for the moment.

Shane nodded. "Please sir, need you. Need your cock inside me. Need to feel you."

Rozanov repositioned Shane's hips and slowly, slowly, pushed himself inside. Shane's body responded before his mind remembered not to. He pushed down, taking Rozanov all the way in and groaning at the delicious pressure.

But then it was gone.

Fuck.

Rozanov had pulled out and moved back, no longer touching him.

"I'm sorry," Shane cried. "I'm sorry, please, sir, please give me another chance."

"Maybe you don't want to get fucked tonight," Rozanov said, his tone serious. "Maybe is too much for my little *kotik*. You just want to lay on bed and not be touched."

Shane shook his head. "No, no, no. Please, please, I can behave. I can be good." An old panic began to take shape inside him, and he tried to push it down. Instead, acknowledging the pain brought it to the forefront of his memory and caused tears to suddenly spill down his face. "Please, Rozanov, please."

Maybe it was the momentary break in the scene when Shane used his name, but he saw something shift in the dom's eyes. Rozanov moved back between Shane's legs. He had grabbed the flogger at some point and held it up to Shane's mouth.

"No. More. Talking."

Shane bit down obediently on the leather handle.

Rozanov pushed back inside him and Shane forced his body to relax and stay still. Rozanov inched in slowly. Shane ignored the drool that was leaking out of his open mouth. Once he was fully in, Rozanov pulled out and pushed in with the same slow pace and Shane finally let go.

The sensation of Rozanov's body above him, of his strong hands gripping Shane's thighs, of his lips occasionally peppering kisses along Shane's jaw, was all encompassing. Shane let himself get lost in the feeling. He closed his eyes and let the touch wash over him, his mind quieting.

His shoulders ached deliciously from being restrained so long, but he barely noticed. His cock was throbbed from not being touched, but it only heightened the sensation of Rozanov fucking him. His legs were trembling from being pushed to the edge over and again, but he just let them. There was nothing here that he needed to control. Nothing he could control. He let it all go.

Rozanov's thrusts stilled for a moment as he buried himself inside Shane. He reached up and opened the wrist restraints.

"Touch yourself," Rozanov said. "I want to watch you."

He didn't move his hips, leaving all of that pressure inside Shane. Shane's brain was barely functioning and his arm felt a little tingly from being suspended above him, but he reached down and wrapped his hand around his leaking cock. He swiped his thumb over the tip and stroked himself.

"Good boy," Rozanov praised. "But you don't come until I tell you. Match my pace."

Their bodies moved in sync, Rozanov thrusting slowly into Shane, and Shane forcing his hand to move at the same speed. As Rozanov began to speed up, Shane matched him.

"Please sir," Shane moaned, "I can't, I can't."

"Yes you can, kotik. Do not come yet."

Rozanov slowed them down. Shane wanted to cry.

The thrusts came faster and Shane didn't think he was fully inside his body anymore. How was his hand keeping rhythm with Rozanov when he wasn't sure where one of them ended and the other began?

"Come for me."

The words seemed to come from far away, but Shane's body responded immediately. He thrust upward into his hand as Rozanov pounded into him. He clenched down as he came, drawing Rozanov's own orgasm out with him. Shane knew he was crying out in pleasure, but his own voice seemed miles away.

Gentle hands. The warm sensation as a cloth moved along his body. Strong arms anchoring him to a warm, broad chest. Soft kisses in his hair, his cheeks, his lips. Endless whispered words of praise.

Later, when they were both fully back down from the scene, Rozanov sat with Shane as the sub drew closer to sleep. After ensuring his arms were okay from the bindings and his body was okay from the sex, Rozanov kissed him gently before going. He traced lines along Shane's face and told him again how good he had been. He made sure Shane was feeling alright and reminded him to call if he felt off in the middle of the night.

"Thank you for showing me the other side," Rozanov whispered against his lips. "I am so proud of you."

Shane wrapped all of his blankets more tightly around himself and tried to ignore the disappointed feeling that Rozanov would not be here when he woke up in the morning.

Chapter End Notes

Apologies to both New York and Montreal bagel lovers

Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Rozanov: back in town tonight

Rozanov: dinner? play?

Shane: yes and yes

“Who are you smiling at?” Hayden asked.

Shane hurriedly put his phone face down.

“Dude. Are you seeing someone?”

“Sorta.”

Hayden raised his eyebrows and gave Shane a meaningful look across the table. “Details!”

Shane shrugged and Hayden wouldn’t let it go.

“He’s, uh, he’s. It’s complicated.”

“That look on your face is not complicated,” Hayden joked.

“Okay. Remember I told you that this dom rescued me from that … from being a slave? So uh, we met up again in New York when I went. And we uh, we’ve been texting since then. And uh, we’ve done a few scenes together.”

“The mystery dom who saved you is the mystery guy in your phone that you’re always smiling about?” Hayden grinned. “Shane, that’s great. I love this.”

“It’s —. Yeah, it is. We’re not, like, dynamic partners or anything. Neither of us want that. But when we have time we get together and play.”

“He lives here?”

“He’s in Montreal for a few months. But I don’t know how long that will last.”

Hayden couldn’t get the smile off his face. “Okay, but like, that’s awesome. I’m glad you’re having fun. And he’s a good guy? A good dom?”

Shane nodded and tried not to smile. “Yeah, he really is.”

***

Rozanov: I have job tonight, not sure how long it'll take. If you don't hear from me, don't worry, da?"

Shane: good luck

Shane: be careful

***

Rozanov: Tell me something boring and Canadian

Shane sent a selfie.

Rozanov: my favorite boring Canadian

***

Shane: busy tonight?

Rozanov: yes, got some new rope I need to break in

Rozanov: 8pm?

***

Shane knelt on the mats in Rozanov's bedroom. It was the first time he had been to Rozanov's apartment in Montreal, usually they met at Shane's. It hadn't been a conscious decision, but maybe they'd both assumed Shane would feel safer in his own space.

They'd negotiated the scene when Shane arrived.

Well. To be accurate, when he first arrived, Shane had launched himself into Rozanov's arms and captured his lips. He had been thinking about the dom all day, ever since Rozanov texted him back, and now he couldn't pull himself away. They had met up every week since Rozanov came to Montreal, and the scenes they had done had given them both a sense of calm and mental quiet they rarely felt.

Tonight felt different. Something was shifting between them, and neither could quite name it. It started with the feeling of anticipation Ilya got when Shane texted him. It continued when Shane pulled Rozanov's strong body against him and kissed him breathless.

Shane could feel it as he knelt in seiza, gaze downward, but never closed, as he waited for Rozanov.

After the first time Shane had refused to close his eyes or be blindfolded, Rozanov had never asked again. Nor had he tried to trick Shane into it, or do anything that obstructed his vision. If anything, Rozanov had seemed to enjoy Shane watching him when they played. The dom narrated everything he did, letting Shane's ability to see the toys and hear the scene unfold add to the tension that made their play so delicious. Instead of seeing Shane's need to see as a detriment to their scene, Rozanov had made it a key part of his way of playing with Shane.

Shane heard the dom enter the room behind him.

Rozanov knelt down next to him and pulled Shane's back against his chest. The subs breath caught at the quick contact. Rozanov kissed the back of his neck, his lips ghosting along Shane's skin.

Rozanov's hands worked quickly, pulling open the ropes and quickly immobilizing Shane's arms and binding his chest in a harness. The ropes slid tantalizingly against his skin as Rozanov's fingers navigated the knots and loops around his body.

Rozanov nudged Shane's thighs, breaking the seiza and bringing him into the dom's lap.

They had discussed the scene beforehand, so Shane knew his legs were next. But Rozanov was not in a rush. He teased the rope down Shane's legs, using the raw ends to tickle his ankles. Rozanov trailed the rope further up, up, up, the rope teased his inner thighs, sending sparks through Shane.

Rozanov tied a ladder up Shane's legs, the loops of the new, red rope, highlighted against his bare skin.

"Color?" Rozanov asked, double checking the tightness of the ropes and the locations of the knots.

"Green—. Wait, ankle."

Rozanov hummed and repositioned the rope on Shane's ankle to move it off the joint. "Good, thank you for telling me. Ready for more?"

"Yes," Shane murmured, already slipping down.

Rozanov rolled him onto his side, his ass bared, the ropes presenting him perfectly.

Three quick slaps. Shane let the cry escape, and heard Rozanov's breath catch at his reaction.

"Thank you," Shane gasped out.

Three more slaps.

So far, Shane had not been comfortable using more than Rozanov's hands for impact play. Tonight however, they had agreed to mix it up, while maintaining the boundary that Shane always saw the toy before so he knew what to expect.

"I want to do the scene differently," Shane had told Rozanov earlier that evening. "Without you narrating this time. Is that okay?"

Rozanov nodded. "Of course. But you tell me if that changes. Why more quiet today?"

Shane looked sheepishly down. "It was … it was an idea from my therapist. To see if I knew ahead of time what would happen, if my anxiety would be lowered enough that I could fall into subspace easier."

Rozanov considered. "Many years people touched you without your consent, without you knowing what would happen. I don't know if a few weeks of this will fix that."

Shane faltered. "I'm not. Sorry, i explained that wrong. I'm not asking you to fix it, Ilya, just that I want to try and find out."

"Okay. But I will ask you for color, is not negotiable for me."

And that was how Shane found himself comfortable and quietly falling into subspace as Rozanov shifted him, using the ropes to apply pressure as he pulled Shane's ankles up and held him in a hogtie position. With his other hand, the dom traced the edges of the rope along the newly reddened skin. Then three more slaps on the other cheek.

"Yes, thank you, sir," Shane said, his voice drifting as he sank deeper into subspace.

Rozanov lowered his ankles and rolled him back onto his side.

"Open your eyes," Rozanov said quietly. Shane hadn't even realized he'd closed them. He had never closed his eyes during a scene, even when he felt amazing, even when he soared at the touch and sensation, his eyes had always remained open, a vestige of power he was finally safe enough to claim.

Tonight he found, he didn't want it. Something had shifted and his mind was too floaty to fully understand it.

Shane shook his head. "I don't need to look anymore," he murmured.

There was a long, long pause. Shane heard Rozanov open his mouth as though he would say something, but instead all he felt was a gentle touch on his back.

"Open your eyes, kotik, that's what we agreed to. Please. You're doing so well, but you need to open."

Shane's sub nature warred with him. The dom was giving him a direction and he felt compelled to obey, but he also badly wanted to surrender to the unknown and let his eyes stay shut.

"Open. Kotik. Open."

Shane's eyes opened and he saw Rozanov's fingers tracing their way along a paddle. His breathing hitched as he watched Rozanov slap his own hand against the paddle, drawing a quick, sharp sound.

"Color?"

"Green sir. Please."

The paddle left his view and Shane waited for the hit. And waited. And let his eyes drift shut again. This time, Rozanov didn't stop him.

Thwack.

Oh fuck, that felt better than Shane could have imagined. He'd never done proper impact play, he'd only experienced it as a form of punishment or abuse at the hands of his former masters.

The hits Rozanov delivered were precise, landing on the meatiest part of his ass, ensuring a proper sting without causing lasting damage. Each hit drew another sound from Shane, until he barely recognized his own voice.

Part of this scene was a lack of praise, and Shane could almost hear Rozanov biting his own tongue to stop from speaking. Shane asked him to withhold it, to make him squirm through the scene and then pour it out at the very end. Rozanov was never this silent during a scene and it kept Shane on edge in an exciting way, feeling the dom push down his own desires in order to fulfill Shane's wishes.

Two more smacks, one on each cheek and then Shane heard the paddle set down on the side. Rozanov rolled him onto his back, propped up against the dom's chest.

One of Rozanov's hands held him in place, putting pressure on his chest, pushing the ropes deeper against his skin. The other hand traced down Shane's chest, stomach, and took hold of his leaking cock.

"Green," Shane whispered. "Please, sir, please I've been so good, please let me come."

Rozanov kissed his neck as his hand started to stroke Shane.

He must be good, right? If the dom was rewarding him like this? He must … Shane could feel his mind starting to spiral. Maybe he hasn't been good, maybe Rozanov wanted —

"Yellow. I need to hear you, please, Rozanov, I need to know —"

It was like a dam burst inside the dom. Rozanov showered him with praise as his hand continued to stroke Shane.

"You are doing so well, Hollander," Rozanov said, his voice rough. "You took the hits so perfectly, your ass is the perfect shade of red. I wish you could see how wrecked you looked after taking it, you did so well. You look so beautiful like this. Tied up and presented for me. These ropes make your skin look incandescent. Such a good kotik, taking all of this so well."

It worked. Shane's mind dropped right back into subspace. Rozanov's voice stayed in his ear as he neared his orgasm, but Shane had drifted further and further, untethered from his body as his thighs trembled from the stimulation.

"You did so well, now you take your reward. Come for me, little sub, let go Hollander, I have you."

Shane heard himself cry out as his cock spurted and painted his chest. He felt Rozanov's hand work him through the orgasm, he felt the right hold of the ropes around his body. His

mind was so quiet, focused only on the wonderful sensations of Rozanov's hands, the touch of their bodies, the pressure of the rope.

Ilya cradled Shane against his chest as he watched the sub's breathing slow and even out. He took a cloth from beside the mat and gently wiped down Shane's stomach and chest.

Shane hummed and sighed deeply in his arms and Ilya simply held him there. He ignored his own erection, pressed against Shane's back. He could deal with that later when his sub was back and cared for.

Fuck. Shane was not his sub. What was wrong with him today? Ever since Shane had texted him, since he had kissed Ilya when he arrived, he was just distracted.

Ilya forced himself back into the moment. He gently began undoing the knots, pulling the ropes free, keeping constant contact with Shane's body as he did. Once the ropes were gone, Ilya lifted Shane up and into his bed, whispering praises for him the entire time.

He rubbed soothing cream onto Shane's ass and held a cold pack there to minimize the sting and marks. He relished seeing the marks from the ropes imprinted in Shane's skin, and tried to let go of the possessive feeling that grew at the sight of them. That was just the nature of his dom instincts, it didn't need to mean anything more.

For a moment, Ilya got lost in the memory of the first time Shane had been in his bed, over a year ago when he had been terrified and lost, but still sought out Ilya for comfort. If only that Shane and Ilya could see them now.

"Hey," Shane said, drawing Ilya's mind back to the present.

Ilya gently tipped a bottle of water to his lips, and Shane gratefully drank.

"How are you feeling, Hollander?"

"I need —"

Ilya nodded. He would give this sub whatever he wanted. The moon? The universe? He could have it.

"I need you," Shane said finally. He rotated down so that his face was in Ilya's lap, mouthing at the dom's very obvious erection.

"Hollander, you don't have to —"

"Please. Rozanov, please, I want to taste you."

Well fuck. Ilya was only human. Who was he to deny the needy sub in his lap? He lifted his hips and pushed down his pants and boxers. Shane's mouth on him immediately.

Shane licked and teased the tip, swirling his tongue around the head and clearly enjoying the sound he got from Ilya. He took a little more in his mouth, inch by inch, letting his throat

relax and as he moved at a tortuously slow pace that had Ilya squeezing the sheets between his fingers.

“Fuck, Hollander, da, just like that, your mouth is so good, was made for this, was made for me.”

And there it was again. This thing that was becoming clearer the longer Ilya refused to look at it. They didn’t have sex outside the scene; sometimes sex wasn’t even a part of the scenes they did, and they both knew they each dealt with themselves after Ilya went home. Today, something was different. Because usually it was Ilya’s dom nature that pushed him into Shane’s arms and bed, but tonight it didn’t feel the same. It didn’t feel like nature or dynamic hormones or dom instincts, it was just him.

Ilya just wanted Shane.

Shane’s mouth moved more urgently, and Ilya found himself thrusting his hips up.

“Yes. Please, fuck my mouth,” Shane gasped, his hand now wrapping around the base of Ilyas cock to help move him closer.

Their bodies moved in perfect rhythm, and soon, Ilya tapped on Shane’s head, knowing he couldn’t delay his orgasm much longer. Shane gave a slight shake of his head and sucked down hard, swallowing down Ilya’s cum as his hips jerked and tensed.

Ilya couldn’t stop himself. He pulled Shane up and claimed his mouth, tasting himself on the sub’s tongue. Shane returned the kiss with equal passion, tangling his fingers in Ilya’s curls and pressing their bodies even closer together if that was even possible.

Ilya folded himself into Shane’s arms, his head tucked under the sub’s chin.

“Stay?” Ilya whispered into his chest.

Shane nodded sleepily. He couldn’t imagine being anywhere else.

***

When Shane awoke, it took him a minute to realize where he was. The bed, while very comfortable, was not his. The blankets piled on top of him felt different. The room had some natural light, but the shadows on the wall were not the ones he knew from his home.

For a moment, an aching panic and confusion began to set in. He had been taken again. But no, his body didn’t hurt, his limbs weren’t restrained, he didn’t feel drugged.

Rozanov. He had come over to Rozanov’s apartment and they had done a scene and Shane had … fallen asleep here? Oops. They had never slept over, always keeping a clear line when the aftercare was done. Apparently last night, Shane had broken that unspoken rule.

He got up and saw a clean pair of boxers, a pair of soft joggers and a t-shirt laid out on the nightstand next to the bed. Shane gratefully put them on before padding out to the kitchen where he smelled coffee and breakfast.

“Good morning Sleepy Beauty,” Rozanov greeted with a smile, looking up from his phone.

The memory hit Shane like a tidal wave. He was no longer standing in Rozanov’s kitchen in Montreal. He was standing in a different kitchen, wearing different borrowed clothes, while Rozanov happily chatted and served him breakfast. His body ached at the phantom pains of injuries long healed. His mind tormented him with the feeling of being caged.

“Hollander are you —?”

A pair of strong arms prevented him from falling, and Rozanov’s eyes met his.

“Shane? Shane?”

The sound of his name pulled Shane back into the present.

“There you are. Shit, I’m sorry, I didn’t think —. Come, sit. I’m sorry, I’m sorry.”

Shane let Rozanov guide him to a chair and the dom rubbed soothing circles on his back.

“I’m sorry,” Shane said eventually. “I didn’t … that was … it’s been awhile since I had a memory trigger that strong. Sorry. I .. sorry.”

Rozanov kissed him gently. “Nothing to be sorry for. But you’re safe now, yes?”

Shane nodded.

“What happened to you was horrible, you don’t have to pretend it’s not uh, in the background sometimes,” Rozanov said softly. “I know you have a good life now, but there is no shame in the bad memories.”

“It took months for me to even start feeling normal again,” Shane whispered sadly. “I couldn’t go anywhere or trust anyone new or do anything for weeks when I got home.”

“Tell me?”

So Shane did.

Chapter End Notes

Next time we will get the missing year from Shane's POV, with Ilya providing colorful commentary throughout.

Also. This story will end with 13 chapters, but I have begun plotting out the sequel. I'm not ready to let go of this version of Hollanov yet and I hope you'll stick around for part 2 :)

Chapter 10: The Missing Year

1+ Year Ago, Santa Fe

Shane paced back and forth in the hotel room. He checked the time, he checked the flight schedule, he pushed down the anxiety that threatened to creep in again. For the first time in years, the knock on his door settled his nerves instead of triggering him.

“Shane!” His mom exclaimed as she wrapped him in a tight hug. “Oh sweetheart, I can’t believe it. Fuck, I’m so happy to see you.”

Shane sighed in relief. It was finally over. He was finally going home.

“We have flights for this evening. Your dad will pick us up at the airport in Ottawa. Do you need anything? Are you still in a drop? Did you eat today yet? We can schedule an emergency clinic visit and one of us will wait for you right outside the door so you’ll know you’re safe.”

Yuna always had a plan. She always thought ten steps ahead and made contingency plans. Shane couldn’t tell her he had gone back to Rozanov’s last night. He couldn’t face the questions or the fear he would see in her eyes. Maybe she would be disappointed in him. He hadn’t seen his mom in over three years and he couldn’t bear to shatter her image of him now.

> *“I never told them,” Shane said. “They still don’t know I came back to you. At first I thought I’d tell them later, but then, it never felt right. Those first months were so heavy and I couldn’t find the right time or words. I’m sorry.”*
>
> *Ilya nodded. “I understand. Is okay.”*
>
> *“Part of me still wondered if you would stop me from leaving. If maybe I had been wrong, if you really were gonna hurt me. I’m sorry. I’m sorry I didn’t trust you, even after everything you did.”*
>
> *“You couldn’t trust me yet,” Ilya said sadly. “You had been through something terrible. I understand, Hollander. Is okay.”*

“I’m actually a bit better now,” Shane said vaguely. “I think I just needed some rest. We can go to the clinic when we get back,” he added to allay her suspicions. “I just really want to leave this place.”

Shane showered and changed into the clean clothes Yuna had brought for him. It had been three years since he had worn his own clothes. His body had changed shape and they didn’t quite fit right, which, to be fair, nothing really felt like it fit right at this moment. He had been alone for so long, he wasn’t sure how to act around his mom, how much to tell her, how much to edit out. He didn’t want her to hear all the terrible things that had been done to him in the past few years, but he also couldn’t just slip back into his old self. He felt like an old t-

shirt that didn't fit anymore, he didn't know where his own edges were or how he was supposed to sit or stand or breath.

The journey back to Ottawa passed in a blur. Every moment, Shane was convinced something would happen to stop him from getting home. Would Andrei send someone after him? Would someone notice his injuries and pull them aside at airport security? Shane belatedly realized that he was not as worried about Rozanov following him as he should be. Maybe the mystery dom really was who he said.

Yuna never let him out of her sight until they were back across the border, as though worried if she blinked, he would disappear. She didn't ask too many questions, an unspoken agreement between them that everything could wait until they were home.

The first few days were quiet, but deeply stressful. David took Shane to the doctor to get his injuries treated, and the entire visit Shane could feel his body in fight or flight as the memories of being taken from the dynamics clinic resurfaced. His mom arranged meetings with the local police to take his statement about the kidnapping. He visited the emergency clinic and scened to stabilize his hormones. He was glad he wasn't actually actively dropped anymore, he was so anxious being back in the clinic that he felt sick and nauseous the whole time.

The first few weeks home, Shane spent a lot of time reading, wandering around his parents house, trying to banish the ghosts in his mind. He tried working out, something that had always settled his mind. He didn't want to go to the gym yet, so he set up a space in the garage with weights and a yoga mat. The exercise helped in the moments his body was active, but once it was ended, all the terror crept back in. Every car that drove by the house made him jump, certain someone would come take him away again.

Yuna set up an appointment with a therapist who focused on trauma recovery. Shane hesitated, but eventually agreed to go.

He woke up in cold sweat almost every night, haunted by nightmares. He jumped at loud noises and sudden movement in his periphery. Once he dropped a plate and it broke apart. Shane had a full panic attack, worried someone would punish him. David had found him kneeling in the kitchen, sobbing and apologizing, curled in on himself as though waiting for a hit. David had wrapped his arms around his son, helping him slow his breathing, reminding him that it was just a plate and he wasn't going to be punished. Shane felt like a child, being comforted for something a stupid as a broken plate.

> *Ilya wrapped his arms tightly around Shane, running his fingers through his hair and trying to soothe him.*

Basic tasks like going to the grocery store seemed impossible, Shane couldn't ignore the feeling that someone was watching him, that someone would jump out and attack him. After his first trip outside the house by himself, he had locked himself in his room for hours, curled in on himself under a blanket. He tried to soothe himself and realized he was dreaming of strong, calloused hands and a gentle voice with a Russian accent. He imagined Rozanov's arms around him, the comforting weight of him holding Shane tight.

Yuna vetted several dynamics clinics and one of them always went with him, waiting in the lobby while Shane scened. It was awkward having his parents wait for him like a kid at the dentist, he was an adult, but it was better than being trafficked again. Shane wasn't sure if she did it for his sake or hers, but he was grateful.

A month after he got home, Shane's best friend Rose came to visit. They had been friends since university, dealt with rumors of them dating (they never did) and continued to talk almost everyday after graduation. She had grown close with Shane's parents during his missing years, never giving up hope he'd come home.

Rose wrapped Shane in a tight hug and didn't leave his side during her visit. They stayed up late watching movies, eating Shane's favorite snacks and talking about the time Before as though the recent past couldn't touch those memories. Rose's enthusiasm for everything was infectious. She begged Shane to take her to her favorite breakfast diner, and reluctantly, he did. And nothing bad happened, they just gorged themselves on waffles and diner syrup like they were back in university.

The next day Rose said she wanted to go take some new pictures in the park with the changing autumn leaves. She took Shane shopping and picked out "cute fall outfits" for both of them. Shane found that the department store wasn't as scary with Rose holding his hand. He even found that he excitement and laughter in the park while he tried to pose with her for photos distracted him from his usual hyper vigilance in public. By the time Rose's trip was over, Shane felt ready to walk down the street to the local coffeeshop without having a panic attack.

Four months went by before Shane approached his parents about looking for a job. David was worried that it was too soon, and Yuna agreed, but encouraged Shane to keep an eye out for something he would like doing and not feel rushed.

Six months of therapy showed Shane he needed a fresh start, away from the ghosts of Ottawa, away from the memories of the past. He had been trying so hard to fit into his old life instead of moving forward. He needed to start again, to figure out who he was *now* instead of just shoving himself into the shape of someone he wasn't anymore. His parents were supportive, under the condition he stayed within driving distance. Shane's therapist helped him understand that his kidnapping hadn't just traumatized him, but had left a mark on his parents as well. They could all help each other heal by finding healthy boundaries together.

"Shane, did you see this job post?" Yuna asked over dinner, passing him her phone.

Shane scanned through it. Sports coordinator and Coach. Centaurs Community Center. Queer run and inclusive setting.

"I think you'd be perfect," Yuna said. "It's in Montreal. Which could give you the fresh start you're looking for. You already know the city, it could be great."

So Shane applied. Drove out to Montreal for the interview. He insisted that he could go alone. Felt at ease the moment he walked past the funny mural on the front wall of the Centaurs

building. He met Hayden and Harris. And Harris's boyfriend Troy, who would be the assistant coach for the new sports program.

"You'll be starting from scratch," the director of the center, Wiebe, told Shane. "So there's a lot of freedom for you to build it the way you want, but also, you'll have to recruit and get people interested."

A month later, Shane moved into his new apartment in Montreal. Hayden, who immediately declared they would be best friends, had even showed up to help him unpack. A few days later, Rose had come to visit again.

"Have you found somewhere safe to scene yet?" Rose asked as they lounged on the couch with takeout and watched one of the movies she'd released during the missing years. Rose hated watching her own movies, but Shane loved getting her behind the scenes commentary and all the drama on set or things that went wrong during filming.

Shane shook his head. "Centaurs has a clinic, but I'm …"

"Scared?" Rose reached out and put a hand on his shoulder.

Shane nodded. "I guess if I'm working there I shouldn't be. But…."

"But working there is different. Because you're fully in control and aware. Scening means actually letting go of that. I get it. It's not stupid," she clarified, knowing what Shane was about to say.

Rose stayed for a few days and one night when Shane came home particularly exhausted and stressed, they'd done a brief scene together to help his mind and body settle. They'd done this in college when neither of them had a consistent partner, and while it never fully worked for both of them, the emotional connection they'd built up over years of being friends provided enough relief for the buzzing under Shane's skin.

A month after joining Centaurs, Shane approached Hayden in his professional role.

"This looks serious?" Hayden said as Shane closed the office door.

"The clinic." Shane's voice was awkward. He didn't know how to approach this. He felt so embarrassed by the fact his body needed this. To his credit, Hayden just waited.

"The clinic," Shane tried again. "Are there any spots open, for uh, for a sub?"

Hayden gave him a small smile. "Yes, there are. Do you have someone to refer?"

Good friend Hayden, giving him an out if he wanted it.

"Is it available to staff?" Shane asked, already knowing the answer.

Hayden nodded, patiently waiting for the question.

"Okay. I might like this Hayden, he knows you well enough to help," Ilya interjected.

"He does. He's a really good friend. Maybe I'll introduce you if you promise to behave."

After several excruciating minutes, Shane had finally asked Hayden if he could join the clinic as a client for monthly dynamics maintenance.

"Were you scared, first time?"

Shane nodded, "Yeah, of course. I was terrified. But it wasn't so bad. It helped. And then I went again the next month, and it wasn't as scary, and then something happened and I needed to add a session and it was fine."

And it *was* fine.

Shane had thought that recovery would mean one day woke up and suddenly everything was good again. That the clouds would part and suddenly he'd feel right again. Turns out, it didn't work like that. More like a slow turning, day after day, until he realized he was feeling alert because he wasn't up half the night recovering from a nightmare. Until Hayden invited him over for family dinner —

"With his fifteen children?"

"Three! Don't be an ass."

— and Shane had felt like he could trust someone new again. Until one day Harris offered him leftovers from the cooking club and he wasn't afraid of being drugged. It had happened gradually, like water cutting its way through a mountain until one day a new river was formed.

Two months ago, Rose was filming a new movie in NYC. She hadn't seen Shane since her visit to Montreal and she'd asked if he wanted to come visit. All of her scenes had to be shot midday and at sunset, so she promised him brunch in the Village and late dinners at her favorite restaurants. Shane had struggled for two days, even chatted with Hayden about whether he was ready for an international trip, especially back to the States. He worried about his passport being taken again, about disappearing in a city where no one knew him.

"This is like, really stressing you out," Hayden observed. "I know we haven't been friends very long, but if there's something you wanna talk about, I'm here, you know that right? I know you're a very private person and I respect that. But it seems like there's something eating at you, and I just want you to know I'm here."

And that was how Shane realized he'd been walking through his life assuming everyone knew everything that had happened to him. In his parents' neighborhood back home he was the missing sub who had been found, his old friend group couldn't see him as anything else than an escaped victim. Shane had just never said anything at Centaurs and even in moments of panic, no one had ever pushed him to divulge his past.

Shane told Hayden everything. It poured out of him and the words just wouldn't stop. He could finally tell the story from his own perspective, to choose what he included and what he kept to himself. It wasn't the police or a doctor or anyone who could pressure him for more

than he was ready to say. And he wanted to tell Hayden. He wanted his friend to know him and all the baggage he carried.

When he finally stopped Hayden just hugged him and thanked him for trusting him. And then told him to get his ass to New York and have a fun weekend.

“You work harder than anyone here. You’ve built an entire program from nothing with a hilarious excuse for a budget. You deserve to have some fun. Go. Enjoy. And come home safe. You have people on your side, Shane. No one here would ever let you disappear. I've got your parents number, you'll text me so you know that I know you're safe. And you'll come home.”

“I’m glad you came to New York, perhaps I owe Hayden some thanks for pushing you,” Ilya said, kissing Shane. “I am so impressed by the life you built for yourself, I am lucky to be part of it.”

Ilya abruptly stopped, as though worried he had said too much, been too vulnerable. Shane burrowed closer against him on the couch and kissed him slowly.

“I’m the lucky one. Not only were you not a depraved trafficker, but you’re the only person I …” Shane decided to be brave, “the only person I have ever wanted this with.”

“Ghosts are gone now, yes?” Ilya asked, running a hand along Shane’s back. “Good. Now we eat.”

Chapter 11

Rozanov: Can you talk?

Shane: Sure, what's up?

Less than a minute later, Shane's phone rang.

"Hey. How are you?"

"Not good. Probably bad," came Ilya's reply.

"What happened, are you okay?"

For a moment, Shane's mind cycled through all the things that could have happened to Ilya. Did he fail to find the person he was looking for? Did he get hurt?

"Yes, I am safe, don't worry, Hollander. I am in one piece, I promise. It was … It was a very rough trip."

Shane waited, hoping that Ilya would expand.

After a long pause, Ilya continued, "I went to house we have been keeping eye on. Sveta heard some rumors so I went to check it out. It was, uh, it was not good. The Doms there are rougher than they need to be, the subs are not well taken care of. It was hard to watch. I don't understand, Hollander, I don't understand. Fuck. I'm sorry."

"It's okay," Shane assured him. "Are you back? Do you want to come over and talk in person?"

"Yes," Ilya said quickly. "But, I don't want to spoil your evening. I'm sorry, I should not have called, I can go."

"Don't hang up," Shane interrupted. He could hear how awful Ilya sounded and he couldn't imagine letting him disappear in this state of mind. "Please. It's okay. You can talk to me, I promise."

"I don't. I'm not. I."

"Rozanov, come over here and let's talk. For my sake," Shane said, wondering if he could get Ilya's Dom instincts to kick in and pressure him to come see Shane. "Please, I could really use the company. It's been a long day and I could use some grounding touch. Please."

"I know what you're doing, Hollander."

"Is it working?"

"Okay, I'm coming." Even in those three words, Ilya's tone sounded lighter.

Shane spent a few minutes pacing around his apartment. He pulled out some of Ilya's favorite snacks that he had started stashing in his pantry and laid them out on the counter. He checked that the living room and bathroom were tidy, as though that was a real concern. He tried not to obsess over what had upset Ilya so much, he would hear about it soon anyway.

When Ilya arrived, he hung up his jacket and toed off his shoes before collapsing into Shane's arms.

"Welcome back," Shane said into his hair. "I missed you."

"Missed you too," Ilya mumbled into his shoulder. "Sorry. Has been very long day."

Shane led him into the livingroom, where he'd laid out snacks on the coffee table.

"Hollander, you don't eat this kind of stuff," Ilya said, shoving a fistfull of popcorn into his mouth

"But you do," Shane said, shrugging. "I got all the same brands I see at your place, I hope that's okay."

Ilya's eyes widened. "You got –? Hollander, I don't deserve you."

Shane laughed. "We can argue about that later." He shifted to sit partially behind Ilya so that the dom could lean back against his chest and Shane could wrap his arms around him. "Tell me what happened." He kissed behind Ilya's ear.

Ilya sighed in frustration. "Sveta gets call that someone is running a ring that isn't safe. I went to go check it out. Similar to how I got into Andrei's, I pretend to be interested as someone who runs club, they welcome me in, and because I have big scary reputation, they can't wait to show me how terrible they are."

"I'm sorry, that must be really hard to play that part while also caring so much about the people there." Shane kissed his neck again, offering gentle reassurance of his presence.

Ilya leaned into the touch. "Yes, it was awful. It always is. But I tell myself is worth it for the people I help. But last night. *Fuck*. Last night I see someone I had rescued before. Someone I got out. Someone I helped go back to regular life. I thought she had been kidnapped again or trafficked or sold or something terrible. And I thought about how awful it would be to be free and then be taken again. And then I worried about you. What if someone took you again. What if someone hurt you again."

Shane squeezed Ilya tightly, leaning forward to speak softly in his ear. "No one is going to take me," he promised. "But it means so much to me that you care this much. Did you speak to her?"

Ilya nodded. "Yes, I asked house master if I could use her for scene in private room. Once I got her alone, I asked her all of this. I was trying to figure out a way to get her out again without losing my cover. Do you know what she said? She said she *wanted* to be there. She *chose* to go back. She hated me for taking her from her former master, and she was scared if

she went back to her last domme, she would hurt or kill her, so she had to settle for this place. Hollander, she wanted to be owned like this. She wanted to be hurt and taken."

"It was awful," Ilya said, shuddering. "I remember getting her free the first time. It was a very tricky case, and we basically had to purchase her contract. It was a mess. But I told myself it was worth it. And it wasn't. What if –. What if she's right, and I was wrong to free her? What if there are others like her who have gone back or wish I'd never helped them? What if everything I'm doing is mistake? I thought I was doing good, but maybe nothing I do even matters."

"Hey, hey, no, absolutely not," Shane interrupted. "Everything you do matters, Rozanov. *Everything.* You helped me. And you've seen how great my life is now. There has to be more like me than like her."

"But I didn't help her!"

"Yes, you did. You gave her a *choice*. That's what you always told me, that you return the choice to people who had it taken away. You gave her agency again, and that is a priceless gift."

"Then why did she go back?" Ilya said helplessly.

"I don't know. Maybe it really was what she wanted. Maybe she got traumatized in a way that her sub instincts needed to be back in that dynamic. Maybe she needs the pain or the fear now, and maybe it works for her. Like a coping mechanism or something. Maybe that was always the outcome for her."

There was a long, hard pause, and Shane could see Ilya was trying to decide if he should say something. He could feel the tension in the dom's body, the subtle shift of his shoulders against Shane's chest.

"Hollander, is that what this is?" Ilya whispered, his voice filled with fear. "Am I … Am I your coping mechanism?"

"What? No!" The idea was absurd.

"You disappear for a year. You don't find regular scene partner, you don't want to," Ilya's voice revealed the internal spiral taking hold of him. "Then suddenly you see me in club and you invite me back to hotel, you tell me to be rough, you tell me to hurt you –"

"I told you I was okay with pain. You know as much as I do there's a difference between pain and hurt, Rozanov."

Ilya continued, his voice hard. "You tell me to hurt you. Now we live in same city and you only play with me. You want me to be hard, to be rough, to cause you pain. Am I the only outcome for you?"

Shane shifted sideways and tipped Ilya's face towards him so he could look him in the eye when he said, "Listen to me. Absolutely not. That is not what this is. It never has been. I

trusted you the day after I left your place, the day I realized everything you told me was real. I thought about you for a year because I couldn't believe someone like you not only existed, but managed to get me home. I had basically given up when you met me, and you showed me that I deserved another chance. The night I saw you in that club, it was like seeing a lighthouse in a storm. Everything about you settled me; being near you was enough to captivate me. I invited you to my room because I wanted you; I didn't want pain, I didn't want marks or binding or anything in particular, I wanted you. I still do. If you told me right now that we would never play again, or that we would never do anything beyond kneeling, I would still want you. I would still text you about my day, I would still want to be close to you and order takeout and watch stupid action movies together. Rozanov, you are not taking the place of trauma in my head, you are a fucking gift that I don't deserve."

Shane could feel the tears threatening to spill from his eyes, and he tried to slow his breathing. He had probably said way too much. His earnestness would probably scare Ilya away. But he didn't care. He couldn't hold this inside any longer.

Ilya leaned forward, grabbing his face and kissing him, hungry and passionate. He tangled his hands in Shane's hair and pulled him closer, breathing heavily as he kissed and nipped at his lips. Shane leaned back on the couch, letting Ilya straddle his lap as they continued to devour each others' mouths. Nothing felt as good as kissing Ilya. Nothing could replace this feeling, nothing could ever feel this right or fit this perfectly.

After several breathless minutes, they pulled apart and simply lay tangled together on the couch.

"Have you eaten today?" asked Shane. "Can I make you some lunch?"

Ilya shook his head. "I had coffee and bagel at the airport, but was not much. Can I, um, can I make you, *us* some food?"

"Rozanov, it's my house. I'm not gonna invite you over here and then make you cook."

"Hollander, I –. Okay, I promise this is not why I came here, but I have favor to ask."

"Okay?"

"Can I make you food. Please?"

Shane processed this and thought he understood the question behind the question. "You need to take care of someone?"

Ilya nodded. "Is like, bees buzzing under my skin. Or like when you come into bright sunshine after dark room. I can't explain well. But yes, I need … I need to take care of you. It feels so good to take care of you, and I need that right now. Please."

Shane kissed him softly and nodded. "You can tell me, I promise it's not a problem. You never have to apologize for taking care of me. It feels … it feels good to me too."

Ilya smiled and headed to the kitchen. Shane let himself relax on the couch, turning on the tv and letting whatever sports game was playing go on in the background.

Shane was glad Ilya had called him. He was glad they had talked, he didn't want Ilya to think for a moment that their scenes were some kind of trauma response for Shane. It never had been, Shane knew that with certainty. He had been drawn to Ilya even when he thought he was Ilya's prisoner; even when he was terrified of him, some deep, primal part of him had still wanted Ilya. Running into him again this year had been the most insane and best thing to ever happen to Shane. He could still barely believe the dom who he wanted so badly, wanted him just as much.

Ilya returned with sandwiches and drinks. Shane didn't pick up his food, merely smiled, his eyes slightly downcast, watching Ilya.

Understanding and an immediate warmth bloomed in Ilya's chest. He picked up the ginger ale and opened it. He held it up to Shane's mouth and the sub took a long sip.

Ilya broke off a piece of one of the sandwiches and slowly held it out to Shane. Shane's lips left a ghost of a kiss on Ilya's fingers as he took the bite. Ilya shivered and they repeated the motion, again and again. When half the sandwich is gone, Ilya held the can up again, and Shane gratefully drank, Ilya watching his throat as he swallowed the liquid.

"So perfect," Ilya praised, held out another piece and ran his thumb along Shane's lower lip as he took it. "So good for me."

When Ilya had fed Shane his entire meal, Shane slowly slid down off the couch and knelt in front of Ilya, resting his head against the dom's knee.

"Hollander –"

"You never have to apologize for wanting to take care of me," Shane reminded him. "And you haven't eaten yet, sir."

Ilya's hand stroked through his hair and Shane let his eyes close. He could do this for Ilya, he wanted to do this for Ilya. He heard Ilya eat his own lunch, one hand still on Shane's head, or brushing the back of his neck, or rubbing his back.

The feeling of serving Ilya like this was indescribable for Shane. He heard the dom sigh and relax as he finished his meal, his body settling against Shane's. Shane wanted to do more for him, to show him how well he could take care of Ilya too.

Shane gently kissed Ilya's knee. Then let his hands wander up along Ilya's legs, and kiss his thighs, and mouthing at his dick through his pants. He could hear Ilya's breathing changing as they both slipped deeper into the dynamic.

Shane could feel Ilya getting hard and continued to tease with his mouth. Eventually, he needed more. He needed to touch, to taste. Ilya clearly needed this too and pulled his pants down far enough for Shane to take him in his mouth.

“Fuckkkkkk,” he breathed out. “Yes, you are so good, Hollander, you are so perfect.”

Shane felt himself beginning to float already, it was always so easy with Ilya. He never had to try to settle his mind, the moment he touched Ilya, all of the noise simply faded away. Right now, he wanted to be good for Ilya, to show Ilya how safe and comfortable he felt with him. Wanted to be as close as possible, but didn’t have the patience to properly prep himself.

He pulled off and climbed onto Ilya’s lap, pulling down his own pants to take out his now hard cock, and taking both of them in hand. Ilya pulled him in for a kiss, their mouths and bodies moving in perfect unison.

Shane’s mind was quiet, all he could hear were the sounds of pleasure and desperation coming from Ilya. All he could think about was being good for Ilya, pleasing him, helping him feel as content in his body and role as he made Shane feel in his. His lips crushed against the dom’s, trying to pour everything he felt into the kiss.

Their movements became more urgent, less steady, as they both got closer. Ilya wrapped one hand around Shane’s, stroking them off together, while the other he used to pull the subs mouth against his.

“Oh, fuck, Shane,” Ilya panted out as he came, his breathing heavy, his eyes wild with lust and adoration.

“Ilya,” Shane gasped, resting their foreheads together as he finished. The world was so pleasantly muted in Shane’s mind, all he could think about was kissing the beautiful man under him, all he could imagine was hearing his name spill from Ilya’s lips. And he needed to hear it again.

Ilya leaned up to kiss him, but Shane pulled away for a second, trying to get his bearings.

They didn’t do this. They didn’t play together because one of them needed it, it has always been for fun only, never maintenance. But Shane hadn’t hesitated when Ilya called to invite him over. He hadn’t hesitated when Ilya told him his dom side needed to take care of Shane and make him lunch. He hadn’t hesitated to get on his knees, knowing it would help his dom regulate.

His dom? Well. That was different.

Shane opened his eyes to see Ilya watching him, his brows tight with concern.

“Shane?” He whispered, as though unsure he could use the name.

Shane stood, faster than he should have, his head rushing a little bit. He saw fear cross Ilya’s eyes and he realized his dom must think he had done something wrong or that Shane was pushing him away. Shane reached down and pulled Ilya up with him, taking his hand and basically out pulling him down the hallway into the bedroom.

“Take me to bed,” Shane said, kissing him hard. “Please. Ilya. Please, I need you. I need you to take me, to mark me. I need to hear you say it a thousand more times. Ilya, please, I need

you Ilya."

Ilya's lit up immediately and fuck, Shane would do anything to keep that smile on Ilya's face.

"Shane," Ilya said, kissing him again and again. "Shane, you are so perfect. My wonderful, beautiful, Shane."

Ilya pushed Shane down on the bed, holding his wrists above his head and kissing him relentlessly. "I'm going to have my way with you, yes? I'm going to make you scream my name again and again until you're too overstimulated to even speak. I'm going to mark and kiss you and touch you until you're begging for release."

Shane groaned, his mind slipping down into subspace already. "Yes Ilya, please Ilya, green, yes, I want it. I want it all. Please Ilya, I need you."

Ilya took his time, taking Shane apart. He bound his wrists, he kissed and bit his way across his chest. He opened Shane up slowly, bringing him to the edge again and again, pulling back before it became too much. He eventually stroked him with one hand while curling his fingers inside until Shane came with Ilya's name on his lips. Then he entered his already too sensitive hole and thrust hard and fast until he ripped another orgasm from Shane while chasing his release. He chanted constant praises using Shane's name, watching how it pushed him deeper and deeper, until he was soft and pliable under Ilya's touch.

Afterwards, Ilya whispered how good he was while wiping them both down and making Shane drink water and electrolytes and feeding him pieces of chocolate. Afterwards, Ilya wrapped them both in Shane's favorite quilt and they fell asleep tangled together.

Shane awoke to feel a strong body under him and it took his mind a moment to catch up and remember the previous night.

Ilya must have felt him move, he whispered into the darkness, "Is okay kotik, is middle of the night, go back to sleep."

"You stayed?" Shane asked sleepily, as though he couldn't believe it.

"Yes." A pause. "Do you want me to leave?"

Shane burrowed deeper into the quilt and against Ilya, locking him in place. "Absolutely not. Please stay, Ilya. Please be here when I wake up."

"I will, Shane. Get some sleep."

Chapter 12

“Hey man. Thanks for coming by.” Hayden looked stressed, but tried to hide it behind a smile.

Shane took a seat in Hayden’s office. “What’s up?”

Hayden pushed a bunch of folders aside on his desk. “So. We have a bit of a problem at the clinic. Two of our doms are out. Gillian started her parental leave, yes, the baby came several weeks early. Also, Patrick had to go back to Vancouver to take care of his mom for a few months. So we are short staffed over here.”

“Whoa. Okay, no wonder you look stressed,” Shane said. “Can I do anything? Or like, take you out for a drink?”

Hayden laughed. “Absolutely. But yes. I have a very uncomfortable job this week. I’m sorting through our current caseload and trying to see if there’s anyone we can send to alternative locations. I have a question, and I hate even asking you this.”

“Hayd, just spit it out.”

“Okay. Sorry. Like I said this is awkward. I’m chatting with staff who use the clinic to see if anyone can make personal arrangements elsewhere, just until we’re back to full staff. I know you have someone you play with, is there any chance that you can … I dunno, scene with him for a bit? Like on a regular basis? Probably just for a few months. I know this a big ask, and I don’t want to interfere with your dynamic, or relationship or whatever label you did or didn't put on it, but, is there any chance?”

Shane considered this. He and Ilya and had decided that they didn’t do maintenance, but they had also let their roles evolve as their trust grew. Ilya had felt comfortable asking Shane to help him, maybe this wouldn’t be so hard. A few months relying on Ilya, and Shane could push himself to his limits, that was maybe two to three times. Okay, he could ask Ilya.

“Yeah. I can ask.”

“Really? Okay thanks Shane. This is a huge help. And if he says no, then we will figure something out for you. Don’t like, not scene or anything, okay, we’ll find you someone.”

“I won’t,” Shane promised. “I’ll talk to him and see what he says.”

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Shane: Hey are you around tonight?

Ilya: Maybe ;)

Shane: Can I come over? I want to talk to you about something.

Ilya: Of course. I'm home all day, come over whenever.

Ilya: Everything ok?

Shane: Yeah

Shane: I have a favor to ask. Nothing serious

Shane: Well, I guess a little serious

Shane: Wait, not like wrong serious.

Shane: Nothing is wrong.

Incoming Call from Ilya Rozanov

"Shane, you are freaking out, what's going on?"

"I'm sorry, I shouldn't have sent so many texts. I just, I need to talk to you, but it's not an emergency or anything."

"Are you done at work? Come over now. We talk."

Shane sucked in a breath. There was a difference between thinking about talking to Ilya about this and actually talking to him about it.

"Shane?"

"Right, yeah, sorry. Okay, yeah, I can come over now."

"Do you need me to come get you? You sound distracted or upset."

"No, no it's fine. I'm okay, I promise. I'll be there soon," Shane managed to say.

Half an hour later, Shane was sitting on Ilya's couch, staring at the cold soda in his hands and trying to figure out how to ask Ilya. He had never had a recurring scene partner, he had never really wanted one. He didn't actually know how people approached these conversations.

"Shane." Ilya sat down next to Shane and ran a hand along his back, coming to rest on the back of his neck. He applied the slightest bit of pressure there, and watched content as the sub relaxed into the touch. "Tell me."

That version of Ilya's voice always helped him focus. Shane needed to ask because Ilya told him to.

"You know that one of the services we offer at the community center is a scene clinic. Most people who come through the center are queer, so it's really important we have safe spaces

and vetted doms or subs for them to scene with." Shane took a breath. Ilya nodded along, he knew all of this. Okay, so far so good. "One of our doms just went on early parental leave, and another had to go home to take care of his mom. Since we're short staffed, Hayden, my friend who runs the clinic, has asked the staff who use the clinic if we can make … outside arrangements."

Ilya nodded. He could see where this might be going. He rubbed his thumb against the back of Shane's neck, encouraging him to continue.

"I know that we said we don't do this for maintenance. And you should say no if you feel uncomfortable or weird about it or just, I dunno. I don't mind, I can figure out another option, they won't kick me out of the clinic, it's just about trying to balance the number of clients they have. But, I was wondering." Fuck, why was this so hard? He looked over at Ilya, as though the dom would simply answer the unasked question.

Ilya smiled at him. "Be good and ask your question, Shane."

How did he always know how to apply the right amount of pressure to let Shane help himself?

"It would just be for a few months, but would you, would you be open to being a regular scene partner?"

"Very good," Ilya whispered, running his hand along Shane's spine again and watching his breathing catch at the praise and touch. "So brave to ask."

Shane closed his eyes for a moment and just enjoyed the feeling of Ilya's hand on him. When he opened them, Ilya was smiling at him.

"Of course," Ilya said. "I know you have not wanted scene partner in the past, but since I came to Montreal, feels like maybe that's what we've been doing? This would just make it more formal, and scheduled. That would help you, yes, if we have schedule?"

Shane let out the breath he was holding. "Really?"

"Yes, Shane. Were you so nervous to ask me? Did you think I would chase you away or something? What have we been doing since we both moved here?"

"Right. Yeah. But this is different. Cuz like. I usually make sure my hormones are all balanced and that I'm not as risk for drops or anything by going to the clinic. And then we can just play, and it's separate. But I. I trust you. And if you're sure, only if you're sure, I don't want you to think I'll disappear or something if you say no, you can say no, obviously, I mean –"

"Hollander, you are going to have panic attack if you keep talking so fast. Is okay, is just a plan to play and maybe fuck, and play some more. Don't panic, okay? I said yes. We can do this."

Shane wanted to kiss him. Shane felt like he could float from just this conversation. Ilya wanted to help him, he wanted to spend more time with Shane, he wasn't tired of him or –

"Stop thinking so loud, Hollander," Ilya said, applying that soothing pressure at the back of his neck again and letting his hand rest there.

"Sorry, sorry. I think I got more nervous about asking you than I needed to. Thank you, Ilya, I really appreciate it."

"If we both like it, we can always renegotiate if it's more long term after your clinic can take you back, yes? We can talk about it when you have multiple options."

Shane sighed in relief. How did he end up with the most perfect dom? He had thought about that already but hadn't wanted to add more pressure to the situation. But Ilya had also already thought about it and was offering a solution where neither felt obligated or trapped.

"How about I kiss you and help you relax, and then after we can talk more specifics?" Ilya asked.

Shane nodded, leaning into his dom, his lips parting in expectation. He loved the way Ilya handled him, knew him, met his needs. But that was the problem, right? This would no longer be simply wanting, but needing Ilya to touch him to keep him level.

That thought snagged in his mind and Shane pulled back. "I don't want … I don't want to need you, though, I don't want to be a burden or an obligation or –"

"Who told you that you are burden?"

"What? No, I mean, I love that we just do this because we want to, not because we have to."

Ilya placed a gentle hand on Shane's cheek, guiding his gaze up. "Shane, do you think that the fact you need me to touch you, to kiss you, to mark you, to fuck you … Do you think that since you need it, that I don't want to or that it feels like less to me? Shane, the fact you *need*, the fact you had to come ask me, fuck, it's like, it's like you lit candle in dark room."

"Is that a dom thing?"

"Maybe. Yes, probably. Doms naturally want to protect and care for submissives, and being wanted is very, very nice. But the fact you need my help, the fact you came here and asked so nicely, it's intoxicating to me. It makes me feel awake and alive. It makes the colors of this room more vibrant. It makes everything in my mind feel good. So please, kotik, don't trick yourself into thinking that you have done anything less than give me a perfect gift."

"Really?"

Ilya nodded, leaning in to kiss him again. "Remember when I told you I needed to make you lunch that day? This is like, a hundred times better. Truly, Shane, I want to do this for you."

"Okay? Okay."

Shane let himself get lost in the kiss.

***

Ilya: Finally boarding flight home.

Ilya: stupid canadian storm

Ilya: kotik, are you okay?

Shane: sorry, yeah, I'm fine

Ilya: Do you want to come over tonight? Or I come to you?

Ilya tried not to panic as he switched his phone into airplane mode as he felt the plane begin to rise in the air. Shane had not texted him back yet. He was just busy, Ilya told himself. Maybe he was working, it was a sports club day at Centaurs, right? That must be it.

Ilya tapped his fingers on his thigh and tried to let it go. He put in his headphones and turned on a movie. The time would pass quickly enough and he would hear from Shane. He turned the wifi on, but no notifications came in.

By the time the plane landed, Ilya was fully buzzing with anxiety. Shane usually texted him back quickly. It had been three hours and he had not heard anything. His dom instincts told him something was wrong. His sub, his Shanya, never made him wait this long for a response. Everything in Ilya told him to get to Shane quickly. Finally, as he walked to the taxi stand, his phone vibrated.

Shane: I'm at your apartment

Shane: I hope that's okay

Shane: I used the lockbox to let myself in

Shane: I'm sorry I fell asleep and didn't respond earlier.

Ilya: thank you for texting me, don't worry about falling asleep. I'll see you soon. In taxi now

Ilya breathed a sigh of relief. Shane was okay. Shane was at Ilya's apartment. No matter what was going on, he had trusted Ilya enough to seek him out, and felt comfortable enough with their relationship to let himself in.

The taxi ride seemed unbearably long, but finally he was walking through his door and closer to Shane.

Shane was curled underneath the blankets in Ilya's bed, his hair across his forehead. His chest rose steadily as he slept and Ilya was quiet as he toed off his shoes and stripped down to his boxers and t-shirt before climbing into bed next to the sub. Shane's brow was furrowed, as though sleep had not paused his anxiety.

“Shane, I’m here,” Ilya whispered, pulling the sub close into the position he knew Shane loved, his head resting on Ilya’s chest.

Shane nodded and nuzzled against Ilya in his sleep.

Ilya let his own eyes drift closed and sighed quietly. He was here. They were both here. He would take care of Shane, help solve whatever was bothering him.

“Ilya?”

Ilya glanced at the clock. It was two hours since he’d gotten home, and Shane’s beautiful brown eyes were finally open.

“I’m here, kotik.”

Shane tilted his head up and chased Ilya’s lips.

“I need you,” Shane said.

Ilya closed the space between them and kissed Shane.

“What’s going on?” Ilya asked when they pulled apart.

“I —. I had a really awful day,” Shane said. “I’m sorry. I should have texted you back earlier. I just. I just needed to see you.”

“Is okay, I was just a little worried. I’m glad you’re safe. What happened?”

Shane sat up and rubbed a hand across his face. He looked anxious and Ilya kept a hand on his back to help ground him.

“The center got vandalized,” Shane said at last. “When I showed up this morning, the front mural had been ruined, it looked like someone dumped buckets of paint all over it. Some windows were broken. It was awful. I mean. It’s all repairable. But it just felt … I just felt so violated.”

Ilya reached out and threaded their fingers together, bringing Shane’s hand up to his lips and kissing his knuckles.

“We had to cancel some of our clubs today. We kept the clinic open, but I know it was awful for everyone who came in. The staff were pretty upset, and we started a community fundraiser to fix it. But it just … fuck. I was starting to feel safe, Ilya. I was starting to feel, okay at least. And this is just —.”

“I know, sweetheart, I’m so sorry. I’m glad you came over.”

Shane grimaced. “I’m sorry, I don’t think I need to scene or anything, I just, uh, I just wanted to see you.” He studied Ilya and for a moment, the dom saw something close to fear in his eyes.

“Shane, I … I like you. Beyond just our dynamic, you know this, yes?” Ilya asked quietly. “I want to spend time with you that isn’t just play.”

The sub's shoulders and expression noticeably relaxed at his words.

“I like you too,” Shane said slowly. “I think maybe I like you a little too much.”

“Too much for what?” Ilya asked.

“That wasn’t what we said —.” Shane sighed. “I’m sorry, sometimes my brain is too rigid in its thinking. I guess I’ve been afraid of how I feel because it wasn’t the original plan, but I know you’re going to tell me that the plan is allowed to change.”

Ilya leaned down and kissed him.

“This can be whatever we want it to be.”

Shane smiled weakly. “Tonight, can it be this?”

Ilya nodded. “Let me take care of you.”

Taking care of Shane meant making him comfort food, curling up on the couch, and gently exchanging kisses as they pretended to watch a movie. There was no rush or heat in it, no hurry to get their clothes off or move to the bedroom. Shane had never felt as comfortable as he did in Ilya’s arms, snuggled against him on the couch.

At some point in the evening, Shane felt his mind begin to spiral again and he looked up at his dom, his gaze holding immeasurable trust.

“Can you help me forget?” Shane whispered.

Ilya nodded and laid Shane back against the couch, kissing his way down his body, and leaning his own weight against the sub, knowing the touch anchored him.

When Ilya gripped Shane’s wrists and pinned them above his head, the chaos in his mind grew quieter. When Ilya took Shane in his mouth and worked his cock over with his tongue, tasting every bit of him, Shane’s mind let go. When he came down Ilya’s throat, he was rewarded with praise and kisses, and his body and mind stayed silent and calm.

Chapter 13

Chapter Notes

> Here you go, the final chapter! Thank you so much for all your comments, kudos and love. I have absolutely LOVED writing this story and sharing it with you.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"I want to work with you."

Ilya looked up from his laptop and raised his eyebrows. "You want to … ?"

"Work with you. Yeah." Shane was freshly showered and dressed. His eyes were clear and he looked worryingly earnest.

Ilya was confused. "What do you mean?"

Shane poured himself a cup of coffee and refilled Ilya's mug. He sat down and started again.

"I want to join your operation. I want to help you and Scott and Svetlana."

"No."

Shane stared at him. "Wait, what?"

"No."

"You haven't even heard me out."

Ilya took a drink from his coffee mug and set it down. "Okay, give me your pitch."

Shane smiled. "You, Scott and Svetlana are all doms - "

"Scott is switch."

"Fine, whatever. The point is you're limited by your designation. There's places you can't always go, people who won't always talk to you. But I'm a sub. We can use that. I can go into clubs and help find the bad doms, and the other subs will trust me."

Ilya waited for a moment. Finally he said, "No."

"That's it?"

"Yes. What else do you want me to say?"

Shane was getting frustrated. Why wasn't Ilya listening to him?

"Are we in a scene right now?" Shane asked.

Now Ilya looked confused. "No. The answer is just no, Shane. Is too dangerous."

"You do this all the time," Shane argued. "This is *literally* what you do."

"Yes, and I'm a Dom. Is different."

"Why? And don't you dare say it's because you're in control. You were the one who taught me that me that the sub actually holds the power —"

"When play is done *right*, Shane," Ilya interrupted. "But the places I go, the people I help, it's when it's gone wrong. You know this. Imagine saying that you had power over Andrei, you know is not true. He hurt you, far beyond what you wanted and far beyond what is acceptable. That is kind of people I deal with. Is not safe for you."

"I want to help," Shane argued. He hadn't realized how stubborn Ilya would be on this. "Please. I just …"

Ilya reached out a hand across the table, palm facing up, an open invitation if Shane wanted it.

"Why? *Kotik*, why is this so important to you?"

Shane slowly placed his hand on Ilya's, grounded by the touch.

"Because … because you got me out. Because I needed that help once, and you were there and you saved me. And now, I guess I just want to help too. Why is it fair that I got out, but someone else is still trapped?"

Ilya's heart broke open at this admission. He squeezed Shane's hand. "You are so good, so caring, Shane. I love this about you. I understand it feels unfair, and I respect you want to help others. But this is not the way, it's too dangerous. What if another dom hurts you or takes you?"

Shane looked up, something was bothering him. "Is that what this is about? You don't want another dom touching me?"

"That is not the reason," Ilya said, annoyance creeping into his voice.

"Are you sure?" Shane challenged, pulling his hand back. "Is this about safety or is this about control, Rozanov? You don't want someone else playing with your toys? You don't want another dom to touch me or hit me or —"

"No," Ilya interrupted. "Is this really what you think of me?"

Shane glared defiantly at him.

“Is not about another dom or someone else playing with you. I have made clear, we both have, this is fun, but is not exclusive. Do you even remember how messed up you were when I pulled you out of Andrei’s? You were terrified. You were badly hurt, you wouldn’t speak for a full day and then you spent the week so scared of me that you tried to provoke me to hurt you. You were in bad, bad place Shane. Of course I don’t want anyone to ever hurt you like that again. I would give anything to protect you from that world. And you want to throw yourself back to the wolves, to what, *prove* something? This is not about my ego or pride or ownership, this is about safety. I cannot — “ his voice started to crack, “I cannot watch you get hurt again.”

Shane’s eyes filled with tears. “I know. I know I was messed up. It took me a six months to even feel remotely normal again. I couldn’t go to clinics because of how scared I was, I had to ask my best friend to help me scene just to keep from dropping. I was there, Ilya. Don’t tell me my own story.”

They were both standing, neither remembering how they got there.

“Then why are you so desperate to put yourself in danger again?” Ilya demanded. “What, our play isn’t dangerous enough for you? You want to be more scared, is that it? You want me to hurt you more, or you need a stranger to do it for you?”

Shane scoffed at him. “Fuck you. You know that’s not what this is about. I guess you’re the only one who gets to help people, is that it? You’re the best dom, and the meanest dom, and apparently the only one who can rescue poor, injured subs.”

“Hollander, that is the stupidest thing you have ever said,” Ilya snapped. “This is not about –”

“So you can say that I’m motivated by some weird sub need to be hurt, but there’s no way that *your* natural instincts and dynamics have any role in what you do? Did you ever stop to think for a moment that if you just had a normal bonded relationship, you wouldn’t need to play hero to every sub out there? Who are you trying to impress? Do you think if you save enough subs that you’ll be good enough for whoever it is you’re trying to please? Do you ever wonder if maybe some people don’t want to be saved and you’re actually just fucking it up for them. Maybe more of them have gone back like that kid in Vancouver, and you’re so blinded by your need to play hero that you don’t even realize the people you’re helping don’t even fucking want your help."

Shane regretted it the minute he said it. It was way too low of a blow. What Ilya did was good, and noble. He hadn’t permanently bonded with a sub because he felt it wouldn’t be fair to them because of his work. Maybe his Dom instincts led him to want to take care of the abused subs he rescued, but he couldn’t help his own biology.

“Fuck, Ilya, fuck I’m sorry. That, that wasn’t fair,” Shane said. “I’m sorry, baby, I shouldn’t have said that.”

Ilya’s eyes were wide and his hands were shaking. Slowly, Shane stepped forward and reached out, but Ilya shrunk back from him. Which yeah, that was fair after what Shane said. For a long moment they stared at each other, until Shane, not breaking eye contact, took a step forward so their chests were almost touching. Ilya stayed frozen, watching him.

Exhaling slowly, Shane knelt down in front of him, hands on his thighs, head bowed slightly.

“I’m sorry,” he whispered.

A tentative hand brushed through his hair. A moment later, that hand guided Shane’s head to lean against Ilya’s leg, as his fingers massaged Shane’s scalp. Shane could feel the touch settling them both, their breathing calming, their pulses slowly returning to normal. Shane was so ashamed of his words, he didn’t know what to say. Ilya would never forgive him. Fuck. He hadn’t meant any of it. Well, maybe he’d meant the part about Ilya’s instincts driving him to this work, but certainly not anything else stupid he had said.

Stupid.

That was the word Ilya had used before. Because he was being stupid. He didn’t deserve Ilya. Maybe he didn’t deserve to be rescued. Hell, he hadn’t even been on Ilya’s list. Ilya could have just left him there. Maybe he should have just left him there.

“I can hear you overthinking, kotik,” Ilya said softly. “Stay here with me, do not get lost in dark thoughts.”

Ilya knelt down next to him and wrapped his arms around Shane.

“I’m sorry, I’m sorry,” Shane whimpered into his shoulder.

“No sorry, we both said dumb shit. Is okay. Stop torturing yourself, come here, I have you, I have you.”

Shane didn’t know how long they stayed on the ground like that, but eventually Ilya helped him stand and guided them both to the couch, laying down and draping Shane on top of him so they could maintain as much grounding touch as possible. Shane hadn’t realized he was crying until Ilya’s fingers gently brushed away the tears, which Shane saw mirrored in Ilya’s own eyes. He had known Ilya wouldn’t agree to his plan right away, but he had never expected this conversation to lead to a full blown fight or to the horrible things they had each said. Perhaps that was curse of knowing someone and being known so intimately, the power to cut exactly where it hurt the most.

“Talk to me,” Ilya said, his voice almost pleading. “Tell me where you are.”

Shane shook his head, unable to form words.

“Please, kotik, please try. For me.”

Shane took a long breath. For Ilya. He could do it for Ilya.

“I shouldn’t have said those things.” His voice was rough and barely above a whisper. “I’m so sorry, Ilya. That wasn’t fair. Those were awful things to say, and I don’t even believe them. I know what you do is good, I respect what you do. I wanted to help because I admire it so much. And I know you’re worried about my safety, and I … I’m sorry. I was wrong, I’m sorry.”

The tears fell freely for both of them and Ilya squeezed Shane tightly against him. He kissed his forehead and tilted Shane's face up so he could kiss him properly. Shane hesitated for just a moment before melting into it, his mouth soft and open for Ilya.

They lost track of time, exchanging gentle kisses and touches, but nothing more, and breathing together. At some point Ilya unearthed himself from beneath Shane and returned with the aftercare snacks basket, filled with water, juice, chocolate, mini pretzels and fruit leather. Keeping a comforting hand on Shane the entire time, Ilya guided them both through eating and drinking until they started to feel level again.

Shane's brows furrowed in worry and he wasn't able to look at Ilya when he asked, "Are you going to punish me?"

Ilya shook his head. "I don't think that will help us, not with this. But if you need that to settle your mind, we can talk about it." He gave Shane an appraising look. "If I tell you we are good, that I forgive you, can you let it go? I do think falling apart the way we both did felt like punishment enough," Ilya said thoughtfully. "But, I don't want you to carry this. So you tell me, do you feel able to move forward?"

Shane considered this. Whatever had just happened between them, from the moment his knees hit the floor until now, his apology, the care Ilya had shown him when he least deserved it … it had settled his mind. Nothing in him was screaming for punishment, in fact, the idea of it made him anxious.

"Yes, I … I don't know what we just did, but it felt right."

Ilya watched him carefully. "For me too. I think it regulated both of us, but if you feel yourself starting to drop or worrying about this, we talk again, yes?"

Shane nodded.

The unspoken question sat in the room between them. The question that had started all of this. But it would have to rest for now. Neither could face it again in this moment. Ilya hoped that with time, Shane would simply let it go. Shane hoped that with time, Ilya would realize he was right and give him a chance.

***

It was two weeks since their fight and they had both been gentle with each other outside of scenes. Ilya had been quick to respond to Shane's texts, knowing that waiting to hear from him fed his anxiety. Shane had been more clear in his communication that he knew Ilya was busy and not to worry about responding. They'd sent silly memes and jokes. During Ilya's one work trip, he had let Shane know when he'd be offline so he could attend to his client, and called him immediately when the sub was safely on a train home. The one time their schedules aligned to scene together, they had gone to the local club Ilya felt was safe, and had kept things more controlled and by the book.

Friday night found Shane laying out endless containers on Chinese takeout on Ilya's table while they settled in for an entire weekend together.

“Can we have a serious conversation?” Shane asked. He didn’t want to force Ilya to revisit that painful day, but he also needed to share his new idea.

Ilya lay down his chopsticks and nodded. “Okay.”

“About my idea of working with you.”

Ilya tensed, but nodded.

“I thought of a way we could keep me safe,” Shane said. When Ilya said nothing, he continued. “I know that you’re worried about my safety because I’m a sub, I get that, I do. But I still think I could be useful and helpful, and I really do want to help. Not all the time, I love my job at the center, but maybe sometimes, if it made sense, I could go with you or go alone. But anyway, sorry, I’m getting off topic.”

Shane took a deep steadying breath. “What if I wore a collar?”

“What do you mean?”

“If I wear a collar, then when we go into a club, no one would try to play with me without your permission. Then I would be safe to move around, chat with other subs, we could pay attention to which doms ignore the collar and keep an eye on them. But like, people talk in clubs. That’s how I learned who you were, or, well, I guess, who I thought you were, and it could be useful. This is a good idea, Rozanov.”

Ilya shook his head. “No, Hollander.”

Shane counted to five in his head before opening his mouth. “You’re just dismissing me again. Why?”

“Where is collar coming from? You are going to collar yourself?” Ilya asked, clearly trying for humor.

“It’s not a real collar,” Shane replied. “I mean, yes, it would be a real collar, but it wouldn’t mean anything. It would be like a disguise, a good luck charm that keeps me safe, a no trespassing sign.”

“But do you actually want to be collared?” Ilya asked, something strange in his voice. “Or, just for when you’re playing undercover spy?”

“Can you stop joking around?” Shane was getting annoyed. He didn’t want this to turn into a fight again, but Ilya’s whole laid-back and jokey demeanor was getting under his skin.

“I don’t want to collar you like this,” Ilya said simply. “So, thank you for idea, but no.”

“Ilya –”

“I said no.”

“Why are you being like this?” Shane demanded. “I’m not asking you to actually collar me, I know you don’t want that. I know that’s not what this is.” He gestured between them. “I’m saying that if people think –”

“I know what you are saying. I understand idea. But that’s not what collar is. That’s like asking me to put fake wedding ring on your finger.”

“It’s for safety, Ilya,” Shane insisted. “If a fake wedding ring would do the trick, then I’d be saying that. But in our world you know that a collar would –”

“Collar is not costume, Hollander. Is not … is not joke or dress up or anything like that.”

Shane could feel the anger he had felt last time bubbling up again and he fought to keep his voice steady.

“You like telling me no, but you haven’t even listened to why I want to do this. You’ve already decided your answer, why even pretend you’re listening to me, when you’re not. You said the rules don’t apply in the places you go into, that they’ve already thrown out the true dynamics, that they’re using the dynamics to abuse and hurt. So why is it wrong for us to use something as simple as a little band of leather to keep me safe so we can help people?”

“The fact you call it 'little band of leather' is why you don’t understand my answer,” Ilya bit back. He looked like he was also fighting for control.

“Ilya, come on, it’s just –”

“Red.”

Shane stopped mid-sentence. Ilya had never colored out on him before. Part of him was tempted to barrel on. They weren’t in a scene, this wasn’t a fair use of the color system, right? This was some kind of –. He stopped that train of thought and looked, really looked at Ilya’s face. His hands were fidgeting, his eyes were having trouble focusing on Shane. He was telling Shane the fastest way possible that he couldn’t do this. Shane didn’t need to know why, but he did need to respect the boundary Ilya just presented. If he disrespected it now, he couldn’t imagine how they might build that trust back up.

Shane forced his shoulders to drop and walked around to stand next to Ilya’s chair. “Can I touch you?” he asked softly.

Ilya nodded.

Shane pulled Ilya’s head against his chest and held him. “Hey, hey, I’m here. It’s okay. We can stop. Thank you for telling me.” He kissed Ilya’s curls. “What do you need right now?”

"Just this."

They stayed like that for long minutes, Shane's arms wrapped tightly around Ilya, occasionally kissing his hair. Their breathing steadied and soon matched each other.

Finally, Ilya let out a long breath and murmured into Shane's chest, "I need you to listen, please."

"Tell me."

"Can we stay like this?" Ilya asked, wrapping an arm around Shane's waist.

"Of course."

"I don't want to fake-collar you," Ilya said. "In Russia, is different than here. Doms are in charge, always. The subs, not treated so well. I have told you. The collars are … they are prison. They are way to ensure that the world lets Doms mistreat their subs. It's terrible. When I was younger, I accepted that I would never collar anyone because I never wanted that dynamic, I never wanted to hold power that way over someone. I had thought it would be different over here, that maybe if I just got out of Russia, that maybe I could … but with the work I do, I saw the same thing, over and again. The collar Andrei put on you, the collars I've had to take off of countless subs who never asked for it."

Ilya shuddered and Shane held him tight, waiting in patient silence until he could continue.

"And then I met you. And I –. Fuck. I started to think. Maybe. I don't know. I started to wonder. And when we're together. So you ask to do it as disguise, and it doesn't sound right. Not for me. Not for us. I'm sorry, I am getting all the words wrong."

"Ilya, are you saying that you want to collar me for real, and that's why my question hurt so much?"

Shane held his breath as he waited for Ilya's answer. Ilya pulled back just enough to tip his face up and meet Shane's eyes. The fear, years of self-doubt, and anxiety shone in Ilya's eyes. He looked ready to crumble under the question.

"You can tell me," Shane whispered. "If we're not on the same page, we talk about it, right? Ilya, whatever you say right now, you will not lose me."

"I have wanted to collar you since the day we met," Ilya said finally, not taking his eyes from Shane. "I knew I couldn't, obviously, you were injured, abused, healing. And then you disappeared. But then, by some miracle, here you are again, and some part of me thought, maybe. Someday. If we both wanted."

Shane's body was on fire with want. His whole system was trembling in response to Ilya's words. He hadn't known until this moment how much he wanted this, craved it, needed it. He had spent years in clinics because he couldn't find a Dom who meshed with him, who could satisfy the conflicting urges in his body. He had spent years under Andrei's control, wearing his secondhand collar and being used and abused. He had spent the past year since he was freed wondering if he could ever play properly again, could ever get more the than the dull aches soothed in the clinic.

Now, here was the perfect Dom for him, who wanted him just as much as Shane wanted. Ilya, who knew exactly how far he could push him and still bring him back up. Ilya, who called

Shane when he had a shitty day and trusted him enough to show his own vulnerability. Ilya, who held Shane through a drop and then set him free. Who gave Shane everything he had without reservation. And he wanted to collar Shane.

“If we both wanted?” Shane said carefully.

Ilya nodded. “Yes, I know. Is not for right now. But, that’s why –”

Ilya cut off abruptly because Shane had let go of him and dropped to his knees.

“We both want,” Shane said hurriedly.

“Shane –”

Shane bowed his head. “I want this. Fuck, I’ve wanted this and didn’t even realize it. I didn’t think you would want to, I didn’t know if I could even ask. Ilya, I want this.”

Ilya stared at him.

"Please," Shane whispered.

“Stay here.” Ilya disappeared for a moment and returned carrying a small box. He handed it to Shane. “Open.”

Shane’s heart sped up, his breath quickened. This couldn’t be. Did Ilya just happen to have –?

Inside the box was a thin, black leather collar, with a small gold ring on the front. The leather was soft and smooth, the ring shining brightly.

“We don’t have to –” Ilya started.

“Do it.” Shane cleared his throat and softened his tone. “Please, sir, I want to be yours. Only yours.”

Ilya traced his fingers along Shane’s neck, causing him to shiver slightly at the touch. He looped the collar around his throat and fastened it. Shane should have kept his eyes downward, should have stayed in his submissive pose. That’s what a good sub would do. But Shane had never been a good sub. He didn’t need to be. He was Ilya’s and that’s all that mattered.

Shane looked up and caught Ilya’s eyes. “Yours.”

“Mine.”

Chapter End Notes

Need more of this version of Shane and Ilya? I've already uploaded Chapter 1 of the sequel, I'd Find You in Any Life:
https://archiveofourown.org/works/92584381/chapters/246833006

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!