Such a lovable lamb

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Such a lovable lamb

by DaughterofLegends

Summary

Two certainties defined Shane Hollander's life: he was falling in love with Ilya Rozanov, and he was keeping a career-ending secret. When Ilya discovers Shane's suppressants on the heels of seeing Shane injured during a game, fear makes them say things they both regret.

Nine months later at the All-Star Game, accidentally running into Ilya in the hotel elevator triggers a breakthrough heat—forcing the two idiots to finally talk (and fuck).

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Contains spoilers for those who have only watched the show, and for The Long Game.

A/B/O AU that diverges from canon right after Shane is injured in Chapter 21 (and episode 5) of Heated Rivalry.

Happy ending!

Notes

I can happily say that this fic is betaed. Many thanks to my poor, long-suffering beta reader @ticiakitty, who put up with all of my idiosyncracies and had some great ideas.

See the end of the work for more notes

October 2017 - Boston

For once, Ilya had nothing to say to him when they faced each other at center ice. It had been close to six months since he'd last seen Ilya, and he'd been dreading this game every second of every day since they'd last been together.

Shane kept his eyes downcast. He couldn't bear to see anger, or worse, cold indifference in Ilya's gaze. The weighty silence pulled at the unbearable pit of anxiety in Shane's stomach, which he'd spent the summer trying to get rid of. Shane didn't have many regrets, but how he reacted to Ilya finding out he was an omega was killing him.

God, Ilya must hate him. Shane had said so many hurtful, unfair things. Worst of all, the accusations he'd hurled just weren't true. Ilya was like no other alpha Shane had ever been with.

Shane had been masquerading as a beta, of course, since presenting, but he'd still experienced enough of the notorious alpha possessiveness, obsessive need for control, and entitlement to have a healthy fear of it. Not just as a closeted omega, but *especially* as a lifelong hockey player listening to alpha locker room talk that made him sick to his stomach if he let himself think about it for too long.

Remembering Ilya's gentle 'is okay?'s and 'can I?'s—always making sure Shane was comfortable and enjoying himself—made Shane's chest burn and his throat dry. He swallowed. Now was not the time to think about their time together. Shane forced himself to blink hard. Then again, finally bringing the cuts on the ice into focus.

Shane was playing on autopilot. He knew it. His team knew it, going by the glances they kept shooting his way. This was his third face-off of the night with Ilya, and he'd lost the last two.

He lost this one, too.

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April 2017 - Montreal

A knock on the door startled Shane, pulling his attention from the recovery spreadsheet he'd been obsessing over for the last several hours. He was at his cottage, not willing to face the world after being taken out for the rest of the season by such a stupid fucking hit. It had finally sunk in this morning that he wouldn't be in the playoffs, and he'd impulsively decided he'd rather be at his cottage.

Shane's parents had tried to talk him out of it. They were right, it probably wasn't a great idea to drive for several hours fresh out of the hospital with a concussion and fractured collarbone. Something in his eyes must have convinced them that he was going to do this whether they

liked it or not. His parents had insisted on coming with him and driving. It was late in the afternoon before they finally left for their own cottage nearby, making him promise to call them if he needed *anything*.

Shane rolled his eyes before getting up to answer the door. God only knew what excuse his mother had come up with this time to check on him, *again*.

"What did you 'forget' this ti—oh, Ilya?" Shane's voice ended in an embarrassing squeak as he stared up at the frowning Russian. "What are you doing here?" His flight should have left by now.

Ilya gestured at the snow by the doorway and then at Shane, standing frozen in the middle of it. "You will catch cold standing like this. Can I come in?"

Shane's cheeks heated, and he nodded, stepping out of the way to let Ilya in. He shivered as the cold caught up with him. Ilya's frown deepened from where he'd been in the middle of taking off his coat. In the blink of an eye, Shane found himself draped in a warm scarf drenched in Ilya's scent, woodsy with bright sparks of citrus. It was intoxicating, and Shane took a discreet sniff, hoping Ilya wouldn't notice.

The smirk tugging at Ilya's lips told Shane he was not successful. "Boston looks good on you, Hollander."

Awkward silence now broken, Shane rolled his eyes and walked into the kitchen, Ilya not needing an invitation to follow. "Can I get you anything?"

"Hollander, you are injured one, sit." Shane didn't even have the chance to protest as Ilya gently pushed at his waist until Shane was sitting at the counter.

"Now, where is your teapot?" Ilya demanded, spinning around in the kitchen with his hands on his waist.

"I think my mom might've left one in one of those lower cabinets. Uh, why?" Shane asked curiously.

"Tea fixes all things," Ilya replied absently, crouching down to look through the bottom cabinets.

"I have a concussion and a fractured collarbone, not a cold," Shane said drily.

Ilya ignored him, filling the kettle, then putting it on the stove to heat up. "You will soon see. Now, where is tea and honey?"

Shane used his good arm to gesture at another cabinet above the stove, where he piled the boxes of tea he had accumulated over various holidays. He really only kept it for his mom when she visited. "I don't think I have honey, though."

Ilya was unfazed. "Where is your jam?"

Jam? "Uhh, I think I have some I got as a gift last Christmas somewhere up there, too? There should be some peanut butter and bread in the fridge." He knew it was weird to keep it there, but he liked cold peanut butter after workouts.

A confused look flashed across Ilya's face. "Why do I need bread and peanut butter?"

"Umm, for your PB and J?" Now Shane was confused.

"No, jam is for tea."

"Who the fuck puts jam in their tea?"

"Is Russian thing, Hollander," Ilya sounded exasperated, "You are so, what is word . . ." He trailed off before snapping his fingers, "Not cultured."

Shane huffed out a laugh. He enjoyed seeing this rare, domestic side to Ilya. "Wow. What are you even doing here?"

"You gave me address in March. You hit your head that hard?" The concern in Ilya's voice seemed sincere, but Shane was still confused.

"No shit, why are you *here*? Shouldn't you be on a plane right now?"

"Ah." Ilya paused awkwardly, "I didn't have time to come to hospital. I just needed—are you —?"

Oh.

Shane softened. "I'm okay. I mean, I'm out for playoffs, which sucks, but it . . ."

"Could have been worse."

"Yeah." Shane grimaced, not just at the reminder that he was done for the season, but because the steady throb in his shoulder was getting too loud to ignore. Shane, as a rule, was not a fan of drugs. Even prescribed ones. Years of being drug tested at any given moment had made him wary of just about anything that wasn't alcohol.

Ilya's eyes narrowed, seeming to read Shane's discomfort for what it was. "What did they give you?"

"Oh, just some hydrocodone, or something like that."

"Well, is not enough. Unless you are bad patient?" Ilya's raised eyebrow made Shane's stomach flip pleasantly, and he shrugged.

"Hollander, you will be death of me, and yourself. Where is it?" Ilya thrust his hand out, palm up.

"It's in the bathroom behind the mirror, just down the hall," Shane grumbled. His mom had made him promise to use one of the ground-floor rooms until he was out of the sling.

Ilya wore a self-satisfied smile as he pushed off the counter he was leaning against and disappeared around the corner. Shane traced the imperfections in his kitchen counter with his eyes, letting a small smile slip onto his face. He didn't want to admit it, but he liked it when Ilya took care of him. He rarely allowed himself to enjoy anything that even hinted at his biological reality of being an omega.

Distracting himself by idly drumming the fingers of his good hand on the counter while waiting for Ilya to return, Shane frowned when he realized several minutes had passed. It shouldn't be taking so long; the bathroom was literally just down the hall. Unless Ilya had missed it and gotten lost?

"Ilya?" Shane called. Several long moments stretched before he saw Ilya come back around the corner into the kitchen. Shane felt like he'd been struck by lightning when Ilya turned the corner holding two bottles. Fuck. FUCK. He had forgotten he'd just tossed his suppressants in with the painkillers.

Ilya's carefully blank face was a stark contrast to the expressive one he normally let show when they were alone. Shane *hated* it. He stared down at the counter in front of him, eyes burning with unshed tears.

"It's not what y—"

"Why do you have heat suppressants?" Ilya's voice was quiet, as carefully blank as his face was.

Shane swallowed as his throat tightened painfully. All he could manage was a hoarse, whispered, "Get out."

Ilya barreled on, voice low and anger creeping in, "No. Hollander, you will explain—"

Shane saw red. Fucking entitled alphas, "I don't have to explain shit. Get the fuck out of my house."

"How long have you been taking these?" Ilya demanded, shaking the bottle of suppressants.

"You don't get to come in here and—"

"—months? Years?" Ilya's voice was still low, but now shaking with barely concealed fury, accent thicker than Shane had heard in years.

"I know you're an *alpha,* Rozanov," Shane bit out caustically, "and that we've fucked, but you're not entitled to—"

"— do you know what long use does to omegas—"

"—fucking christ, you're really just like all the other alphas aren't you?" Shane's face twisted with betrayal. "'No' means nothing to you, now that you know I'm an omega? You fucking a __"

"—ANSWER ME HOLLANDER," Ilya finally roared, slamming the bottle of suppressants on the counter. Shane had never seen the look Ilya was wearing now, even in the middle of a brawl on the ice. But it was the way Ilya's scent felt completely alien to Shane, as it turned dangerously sharp and bitter, that made Shane freeze. Fear flooded his body and made him reek, as his instincts wrested control, and he let out an involuntary whine—trying to get the angry alpha in front of him to calm down.

Ilya froze, horrified, as the kitchen descended into heavy silence.

Shane blinked back tears as he looked anywhere but at Ilya. Seared into the back of his brain was the look of rage that distorted Ilya's normally handsome features.

Ilya quietly, but firmly, set the bottles down on the counter in front of Shane. "Take your fucking meds, Hollander," he growled, before storming out of the kitchen. The front door slammed a second later, making Shane flinch.

Shane let the tears drip down his face and onto the counter as he finally let out the choked sob he'd been holding back. Bitter hatred welled up in him at his biology. It took *everything* from him.

Now it had taken Ilya, too.

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January 2018 - Florida

Shane stared listlessly at the numbers on the elevator in front of him. He'd been selected for the All-Star Game again this year, despite a rough start to his season. Shane had thrown himself into hockey after the October game where he'd lost every face-off to Ilya, desperate to prove to himself that he was putting Ilya behind him. He was a *good* hockey player, no matter what the NHL believed about players with his designation.

Shane snorted mirthlessly. No, the NHL knew exactly what players with his designation could do; it just cared more about its carefully curated image of powerful alphas and sharp betas.

"The fans have certain expectations, Mr. Hollander. You understand." Shane mocked under his breath. His contract with the Voyageurs certainly made sure he never forgot.

As the seconds stretched, Shane realized he'd never pressed the button for his floor. He was just standing there, 'like an idiot,' after begging off from another night out with his team. It was lonely, hiding a secret that not even his best friend knew, but it somehow felt even lonelier, surrounded by his team.

He jabbed the button for the fourteenth floor harder than was strictly necessary, and let his gaze rest on the buttons again. Shane was startled back to the present again when the

elevator's doors opened to the thirteenth floor.

His heart stopped.

Ilya stepped into the elevator, and it was instantly flooded with his enticing scent. Shane's body reacted suddenly and viciously. The low, constant burning in the pit of his stomach that he'd been ignoring for the last couple of weeks, chalking it up to anxiety, engulfed him.

Oh fuck.

No. No. No.

This wasn't supposed to happen.

This *couldn't* happen.

Shane felt lightheaded.

Ilya's concerned face swam into his line of vision. A distant thought that Ilya must have been crouching to stand at eye level with Shane amused him. But it soon fled from the increasingly weakening grasp he had on his mind as his very inconvenient, heat set in.

"—lander, Hollander, what is wrong?" Ilya's concerned voice pierced the noise in Shane's head.

Alpha. Shane barely stopped himself from voicing that thought out loud.

Ilya took a deep breath. Then another. Comprehension dawning on his face.
"Hollander . . . you are—"

Ilya's voice was like a cool, soothing blanket. The breathy gasp Shane let out was involuntary. "Please."

Ilya closed his eyes, turning away from Shane. Shane hung his head as his hind brain howled at the rejection. The rejection turned in his stomach with the ever-present guilt he'd been holding onto since April, making him feel ill. He smelled before he felt, his own sharp and clean scent, like a wind bringing a thunderstorm, sour with fear.

Gentle fingers tucked under his chin and tilted Shane's head to look back up at Ilya. Shane closed his eyes in petty protest.

"Solntse, I need you to open your pretty eyes for me," Ilya asked softly.

His eyes opened reflexively, apology already on his lips, "I'm sorry. I'm so sorry."

Ilya gently shushed him, "I am sorry too. But not in elevator. Okay? Your room or mine?"

Shane had at least the presence of mind to remember that he'd been lucky enough to get a room all to himself this year due to a clerical error, and that the floor was even otherwise

hockey-player free. The words wouldn't form enough to explain it, so he settled on a simple "1410."

Shane barely registered Ilya pressing the button to close the doors, then stumbling into his room with Ilya's steady head planted firmly at the small of his back.

He immediately missed the warmth radiating soothingly from Ilya's hand when Ilya pulled it away. They were now standing in the entryway, facing each other.

Shane's throat tightened as the heat jumbled his thoughts and wouldn't let him put together the words he'd spent hours agonizing over, since the cottage. He hated this part about being an omega. Being reduced to a vulnerable, powerless mess.

Ilya stepped into his space, arms held out like he was going to hug Shane, eyebrow quirked in silent question. Shane nodded.

Warm, familiar arms wrapped around him, and Shane melted into the embrace. Shane breathed in the familiar woodsy citrus scent. It calmed some of the fire raging through him.

"I'm really sorry," Shane mumbled into Ilya's shirt, shuddering. Ilya's arms tightened. He felt Ilya press a kiss to the top of his head.

"No, I'm sorry, Shane, I . . . " Ilya trailed off, seeming to be at a loss for the right words. "I have—history, I—never should have pushed like this."

Shane wanted to tell Ilya that he never believed that Ilya would ever . . . but the thoughts fled as heat flared in him again, making him whimper. There was no more Shane. Just burning lust, and desperate need for an—*his* alpha. Shane tilted his head back and pressed a hard, desperate kiss to Ilya's lips.

Ilya froze, abruptly stepping back, and Shane keened, "Please, Rozanov, alpha, please," he begged, hot tears beginning to slide down his face.

"Sh—Hollander, you are," Ilya looked pained, "We can't—you aren't in right mind to do this."

The rejection felt overwhelming, and more tears streamed down his face as the mess of hormones in Shane's body took control.

But then, oh, it was like getting whiplash. Shane was fucking livid. The anger brought the clarity needed for him to jab a finger in Ilya's chest and growl out, "You don't get to decide what I want. I make my own fucking decisions, *alpha*. And I want you to get me through this stupid breakthrough heat."

Ilya didn't move, even as his pupils went wide. Shane watched as uncertainty and lust warred on Ilya's face.

Uncertainty broke through Shane's brief hold on the anger, threatening to send more tears streaming down his face. "Unless," Shane's voice broke, "You don't want me?"

The reaction was immediate, "No, sweetheart, dorogoi, of *course* I want you."

But Ilya still wasn't touching Shane, and the omega in him was frenzied with the need for Ilya to touch him.

"Then what are you waiting for? For me to spell it out for you?" Shane demanded, "I don't know how much more clearly I can say." Shane placed a hand on Ilya's chest and began pressing him back into the room, punctuating each word with another step, "I. Want. You. To. Fuck. Me."

He went in for the kill, leaning into Ilya and tilting his face up. His breath brushed across Ilya's lips as he softly crooned, "I want your *knot*. *Alpha*."

That was all it took.

Before Shane could blink, he found himself being picked up and being tossed onto the king-sized bed. He began frantically pulling his shirt off as Ilya undid his pants and yanked them down Shane's legs. He shimmied out of his underwear and tossed it—somewhere. He shivered in anticipation.

When he still didn't feel Ilya get on the bed, Shane shot him a confused glare.

Jesus, what now?

Ilya had already stripped out of his own clothes, but was now wandering, apparently gathering Shane's clothes from where he'd carelessly tossed them. Shane half-expected Ilya to fold them, like Shane always did, but was surprised when Ilya finally climbed onto the bed with his armful of clothing and began grabbing the pillows.

Comprehension dawned as Ilya began arranging the comforter, bed runner, and the pillows, before finally weaving in their clothes. Shane swallowed hard, suddenly reminded just how bad he was at being an omega. He couldn't remember the last time he'd actually made a proper nest. "You're making a nest?"

Instead of answering, Ilya climbed on top of Shane so that he was hovering with his forearms braced around Shane's head. Ilya leaned down and began peppering Shane's face and neck with kisses. The moan Shane let out, from finally just being kissed, was obscene.

He felt Ilya's lips curl into a satisfied smirk at the base of his neck.

"Shut up," Shane mumbled, already half out of his mind with pleasure.

"No, is compliment. And yes, I made nest. You need nest, da?" Ilya placed a playful kiss on Shane's nose before continuing to kiss down Shane's chest. Shane gasped out a breathy, "Yes," as the thought fled.

Ilya had Shane's cock in his talented mouth, and Shane forgot whatever it was that he wanted to say next. His hips bucked as Ilya swallowed nearly all the way down. Shane cursed and fisted his hands in Ilya's hair.

Ilya used one hand to push Shane's legs open and trailed the other one around back to trace the edges of his hole. He pushed the tip of one finger in. "You are so wet for me," Ilya purred against Shane's thigh as he pulled his mouth off and kissed around his cock. "We should do it like this more often, way hotter than using lube."

Shane pushed himself against Ilya's hand, and Ilya pulled his fingers back, laughing softly as he chastised, "Greedy." Shane whined at the loss of both Ilya's mouth and fingers.

"I like when you are needy like this. Is more fun when I make you wait."

"Oh fuck you, Rozanov." Shane pushed up on his elbows to glare down at Ilya's grinning face.

"No, *I* will fuck *you*," Ilya paused, and Shane perked up. "When I am ready."

Shane flopped back on the bed and groaned. Of course, he was cursed to spend his first partnered heat with a sadist for an alpha. He yelped in surprise when Ilya bit at the sensitive skin of his inner thigh, before sucking hard enough to leave a mark.

Shane couldn't find it in himself to care that the marks would be visible for all to see in the locker room shower. He was too far gone to do anything but luxuriate in the feeling of being claimed.

Ilya continued licking and sucking up and down Shane's inner thighs and pressing light, teasing touches to Shane's hole. Shane turned progressively more and more into a needy mess, until the only thoughts on Shane's garbled mind were *fuck me, alpha please*, playing on loop.

Ilya finally flipped Shane onto his front, pushing Shane's face and chest down into the bed and his ass up into the air. Ilya leaned over Shane and gathered his hands at the small of his back, pinning them there with one large hand, making his back arch.

Ilya's breath ghosted across Shane's ear, making him shiver. "Beg."

"Fuck you." Shane choked out.

He heard the sound before he felt it. Shane moaned as ecstasy shot through him when the sting of being spanked finally registered.

The sharp pleasure broke the last of his token resistance. Shane almost sobbed as the words that had been playing in his mind on repeat finally came out—the words slurring into each other in his desperation to please his alpha.

"Such a good omega for me, Hollander." Ilya crooned as he finally, finally inserted two fingers in Shane's ass, and curled them, rubbing against Shane's prostate.

Shane came with a sharp gasp.

"Always, such a good trick, making you come hands free." Ilya teased, continuing to stroke him. Shane was too far gone to come up with a retort; he only panted as Ilya added a third

finger.

Both of Ilya's hands left Shane as he tore open a condom packet. Shane let his arms relax and moved to brace them on the mattress.

"No, leave hands," Ilya ordered. Shane sank deeper into the intoxicating, hazy feeling that had been growing since Ilya had tossed him on the bed.

Ilya's hand returned to grip his arms as he lined up his cock with Shane's entrance. He let out a low, satisfied groan as his hips snapped forward, burying his length in Shane, in one smooth stroke.

And then Ilya was fucking Shane into the mattress, and Shane finally let go, letting the maelstrom of heat and lust raging through his body consume him.

"Fuck. You are so good for me." Ilya grunted, pounding into him. "My perfect, pretty little omega."

Shane was too far gone to be aware that he was breathlessly repeating "yes," "alpha," and "yours," over and over again into the mattress. He lost track of how many times he came, his world a blur of pleasure, need, and something else he couldn't name.

Ilya's hips stuttered from their brutal, steady rhythm, and he came with a yell. His knot began to expand, making Shane feel fuller than he'd ever been in his life. The thought alone of Ilya being the first to knot him tipped Shane over the precipice he'd been dancing on, and Shane came again with a hoarse wail.

Arms wrapped around him, and Ilya arranged them so that they were spooning on their sides. Once settled, firm, gentle hands began massaging his shoulders and arms, bringing life back into them. Shane let out a contented sigh as the fire abated, and coherent thoughts began forming in his head again. When the red haze that had come over his mind in the elevator didn't fully retreat, Shane knew the heat wasn't over yet.

Not that he was protesting.

Electricity suddenly shot through his body as Shane felt Ilya nuzzle the base of his neck. Even in the middle of the heat, Shane was grateful that Ilya had the presence of mind to be careful to keep his teeth to himself, as he licked and sucked.

They lay in content silence, as Ilya kissed every part of Shane he could reach while still tethered together. Shane took one of Ilya's hands in his and brought it up to his mouth. He felt Ilya shudder as Shane placed reverent kisses on his palm and trailed down to his inner wrist.

It wasn't long before Ilya's knot went down, and the feverish need took over Shane's mind again. The next few hours passed in a euphoric haze. Shane registered bits and pieces as time lost all meaning.

At the height of their frenzy, nothing felt like it was enough. They buried teeth in each other's skin, nipping and sucking, wherever they could reach. But still careful to avoid each other's

necks. Ilya was unrelenting in his need to imprint himself on every inch of Shane's skin as much as he could without actually claiming Shane, as he fucked him from every conceivable angle.

Shane came again, and again, until his yells turned into sobs. Ilya licked at Shane's tears in triumph, as he ruthlessly pushed Shane over the edge into yet another orgasm.

There was no more Shane and Ilya. Just alpha and omega.

The fevered, desperate, all-consuming need that came with heats lifted as suddenly as it had come on in the elevator. Shane blinked up at Ilya, finding himself lying on top of him. He felt pleasantly full as Ilya's knot stretched him once again. For the third time? Maybe fourth? It didn't really matter.

"Are you back with me?" Ilya's voice rumbled pleasantly through Shane, and Shane nodded.

Ilya let a few long contented seconds pass. "We should talk," he said softly, running a hand up and down Shane's arm. Too boneless to do anything, Shane hummed in agreement, burying his nose in Ilya's shoulder and basking in their mingled scents.

Ilya let out a soft huff of laughter and ran a hand through Shane's hair, before tugging on the ends to get his attention, "I'm serious Shane, we must talk."

Yeah. They really needed to.

"I should—"

"I want to—"

They both paused as they spoke over each other. Ilya gently flicked Shane's forehead. "No, I am first."

"Okay," Shane conceded.

"You know my mother is dead." Ilya began, surprising Shane. What did his mother have to do with—?

"She was omega, like you. She also used suppressants, like you."

Oh.

"She—my father—" Ilya cleared his throat, and Shane silently encouraged him with his eyes. "Let me try again. You know my father is not nice man. My mother, she was, very young for him. My father was busy man, working high up in ministry, as cop."

The next words came out with uncharacteristic bitterness for Ilya, "It was *inconvenience* to him, to help my mother during heats. So she went on suppressants. She was already sad, but this made her sadder." Ilya swallowed hard.

"She had an accident."

"An accident?" Shane asked gently.

"Yes," Ilya said with a tight, even voice. "She accidentally swallowed a whole bottle of pills."

Oh.

Oh *fuck.*

"So when I saw your pills, after seeing one of scariest moments of my life when Marlow hit you, I acted badly. And I'm sorry." Shane's eyes blurred with tears, "I'm so fucking sorry. I never want to scare you like that ever again."

"Ilya," Shane said softly, "No, I'm sorry."

Ilya pursed his lips and shook his head.

"How old were you?" Shane asked, dreading the answer.

"Twelve," Ilya exhaled a ragged breath, "I found her." His voice broke on the last word, and then Shane was squeezing Ilya hard, pushing up so that Ilya could bury his head in Shane's shoulder.

Ilya didn't cry. Just took in long, shuddering breaths that tickled at Shane's skin. Shane waited patiently and ran his hand gently through Ilya's curls as he held him.

After several indeterminable minutes, Ilya pulled his head away to look down at Shane again, and announced, "Okay we heard my sad story. Your turn."

Shane didn't really know where to begin. "When I was drafted, the League didn't know that I was an omega." Shane watched as Ilya's eyebrows shot into his hairline.

"Are you really surprised? Name one omega in the NHL." Shane demanded archly. Ilya held up a hand in mock surrender, and a smile finally tugged at his lips. His method was a little underhanded, but Shane was happy to see the light return to Ilya's eyes and his face relax again.

"I kept it secret until right before my first physical, where I knew they'd figure it out. I came clean to my coach—who was livid—and he got the Commissioner involved." Shane's voice dropped, now quiet and subdued as he remembered how small Crowell had made him feel.

Shane rattled off the highlights from the contract after it was updated, "No mating; no telling anyone I'm anything but a beta, except for some select members of the medical and coaching staff—and my parents, of course, and . . ." Shane trailed off, stalling for time. Now that he knew Ilya's mother's history, Shane was pretty sure this last clause was going to upset him.

Oh well. The cat was basically already completely out of the bag anyway. "I have to take suppressants to keep my heats down to one during my time off in the summer." Ilya's face looked mutinous, and the citrus in his scent bittered.

"And just how many heats do you normally have?" Ilya growled.

"Uhh," fuck, "from what I can remember, like two?" Shane was not proud that his voice ended on a squeak.

"From what you can remember?" Ilya gritted out.

"I, uhh," fuuuuck, "I've basically been on suppressants since I presented, so . . ."

Ilya looked downright murderous, and his scent sharpened to an almost painful degree. Shane watched as he took a long, calming breath and schooled his face into something more open and a little sad.

"Do you know what taking suppressants for long time does to you?" Ilya asked gently.

Shane thought back to what he knew about the warning label that he always ignored, then to what he knew about older suppressants—the ones Ilya would be familiar with. "I know," he said softly, "but I can't play hockey without them." Shane looked away, overwhelmed with the feeling of inadequacy that usually came when he thought about how easy it was for the other hockey players in the NHL to just *be*. His own scent bittered as Shane thought about how easily the League handled alphas' ruts or even their mates' heats.

"But, I'm umm, I'm on newer ones. Depression isn't a major side effect anymore." He reassured, staring at where he anxiously played with Ilya's hand between their chests.

Ilya's fingers curled under Shane's chin again, pulling his face up to make steady eye contact. His eyes looked immeasurably sad. "But they still make you sick after long time."

Shane nodded and blew out a breath, "Yeah, sometimes the hormones make me sick."

Desperate to move on, Shane plowed forward, "But umm. That's not really why I blew up at you at the cottage."

"Oh?" Ilya sounded curious, and maybe a little amused, "Are you overachiever in this, too? The League being shitty is not enough?"

If only. "You're a hockey player, you know how other alphas and betas talk about omegas in locker rooms."

Ilya scowled and nodded seriously.

"I just," Shane sighed, feeling all the baggage that came with his secondary gender, "I've experienced enough shitty alphas treating omegas like their property, even essentially being a beta, that you really freaked me out when you wouldn't leave when I asked you to. After you found out."

Shame turned in Shane's gut, and he pulled his face out of Ilya's hand, "I'm so sorry for what I said. I mean, I know you would never just take what you want." Shane felt frantic. "You ask me all the time if I'm okay, and if you can do—"

He was abruptly cut off by Ilya placing a finger on his lips, "Is bare minimum. I'm sorry I made you scared when I didn't listen."

Shane nodded, opening his mouth to apologize to Ilya again. Ilya cut him off again, this time with a kiss. Shane felt the familiar slide of Ilya's tongue against his lips, and he opened his mouth, letting Ilya in, sliding his own tongue along Ilya's.

When Ilya felt Shane finally relax into the kiss, he pulled back. Ilya gently brushed his fingers over the junction of Shane's neck and shoulder, where a claiming bite would traditionally go. Shane shivered and melted further into Ilya's arms.

"Has anyone ever tried to?" Ilya asked in a gentle voice.

"No. No, I just, uhh." Shane swallowed, feeling something like shame heat in his face. He used this chance to try to explain his semi-irrational fear of alphas again. "I love hockey. I can't imagine a life without it. And I can't risk . . . ." This wasn't coming out right. "If I'm bonded. Well, you know. Mates can't be away from each other for long periods of time, and most omegas that have alphas in the NHL drop everything for them. I can't. No, I won't give up hockey. And what kind of alpha would be willing to sacrifice everything for . . . " Shane trailed off, his voice small and quiet. "I'm just an omega."

Ilya sighed heavily, and Shane felt him press a kiss to the top of his head. "Never say you are just anything, Shane Hollander. You are NHL star, capitan of the Voyageurs, winner of Rookie of the Year, and second best center forward," Shane swatted at Ilya, "But you are also moi pugliviy zaichik."

Shane scrunched up his face. He didn't know that one. "What did you call me?"

"Zaichik, rabbit, because you are anxious, and easy to scare, like small rabbit." Shane swatted Ilya again, though half-heartedly this time. He was too content to take offense. For the first time in almost nine months, he felt right. Ilya poked Shane's nose, "But very cute rabbit, with pretty freckles."

Shane rolled his eyes, "I'm pretty sure rabbits don't have freckles."

"You are," Ilya paused, "how you say—"

"Boring?"

Shane felt a gentle, playful tug at his hair. "No, no imagination."

"Oh, unimaginative?"

"Yes, my cute, unimaginative, zaichienok." Ilya declared.

Shane's skin warmed all over as he reveled in the feeling of being called Ilya's. He tried to bury himself further in Ilya's chest, if that was even possible. The bed shook with Ilya's quiet, gentle laughter, "You like that? Being called *mine*, Shane Holl—"

Ilya was cut off by Shane tilting his head up and pressing a kiss to Ilya's mouth. It didn't take long for the kiss to deepen, and for Ilya to bury a hand in Shane's hair while the other squeezed Shane's hip, then his ass. Shane moaned, his cock already hard—ready to go again.

He pulled back long enough to tell Ilya, "I want to be on top this time." The words were barely out of his mouth before Ilya was flipping them and knocking his head against the headboard in his haste.

Shane let out a delighted laugh.

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December 2021 - Ottawa

The crowd's excitement reached a fever pitch as Shane's name was called and he skated out onto the ice he was finally getting used to. The Centaurs' home arena was packed, and he waved, grinning brightly at the crowd that was cheering loudly for a hometown superstar they could finally claim as their own.

A few minutes later, he felt the mark on his neck tingle as Ilya skated up behind him and tapped his ass with his hockey stick, skating off before Shane could retaliate. Shane shot a panicked glance over to the bench where Coach Wiebe was standing with his clipboard. He was wearing a long-suffering expression on his face, and rolled his eyes when he saw Shane looking at him.

Shane flushed when he heard the crowd roar its approval. Thanks to Hayden and that FanMail video, they'd been outed to the entire world. After experiencing the volatile reactions the Voyageurs had and being burned by his team's rejection, Shane was pleasantly surprised, again and again, by his warm reception from the Centaurs and their fans.

His move to the team seemed to incite a rabid loyalty in the Centaurs' fans that the team had never seen before.

The team circled at center ice, with Ilya completing the circle. He caught Shane's eye and tapped his shoulder where Shane's bite sat, a mirror to Ilya's on Shane.

They'd completed the mating bond over the summer, as soon as his contract had been taken up by the Centaurs, which was conspicuously missing all of the omega-specific clauses. He'd thanked his and Ilya's agent profusely, who informed him in no uncertain terms that this was what he deserved. At minimum.

Their mating was still somewhat of a secret. At least one that hadn't left the confines of their friends, family, and team. It wasn't completely unheard of for an alpha and beta to mate, so most of the world was still ignorant of his designation. It was only a matter of time, though.

Shane being an omega, though? *That* secret he was keeping for when Crowell really pissed him off again, and he was ready to come out to the world as an omega.

Shane grinned as he tapped his own shoulder in answer to Ilya.

A shove at his arm had him glancing over at where Bood stood next to him. Bood raised his voice to be heard over the pounding music and cheering. "Stop flirting, we have a game to win."

Yes, they did.

End Notes

Dusted off the mother tongue for this one. Translations:

Solntse (солнце) - sunshine
Dorogoi (дорогой) - darling/dear
Da (да) - yes
Capitan - (капитан) - captain
Moi (мой) - my
Pugliviy (пугливый) - skittish/easily frightened
Zaichik (зайчик) - diminutive for rabbit
Zaichienok (зайчёнок) - sweeter diminutive for rabbit

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