

Chapter 1: Hand in hand, let's play with the fire

The lemon wedge slipped from Shane's fingers and plopped into his water glass with a splash. Rose snorted into her mimosa, her curls bouncing as she shook her head. "Still got those hands of yours, Hollander," she teased, nudging his shin under the café table. Shane flexed his fingers noticing scars from old slashes, knuckles still swollen from last night's game.

"Always," Shane muttered, shaking droplets from his fingertips before wiping them on his jeans. He caught Rose's knowing smirk, the one that said she'd already pieced together why his coordination had tanked today.

Rose twirled her straw between her fingers, the ice clinking against her glass. "So," she said, dragging out the vowel. "When's your lover boy flying in?"

Shane just smiled. The warmth spreading through his chest was almost embarrassing. Rose was the only person, besides his parents, who ever asks about Ilya like he was just a person, not a scandal or a headline. "Tomorrow," he said, tracing the rim of his glass. "His flight lands at eleven."

Shane just smiled. The kind of smile that made his cheeks ache, the kind he only ever wore when thinking about Ilya. It wasn't just relief that Rose didn't treat him like some tabloid spectacle. It was the way she leaned in, genuinely curious, like she was asking about a friend's new boyfriend. Not the NHL's most infamous secret.

Rose arched an eyebrow, swirling her mimosa with deliberate slowness. "Look at you," she said, her voice dripping with amusement. "All starry-eyed over your Russian menace. You're such a sap, Shane. Through and through." Shane ducked his head, but he couldn't stop the grin tugging at his lips. He knew it was true. Ilya had always been the exception to every rule, the one who could unravel him with a look or a careless brush of fingers against his wrist.

Shane's chuckle died in his throat as Rose's expression softened, her teasing shifting into something warmer. "You seem happy together," she said, and the simplicity of it—the normalcy—lodged in Shane's chest like a fist.

Shane's fingers stilled against his ginger ale glass. Happy. Together. The words settled between them like something fragile. "Yeah," he admitted, voice lower than he meant it to be. "We are." The confession tasted strange, sweet like stolen candy.

Rose leaned forward, elbows propped on the table, her grin turning sly. "So, I may have gone down a rabbit hole last night," she admitted, swirling her mimosa. "Watched some old clips of you two. You know, those interviews, press conferences, those incidents on the ice." The way she emphasized 'incidents' made Shane's neck heat. She wasn't just talking about fights. She

meant the way Ilya would crowd him against the boards a second too long, the way Shane would snap his head to the side, exposing his throat before shoving back.

Shane's fingers tightened around his glass. He knew exactly which clips she meant. The ones where Ilya's smirk lingered a second too long after a chirp, where Shane's gloves hit the ice before his fists did. Where the cameras caught the way Ilya's gaze dropped to Shane's mouth mid puck drop.

Rose's grin widened as she took a slow sip of her mimosa, her eyes never leaving Shane's face. "You know," she said, setting the glass down with deliberate care, "it's kinda fascinating how you two perform for the cameras." Shane stiffened, but she barreled on, undeterred. "Like that interview when he said you were 'predictable' and you just smiled at him. Not your usual pissed-off glare. A real, fucking smile." She tapped her fingernail against the rim of her glass. "And then there's the way he touches you during games. Not like he does with anyone else on his team. Like he's... checking on you."

Shane exhaled through his nose, thumb scraping against the condensation on his glass. "It's..." He paused, searching for words that wouldn't sound insane. "With Ilya, it's like... I don't have to think. He just *knows*." The admission slipped out before he could filter it, raw and unguarded. Rose's eyebrows shot up questioningly, her straw freezing mid-sip. "Like, on the ice? If I'm in my head too much, he'll check me into the boards—not to hurt me, just to—" He gestured vaguely, fingers twitching. "Reset me, I guess."

Rose just said, "Oh," but it wasn't the 'oh' of polite disinterest, it was the 'oh' of sudden, dawning comprehension. Shane's skin prickled under her gaze, the way it always did when someone saw too much. He scrambled to backtrack, to smooth it over into something that wouldn't make him sound like he'd lost his grip on reality. "It's not—it's not like that," he muttered, rubbing at the back of his neck. Except it was exactly like that, and the lie tasted sour.

Rose didn't blink. Just held his gaze over the rim of her glass, her fingers tapping once then twice, deliberate. Shane swallowed. The silence stretched too long, and suddenly his throat felt tight. He couldn't tell if she was judging him or waiting for him to dig himself deeper. "It's not—" he started again, then stopped. His fingers drummed against the table, restless. "You think it's weird."

Rose set her glass down carefully, her fingers lingering on the stem like she was choosing her words just as deliberately. "Shane," she said, voice dropping into that soft, steady tone she used when she didn't want him to bolt. "I don't think it's weird. At all." She tilted her head slightly, watching him with an intensity that made his pulse jump. "I just didn't realize you guys had that sort of relationship dynamic, that's all."

Shane blinked at Rose. "What," he asked, voice flattening. His fingers twitched against his glass, condensation dripping onto the tablecloth. The words didn't compute. A relationship

dynamic sounded like something from a psychology textbook, not whatever chaotic, magnetic pull existed between him and Ilya. "What dynamic? Nothing like that is going on."

Rose's fingers froze against her glass. She studied Shane's face. Watching the furrow between his brows, the way his jaw tensed like he was bracing for impact. He genuinely didn't know. The realization hit her then. "Shane," she said slowly, "you seriously don't see it?"

Rose's fingers tightened around her mimosa glass, her brow furrowing as she took in Shane's confused expression. The man was genuinely clueless. Although it was like Shane to miss social cues—but this? This was obvious. She tapped her nails against the glass, debating how far to push. "Shane," she said carefully, "when he tells you to do something—on the ice, off the ice—what do you do?"

Shane shrugged, fingers tapping an uneven rhythm against his glass. "I do it. Why wouldn't I?" The answer came so easily, so automatically, like Rose had asked why he laced his skates a certain way or tapped his stick twice before a faceoff. Normal. Routine. Obvious.

Rose's straw made a hollow, clicking sound as she dropped it back into her glass. She leaned forward, elbows digging into the table, and said, very slowly, "Shane why wouldn't you?"

Shane blinked at Rose like she'd asked why the sky was blue. "Because it's Ilya," he said, as if that explained everything. And maybe it did. The way Ilya's voice curled around commands—half-teasing, half-dead serious—left no room for doubt. When Ilya told him to drop his gloves, Shane's fingers were already loosening the straps. When Ilya growled 'stay' during a warm up, Shane's skates dug into the ice like anchors.

Shane answered like it was the most normal thing in the world, like Rose had just asked why he breathed or why his heart beat, and the simplicity of it made her exhale sharply through her nose. His fingers kept tapping against his glass, restless and nervous, like this wasn't a revelation at all. Just a fact. The sky was blue, ice was cold, and when Ilya Rozanov told him to do something, Shane Hollander did it. No hesitation. No questions.

Shane frowned down at his ginger ale, the ice mostly melted now, swirling in lazy circles as he nudged the glass with his fingertip. "It's just... how we are," he muttered, but his shoulders tensed, not defensively, but suddenly aware of something he'd never examined too closely.

Rose inhaled sharply, her mimosa suddenly tasting too sweet. Shane's obliviousness wasn't cute anymore—it was a live wire between them, sparking under the café's dim lighting. She'd assumed he and Ilya had talked about this. But Shane was staring at her like she'd asked him to explain quantum physics.

Rose's fingers twitched toward Shane's wrist but stopped short—she knew better than to grab him when he was already wound tight. "I'm sorry," she muttered, dragging a hand through her curls. "I didn't mean to—"

Shane shook his head, fingers tightening around his glass until his knuckles whitened. "It's normal," he said, voice rougher than he intended. "What we have...it's just normal." The word tasted strange in his mouth, too small for the weight of what he meant. Normal wasn't the right word, not when Ilya could make his pulse spike with just a glance, not when Shane would follow him anywhere without question. But what else was there to call it?

Rose reached across the table, her fingers brushing Shane's wrist, light, the way she always touched him when he was spiraling. "Hey," she said, softer now. "You guys are normal, Shane. I didn't mean to freak you out." She swirled her mimosa, the orange juice clinging to the glass. "I just meant that you two have a rhythm. A push and pull. That's not weird. That's just you."

Shane exhaled sharply through his nose, his fingers twitching against the tablecloth. "It *is* normal," he insisted, though his voice lacked its usual steadiness. The words sounded defensive even to his own ears, and he hated that—hated how exposed he suddenly felt under Rose's knowing gaze. Again. "We don't—" His cheeks burned at the implication, at the thought of putting labels on what had always just been.

Rose pressed her lips together, watching Shane's fingers drum faster against the tablecloth. The silence stretched too long, filled only by the clink of silverware from other tables. "Shane," she said finally, softer now. "I shouldn't have assumed. I'm sorry. You don't owe me—or anyone—an explanation." She flicked a stray hair out of her face. "You and Ilya are..." She waved a hand, searching for words that wouldn't make him tense up again. "In love. That's all that matters."

Rose recognized the warning signs. His jaw was tight, his shoulders drawn up near his ears. The conversation had shifted into dangerous territory, and Shane was clearly done. She reached for her mimosa. "So," she said, steering them back to safer ground, "what's the plan for tomorrow? Airport pickup? Or is he catching a ride?"

Shane exhaled, relief loosening his shoulders. "Airport pickup," he said, the words rushing out faster than usual. "Always airport pickup." His fingers finally stilled against the glass, tracing idle patterns in the condensation. Routine. Predictable. Safe.

Rose arched an eyebrow, swirling her mimosa with deliberate slowness. "And," she said, dragging out the vowel, "what's the plan when he gets here? Aside from the obvious." Her smirk was knowing, but her tone was light, giving Shane an out if he needed it.

Since it was during the hockey season, Shane had already calculated the logistics: how long it would take to get from the airport to his apartment with traffic, the way he'd be restless but exhausted, wired but heavy-limbed. Routine helped. Predictability soothed. Shane had mapped it out in his head like a power play, each step precise.

Rose swirled the last sip of her mimosa and watched it in her cup. Shane's knee hadn't stopped bouncing since they sat down. "You're practically vibrating," she said, nodding toward his restless leg. "Can't wait to have him back, huh?"

Shane's knee jerked under the table, rattling the silverware against the porcelain plates, and the energy buzzing under his skin wouldn't settle. "Yeah," he admitted, swallowing against the dryness in his throat. The admission felt too big, too vulnerable, but Rose already knew. She always knew. "It's—" His fingers flexed, searching for the right word. "Easier when he's here."

Rose completely understood. The realization settled over her with the quiet clarity of ice melting under spring sunlight. Shane wasn't oblivious—he was safe. Safe enough in Ilya's orbit that he didn't question the gravity between them, the way his body responded before his brain could catch up. It wasn't denial; it was trust so deep it didn't need words. She watched Shane's fingers trace the rim of his glass, his restless energy simmering beneath the surface, and suddenly, she wanted to laugh. Of course he didn't see it. He didn't have to.

That was all she'd ever wanted for him, wasn't it? For Shane to be happy. For him to have someone who didn't make him feel like he needed to explain himself, to justify the way his brain worked or the way his body moved. Ilya didn't ask him to be anything other than what he was. And if that meant Shane didn't need to put a name to the way Ilya did to him, the way Shane's pulse stuttered when Ilya crowded him against the boards—well, who was Rose to demand labels?

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Shane's laptop hummed against his thighs, the blue glow casting harsh shadows across his face as he sat up in bed. His fingers hesitated over the keyboard with half-formed searches deleted before he could commit.

*what does it mean to be obedient?
am I in a power exchange?
am I in a normal relationship?*

He scrubbed a hand over his face. This was stupid. But Rose's words looped in his head like a broken record: *'You don't see it?'*

But what was there to see? Shane just couldn't understand. He stared at his reflection in the darkened laptop screen as if his face might suddenly rearrange into an answer. The mattress dipped under his restless shifting, sheets tangling around his legs. It wasn't like he tried to obey Ilya. It wasn't even a choice. His body just... did it. Like muscle memory, like the automatic way his skates cut into fresh ice.

Shane decided to type in *'different relationship dynamics'* just to see what came up. The search results loaded, and his stomach flipped when the first article title popped up: *Understanding*

Dominance and Submission in Romantic Partnerships. His fingers hovered over the trackpad, pulse hammering against his ribs. He clicked.

The article loaded with clinical detachment, bullet points neat and impersonal. Shane's breath hitched at the definition: *A D/s dynamic involves one partner taking a dominant role, the other submitting willingly*— His fingers twitched against the keyboard. Willingly. That was the word that stuck. Because it wasn't like Ilya ever forced him. Shane just... gave. Without thinking. Without hesitation.

Shane's breath fogged up the screen slightly as he leaned closer, the article's sterile definitions suddenly too intimate under the dim glow of his bedside lamp. *'The submissive partner often derives comfort from structure, from clear expectations...'* His fingers tapped nervously against the keyboard, the rhythm stuttering as he absorbed each word like a bodycheck to the ribs. Structure. Expectations. Those weren't dirty words—they were the scaffolding of his life, the way he organized his gear, the precise rituals before each game. But seeing them laid out like this, paired with phrases like *'voluntary surrender of control,'* made his skin prickle with something between recognition and dread.

Shane's breath caught halfway up his throat as his eyes skidded over the bullet points again. *'The submissive partner often experiences relief in relinquishing decision-making...'* Relief. That was the word that hooked under his ribs and tugged. Because wasn't that exactly what it felt like when Ilya crowded him against the boards during games? The sudden stillness in his muscles, the way his lungs finally remembered how to work. No more buzzing under his skin, no more spiraling thoughts—just the solid weight of Ilya's command settling over him like a weighted blanket.

Shane slammed the laptop shut harder than intended, the sharp *click* echoing in the quiet bedroom. His palms were damp against the computer. What was going on? Shane and Ilya had always been this way. Since that first command of Ilay telling Shane to drink more of his water after that workout in LA. There had never been a name for it, no neat little box to shove their dynamic into. Just heat and familiarity.

The phone buzzed against Shane's thigh, pulling him out of his spiraling thoughts with the sharp vibration. He fumbled for it, fingers slipping on the case before finally flipping it over. The screen lit up with Ilya's name and a single, devastatingly simple message:

Lily 🥺

I miss you and can't wait to see you tomorrow.

Ilya's text dissolved the tension coiled between Shane's ribs. His fingers tapped out a reply before his brain could second-guess the wording:

Jane ❤️

Miss you more. Flight still at 11?

His thumbs hovered, then added:

Bringing coffee.

Because he knew Ilya would need it, knew he took it black with exactly one sugar packet torn open messily over the cup.

Shane's phone buzzed again before he could set it down, Ilya's reply lighting up the screen:

Lily 🙄

Still at 11. Я тебя люблю.

The Russian words were simple, but Shane's chest tightened anyway, warmth spreading under his ribs like spilled syrup. Shane had been getting used to reading simple Russian words. And Ilya never hesitated with those words, never made them conditional or complicated. Just *'I love you'*, like it was as easy as breathing.

The phone screen dimmed, then darkened completely as Shane let it rest against his chest. The weight of the day pressing down on him like a too-heavy blanket. He should sleep. Ilya should sleep. But his brain wouldn't shut off, buzzing with half-formed thoughts and Rose's words circling like vultures.

Shane blinked at his phone when Ilya's next message came through—not another sweet nothing, but a sharp, unmistakable command:

Lily 🙄

Go to sleep, моя любовь. You have to drive tomorrow.

The words hit Shane's nervous system like a slap to the ribs, immediate and electric. His fingers twitched against the screen as another message buzzed through:

Go to the bathroom if you need to then go to sleep.

Shane didn't realize he'd already kicked off the blankets until his feet hit the cool hardwood floor. The bathroom light flickered on, too bright, making him squint as he brushed his teeth with automatic precision. He spat, rinsed, wiped his mouth—all without fully registering the motions.

His body moved on autopilot, obeying Ilya's text like it was a play called mid-game, no hesitation required.

The sheets were cool against Shane's skin as he slid back into bed, his phone clutched loosely in one hand. He thumbed out a quick

Jane ❤️
Going to sleep now. Love you.

before setting it face-down on the nightstand. The weight in his chest had eased, replaced by the familiar pull of exhaustion now that Ilya's voice, even through text, had rerouted his spiraling thoughts. Shane pressed his face into the pillow, inhaling the faint scent of Ilya's cologne lingering in the fabric from their last visit. His muscles unclenched one by one, like dominoes tipping over.

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The alarm didn't need to blare because Shane was already awake. His fingers twitched against the sheets, and Shane swung his legs out of bed. He had already mapped out the day's plans in his head: shower, dress, breakfast, coffee, airport, then Ilya.

The airport parking garage smelled like stale exhaust and old chewing gum. He'd timed it perfectly: forty minutes early, just enough buffer for traffic or an overzealous fan recognizing his car. The cap tugged low over his brow and the aviators hiding half his face made him feel ridiculous, but the anonymity soothed the itch under his skin.

The parking garage's fluorescent lights flickered overhead as Shane pulled out his phone—half out of habit, half to distract himself from the way his knee kept bouncing. He opened his search engine and was suddenly reminded of his last search. *'Understanding Dominance and Submission in Romantic Partnerships.'*

Shane's thumb hovered over the search bar, the letters blurring slightly as his pulse thudded in his ears. *'Signs of a D/s dynamic in a relationship'* The reddit page loaded with an avalanche of forums and links, each more confusing than the last. His breath hitched at one headline: *'How to Know If You're a Natural Submissive.'* The article was riddled with phrases like *'instinctive obedience'* and *'craving structure'*. Shane's fingers scrolled faster, skimming over testimonials from people who described the relief of surrendering control, the way their Dom's voice could *'shut off the noise in their head.'* His stomach lurched. That wasn't... that wasn't *them*, was it?

The screen flickered as he tapped another link—some obscure forum thread titled *'Unspoken D/s: When You Don't Need Collars or Contracts.'* His throat tightened at the first reply:

'Sometimes it's just in the way they touch you. Like they already own you, and you've known it forever.' The words blurred as Shane's pulse kicked up, memories flashing unbidden—Ilya's palm spanning the back of his neck, or the way his grip would tighten just shy of painful when Shane got overstimulated.

Shane's heart rate quickened with another article—*'Natural Submissives: Recognizing the Signs in Yourself'*. The words blurred together at first, then snapped into sharp focus: *'Do you feel calmer when someone else takes charge'* His breath stuttered. Yes, obviously. Hockey was built on hierarchy, on coaches barking orders and other captains calling plays. But this wasn't about hockey. This was about the way Ilya's voice, low and rough, could unravel the knots in his spine with a single *'come here.'*

The article title glared up at him: *'Inside the Dominant Mindset: Control as a Language of Care'*. He'd never considered. Has Ilya ever thought about this? Deliberately, consciously, the way these forum posts described? The screen refreshed with a bulleted list: *'True dominance isn't about power—it's about responsibility. About knowing your partner's needs before they do.'* Shane's breath stuck in his throat. That sounded like Ilya having a cold can of ginger ale waiting for Shane whenever they were in the same town and whenever Shane was too overwhelmed.

The phone buzzed in Shane's hand, snapping him out of it. Ilya's name flashed on the screen.

Lily 🙄

Landed. Where are you?

Shane's thumb jabbed at the screen almost before he'd processed the text his reply

Jane ❤️

A1 level, northeast corner. Black Jeep.

His fingers tightened around the phone, case creaking under the pressure. The words *'I was reading about us'* hovered at the edge of his thumbs, unsent, too raw to voice.

Shane's fingers drummed against the steering wheel, his knee bouncing in erratic time with the garage's flickering lights. The Jeep's dashboard clock ticked on. He knew the math: baggage claim, then the long walk through Terminal A's labyrinthine corridors. Still, his pulse jumped at every distant echo of footsteps across concrete.

Ilya arrived in what seemed like no time. But one moment the garage was empty, and the next, Ilya's battered suitcase hit the pavement by Shane's car with a thud. "You look like shit," Ilya said by way of greeting, reaching over to pluck Shane's sunglasses off his face once he was

inside the car. His fingers lingered just a second too long, brushing Shane's temple. "Thinking too much again, I see."

Shane caught Ilya's wrist before he could pull away, fingers pressing hard enough into the pulse point to feel the steady thrum of blood beneath skin. "Missed you," he muttered, rough and unguarded in a way that only ever happened when they were alone.

The Jeep's engine idled too loud in the sudden silence after Shane's admission. Ilya's wrist stayed locked in Shane's grip, his pulse jumping under Shane's fingertips—not from surprise, but something hotter, sharper. The garage's flickering lights cut shadows across Ilya's face as he leaned in, close enough for Shane to smell the stale airplane air clinging to his jacket. "Say it again," Ilya murmured, voice rough from the flight but edged with that particular tone that made Shane's spine straighten without thought.

Shane exhaled sharply through his nose. Ilya's command hung between them—*'say it again'*—and Shane's body responded before his brain caught up, the words tumbling out raw and uneven. "Missed you. So much." His fingers tightened around Ilya's wrist, grounding himself in the steady thrum of his pulse.

Ilya's hand cradled Shane's jaw like he was holding something breakable and priceless all at once. His lips crashed into Shane's with the same controlled desperation as a drowning man gulping air—like if he didn't kiss Shane right then, he'd suffocate. He could feel Ilya's other hand fisting in the fabric of his hoodie, anchoring them together as if the Jeep's console wasn't barrier enough.

The Jeep's tires hummed against pavement as Shane navigated downtown traffic. Ilya's hand pressed against his thigh, the contact a grounding counterpoint to the storm of half-formed thoughts still circling Shane's mind. The silence between them wasn't uncomfortable. But it never was with Ilya.

Ilya was happy just looking at Shane again. Facetime and phone calls got tiring. The flat glow of screens couldn't capture the way sunlight caught in Shane's eyelashes when he squinted against the morning light, or how his fingers tapped uneven rhythms against surfaces when he was thinking too hard. Now, in the Jeep's dim interior, Ilya memorized Shane's all over again.

When the apartment door clicked shut, sealing them in their own world, Ilya's lips never left Shane's as he walked him backward, step by deliberate step, until Shane's calves hit the edge of the couch. Neither of them wanted to be anywhere else. Not on the ice, not in front of cameras, not even in bed yet. Right here, with Shane's fingers twisted in Ilya's shirt and Ilya's palm cradling the back of Shane's head, was the only place that mattered.

Ilya's fingers traced idle patterns against Shane's ribs through his shirt. "You're quiet today," he murmured against Shane's throat. Not a question. A statement, weighted with that particular undercurrent of authority that made Shane's breath hitch.

Ilya's fingers stilled against Shane's ribs. "Look at me," he said and Shane's chin lifted automatically before his brain caught up. The realization flickered across his face, too quick to hide: the obedience was instinct, wired deeper than thought. Shane's breath stuttered, his shoulders tensing almost imperceptibly beneath Ilya's palm.

Ilya's thumb brushed over the sharp ridge of Shane's collarbone, slow and deliberate—the kind of touch that wasn't just contact but a question. Shane's breath hitched, barely audible, but Ilya's fingers paused mid-motion like he'd heard a gunshot.

Ilya's fingers curled around the back of Shane's neck, firm but not rough, just enough pressure to still the restless twitch of Shane's shoulders. "You're thinking loudly again," he murmured, lips brushing the shell of Shane's ear. "Tell me."

Shane's throat tightened around the words, his fingers curling into the fabric of Ilya's shirt like an anchor. "There's—" He swallowed, forcing air into his lungs. "There's a name for what our relationship is." The admission hovered between them. He watched Ilya's face for any flicker of surprise, any sign he'd crossed some unspoken line, but Ilya's expression remained steady—patient in a way that made Shane's pulse stutter.

Shane's pulse hammered against his ribs, his fingers tightening reflexively around the hem of Ilya's shirt. "We have a dynamic," he managed, the words scraping his throat raw. "How do you feel around me? And about me?"

Ilya's thumb stilled against Shane's jawline, his brow furrowing as he studied the tension in Shane's shoulders. "You are mine and I am yours," he said simply. "And I take care of what's mine." His fingers slid up to card through Shane's hair. Firm and possessive, but with that undercurrent of gentleness that always made Shane's breath catch. "This bothers you?"

Shane's fingers twisted tighter in Ilya's shirt, the fabric straining under his grip. "Rose said—" The words lodged in his throat like a puck caught in his chest protector. He forced them out in a rush. "She said we have a thing. A dynamic. And I looked it up and—fuck." His pulse roared in his ears, too loud, too fast. "There's words for it, Ilya. For how I am with you. So I want to know how it is for you..."

Ilya exhaled slowly through his nose, deliberately unclenching his grip on Shane's hip. His thumb resumed its slow circles against Shane's skin, grounding them both. "Tell me. From the beginning. What did Rose say?"

Shane's fingers twitched against Ilya's chest, grounding himself in the steady rise and fall of breath beneath his palm. "She—" The word caught like a skate blade on chipped ice. He forced himself to exhale, to unclench his jaw. "Rose said we have a thing. That when you tell me to do something, I just... do it." His voice dropped to a whisper, the confession raw. "Like it's natural."

Shane told him everything—about the café conversation with Rose, the frantic late-night searches, the way his stomach had knotted reading definitions that fit them too perfectly. The words spilled out between them like spilled water, unstoppable now that the dam had broken. He watched Ilya's face for any hint of rejection, but all he saw was that same firm focus Ilya wore when breaking down game plays, analyzing every shift in Shane's tone like it held the key to a winning play.

Ilya's fingers stilled against Shane's ribs, his breath slow and measured as he processed the flood of words. The silence stretched taut between them, thick with unasked questions. Shane could almost see the gears turning behind Ilya's eyes. All the calculating, reassessing every touch, every command, every possessive growl over the years with this new lens between them.

Ilya's fingers tightened imperceptibly against Shane's ribs. "You searched," he said slowly, each word deliberate, "because Rose pointed it out?" His voice was deceptively calm, but Shane recognized the edge beneath, the same focused intensity Ilya used when dissecting an opponent's weak spots.

Ilya had never named it. Never needed to. The way Shane responded to him and the way his shoulders relaxed under Ilya's hands. The way his breathing evened out when Ilya gave him simple, direct commands. It was just them. Natural as breathing, inevitable as gravity. He'd never once thought to dissect it with clinical terms or forum posts.

Ilya's fingers stilled against Shane's ribs, his breath hitching slightly before he spoke. "Do you want this to change?" The question was quiet, rougher than usual, like the words had been dragged through gravel. Shane felt the tension coiled in Ilya's muscles beneath his palms, not the usual controlled readiness, but something brittle, uncertain.

Shane's fingers dug into Ilya's shoulders, blunt nails pressing through fabric as if he could fuse them together by sheer force. "No," he rasped, the word cracking like split ice. "Never." His breath hitched when Ilya's grip on his hips tightened—possessive and reflexive—but Shane surged forward before the doubt could take root. "I like how we are. How you—" His throat worked around the confession, raw and unpolished. "How you know me better than I know myself."

Ilya exhaled sharply through his nose—not relief, not laughter, but something raw and possessive settling deep in his chest. "Good," he murmured, pressing his forehead against Shane's. His thumb traced the hinge of Shane's jaw, the touch featherlight but deliberate. "Because I like it too. Very much." The admission rolled off his tongue like it was nothing, like it hadn't taken root in his ribs years ago and grown thorns around his lungs every time Shane melted under his hands.

Shane's fingers flexed against Ilya's shoulders, the fabric wrinkling under his grip. "We have to talk about this," he said, voice sharper than intended. Less a request and more a demand that surprised even him.

"Then we talk." Ilya said as his thumb pressed into the delicate skin beneath Shane's palm. Not a command, not yet, but the promise of one.

Chapter 2: Take me, don't hesitate

It had only been a few hours since Shane picked Ilya up from the airport. Only time for a quick shared lunch before Ilya got to his research.

Shane's laptop screen glowed blue in the dim apartment, illuminating the sharp angles of Ilya's face as he scrolled through the same articles Shane had already discovered as well as some new ones. His jaw was set, brow furrowed. This was them, stripped raw and held up to the light.

The laptop clicked shut where Ilya sat on the couch and the sound was too loud in the quiet apartment. Ilya exhaled through his nose, fingers still resting on the warm metal casing. Shane watched from the kitchen where he'd been methodically shredding a small paper towel into confetti, his pulse hammering against his ribs like a trapped bird.

The crumpled napkin scraps formed a tiny mountain on the counter by the time Ilya finally spoke.

"You know," Ilya started, voice low, "apparently Doms are supposed to be good at reading their subs. Not just..." he gestured vaguely at Shane with his free hand, "you, but the... the needs underneath."

Shane's pulse stuttering at the casual way Ilya said '*Doms*' and '*subs*' like they were discussing power plays on the ice. The words settled between them with heavy resonants.

"You read that?" Shane asked, nodding toward the closed laptop. He moved over to where Ilya was, calming down only a little by being close to Ilya.

Ilya's fingers tapped once against the laptop lid. "I did, yes." His gaze locked onto Shane's, dark and unreadable in the dim light. "You want to know how I feel? Not what some article says?" He looked at Shane as he nodded.

Ilya leaned forward, elbows braced on his knees, fingers laced together like he was containing something volatile. "It is..." He exhaled sharply, searching for the word in English, in Russian, in the space between them where language had never been necessary. "A little...scary," he settled on finally, voice rougher than the scrape of Shane's blade against fresh ice. "To have words for this. Labels." His thumb pressed hard into his opposite palm. Grounding. "I never thought of it as a '*dynamic*'. It was just... you. Me. How we are."

Ilya's hands flexed against his knees, the tendons standing out stark under his skin. "When you read those things," he said slowly, each word deliberate like he was translating them from a language he didn't quite know, "did they feel true? Or just... close enough to be comfortable?" His gaze flicked up, sharp as a blade's edge, waiting.

Shane's fingers curled into his palms, blunt nails pressing into his skin. The air between them felt charged, thick with unsaid things. "They feel true," he admitted, the words scraping his throat raw. "Too true. Like someone had been watching us and wrote it down." His gaze flicked to the closed laptop, then back to Ilya's face. "The part about... about how I respond to you. And how I feel when I do it. That wasn't just close. That was us."

Ilya's fingers traced the hinge of Shane's jaw, his touch deliberate, like he was mapping the tension there. "Hey," he murmured, voice low enough to vibrate through Shane's bones. "What does it feel like? When your body listens to me before your brain catches up." His thumb pressed just beneath Shane's earlobe.

"It's like..." He trailed off, brow furrowing as he searched for the words. "Like when you're on the ice and you see a pass coming before it leaves your teammate's stick. Your body just *knows*." His voice dropped to a whisper. "You don't think. You move."

Ilya exhaled sharply through his nose, fingers curling around the back of Shane's neck. "For me?" His voice roughened, syllables clipped like he was forcing them through teeth. "It's like stepping onto fresh ice. That first moment where everything is quiet." His thumb pressed into the tendon behind Shane's ear, deliberate. "You are the only thing that makes sense. The only one I *need* to see."

Shane's smile was small but unmistakable. The kind that started at the corners of his mouth and spread upward until it reached his eyes, softening the sharp lines of his face. Ilya's thumb still pressed against his jawline, warm and solid, and Shane leaned into the touch instinctively. It wasn't just the physical contact; it was the way Ilya's fingers always seemed to find the exact right pressure, the way his grip adjusted without thought whenever Shane tensed or relaxed.

Shane's fingers twitched against the takeout container, the plastic edge digging into his skin. "Are there...limits?" he asked abruptly, voice cracking on the word. "For you. Things you wouldn't want—" He gestured vaguely between them, the motion jerky like a stickhandling misfire. "With this. Us."

When Ilya finally spoke, his voice was resolute. "I never want to hurt you," he said, thumb tracing the curve of Shane's cheekbone. "Unless..." His grip tightened incrementally, just enough for Shane to feel the shift in pressure. "Unless it's what you need. Unless you ask for it."

Shane's breath hitched. The words settled between them, heavier than the silence had been. He could feel the warmth of Ilya's palm against his skin, the rough calluses felt nice.

Shane's fingers tapped an uneven rhythm against the takeout container, the plastic echoing hollow under his touch. "You'd stop," he said, not quite a question. "If I told you to." His gaze flicked up to Ilya's face, searching for something beneath the sharp angles and shadowed planes. "I know you would."

Ilya's grip loosened immediately, his palm flattening against Shane's cheek. "Always," he said, the word leaving no room for interpretation. His thumb traced the curve of Shane's cheekbone, deliberate as a blade etching ice. "You say stop, we stop. You say slow down, we slow down." His fingers flexed against Shane's skin, just enough pressure to emphasize the point.

Shane exhaled sharply, shoulders dropping. "I know," he murmured, leaning into Ilya's touch. His fingers twitched against the coffee table, restless. "But I needed to hear it." The admission felt jagged in his throat, like swallowing broken glass. "Out loud. Thank you."

Shane's fingers dug into the edge of the coffee table, grounding himself against the weight of Ilya's stare. "What if—" His throat clicked around the words, dry as skate blades on concrete. "What if I don't know my own limits yet?" The admission hung between them, fragile as a puck balanced on the goal line.

Ilya's fingers traced the curve of Shane's ear before his hand slid down to grip the back of Shane's neck. "That's why we need a safeword," he said, voice roughened. "If you don't know your limits, that is fine. You say the word, everything stops. No questions. No arguments." His thumb pressed into the hollow behind Shane's jaw, punctuating each syllable. "And same for me."

Shane's pulse jumped under Ilya's fingertips. "A safeword," he repeated, testing the shape of it in his mouth. It felt foreign—too clinical—for the way Ilya's touch already mapped his skin like a familiar playbook. "Have any ideas?"

Ilya's thumb stilled against Shane's pulse point. "Something simple," he said, voice dropping into that register that made Shane's skin prickle. "But not hockey terms. Too easy to mix up mid-game." His lips quirked at the corner, the ghost of a smirk. "Unless you want to scream '*hat trick*' during sex."

Shane's laugh punched out of him unexpectedly, sharp and bright in the dim apartment. The sound startled them both—Shane's fingers flew to his mouth as if he could catch it, while Ilya's grip on his neck tightened instinctively, pulling him closer. "You're ridiculous," Shane muttered, but his shoulders had lost their tension, the curve of his spine softening under Ilya's palm.

"Maybe, but you like it." Ilya's thumb swept along Shane's jawline, smugness bleeding into his touch. "Tell me you wouldn't think about it every time I did one now." His voice dipped lower, roughened at the edges.

Shane groaned, tipping his head back against the couch. "You'd do it on purpose," he accused, fingers twisting in the hem of his shirt.

Ilya's answering grin was all teeth. "Obviously."

Shane's fingers twitched against the fabric of his shirt, his gaze darting to the forgotten takeout containers before settling back on Ilya's face. "What about... pineapple?" he said. He could already feel the flush creeping up his neck. Hockey terms were too woven into their lives, too likely to slip out accidentally during practice, during interviews.

Ilya's fingers paused where they'd been tracing Shane's collarbone. "Pineapple," he repeated, rolling the word around in his mouth like he was testing its weight. The corner of his mouth twitched into a slight smile.

Shane's fingers tapped a nervous rhythm against his thigh, the fabric of his sweatpants whispering under his touch. "Pineapple," he repeated, firmer this time. "It's....it's neutral. Not something we'd say accidentally." His brow furrowed slightly, the way it did when he was mentally replaying a play, checking for flaws. "And it's... distinct. Hard to mishear."

Ilya's fingers stilled against Shane's skin, his thumb resting just below the hinge of Shane's jaw where his pulse jumped in an erratic rhythm. "You know," he murmured, his breath warm against Shane's temple, "they say good Doms reward their subs." The words were deliberate, weighted.

Shane's fingers clenched reflexively around Ilya's wrist, his grip tightening incrementally as his brain caught up with the implication. "Rewards," he repeated, voice raspy.

Ilya's fingers lifted away from Shane's skin all at once, leaving behind phantom impressions where his touch had been. The sudden absence was jarring—like stepping off the ice mid-shift, momentum interrupted. Shane's breath caught, his hands hovering awkwardly in the space between them before settling back onto his own thighs. Ilya exhaled sharply through his nose, shifting back just enough to put space between them without retreating entirely.

Shane understood the necessity of it, the way Ilya was giving him room to breathe, to think. That didn't stop the ache in his chest from spreading, sharp as a misplaced elbow to the ribs. His fingers flexed against his thighs, the fabric of his sweatpants rough under his nails.

Shane's fingers traced the seam of his sweatpants, the texture rough under his fingertips. Rewards. The word looped in his head like a broken record, skipping over the same groove. What did rewards look like to him? Not praise—that was too nebulous, too dependent on tone and context. Not gifts—those were transactional, hollow. He needed something tangible, something he could feel.

Ilya's knee brushed against his, the contact deliberate. "What would you want," he murmured, voice pitched low enough that Shane felt it in his ribs. "Not what you think I want too."

Shane exhaled sharply, his pulse stuttering. "Structure," he said finally, the word scraping his throat raw. "Not—not necessarily rules, but... consistency. Knowing what to expect." His fingers flexed against his thighs. "And—" He swallowed hard, the next words sticking in his mouth like

dry protein powder. "When I do something right, I want you to—to tell me. Explicitly. Not just assume I know."

Ilya's fingers twitched where they rested on his own knee, like he was stopping himself from reaching out. "So feedback," he said, nodding slowly. "Clear. Direct." His thumb tapped once against his kneecap, thoughtful.

Shane's fingers stilled against his sweatpants, his breath hitching as he forced the words out. "There has to be a difference." His voice was quiet but firm. "A difference between my Ilya and the Rozanov everyone else sees."

The '*my Ilya*' hit Ilya like a puck to an unprotected ribcage: harp, breath-stealing, and lingering long after the initial impact. His fingers twitched against Shane's knee, the urge to haul him close warring with the need to let Shane set the pace. "Your Ilya," he repeated, voice rough as fresh ice under skates.

Shane's fingers curled into the fabric of his sweatpants, knuckles pressing white against the dark material. "Yeah," he breathed. "The one who—" His throat clicked around the words. "Who knows how I take my coffee. Who doesn't laugh when I line up my protein bars by expiration date." His gaze flicked up, holding Ilya's with startling intensity. "The one who sees me."

Ilya's palm landed on Shane's thigh, warm and heavy through the thin fabric. "Your Ilya," Ilya said, thumb pressing into the muscle, "is the only one who gets to have you like this." His grip tightened incrementally, just enough for Shane to feel the shift in pressure. "Yes?"

Shane wanted nothing more than to be just Ilya's. The thought curled hot and insistent in his chest, tightening around his ribs like Ilya's hands had around his wrists last week—firm, possessive, leaving marks that faded too quickly. He nodded, swallowing hard against the sudden dryness in his throat. "Yeah," he managed, voice cracking. "Of course."

Ilya's hand lifted from Shane's thigh. The absence was a physical ache again. Shane's fingers twitched against his sweatpants, resisting the urge to chase the contact.

Shane's fingers twitched against his thigh, the fabric of his sweatpants suddenly too rough, too present. The words sat heavy behind his teeth before he forced them out—quiet, but deliberate. "Touch me again." Not a demand. A request. A test. "Please."

Ilya's left hand came up slowly, fingers spreading wide before settling along the sharp angle of Shane's jaw. His thumb pressed into the hollow just below Shane's cheekbone—deliberate pressure, measured and firm. Shane's breath hitched, his eyelids fluttering shut as he leaned into the touch with a soft hum vibrating through his throat.

"Good," Ilya murmured, the praise landing warm against Shane's skin. His fingers flexed incrementally, adjusting their grip until Shane's pulse jumped visibly beneath his palm. "For telling me what you wanted."

Shane's breath shuddered out between parted lips, the tension in his shoulders easing under Ilya's touch. The praise settled into his bones—warm and solid. His fingers uncurled from their death grip on his sweatpants, knuckles no longer grasping the fabric. "And what do you expect from me?"

Ilya's fingers traced Shane's jawline, his thumb pressing just hard enough to keep Shane grounded in the moment. "Expect?" His voice was low, considering. "I expect you to tell me when something is not working. Not after. Not when you're already ripping skin off your fingers." His grip shifted, fingers sliding down to curl loosely around Shane's hands. "I expect you to use our safeword whenever you need it. No trying to power through for me."

Shane nodded again—instinctive, automatic—but Ilya's grip tightened before he could pull away. "Words," Ilya reminded him, voice dropping into that tone that made Shane's stomach flip. "Actual words, Hollander."

Shane's throat worked around the sudden dryness. "Yes," he rasped, then clearer: "Yes, I'll tell you. I'll—" His fingers flexed against Ilya's wrist, grounding himself in the contact. "I'll use the safeword. No powering through." The admission tasted bitter, like swallowing his own pride.

Ilya rewarded him by bringing Shane's hands up to his mouth, pressing slow, deliberate kisses to each knuckle—first the right hand, then the left. His lips lingered over the faint crescent marks Shane's nails had left in his own palms earlier, tongue flicking out once to trace the indents before closing his teeth just shy of biting down. Shane's stomach fluttered violently, breath catching in a way that had nothing to do with the sharpness of Ilya's canines and everything to do with the precision of the gesture.

Shane's fingers twitched against Ilya's wrist, his breath coming uneven. "You can't just—" The words dissolved into a shudder as Ilya's teeth grazed his knuckle again, blunt pressure that promised marks if he pushed harder. "Do this. Not right now." His voice wavered, caught between protest and plea.

Ilya's teeth released Shane's knuckle with a slow, deliberate drag that sent heat spiraling down Shane's spine. But then his hands retreated entirely, settling back on his own thighs the very picture of surrender. The whine that threatened to escape Shane's throat was almost embarrassing. Almost.

The sound of Shane's suppressed whine lingered between them. Ilya's fingers twitched against his own thighs, his pulse jumping at the way Shane's breath hitched when he denied him contact. He loved this. Loved the way Shane's restraint frayed at the edges, the way his body

tensed with unspoken need. Most of all, he loved the quiet, desperate noises Shane made when he was holding back.

The silence stretched between them, charged with unspoken tension, until Ilya exhaled sharply through his nose and patted his thighs. "Come here," he said, voice roughened with something that wasn't quite command but wasn't a suggestion either.

Shane didn't hesitate—just climbed into Ilya's lap with the same single-minded focus he brought to breakaways, thighs bracketing Ilya's hips, forehead pressed against his collarbone. Ilya's arms came around him immediately, locking tight across the small of Shane's back, one hand splayed between his shoulder blades like he was measuring the expansion of Shane's ribs with each breath.

Shane's breath hitched as Ilya's palm settled between his shoulder blades, warm and heavy. The weight of it anchored him—steadyng the frantic flutter of his pulse against Ilya's collarbone.

"I love you," Ilya murmured into the crown of Shane's hair, the words vibrating through bone and muscle. His fingers flexed against Shane's spine, blunt nails pressing just shy of painful. "And your safety..." His grip tightened incrementally, a silent punctuation. "That comes first. Always."

Shane shuddered, pressing closer as if he could fuse their ribs together. "I know," he whispered, the admission muffled against Ilya's throat. His fingers curled into the fabric of Ilya's shirt, twisting tight. "But I—" He swallowed hard, forcing the words past the knot in his chest. "I need you to know that I trust you. More than anyone." His breath stuttered as Ilya's thumb traced the knobs of his spine. "Which is why I love you."

Ilya exhaled sharply, the sound almost pained. His fingers slid up to tangle in Shane's hair, gripping just hard enough to tilt his head back. "Do not," he said, voice roughened, "use trust as an excuse to ignore your own limits." His thumb brushed the flutter of Shane's pulse. "That is not how this works."

Ilya's fingers tightened incrementally in Shane's hair, grounding them both. "One of the articles," he began, voice deliberately measured, "talked about aftercare." His thumb brushed Shane's temple, tracing the fine bone there. "Not just for you. For me too."

Shane went very still against Ilya's chest. The realization punched through him—of course Dom drop was a thing. He'd read about it in those damn articles, skimmed right past the section because his brain had been too busy short-circuiting over the *other* parts. "Shit," he muttered into Ilya's collarbone, fingers tightening in his shirt. "I didn't—" His throat clicked around the admission. "I didn't think about what it costs you."

Shane's fingers curled tighter in Ilya's shirt, the fabric damp where his forehead had pressed. "Have you—" His voice cracked. He cleared his throat, tried again. "A Dom drop. Has that

ever...happened to you? When we've been together?" The question hung between them, fragile as the pause between a referee's whistle and the call.

Fingers stilled against Shane's scalp. The pause stretched long enough that Shane could hear Ilya's heartbeat picking up. "Once," Ilya admitted finally, voice scraped raw. "Vegas. All those years ago."

Shane sat up abruptly in Ilya's lap, hands braced against his chest as he searched Ilya's face. The dim lamplight caught the shadows under Ilya's eyes—deeper now than they'd been a moment ago. "Vegas," Shane repeated, voice cracking. His fingers flexed against Ilya's shirt. "After we—" The memory hit him, the way Ilya had pinned him against the bed with a hand holding his head down, how Shane had come apart beneath him with tears streaking his cheeks. And then—nothing. Ilya told him to leave.

Ilya tightened his hold on Shane's neck. "You left," he said, the words jagged. "And I..." He swallowed, gaze flicking to the ceiling before dragging back down to Shane's face. "I sat there. For hours. Felt like my skin was wrong. Couldn't move. Couldn't think." His thumb brushed Shane's temple, a silent apology. "I kept seeing your face in my head. The way you looked at me after."

Shane's breath hitched. He remembered the hotel room door slamming behind him, the elevator ride down—how his hands had trembled too badly to press the right button. The way his skin had felt too tight, his throat raw like he'd been screaming. "I thought," Shane started, then swallowed hard. "I thought you regretted it. That I'd done something wrong." Shane's eyes glosses over ever so slightly at the memory. "Everything was too much after. Lights. Sounds. Couldn't get warm." The memory coiled around him, the hotel sheets scratchy against his oversensitive skin, the hollow ache in his chest.

Ilya's grip on Shane's neck shifted, fingers sliding up to cradle his skull. "No," he growled, the word vibrating through Shane's bones. "God no. Never that." His thumb traced the shell of Shane's ear, the touch unbearably gentle. "I was afraid to even kiss you that night. Because if I had, I never would have stopped. I wanted it...wanted you so bad."

Jesus fucking Christ. Shane's stomach lurched as the realization settled between them like a third body in the bed. They'd both crashed—hard—at the same time, each drowning in their own private aftermath without knowing how to reach for the other. His pulse hammered against Ilya's palm where it still cradled his skull. "We were both—" Shane's voice broke. He dug his nails into Ilya's shoulder, grounding himself in the bite of muscle beneath fabric. "Fuck. That's why everything felt so..." He gestured vaguely at the air between them, the memory of that hotel room's fluorescent lights buzzing against his skin even now.

Ilya's fingers flexed against Shane's scalp. "Never again," he said, voice rough with conviction. "Not like that." His thumb traced the curve of Shane's ear—gentle now, almost reverent. "We do this right, or we don't do it at all."

Shane's fingers traced the seam of Ilya's shirt collar, grounding himself in the texture as his mind cycled through variables. "What if..." he swallowed hard, the words sticking like dry ice in his throat. "What if I can't speak during...?" His fingers twitched against the fabric.

Ilya's fingers tightened around Shane's pinned wrist, pressing his pulse point firmly into the couch cushion. "Then you tap me," he said, shifting his grip to demonstrate—three sharp raps of Shane's knuckles against his collarbone. "Doesn't matter where. I'll feel it." His thumb swept over Shane's racing pulse. "And if that's not possible—" He released Shane's wrist abruptly, hand sliding down to grip Shane's thigh instead. "You make noise. Scream the damn safeword into my mouth if you have to."

Shane's fingers tapped a staccato rhythm against Ilya's ribs—three hesitant beats, then two firm. Testing. "Like this?" His voice scraped low, uneven with the effort of keeping it steady.

Ilya's fingers curled around Shane's tapping hand, stilling the rhythm against his ribs. "Exactly like that," he confirmed, his voice roughened with something that wasn't quite praise but carried the same weight. His grip shifted, fingers interlacing with Shane's—palm to palm, callus to callus—before squeezing once, sharply. A silent question.

Shane's fingers tightened around Ilya's, his pulse jumping visibly beneath the thin skin of his wrist. "I never want this to change," he said abruptly, the words raw-edged in the quiet between them. His thumb traced the ridge of Ilya's knuckles, familiar as his own heartbeat. "What we have now. I want it exactly like this. Forever."

Ilya's grip shifted incrementally, fingers sliding to bracket Shane's wrist where his pulse hammered. "Forever," he repeated, testing the shape of the word against his teeth like it might dissolve. His thumb pressed into Shane's tendon, deliberate pressure. "But you know this is not set in stone, yes? What we do—it may shift. Adjusts." His voice dropped into that rough register that made Shane's stomach flip.

Shane's fingers tightened around Ilya's wrist, pressing their joined hands harder against Ilya's ribs until he could feel the steady thud of his heartbeat. "I won't care," he said, voice low but unwavering, "as long as it's still you." His thumb traced the ridge of Ilya's knuckles, rough with old scars. "As long as you're the one taking care of me."

Ilya's grip shifted, fingers sliding up to curl around Shane's nape, blunt nails scraping lightly. "Taking care of you," he repeated, tasting the words like they were new. His thumb pressed into the tendon behind Shane's ear, deliberate. "And when I tell you to do something?" The question was quiet, weighted—not a demand, not yet, but the ghost of one.

Shane exhaled sharply, his pulse jumping under Ilya's fingers. "Then I'll do it," he said, the admission scraping his throat raw. His fingers twitched against Ilya's ribs, restless. "Unless—"

"Unless you safeword," Ilya finished for him, grip tightening incrementally. "Which you are allowed to. The second you need to." His voice dropped into that rough register that made Shane's stomach twist, hot and tight. "No hesitating."

Shane nodded but Ilya's fingers tightened in his hair before he could complete the motion. "Words," Ilya reminded him, thumb pressing hard into Shane's jawline and angling Shane's face up with his "I need words."

Shane's breath stuttered as Ilya's thumb dug into his jawline, forcing his gaze upward. "Yes." His throat clicked around the words, dry and hesitant. "I love when you're like this. When you make me look at you." The admission came out in a rush, barely above a whisper, but Ilya's pupils dilated instantly, his grip tightening incrementally.

Ilya knew Shane loved it, but it was still nice to hear. The raw honesty in Shane's voice, the way his pupils blew wide even as he fought to hold Ilya's gaze. His thumb traced Shane's jawline, rough with stubble, and he felt the shiver that ran through him at the contact. "Good," he murmured, the word deliberate, weighted. "You always look so pretty when you are honest with me."

Shane's lips parted slightly, still catching his breath from the last admission. The weight of Ilya's gaze pinned him as effectively as a body check against the boards in the rink. "What else?" Ilya prompted, fingers sliding from Shane's jaw to trace the shell of his ear—slow, deliberate circles that made Shane's pulse stutter. "What else do you love?"

"You already know how I like it," Shane muttered, trying to avoid Ilya's gaze by focusing on the stray thread at the collar seam. His pulse jumped under Ilya's thumb where it rested against his throat.

"I do." Ilya's fingers tightened incrementally, tilting Shane's chin up until he had no choice but to meet his eyes. "But I want to hear it anyway." His thumb brushed Shane's bottom lip, pressing just enough to part them.

Shane's throat clicked as he swallowed, his fingers twitching against Ilya's ribs. "I like—" The words died halfway up his throat, crumbling under Ilya's expectant silence. He tried again. "When you're... in control." Vague. Useless.

"Tsk, ts, tsk." Ilya shook his head. The sound sharp and deliberate, his fingers tightening incrementally in Shane's hair. "Specifics, Hollander," he murmured, thumb pressing into the hinge of Shane's jaw until his mouth fell open on a shaky exhale. "'In control' could mean anything. You want me to pin you down? Tell you what to do? Make you beg?" His grip shifted, tilting Shane's head back further, exposing the frantic flutter of his pulse. "I need to know what's in that pretty head of yours."

Shane's fingers twitched against Ilya's ribs, his breath coming uneven. The words lodged in his throat like a stubborn piece of tape stuck to his skate blade—refusing to budge no matter how hard he scraped. But then Ilya's thumb pressed harder against his jawline, and Shane blurted it out: "You have to tell me what you like too."

Ilya exhaled sharply through his nose before pressing his forehead to Shane's. "What I like," he murmured, his free hand sliding down to grip Shane's hip bones hard enough to bruise, "is watching you come undone because of me." His thumb traced the ridge of Shane's pelvic bone, deliberate. "The way your voice cracks when you're trying not to beg. How your hands shake when you finally let go." His grip tightened, fingers digging into the muscle. "And I like knowing no one else gets to see you like that."

Shane's fingers twitched against Ilya's chest, his pulse hammering so hard he was sure Ilya could feel it through his shirt. The confession sat heavy in his throat—not because he was ashamed, but because voicing it felt like handing Ilya a weapon. A weapon Shane *wanted* him to use. "I like..." his voice cracked. He swallowed, tried again. "When you use me."

Ilya's grip on Shane's hips tightened possessively, his breath warm against Shane's temple. "Use you," he repeated, testing the words. "How?"

Shane's breath stuttered as Ilya's grip tightened, the heat of his palms branding through the thin fabric of Shane's shirt. "How?" Ilya repeated, voice dropping into that gravel-rough register that made Shane's spine liquefy.

"However you want." The words tasted like surrender, bitter and sweet all at once. "Touching me whenever, however, you feel like it. Making me wait." His throat clicked around the confession. "Using my mouth. My hands." He broke off with a shudder.

Ilya's fingers traced slow circles against Shane's hip bones, considering. "What about when we are in public?" His thumb pressed into the dip of Shane's pelvis, deliberate. "What does that look like?"

Shane swallowed hard, his fingers twitching against Ilya's chest. "Orders," he rasped. "Small ones. Telling me to get you coffee, or—or move closer." His pulse jumped under Ilya's fingers. "Your hand on my neck when no one's looking."

Ilya's fingers traced the sharp line of Shane's collarbone, pressing just hard enough to make Shane's breath hitch. "I like," he began, voice low and deliberate, "when you forget how to speak." His thumb dragged over Shane's pulse point, feeling the rabbit-quick flutter beneath his skin. "When your brain goes quiet and all you can do is feel." He leaned in, his breath hot against Shane's ear. "When you are so far gone you don't even remember your own name."

"Only you," Shane admitted, voice rough. "When I'm like that. Only you can bring me back." His thumb pressed into the divot of Ilya's throat. "No one else can take me so high and bring me back down."

Ilya just stared at Shane with all the love he could muster. "I like," he began, tracing the waistband of Shane's sweatpants with blunt nails, "when you fight me." His fingers hooked into the fabric, tugging just enough to make Shane's breath hitch. "Not seriously. Just—" His grip shifted, palming the curve of Shane's ass through the fabric. "Enough to remind me how strong you are too. How much you are choosing to give over to me."

"You like it when I fight back?" Shane's voice cracked on the last word, disbelief coloring the edges.

Ilya's grin was all teeth, sharp enough to draw blood. "Да," he murmured, fingers tightening in Shane's hair to tilt his head back. "Not really fight back," he corrected, dragging his thumb along Shane's bottom lip until it trembled. "But fight me." His grip shifted, twisting just enough to make Shane gasp. "Those are different things."

Shane looked Ilya in the eyes now. "How?" he demanded, breathless. "How are they different?"

Ilya's grip shifted, fingers sliding from Shane's hair to cradle his jaw. "When you fight back," he murmured, thumb pressing into the hinge of Shane's jaw, "you are trying to win." His other hand palmed the curve of Shane's ass, squeezing just hard enough to make Shane's hips jerk forward. "When you fight me," He leaned in, lips brushing the shell of Shane's ear, "you are reminding us both who you are surrendering to."

Shane went utterly still in Ilya's lap, his fingers freezing where they'd been clutching at Ilya. The realization hit him, both violent and unexpected. He'd never considered surrender as an active choice rather than passive acceptance. The distinction rearranged something fundamental in his chest, his breathing turning shallow against Ilya's collarbone.

"You're—" Shane's throat clicked around the words. "You're saying I'm not just giving up control. I'm handing it to you. Deliberately."

Ilya's grip shifted, his fingers sliding from Shane's jaw to tangle in his hair instead. Loose enough to let Shane pull away if he wanted, tight enough to remind him he didn't. "Yes," he murmured, the word warm against Shane's temple. "That is exactly what I'm saying." His thumb traced Shane's cheekbone. "You think I don't notice?" His fingers tightened incrementally. "Every time you arch into my touch instead of away. When you bite your lip to keep from begging until I tell you to stop." His breath hitched, barely audible. "You think that doesn't undo me too?"

Ilya, of course, noticed.

He always did. The way Shane's fingers flexed like he wanted to grip but wouldn't let himself, the sharp inhale when Ilya's thumb pressed too hard against his pulse point. He had memorized each reaction with the same precision he used to track opposing wingers on the ice, anticipating Shane's movements before Shane himself did.

Shane surged forward and crashed his lips into Ilya's, teeth knocking together in his urgency. The kiss tasted like desperation and surrender, Shane's fingers twisted in Ilya's curls. God, he loved this man. *His* man. The thought sent a possessive thrill down his spine, contradictory and consuming. Because how could someone who belonged to him so completely also hold such absolute power over him?

Ilya pulled back abruptly, his palms framing Shane's face with a grip that was both possessive and tender. The sudden distance forced Shane to blink up at him, lips still parted from the bruising kiss, breath uneven. Ilya's thumbs traced the high curve of Shane's cheekbones, rough with stubble, before tilting his head back just enough to lock their gazes.

"You," Ilya said, the word a rasped declaration, "are perfect." His fingers flexed against Shane's jaw, blunt nails scraping lightly. "Perfect for me." The possessive edge in his voice sent a visible shudder through Shane, his pulse jumping beneath Ilya's fingertips. "My perfect boy."

Shane's breath hitched. The words curled hot and heavy in his stomach, but— "You don't have to say that," he muttered, gaze flicking away to the loose thread on Ilya's collar again. "It's not true."

Ilya's grip tightened, forcing Shane's chin up until their eyes met again. "It is," he countered, voice dropping into that graveled register that made Shane's spine melt. "Perfect for me." His thumb brushed Shane's bottom lip, pressing just enough to part them. "Not flawless. Not some fantasy. You—" He leaned in, close enough that Shane could taste his next words before they left his mouth, "—with your routines and your stubbornness and your goddamn inability to ask for what you need unless I pry it out of you." His lips ghosted over Shane's, a promise. "Perfect."

Ilya licked into Shane's mouth, hot and messy, his grip tightening in Shane's hair to keep him angled just right. The kiss tasted like need and possession, like Ilya wanted to carve himself into Shane's bones. Shane whimpered against his lips, fingers scrabbling against Ilya's shoulders, not pushing away, just needing to hold on.

Ilya pulled back just far enough to study Shane's face—the flushed cheeks, the parted lips still damp from their kiss. His thumb traced the swell of Shane's bottom lip before he spoke, voice rough with promise. "Is there," he murmured, "anything you have imagined trying? With me?" His fingers tightened incrementally in Shane's hair, not quite a demand, but close. "Or anything at all?"

Shane thought about it for a long moment, his fingers tracing the hem of Ilya's shirt where it had ridden up. The silence stretched between them, thick with anticipation, but Ilya didn't rush him.

He just waited, his thumb idly stroking the hinge of Shane's jaw, patient in a way that made Shane's chest ache.

Finally, Shane swallowed hard and spoke, his voice barely above a whisper. "I've thought..." he broke off, his throat working around the words. "About you tying me up." The admission landed heavily between them, and Shane's fingers tightened reflexively in Ilya's shirt. "Not just—not just my wrists. All of me. So I can't move at all."

Ilya's breath stuttered before his grip found Shane's hips, fingers pressing into his pelvis hard. "All of you," he repeated, voice gone dark with intent. "Completely at my mercy." His thumb traced Shane's hipbone. "How long have you been thinking about this?"

Shane's pulse jumped beneath Ilya's fingers. "Since—" His throat clicked. "Since that Montreal and Boston game when you held me down on this couch." He swallowed, recalling the bruising grip on his wrists, how Ilya had pinned him effortlessly while whispering filthy praise in Russian.

"I want," Ilya began, then stopped. Uncharacteristic. His jaw worked silently before he forced the words out: "To hear you." The admission landed like a body check—sudden and bruising in its simplicity. Shane blinked. Ilya's fingers tightened incrementally around his wrists. "Not just noises. Not just begging." His thumb swept over Shane's pulse point. "I want to know what's happening in here." He tapped Shane's temple once.

Shane studied the flush creeping up Ilya's neck. "I like," he began, voice scraping low, "when you forget your English." His thumb pressing against Ilya's throat. "When you're so far gone you can't..." he swallowed, fingers tightening in Ilya's shirt. "When it's just Russian. Just you."

Ilya exhaled sharply through his nose, fingers tightening incrementally around Shane's wrists where they rested against his chest. The pressure was deliberate—not enough to hurt, but enough to make Shane's pulse jump visibly beneath his skin. "My turn," Ilya murmured, thumb sweeping over the delicate bones of Shane's wrist. "You want specifics? Then listen." His grip shifted, fingers sliding up to trace the ridges of Shane's knuckles, calloused from years of gripping his stick too tight.

Shane swallowed hard, the sound audible in the quiet between them. His fingers twitched against Ilya's chest, restless even as Ilya's touch grounded him. "I'm listening," he rasped, voice scraping low.

Ilya's thumb stilled against Shane's knuckles, pressing just hard enough to make Shane's breath hitch. "Would you mind," he began, voice roughened by something darker than anticipation, "if I was a little mean sometimes?"

Shane's fingers froze against Ilya's ribs. "Mean," he repeated, voice flat. The word tasted unfamiliar on his tongue. Too broad, too undefined. His brow furrowed as he parsed through possible interpretations, the gears turning visibly behind his eyes. "Define 'mean'."

Ilya's fingers flexed against Shane's knuckles, his breath warm against Shane's temple. "Mean," he clarified, voice roughened with intent, "like calling you my pretty little slut when you're shaking apart beneath me." His thumb pressed into Shane's wrist. "Not cruel. Never cruel." The distinction landed heavily between them, Ilya's gaze locked onto Shane's face as he parsed the difference.

Shane would enjoy that very very much. "God, yes." He breathed out, already chucking at himself for how much he loved that idea.

"So I've been thinking," he started, then stopped when his voice cracked. Ilya's fingers tightened in his hair, not pulling, just present. A silent *'go on'*.

Shane swallowed. "About how sometimes," he managed, gaze flicking to where Ilya's thumb rested against his pulse, "I don't want it to be about... finishing." The word landed awkwardly between them, clinical and wrong, but Ilya didn't smirk. Just waited, fingers carding through Shane's hair in slow, deliberate strokes. "Just—playing. Touching. Without the... end goal."

Ilya's fingers stilled against Shane's scalp, his exhale warm against Shane's temple. "So," he murmured, thumb tracing the shell of Shane's ear, "you want to be played with." The words landed deliberately between them—not a question, but an invitation for Shane to expand.

Shane exhaled sharply through his nose, fingers tightening reflexively in Ilya's shirt. "It ties into the whole... being used thing," he admitted, his voice dropping to a rough whisper. His pulse jumped under Ilya's palm where it rested against his throat. "Like—" He swallowed, forcing the words out. "Like when you touch me just because you feel like it. Not because we're... working toward something."

Ilya's grip loosened slightly, his thumb still tracing idle patterns against Shane's wrist. "Explain it to me," he murmured, voice low but insistent. "Not just the act but why." His fingers tightened incrementally. "What does it do for you? Being touched without...purpose."

Shane's breath hitched as he parsed the question, his fingers twitching against Ilya's chest. The silence stretched between them, thick with anticipation, but Ilya didn't rush him. He just waited, his thumb pressing deliberate circles into Shane's pulse point—steady pressure to ground him as he sorted through the tangle of thoughts.

Shane's fingers curled into Ilya's shirt, his knuckles pressing against the solid warmth of Ilya's ribs. "It's—the mindset," he managed, voice scraping low. "Knowing my body is for you. Not just when you're fucking me, but... always." His throat worked around the admission. "Like I'm yours to touch whenever you want. However you want."

Ilya's grip tightened around Shane's wrist, pressing his pulse point in a silent demand for honesty. "If I wanted—" He paused, teeth scraping over his lower lip before continuing with

deliberate precision. "To bend you over right now. Just to look at you and taste you. No other reason." His thumb dragged down Shane's palm, tracing the calluses from his stick. "Would you let me?"

Shane's pupils dilated instantly, darkening until only a thin ring of blue remained around black. His breath hitched audibly, fingers twitching against Ilya's ribs where they'd been clutching his shirt. The answer was written in every tense line of his body, in the way his hips jerked forward involuntarily—but Ilya remained perfectly still, his grip on Shane's wrist unrelenting. Waiting.

Ilya didn't move despite the way Shane's breath stuttered against his collarbone, despite the way his hips jerked forward in silent, desperate assent. His grip remained steady on Shane's wrist, thumb pressed against the rapid flutter of his pulse. The silence stretched between them, thick with anticipation, until Shane finally choked out a ragged, "Yes."

Ilya claimed Shane's mouth again with his own, biting just hard enough to make Shane gasp before licking into him with deliberate precision. The kiss tasted like control—hot and possessive—but Shane melted into it with a soft moan, fingers scrabbling against Ilya's shoulders.

Shane shifted subtly against Ilya's thigh, the friction sending sparks up his spine. He bit his lip to stifle a whimper—too soft for anyone else to hear, but Ilya's sharp inhale told him he'd noticed.

When Ilya finally broke the kiss, Shane chased him instinctively, lips still parted, breath ragged. Ilya smirked, pressing a thumb against Shane's bottom lip to stop him. "No," he murmured, voice rough with amusement. "Not until you ask nicely."

Shane's pulse jumped, his fingers flexing against Ilya's shoulders. "Please," he rasped, the word scraping his throat raw.

Ilya's thumb traced Shane's opened lips, slow and deliberate. "Please what?" he prompted against Shane's mouth.

Shane's breath stuttered against Ilya's thumb still pressed to his lips. The words crystallized in his throat, sharp and dangerous—something he'd never dared voice before, not even in the privacy of his own thoughts. "I want—" His fingers dug into Ilya's shoulders, blunt nails biting through fabric. "I want you to use me where someone could see."

Ilya's fingers froze against Shane's lips. His pupils dilated so fast Shane could practically hear the blood rushing south. "Fuck," Ilya breathed, the word scraped raw. His grip tightened convulsively in Shane's hair. "You—" His thumb pressed hard against Shane's bottom teeth, forcing his mouth wider. "Are going to kill me."

Shane's pulse hammered against Ilya's palm where it still framed his jaw. The confession sat between them like a live grenade with the pin pulled. He hadn't planned to say it. Hadn't even

known the thought existed until it came tumbling out. But now that it had—now that Ilya was looking at him like he wanted to devour him whole—Shane couldn't take it back. Didn't want to.

Shane didn't need to explain because Ilya already knew and understood. Of course he did. That's why their relationship worked so well.

Ilya exhaled sharply, his grip tightening incrementally in Shane's hair. "You want to be seen," he murmured, thumb pressing into the hinge of Shane's jaw. Not a question. An observation.

Shane's pulse jumped beneath Ilya's fingers, his breath coming in shallow bursts. The silence stretched between them, thick with unspoken implications. Ilya's thumb pressed harder against Shane's jawline, tilting his face up further—demanding eye contact Shane couldn't evade.

Ilya's thumb stilled against Shane's pulse point. A slow, knowing grin spread across his face—the kind that usually preceded Shane being pinned against the nearest flat surface. "I know just the place," he murmured, fingers sliding down to grip Shane's ass as he stood abruptly, hauling Shane upright with him.

Chapter 3: In your arms, I'd start a war

The dining table shuddered under Shane's back when Ilya lowered him onto it. Shane barely registered where he was; too busy staring at the floor to ceiling windows that framed them like a live exhibit. Downtown lights twinkled beyond the glass, indifferent to the way Shane's pulse thundered against his ribs.

Ilya's fingers dug into Shane's hips as he pinned him against the polished table, the city lights framing them in fractured gold. "Perfect," he murmured against Shane's throat, teeth scraping over his pulse. "This is exactly where I want you." His grip tightened possessively, blunt nails biting through Shane's shirt. "Where everyone can see how beautiful you are for me."

Shane's fingers dug into the edge of the table, the wood cool against his overheated skin. His gaze flickered to the windows again. They were many floors up, the glass reflecting their tangled bodies back at them like some twisted mirror. Logically, he knew no one could see them.

Shane's breath hitched when Ilya's palm slid up his ribs underneath his shirt. The pads of his fingers traced the dip between muscles, lingering where Shane's shirt had ridden up. "You are shaking," Ilya murmured, thumb brushing a nipple through the damp fabric. "Tell me why."

"Because..." Shane swallowed hard, his fingers flexing against the table's edge. "Because part of me hates that we could be seen. And the other part..." His voice cracked. "The other part wants it more than anything."

Ilya exhaled sharply through his nose, dragging his teeth along Shane's jawline. "This is what you need," he growled, low and rough. "To be seen. To be mine." His hand splayed over Shane's stomach, pressing down until Shane arched into the touch.

Shane squeezed his eyes shut, torn between the instinct to hide and the desperate need to be exposed. "I don't know how to turn it off," he admitted, voice small. "The part of me that panics."

Ilya exhaled slowly through his nose, fingers stilling against Shane's ribs. The city lights cast shifting patterns over Shane's flushed skin as Ilya leaned back just enough to meet his gaze. "Look at me," he murmured, voice softer now but no less commanding. When Shane hesitated, Ilya's thumb brushed the hollow beneath his cheekbone. "Shane. Eyes here."

Shane's eyelids fluttered open at Ilya's voice, his pupils blown wide. The way he looked up at Ilya, like he was both terrified and enthralled, sent a possessive thrill down Ilya's spine. "You are safe," Ilya said, enunciating each word with deliberate clarity. His palm settled over Shane's pounding heart. "This? This is mine to take care of." His grip tightened fractionally. "Do you understand?"

Shane swallowed hard but nodded, his fingers twitching against the table's edge. "I know," he whispered. "I just..." his breath stuttered when Ilya's other hand slid lower, tracing the waistband of his pants. "I don't know how to stop thinking."

Ilya's fingers traced the sharp line of Shane's hipbone. "No chasing," he murmured, pressing his lips to the flutter of Shane's pulse. "You do not need to think about what comes next." His teeth grazed skin, not quite biting, just enough to make Shane's breath hitch. "Just feel. Only how I make you feel."

Shane's breath came in shallow bursts as Ilya's lips trailed fire down his sternum, his tongue flicking against the sensitive skin just above his waistband. "Ilya—" The name was half-protest, half plea, fractured by the way Ilya's teeth nipped at the jut of his hipbone.

Ilya dragged his tongue along the taut line of Shane's abdomen, savoring the way muscles jumped beneath his lips. "So beautiful," Ilya murmured against Shane's hipbone, fingers hooking into the waistband of his pants. "Every sound is mine." The possessive growl in his voice wasn't just for show; it coiled hot in his chest, tightening his grip on Shane's trembling thighs.

Ilya yanked Shane's sweatpants and underwear down in one fluid motion, the elastic snapping against his thighs before pooling around his ankles. The cold air hit Shane's bare skin, making him shudder, but Ilya didn't give him time to overthink it. His hands were already mapping the newly exposed territory. "Look at you," Ilya murmured, voice rough with something deeper than hunger. His thumbs pressed into the crease where thigh met hip, possessive and claiming, as if memorizing every inch of him. "So perfect."

Shane's breath hitched when Ilya's fingers trailed up the sensitive skin of his inner thighs, slow and deliberate, circling but not touching where he needed it most. "Ilya—"

The shirt came off in a slow, deliberate drag of fabric. Ilya's knuckles grazed Shane's ribs as he peeled it away, letting the material catch on Shane's wrists before finally tugging it free and tossing it aside. His breath stuttered at the sight: Shane laid bare beneath him, flushed from his face to his ankles. His chest rising and falling with shallow breaths. Ilya's fingers traced the arch of Shane's ribcage. "Fuck," Ilya muttered under his breath, reverent and raw. His thumb brushed a nipple, already peaked and sensitive, and Shane jerked beneath him with a bitten-off sound.

Shane lay sprawled across the polished wood table, completely exposed. The curve of his cock resting against his stomach, the flush of his ribs visible with every uneven breath. The air hummed between them, thick with the scent of want, but Ilya didn't move. Not yet. He drank in the sight like a man starving. The sharp angle of Shane's hipbones, the delicate trail of hair leading downward, the way his thighs trembled ever so slightly under Ilya's gaze.

"Christ," Ilya muttered, dragging a knuckle down Shane's sternum. Shane twitched beneath the touch, his skin flushing as Ilya traced the path down his body. "You look like—" He bit off the words, shaking his head slightly as if no language could capture it. His fingers curled

possessively around Shane's ribcage, thumb pressing into the hollow just beneath his pectoral. "Like something I should worship."

Shane's cock twitched against his stomach, just once and barely there, but Ilya's gaze zeroed in on it like a predator tracking its prey. His fingers paused their exploration of Shane's body. A slow, knowing smile curled Ilya's lips. "Oh," he murmured, voice dripping with dark amusement. "You like that idea, yes?" His knuckles dragged down Shane's sternum again, slower this time, deliberate. "Being worshiped."

Shane had never thought about being something to worship before, not like this, not with Ilya's hands mapping his body like it was sacred ground. But if worship meant Ilya's mouth trailing fire over his skin, if it meant the possessive scrape of teeth against his hipbone, if it meant the reverent way Ilya's fingers curled around his trembling thighs, then yes. Shane liked that very, very much.

Ilya pressed his entire weight into Shane's naked chest, pinning him to the table with deliberate pressure. His lips brushed Shane's parted mouth, just enough to make Shane's breath stutter. Then, with agonizing slowness, Ilya dragged his mouth sideways, tracing the sharp line of Shane's jaw before sinking his teeth into the tendon of his neck. Shane arched beneath him with a choked-off noise, fingers scrambling for purchase against Ilya's shoulders, but Ilya didn't let up. His tongue soothed the bite immediately, lapping at the mark like he was tasting something divine.

Ilya's mouth finally found Shane's, swallowing his gasp with a kiss. His lips moved with bruising pressure to remind Shane exactly who owned him in this moment. One hand cradled the back of Shane's skull, fingers tangling in his hair while the other traced the frantic flutter of Shane's pulse beneath his jaw. The kiss was relentless, a slow devouring that left Shane's lungs burning and his fingers twisting in Ilya's shirt.

Ilya pulled back from Shane's mouth with a wet sound, his breath ragged against Shane's lips as he straightened back up. His gaze raked over Shane's body. The city lights painted Shane in fractured yellow and gold, highlighting every trembling muscle. Ilya exhaled sharply through his nose, his fingers tracing idle patterns along Shane's thigh with featherlight pressure.

Ilya stood back and hummed as he appreciated what he had done. The sound vibrated low in his chest. Shane shivered under the scrutiny, his breath coming too fast, his fingers flexing against nothing. The air between them felt charged, but Ilya didn't touch him again. Not yet.

"Stay," Ilya murmured, pressing a single fingertip to Shane's sternum as if pinning him in place by sheer will alone. The command curled around Shane's spine like smoke. Ilya didn't wait for confirmation before turning away, his silhouette cutting through the dim light as he moved out of Shane's sight.

The distant sound of Ilya's footsteps moving through the apartment sent a shiver down his spine at the acute awareness of being left there, exposed. He could hear Ilya humming softly somewhere behind him, the sound low and familiar, but not being able to see him made Shane's pulse thrum work in overtime.

Shane couldn't even bring himself to close them his legs. Not when Ilya had left him like this, not when the thought of moving without permission sent an anxious jolt through his chest. His fingers twitched around nothing, his cock half-hard against his stomach, aching from neglect.

The footsteps returned but Shane didn't dare turn his head to look. Not until Ilya's shadow fell over him again. Shane's breath caught when Ilya's fingers brushed his temple, gently tilting his head up to slide a pillow beneath it. The gesture was unexpectedly tender. "Better," Ilya murmured, his thumb stroking Shane's cheekbone.

Shane watched through half-lidded eyes as Ilya placed a condom and the lube bottle on the table beside his hip with deliberate precision. A towel was draped over his forearm like some fucked up waiter. The silliness of it made Shane laugh a little. "Thoughtful," Shane rasped, his voice wrecked already. Shane also noticed that Ilya returned just in his underwear too.

Ilya's nails scraped up the sensitive skin of Shane's inner thigh, leaving faint pink trails in their wake. "Чёрт возьми," he muttered. "Ты чертовски прекрасна." His palm pressed possessively against Shane's stomach, fingers splayed wide as if trying to claim every inch of him. The city lights caught the sheen of sweat along Shane's collarbones.

The Russian syllables curled thick and honeyed around his ribs, settling against his skin. He didn't need translation, not when Ilya's fingers traced paths over his most sensitive parts.

Ilya's palms slid up Shane's thighs with deliberate slowness, fingers spreading wide to span the trembling muscle beneath. He exhaled sharply through his nose at the way Shane's breath stuttered when his thumbs dug into the soft inner flesh. "Down," Ilya murmured, pressing down until Shane's spine met the table again. His fingertips traced the crease where thigh met hipbone, circling closer with agonizing patience while Shane's cock twitched against his stomach, already leaking.

The first brush of Ilya's lips against Shane's inner thigh was shocking. Ilya breathed against the sensitive skin, watching the way Shane's legs shook. "Mine," Ilya murmured, the word a dark promise as his teeth grazed the same spot. Shane whimpered, but his thighs stayed parted, obedient even as his chest rose and fell.

Ilya didn't hurry. He dragged his lips up Shane's body, pausing to lick a stripe over the curve of Shane's neglected cock that made Shane jerk with a punched-out sound. "Mmhh," Ilya murmured against the quivering muscle.

Ilya's hands were everywhere at once, squeezing Shane's pecs, thumbing his nipples until they ached, dragging blunt nails down the quivering planes of his stomach. Shane gasped, his hips jerking involuntarily, but Ilya ignored it. Shane's breath hitched when Ilya's fingers dug into his thighs, kneading the muscle. "Мякий," Ilya murmured against Shane's knee, biting the skin there just hard enough to make Shane twitch. "So soft for me." His hands slid up, thumbs pressing into the crease of Shane's hips. Shane's cock lay flushed against his stomach, but Ilya paid it no mind. Ilya was only squeezing wherever he pleased.

Ilya's fingers trailed lower, dipping below the weight of Shane's balls. The rough pads of his fingertips traced the skin there, circling without quite touching where Shane wanted him most. Shane's breath stuttered, his hips lifting instinctively. Ilya pressed him back down with a firm hand across his pelvis.

Shane's breath hitched when Ilya's fingertips traced the curve of his ass, light as a whisper but deliberate enough to make his thighs shake. "Turn over," Ilya murmured, the command curling like smoke through Shane's veins. His fingers tightened briefly on Shane's hip before withdrawing completely. The sudden absence of contact left Shane shuddering.

The command, simple and direct, sent a tremor through Shane's limbs. He knew what Ilya wanted. But the thought of rolling over, of presenting himself so blatantly, made his skin prickle with heat. But the way Ilya stood there, watching him with that patient, predatory stillness, sent another kind of shiver down his spine.

Cold wood was beneath his overheated palms, grounding him just enough to process Ilya's command. *'Turn over'*. Two words, simple and devastating. His stomach tightened, muscles twitching with the instinct to obey even as his brain scrambled to catch up.

Shane rolled over. The shift exposed the long line of his back, the dip of his spine, the lower back dimples, and the curve of his ass. All laid bare for Ilya's hungry gaze. He heard the scrape of chair legs against the floor as Ilya dragged a seat over, the sound sending a thrill down Shane's spine.

Ilya exhaled sharply as he settled into the chair. Shane shivered against the table, his bare back exposed, the muscles twitching under Ilya's gaze. "So pretty," Ilya murmured, dragging a single fingertip down the dip of Shane's spine. The touch was featherlight, barely there, but Shane arched into it.

His hands slid over Shane's hips. "You look better like this," Ilya mused, voice rough. "Spread out for me." His palms smoothed over the curve of Shane's ass, squeezing, testing the flesh beneath his grip. Shane's breath hitched, muffled against his own forearm.

Ilya's fingers curled around Shane's hips, tugging him backward with effortless strength until his ass was just at the table's edge. The wood dug into Shane's thighs, the slight discomfort only heightening his awareness of how exposed he was. Ilya didn't ask. He never did in moments

like this, his hands moving with the certainty of someone who'd memorized every dip and curve of Shane's body. Ilya nudged him forward until his cock hung just over the table's edge.

Shane's breath hitched as Ilya's palms slid up the backs of his thighs, spreading him wider with deliberate intent. The pressure of Ilya's thumbs pressing into the crease where thigh met ass sent sparks skittering up his spine. "So responsive," Ilya murmured into Shane's thigh, his breath hot against flushed skin. Shane could feel himself drifting. That familiar, floaty sensation where his body became pliant under Ilya's hands.

Ilya traced the curve of Shane's ass. His thumb dragged down the center, spreading Shane wider, and exposing him completely. The sight punched the breath from Ilya's lungs. Shane trembled beneath his hands, pink and perfect, his hole clenching instinctively under Ilya's attention.

The sharp slap of skin against skin echoed through the apartment when Ilya landed the first smack. "If this is what me playing with you means," his thumb pressed into the crease of Shane's thigh, rubbing slow circles just shy of where Shane needed it most. "I could get used to this."

"It is," Shane gasped, the words tearing from his throat as Ilya's teeth grazed the curve of his ass. "Fuck, Ilya—it is what I want." The admission burned his tongue, despite having already told Ilya. He squeezed his eyes shut, pulse hammering where Ilya's thumbs pressed into the backs of his thighs. "Even if it—god—even if it makes me feel stupid afterward."

Ilya chuckled, the vibration against Shane's oversensitive skin sending a fresh wave of tremors through him. "Mmm, нет," he murmured, dragging his tongue up his cheeks. "Not stupid." His hands tightened, kneading Shane's flesh possessively. "Needy, yes. Desperate—" another lick, this time on Shane's balls "*—absolutely*. But stupid?" His teeth scraped lightly over the same spot, making Shane jerk against the table. "Never."

Shane gasped as Ilya's teeth grazed the curve of his ass again. "You'd tell me," he mumbled into his forearm, the words muffled but urgent, "if anything I wanted was... weird. Right?"

Ilya's laugh vibrated against Shane's skin, warm and dark. "Weird?" His teeth grazed Shane's ass. "Remember when you asked me to fuck you against the Zamboni during the All Star game after everyone left?" His tongue swiped over the same spot. "Or when you begged me to keep fucking you that morning Marley came by to get me. We had a whole conversation while I was deep inside you. And *this* is what you worry about?"

Shane groaned, pressing his forehead against the table. "Asshole," he muttered, but the way his thighs trembled gave him away. "That's different. You know what I mean."

Ilya's hands stilled on Shane. "Listen to me," he murmured, voice rough but impossibly gentle. "There is nothing you could say or do that would make me think less of you. What you need could never be weird."

Shane's protest died quickly as Ilya's tongue licked over his asshole. The sound that tore from Shane's throat was beautiful to Ilya. "F-fuck, Ilya—" His fingers grasped at the wood as Ilya's thumbs dug into his cheeks, spreading him wider. The first press of Ilya's tongue against his hole was electric, deliberate, and Shane's entire body jerked like he'd been shocked.

Ilya's tongue traced slow, deliberate circles around Shane's hole without ever dipping inside. "Always so tight," Ilya murmured against his skin, breath hot and damp. His thumbs pressed into the creases of Shane's thighs, spreading him wider as his tongue flicked over the rim again. The way Shane jolted beneath him.

Ilya's tongue dragged up Shane's ass one last time before pulling away with a wet sound. His breath caught when his gaze landed on the mess beneath Shane. Strings of precum dripping from the flushed head of his cock, pooling on the floor beneath the table.

Shane heard a sound from Ilya behind him. "What?" Shane rasped, his voice wrecked. "What is it?"

His thumb swiped through the mess at the head of Shane's cock, lifting it so Shane could see. Glistening strands stretched between his fingers. "Dripping like a fucking faucet." He pressed his wet thumb against Shane's lower lip, smearing his own precum across his mouth. "All from my tongue on your ass. You really love being my whore, yes?"

Shane moaned at the name, the sound punched out of him as Ilya's fingers tightened around his cock, slick with precum. The filthy words wrapped around him in the best way. Ilya's thumb swiped over the leaking slit, spreading the wetness down his shaft.

The moment Ilya withdrew his hands completely, Shane made a sound that punched straight through Ilya. A high, needy whimper that dissolved into a broken exhale. Before Shane could catch himself, his hips lifted off the table in a shameless arch, his ass giving a desperate little twitch like he was begging without words. The movement was so instinctive, so uncontrolled, that Shane's ears burned the second he realized what he'd done.

"Fuck," Ilya muttered, voice thick with something darker than amusement now. His palm settled heavy between Shane's shoulder blades, pressing him flush against the table. "You have no idea how hot that is."

Shane's breath stuttered when Ilya's palm pressed flat between his shoulder blades, pinning him harder against the table. The wood was cool against his flushed skin, but it did nothing to temper the heat crawling up his neck. "I..." He swallowed. "Sorry, I didn't mean to—"

Ilya's grip tightened on Shane's hips, fingertips digging into the soft flesh. "No," he growled, the word vibrating against Shane's skin as his tongue traced a slow, wet circle around his hole. "No apologies." His teeth grazed the swell of Shane's ass, just enough to make Shane's thighs tremble. "You arch for me like you were made for it." His tongue flicked against Shane's rim again, deliberate and teasing. "Because you were."

Shane cried out when Ilya's tongue pressed inside. It was just the tip at first, teasing, then deeper with a slow, filthy curl. "Oh fuck—" The words dissolved into a moan as Ilya's hands spread him wider, his tongue working him open with lazy, relentless strokes.

The wet drag of Ilya's tongue against Shane's rim sent a full-body shudder through him. "Fuck—" Shane gasped, his hips jerking backward instinctively, chasing the sensation. Ilya's answering growl vibrated against his skin, hands tightening on Shane's hips to hold him in place.

"Такой вкусный," Ilya murmured against him, lips brushing Shane's hole before his tongue pressed inside again, deeper this time. His thumbs dug into Shane's ass, spreading him wider as he lapped at him like a man starved.

Shane buried his face in his forearms, muffling a moan as Ilya's tongue worked him open with slow, filthy strokes. The obscene sounds alone were enough to make his cock twitch against the table, dripping more onto the wood beneath him.

"You taste—" Ilya paused to bite the curve of Shane's ass, just hard enough to make him yelp. "—like heaven." His tongue traced the rim again, teasing before pressing back in. "Like I should be on my knees for you every night."

Shane's fingers scraped against the table, his hips rocking back instinctively. "Ilya—"

"A-ah." Ilya's palm landed sharply against Shane's ass, the slap echoing through the room. The sting bloomed hot under his skin. "You don't get to beg yet." His tongue swiped over the reddened skin, soothing it before diving back in. "You take what I give you."

Shane whimpered, pressing his forehead into his forearms. Every flick of Ilya's tongue sent sparks up his spine, every nip of teeth left him trembling. He was already wound up so tight he could barely breathe.

"Is this what you wanted?" Ilya's fingers groped Shane's ass. "To be spread open and used?"

"Yes," Shane gasped, the word fracturing as Ilya's tongue curled deeper inside him. He didn't recognize his own voice. It was raw and wrecked, stripped down to something primal under Ilya's hands, under his mouth. "Fuck, yes, I—"

"You what?" Ilya's breath ghosted over Shane's dripping hole. His thumbs kneaded Shane's ass, spreading him obscenely wider. "Tell me exactly what you feel, моя шлюха" The Russian endearment dripped like honey. Shane made a mental note to ask Ilya what they all meant later. If he remembered.

Shane's hips jerked involuntarily when Ilya's tongue flicked against his rim again. "Feels—god—feels like you're everywhere." His fingers scratched against the table's edge. "Your mouth, your—fuck—your voice—"

Ilya hummed, the vibration traveling straight up Shane's spine. "Mmh, that's it," he murmured against Shane's skin, lips brushing his hole with every syllable. "Tell me how my voice makes you feel." His tongue pressed inside Shane again.

"Like—" Shane gasped as Ilya's fingers dug into his hips. "Like you're crawling under my skin." The admission burned his throat. "Like I can't—fuck—can't think when you talk like that."

Ilya liked when Shane didn't think. Ilya liked when his body went like this. It made Shane's pleasure easier, purer, like tapping directly into Shane's soul.

He stood, the shift of his weight making the floorboards creak, and reached for the lube bottle left on the table. The sound of the cap flicking open cut through Shane's ragged breathing. "You are still so tight," Ilya murmured, pouring a generous amount onto his fingers. "I have to stretch you open."

The first press of Ilya's slick fingertip against Shane's hole was slow, letting Shane feel every inch of the intrusion. Shane whimpered, his thighs trembling as Ilya's finger worked inside him.

Ilya's fingertip curled inside Shane, pressing deliberately against that spot that made Shane's vision whiten at the edges. "I don't need to ask." His finger dragged out slowly, the stretch burning just enough to make Shane's toes curl. "I already know how you like it. Slow first. Then hard." Another finger joined the first, twisting as they pushed in. Shane's choked moan was swallowed by the table beneath his cheek. "And you love when I talk you through it."

Shane shuddered, his cock straining against the table. "Ilya, oh my god!"

"Say it." Ilya's voice was a dark rumble against Shane's spine as his fingers scissored wider. "Tell me you want my cock filling you up." His free hand palmed Shane's ass. "Tell me you need it."

Shane's breath hitched when Ilya's fingers crooked just right. "Fuck! Yes, I...I need it." The words tumbled out raw, unfiltered. "Need you inside me."

The third finger pressed in alongside the others, the stretch burning in the best way, and Shane arched off the table. His forearms braced against the wood, shoulders trembling as he tried to

push up only for Ilya's palm to slam between his shoulder blades, shoving him back down with effortless strength.

"No," Ilya growled, fingers twisting deeper, making Shane's thighs jerk. "You just take it. Take what I give you."

Shane's groan was muffled against the table, his hips rocking back involuntarily. Ilya's fingers were relentless, scissoring him open, curling just enough to make Shane's vision blur. "Ilya—fuck—I can't—"

"Oh, you can," Ilya murmured, his lips brushing the sweat-damp skin between Shane's shoulder blades as his fingers twisted deeper. "And you will." His free hand slid up Shane's trembling back, fingertips tracing each ridge. "This pretty hole takes what I give it."

Shane whimpered, his cock twitching against the table. "Ilya—"

"Listen to me." Ilya's voice dropped lower. "You don't cum until I say you can." His fingers stilled inside Shane, pressing firm against his prostate. "Not when I slide my cock into you." A slow drag outward, just to hear Shane's punched-out gasp. "Not when you're clenching around me." Another torturous thrust. "Not even when you're begging." His teeth grazed Shane's spine. "You take it. Every inch. Until I decide you have earned it."

Shane's hips jerked helplessly. "How—how do I earn it?" The words tumbled out wrecked, already pleading.

Ilya's fingers stilled inside Shane, pressing just deep enough to make his thighs shake. "You earn it," he murmured, lips dragging up Shane's spine, "by being my good boy. Can you do that for me? Be my хороший мальчик?" His thumb rubbed slow circles over the small of Shane's back.

Shane's breath hitched, the Russian endearment curling hot in his stomach. "Yeah," he gasped, the word cracking halfway. His fingers scrambled against the table when Ilya crooked his fingers just right. "I—fuck—I can be good."

Ilya withdrew his fingers with a slow drag that made Shane's hips jerk backward, chasing the sensation even as his hole clenched around nothing. The sound of his slick fingers pulling free echoed in the quiet room. Shane shuddered, his forehead pressed against the table, the wood cool against his overheated skin.

Ilya's breath ghosted hot over Shane's exposed neck as he leaned in, his teeth scraping the delicate skin just below Shane's ear. "All you want is something to fill you," he murmured. His palm pressed flat between Shane's shoulder blades, pinning him harder against the table. "Isn't that right, малыш? All empty without me."

Shane couldn't help but agree. His entire body trembled with the truth of it—that hollow ache between his thighs, the way his muscles went slack and pliant under Ilya's hands. "Yeah," he breathed into the table's surface, the wood biting into his cheekbone. "Fuck, yeah, I—" His voice cracked when Ilya's palm smoothed down the curve of his spine. "I'm empty." The confession burned his tongue. "Need you to fill me up."

Ilya stepped back with deliberate slowness, the drag of his socks against hardwood the only sound before he rounded the table to loom beside Shane's flushed face. Shane turned his head on the pillow just enough to see Ilya's fingers hook into the waistband of his underwear and peel them down slowly. The fabric clung briefly to the wet head before snapping free, and Shane's mouth watered so violently he had to swallow.

"You realize," Ilya murmured against the shell of Shane's ear, fingers kneading the reddened swell of his ass, "that anyone could look in this window and see you right now." His thumb pressed into the crease of Shane's thigh, spreading him obscenely wider. "See how wet and open you are for me." Shane tensed, a strangled sound catching in his throat as his hips jerked, not away, but deeper into Ilya's grip. "Oh?" Ilya's laugh was curling around Shane. "You *like* that idea, don't you?"

Shane shuddered when Ilya's fingers dug into the meat of his ass, spreading him wider for the audience. The cold air against his exposed hole made his cock twitch against the table. "My god," Ilya murmured, his voice thick with something darker than amusement. His thumb swiped over Shane's rim, pressing just enough to make Shane's thighs jerk. "So tight. So wet." He leaned down, breath hot against Shane's skin. "You would let them watch, wouldn't you? Let them see how well you take my cock?"

Shane's fingers scraped against the wood, his hips rocking back into Ilya's grip. "Fuck—Ilya—"

"Answer me." Ilya's voice dropped, his fingers tightening possessively. "Would you let them see you like this? Spread open and dripping?" His thumb circled Shane's hole, pressing just inside enough to make Shane gasp. "Begging for it?"

Shane's forehead pressed harder into the table. "Y-yes," he choked out, the word dissolving into a moan when Ilya's thumb pushed deeper. "Fuck, yes, I—"

Ilya's chuckle vibrated against Shane's spine as he withdrew his thumb, leaving Shane's hole clenching around nothing again. "So greedy," he murmured, dragging his palm up the curve of Shane's ass. The slap landed sharp—once then twice—the sting blooming hot under Shane's skin. "Tell me why you want them to see."

Shane hesitated, his forehead still pressed against the table. The question lingered in the air like a challenge, and suddenly the truth was clawing its way out of him, messy, unfiltered, raw. "Because then..." His fingers flexed against the wood, knuckles white. "Then they'd know." The

words tumbled out before he could stop them. "Know I'm not just—just some fucking robot on the ice." His voice cracked. "Know I can feel things. That someone actually wants me like this."

Ilya froze mid motion, his fingers stilling against Shane. The raw confession hit him like a gut punch. His breath caught as he carefully rolled Shane onto his back. Before Shane could brace for another teasing remark, Ilya was covering him completely, his torso pressing Shane down into the table in a crushing embrace, one hand cradling the back of Shane's head protectively.

Ilya's grip tightened in Shane's hair, his other hand splayed possessively across Shane's chest as he hovered above him. "Eyes up here now," he demanded, voice rough. When Shane's dazed eyes finally focused, Ilya's expression was terrifyingly earnest. "Every time I touch you, every time I open you up, you belong to me more. Not because I take it from you," his thumb brushed Shane's nipple, "but because you *give* it to me." His hips rolled deliberately against Shane's thigh. "And when you shake apart on my cock tonight, it won't be because I fucked you so good..." his teeth scraped Shane's collarbone, "it will be because you trusted me to ruin you perfectly."

Shane nodded, his throat working around the words. "Yeah," he rasped, fingers curling against Ilya's chest. "That's exactly it." The confession hung between them, raw and vulnerable in a way that made his skin prickle. "I don't know why I need it like this, but I do."

Ilya's thumb dragged slow over Shane's bottom lip, pressing down just enough to feel the heat of his breath. "You don't have to know why," he murmured. His other hand slid down to grip Shane's thigh, hiking it higher around his waist. "You just have to know how good you look when you fall apart for me." His hips rolled forward, the thick press of his cock against Shane's stomach deliberate. "How pretty your mouth gets when you beg."

Shane groaned as Ilya's hands gripped his hips, turning him sideways across the table, angled perfectly toward the uncovered windows. The movement was deliberate, possessive, and Shane's pulse spiked when he realized what it meant. Anyone could see the way Ilya loomed over him, could watch the obscene stretch of his body as Ilya took him apart.

Ilya tugged the pillow under Shane's head to make him as comfortable as possible. But with a gentleness that contradicted the filthy promise in his eyes. His knuckles brushed Shane's cheek before his fingers curled possessively around Shane's throat. "You are going to look at me the whole time," he murmured, thumb pressing into the pulse point beneath Shane's jaw. "And when I settle inside you, you are going to say 'thank you'."

"I will," Shane said obediently, breath hitching as Ilya reached toward the condom. But before Ilya could grab it, Shane's hand shot out. The hesitation was barely there, but Ilya caught it immediately, his grip tightening instinctively around Shane's wrist in response.

Ilya didn't move. He knew. Of course he knew. The way Shane's breath hitched, the way his thighs tensed before he'd even reached out. Ilya's thumb stroked the delicate skin inside

Shane's wrist, feeling the quick pulse beneath. "Ask," he murmured, voice low and rough. "Ask for what you want."

Shane's throat worked around the words. "I want..." he swallowed hard, the confession lodged like a stone. "I want to feel you." The admission sent a violent shiver down his spine. "Just... just you."

"Since you asked so nicely," Ilya murmured, voice dripping with dark amusement as he reached for the lube instead of the condom. Shane watched, transfixed, as Ilya slicked himself up. His fist gliding over his cock in long, wet strokes. "You want to feel every inch," Ilya continued, his thumb swiping over the head, spreading the lube thickly.

Ilya's grip on Shane's hips was bruising as he yanked him bodily to the table's edge, the sudden movement making Shane's breath catch. Before Shane could recover, Ilya was pushing in. One relentless, unforgiving motion that punched the air from Shane's lungs in a broken gasp. The stretch burned so good Shane saw white at the edges of his vision, his fingers scrambling against the table's surface as Ilya bottomed out with a growl that vibrated through their joined bodies.

The air refused to return to Shane's lungs. His vision pulsed black at the edges with every brutal inch of Ilya's cock buried inside him, the stretch bordering on unbearable. His fingers clawed at the table, his throat working soundlessly around the words Ilya demanded. His body convulsed around the intrusion. Helpless, rhythmic clenches that dragged a groan from Ilya's chest.

Ilya didn't move. Not an inch. His hips locked in place, every muscle taut with restraint, his cock buried to the hilt inside Shane's trembling body. The only movement was the rapid rise and fall of his chest, the way his fingers flexed against Shane's hips like he was fighting not to snap them entirely.

"Say it," Ilya growled, voice ragged with the effort of holding still. His thumb dug into the hollow of Shane's hipbone. "Or I don't move."

Shane's mouth opened and closed soundlessly, his throat working around nothing but punched-out gasps. The stretch was too much, too perfect, his body clamped around Ilya's cock in involuntary pulses that made his vision flicker.

"Thank you," Shane gasped, the words barely audible over the pounding of his own pulse.

Ilya's grin was feral. "That's my good boy." And then he moved.

The first thrust tore a ragged scream from Shane's throat, his fingers gouging into the table's edge as Ilya set a brutal pace from the start. No warm up, no mercy. Just the relentless slide of his cock dragging against Shane's oversensitive walls, the slap of skin echoing off the walls.

Ilya's palm cracked sharply against Shane's thigh. "Eyes," Ilya growled, fingers tightening in Shane's hair when his gaze flickered toward the ceiling. "I said *'on me'*." He tugged Shane hair to make eye contact. Shane's legs instinctively wrapping around Ilya's hips to stay grounded. "Look at me when I fuck you," Ilya murmured, thumb brushing Shane's lower lip.

Shane's eyes snapped back to Ilya's, pupils blown wide. "S-sorry," he stammered, fingers scrambling against the sweat-slick plane of Ilya's chest.

"Tell me why you hide." Ilya's thrusts slowed to a torturous grind, his hips circling just enough to make Shane whimper. His fingers traced the frantic flutter of Shane's pulse. "What happens in that pretty head when you look away?"

Shane's breath hitched. "Too much," he admitted, nails digging into Ilya's shoulders. "Feels like—like I'll break apart if I stare too long."

He hauled Shane upright until their foreheads touched, his free hand gripping the base of Shane's skull. "Then break," he murmured against Shane's lips before biting down. "I'll put you back together." His thrust snapped sharp enough to jolt a cry from Shane's throat. "Every fucking time."

Shane's hands flew to Ilya's forearms, gripping like he might float away otherwise. The new angle drove Ilya impossibly deeper, each rolling thrust grinding against his prostate until Shane's thighs shook uncontrollably.

"Ilya—"

Shane cried out into Ilya's face, the sound raw and unfiltered as Ilya's thrusts turned punishing. His fingernails carved crescent moons into Ilya's biceps, his entire body trembling with the effort of holding eye contact like Ilya demanded. "F-fuck—Ilya, I can't—"

Ilya's thrusts slowed to a deep, rolling grind, his hips circling just enough to keep Shane teetering on the edge without relief. His fingers, still tangled in Shane's sweat-damp hair, gentled their grip, thumb brushing the shell of Shane's ear in a startling contrast to the possessive bite of his cock. "Stay with me, *малыш*," he murmured, voice rough but softer now. The same tone he used when Shane's thoughts spiraled too fast.

Shane blinked, lashes fluttering as he struggled to focus. His hands slid down Ilya's arms, fingers trembling where they clung to his wrists. "I'm here," he breathed, the words slurred with pleasure.

Shane's fingers dug into Ilya's forearms as another slow, deliberate thrust punched the air from his lungs. The stretch burned in the best way, his hole clenching helplessly around Ilya's cock, but it was the words that truly unraveled him. Each syllable dripping straight into Shane's bloodstream like venom.

Ilya's hips rolled slow and filthy, grinding deep into Shane with a precision that made Shane's toes curl against the table's edge. His lips brushed Shane's ear, breath hot and uneven as he murmured, "Такой хороший для меня. So tight around my cock." The mix of Russian and English sent a shiver down Shane's spine, his grip on Ilya's forearms tightening. "You take me so well, малыш."

Shane's hips jerked helplessly at the rough Russian murmurs as Ilya's teeth grazed his earlobe, the bite just shy of painful as he growled, "Ты так красиво стонешь для меня." Shane shuddered, his cock twitching against his stomach at the dark promise at Ilya's tone.

Shane's fingers twitched toward his leaking cock, desperate for any friction, but Ilya caught his wrist mid-reach with a sharp tut. "No," he murmured, pinning Shane's arm back against the table with effortless strength. His other hand smoothed up Shane's trembling stomach, fingertips skating over sweat-slick skin. "This isn't yours to touch right now." His palm pressed flat over Shane's racing heartbeat. "It's mine."

Shane's hips jerked upward, chasing friction that wasn't there, his cock leaking against his stomach in thick, aching pulses. "Ilya—please—" The words tore from his throat, his fingers scrambling against Ilya's forearm where it pinned him to the table.

Shane's protest died in his throat when Ilya's mouth crashed against his, swallowing his desperate noises with a kiss that felt more like a branding. Ilya's tongue swept possessively over his, stealing the breath from Shane's lungs while his fingers dug bruises into Shane's hips. The thrusts slowed to an agonizing crawl, Ilya's cock dragging against Shane's oversensitive walls with deliberate precision.

"But I—fuck—Ilya, I *need*—" Shane gasped against Ilya's lips, his cock twitching violently against his stomach, smearing precome across his abs with each aborted jerk of his hips.

Ilya laughed as Shane arched his back from the pleasure, his cock dripping untouched between them. "Aw, come on," Ilya murmured, lips dragging lazily over Shane's collarbone before biting down just enough to sting. "You are a big boy. Да?" His hips rolled deliberately slow, the thick drag of his cock inside Shane a teasing contrast to the sharpness of his teeth. "Then use your big boy words."

Shane's fingers dug into Ilya's shoulders hard enough to leave crescent-shaped welts. "Fuck you," he gasped, the words cracking halfway through as Ilya's cock dragged against his prostate. His hips jerked uncontrollably, his cock dripping untouched against his stomach. "Fuck you and y-your fucking Russian—" Another slow, deep thrust stole his breath. "—and your fucking hands—"

Ilya's grin widened at Shane's snarled curses, his hips rolling in slow, deliberate circles that made Shane's toes curl against the table's edge. "That's it," he murmured, lips dragging wet

along Shane's jaw. "Let me hear how much you hate it." His fingers traced the quivering muscles of Shane's abdomen, pausing to swirl through the mess of precome smeared across his skin. "Such a filthy mouth on such a perfect boy."

Ilya's fingers dug into Shane's jaw, thumb pressing hard against the hinge as he tilted Shane's face up—the exact angle Shane craved when he needed to be overwhelmed. The kiss wasn't gentle. It was teeth and tongue and the sharp tang of copper where Ilya bit too hard, swallowing Shane's gasp like a victory he won.

Ilya pulled back just enough to trace his fingers over Shane's swollen lips, watching with dark satisfaction as Shane's mouth instinctively opened in silent request. And that was the perfect, wordless obedience that never failed to unravel Ilya. His thumb dragged slow across Shane's lower lip, pressing down just enough to feel the damp heat of his breath.

Ilya's fingers pressed deeper into Shane's mouth, the pads rough against his tongue in a way that made Shane groan around them. The taste of salt and skin flooded his senses—Ilya's skin, always Ilya—and Shane's lips sealed tighter instinctively, sucking hard as his eyes fluttered shut.

Ilya knew Shane loved to have something, *anything* in his mouth—fingers, his own knuckles, the hem of his shirt, his mouthguard—it didn't matter. The pressure made Shane's chaotic thoughts stutter into silence, left him floating in that perfect headspace where nothing existed except Ilya's hands and Ilya's voice and the relentless drag of Ilya's cock inside him.

Shane pulled off Ilya's fingers with a wet 'pop,' his lips swollen and glistening. His pupils were blown wide, his breath ragged, but his voice was startlingly clear when he asked, "Can I cum now?" The politeness of it, the quiet submission laced through each word, made Ilya's cock twitch inside him. There was no desperation, no bargaining. Just pure, unguarded surrender. As if Shane would nod and take another hour of edging if that's what Ilya decided.

Ilya had seen Shane in the submissive headspace before. But this? This was something else entirely. Pliancy. Pure, liquid surrender radiating from every tensed muscle, every hitched breath, every unfocused blink of those dark eyelashes. Shane wasn't just submitting, he had dissolved. And god, it was glorious. And terrifying.

"Not much longer," Ilya murmured against Shane's sweat-damp temple, his hips snapping forward with a sharpness that made Shane's breath catch. He could feel Shane trembling beneath him, every muscle locked tight, his fingers twitching where they clutched at Ilya's forearms like he might float away otherwise. The way Shane's eyelashes fluttered told Ilya everything. Shane wasn't just *there* anymore. He'd slipped somewhere deeper, somewhere quiet and pliant, and while Ilya loved that yielding surrender, he needed to bring him back now. This was unknown territory and Ilya didn't want to unintentionally hurt Shane in any way. He couldn't live with himself if he did.

Ilya pulled out with agonizing slowness, watching Shane's face twist at the sudden emptiness. The moment his cock slipped free, Shane's entire body jerked. A full body flinch that made Ilya's chest tighten. He caught Shane's wrists before his hands could fly to his own throat or mouth, pressing them gently but firmly against the table. "Shh, I have you," Ilya murmured, carefully rolling Shane onto his side to curl around him. Shane's breath hitched unevenly, his fingers twitching against Ilya's palms like he wasn't quite sure where his own limbs ended.

The first grounding touch was Ilya's palm flat and warm between Shane's shoulder blades, rubbing slow circles just hard enough for the pressure to register through the haze. "Count my fingers with me, sweetheart." He held his free hand up between them, wiggling his fingers one by one. Shane blinked sluggishly, his gaze drifting over Ilya's knuckles. Ilya caught Shane's chin gently, tilting his face up until their foreheads touched. "Five," he prompted softly, tapping Shane's nose with his thumb. "Then four, then three. Slow. With me."

Shane's lips parted soundlessly, his throat working around nothing for a long moment before he managed a rasped, "F-five." The word came out cracked, unsure, but Ilya rewarded it with a gentle squeeze to the back of his neck.

"Good. Again." Ilya kept his voice low and even, the same tone he used when Shane's thoughts spiraled too fast during post-game interviews. His thumb brushed the hinge of Shane's jaw—just enough pressure to anchor without overwhelming. Shane's exhale shuddered against Ilya's collarbone, his fingers finally curling weakly around Ilya's wrist.

"Four," Shane whispered, his pupils still blown wide but his grip tightening incrementally around Ilya's pulse point. The contact seemed to steady him, his breathing slowing to match Ilya's deliberate inhales.

Ilya hummed approval, shifting them carefully until Shane's back was flush against his chest, their legs tangled together on the large table. He pressed a kiss to the base of Shane's spine, letting his lips linger until he felt the tension bleed from Shane's shoulders. "Three," Ilya murmured against his skin, his palm splaying wide over Shane's racing heart.

Shane's fingers twined with Ilya's where they rested over his sternum. "Three," he echoed, voice rough but clearer now. His hips shifted restlessly, the movement unconscious, chasing friction that wasn't there anymore. The flush across his chest had faded from violent red to something softer, his skin cooling where Ilya's breath ghosted over it.

Shane's voice wavered on "two," his fingers tightening around Ilya's wrist like a lifeline. "One."

"Again," Ilya murmured, pressing another kiss between Shane's shoulder blades. His palm smoothed up Shane's chest, fingers splaying wide over his sternum. The touch was grounding, deliberate—the exact amount of pressure Shane needed when words stopped making sense.

Shane inhaled, the numbers catching in his throat like splintered glass. "F-five." His breath hitched as Ilya's thumb brushed strands of hair off his dampened forehead.. "Four." The world sharpened incrementally with each count. The sweat cooling on his skin, the ache between his thighs, the unfamiliar vulnerability of being cradled naked against Ilya's chest in the aftermath. "Three." His voice steadied, fingers flexing against Ilya's forearm where it wrapped around his waist.

"Good," Ilya murmured against the shell of Shane's ear. His lips lingered there, warm and familiar. "Keep going."

Shane swallowed hard, blinking rapidly as the last remnants of that headspace dissolved like fog under morning sun. "Two." Awareness crashed over him—the stickiness between his thighs, the dull throb of fresh bruises blooming across his hips. The way Ilya's heartbeat thundered against his back, steady and reassuring. "One."

Shane's fingers dug into Ilya's forearm with sudden urgency, his breathing turning ragged as he arched back against Ilya's chest. "Ilya—" The name tore from his throat raw and uneven, his body trembling with the aftershocks of being pulled too deep, too fast.

Ilya reacted instantly, his arms locking around Shane's torso like living restraints. One palm spread wide over Shane's pounding heart, the other cradling the base of his skull where sweat-damp hair curled against his neck. "I'm here," Ilya murmured into the shell of Shane's ear, his lips brushing the sensitive skin there with each word.

Shane's fingers twitched against Ilya's forearm, his breath still uneven. "What...what just happened?" The words came out thin, like paper stretched too tight over a frame. He blinked slowly.

Ilya's thumbs traced circles on Shane's wrists where they rested against his own pulse points. "You went under," he murmured, lips pressing gently to the knob of Shane's spine. "Very deep." His voice carried no judgment, only quiet certainty. The kind that made Shane believe it wasn't wrong, just different.

Shane swallowed. His throat felt scraped raw. From screaming, from gasping, from words he couldn't remember forming. "I didn't—" His fingers flexed against Ilya's skin. "I didn't mean to."

Ilya's palm settled warm and heavy over Shane's heart again. "Meant to or not," he murmured into Shane's hair, "it's not wrong. You do not have to apologize for how your body reacts."

Shane's cock twitched against his stomach as if on queue, flushed and leaking against his abdomen with each shallow breath. A soft whine escaped his throat as his hips jerked involuntarily, the movement desperate, uncoordinated. The oversensitivity was bordering on pain now, his neglected arousal a live wire sparking under his skin.

Shane's moan cracked halfway through, transforming into a pained gasp as his cock throbbed against his stomach, untouched and oversensitive. "Ilya—" His fingers spasmed against Ilya's forearm, nails digging crescents into the sweat-slick skin. "It *hurts*."

Ilya's entire demeanor shifted in an instant. His palm smoothed up Shane's heaving chest, fingers splaying wide over his sternum. "I know, малыш," he murmured, pressing his lips to the damp curve of Shane's shoulder. "Let me fix it for you." His other hand slid down Shane's trembling abdomen.

Shane's fingers clawed at Ilya's wrist before he could reach lower. "No—not like that," he rasped, his voice frayed at the edges. His hips arched off the table, chasing something neither of them could name. "I need—" The words dissolved into a shattered moan as his cock twitched violently against his stomach.

Ilya stilled instantly. His palm hovered over Shane's trembling abdomen, waiting. "Tell me," he murmured, pressing his lips to the damp nape of Shane's neck. The scent of sweat and sex clung to Shane's skin, sharp and familiar. "What do you need?"

Shane's fingers twitched against Ilya's forearm, his breathing ragged as he swallowed hard. "I need—" He hesitated, his throat working around the words like they were physical things he had to push out. "Can I...sit on your lap?" The request was so quiet, so soft, that Ilya almost missed it beneath the sound of Shane's uneven breathing.

Ilya's arms loosened instantly, his palms sliding up to cradle Shane's ribs as he shifted them upright. "Come here," he murmured, guiding Shane's trembling limbs until he straddled Ilya's thighs. The position forced Shane's back straight, his flushed cock bobbing between them, still hard, still leaking, but now with the added vulnerability of facing Ilya fully. Shane's breath hitched, his hands hovering over Ilya's shoulders before settling there like he wasn't sure he deserved the contact.

Ilya watched Shane's eyelashes flutter as he sank down onto his cock, the slow, deliberate descent drawing a moan from Shane's throat. His hands trembled where they gripped Ilya's shoulders. Ilya kept his hips perfectly still, letting Shane set the pace. Letting him control the penetration even as his body quaked with oversensitivity.

Shane's hips rocked forward with a broken gasp, his body shuddering as he took Ilya in deeper. Not just inside him, but into the marrow of his bones, the frayed edges of his thoughts. He could feel Ilya's breath hot against his lips, uneven and ragged, their foreheads pressed together so tightly it blurred his vision. No teasing now. No games. Just the raw, primal need to feel each other completely before they shattered.

Shane's gasp broke against Ilya's lips, his hips stuttering mid-motion as pleasure crested unexpectedly. Ilya caught him by the jaw, forcing their foreheads together. "Look at me," Ilya ordered, voice ragged but unwavering. "When you come, I want your eyes open. On me."

Shane's hips jerked violently as the orgasm tore through him untouched, his cock pulsing thick ropes of cum between their sweat slicked stomachs. His vision blurred at the edges, but Ilya's grip on his jaw kept their foreheads pressed together and forced him to watch as pleasure unraveled him strand by strand. Ilya's name spilled from Shane's lips as his thighs trembled with aftershocks.

Shane's fingers dug into Ilya's biceps as his body clamped down on Ilya's cock with such brutal force that Ilya saw white. The sudden pressure dragged a ragged groan from Ilya's throat. His hips jerked upward involuntarily, driving deeper as Shane's trembling thighs locked around his waist.

"Fuck—Shane—" Ilya's warning dissolved into Russian curses as Shane's body milked him through the last aftershocks of orgasm. Shane's breath hitched when Ilya spilled inside him, his oversensitive walls fluttering around the thick pulse of heat filling him.

Shane felt so warm inside with Ilya's cum. It was warm like the first sip of coffee on a cold morning, warm like the flush spreading across his chest whenever Ilya smirked at him during warm ups. Only this heat pulsed deeper, settling low in his stomach. He could feel it—Ilya—marking him from the inside out, and the realization made his spent cock twitch weakly against his stomach.

Ilya laid back against the table and pulled Shane down with him, the muscles of his abdomen flexing as he took Shane's full weight without hesitation. Shane landed on Ilya's chest with a soft grunt, his sweat-slick skin sticking to Ilya's as strong arms encircled him. Ilya was still buried deep inside him, the stretch now achingly familiar even as Shane's body trembled with oversensitivity.

The shift jostled them enough that Shane felt Ilya's softening cock twitch inside him, pulling another weak whimper from his throat. He turned his face into the crook of Ilya's neck instinctively, breathing in the sharp scent of sweat and sex. His fingers traced over Ilya's face.

Ilya's thumb traced the sharp line of Shane's cheekbone, his touch impossibly gentle for hands that had pinned Shane down so ruthlessly minutes ago. "Я тебя люблю," he murmured, his Russian softening the words. The pads of his fingers skimmed over Shane's damp eyelashes, catching the moisture clinging there.

Shane knew exactly what those Russian words meant. He'd heard them whispered against his skin in hotel rooms across continents, murmured into the curve of his neck after brutal games, gasped between their tangled limbs in the early morning hours when the world felt far away. *Ya tebya lyublyu*. I love you. Five syllables that never failed to make his chest ache.

Shane turned his face into Ilya's palm, pressing a kiss to the calloused skin there. "I love you too," he murmured, the admission slipping out as easily as breathing.

The silence between them wasn't empty. It was left with the weight of everything unsaid and everything done. Shane traced circles on Ilya's chest. The sticky mess between their stomachs had cooled, but neither moved to clean it. Not yet.

Chapter 4: Come on, I know you feel it too

Shane felt the warmth of his breath mingling with the sweat still drying on Ilya's skin. He could feel Ilya softening inside him. It was a slow, gradual shift that should have made him pull away, but the weight felt right somehow. Grounding. His fingers traced over Ilya's sternum, following the faint scars from old hockey injuries. "Your thoughts are very loud," Ilya murmured into Shane's hair.

"I can hear your heartbeat," Shane murmured against Ilya's chest. "It's nice."

Ilya tightened his arms around Shane. "You know I like this too," he said, voice rough at the edges. "You. Like this." His thumb traced the ridge of Shane's collarbone.

Shane exhaled, pressing closer. "Yeah?"

"More than you know." Ilya shifted just enough to tilt Shane's chin up. The outside lights caught the flush still high on Shane's cheeks. "You give yourself so completely. I won't ever take that lightly."

Shane swallowed, suddenly aware of how exposed he was, not just physically, but in the way Ilya always saw through him. He pressed his forehead against Ilya's sternum again, grounding himself in the steady thump of his heartbeat. "You say that like it's always easy for me," he admitted, voice muffled against skin. "Giving myself like that."

Ilya's fingers stilled on his skin. "It's not easy for you?" He questioned intently. "But you said it was...before." Ilya started to spiral a bit with the thought that he had thought him and Shane were on the same page. But what if he wasn't.

Shane shook his head quickly, catching the shift in Ilya's tone. "No—not like that. I meant...it's not easy in general. For me. With anyone." He hesitated, then forced himself to look up. "But with you, it's...different." Shane's fingers flexed against Ilya's ribs, searching for the right words. "I feel safe with you."

Ilya's grip tightened, just slightly, like he was holding onto that admission. "You are safe," he said, low and firm. "Always." He exhaled sharply, then added, quieter, "But you need to tell me if something does not feel right. Even if it is small."

Shane nodded. "I know." He swallowed. "And you need to tell me too. What you want. What you...need from me." His pulse jumped under Ilya's palm.

Ilya's thumb stroked over the racing vein in Shane's wrist, steadying. "I like when you let me take care of you," he said after a beat. His voice was deliberate, testing the words. "When you

trust me with this." His hand slid up Shane's arm, possessive but not demanding. "But I do not want to assume."

Shane's breath hitched. "You don't have to assume," he murmured. He tilted his head, pressing his lips to the hollow of Ilya's throat. "I like it too. When you..." he hesitated, the words sticking. "You know."

Ilya laughed, low and warm, his breath stirring Shane's hair. "After everything we just did," he murmured, fingers tracing idle patterns down Shane's spine, "you get shy now?"

Shane huffed, pressing his forehead harder against Ilya's chest as if he could burrow into him and escape the heat crawling up his neck. "It's not shy," he muttered. "It's just...words are hard." Words were slippery, never quite fitting the shape of what he meant, especially when it came to this. Especially with Ilya, who always seemed to understand him better than Shane understood himself.

Ilya's hand stilled at the small of Shane's back, his thumb pressing just hard enough to make Shane shiver. "Let me ask," he said, voice dropping into that rough, deliberate register that made Shane's stomach tighten. "Yes or no questions. Would that be easier?"

Shane exhaled, nodding against Ilya's chest. "Yeah. That would be easier." His fingers curled lightly against Ilya's ribs, grounding himself in the solidness of him.

Ilya hummed, thoughtful. His fingers traced the dip of Shane's spine again, slow and deliberate. "Good," he murmured. "Then we start simple." He shifted just enough to catch Shane's gaze, his own dark and intent. "Do you like when I am in control? Not just in bed."

Shane wet his lips, noticing the way his pulse jumped when Ilya's gaze dropped to follow the motion. "Yes," he said finally, the word rough in his throat. "I like it." He swallowed, forcing himself to hold Ilya's stare even as his skin prickled with the vulnerability of it.

Ilya's thumb brushed over Shane's lower lip, slow and considering. "Do you like it when I decide things for you?" His voice was quiet, but the weight behind it pressed into Shane's ribs like a physical touch. "Little things. What you eat. What you wear."

Shane exhaled sharply through his nose, his fingers tightening where they rested against Ilya's side. The thought sent a slow curl of warmth through his stomach—not just the idea of Ilya choosing for him, but the way Ilya asked, like Shane's answer mattered more than some fantasy. "Sometimes, maybe." He cut himself off, frustration flickering across his face. Shane forced the words out. "It's easier when I don't have to think. But only if it's you." He swallowed, forcing himself to meet Ilya's gaze. "Does that make sense?"

"Of course, yes," Ilya murmured. His fingers slid into Shane's hair, twisting lightly in the damp strands. "And what about when we are not alone? When we are in public?" His voice dipped

lower, rougher. "Do you still want that? Want me to—" He hesitated, searching Shane's face. "To remind you? When I can?"

Shane's breath caught. His pulse hammered against his ribs, loud enough he wondered if Ilya could hear it. The thought of Ilya's hand curling around the back of his neck in a crowded restaurant, or his voice dropping into that commanding register between shifts at practice—it sent a jolt down his spine. "Yes," Shane admitted, the word barely more than a whisper. "But—subtle. Something no one else would notice."

Ilya's lips twitched. "You think I do not know how to be subtle?" His fingers tightened in Shane's hair, just enough to make Shane shiver. "I have been loving you subtly for years." His thumb brushed Shane's temple, lingering.

"If I ask too many questions, will it—" Ilya hesitated, searching Shane's face. "Will it feel like pressure?"

Shane shook his head quickly, his fingers tightening where they gripped Ilya's side. "No, it—it helps. When you ask like that." His throat worked as he forced himself to hold Ilya's gaze. "It's not pressure if it's...structured."

Ilya exhaled, slow and measured, his fingers still tangled in Shane's hair. "Alright then," he murmured. "Do you like it when I hold you down? Like tonight?" His voice was deliberate, but there was a roughness beneath it, like he was holding back. Shane could feel the tension in Ilya's thighs where they pressed against his own.

Shane swallowed, his skin prickling at the memory of Ilya's weight pinning him, the way his breath had hitched when Ilya growled '*stay*' against his ear. "Yes," he admitted, his voice lower than he meant it to be. "Especially when you use your voice like you did."

Ilya's thumb traced the shell of Shane's ear. "You like my voice," he murmured, not quite a question. Shane could hear the smirk in it.

"Yes," Shane admitted, his exhale warm against Ilya's collarbone. His fingers flexed against Ilya's ribs. "You know I do."

Ilya hummed, pleased. His fingers drifted lower, skating over the curve of Shane's shoulder. "And the marks?" His voice dipped, rougher. "Do you like when I leave them?"

Shane's breath hitched. The bruises from Ilya's teeth were still fresh on his thigh, the sting a dull throb when he shifted. "God yes," he said, too fast, then caught himself.

Ilya's chuckle vibrated against Shane's temple. "Eager," he murmured, thumb pressing into the hollow of Shane's hip. "Good." He paused, considering. His next question came slower, deliberate. "Did you like when I made you wait tonight? When I told you not to come yet?"

Shane's throat clicked as he swallowed. The memory of Ilya's palm pressing flat against his stomach, holding him down while Shane writhed, desperate and pleading, heat flooded his face. "Yes," he rasped. His fingers dug into Ilya's side, grounding. "But it was...hard. In the moment."

Ilya's fingers stilled against Shane's hip. "Was there something tonight," he asked carefully, "you wanted to change?" His voice was steady, but Shane felt the slight tension in his muscles.

Shane felt the exact moment Ilya tensed, the barely perceptible hitch in his breathing, the way his fingers stilled against Shane's skin like he was bracing for impact. Shane tilted his head back, studying the tightness around Ilya's mouth. "Yes, but not in the way you're thinking," he said quietly.

Ilya's fingers tensed against Shane's hip, his breath catching. "I'm sorry, I didn't—"

"No," Shane interrupted, pressing closer, his forehead bumping against Ilya's jaw. "Not like that." He swallowed hard, forcing himself to keep talking before the words evaporated. "I meant...you could have been rougher." The admission hung between them, raw and exposed. Shane could feel his pulse hammering in his throat, absurdly loud in the quiet room.

Ilya went very still. His thumb dug into the soft skin below Shane's ribs, pressing just shy of pain. "Rougher," he repeated, voice dropping into something dark.

Shane exhaled sharply. His fingers flexed against Ilya's side, grounding himself. "Yeah. I could have—" He broke off, frustrated, then forced it out. "I could have taken more." His breath hitched when Ilya's fingers tightened possessively around his hipbone.

Ilya's breath stuttered, fingers flexing against Shane's hip like he was resisting the urge to flip him onto his back and pin him down all over again. "You—" He cut himself off, voice rough. "You want me to be rougher?" The words came out half-disbelieving, half-ravenous.

Shane felt the flush crawl up his neck, but he held Ilya's gaze. "Sometimes," he clarified, fingers tracing the ridges of Ilya's ribs. "When you're...when you're like that." He swallowed hard. "I like it when you lose control a little."

Ilya exhaled sharply through his nose, his grip tightening just enough to make Shane shiver. "You have no idea," he murmured, voice dipping into that dangerous register that curled low in Shane's stomach, "what you do to me when you say things like that." His thumb pressed into the bruise on Shane's hip, drawing a sharp inhale. "You take everything I give you and then ask for more."

Shane's pulse jumped under Ilya's palm. "Is that...bad?"

Ilya's laugh was rough, almost disbelieving. "Bad?" His fingers slid up Shane's spine, possessive and heated. "It is perfect. You are perfect." The words came out raw, like Ilya was barely holding back. "You—" He broke off, shaking his head. "You let me have this. Have you. And then you tell me you want me to take even more." His voice dropped to a growl. "How am I supposed to resist that?"

Shane exhaled shakily, his fingers tightening against Ilya's ribs as the words settled between them. "You don't have to resist," he murmured, voice rough with something he couldn't name. "That's the point." He swallowed, forcing himself to meet Ilya's darkened gaze. "I want—" His throat clicked. "I just want to be yours. However you need me."

Ilya's breath stuttered, his grip shifting to cradle Shane's jaw, thumb pressing against the hinge. "You are," he growled, low and possessive. "You always are." His fingers tightened just enough to make Shane's pulse jump. "But this—" He broke off, shaking his head. "You need to be clear. What you mean when you say 'however I need you.'" His thumb stroked Shane's cheekbone, deliberate. "Because I have ideas. Many. Not all of them gentle."

Shane's breath hitched, heat pooling low in his stomach. "I know," he admitted quietly. "I've thought about it to." The confession clung to his tongue, sticky with vulnerability.

Ilya stilled, his gaze sharpening. "Have you?" His voice dropped, rough with intent. "Tell me about it."

Shane swallowed, his pulse kicking against Ilya's palm where it still cradled his jaw. "I mean—" He broke off, fingers flexing against Ilya's ribs as he searched for the right shape of the thought. "When you...use me." The words came out rough, heat crawling up his neck. "However you want. Whenever." His throat worked. "Like—like tonight, but more. If you wanted."

Ilya's fingers stilled against Shane's cheek, his brow furrowing slightly. "You want to be free use to me?" The words came out rougher than he intended, laced with surprise and something darker, hotter.

Shane blinked up at him, confusion flickering across his face. "What's...free use?" The question was hesitant and Shane was bracing himself for the answer.

Ilya's fingers froze against Shane's skin. The realization hit him like a bad check—how had he missed this? All the times Shane had melted under his touch, the way he'd arch into every command, the quiet desperation when Ilya took control—it had been staring him in the face for years. His chest tightened. "Fuck," he muttered, pressing his forehead against Shane's. "How did I not see this before?"

Shane's brows knitted together. "See what?" His fingers twitched against Ilya's ribs, uncertain. "Did I...say something wrong?"

“No, no малыш,” he said firmly, thumbs brushing the high flush on Shane’s cheeks. “You did not say anything wrong. You—*fuck*—you said everything right.” His voice wavered with something raw. “That’s the problem.”

Shane pushed himself up onto his palms. His brow furrowed as he studied Ilya’s face, the tension in his jaw, the way his fingers twitched like he was holding himself back. “What?” Shane demanded, voice edged with frustration. “What does it mean?”

Ilya moved before Shane could brace for it—hands gripping his hips, hauling him upright in one fluid motion until Shane was straddling his lap, thighs bracketing Ilya’s waist, the sudden shift seating Ilya deeper inside him. Shane gasped, nails biting into Ilya’s shoulders at the sudden motion. “Jesus—” The curse punched out of him, breathless and ragged. Ilya exhaled sharply through his nose, his grip tightening around Shane’s hips as he adjusted to the shift in position. Shane’s thighs trembled against his waist, still loose-limbed from earlier, but his gaze was sharp, demanding.

Ilya exhaled sharply through his nose, fingers flexing against Shane’s hips like he was physically restraining himself from moving. “Free use,” he began, voice rough with restraint, “is not just sex whenever I want.” His thumbs pressed into the hollows of Shane’s hipbones, grounding. “It is you. Anywhere. Any time.” His gaze burned into Shane’s, unflinching. “If I push you against the kitchen counter while you’re making coffee. You take it. If I wake you up with my fingers inside you. You don’t complain. If I decide I want you on your knees in the locker room shower. You go.”

Shane’s breath hitched, his thighs tightening reflexively around Ilya’s waist. “Oh,” he breathed, the word barely audible. His fingers dug into Ilya’s shoulders.

The words—*‘anywhere, any time, you take it’*—echoed in his skull, too big and too much all at once. He pressed his forehead harder against Ilya’s collarbone, his throat working around nothing. A damp heat pricked at the corners of his eyes, and then, embarrassingly, a tear slipped free, soaking into Ilya’s skin.

Shane’s breath shuddered against Ilya’s collarbone, his fingers curling tight into soft curls. Ilya’s hands went rigid against his hips. “Shane?” The name cracked in his throat, raw with panic. “Shane. Talk to me. Please.” His fingers trembled where they gripped Shane’s waist, thumbs pressing bruises into his skin. “Was it too much? Did I—”

Shane blinked up at Ilya, his lashes damp and sticking together, and the sheer panic in Ilya’s eyes made his chest ache. “No—*no*,” he rasped, fingers tightening in Ilya’s hair. “You didn’t—I’m not—” His voice cracked, frustration twisting his face as the words tangled in his throat.

Ilya’s thumbs brushed under Shane’s eyes, wiping away the tears with a gentleness that made Shane shudder. “Then what?” Ilya’s voice was raw, his breath uneven. “Tell me. Please.”

Shane wanted that life. So fucking bad. The kind of want that settled deep in his bones, hot and insistent, like the ache after a good hit. His throat worked, fingers tightening in Ilya's hair. "I want that," he managed, voice rough.

Ilya exhaled sharply, his grip on Shane's hips bordering on painful. "You—" He swallowed hard, searching Shane's face. "О, слава бору, с тобой всё в порядке."

Ilya's fingers curled tighter around Shane's hips, grounding him as Shane struggled to find the words. The silence stretched, thick with the weight of what Shane couldn't articulate—the way his chest ached with want, how his skin prickled with the need to be claimed and owned. Ilya exhaled slowly, deliberately loosening his grip. "Breathe," he murmured, pressing his forehead to Shane's. "Just breathe."

Shane swallowed, his throat clicking. His fingers trembled where they gripped Ilya's shoulders. "I can't—" He broke off, frustration flickering across his face. "I don't know how to say it."

Ilya exhaled sharply through his nose, pressing his forehead harder against Shane's. His fingers flexed against Shane's hips, grounding them both. "Alright," he murmured, voice deliberately calm. "Yes or no. Do you want me to keep asking questions?"

Shane nodded immediately, his fingers loosening slightly against Ilya's shoulders. "Yes."

"Good." Ilya's thumb brushed the sharp jut of Shane's hipbone. "Do you want to try free use with me?" The words came out rough, like he was bracing for impact.

Shane's breath hitched. His pulse jumped under Ilya's palm. "Yes," he whispered, then swallowed hard. "Want to try. With you."

Ilya exhaled sharply, his fingers flexing against Shane's skin like he was trying to imprint himself there. "Then listen," he said, voice dropping into something deliberate, measured. "Because this—this only works if you know you have full control over me in this too." His thumb pressed into the hollow of Shane's hip, grounding them both.

Shane blinked, his brows knitting together. "I do?"

"Yes." Ilya's grip tightened, insistent. "You say 'no'—even if it is small, even if it is seconds before—everything stops. No questions." His jaw tensed, eyes darkening. "No guilt."

Shane swallowed, his pulse stuttering under Ilya's palm. "Please."

Ilya cradled Shane's head in both hands like something precious, his thumbs pressing into the sharp angles of Shane's jaw, and kissed him, deep and slow and stupidly tender, until Shane's fingers went slack against his shoulders and his breath came in quiet, stuttering gasps between them. "You," Ilya murmured against his lips, voice rough with something unnameable, "mean

everything to me, Shane Hollander." His teeth grazed Shane's lower lip, just shy of biting, and Shane shuddered, fingers twisting into Ilya's hair. "Everything."

Ilya never thought he'd be the kind of man who craved this. The kind who'd lie awake imagining Shane's wrists pinned beneath his palms, Shane's breath hitching on command, Shane's body yielding whenever and however Ilya wanted. He'd heard whispers of this, seen it in the way some couples moved together at clubs. But always dismissed it as something other people did. Not him. Never him.

Not until Shane.

Shane, who arched into every rough touch like it was salvation. Shane, whose pulse jumped under Ilya's palm when he spoke in that tone. Shane, who was staring at him now with pupils blown wide, lips parted around uneven breaths.

Shane's fingers trembled where they gripped Ilya's shoulders, his breath coming in uneven bursts against Ilya's collarbone. "I want—" He swallowed hard, forcing the words past the tightness in his throat. "I want you to own me. Completely."

Ilya's hands tightened on Shane's hips, pressing bruises into the skin there. "You already do," he murmured, voice rough with something raw and unguarded. His thumbs traced the sharp jut of Shane's hipbones with reverence. "You own me completely too, Shane."

Shane slumped forward, his forehead pressing hard against Ilya's collarbone as the tension bled from his shoulders. Ilya's arms tightened around him, one hand sliding up to cradle the back of Shane's neck, fingers tangling in the damp strands of his hair. They stayed like that, breathing in sync, Shane's pulse slowing against Ilya's chest.

"Mhm," Ilya hummed after a long moment, his voice rumbling against Shane's temple. His fingers traced idle patterns along Shane's spine. "You know," he murmured, lips brushing Shane's forehead, "I have been inside you this whole time."

Shane huffed a laugh against Ilya's collarbone, the sound muffled and warm. "Yeah, I noticed," he muttered, shifting just enough to feel the drag of Ilya still buried deep inside him. His thighs trembled with the movement, sore and loose-limbed, but the stretch was a familiar ache now, one that settled low in his stomach like a brand.

Ilya's chuckle vibrated against Shane's temple, his fingers flexing against the nape of Shane's neck. "You are so warm," he murmured, voice roughened with something tender. His thumb traced Shane's jaw.

Shane exhaled, letting his weight sink heavier against Ilya's chest. "You like that?" he asked, voice sleep-thick. "Being inside me for so long?"

Ilya's breath hitched, his fingers tightening possessively in Shane's hair. "Да," he admitted, voice rough with something too raw to name. "I like feeling you around me. Like you cannot let me go." His thumb pressed into the hollow of Shane's throat. "Like you do not want to."

Shane didn't want to let Ilya go. He clung tighter, fingers digging into the sweat-damp skin of Ilya's back, thighs tensing around his waist in silent protest when Ilya shifted like he might pull away. The movement made Ilya groan low in his throat, his cock twitching inside Shane where they were still joined.

Ilya's hands slid down to grip Shane's ass, kneading the sore muscle there. "I am not going anywhere." His voice was rough with amusement, but beneath it ran something darker, possessive. The same thread that had tightened around Shane's throat all night. "You feel that? How deep you take me? I could not leave if I tried."

Shane exhaled sharply, his forehead dropping to Ilya's shoulder. The words coiled hot in his stomach, settling right where Ilya's cock still stretched him open. "Good," he muttered against Ilya's collarbone. His teeth scraped the skin there, not quite biting.

Ilya's fingers tightened on Shane's hips. "Careful," he warned, but his voice had gone rough edged, that dangerous register that made Shane's pulse stutter. "Unless you want another round already."

Shane lifted his head just enough to meet Ilya's gaze, his lips brushing Ilya's jaw as he spoke. "If you wanted another round," he murmured, voice rough with exhaustion and something darker, "I wouldn't stop you." The admission hung between them, raw and vulnerable.

Ilya would give anything for this man. Shane, who had just offered himself up with nothing but raw, aching honesty. His grip tightened reflexively on Shane's hips, fingers pressing into the bruises he'd left there earlier, as if he could imprint himself deeper.

"You wouldn't stop me," Ilya repeated, voice gone rough. His cock twitched inside Shane at the words, half-hard again already. "Even now? When you're sore and tired and—" His breath hitched when Shane shifted slightly, the movement dragging a quiet gasp from both of them.

Shane's fingers curled into Ilya's shoulders. "I told you," he murmured, voice sleep-slurred but stubborn. "However you want me. Whenever you want me." His lips brushed Ilya's collarbone, damp and warm. "That includes when I'm sore."

Ilya exhaled sharply through his nose, his fingers flexing against Shane's skin. "Christ," he muttered, pressing his forehead to Shane's. "You are going to kill me." His thumb traced the bite mark on Shane's neck possessively.

Ilya exhaled hard through his nose, his fingers flexing against Shane's hips like he was physically restraining himself from flipping them over and having his way with him. "We

should..." his voice cracked, rough with want. He cleared his throat. "Shower and food. We need that." Ilya's fingers flexed against Shane's hips, his breath uneven. "I'm going to pull out now," he murmured, voice thick with warning. His thumb brushed the crease of Shane's thigh. "It's going to be messy."

Ilya's hands slid up Shane's trembling thighs, thumbs pressing into the sensitive skin just above his knees. "Easy," he murmured, voice rough as he began to withdraw while watching Shane's face twist at the drag of his cock. Shane's fingers dug into Ilya's shoulders, his breath hitching when the head finally popped free, followed by the unmistakable wet spill of cum between his thighs.

"F-fuck," Shane gasped, thighs twitching as warmth trickled down his inner leg. His hole clenched around nothing, oversensitive and still loose from being stretched open for so long. The slick sound of liquid hitting the table made his ears burn.

Ilya's fingers traced lazy circles around the swollen rim of Shane's asshole, still stretched wide and glistening from being filled for so long. Shane shivered at the featherlight touch but didn't protest, his head lolling back against Ilya's shoulder as his thighs trembled with oversensitivity. Shane sighed against his collarbone, boneless in his lap, letting Ilya spread his cheeks wider with rough palms.

Shane's thighs tightened reflexively around Ilya's waist. "Feels weird," he admitted, voice sleep-slurred but edged with something darker. His fingers flexed against Ilya's shoulders. "Good weird."

Ilya hummed, pressing two fingers against Shane's stretched rim, watching it flutter weakly around nothing. "Still so open," he murmured, thumb rubbing circles into Shane's cheek as his fingers teased the sensitive skin. "You take me so well." His other hand palmed Shane's ass roughly, kneading the sore muscle with possessive intent. "Look at you—still dripping me." His voice dropped into that dangerous register that made Shane's breath hitch.

Shane just smiled contently in Ilya's lap, his cheek pressed against the damp warmth of Ilya's collarbone. He liked this, the lazy drag of Ilya's fingers over his oversensitive skin, the way his body still trembled with the aftershocks of being stretched open for so long. He liked being played with, being examined like something precious and ruined all at once.

Ilya exhaled slowly, pressing his forehead against Shane's temple before shifting his grip—one hand sliding to cradle Shane's lower back, the other hooking under his thigh. "Alright, малыш," he murmured, voice roughened with exhaustion and something tender. "Let's get you up." His fingers flexed against Shane's skin. "Can you stand?"

Shane made a quiet noise of protest, his thighs tightening reflexively around Ilya's waist. "Don't wanna," he mumbled against Ilya's collarbone, the words slurred with exhaustion. His fingers twitched against Ilya's shoulders. "Comfortable."

Ilya exhaled through his nose, pressing his lips to Shane's damp temple. "You are sticky," he murmured, fingers tracing the dried sweat along Shane's spine. "And I am sticky. And the table is..." he glanced down at the mess between them, his cock twitching traitorously at the sight of Shane's thighs glazed with spend.

Shane groaned, burying his face harder against Ilya's shoulder. "Don't care." His voice was muffled, stubborn. His fingers flexed against Ilya's back like he could physically anchor them here forever.

Ilya's chuckle vibrated against him. "You will," he countered, thumb brushing a possessive circle over Shane's hipbone. "When you realize you are sitting in—"

"Stop talking," Shane hissed, ears burning. He shifted slightly, wincing as the movement made fresh warmth trickle down his inner thigh. "Fuck. Okay. Fine." His fingers tightened in Ilya's hair.

Ilya exhaled, shifting them both carefully until Shane's feet touched the floor. Shane swayed immediately, thighs trembling, both from exhaustion and the slick mess between them. Ilya's arm locked around his waist, hauling him flush against his chest. "You are okay," he murmured, lips brushing Shane's temple. "I have you."

Shane exhaled sharply through his nose, fingers digging into Ilya's biceps. "I know." His voice was rough, half from embarrassment, half from the way his hole clenched around nothing, still loose and oversensitive. "Just—don't let go."

Ilya's grip tightened possessively. "Never." The word was a vow, dark and unyielding. He shifted them toward the bathroom, one hand around Shane's waist as Shane stumbled against him. "Careful," he murmured, lips brushing Shane's ear.

The bathroom tiles were cool under Shane's bare feet. He leaned heavily against Ilya's side, letting his boyfriend guide him toward the shower with a steadying hand. Shane's thighs trembled with every step, the residual ache a grounding reminder of what they'd just done. And what they'd agreed to.

Ilya's hands slid under Shane's thighs, lifting him effortlessly off the floor before Shane could protest. The sudden motion made his breath hitch—both from the unexpected strength and the way his body still throbbed between his legs. The cold porcelain of the bathroom counter sent a shiver up Shane's spine as Ilya deposited him there with careful precision, his palms lingering on Shane's knees to steady him.

"Stay," Ilya murmured, pressing a kiss to Shane's forehead before stepping back. His fingers lingered on Shane's knees, tracing idle circles against the sensitive skin there. "Don't move."

Shane exhaled through his nose, shifting slightly on the cool countertop. His thighs ached, his hole still throbbing faintly from being stretched open for so long. "Not like I can go anywhere," he muttered, rubbing his palms against his thighs.

Ilya arched a brow, already halfway to the linen closet. "You could try," he said, voice dropping into that dangerous register that made Shane's pulse stutter. "I would enjoy stopping you."

Shane's breath hitched, his fingers curling against the edge of the counter. The image of Ilya dragging him back, hands rough on his hips, coiled hot in his stomach. "Fuck," he breathed, shifting again. His cock twitched traitorously against his thigh.

Ilya smirked, tossing a towel over his shoulder before grabbing a washcloth from the shelf. "See? You like that idea." His fingers flexed around the fabric. "My stubborn Shane, trying to run when he can't even walk."

Shane scowled, but his thighs trembled at the words. "Asshole," he muttered, watching Ilya move toward the shower. The water hissed to life, steam curling in the air between them.

Ilya adjusted the temperature with practiced ease, one palm held under the spray. His back muscles flexed as he leaned in to test the heat. "But you like it."

The shower water hit Shane's back, scalding and perfect. He braced his palms against the tile, letting Ilya's hands guide him under the spray, firm, possessive, grounding. He didn't flinch when Ilya's fingers traced the bite marks littering his shoulders, or when the washcloth dragged rough over his thighs, cleaning away the evidence of their earlier mess with a tenderness that made his chest ache.

"Still with me?" Ilya murmured against his nape, lips brushing damp skin as he worked the shampoo into Shane's hair. His fingers massaged Shane's scalp with careful precision, mindful of the way Shane's eyelids fluttered at the sensation, too much and not enough all at once.

Shane tilted his head back into Ilya's touch. "Yeah," he muttered, voice hoarse. His fingers flexed against the tile. "Just thinking."

Ilya's hands stilled. "About?"

The water flowed between them, warm where Shane's back pressed against Ilya's chest. "How good I feel. How I should've told you sooner." Shane swallowed. "About liking...all this."

Ilya exhaled sharply against his shoulder blade. He pulled Shane back into him. "You are telling me now." His thumb traced Shane's abs. "That is what matters."

Shane leaned back into Ilya's chest with a quiet exhale, letting his weight settle fully against the solid warmth of him. The shower spray hit his shoulders, loosening the tension there as Ilya's

hands slid possessively down his torso—broad palms mapping every dip and plane of muscle like he was relearning Shane's body all over again. His thumbs pressed into the hollows of Shane's hips, fingers splaying wide to span the width of his waist.

Ilya's fingers traced the curve of Shane's spine with the washcloth, pressing just hard enough to make Shane shiver against him. "You take care of your body so well," he murmured against Shane's wet shoulder, his voice roughened by steam and something darker. The cloth dragged lower, circling the faint bruises blooming across Shane's hips. "Strongest fucking thighs in the league...and they shake so pretty for me."

The dual sensation of rough fabric and Ilya's calloused fingertips made his skin prickle, every pass of the washcloth felt like a brand. "Yours," he mumbled, the word slipping out, raw at the edges. His fingers flexed against the shower wall when Ilya's hand slid between his legs, cleaning him with deliberate thoroughness.

Ilya's knees hit the shower floor with a quiet thud, the water cascading over his shoulders as he knelt behind Shane. His hands spread Shane's cheeks with deliberate care, thumbs pressing into the plush flesh as he examined the still stretched rim, puffy and slack from use. "Mine," he murmured, voice rough with reverence. His breath ghosted hot over Shane's oversensitive skin.

Ilya's fingers pressed against Shane's rim with practiced ease, the warm water and soap making the glide effortless as he worked him open just enough to clean inside. "You were good for me," he murmured, his voice low and reverent against the curve of Shane's ass. "Taking me so deep for so long. And now letting me clean you." His thumb rubbed soothing circles into Shane's hip, grounding him even as his other fingers pressed deeper, swirling carefully.

Shane's breath hitched when Ilya's fingers curled inside him just enough to make his knees buckle. Not to stretch, not to tease, just to clean, with a meticulousness that sent heat crawling up his spine.

"You are so perfect," Ilya murmured, the words vibrating against the damp skin of Shane's lower back. His fingers twisted slightly, pressing against that spot that made Shane's thighs tremble. "Taking everything I give you without complaint. Even now."

Shane's breath hitched as Ilya's fingers worked deeper, the water washing away the last traces of their intimacy with clinical thoroughness that shouldn't have felt this good. His forehead pressed against the shower tiles again, cool against his flushed skin as Ilya was speaking in Russian against the small of his back.

The Russian words poured from Ilya's mouth like warm honey. Shane didn't need to understand them to feel their weight settling between his shoulder blades as Ilya murmured against his skin, the foreign syllables curling with possessiveness around his heart.

"Красивый," Ilya breathed against Shane's lower back, fingers still working methodically inside him. The water had turned lukewarm, but Shane barely noticed—not when Ilya's voice dropped into that rough, reverent register that made Shane's pulse stutter. "Ты мой мальчик. Мой хороший мальчик."

Shane exhaled sharply through his nose, and dropped his head back

Ilya's chuckle vibrated against his "You like hearing it?"

Shane's throat worked. "Yeah." The admission was raw. "Even when I don't understand."

"All clean," Ilya murmured against the curve of Shane's ass, his thumbs pressing deeper into the plush flesh as he examined his handiwork. The water had washed away every trace of them, but Ilya's gaze remained dark with possession. His breath ghosted hot over Shane's sensitive rim. Still pink, still loose. "Perfect."

Ilya's thumbs dug into the plush flesh of Shane's ass, spreading him wider as he leaned forward. His tongue dragged a hot, wet stripe over Shane's loosened rim, and Shane's fingers scrambled against the shower tiles, his knees buckling. "F-fuck—Ilya. I thought you were done."

Ilya pulled back just enough to smirk up at Shane's flushed face over the curve of his ass. "I said I was done cleaning you," he murmured, his breath hot against Shane's dripping skin. His thumbs pressed deeper into the plush flesh, spreading him wider. "Never said I was done with you."

Shane's fingers scrabbled against the shower tiles, his hips jerking forward instinctively, away from the teasing heat of Ilya's mouth, only for Ilya's grip to tighten, holding him in place. "You're not fair."

Ilya's tongue pressed flat against Shane's loosened rim, licking into him with a wet, filthy noise that echoed off the shower tiles. Shane's thighs trembled violently, his fingers scrambling for purchase against the slick wall as Ilya's grip tightened on his hips, holding him open and still.

"Fuck—Ilya," Shane gasped, his voice cracking as Ilya's tongue worked deeper, relentless. The sensation was overwhelming—hot, wet pressure against his oversensitive flesh, the scrape of stubble against his inner thighs—but it was Ilya's voice that unraveled him completely.

"Mhmm," Ilya hummed against him, the vibration making Shane's knees nearly give out. "Should not look so good," he murmured between slow, deliberate licks, his thumbs pressing deeper into Shane's ass to spread him wider. "Should not taste so good." His tongue flicked against Shane's rim, teasing. "This is all your fault."

Shane's breath hitched, fingers curling against the slick tile as Ilya's tongue pressed deeper. The words shouldn't have twisted his stomach into knots, shouldn't have made his cock twitch

against his thigh, already half-hard again despite the exhaustion weighing his limbs down. But they did. *God*, they did.

"Your—" Shane's voice cracked when Ilya's teeth grazed his rim. "Your fault for—*fuck*—for making me like this." He arched into the touch despite himself, thighs trembling violently.

Ilya pulled back just enough to smirk up at him, water dripping from his lashes. "No, sweetheart" he murmured, thumbs pressing bruises into Shane's hips. "You were always like this." His tongue dragged another wet stripe over Shane's loosened rim, deliberate. "Just needed someone to see you."

The truth of it punched the air from Shane's lungs. He had been like this. Aching beneath his skin, desperate to be seen, to be wanted like this. Not despite his control, but because of it. The realization curled hot in his gut, his cock twitching against him.

"I hate you," Shane breathed, fingers scrambling against the tile.

Ilya laughed against the curve of Shane's ass, the sound vibrating through Shane's oversensitive skin. "You hate me?" His thumbs dug deeper into Shane's cheeks, holding him open as his tongue pressed flat against Shane's rim again. "Such a terrible liar, моя любовь."

Shane's thighs trembled violently as Ilya's tongue dragged one last, deliberate stripe over his abused rim before pressing a soft kiss to the puffy flesh. The contrast—filthy heat followed by sudden tenderness—made his breath hitch. His fingers scrambled against the shower tiles, finding no purchase as Ilya rose fluidly, his wet chest pressing against Shane's back, trapping him in Ilya's arms.

"You okay?" Ilya murmured against Shane's shoulder, palms sliding down to his waist. Shane could feel Ilya's cock hardening against his ass, but the touch was patient. Waiting.

Shane let his head rest back against Ilya's shoulder, breathing in steam and Ilya's scent. Ilya's hands lingered on his hips, possessive even in stillness.

"Yeah," he whispered, the word cracking under the weight of everything he couldn't say. *I'm okay. I'm yours. I'm so fucking in love. Please don't let me go.*

The water shut off with a metallic groan, leaving Shane swaying against Ilya's chest as steam curled around them. Ilya's hands guided him onto the bathmat with the same firm gentleness he'd used to wreck him against the table earlier.

The towel scraped rough against Shane's shoulders, Ilya's hands firm as he worked the fabric down Shane's arms with methodical thoroughness. Water droplets clung stubbornly to Shane's collarbones until Ilya swiped them away with a fingertip, his touch lingering just long enough to make Shane's breath hitch.

"Lift," Ilya murmured, tapping Shane's ankle when he crouched to dry his legs. Shane obeyed automatically, bracing a hand on Ilya's shoulder for balance as Ilya dragged the towel up his calf with deliberate slowness. "Good." The praise curled warm in Shane's chest.

Shane stood swaying slightly as Ilya shook out the soft flannel pants. Ilya's fingers brushed Shane's hipbone as he guided his right foot into the leg hole. "Up," he murmured, waiting for Shane to lift his left foot before sliding the fabric up his legs with practiced ease. The waistband settled just below Shane's navel, and Ilya's knuckles grazed the sensitive skin there as he tied the drawstring.

Shane watched, leaning against the bathroom door frame, as Ilya tugged the fresh shirt over his head, the fabric catching briefly on his still-damp hair before settling across his shoulders. Shane's fingers twitched at his sides. He wanted to reach out and smooth the shirt down himself, to feel the warmth of Ilya's skin beneath the crisp fabric.

"I can feel you staring," Ilya said without looking up.

Shane's fingers curled against the doorframe, the wood cool beneath his fingertips. He wasn't staring at the way Ilya's muscles flexed beneath his shirt—not really. He was staring at the shift of fabric over shoulders that had pinned him down, at hands that had wrecked him with terrifying precision. At the mouth that had whispered Russian praise into his skin like prayers. It wasn't hunger twisting in his gut. It was something quieter, heavier.

Shane watched the way Ilya's fingers adjusted the hem of his shirt. It wasn't the muscles or the sharp lines of his body that held Shane's gaze. It was the way Ilya moved, deliberate and unhurried, like he knew exactly where he belonged in the world. Like he knew exactly where Shane belonged too. Which was with him.

Shane's fingertips twitched again. The motion was small, barely noticeable. Unless you were Ilya Rozanov, who noticed everything about Shane Hollander.

Ilya's fingers paused at the hem of his shirt, his gaze lifting to meet Shane's. The corner of his mouth tilted up, just slightly, as if he'd caught Shane mid-thought.

Ilya's fingers stilled at the hem of his shirt, the fabric stretched between his hands as he studied Shane's face. The air between them thickened with something unspoken—something Shane couldn't quite name but felt vibrating beneath his skin. His own fingers flexed uselessly at his sides, the urge to reach out clawing at him like a living thing.

"You don't need permission to touch what is already yours. Not now, not ever." Ilya said, voice calm, certain. "As your Dom, I want you to trust that you are exactly where you are meant to be. Here with me."

Something in Shane's chest cracked open at those words—'as your Dom'—like Ilya had reached inside him and flipped a switch he didn't know existed. His feet were moving before his brain caught up, crossing the bathroom in four strides before he crashed into Ilya's chest, arms locking around his neck like a lifeline. His face buried against the warm skin of Ilya's throat, inhaling his favorite scent. Ilya's arms locked around his waist before Shane's feet left the ground. Ilya lifted him effortlessly onto the countertop like he weighed nothing.

Ilya settled between Shane's open legs, their bodies pressed together from chest to thigh, Shane's calves hooked loosely behind his back. Shane clung to him with everything he had. Ilya's arms locked around him in response, one hand cradling the back of Shane's head while the other traced slow, grounding circles between his shoulder blades.

"Дышать," Ilya murmured against Shane's temple, his lips brushing damp hair. "I have you." His fingers slid up to knead the tense muscles at the base of Shane's neck. "I'm right here."

Shane exhaled sharply, his fingers twisting in the fabric of Ilya's shirt. The cotton stretched taut between them, damp from their shower and the heat of Shane's grip. "I know." His voice cracked. "I know." Ilya's breath warmed the shell of Shane's ear as he murmured things in Russian, the words liquid and low, syllables dissolving into the humid air between them. Shane shivered despite the warmth of Ilya's chest pressed against his own.

Ilya was not about to let go of Shane. Not when Shane was like this, his breathing uneven, his fingers clenched tight enough in Ilya's shirt to strain the seams. Not when Shane's entire body trembled against him, caught somewhere between surrender and something raw and nameless. Ilya knew the way Shane was clinging to him like a drowning man, trembling against his chest, fingers twisted tight enough in his shirt to tear seams...that this wasn't just exhaustion. That wasn't just aftercare.

That was a drop.

A delayed one, sharp and sudden, like stepping off a cliff Shane hadn't realized he'd been balancing on.

Ilya's hands cupped Shane's face the moment he felt the first ragged inhale against his collarbone. "Hey. Hey." His thumbs brushed the damp hollows beneath Shane's eyes, catching the first traitorous wetness before it could fall. "Look at me."

Ilya's thumbs pressed gently beneath Shane's jaw, tilting his face up until their eyes met. Shane's gaze skittered away instinctively, but Ilya held firm. "Look at me, Shane" he murmured, voice low but unyielding. When Shane's eyes finally lifted, dark and wet with unshed tears, Ilya exhaled sharply. "There you are."

Shane swallowed hard and his words tangled in his chest, knotted too tight to speak, but Ilya read them anyway in the tremor of Shane's lower lip, the frantic pulse at his throat.

"I know this feeling," Ilya said quietly, his thumbs smoothing over Shane's cheekbones. His voice was steady, grounding. "I know how it hits you. But you don't have to go through it alone. Not with me. I'm right here. I'm not letting you fall into that place where you think you are too much or not enough." Ilya pressed their foreheads together, his breath warm against Shane's lips. His hands slid down to grip Shane's wrists, pressing their palms flat against his chest so Shane could feel the steady thud of his heartbeat. "And that means I stay. That means I hold you when you are shaking. That means I don't let you fall apart without me catching you. You are safe. You are here with me. I have you. You are not a burden I have to carry. You are someone I choose to hold. You are mine. You are my sub. My beautiful, brave sub. So I am staying right here. I'm not going to let you drown in your own thoughts. Not alone."

Shane didn't know how long he sat there letting Ilya hold him, but he eventually pulled back with his composure back, or at least something approximating it. His fingers unclenched slowly from Ilya's shirt, leaving wrinkled damp patches in the cotton. The bathroom air felt cooler against his skin now, sharper, like the world had reset while he'd been wrapped in Ilya's arms.

Shane's lips parted and Ilya saw it coming.

"No," Ilya said before Shane could speak, pressing a thumb against his bottom lip to stop the words physically.

Shane blinked. His brows knitted together, confusion flickering across his face as his mouth worked silently beneath Ilya's touch. The apology died unspoken, leaving Shane hovering in uncertain silence.

Ilya kept his thumb pressed firmly against Shane's lips, watching the way his eyelashes fluttered with each unsteady breath. "No," he repeated, quieter this time, his voice roughened by something deeper than exhaustion. "You don't need to apologize for this. Not ever."

Shane loved this man. His Dom. The one person who knew him better than anyone—better than Shane knew himself some days. The realization curled hot and heavy in his chest, pressing against his ribs like it might burst free. Ilya's thumb still rested against his lips, warm and insistent, stopping the apologies Shane hadn't even realized he'd been forming.

Shane's throat tightened as Ilya's thumb finally slid away from his lips, leaving behind the phantom pressure of that unspoken command. His fingers twitched against Ilya's chest where they'd been pinned, not trapped, just held. Always held.

Ilya's hands slid down to grip Shane's hips, anchoring him to reality. "Listen to me," he murmured, voice low with that particular blend of command and tenderness that made Shane's pulse stutter. "We are going to go downstairs. I will order us food, whatever you want. And then we will cuddle on the couch under a warm blanket." His thumbs pressed into Shane's thighs.

"You will eat. You will drink plenty of water. And I will hold you while we watch something so boring and stupid it makes your brain stop spinning. Да?"

Shane's exhale shuddered against Ilya's collarbone, fingers flexing against the damp cotton of Ilya's shirt. The weight of Ilya's hands on his hips was solid, real. He hated this part, the way his body betrayed him long after the high of submission had faded, leaving him raw and exposed like a live wire. But Ilya didn't flinch. Never flinched.

"Boring and stupid," Shane echoed, voice scraped thin. His fingers traced the stretched neckline of Ilya's shirt, grounding himself in the tactile reality of threadbare fabric. "Like... that baking show we like?"

Ilya's thumbs traced slow circles against Shane's hipbones, his breath warm against Shane's temple. "That baking show, yes." His lips brushed Shane's forehead.

Shane exhaled, fingers twisting tighter in Ilya's shirt. The familiarity of it, the stupid baking show they'd watched half a dozen times, the way Ilya always mocked the contestants' frosting techniques, settled something restless under his ribs.

"Ilya," he murmured.

Ilya hummed against his hairline, waiting. Shane swallowed hard.

"I need you to—" Shane's fingers flexed against Ilya's shoulders, nails scraping cotton. "Can you say it again? Please?"

Ilya's hands stilled on Shane's hips. He knew exactly what Shane was asking but he still waited. The silence stretched, thick with the weight of unspoken words, until Shane squirmed against him, his breath hitching audibly.

"Use your words, sweetheart, I know it is hard," Ilya murmured, lips brushing Shane's temple. His thumbs pressed into Shane's hipbones, grounding him. "Tell me what you need."

Shane's throat worked, his pulse fluttering under Ilya's fingertips. "I want—" He swallowed hard, fingers twisting tighter in Ilya's shirt. "I need to hear you say it again. That I'm yours. That you're my—" The words clogged in his throat, but Ilya felt them anyway, vibrating through Shane's skin.

Ilya's fingers tightened fractionally on Shane's hips, his breath hot against Shane's temple. "You are mine," he said, voice rough with certainty. "Every part of you. Your stubbornness, your silence, the way you bite your lip when you're thinking too hard." His thumb brushed the exact spot Shane had been worrying between his teeth. "Mine to take care of. Mine to wreck. Mine to put back together." He pressed their foreheads together, his next words exhaled a promise. "And I am yours. Your Dom. Your Ilya. Always."

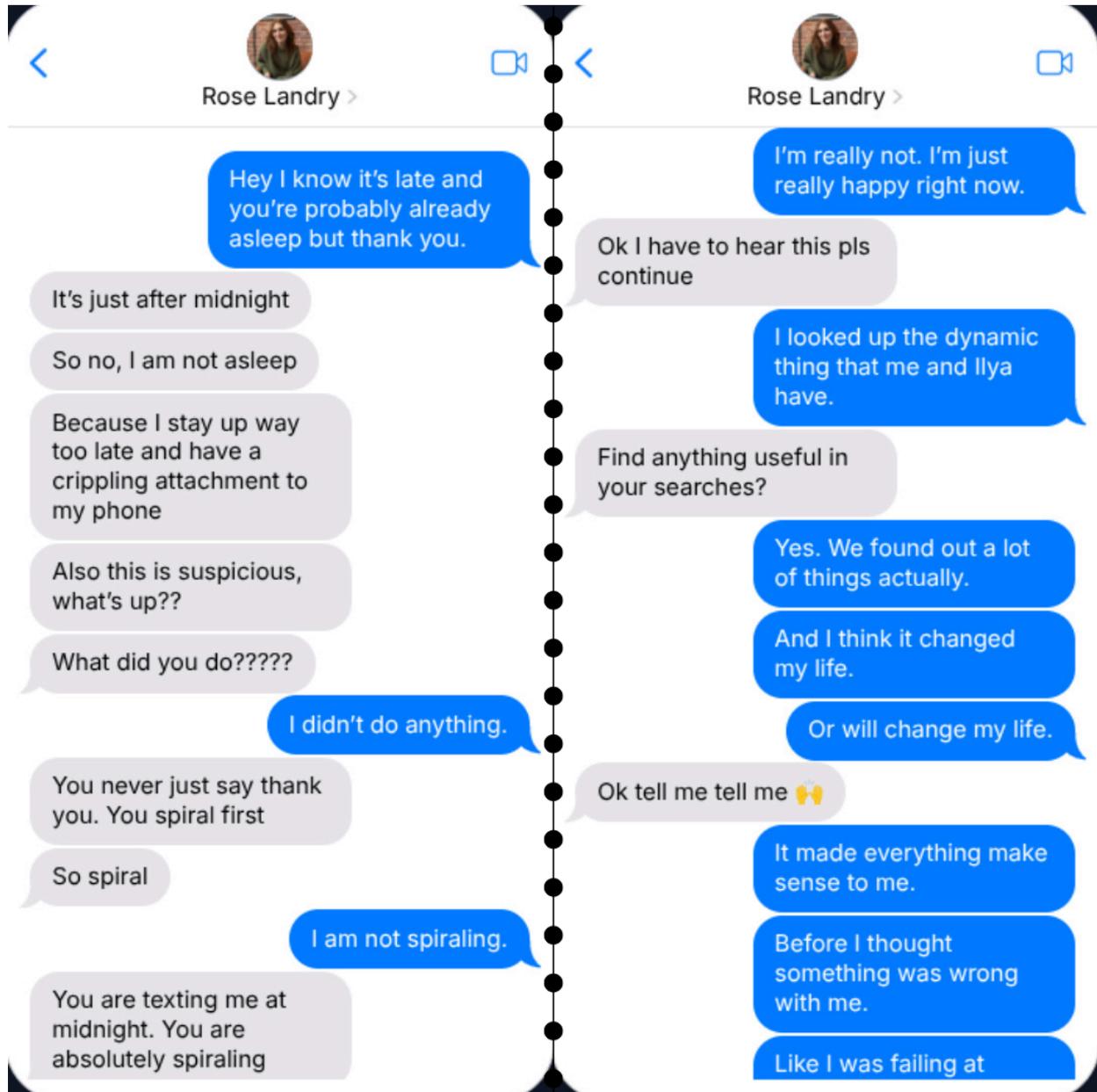
The words settled over Shane like a weighted blanket—heavy, warm, real.

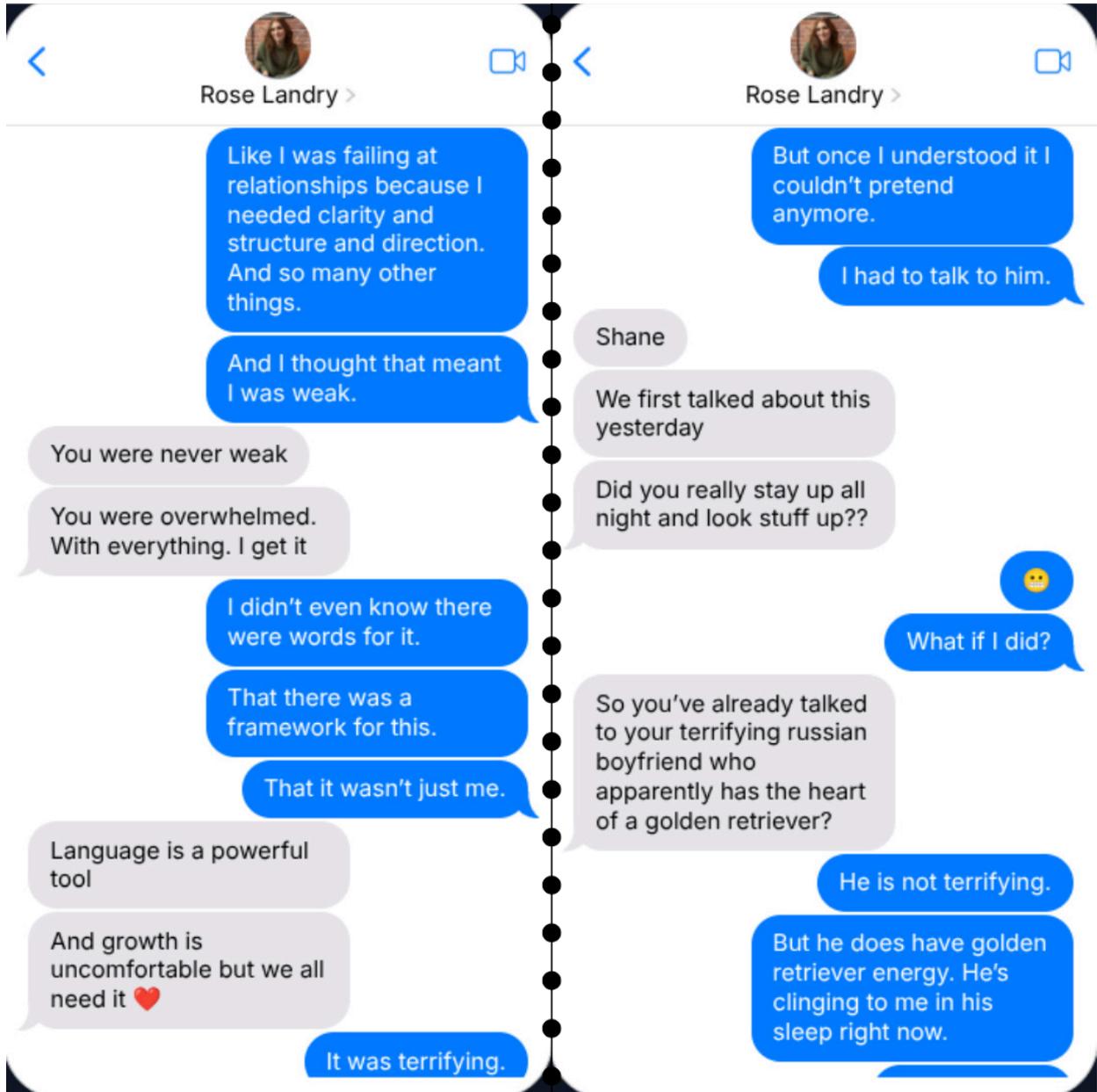
Shane pressed his forehead harder against Ilya's, grounding himself in the pressure. "Say it in Russian," he whispered, the request slipping out before he could second-guess it.

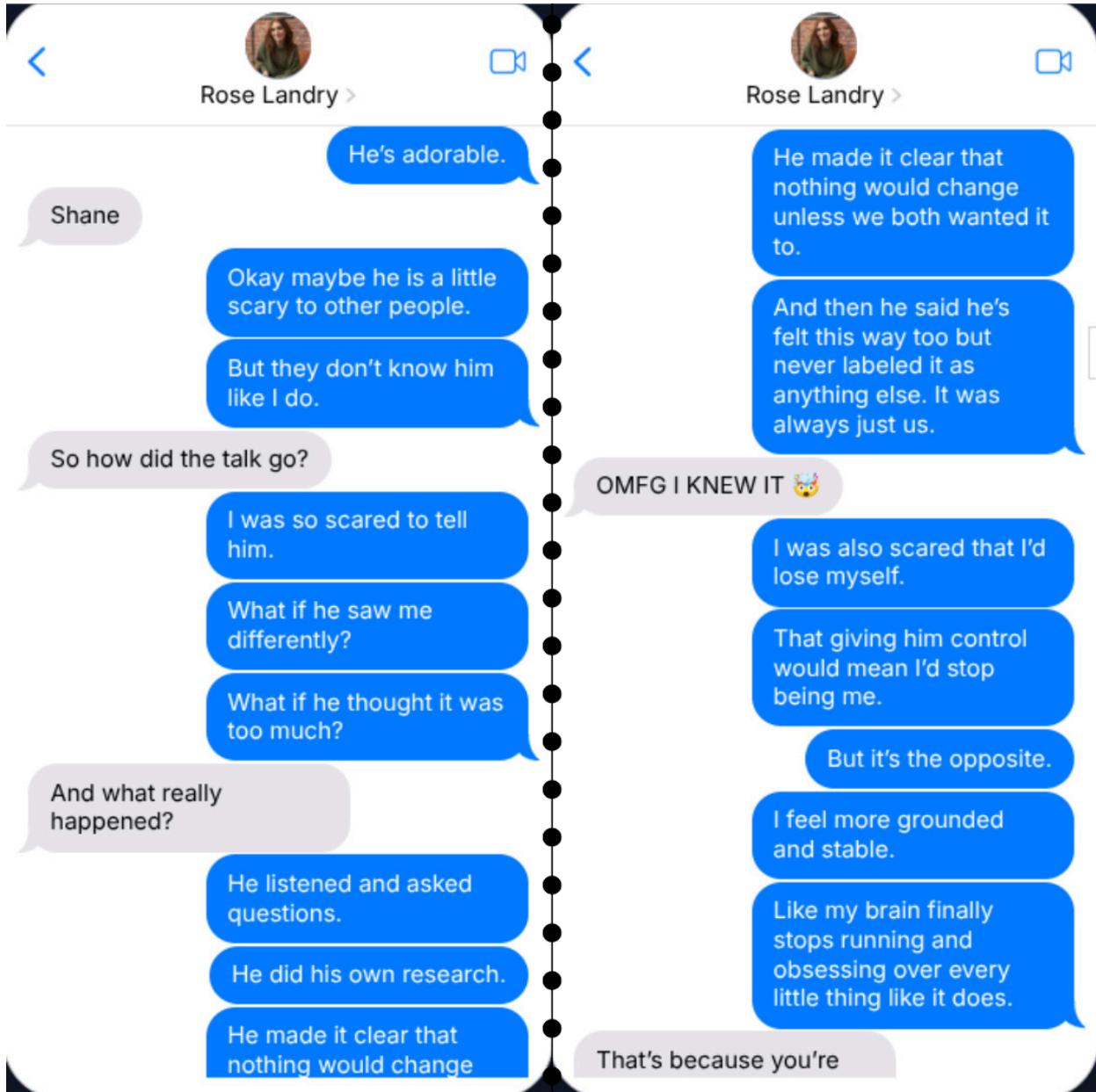
Ilya's exhale was warm against Shane's lips. "Ты мой." His grip shifted to cradle Shane's jaw. "И я твой. Мой Шейн." The syllables curled dark and possessive in the space between them. "Ты — мой дом. Твой Доминант. Твой Илья. Всегда."

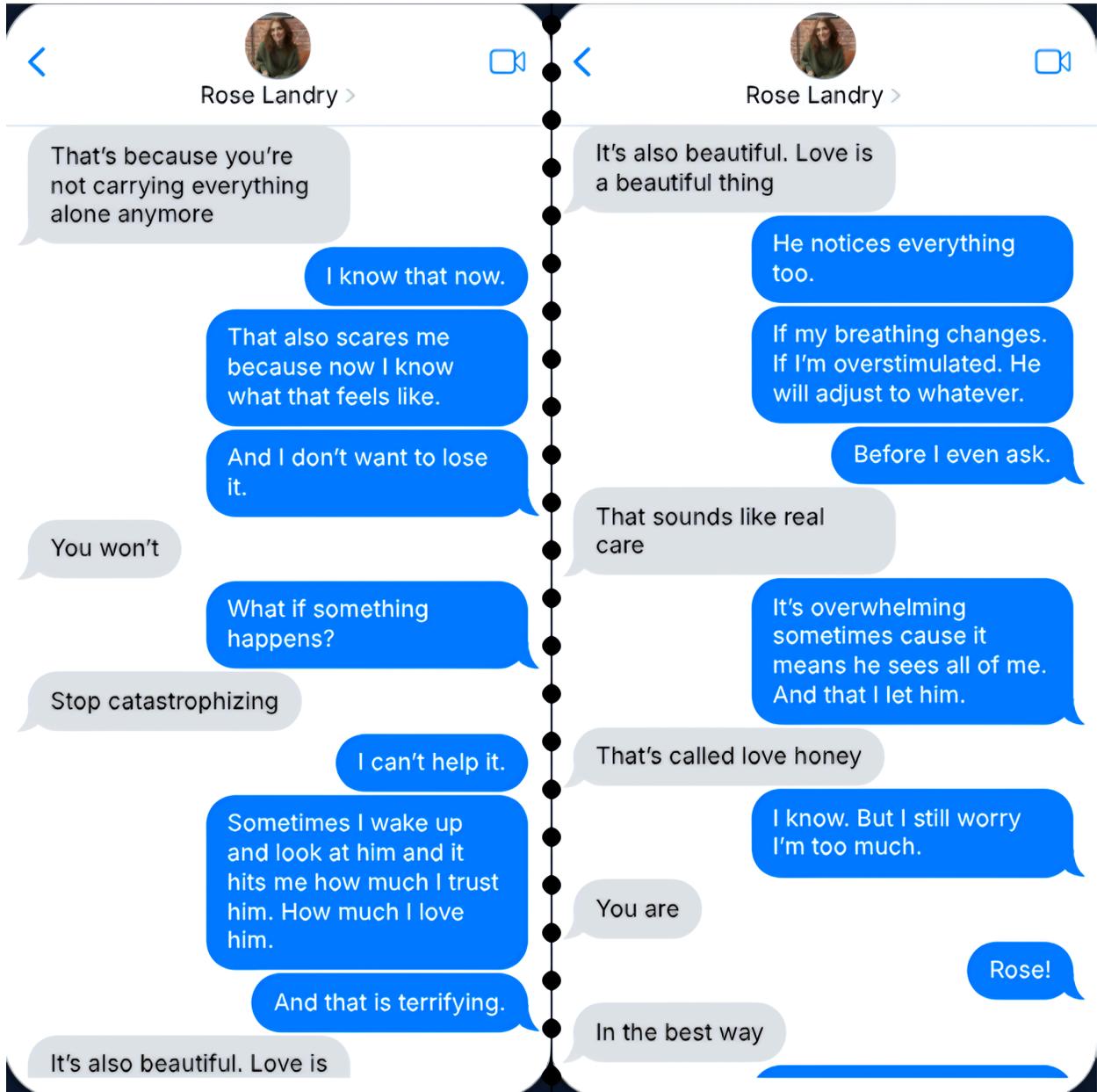
Shane shuddered, his fingers finally loosening their death grip on Ilya's shirt. The Russian always did this to him—stripped him bare in ways English couldn't sometimes. Maybe because he couldn't overanalyze words he barely understood, could only feel them within his heart. And know that the words are true.

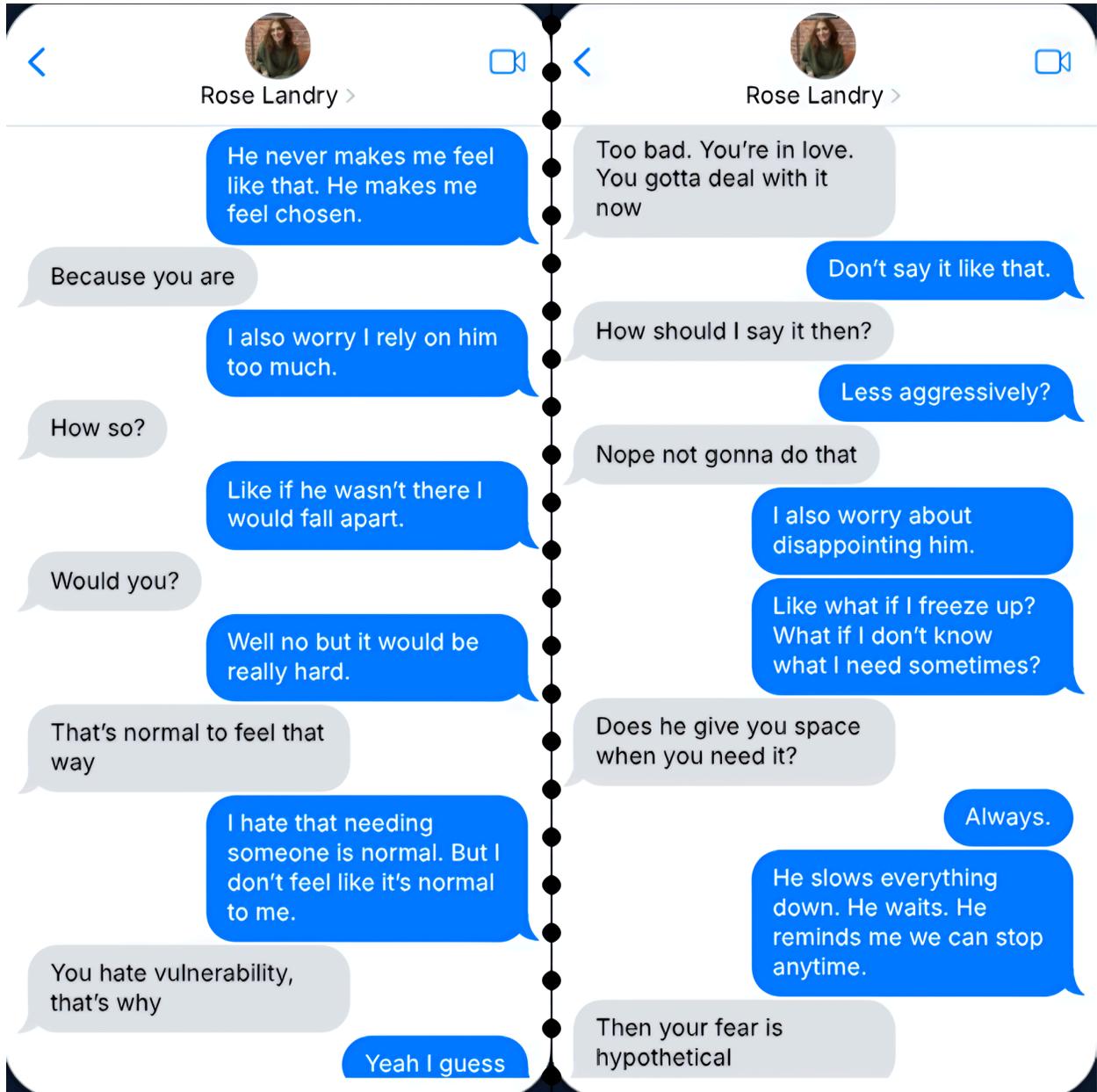
Chapter 5: We've both been here before

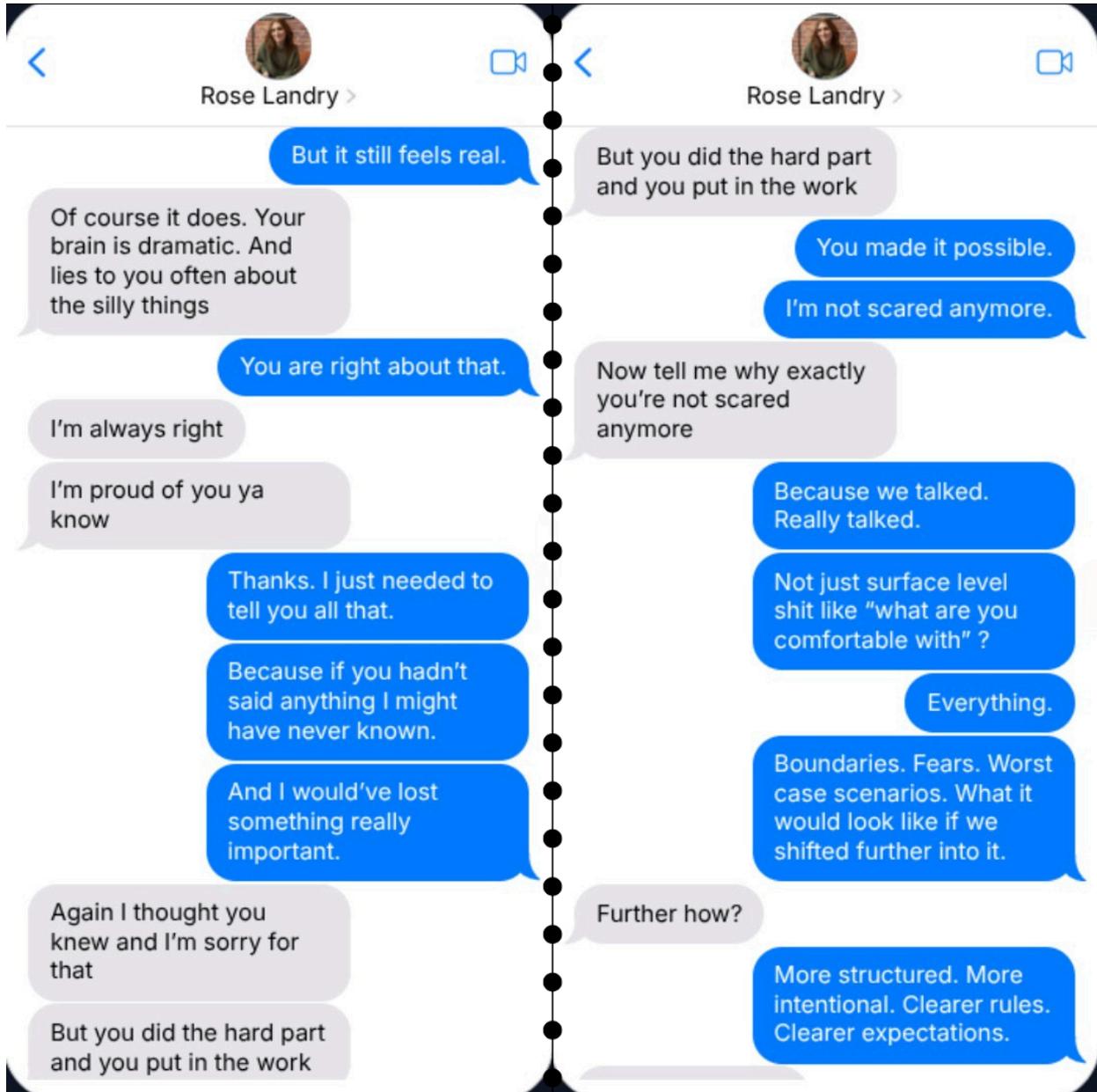


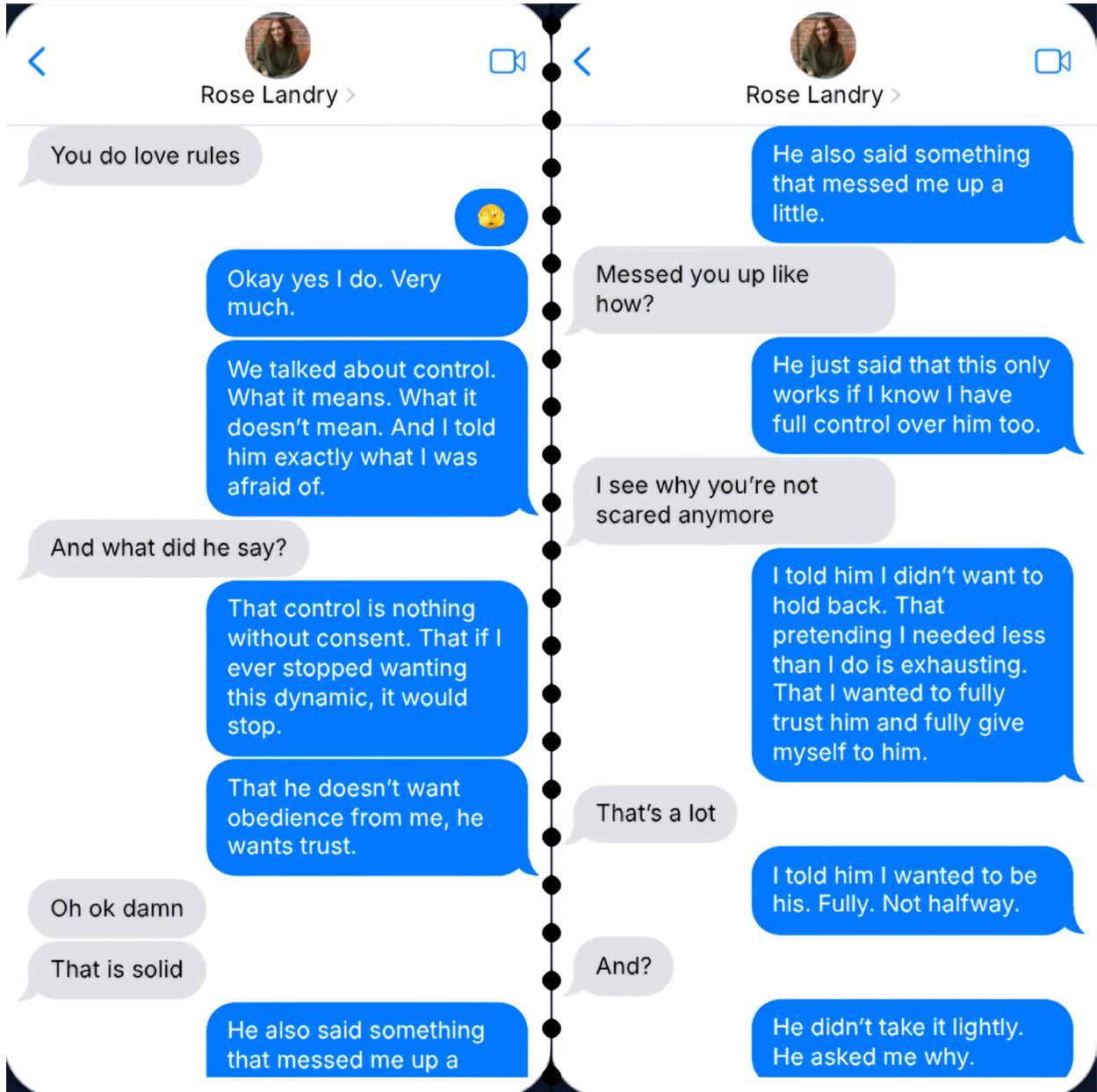


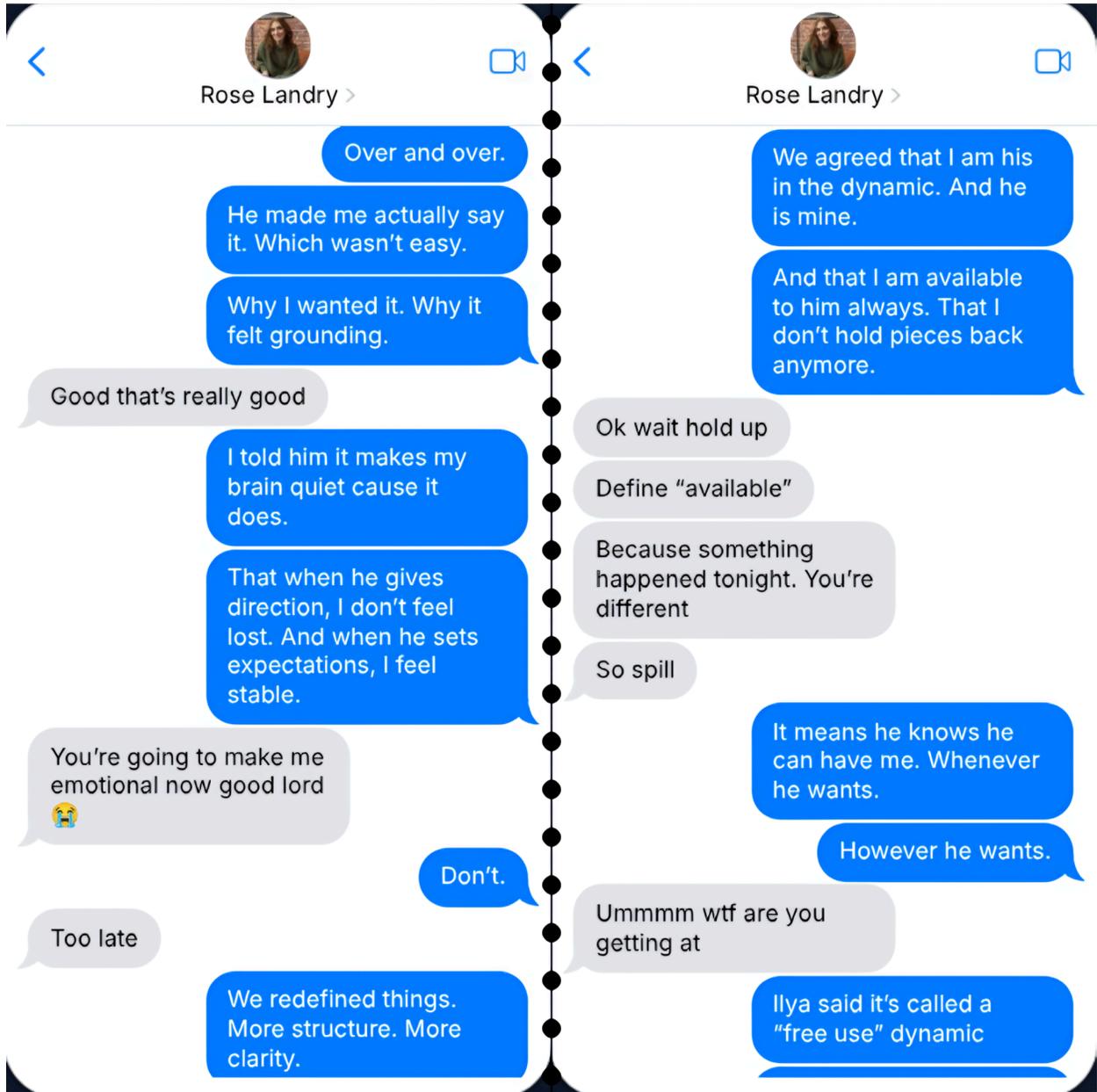


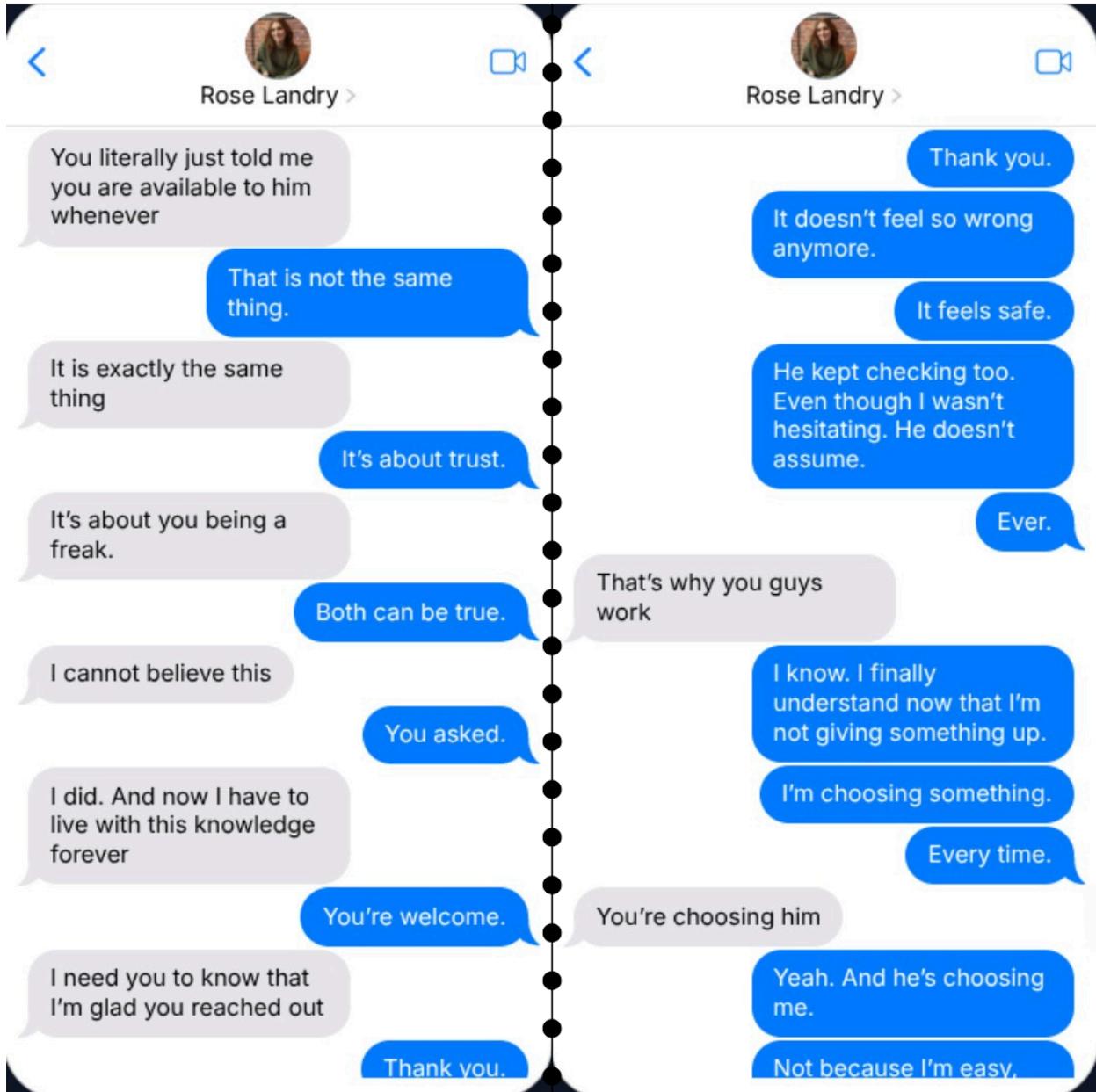


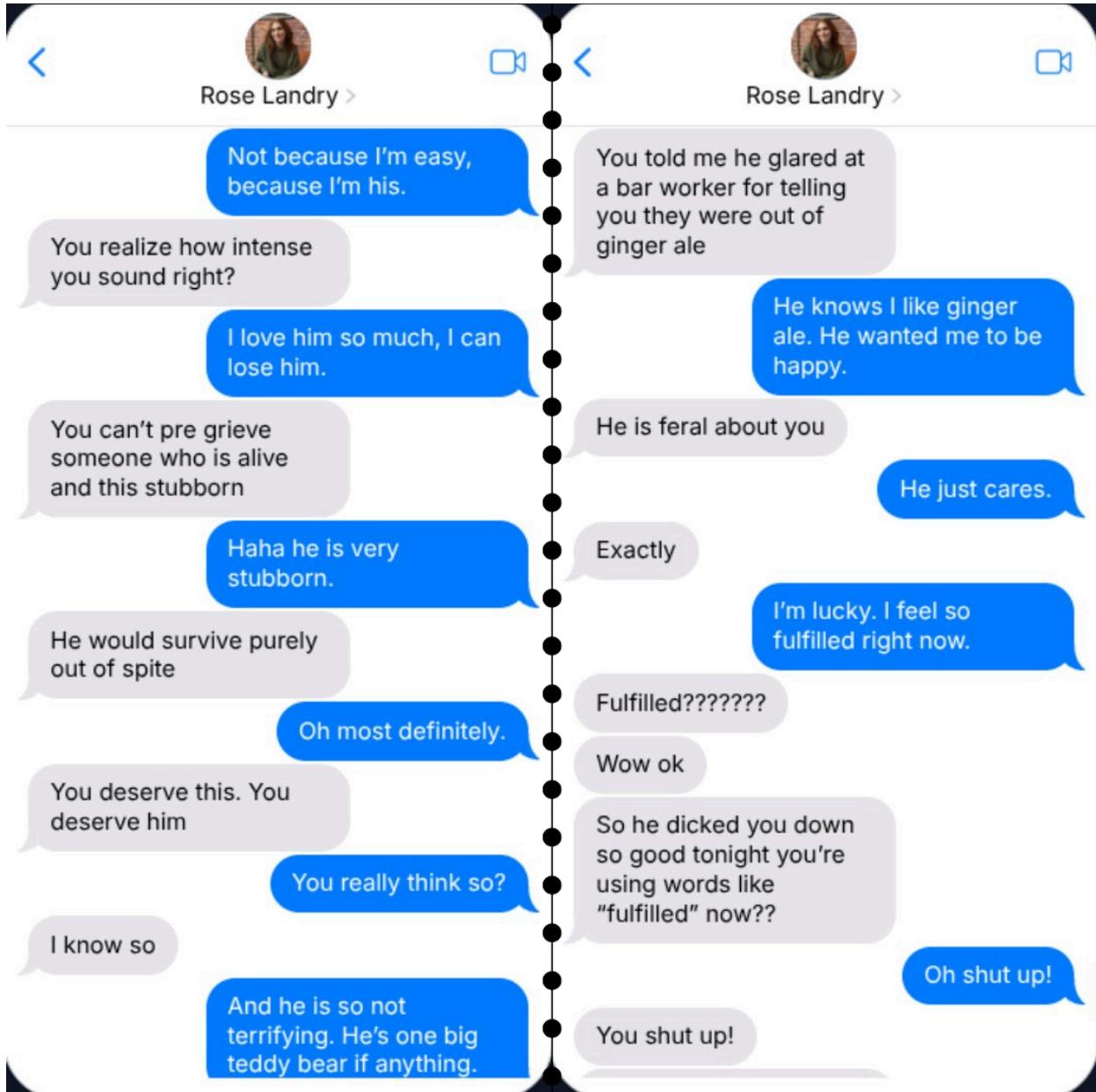












Rose Landry >

Not because I'm easy, because I'm his.

You realize how intense you sound right?

I love him so much, I can lose him.

You can't pre grieve someone who is alive and this stubborn

Haha he is very stubborn.

He would survive purely out of spite

Oh most definitely.

You deserve this. You deserve him

You really think so?

I know so

And he is so not terrifying. He's one big teddy bear if anything.

Rose Landry >

You told me he glared at a bar worker for telling you they were out of ginger ale

He knows I like ginger ale. He wanted me to be happy.

He is feral about you

He just cares.

Exactly

I'm lucky. I feel so fulfilled right now.

Fulfilled????????

Wow ok

So he dicked you down so good tonight you're using words like "fulfilled" now??

Oh shut up!

You shut up!

